

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee held on
Tuesday, 6 June 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

Chair: Pippa Heylings

Vice-Chairs: Dr Martin Cahn and Geoff Harvey

Committee Members in attendance:

Ariel Cahn

Paul Bearpark

Dr Shrobona Bhattacharya

Dr Tumi Hawkins

Dr Lisa Redrup

Natalie Warren-Green

Councillors Bunty Waters and Sue Ellington were in attendance remotely.

Officers:

Peter Campbell

Laurence Damary-Homan

Bode Esan

Siobhan Mellon

Alex Snelling-Day

Rebecca Weymouth-Wood

Head of Housing

Democratic Services Officer

Head of Climate, Environment & Waste

Development Officer - Climate and Environment

Waste Policy, Climate and Environment Team

Manager

Waste Policy and Climate Manager

1. Apologies

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Peter Sandford. Councillor Natalie Warren-Green was present as a substitute.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Pippa Heylings, Dr Martin Cahn, Dr Tumi Hawkins made declarations that they had engaged with the Solar Together Scheme, as customers, to install solar panels on their own homes.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

By affirmation, the Committee authorised the Chair to sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2023 as a correct record.

4. **Zero Carbon and Doubling Nature Action Plan Annual Review 2022-23**

The Development Officer (Climate & Environment) presented the report and provided a number of updates to the report:

- Members were informed that CO2 emission data was released at the end of June by Central Government, thus it was proposed that future Zero Carbon annual reviews be brought to Committee later in the year.
- It was clarified that there were 65 actions in the current plan, rather than 66 as listed in the report.
- The pie chart labelled “Scope 2” on page 46 of the agenda was listed as 264 TCO2E when the actual figure was 182 TCO2E.
- Action 4.2.1 had been amended to read “working through the Cambridgeshire Energy Retrofit Partnership deliver government funded HUG2 scheme by Q4” and an action to “develop the Action on Energy scheme to serve the needs of able-to-pay households” was added.
- The replacement of the action to “go beyond current building regulations of energy efficiency (part L) in new build on Council owned land subject to feasibility” was to read “continue to explore high energy efficiency specifications on homes built through the South Cambs Investment Partnership”.

The Committee agreed to the adjustment to annual timing of the report to include the June data. Members made a number of comments regarding the action plan.

Section 1: Reduce consumption of resources and waste

The Committee noted the completed actions and supported the proposed revision to action 1.1. Members were pleased to see the reduction of single-use plastics and the uptake of reusable/recyclable materials. Officers advised that the experience of reducing waste within the Council provided good experience to carry forward into campaigns to help other organisations reduce their waste.

Members were informed that the Joint Waste Strategy was up for renewal at the end of the year. The Committee requested that a draft of the proposed strategy be brought to Committee to allow Members to make comment prior to implementation.

Members discussed the challenges of recycling solar panels and officers advised that, whilst most solar panels installed in the region would not need to be disposed of for a number of years, the issue of solar panel recycling was being explored, in conjunction with Cambridgeshire County Council, in order to produce a joint approach to disposing of used solar panels before it becomes an issue for the region.

Section 2: Decarbonise planning and land use

The Committee discussed the causes of emissions that arose from land use in the District, including agriculture, development and the drying of peat land at the fen border of the District.

Members noted the progress of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan but emphasised the need to continue to take action to decarbonise planning in the District. Members noted the limitations of national legislation but commended the amount of sustainable development in the District, with many large developments going above the minimum requirements for energy efficiency, biodiversity net gain and other sustainability measures. Members felt that the aspirational targets set by the Council set a high standard for development in the District, and that developers were responding to market demands for efficient, sustainable properties.

Section 3: Decarbonise transport

The Committee noted that transport was the leading cause of emissions in the District and the biggest challenge to nationwide decarbonisation.

Local Transport and Connectivity Plan

Members were pleased to see the transport strategies listed in paragraph 32 of the report but expressed disappointment that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) had deferred the approval of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. The Committee emphasised the importance of working with partners on sustainable transport and travel strategy, and supported the approval of the Plan at the earliest possible time.

Active transport

The Committee noted that changes to legislation were due to increase the required amount of active travel consultation undertaken as part of planning applications for large developments. Members acknowledged that challenges of transitioning to active travel and stated national action was required for significant progress to be made, but that local measures were also important and could have a substantial impact. Officers referenced the Active Travel Toolkit that had been produced to provide information on how to deliver effective active transport infrastructure to developers; the Committee requested that copies of the Toolkit be provided to both Members of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee and the Planning Committee.

Council transport emissions

The Committee noted that the waste vehicle fleet was the biggest contributor to the Council's transport emissions. Members enquired as to why the introduction of electric vehicles to the fleet had not led to a reduction in emissions. Officers advised that a data lag could partially explain this, but also advised that the length of rounds had increased alongside population. The Committee requested that, where necessary, targets be changed in response to demographic changes.

Officers informed the Committee that trials with replacing diesel with HVO biofuel in waste vehicles had been positive and funding had been secured to transition 1/3 of the fuel used by waste vehicles to HVO, with implementation to start in 2023. Members were advised that the Council sourced HVO that had an International Sustainability and Carbon Certification.

Emissions from staff travel

The Committee discussed the electric car salary sacrifice scheme and enquired about the impact of working from home and reduced daily commutes, asking if there was any data available on staff travel emissions. Officers advised that working from home would likely have led to a significant reduction from staff travel emissions but did not have data; Members were informed that annual snapshot surveys on staff travel used to be undertaken but were not currently in place. The Committee requested that data on emissions from staff travel and the impact of working from home be captured in some way.

Section 4: Decarbonise housing and other buildings

Emissions at South Cambridgeshire Hall

Officers advised that a significant proportion of the emissions from South Cambs Hall were due to heating being provided through gas, with a large reduction in emissions expected to follow the transition to the ground source heat pump. Members noted the co-benefits of retrofitting South Cambs Hall to improve energy efficiency and the Committee requested that data on the financial savings from reduced fuel costs/increased energy savings at South Cambs Hall be provided to the Committee.

Solar panel installations.

Members discussed an article which showed that South Cambridgeshire had the highest rate of solar panels installed per household in the nation, highest rate of solar panel installation and the greatest number of planning applications which referenced solar panels, even when it was not a requirement. Members attributed this to the success of promotion campaigns, schemes and the setting of culture around development through aspirational targets.

Members discussed the Solar Together scheme and commended the overall successes of the scheme. Members noted that there had been some challenges in delivering the scheme, particularly around service availability and the ability of installation to match demand, but noted that oftentimes residents would utilise the viability assessment provided through the scheme and then procure panels privately. The Committee felt that even where panels were not directly installed through the scheme, awareness and information access promoted by the scheme was resulting in greater numbers of solar panels being installed in the District. Officers advised that Cambridgeshire County Council was reviewing whether it would reopen the scheme, based on experiences of the delivery of solar panels through Solar Together, and Members urged officers to ensure that the Council could still operate as a trusted broker/promoter of solar panel installation to residents.

Home upgrades and skills

Members were pleased to see the amount of grant funding spent on retrofitting properties to improve efficiency but raised concerns that some home upgrade schemes had underdelivered due to a lack of skills in the District required for the installation of energy efficiency measures in homes. The Committee requested that an investigation into what skills were lacking in the region be undertaken, with the issue being referred to the Greater Cambridge Partnership skills group- Members noted that the CPCA skills group was already addressing the issue.

The Committee noted that only one company was delivering efficiency upgrades to homes under the HUG1 scheme. Officers advised that a network of installers was now in place to deliver the HUG2, and that other schemes were available to assist able to pay homeowners in improving the efficiency of their homes.

Housing stock

The Committee discussed the progress in improving the energy performance of Council properties and noted the successes achieved. Officers advised that more information on the Council's housing stock would be available once the stock condition survey was completed; it was noted that the survey had been delayed to allow for mould and damp assessments to be undertaken, with results expected to be produced by the end of the calendar year.

Heritage buildings

The challenges of retrofitting heritage buildings to improve energy efficiency was discussed. Members discussed the importance of improving the energy efficiency of

heritage buildings in the District as a public benefit, balanced with conservation requirements and minimising harm to heritage assets. Members noted that the Council provided information to residents on how to effectively improve the energy efficiency of heritage buildings and encouraged officers to continuously update advice based on technological developments and new recommendations regarding heritage asset management, such as that produced by Historic England with regard to heat pump installation. The Committee agreed to add a new action regarding maximising residents' ability to improve the energy efficiency of heritage assets, using the best available technology, whilst maintaining the planning balance with heritage harm.

Section 5: Decarbonise business and industry

The Committee noted the progress of the actions to decarbonise business and industry and enquired as to how changes in shopping habits were affecting the levels of waste produced through commerce. Officers advised that national legislation played a significant role in regulating packaging waste and referenced the forthcoming extended producer responsibility for packaging. It was noted that many businesses had their own net zero policies, and that the Council was working with business to help them change consumption habits and adopt more sustainable approaches through Council led schemes, such as the Zero Carbon Communities and the Waste Champions Group. Members requested that further information on business and packaging waste be brought to the Committee, and details on if trading standards could be utilised to reduce commercial waste.

The Committee discussed the proposal to replace the previous action regarding building regulations agreed that the replacement action should cover all new build on Council owned land delivering Net Zero housing, including housing delivered through the South Cambs Investment Partnership.

Members felt that it was important to set aspirational targets and continue to encourage developers to go beyond the minimum sustainability requirements when delivering new build homes. The Committee agreed to add an action that captured the intent to continue encouraging developers to go beyond current Building Regulations for energy efficiency for all new builds.

Section 6: Decarbonise food systems and agriculture

The Committee discussed the impact of agriculture in the District on greenhouse gas emissions and noted the progress towards further sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices being implemented in South Cambridgeshire.

Members discussed the challenges of promoting sustainable diet and tackling the issues of food waste and waste produced as a by-product through packaging. The Committee noted the progress being made through ongoing campaigns, the food waste strategy and sustainable food strategy,

Section 7: Deliver training, education, communications and advocacy

The Committee noted the progress of the actions and agreed to the proposed revisions to actions. Officers advised that various strategies to engage with business and residents were ongoing, and active engagement with commercial waste customers on avoiding single use plastics was being well received, especially by catering companies. The Committee noted that Council efforts were helping increase the use of reusable/recyclable materials in the District.

Section 8: Respond to the ecological emergency

Members commented that they were pleased to see the new action on promoting gardening for nature to residents, and expressed a desire to see more information on how residents can improve biodiversity in their gardens be made publicly available. The Committee noted that private garden space accounted for ~5% of green space in the UK, and enquired as to if it would be possible to map out garden space in the District to highlight nature corridors and help inform strategy on how to maximise the ecological benefits of gardens in the District.

The Committee discussed the challenges of hiring ecologists in the public sector, especially with increased demand due to the forthcoming biodiversity net gain legislation, and officers advised that an application had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding to provide additional ecological advice to Parish Councils.

The Committee **noted** the progress on the Zero Carbon and Doubling Nature Action Plan 2020-25 and **supported** the proposed revisions to actions and new actions, with the following amendments:

Split the revised/new action regarding energy efficiency in Section 5 into two actions, in order to capture the intention to:

- Continue to encourage developers to go beyond current Building Regulations for energy efficiency for all new builds.
- Ensure that new builds on Council owned land, including those developed through the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership, are delivered to the highest standard of energy efficiency possible.

Add a new action regarding maximising residents' ability to improve the energy efficiency of heritage assets, using the best available technology, whilst maintaining the planning balance with heritage harm.

5. Date of Next Meeting

The Committee was informed that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 12 October 2023.

The Meeting ended at 3.55 p.m.
