

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

Climate and Ecological Emergencies

Advisory Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON MONDAY 11 DECEMBER 2023
THIS WAS A VIRTUAL, ONLINE MEETING.

Attendance:

Councillors: Sam Casey-Rerhaye (chair), James Barlow, Ali Gordon-Creed, Alexandrine Kantor, Denise Macdonald, Leigh Rawlins and Andrew Tinsley

Officers: Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader), Jessie Fieth (Senior Climate Action Officer), Ben Whaymand (Leisure Facilities Team Leader) and Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer).

Guests: Alison Offord, BBOWT

52 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Stefan Gawrysiak, Katharine Keats-Rohan and Sam James-Lawrie.

53 Declaration of interests

None.

54 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair welcomed everyone to the first CEEAC meeting of the administration. There would be task and finish groups in addition to the public meetings.

Chair mentioned meeting arrangements and etiquette for those wishing to speak.

55 Minutes of the last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 3 April 2023 were discussed and agreed to be an accurate record.

Chair mentioned People's Plan for Nature as she had raised it at the last meeting. She added that this document would be included in the suite of documents for creating the Corporate Plan and the Climate and Nature Recovery Plan (CNRP). This was raised in the last meeting and was being taken forward.

56 Public participation

None.

57 An introduction to the Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray project

An introduction to the Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray project was presented by guest speaker Alison Offord from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). This presentation was for noting but open to committee questions and comments, and to consider any advice for Cabinet from CEEAC. Alison explained that the BBOWT team's role was to work beyond and between nature reserves and protected sites to create better conditions for wildlife across big landscapes.

It was explained that the current focus was on the Bernwood, Otmoor and Ray landscape and this presentation was to show plans for the area and what BBOWT was hoping to achieve in partnership with others. Committee were asked for their support and involvement going forward in addition to the ideas and input from officers. The Trust covered Wheatley, Beckley and Stanton St. John as some of the key settlements in the South Oxfordshire part of the boundary. There's no overall designation at the landscape scale but it does have some really important protected wildlife sites and local heritage. There were very good areas for nature but generally quite small and fragmented, whereas there were some quite large areas that were not currently managed well for wildlife and had been influenced by historic agricultural intensification modifications of the river and drainage system and more recently the cumulative impact of a number of high-profile developments such as HS2 and other infrastructure and housing projects throughout the landscape and so this project had really come about in response to these pressures and ongoing negative trends in the key wildlife populations, which were now also threatened by climate pressures. As a result of these developments the area was highlighted as one of the priority strategic scale landscapes to focus nature recovery effort and the current boundary brought together a number of existing conservation target areas and biodiversity opportunity areas across the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire borders.

Following on from this, BBOWT was funded by Bucks Council initially to undertake a feasibility study to help bring forward nature recovery action at the landscape scale. Over the past year and a half, we've consulted with over 200 individuals from over 44 organizations to identify opportunities with broad support that would deliver for nature and people and that could be initiated within 5 years. This process had now produced a working vision for the landscape around six broad areas of action which we're now in the process of developing further and these are these six were:

1. Setting up a farmer cluster to coordinate nature recovery across third party land and this had already been initiated so we're working with about 25 local farmers at the moment.
2. A project to enhance the river Ray and its associated habitats and flood plain meadows.
3. Increasing the connectivity of green infrastructure between the city of Oxford right through the landscape to the Upper Ray.
4. Reconnecting woodlands and improving habitat mosaics between woodlands.
5. Condition and quality of key linear habitats such as hedgerows and verges
6. Enhancing nature connection pathways for a more diverse range of people living or working in the area

Full details of the consultation and report had been published, which was sent in the initial papers to the committee and a link can be sent after this presentation. In order to translate the vision quickly into action we needed to raise some of the funding. We were moving forward with a round one application to the National Lottery Heritage fund for an ambitious 5-million-pound program covering the whole landscape and all six themes working in

partnership with a range of organisations both within and outside the natural environment sectors. We're currently in the process of building the content for the application, aiming to submit the application no later than May. If successful, this would lead us to seven years of funding including a 2-year development phase to further test ideas and plan projects close to the communities we work with followed by five years of delivery funding at the end of which there'd be potential to pivot to a landscape recovery project to continue over the longer term - in the context of landscape and species recovery we're really talking about a much longer time than funding programs reflected.

The project was currently divided into three core themes which were all about creating and connecting more and better-quality habitats for wildlife and people in nature and exploring human relationships with nature at a range of local sites and enhancing green spaces. We hope that other partners will join the partnership at a later date.

To reflect on a possible role for South Oxfordshire District Council within such a program, officers had already inputted to this project, and we are keen to maintain and develop existing links to complement local nature recovery and place shaping policies. With other partners we had been provided with letters of support and expertise and advice and we welcome thoughts from committee.

Below summarises the committee's main comments:

- It was confirmed there was some cover of Cherwell under this project. It was explained that the project was hoping to utilise existing channels and not set up further layers of governance.
- A member asked can we create funding for student projects – spatial GIS? It was confirmed that BBOWT had been talking to universities and welcomed other contacts.
- A member raised the risks of muddy flooding – how can we prevent that? Can landscape connectivity and wildlife be part of Planning GIS? It was responded that BBOWT had been working with Environment Agency and the Freshwater Habitats Trust to undertake modelling and were planning to use natural measures of flood management.
- A member suggested creating an increase of biodiversity and knowledge in gardens – hedgehogs, bats owls. Was BBOWT doing anything urban – connectivity issues. It was responded that yes, work was confirmed in urban areas – e.g.s include Slough, Wild Bicester, Wild Banbury. Guest speaker would be happy to provide contacts for such projects.
- Discussion was had around farmer clusters and supporting regenerative farming. Guest speaker explained that the work was collaborative and supportive as farmers have their own challenges to deal with. Farmland was still needed to produce food but working with farmers to produce more space for wildlife on farmland where possible.
- Muntjac control.
- Anthropogenic biomes – human land management dictating habitats and what lives there.
- Mention of transport infrastructure impacts, e.g., HS2, M40, East-West rail, for consideration.

CEEAC showed much support for this project, chair suggested that the District Council should look at how we can support these projects and would provide this comment to Cabinet.

Resolved:

CEEAC advise Cabinet to look at how SODC can support BBOWT projects.

58 Progress report on Leisure Centre Decarbonisation

An update report was presented to the committee by the Leisure Facilities Team Leader for committee to note.

46.8% of council's emissions come from leisure centres, therefore the work on decarbonisation of leisure centres was crucial. This report summarised all of the work so far on leisure centre decarbonisation.

The officer summarised the report, covering topics such as the impact of lockdown in reducing emissions for leisure, but shared use of centres (joint user agreements) including County Council for school swimming lessons etc, also emergency use during Covid, meant that there was still energy consumption. Consideration had to be given to pool and building structures at the time to ensure they weren't damaged, which resulted in some energy consumption, but then the facilities were ready for use again and needed to be heated. Post covid there was still some measures in place and work was done to adjust opening hours depending on usage, as well as sorting out the financial support package from Government.

Projects carried out to reduce consumption included LED lighting replacing halogen. Officers worked closely with the infrastructure and development team to draw down developers funds through Section 106 funding and Community Infrastructure Levy funding so that we could deliver those projects and use developers funds to move forward those lighting programs. Working with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) officers ensured contributions were fairly apportioned as per the joint use agreements.

We had an exercise conducted which looked at the turnover of the swimming pool in the leisure industry - a lot of the time circulation pumps work at 100% during the day and then leisure operators turn them down to 50% during the day but the officer's view at the time was who had actually calculated that this was the right percentage? The feedback received from the engineers in terms of the turnovers of those swimming pools was that we didn't need to be circulating the pumps in that amount of velocity, we only needed to turn over at 30%, so that one suggestion saved a lot of energy usage. So, centre operation as well as project delivery had helped reduce consumption of energy.

The Leisure team had been working with the Climate team and also talking to like-minded local authorities and key individuals in the industry to come up with ideas to reduce our carbon emissions in the leisure centres. A project on destratification of our leisure centres was delivered at White Horse Leisure Centre in July, to improve old buildings, their heating and ventilation systems.

Destratification fans around the pool side slowly push the air back down. Units don't consume much energy and keep the centre warmer. This had recently been completed at Didcot Wave also, and this will be monitored to see how well it works.

We had recently recruited an external funding lead in the council who's been applying for grant funding, and we've just recently put in for the Salix phase 3 C grant funding, which was government grant funding to support public facilities including educational facilities.

We will be hearing in January whether we're successful with that bid for Didcot Wave and Park Sports Centre. For those two facilities we'll be looking at solar PV insulation for the roof and air source heat pumps on the side of the buildings to support with the decarbonisation of the centres.

An application had been submitted for a specific swimming pool support fund. Officers had put in applications, except Riverside, as outdoor pools are not included in the funding, and the funding was specific to the pools themselves and not changing rooms etc. A lot of progress had been made and further projects planned, working with new technology, ideas and funding opportunities as they emerge.

When planned projects complete, we will have managed to reduce carbon emissions by just over 3.2 million kilowatt hours since the declaration of the climate emergency. The current Leisure contract expires on 31st August 2026. Work in the run up will inform performance monitoring for future contracts to ensure we can monitor the progress of all the work so far on decarbonisation, and we wanted to continue to reduce energy consumption under new contracts with the help of providers and service users.

Comments from committee:

- Point 24 clarification: 96 and 99% savings - what did this represent? It was responded by the officer that on those sites, it was the whole building approach using Salix grants – the figures were expectations from Concept Energy who conducted the heating savings report for these projects. We will be generating renewable energy from Solar PV to support emissions reductions. Gas boilers will be changed over to air source heat pumps that will be run on energy from the solar installations – aiming to move completely away from gas use.
- It was raised whether we can share as well as seek out best practice.
- We have Local Government Association presence - cross working was happening.
- Combined heat and power (CHP) was not used anymore, and new technology will mean it won't be needed anymore.
- Local hospitals (John Radcliffe) had been sharing heating – their heating generated electricity that they share between buildings – can we learn from this example?
- Consideration of ethical sourcing of solar panels. Officer explained that this had been considered in tendering and we will continue to look at framework models as well as the tendering process questioning.
- Clarification asked for on big energy savings at Riverside. It was explained that the figures were impacted by installation of pool covers, creating savings. They kept water vapour in place and maintained the temperature (reducing gas consumption).
- EV chargers at Leisure centres – can we consider this?
- Chair suggested whether this could be a task and finish group topic.

Committee noted this report and thanked the officer for his work.

59 Report on Progress with Retrofit Activities

CEEAC members were previously asked to provide a steer on actions the councils should take to upscale the retrofitting of buildings in the district. Senior Climate Action Officer provided an update report and presented it to committee.

The report discussed actions that the council should take to upscale the retrofitting of buildings in the district, mostly homes but also businesses and community buildings. The Council doesn't have direct control over this but homes were the second biggest source of carbon emissions in the district so there was a strong feeling that we should do as much

as we possibly can to encourage and facilitate retrofitting. The progress made had been presented in the report within the agenda pack.

Members congratulated the officer for the work achieved. Can we publicise more in parish magazines etc, to reach groups and less heard voices such as those in fuel poverty – stretch our reach further? Officer encouraged members to signpost people as well to help. Chair referred back to the Joint Scrutiny Committee task and finish report on retrofit that was written, and said she was glad to see these recommendations taking effect. On planning advice, chair suggested being proactive, by replying to applications with “have you considered retrofit...” at that point, it was more direct than putting the information on the website.

It was questioned whether we can monitor the number of retrofit homes, but the officer explained that so far, a solution had not been found, but this was being considered by officers already. A member mentioned Project Red as a contact group regarding prioritisation of retrofitting.

It was noted that we had a dedicated communications officer, Lucy Billen, and there would be feedback to Lucy about the communications to widen our reach.

Resolved:

Committee noted the update report.

60 Update from the Climate and Biodiversity Team

As the Cabinet Member was on leave, Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader gave a brief update.

- Developed a climate impact tool so officers can see climate impact of council decisions across council teams. It will be used in corporate decision making and will be rolled out as a six-month trial at first and then will be formally factored into reporting as standard.
- In October the annual Greenhouse Gas report was published. Work is currently underway to assess progress against our climate targets using projections of future emissions.
- In 2022, an application was submitted to DEFRA for bathing water status in Wallingford, which was unsuccessful. This October another application was submitted, with help from charity Thames 21. Officers believe that we now meet the criteria which DEFRA has published. Result expected in March 2024.
- UK100: Cllr Cooper previously suggested we become members. South will need to go through the same process Vale did. This involves motioning at Full Council to join. Chair will follow up on this.

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader shared a short presentation with updates on; Task and Finish groups, the Environment Act, and Climate Action Scorecards – the presentation is attached to the minutes.

- A member asked about Net Zero task and finish – officer confirmed that net zero would form part of the greenhouse gases target projections work and will inform the development of the Climate and Nature Recovery Plan.
- A member asked whether we could discuss biodiversity net gain in a Task and Finish Group. Can we better protect what’s already there in terms of biodiversity – for example, mitigation such as green bridges. Officer responded that members

would be involved in the Joint Local Plan all member briefings because of the wide level of interest.

- Legacy wildlife infrastructure: hedgerows, filled in ditches – potential to help connectivity in the urban environment and reinstate features based on local knowledge.
- A member asked if connectivity of habitats can be considered along with biodiversity net gain (Environment Act item) – officer responded yes, this could be considered for the Climate and Nature Recovery Plan.
- Joint Local Plan includes hooks to the future Nature Recovery Strategy. This will be strengthened once the strategy was finalised. The timescales were slightly misaligned.
- Climate Action Scorecards – the council achieved 35% against the national average of 29%. The council were 17th out of 153 district councils.

The team leader was thanked for the update.

61 Draft Climate Action Plan Q2 Performance report

A member suggested that in the RAG column we could use a letter rather than using colour, to save on the print.

A member asked about Environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) in finance investment, and ethical procurement (green procurement and supply chains). Were these potential future items / task and finish groups.

The committee noted the Q2 report.

62 Future agenda items

The next formal meeting is on 10 June 2024. Potential items coming are:

Draft Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan
Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Local Area Energy Planning – local heat networks/market towns
Green finance
Berinsfield Community Energy

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

Chair

Date

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