



# Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee – Draft Minutes

**Monday 13 November 2023**

Venue:	Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon PE29 3TN	
Time:	10.00 to 12.00	
Present:	Councillor Bridget Smith Councillor Martin Goodearl Councillor Gavin Elsey Councillor Mike Todd-Jones Councillor Lara Davenport-Ray Councillor Lorna Dupre Mayor Dr Nik Johnson	Chair and Member for South Cambridgeshire District Council East Cambridgeshire District Council Peterborough City Council Cambridge City Council Huntingdonshire District Council Cambridgeshire County Council CPCA Mayor
Apologies	Ms Belinda Clarke	Business Board Representative

## Minutes:

<b>1</b>	<b>Announcements, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest</b>
1.1	The Chair welcomed the new Peterborough member of the Committee, Cllr Gavin Elsey
1.2	Apologies were received from Ms Belinda Clarke, Business Representative.
1.2	Cllr Elsey declared an interest at Item 8 on the agenda, specifically section 2.3 of the report; Care Homes Retrofit programme as he was a Director of Ethos Care Group.
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee meeting on 11 September 2023 and Action Log</b>
2.1	Before the meeting Cllr Davenport-Ray had raised an issue of accuracy in regard to Huntingdonshire's net zero target. To clarify the issue the minutes had been amended at 5.2 (a) to add the words 'for internal council operations'.
2.2	The minutes of the meeting on 11 September 2023, with the amendment as outlined above, were approved as an accurate record.
2.3	The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
<b>3</b>	<b>Public Questions</b>
3.1	No public questions had been received.

<p><b>4.</b></p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p>	<p><b>Combined Authority Forward Plan</b></p> <p>Clr Davenport – Ray asked for the following two additions to be added to the March agenda of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A further update on the GSEnz Hub.</li> <li>• Huntingdonshire Biodiversity for all programme</li> </ul> <p>The Combined Authority Forward Plan was noted by the Committee.</p>
<p><b>5.</b></p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p>	<p><b>Directorate Highlight Report</b></p> <p>Steve Cox, Interim Executive Director – Place &amp; 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> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The CO2 metric being tracked was the net carbon figure but Members were also interested in understanding the gross measure to see whether the downward trend was because there were less carbon emissions being produced or whether it was because some carbon emissions were being sequestered. Officers agreed that it was important to understand both metrics and would investigate this further.</li> <li>b) The dilapidation of the road infrastructure due to extreme weather and the soil lying beneath the roads had been raised with the National Infrastructure Commission. Although this was technically a Cambridgeshire County Council responsibility the support of the Combined Authority was needed in pressing for the significant amount of investment that was needed which was far beyond that available to the County Council.</li> <li>c) The issue of the drought and soil affected roads across the region came within the remit of both the Transport and Infrastructure Committee (TIC) and the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee (ESCC) but was also the responsibility of the two Highways Authorities.</li> <li>d) All other mayoral combined authorities, with the exception of the CPCA, had a City Region’s Sustainable Transport Settlement to fund a 5 year highway investment programme. The CPCA were therefore lobbying hard for this, as not sorting out the roads had an economic impact for the CPCA region in terms of rural connectivity, economic isolation, access to services and being able to run bus services efficiently.</li> <li>e) As part of the budget planning process officers were working to see how they could support Peterborough City Council (PCC) and the County Council in their work on highway investment.</li> <li>f) The Chair suggested that there be a future paper to both the TIC and ESC Committees on the potential economic consequences of not maintaining the road infrastructure, and also the impact of flooding.</li> <li>g) One of the Mayoral priorities was a recognition of the uniqueness of the Fens and how important investment was in roads, flood management and water management. A new reservoir could be a massive opportunity for the region not only for the benefits it would bring but also in terms of tourism and further investment in the economy.</li> <li>h) The Member for Peterborough stressed that PCC would like to be involved in the development of the thematic performance reports.</li> <li>i) The Chair asked that a workshop to further explore the KPIs be held in the new year.</li> </ol> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to note the report.</li> </ol> <p><b><u>ACTIONS:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Officers to investigate the gross CO2 measure and report back to the Committee</li> <li>2. A report on the potential economic consequences of failing to maintain the road infrastructure be presented to both the TIC and E&amp;SCC at a future meeting.</li> </ol>

	3. A KPI workshop to be organised for the Committee in the new year.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Natural Cambridgeshire</b>
6.1	Martin Doel, the new Chair of Natural Cambridgeshire introduced himself to the Committee and talked about the work that natural Cambridgeshire were doing. .
6.2	During discussion the following points were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Professor Doel thanked the Committee for its support of Natural Cambridgeshire.</li> <li>b) After leaving the Airforce, having been Director of Education and Skills for all three forces, Professor Doel became the Chief Executive for the Association of Colleges looking after all the further education colleges across the country. He worked closely with Government developing policy around skills before becoming the first Professor of Skills and Further Education at University College London.</li> <li>c) Taking on the role of Chair of Natural Cambridgeshire had been motivated not only by his work experience but also being a resident in the area and, during the pandemic, becoming much more part of the community.</li> <li>d) The Natural Cambridgeshire Committee was hugely impressive and had brought their expertise to build on the work of the Local Nature Partnership which had been in place since 2012. They had taken up the aim of doubling nature which had been transformed by the provision of the Doubling Nature Fund and were now at the contract stage with three projects. The Committee wanted to learn from these initial projects and look at their output as well as seeing how they could leverage additional funds to ensure the CA got the best value for their investment.</li> <li>e) A small amount of the fund had been allocated to bottom-up community projects. The first deadline for submission was November and there had been a surfeit of applications.</li> <li>f) The development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) brought about huge opportunities to bring emerging strategies into a coherent whole and to identify where there may be putative gaps.</li> <li>g) Natural Cambridgeshire was now in a solid position to get things done as it was able to connect government initiatives with voluntary activity and had strong alliances to take things forward in a very effective way.</li> <li>h) Currently, Natural Cambridgeshire's officers spent a considerable amount of time approaching each of the constituent authorities individually to seek additional funding. A modest increase directly from the CPCA, being a central source, would allow officers to work more profitably and efficiently and make the best use of time.</li> <li>i) In terms of what came next, it was to look at the actions and deliverables and what would come after the LNRS.</li> <li>j) The LNRS steering group had representation from each of the constituent authorities, except for one which had decided to not get involved in the development of the strategy but to comment on its proposals later.</li> <li>k) The Steering group was quite large, but the organisation's preference was to have all involved from the outset.</li> </ul>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</b>
7.1	Adrian Cannard, Strategic Planning Manager, introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress on the development of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Quinton Carroll, from Cambridgeshire County Council and Co-Chair of the LNRS Steering Group was also in attendance (online) to answer any of the Committee's questions.
7.2	During discussion the following points were noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Having a LNRS was a statutory requirement, and the new Government funding was to get the Strategy in place.</li> <li>b) Two consultants had been appointed to carry out key pieces of work for the Strategy; Natural Capital Solutions were doing the mapping of information on habitats and Land Use Consulting to help with the authorship of the document.</li> <li>c) There was a steering group and also thematic groups to look at the different habitats.</li> </ul>

- d) When the LNRS was adopted it would have weight in planning decisions.
- e) Government guidance had been delayed several times so the Authority was further behind than it hoped to be at this stage. The Timetable had therefore had to be adapted and officers would now be working towards approval of the Strategy in March 2025. An updated version of the timetable would be circulated to the Committee.
- f) Although not as advanced as hoped for, the CA was far ahead of the curve when compared to other authorities.
- g) The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) support document had been due to be introduced in November 2023 but had been pushed back to January 2024 again because of delays in Government guidance.
- h) The Chair commented that it was concerning that the delivery timeframe had been delayed especially in light of the huge housing growth that had been planned.
- i) It was frustrating that the CA had to manage expectations from DHLUC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) with dealing with DEFRA (Department for Rural Affairs) which seemed to move to different timetables.
- j) The CA was asked to focus funds and skills attention on supporting the development and training of Ecologists.
- k) Concerns were raised about the ability to deliver within the timeframe and so it was imperative to work closely with partners and have a very robust project management team.
- l) CA officers assured Members that they, and Natural England colleagues who were doing some of the stakeholder work, were closely engaged with the relevant specialists which would help push through delivery. Pressure would also be put on officers in constituent authorities to help get this project delivered and meet the timeframe given.
- m) Local Plans across the area were in different stages of development and review and it was hoped that once the Strategy was approved that the different constituent authorities would align with it as soon as possible. In the meantime, there were ways in which the gaps could be filled.
- n) Officers had learnt from the pilot LNRS projects that it was important to get the balance right with the document between it being a nature driven document and a planning policy appropriate document. In order to get the specialist planning input that was needed the steering group would work with the Planning Policy Forum.
- o) Supporting authorities had two opportunities to comment on and endorse the LNRS before it was submitted to the Secretary of State for sign-off. The timetable was up until the point that it was sent to the Secretary but it could be used whilst it was awaiting formal sign-off.
- p) The Mayor thanked officers for their work on the Strategy but challenged officers to consider the Public Health Implications of having an LNRS, such as having access to nature improving mental health.

**RESOLVED:**

1. To note the progress with the LNRS.

**ACTIONS:**

1. Officers to circulate to the Committee a revised timeline

**8. Climate Projects Update**

8.1 Adrian Cannard, Strategic Planning Manager, introduced the report which provided an update on the climate projects funded by the Combined Authority and set out the rationale for programme alterations where appropriate.

8.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The Care Homes Retrofit Programme was focussed on independent care homes as they had been identified as those most in need of support. Although there was a very simple application process independent care homes were not used to applying for Government funding and there had been a very poor uptake. There would be another push to engage with the homes, after which the Committee could then decide if the criteria should be widened or if the funds should be deployed elsewhere.

- b) An error was noted in the recommendation which stated that the delivery programme for the Care Homes Programme should be extended to December 2024. This should read December **2025**.
- c) Officers had engaged with the Care leads at PCC and CCC, and with the Care Commission, to promote the scheme and identify who to go to. Members suggested that there should also be engagement with environmental officers and economic development officers.
- d) Some of the care homes were looking to invest in their buildings but not for several years so although 50% of costs were covered they could not be persuaded to take up the offer as they were not currently in a financial position to do so.
- e) The City Portrait project had been very specific to Cambridge but the impact of it would be reviewed to see how lessons learnt could be fed back across the region. It was not currently anticipated that any further activity of the same nature would be funded.
- f) The Chair asked that an interim report on the joint Chalk Streams Programme and an update on the Care Homes Retrofit Programme come back to the Committee's January meeting.

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Mayor, the Committee unanimously agreed the following recommendations (with amendments shown in blue):

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That the Sustainable Land Use Advice programme is used for: (a) a Biodiversity Net Gain register, (b) advice to farmers on accessing the Fund for Nature; and (c) support for farming groups looking at landscape-scale solutions.
- 2. To extend the delivery period for the Care Homes Retrofit Programme to December 2024 **25. subject to a full review in January 2024.**
- 3. To extend the Doubling Nature metrics survey programme to January 2026.
- 4. To note the progress on climate-related projects.

**ACTION:**

- 1. The agenda for the January meeting of the Committee to included reports on the following:
  - The joint Chalk Streams Programme
  - An update on the Care Homes Retrofit Programme

**9. Affordable Housing Programme – Update on Implementation**

Azma Ahmad-Pearce, Housing Programme Manager, introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress of the Affordable Housing Programme 2017-2022.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee noted the report.

**10 Housing Loans Update**

10.1 Nick Sweeney, Residential Development Manager, introduced the report which sought to inform the Committee of the current position concerning receipt of loan repayments that were required to fund the 2021-2022 Affordable Housing Programme.

10.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Although the report showed that there was outstanding interest on the loan made to support the development at Histon Road Cambridge, the officer was pleased to report that since the publication of the agenda, the loan had now been repaid. This meant that all the Affordable Housing Programme Loans issued to developers had now been repaid.
- b) In March 2023 the former Housing and Communities Committee were informed that an initial internal review was planned to look into the governance and processes followed in agreeing and managing loan terms between the Combined Authority and private housing developers. The review had yet to take place but a meeting was arranged with the Assistant Director of Finance who would lead on this work.

- c) The money received from the loan repayments would be used to fund the grant commitments under the Affordable Housing Programme.
- d) The CA would not have the ability to undertake any new programmes unless it received more funding in any future devolution deal.
- e) It was up to the CA how this existing programme was managed and the Government was not looking to sign-off on any expenditure.
- f) The Mayor, and other members, hoped that Community Land Trust (CLT) documents, drawn up at the time by a previous administration, would be looked into as part of the internal review into housing loans.

**RESOLVED:**

1. The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to note the current position in respect of loan repayments required to fund the 2021-2022 Affordable Housing Programme.

**11. GSE Net Zero Hub Board Decisions**

11.1 Maxine Narburgh, Regional Director of the GSE Net Zero Hub, introduced the report which set out the decisions made at GSE Net Zero Hub Boards since the delegated authority to the Executive Director of resources and Performance had been approved.

11.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) An interim Net Zero Board terms of reference and governance framework had been agreed to align with the new Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) as well as the transition of the LEP functions into local authorities.
- b) The department was looking to employ a strategic stakeholder manager to start to identify priorities in geographical areas but also to identify areas where project delivery could be accelerated, and commercial investment could be attracted. This would allow the Hub to use these case studies to support other areas, especially those areas that did not have any internal capacity and had not been doing much work in this area. This Hub wanted to make sure that it was servicing the needs across the whole of its geographical patch which was very large.
- c) Members asked that they be reminded of the Community Energy Fund when it got the go ahead so that they could help disseminate information to their parishes.
- d) Towards the last three months of the programme, it became apparent that it was not just the South East that was having issues with delivery but that it was country wide. By being upfront about the difficulties it was experiencing, the GSE Net Zero Hub had built trust with the Government.
- e) The Hub would welcome referrals by local authority officers for the Community Energy Fund so that they could help with the initial scoping, and in effect 'triage' the projects.

**RESOLVED:**

1. To note the decisions made by the GSE Net Zero Hub Board.

**12. Climate Partnership Update**

12.1 Adrian Cannard, Strategic Planning Manager, gave a verbal update on the work of the Climate Partnership and also the Climate Summit which had taken place the week before.

12.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The Climate Partnership celebrated the extension to the university bus service which was now fully electric with a further nine buses added to the existing 30.
- b) The Partnership had received a presentation from Nathan Veer of the Pan-Regional partnership which discussed funding opportunities and the potential for a climate programme budget going forward
- c) The Business Board held a climate workshop and were very interested in strengthening the links between what they were considering and the Climate agenda.

	<p>d) Over a hundred people had attended the climate summit held at Ely Maltings. Items covered on the agenda included Future Fens, retrofit, charging for electric vehicles, soils and farming issues.</p> <p>e) Also highlighted at the conference was the letter received from the Cambridgeshire Youth Group which talked of their climate aspirations. Officers would seek to continue their engagement with them.</p> <p>f) The focus moving forward would be on how to build on this engagement and re-energise climate issues.</p> <p>g) Members reminded officers of the importance of engagement with local people and gathering their views.</p> <p>h) As part of refreshing the Climate Action Plan next year, officers would look to see how the thematic work streams could engage more effectively with communities.</p> <p>i) The Chair thanked the team for the work done on the summit.</p>
<b>13</b>	<b>Budget and Performance Report – November 23</b>
13.1	Tim Greenwood, Finance Manager, 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 September 2023.
13.2	<p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <p>a) Members commented that they felt that the revenue line for climate change shown in the MTFP was insufficient given the scale of the challenge.</p> <p>b) The draft budget would go to Board at the end of November.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Note the financial position of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Division for the financial year 23/24 to September 2023.</li> <li>Review and comment on the current Environment and Sustainable Communities budgets within the Combined Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme.</li> </ol>
<b>14</b>	<b>Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee Agenda Plan</b>
14.1	<p>As discussed under item 8, items on the joint Chalk Streams Programme and the Care Homes Retrofit Programme would be added to the January meeting agenda.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee Agenda Plan be noted.</li> </ol>
<b>15</b>	<b>Exclusion of the Press and Public</b>
	<p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to remain in public session.</li> </ol>
<b>16</b>	<b>Affordable Housing Programme – Reallocation of Funds</b>
16.1	Azma Ahmad-Pearce, Housing Programme Manager, introduced the report which set out the proposals to reallocate funding within the Affordable Housing Programme and provided details of both the sites concerned.
16.2	During discussion the following points were noted:

	<p>a) The Member for Peterborough felt that, knowing the area, it would greatly benefit from completely rented properties rather than shared ownership and asked colleagues to support the proposal.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To note the Affordable Housing Programme and the non-delivery of 4 of the 6 Garage sites, which will lead to the loss of 8-11 units in total, subject to design and planning.</li> <li>2. To approve the reallocation of the remaining funding for the Garage sites to the Stanground site; this sum is £332,500.</li> </ol>
<p><b>17</b></p> <p>17.1</p>	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting</b></p> <p>The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Monday 22 January 2024.</p>

Meeting Ended: 12.08pm