

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

Climate and Ecological Emergencies

Advisory Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON MONDAY 3 APRIL 2023
THIS WAS A VIRTUAL, ONLINE MEETING.

In Attendance:

Councillors: Sam Casey-Rerhaye (Chair), Sue Cooper, Stefan Gawrysiak, Kate Gregory, Lynn Lloyd, Caroline Newton, Andrea Powell, Leigh Rawlins, Sue Roberts, David Rouane and Celia Wilson

Officers: Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer), Emily Barry (Democratic Services Officer), Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader), Jessie Fieth (Senior Climate Action Officer), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive Place) and Bertram Smith (Broadcasting Officer).

40 Apologies for absence

None.

41 Declaration of interests

There were no declarations of interest.

42 Urgent business

In advance of the meeting the chair had circulated 'The People's Plan for Nature' report for the committee to read. The chair highlighted that the report was produced by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and had come out of a people's assembly where people were asked about how they see nature in 2050. Various calls for action were published in the report which the chair felt were very useful due to their specific nature. She wanted to see if there were any actions which could be brought out for the councils in light of the next corporate plan which needed to be prepared soon and a direction needed to be chosen. The chair asked that the present cabinet members considered the recommendations which the committee made.

The committee reflected that they had enjoyed reading the report and agreed that it would be of use when the next corporate plan was formulated. It had been difficult to formulate actions when the corporate plan had last been developed. They highlighted that the report contained specific actions for local government to take. Members were keen to ensure that special protection was given to the River Thames.

The chair highlighted that partnership was a very key part of the report and that the committee had been proactive in ensuring this through work with the Local Nature Partnership which she identified as an important place for these actions to be able to happen. A need for large scale biodiversity mapping was identified to allow for a more joined up view to be taken. One member did note that the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) did not have statutory weight as it was not a statutory consultee. The chair reflected that this was a national government power but that as a local authority it was possible for feedback to be driven upwards on this matter. It was highlighted that through Oxfordshire County Council which was the accountable body for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) the Local Nature Partnership will be a key partner feeding into the LNRS. A member stressed the importance of actions formulated from the report being measurable. They were also keen to ensure that a regional nature park was created to build on areas where nature already had a strong hold.

Another member identified that the main cause of stress to nature was climate change and therefore this should be a key part at the beginning of the report.

There was discussion of the broad nature of the membership of the Local Nature Partnership. The committee had previously discussed if the Local Nature Partnership should respond to all planning applications and whilst this was not possible in resource terms the committee felt that responses should be submitted to large strategic sites such as the Botley solar farm application.

The committee agreed it would be beneficial for the report to be sent to the Local Nature Partnership as an agenda item for them to consider. It was suggested that the report was built into their future planning.

A member noted that there was emphasis in the report on what individuals and communities can do and that there were already a number of communities and individuals who were active and that this should be encouraged as there was a responsibility on everyone to take actions against climate change. They posed the question “what could the committee do to help individuals and communities convene, be informed and to take more action?”. The Climate Action Oxfordshire website was referenced as a good framework for giving people information to allow them to take actions themselves.

One member made comment that they felt the local authority had a huge part to play. Many communities do not know where to start with this kind of work but more fundamentally the local authority was the planning authority and where houses and roads were built nature cannot be restored so this must be mitigated.

The chair highlighted that the report stated there should be an access to nature as a right and this will then feed through into all legislative and statutory duties.

Recommendation:

That the “People’s Plan for Nature” report forms part of the evidence base for the next corporate plan to establish measurable targets

Consideration should be given to a local nature park.

43 Chair's announcements

None.

44 Minutes of the last meeting

Resolved: The minutes of the last meeting on 16 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment under item 38 of 'Ragnor Road' to 'Radnor Road'. The chair highlighted that the three actions relating to the climate action plan were resolved under item 11 of the agenda.

It was also noted that the tree champions had not given an update at this meeting and therefore this item should be carried forward to the next meeting.

45 Public participation

None.

46 Update from the Environment Advisory Group (EAG) - Future Oxfordshire Partnerships

Councillor Andrea Powell presented an update from the last EAG meeting.

There were two main topics of discussion. Cllr Powell proposed not to say much about PAZCO as this was to be covered as an item later in the agenda but did note that the EAG had reviewed an earlier version of the route map and action plan for submission of their comments.

Cllr Powell highlighted that there had been a presentation from Matt Witney the manager of the LNP. She noted that whilst the focus of EAG was zero carbon it was useful to hear the LNP approach to identify that where there were interfaces there was consistency of approach.

Councillor David Rouane fed back that EAG had adopted PAZCO as a methodology not because it was perfect but because it was better than having no methodology or wasting time on developing a new or different methodology which could have delayed action 6 months to one year.

47 Environment Act update

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader provided an update on the Environment Act. The slides presented will be published with the minutes.

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader covered the published response to the consultation on Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) which had taken one year to publish due to the complexity of the subject. The response indicated significant changes for the local authority. He identified that whilst South Oxfordshire District Council had been implementing BNG for a number of years on major sites, there needed to be systems in place to monitor that net gain.

During member's discussion it was queried whether the biodiversity credits that Natural England manage will have a deterrent effect, as there was a concern these could be anywhere in the UK. The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader confirmed that the credits would be expensive to discourage their use. Members also asked if anybody could put land forward and this was confirmed.

Members asked what was being done to ensure that beneficial sites were identified, as biodiversity requires networks not necessarily isolated sites. The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader stated there was a clear expectation that by setting up an LNRS and the accompanying map this was where BNG should be targeted. The Joint Local Plan was setting a clear link that off site BNG sites will be targeted in the LNRS.

The committee recognised that many developers were trying to deliver BNG on site which was preventing a market for off-site BNG locations from developing. One member asked for the Climate and Biodiversity Team Leaders view on delivery on site and he responded that it does not always achieve high quality biodiversity and habitats for instance where species were less tolerant of human disruption. He noted there was a place for off-site BNG delivery.

48 Cabinet member for environment update

Councillor Sue Cooper provided the update.

Following the successful bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and the award of money for works to Cornerstone we would be looking at other buildings for further bidding opportunities. Contracts were being set up for decarbonisation at the leisure centres in the district and also the Riverside Park and Pool.

APSE had been appointed to undertake a feasibility study into investing in solar energy on council land, with an aim to offset the councils' unavoidable carbon emissions. The report will include a financial model as well as contractual, planning and grid supply issues that will feed into future decisions about investments in a solar farm. A methodology for assessing areas of council owned land and buildings such as car parks will be beneficial.

A bid has been submitted to Net Zero Fast Followers Fund which if successful will fund an officer post to develop an approach to investment in nature-based carbon offsetting in Oxfordshire. This was being led by South Oxfordshire but other Oxfordshire authorities were partners in this.

Through Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding £700,000 had been secured to be used across the county to fund cable gullies enabling Oxfordshire residents with properties on the street to run an Electric Vehicle charging cable under the pavement to charge their EV vehicles. Members felt that it would be beneficial for villages to also be considered for cable gullies due to lack of off street parking.

Councillor Cooper talked about the 'Let it Bee' project which aimed to promote wildlife friendly management of council owned land. This followed on from the No-Mow May trials which ran across the last growing season. She identified that wildflowers had been planted in Cronshaw Close in Didcot as well as another site in Woodcote. She was hopeful to take this further in future.

Councillor Cooper reported that the bathing water status application at Wallingford had been unsuccessful and that there had been no response from Defra as to why the application had been unsuccessful. Members asked if a Freedom of Information request will be submitted to Defra due to their failure to respond. Councillor Cooper did not feel that it was a failure to respond but that there was a delay to the response. She felt a useful discussion on how we can progress in this area would be more beneficial.

Regarding the retrofitting of buildings, a member highlighted that we used to work with an organisation to offer tours of buildings and answer questions on works which had been carried out but the company provided the required insurances and associated admin. They asked if this was something we could consider again in future. It was noted this was labour intensive for officers but if funding was available this could be possible. The Senior Climate Action Officer stated this was something to be looked into but that written up case studies were where resource had been focused.

Councillor Cooper also noted that there were now car clubs operating in the district and a memorandum of understanding had been signed to allow the car clubs to use the EV chargers in council owned car parks.

49 Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader introduced the item. The plan was commissioned in early 2022 to take forward the ambitions set out in PAZCO. Oxfordshire adopted a high ambition for delivering net zero faster than government requirements. Route map and action plan has taken areas where we need to save carbon forward. Developed a county wide approach to achieve net zero by 2050. The action plan identified 14 key actions. These actions included expanding and scaling up retrofit delivery, scaling up programmes to address the retrofit skills gap and development of a collective purchasing approach that supports widespread deployment of rooftop solar.

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader noted there was a high level of ambition in the plan and that funding was simply not available. Five key priority workstreams had been identified to take forward:

- Buildings decarbonisation
- Net zero energy local area energy planning
- Electric vehicle infrastructure
- Land-based carbon sequestration offset model
- Green finance

Members reflected how ambitious the plan was and that it was likely a number of the items would not be achieved on time and therefore there was a need to plan to overachieve in order to achieve the goal of net zero by the end of the journey. However, they did feel a statement of what actions need to be taken was useful. Members highlighted that we knew we needed to be carbon zero by 2030 therefore the good work which was being done needed to speed up. They also felt that the plan did not take account of land use and the impacts effective land use can have.

Officers were congratulated on the hard work they had put into developing the plan.

A member noted they felt that green finance should be a focus as all of the actions will require financing. They also felt that the plan should be included in all of the district council's plans moving forward.

50 Climate Action Plan Performance Quarter three

This was the third time the report had been presented to the committee. As the members had all read the report the chair suggested that the committee should move straight onto any comments or questions.

The chair noted she was pleased with the progress of the plan.

Another member highlighted that she felt there was a lack of metrics in the plan and requested that it would be helpful to have a figure as to how much carbon was being saved by any of the measures in the plan.

There was a discussion around requiring builds to be zero carbon as opposed to using carbon offsetting. Councillor Sue Cooper highlighted this requirement has recently been introduced via an SPD by Bath and North East Somerset Council. Once the principle has been established it should be possible for others to move forward with this.

Members discussed supporting HGVs and delivery vehicles in becoming low or zero carbon. They noted that the way to tackle this in the districts was to utilise ANPR and weight restrictions to prevent them coming through the districts but this was not detailed in the plan. Members noted this was an Oxfordshire County Council issue but there was a current consultation with parishes as to what they thought of weight restrictions and where they would want them.

51 Future items

The chair reflected that any items taken forward would be for the new administration as we had come to the end of this electoral term. Particularly thinking of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and incorporating this into the corporate plan. Members reflected that specifically focusing on achieving net zero by 2030 should be included in the corporate plan.

The chair thanked committee members for their time and input and reflected she felt the committee had made positive progress. The chair also thanked officers for their work and the support they provided to the committee and noted it was good to see the council had a specific climate team in place.

The meeting closed at 7.58 pm

Chair

Date

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