

Notes

of an informal meeting of



Climate emergency advisory committee members

THIS MEETING WAS HELD AS AN INFORMAL, VIRTUAL MEETING

The recording can be watched here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Hc0SPQvxEs>

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Members: Councillors David Grant (Chair), Eric Batts, Eric De La Harpe, Amos Duveen (Vice Chair), Hayleigh Gascoigne, Alison Jenner and Bob Johnston

Officers: Heather Saunders, Harry Barrington-Mountford, Andy Egan and Suzanne Malcolm, Candida McKelvey and Heather Saunders

Also present:

Public Speakers: Sally Reynolds and Lucille Savin of Abingdon Carbon Cutters.

52. Chair's announcements

General comments from Chair's introduction:

- Good feedback received regarding the Town and Parish Forum, and that more events like this would be appreciated.
- There was ongoing investigative work on retrofitting homes, and ensuring the skilled workers are available to complete the works needed. Ties into the Joint Scrutiny committee, who have a task and finish group on this item. We will find a way to share Joint Scrutiny task and finish group report on retrofit with CEAC members.

53. Apologies for absence

None.

54. Declarations of interest

None.

55. Urgent business

None.

56. Public participation

Public Speakers: Sally Reynolds and Lucille Savin of Abingdon Carbon Cutters.

- The public speakers talked about the tree policy and what they look for when helping organisations to plant trees.
- What are the aims? Who are the audience? Have sites been surveyed yet? Tree selection? Purpose – is it public access, is safety a consideration? Would there be any financial backing or external grant funding? timescales? Maturity of trees wanted? public engagement needed?
- We have been trying since 2019 to work through policy and permissions to plant on suitable land in Abingdon. The way forward wasn't clear, and we hope the new tree policy will be a one-stop shop to be able to plant trees.
- Wanting clarity, and a list of what is wanted from community groups to get permission.
- Could the council be proactive and identify pieces of land that are ready to be applied for.

57. The Development of Vale of White Horse Tree Policy

The Tree Policy, presented by Elizabeth Kingdom, an overview of the policy - are we going in the right direction.

- High level document to facilitate community groups planting on Council land.
- Other documents that exist – nationally, England Trees Action Plan. Corporate Plan, Climate Emergency declaration, Design Guide, Tree Protection Orders, Tree Care criteria, and a Green infrastructure strategy.
- Outlines how to protect, develop, and manage trees on our land.
- The principles are: Care and maintenance, supporting biodiversity, planning and development, community involvement.
- Email climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk with any comments. The policy will be sent out for review too. The deadline for comment is 2 July.

Comments:

Agreed this should be a joint policy with SODC. The aims are the same for the districts. Feedback on the community principle – town and parish council involvement was viewed as an important lead on this. Noted we should be ready for community groups to be involved.

Needs to be the right trees in the right place. We should not exclude other eco positive projects, such as flower meadows and hedgerows.

New housing developments – people want to plant trees. Management companies are managing these, not town or parish. Can local companies get involved to help fund local projects? Onsite carbon offsetting for companies to take up?

Councillors can communicate to community – parish newsletters, social media, sharing council communications.

It was felt the principles were good, specific goals should be outlined clearly in the policy.

A view was expressed that an understanding of how much carbon is captured, annually, and how does this change over time, is wanted in the policy.

What happens at the end of life of a tree – consideration. Officer stated that this may be in tree maintenance. The Parks team may be able to advise on the procedure followed.

Shade from trees in built up areas is important for managing heat waves.

Oxford College furniture making department – could we ask them for advice?

Can we choose species that can be used for building materials afterwards, therefore locking away more carbon, and replacing mature trees with carbon absorbing saplings?

A higher concentration of trees (like a woodland) for people to visit – will the policy cover larger projects such as this?

Officer informed that Oxford Trees for the Future are developing a mapping tool as an online resource. There is an ELM Scheme to incentivise turning farmland into environmentally sustainable landscaped areas.

A draft is wanted for viewing by CEAC, but not to hold back the timeline for sign off, understanding that time is of the essence.

58. Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) projects

This item was regarding our leisure centres. In phase 1 of the funding, £1 billion was available to this scheme, managed by Salix, on behalf of the government. We submitted a £361k bid, for Faringdon leisure centre, for air source heat pumps and solar energy works. We are pleased to announce we were successful. The project is on track, with the contract being awarded already.

Phase 2 of this scheme was for £75 million. A significantly smaller amount. We submitted for Wantage Leisure Centre, for £614k. We unfortunately were not successful in this phase.

Harry Barrington Mountford added that the team had reflected on this. It was felt that the end date was not clear for submissions, and therefore there was a rush for bids, and the submissions were closed when enough bids were received. The addition of mandatory criteria, much later on, meant that it negatively affected our bid. The team worked hard around the easter break to look at this, and unfortunately, we missed out. We did not have time to amend our bid before the submission window closed. Larger organisation's full time bid teams were more able to meet the tight deadline and the change in the mandatory criteria. However, we expect a third phase of funding to bid for.

A member did ask whether the notification of phases of funding could be shared wider to towns and parishes. HBM responded that it would depend on whether smaller organisations could manage such applications in light of phase 2, and we can advise if it would be useful to them.

Options regarding external consultants will be explored.

The committee raised the importance of having plans in place so that when funds become available at short notice, we are able to bid successfully.

59. Task and finish group update

DEFRA environmental principles consultation was discussed in one group. We formed a VOWHDC response to the consultation. Our main comments were, in brief:

- We didn't feel there was enough quantitative, practical, robust priorities. We gave suggestions to improve this.
- Cascade from the environment bill – we felt these principles were watered down from the bill. We felt we should be more positive than just mitigation. We want to prevent harm in the first place.

The meeting closed at 7.11 pm