



Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee – Draft Minutes

Monday 11 March 2024

Venue:	Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon PE29 3TN	
Time:	10.00 to 12.00	
Members Present:	Councillor Bridget Smith Councillor Lara Davenport-Ray Councillor Martin Goodearl Councillor Nicola Day Councillor Mike Todd-Jones Councillor Lorna Dupre Mayor Dr Nik Johnson	South Cambridgeshire District Council (Chair) Huntingdonshire District Council (Vice Chair) East Cambridgeshire District Council Peterborough City Council Cambridge City Council Cambridgeshire County Council CPCA Mayor
In Attendance	Helen Lack	Development & Delivery Manager – Environment and Parks Huntingdonshire District Council
Apologies	Cllr Gavin Elsey	Peterborough City Council

Minutes:

1	Announcements, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest
1.1	Apologies were received from Cllr Elsey who was substituted by Cllr Day.
1.2	No declarations of interest were made.
2	Minutes of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee meeting on 15 January 2024 and Action Log
2.1	The minutes of the meeting on 15 January 2024 were approved as an accurate record, subject to the following amendments, listed as actions: <u>ACTIONS:</u> 1. Officers to supply Members with further information on 6.2a and the housing monies received from Government. 2. The status of actions 1 and 2 on the Action Log in relation to the Climate Action Plan, to be changed from <i>closed</i> to <i>on-going</i> .
3	Public Questions
3.1	One public question had been received. This had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting and can be found, together with the response given by the Chair, on the website here: CMIS > Meetings under additional meeting documents. The question was read out by the Governance Manager.
4.	Combined Authority Forward Plan
4.1	The Combined Authority Forward Plan was noted by the Committee.

<p>5.</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p> <p>5.3</p>	<p>Directorate Highlight Report</p> <p>The Executive Director, Place & Connectivity, introduced the report which provided a general update on the key activities of the Place and Connectivity Directorate in relation to Environment and Sustainable Communities, which were not covered in other reports to the meeting. It also provided information on some key developments, risks and opportunities that had emerged.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Wisbech had been named as one of 20 towns to receive up to £20million of Government funding for investments and initiatives over the next ten years. The Mayor asked when the money would be received and whether it would come to the CA to passport it through or whether it would go directly to the District Council. Officers would write to Central Government asking them to confirm the arrangements of the Grant. b) If a homeowner of one of the £100k homes at Fordham approached the CA wanting to sell their home before a further decision on the CA's position, in respect of nominating purchasers, had been made, then East Cambridgeshire District Council would be asked to nominate someone on their list, replicating what had been done previously. Correspondence from Fordham Parish Council, who kept their own list of potential residents, would also be passed on and taken into consideration. c) The Executive Director would liaise with the Assistant Director for Skills and provide a written note for the Committee indicating when the new Centre for Green Technology would be open to students, what green skills would be on offer and how these met local need, and also what transport options had been considered. Members were also interested in finding out what the private industry initiatives to develop green skills were. d) The Committee would welcome a briefing session on the issues around water and what the 'plan' was for increasing the availability of water in Cambridgeshire to meet the needs of future development. e) The Mayor voiced his serious concerns about the development consent that had been granted by the Secretary of State for the Medworth Energy from Waste 'super' incinerator at Wisbech which he felt was a project that was wholly inappropriate for the town. Fenland District Council were exploring whether there were grounds for a judicial ruling on the issue and if so, would be looking for support to undertake this. <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>A. The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to note the report.</p> <p>ACTIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to write to central Government to ask them to confirm the arrangements of the £20m grant funding for Wisbech, as announced in the latest budget. 2. The Executive Director for Place and Connectivity to liaise with the Assistant Director for Skills to provide a briefing note for the Committee giving further information on the new centre for Green technology and the development of green skills in the region. 3. A briefing session on the supply of water and the impact it would have on future development in the region to be organised for Members. 4. A report on Communications activities within the Climate Agenda to be added to the agenda for the Committee's June meeting.
<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>Affordable Housing Report</p> <p>The Housing Programme Manager introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress of the Affordable Housing Programme 2017-2022. Completions were now anticipated by the end of the financial year 2025/26.</p> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <p>A. The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee noted the report.</p> <p>ACTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to show the housing developments on a map to depict the coverage of the whole CPCA area and to circulate this to Members.

<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p>	<p>Huntingdonshire Biodiversity for All Programme Update</p> <p>The Committee received a presentation from Helen Lack, Development and Delivery Manager – Environment and Parks at Huntingdonshire District Council. The presentation updated members on the Biodiversity for All Programme which had been awarded a three-year £1.35 million bid by the CPCA to accelerate the delivery of measurable biodiversity net gain in Huntingdonshire. The presentation has been published and can be found on the website here: CMIS > Meetings under additional meeting documents.</p> <p>During discussion, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) It was hoped that the work that HDC were doing on Biodiversity could inform projects and be applied across the CPCA region. b) Communities could apply for time with HDC’s ecologists who would then carry out a detailed site audit, highlighting ways in which biodiversity could be increased. This enabled communities to then apply for a grant either from HDC or other external sources. c) Residents were encouraged to download the iNaturalist app to help map biodiversity in the CPCA area. d) Young people had and would be involved in the project; students at ARUP (Anglia Ruskin University Peterborough) through their SHoKE (Students At The Heart of Knowledge Exchange) programme and local pupils whose schools had applied for grants. e) Once the concept had been proved the work could be rolled out not only within the CPCA area and its constituent authorities but to other authorities nationally. f) Members queried whether biodiversity was being considered in relation to the planting on the A14. g) The Mayor commended the officers and the programme for the work that had been done and was extremely proud to see its progress and development. <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to write to and engage with National Highways to keep up pressure about the planting on the A14.
<p>8.</p> <p>8.1</p> <p>8.2</p>	<p>Climate Action Plan Review</p> <p>The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report which sought agreement for revisions to the Action Plan and laid out the broad principles which would guide the development of the capital and revenue climate programme delivery.</p> <p>During discussion, the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) This Plan would run until March 2025 so this date would apply to updated sections without a specific date. b) The intention of the amendments to the Plan was to increase pace on both the engagement and delivery during 2024 and through to March 2025 c) Members queried whether the action (listed under Work Stream 2) to deliver small scale community projects under the Net Zero villages investment programme could be sped up if monies were passported out to either individual partner councils or by having one council as the accountable body to deliver the grants. The CPCA would have to resource up to manage the process whereas there were already some councils set up to undertake this. Under this proposal delivery of the programme could be accelerated and far less money would be spent on the administration costs. d) The Mayor voiced concerns that the ambitions that were set by the Independent Climate Commission (ICC) and agreed by the Board could be diluted if costs have to be incurred to enable partners to spend. Members felt that concerns could be allayed by having a watertight agreement that defined the remit of the accountable body so that it aligned with the Plan and that could also stipulate that a maximum, for example, of 10% be spent on administration costs. e) There is a ‘Place’ directors’ group, with representatives from the CA and all the constituent authorities, that met regularly to discuss issues and this could be used as a vehicle for discussion on the proposal to passport out the Net Zero Villages funding.

- f) All the constituent authorities had been brought together so that they could share their experiences of preparing for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) systems and this led on to discussion about sharing officers and different arrangements. The action to have an effective BNG system for the CPCA was about collaborative working such as supporting landowners who could bring forward good schemes that could offer BNG credits. The CA had also been working with Natural Cambridgeshire to identify good locations that could deliver BNG.
- g) Officers in the Climate Change Team at Peterborough City Council (PCC) who had helped to update the Plan and intended to help deliver the upcoming Plan for 2025-2028 were fully supportive of the additional provision of £9m of capital in the MTFP but felt that the CA needed to define the criteria for awarding the funding more fully so that projects could be developed to align with this.
- h) Members were concerned that if officers were to come back in June with their suggested capital and revenue spending this was already one quarter into the financial year and there would be very little room for Members to input and shape plans by then. Officers reassured Members that, as part of the new processes emerging on how the Authority assessed its projects through the Assurance Framework, the new project concept template would be used in an informal way to gather views from constituent authorities and Members, and that this would be pushed out very soon.
- i) In any kind of programme design there was a balance to be struck between achieving the strategic aims of the CA and what applicants wanted to do.
- j) It was important to reflect on the capital nature of the funds and whether to have fewer, larger capital grants that would take longer to push out because of the planning involved but would fit with the aim to do fewer things better, or whether there should be a programme of smaller capital grants that many could participate in.
- k) The Mayor asked that as projects were delivered that the joint collaborative working was recognised in the form of some type of small plaque.
- l) Going forwards there would be more visible communications to help drive the shared collaborative position.

8.3 On being proposed by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Davenport-Ray, the Committee resolved to:

RESOLVED

- A. Agree the revisions to the Climate Action Plan 2022-2025 actions as set out in Appendix A, and delegate authority to the Executive Director, Place and Connectivity to approve relevant changes to the supporting text of the Plan prior to publication.
- B. Comment on the proposed approach to developing the capital and revenue climate programme as agreed in the MTFP.
- C. Agree £50,000 in FY2024/25 and £120,000 in FY 2025/26 from the Subject to Approval revenue budget allocation for Natural Cambridgeshire, delegating authority to the Executive Director Place and Connectivity to consider and approve a revision to the existing grant funding agreement.
- D. Agree £60,000 in both FY2024/25 and FY 2025/26 from the Subject to Approval revenue budget allocation for Fenland Soil, delegating authority to the Executive Director Place and Connectivity to consider and approve an extension to the existing grant funding agreement.

ACTIONS:

- 1. Officers to confirm with the Monitoring Officer that changes to the delivery of the NetZero Villages funding could be agreed by the Committee without being referred to Board and if so, that officers write to constituent councils to explore whether any of them would be willing to become the accountable body for the Programme and its funds.
- 2. Officers to invite Fenland Soil to present at a future meeting of the Committee.

9 Care Homes Retrofit Programme Update

9.1 The Strategic Planning Manager and the Executive Director, Place and Connectivity introduced the report which provided an update on the Care Homes Retrofit Programme, recommending an extension to the current programme with an end date to December 2025 but with a review in June.

<p>9.2</p> <p>9.3</p>	<p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A review of the Care Homes Retrofit Programme would form part of the wider funding discussion on the Budget at the June meeting. b) Options for the programme were contained within the report at section 3.9 c) Members were uncomfortable with making a decision today on continuing with the Programme and its £2 million budget until December 2025 and instead suggested that the Committee approve a sum that covered the indicative grant commitment of £285,950. d) Officers wanted to make sure that any cap did not preclude any applications going through the current process, despite the indicative grant commitment. <p>On being proposed by Councillor Davenport -Ray and seconded by Councillor Dupre, the Committee resolved to replace the report recommendation as follows:</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> (UNANIMOUS)</p> <p>A. That the Care Homes Retrofit Programme be capped at £400k with delegated decision making to be given to the Executive Director for Place and Connectivity to amend that figure once the full extent of the spend is clear.</p>
<p>10</p> <p>10.1</p> <p>10.2</p> <p>10.3</p>	<p>Budget and Performance Report – January 2024</p> <p>The Assistant Director, Finance introduced the report which provided an update of the financial position for 2023/24 and an analysis against the 2023/24 budget up to the period ending January 2024.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Any underspend for the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator and the Public Decarbonisation Fund would be rolled over into the next financial year. b) The big underspend was around the domestic retro fit programme that Government had devolved out to the Net Zero Hubs around the country. Local Authority Delivery (LAD) 1, LAD 2 and HUG (Home Upgrade Grant) 1 had all completed. After an audit any underspends for these programmes would be returned to the Department for Net Zero (DNEZ). This underspend was currently forecast at between £800-900k. c) DNEZ had decided to change some of the terms and conditions for HUG2, which was the successor scheme to HUG1. This had led to significant delays, both locally and across the country, in contracting with providers to deliver the retrofit interventions and meant that nine months of the programme had been lost in the current financial year. DNEZ was sighted on the speed of process because this time, rather than giving the money upfront, authorities applied for the money to be released in tranches as projects completed. It was unrealistic to expect delivery of a two-year programme in little over a year so, on a national basis, discussions were ongoing with DNEZ about what was going to happen to the underspend. The CA would continue to do its best to deliver and had put in for a change request to the programme. d) At the January meeting Members had queried 3.3 of the finance report which stated that the forecast outturn for Net Zero was expected to underspend but the figures in table showed an overspend. In the current report the forecast outturn was expected to be in line with budget and Members wanted to know what had changed during this time and the two reports. <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee:</p> <p>A. Note the financial position of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Division for the financial year 23/24 to November 2023.</p> <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <p>1. Officers to provide a note for Members to explain the change in the forecast outturn between January and March.</p>

<p>11</p> <p>11.1</p> <p>11.2</p>	<p>Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee Agenda Plan</p> <p>Members discussed whether an informal session in May should be considered in order to help streamline the heavy workload scheduled for the next meeting in June. Officers would report back to the Committee with a proposal on this.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>A. That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee Agenda Plan be noted with the addition of the following items, as discussed in the meeting:</p> <p><u>June meeting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Programme 24-25 • Infrastructure Delivery Framework • Local Nature Recovery Strategy • Communication Strategy • £100k Homes • Rural Communities Energy Fund • Net Zero Villages • MTFP Update on Environmental Projects <p><u>For future Consideration – yet to be allocated:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fenland Soil • Locally Determined Contributions • A14/East-West Rail • Water Supply • Drought Affected Roads • Local Area Energy Plan • Update on the Waterbeach Solar Panels and Charging Project
<p>17</p> <p>17.1</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 19 June 2024.</p>

Meeting Ended: 12.47pm