

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

held on Monday 1 June 2020 at 6.00 pm



This was an online virtual meeting. To view the meeting copy and paste this link into your browser: <https://youtu.be/kkWJd2WKHHM>

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors David Grant (Chairman) Nathan Boyd, Amos Duveen, Hayleigh Gascoigne, Eric De La Harpe, Alison Jenner, Max Thompson

Officers: Chloe Bunting, Steve Culliford, Candida Mckelvey, Michelle Wells, Heather Saunders and Michael Flowers

1. Chairman's announcements

Councillor Grant welcomed everyone to the greenest climate emergency advisory committee to date. He addressed the committee, saying that having a virtual committee was a pipe dream, but has now been made possible due to arrangements being made to continue committees during the current crisis. It demonstrates that we are willing to make changes and that at times of crisis, there can be silver linings – we can choose to try and return to how things were, or we can forge a new green future.

Officers have been working hard to keep local services running and helping vulnerable people. There have been close to zero carbon emissions due to everyone working from home. One of the issues we face with virtual meetings is that we currently cannot have external attendees to speak publicly at meetings. Due to the meetings being broadcast publicly and live as required, we are still looking for a solution to allow external speakers. Currently written statements can be submitted to the meeting. This means that item 6 of the agenda, a presentation by Aether, cannot go ahead. When we get to item 6, the committee will be asked to decide how we receive this presentation.

2. Apologies for absence

Councillor Eric Batts submitted apologies, and Councillor Nathan Boyd was present as a substitute.

3. Minutes

The minutes were approved as a correct record of the last meeting, and will be signed by the Chair as such.

4. Declarations of interest

Councillor Gascoigne declared that she is an investor in the low carbon hub.

5. Urgent business

None.

6. 'Determining the Vale of White Horse District Carbon Baseline'

The committee agreed that the written report by Aether, regarding the Vale of White Horse District carbon baseline, should be presented to the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee's (CEAC) councillor-officer task and finish group as soon as possible. The task and finish group would then feedback into the committee.

7. Work programme update and the impact of the Covid-19 response on progress

The Policy and Insight Manager was present to answer questions regarding the work programme and the impact Covid-19 has had on progress and steer.

It was explained that there has been a shift in staffing towards resourcing the Vale of White Horse Council Community Support Hub in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, to support residents. Also, staff have been working from home and have to balance work and family commitments.

Officers recommended another Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) meeting in early July in order to review a report on the Oxfordshire and regional recovery programme, in tandem with reviewing the draft corporate plan before it goes out to public consultation. The review of the draft corporate plan by the CEAC would be focused on priorities regarding environment and health.

Officers were thanked for their contribution to Covid-19 support efforts.

The committee worked through the update. The following points were raised:

- The committee's budget was discussed in light of Covid-19 – councillors queried if this budget might be reallocated. It was confirmed that any uncommitted spend may be challenged. We can carry over budget to the following financial year.
- The committee expressed their support of active transport measures and the recent increase in cycling and walking due to Covid-19 social distancing measures and traffic restrictions. The committee agreed that encouraging home working to continue and encouraging relevant authorities to implement such measures would be helpful to reduce carbon emissions.
- The committee asked for the report to include some highlighting (editing) of the changes. An officer confirmed that the items labelled "paused" were the ones where progress had been impacted by Covid-19.

- There was interest in the Faringdon Leisure centre renewable energy (item 4). An officer responded that the leisure team are looking at the cost and the carbon benefit. Upfront costs are a consideration, but the potential is being explored.
- Oxfordshire tree mapping (item 5) – an officer confirmed that a specialist planning officer can come to a future CEAC committee meeting to present to the group.
- It was confirmed that the economic development team were focussed on Covid-19 efforts, and that Oxfordshire Green Tech (item 7) was to be progressed at a later stage.
- Item 6 on solar energy opportunities – an officer updated that this is delivered by an external company and is in progress. Senior Management Team (SMT) approval is needed to sign off the specification and quote received.
- Crowmarsh office project – contingency was built into the programme of work. SMT and Cabinet will review the impact of Covid-19.
- The planning design guide (item 13) – delivery of the project is expected by Sept 2021. A task and finish group was agreed, to be held with the specialist planning team. The committee should advise on climate-related principles. The guide should be set up to make green alterations to current stock, not just projects of 10+ homes. Officers to put this point forward to the planning team. Current planning policies to be circulated to the committee before the task and finish.
- The Project Lead for climate emergency – Michelle Wells is working on the job evaluation and the salary banding – which needs to go to SMT before being advertised.
- Electric pool vehicles for staff travel (item 18) – there is still time until the delivery date – may need to wait and see whether this project changes in light of Covid-19 and widespread working from home.
- The lighting at the Beacon in Wantage (item 20)– proposed that this could be done whilst the building is closed. The corporate energy officer confirmed this is being discussed within the parameters of safety advice and social distancing.
- The committee were supportive of cycling and walking encouragement measures
- Solar panels in carparks – this was suggested by members, examples include Northern France.
- Officers reminded the committee that the work programme has been ratified by Cabinet and cannot be changed after a thorough and well-rounded selection process by the CEAC and is fixed for 2020/21.

In summary, it was proposed that:

The task and finish group will review the Aether report in July, will have a specialist planning officer present to them regarding the tree mapping project at a future committee meeting, and the specialist planning team will consult the CEAC regarding the design guide; initiation of this through a task and finish group meeting.

It was noted to also invite substitute committee members to the task and finish group regarding the Aether report.

Other mentioned items:

- Will there be an update on car parking charges
- Discussing virtual meetings will be a future agenda item
- Proactive promotion of meetings needed – twitter etc

8. Public participation

There was one statement submitted before the meeting.

Statement:

“Dear Councillors,

We have all enjoyed the quieter streets in Abingdon during the coronavirus lockdown and have also noticed the increase in traffic over recent weeks. As you are aware, on 9th May, the government announced that it is making funds available to create and improve infrastructure for cycling:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking>

We want to know what the plans are in Abingdon to improve the safety of cycling in response to this announcement. In particular, we would like feedback on what the plans are for pop-up bike lanes with protected space for cycling, wider pavements, safer junctions, and cycle- and bus-only corridors as part of the £250 million emergency active travel fund which the government has made available across England.

We have some suggestions on routes in Abingdon which we feel are currently unsafe and where safety for cyclists could be improved through pop-up cycle lanes. These are: Oxford Road, Wootton Road, Spring Road, Ock St and Drayton Road. We also suggest that the Oxford Road through Bagley Wood could be closed to through traffic to create a direct and safer route for cycle commuters to travel into work.

Some other suggestions we have which could be immediately implemented include an end to free car parking and creating more cycle parking in Abingdon town centre.

Longer-term measures which should be considered to improve safety for cyclists include widening current cycle paths, giving cyclists priority at junctions, closing off roads used as rat runs for through-traffic (where there are alternatives) and introducing 20mph speed limits on residential roads.

We appreciate that road infrastructure decisions are made by the county council. If they are the ones who will be administering the government funding, then we would like to see the district council’s Climate Emergency Advisory Committee putting pressure on them to begin urgently using this money to create local, safe cycle spaces.

Kind regards,

Jenny, Pete, Tim, Michelle and Nicky (Representatives from XR Abingdon)”

Councillor De La Harpe is cycling champion and welcomes suggestions like this, and from other Parishes in the Vale of White Horse district. It was discussed that CEAC should show support of active travel and traffic restriction measures that have been set up in light of Covid-19. Also noted that a letter from Council would add strength to the message.

A motion was moved by Councillor De La Harpe and seconded by Councillor Jenner. All seven members were in favour.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) ask the Chairman to write to Oxfordshire County Council to show support of the active travel and traffic restriction measures being developed by Oxfordshire County Council, and support these to become a permanent measure; and
- (b) ask Cabinet to recommend to Council that they write to Oxfordshire County Council in support of these measures also.

The meeting closed at 19:35