

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Climate

Emergency

Advisory Committee



held on Monday, 27 March 2023 at 6.00 pm
this was a virtual meeting

Open to the public, including the press

Present:

Councillors: Hayleigh Gascoigne (chair), Catherine Webber, David Grant, Eric De La Harpe, Alison Jenner

Cabinet Member: Councillor Sally Povolotsky (Environment, Climate Emergency and Technical Services)

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

40. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Eric Batts.

41. Declaration of interests

None.

42. Urgent business

None.

43. Chair's announcements

Chair mentioned daylight savings time starting, and how it was originally put in place to save energy by being awake in more daylight.

Councillor Jenner has previously asked about a potential meadow creation presentation for committee, and an event had been sourced by an officer for members to attend. A link will be shared with committee on email.

Chair thanked everyone's contributions to committee, in light of the upcoming elections and the potential for committee membership to change.

44. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record, and the chair shall sign them as such.

45. Public participation

John Salmons addressed the committee.

He asked, "Insofar as this Committee exists to review and make recommendations to the Cabinet on how the Council can reduce their damage to the environment, is this Committee supportive of the Council's scheme to tarmac over a wildflower meadow, and if not, what steps will the Committee take to protect this important habitat from development?"

Chair noted that the relevant Cabinet Member for Environment, Climate Emergency and Technical Services was present, and Cabinet Member responded when asked:

South Oxfordshire District Council made a planning application to use part of a site which was currently used by construction firms (it was base zero for Taylor Wimpey and had been for the last 18 to 20 years) as a location for the council shared Grounds Maintenance team.

The land was in the Vale of White Horse District Council (VOWHDC), but in its capacity as a Planning Authority, therefore had to remain impartial, which was why South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) made the application and not VOWHDC.

I was concerned about the misinformation that was circulating amongst the local community and in the local media and SODC withdrew its application, to engage more widely with the local community to ensure the reasons for choosing the site were very clear - I understand that one of those reasons was the central location of the site meaning much reduced mileage for the vehicles which obviously will be on our policy, to head towards zero emissions and also reduced carbon emissions due to the amount of activity there will need to be on Great Western Park and obviously the future for Valley Park just next door as a proposed facility will serve both South and Vale districts.

We would ensure that affected Vale residents were communicated with before any new plans were submitted, and one of the things that we discussed on our emails Mr Salmons was around the vision for that site beyond what had been communicated already and the original plans that were put in needed to go a lot further and do a lot more for the community. An ecological assessment was submitted with the withdrawn application, and we expect to see that any further application would set out details for any ecological mitigation and biodiversity net gain as you mentioned earlier with the different metrics, that was an essential part of planning now, and we would work to ensure that this means any land set aside for biodiversity features in early proposals would be more than offset by additional planting and schemes nearby.

We won't expect any future application to detail the need for or benefit of the maintenance yard to be located at this site, but as mentioned, currently there was no active planning application for this site, and I am more than happy to continue communicating with you accordingly.

Chair thanked Councillor Povolotsky for her response. Chair expressed the importance of open communication and transparency, and thanked Mr. Salmons for his question.

46. Update from the Cabinet member / climate team

Cabinet member updated the committee.

Future Oxfordshire Partnership - Environmental Advisory Group

The last Environment Advisory Group (EAG) meeting took place on 02/03/2023 and the main item of discussion was the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan which we will be looking at later on in the agenda.

There was also a discussion about what the EAG could do to help inform the current debate around the location of ground mounted solar farms. Further work was required to scope out what needs to be done and this will be brought back to a future meeting of EAG for discussion.

Energy

Following the successful bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and the award of £5.99m for works to Wantage Leisure Centre and White Horse Tennis and Leisure Centre, we had started work looking at our other buildings, with a contract to be awarded for site decarbonisation assessments for Abbey Meadows Pool and the Beacon. These assessments will determine what works were required to decarbonise the buildings and will inform the evidence required to make future funding bids to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

APSE Energy 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 and will feed into future decisions about investment.

Climate Action Fund (CAF) 2022/23.

A total of £42,835 was awarded to 15 organisations across the Vale of White Horse, to support projects taking climate action. Following the successful allocation of funds in 2021/22 and 2022/23 officers had initiated a review of the previous CAF rounds in order to prepare for launching the next round of funding which will benefit from an increased allocation of £100k.

Bid to Net Zero Fast Followers Fund

Officers submitted a funding application to the Net Zero Living, Fast Followers programme. If successful in this bid, this project will fund an officer post and consultant support to develop an approach to investment in nature-based carbon offsetting in Oxfordshire, aiming to offer Oxfordshire's businesses and local authorities' opportunities to invest in nature-based carbon sequestration schemes within the county. South Oxfordshire were leading the bid, and Vale of White Horse District Council, Cherwell District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership were project partners.

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding

The Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles (OZEV) had awarded £700k from the pilot LEVI scheme (we were previously unsuccessful with OZEV wanting to "level up" other areas). The money will be used across the county to fund cable gullies enabling Oxfordshire residents with properties on the street without off street parking to run an Electric Vehicle charging cable under the pavement to charge their EVs.

Nature Recovery:

Officers in the Climate and Biodiversity team worked with the Parks and Communications teams to develop the 'Let it Bee' project which aims to promote wildlife friendly management of council owned land. This follows on from the No-Mow May trials which ran across the last growing season and will involve a total of nine sites covering around 51,000m² where the grass will be left to grow for the benefit of wildlife. The sites are spread across Abingdon, Faringdon, and Wantage. In addition, we also created a new wildflower meadow at Herons Walk in Abingdon where the grass was scarified, and a wildflower mix was sown. All the sites will be monitored this summer to determine how successful the approach is both in terms of wildlife benefit, costs and public perception.

Cabinet member also mentioned the International Panel for Climate Change's (IPCC) current warning to take more ambitious action for a sustainable future for all. She thanked all

committee members and urged those continuing in the role after the elections to continue to push for climate action.

In questions to the Cabinet member, Cabinet member would send Cllr Grant details of the member who had EV gullies in their ward, to get further information.

Another question was raised about solar panels on car parks. Currently there were no plans, the current focus for redevelopment on carparks was green and blue infrastructure. Examples in France were much larger than what we have. Cabinet member suggested that there were many rooftops to utilise first. Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader also added that there was a study commissioned to look at ground mounted solar panels on council properties, by a company called APSE. The pros and cons of such work, including car parks, would be looked at.

47. Environment Act update

Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader updated the committee and provided presentation slides which will be included with the minutes.

The main points were:

- Biodiversity Net Gain Consultation had been commented on by Government. A clearer steer given on where legislation was likely to go. Including small scale household planning applications being excluded from 10% biodiversity net gain. 'Small scale' needed to be better defined for custom and self-build applications. November 2023 was the start date for biodiversity net gain delivery on large scale / major applications.
- From November 2025, National Infrastructure Projects were included in Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Offsite net gains will be on a public register.
- Natural England will be the supplier of 'biodiversity credits' for developments that cannot fulfil biodiversity net gain on-site and cannot find a local supplier.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). Oxfordshire County Council had offered to be the responsible body (had to be County level). There was a steering group in place, including councils, AONBs, trusts and other partners. Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader was a representative on this group, representing our local councils.
- Defra had published guidance and regulations for LNRS on 23 March 2023. Part of this was the need for mapping biodiversity. We will update the work we had already undertaken on mapping.

A member asked how biodiversity net gain would be maintained later? Team Leader responded that it would likely be the developer / maintenance company on site (covered by planning conditions / obligations), or the organisation taking the money to deliver the offsite net gain habitat. Local Planning Authority had an obligation to ensure delivery and maintenance for 30 years after habitat creation in the district. Offsite will be recorded by Natural England on the BNG site register. There would need to be further clarity on this in due course.

A member asked about biodiversity credits – can we have a local scheme to better monitor local investment in net gain and the later maintenance of habitats? Team Leader explained that a separate trading body would need to be set up as it would be a commercial enterprise, there were further rules around a district council being a habitat bank. There were other organisations that we could work with to ensure net gain can be kept locally.

Chair suggested the topic of habitat banks should be a future agenda item or task group.

48. Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan

Senior Climate Action Officer briefed the committee on the progress of the PAZCO route map and action plan, which had been finalised.

- Contains detailed pathway modelling and route maps identifying carbon emission reductions needed to achieve net zero by 2050.
- Proposes joint actions to address the County's direct emissions, the circular economy and some scope three.
- Reviewed and endorsed by Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) on 20 March 2023.
- County led the consultation process
- There were 14 priority actions proposed, delivered by joint working in Oxfordshire. Advisory groups of the FOP will lead on areas of work, monitoring against targets and reporting back to FOP on a yearly basis.
- Five actions had been identified for prioritisation, particularly where work was already underway. 1. Building Decarbonisation and retrofit. 2. Local Area Energy Planning. 3. Electric Vehicle Infrastructure. 4. Land-based carbon sequestration model. 5. Green finance / green bonds. Funding sources being critical to continuing this work.

The action plan will draw on resources of the partners involved. Currently there were no financial commitments from Vale of White Horse on publication of this action plan, no financial commitment made yet, but details would need to emerge as to the various funding streams, as well as ownership and resourcing of particular actions.

After the presentation, committee discussed education and the role of educating future skilled workers / green skills gap, working with local colleges. The action plan was looking to influence here and work with County who have education responsibility.

Concern was raised by a member over the achievability of retrofitting, we needed to look at what was a realistic target, where some older houses were tricky to effectively retrofit. Team Leader explained that there were high ambitions in the original report and the new report follows the same trajectory to demonstrate what was needed to achieve climate targets.

Chair suggested recommending that where it was felt that a target was not close to achievable, whether buffers could be in place for other targets that were more achievable. Team Leader added that this was a live document that would be reviewed as time moves on, should some areas of work prove to be difficult to achieve.

Building regulations were raised as a concern, we needed stronger regulations to ensure that developers included air source heat pumps etc. Was there any new or strengthened regulations? Officers would find out and feedback to Councillor Webber. Planning authorities can request higher standards than the regulations allow for.

Page 82 in the pack – a member asked about the use of natural gas for district heating, considering that it could not be decarbonised. It was thought that it would be easier to upgrade in future, but not suggesting new gas heating.

Proposal for rooftop solar panels in the report states its for Oxford City, but it was confirmed it would be opened up to the districts. City was currently ahead for this, and it would be rolled out in due course.

It was confirmed that working groups would be prioritised first in order to allocate current resources.

49. Climate Action Plan Performance Quarter 3

]The committee reviewed quarter three performance of the Climate Action Plan (CAP).

Questions included:

- A member asked about developing the section on officer reports, regarding climate and ecological implications. Team Leader explained that the aim was for the Climate Action Team to be part of the review process for all report sections on climate. Training will be considered, and officers noted this comment.
- Page 125 – EV charging points. A member raised the concern of slow charging, which puts off purchasing of EV cars. Team Leader explained that uptake had not been great for EV charging, but this issue would need to be fed back to the specific teams involved in this work as it wasn't the Climate Action Team. Officers could enquire during the quarter four data gathering for the CAP performance report. Members discussed where fast and slow chargers needed to be.
- Page 119 SD10: asked about working with Town and Parish Councils, and the monthly engagement sessions - was there more information on what these entailed? How does this link to page 134 - C11 (quarterly climate focus network meetings, which were marked amber)? Team Leader explained that SD10 was linked to planning service – a surgery for planning issues. There was opportunity to raise environmental issues here, and it was well-established. C11 was being looked at by the Climate Action Team, but was resource intensive, and we were working with the Communications Team to gauge the best way to implement this. Not one-size-fits-all. Looking at how we communicate to different groups – ranging from face-to-face to utilising existing networks and communication streams – a multifaceted approach.
- Page 34 – C7: the website information on 'reduce your energy costs' was praised by a member.
- Page 136 - OP3: Was there a way for CEAC to have a more direct role in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP)? Team Leader encouraged CEAC to respond to the consultation process – but officers would follow up with the relevant team on other ways that could assist the CEAC in having more impact on the development of LCWIP.
- Chair commended the new additions to the layout of the report.

Recommendation

To Cabinet: As part of the Local Plan, we should highlight areas suitable for EV service stations for mixed vehicles, for cars and freight/lorries.

50. Future items

Chair suggested that the topic of habitat banks should be a future agenda item or task group.

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Chair:

Date: