

Climate Change Sub-Group
23 November 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CLIMATE CHANGE SUB-GROUP held on Tuesday 23 November 2021 at 7.30 pm in the Via Zoom

PRESENT: Councillors D. Richardson (Chair)
G. Ganney, T. Jackson-Mynott, J. Lake, R. Lass, J. Quinton and J. Weston

ALSO PRESENT Councillor F. Thomson (Executive Member for Housing & Climate Change)
Speakers G. Watt (Affinity Water)

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Head of Environment (D. Reyner)
Landscape & Ecology Manager (O. Waring)
Communication & Marketing Manager (M. Williams)
Principal Planner (M. Wilson)
Economic Development Officer (L. Devayya)
Energy Efficiency Officer (V. Appasawmy)
Principal Governance Officer (J. Anthony)
Democratic Services Assistant (B. Taylor)

18. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chair.

19. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 12

The Chair stated that urgent business was received from Councillor T. Jackson-Mynott.

20. AFFINITY WATER: SAVE OUR STREAMS

Members received a presentation from Gillian Watt, of Affinity Water, on the company's Save Our Streams campaign. The speaker stated that the campaign started in April 2021 with the aim to provide sustainable high-quality water, waste less water and stopping unsustainable abstraction of water from rivers. Members were informed that England is home to 85% of the worlds Chalk streams and water wastage is a critical local and global issue. Gillian Watt explained that Affinity water created a microsite to engaged with customers in the campaign and make it a community effort. Further ways that the campaign interacted with customers and wider audience was by social media which was seen 30.9 million

Climate Change Sub-Group
23 November 2021

times; a large bathtub was taken to town centres to demonstrate the importance of wasting less water; and a stand-up comedy sketch was recorded and broadcasted alongside radio ads. A heavy print campaign was also targeted at bus stops and an Ad was created for the Euros (*From Chilterns to Champions*). Gillian Watt informed members of the results of the campaign. In particular that there were 32 million impressions, 470,000 web visits, 170,000 people signed up to the campaign and 85,000 free device packs were sent out to help customers waste less water and save money. Gillian Watt explained to members that Affinity Water supplied 1.6 million homes and that 50% of Affinity Water customers had heard about the campaign and the company had witnessed a 73% change in behaviour so far from customers. In addition, 4000 trees have been planted on behalf of the campaign.

Members discussed the following points:

- Members thanks Gillian Watt for her presentation and expressed their personal involvement with the campaign and use of water saving devices. Members thanks Affinity Water for the campaign and tree planting.
- Members asked it was possible to see water savings in each area and asked whether the campaign had resulted in a reduction of water usage. The speaker stated that on average 5million litres of water had been saved each day since the start of the campaign. Modelling was being done to understand the specific savings. This modelling was taking some time to complete but Gillian Watt confirmed that the company would be happy to share the findings once the results were confirmed. The speaker agreed with the idea of providing a breakdown of water consumption and saving by area.
- Members asked about the next steps of the campaign and whether it was targeting young people and schools. The speaker stated that Affinity Water were laying out the plans for year two of the campaign and they wanted to better connect with schools. However, they wanted to get the messaging right before going into schools. Gillian stated that they had received feedback from teenagers during the bathtub in the town centres.
- Members suggested linking with organisations that involved young people. Gillian stated that the campaign had got in touch with local groups.
- Members asked whether the campaign worked with anglers. Gillian stated that this was the intention and unfortunately a television opportunity was missed due to scheduling clashes. However, Gillian assured Member that this something that the campaign wanted to make work especially with people with an active voice in the area of water.

21. HCCSP ACTION PLANS UPDATE

Report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) which introduced the Hertfordshire Climate Change & Sustainability Partnership's (HCCSP) draft Strategic Action Plans for Transport, Water and Carbon Emission Reduction. Officers gave a brief overview on the Transport and Carbon Emission reduction actions plans, highlighting the Ambitions, Areas and

Climate Change Sub-Group
23 November 2021

Actions. Officers informed Members that the actions were for Hertfordshire County Council but were also far reaching within Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and included collaborating with the local authorities within Hertfordshire. Officers stated that there would be an annual assessment review and progress reports for each of the action plans.

Officers focused on the water action plan due to the theme of the meeting. Officers stated that the action plan ambitions were to ensure clean and plentiful water supply in the county. Officers stated that if water is not looked after and carefully managed sustainably then it would have a detrimental impact on biodiversity. The high level of water consumption and abstraction alongside bad infrastructure was causing harm. Officers highlighted the themes of the action plan stating most of the actions went to water companies however stated that some were for local authorities about reducing their own water consumption. Officers informed Members that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council had already implemented some of the actions, and whilst others would need to be adopted, the Council would need to be mindful of national policies as they dictated planning rules.

The following points were noted:

- Members sought clarity of the definition of sustainable under the transport action plan. Officers agreed to clarify and provide an answer.
- Members asked what the Council was doing about water refiltration recovery systems and whether these could be made conditions on developments of 10 or more dwellings. Officers agreed with Members about the benefits of integrating actions into planning requirements and would look at what could be done through the use and adoption of a Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD).
- Members expressed a desire to be ahead of national policy as there is an environmental bill in place. Officer confirmed that the action plan was a tool to help the council get to where it would want to be, which is to have the highest quality sustainable developments possible.
- In response to a question Officers reminded Members that the actions listed in the action plan was the result of a collaboration between all Hertfordshire councils and some of the actions are specially aimed at the Hertfordshire County Council level, However, as a council, Welwyn Hatfield could do more if Members were minded to.
- Members asked for an update on the Council's Climate Change SPD since a Climate Emergency was declared. Officers stated the Policy Team was working on the Climate Change SPD but the work on this needed to fit with work on the Local Plan.
- Members felt that the Carbon emission reduction action plan did not go far enough in encouraging developments to add solar panels.
- Members were pleased with the water action plan.
- Members felt that the EV charging policy was not strong enough and if funding was available then more EV charging was desired.
- The Executive Member stated that the HCCSP action plans were about partnership work, with general plans that covered the whole county.

Climate Change Sub-Group
23 November 2021

However, there would be an opportunity for each borough and district to fine tune the action plan for their own projects and aspirations.

- Members queried the lobbying aspect of the action plan and asked whether lobbying would allow the competition of business aspect seen with other essentials (gas and electricity). Officer stated that lobbying central government is not desired by all councils whether at county or district level.
- Members highlighted the cost of bus fares which deters customers, and the reduction of costs was not mentioned under sustainable travel. Members referred to another council who worked alongside bus providers to reduce fares and increase passengers. It was noted that that the purchase of hydrogen and electric busses was expensive and would need to fit within a replacement programme.

RESOLVED:

That the three thematic strategic Action Plans be noted, and comments be provided to Officers by Monday 29 November 2021.

22. COP26 UPDATE

Members received a verbal update from the Communication and Marketing Manager on COP26. Officers informed Members that the Council used digital media to raise awareness of COP26 and initiatives and funding available for residents. Officers gave an overview of the digital media usage showing web traffic. Officers informed Members that there had been an increase of web traffic on all platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Webpage) by at least 25%. The UK Green Film Festival saw fewer young people than expected and Officers felt the involvement of the Youth Council would be beneficial.

The following points were noted:

- Members asked how the Council could have made the campaign wider, driven more traffic to the website and whether schools and the university had been involved. Officers suggested that continuous communication engagement with a dedicated communication plan would help the Council in meeting its commitment to combating Climate Change. Officers stated that more engagement with school and the young demographic would be beneficial.
- Member asked if the Council could make a competition of photography/writing to involve schools and the college asking the latter to make the prize from eco-metals. The competition could take place on Instagram Reels which would target young people and generate engagement. Officers stated that ideas were helpful for the wider communication plan.
- Members were happy with the increased web traffic, and would like the climate change messaging to be on going rather than just for the period of COP26.
- Members agreed to get the Youth Council involved and stated there was a youth COP26 that would happen in May 2022 which was a great opportunity to involve younger members of the community.

Climate Change Sub-Group
23 November 2021

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

23. ENERGY SAVING TRUST APP PROPOSAL

Report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) which proposed adopting an Energy Saving Trust App across Hertfordshire which would help householders reduce energy usage around their homes. This would help residents save money and reduce their carbon emissions. Dacorum Council has asked via HCCSP if local authorities wanted to join the scheme by purchasing the app and sharing the one off set up fee. Officers informed Members of the additional charges of 0.15p for every household download of the app and small monthly contribution for the IT support. The council would be invoiced on a quarterly basis. Officers stated the download target of 9,706 households over a three-year period would equate to approximately 20% of Welwyn Hatfield residents.

The following points were noted:

- Members felt that the proposal was a win-win as a reduction of emissions and cost saving benefits.
- The Executive Member stated that the app had been discussed at HCCSP and was a good opportunity across the county.

RESOLVED:

(Unanimous)

That the Climate Change Subgroup supported the report's recommendation that £2,100 of the Climate Change earmarked reserves be drawn down to contribute to the HCCSP EST Energy Saving App proposal to cover set-up charges, 12 month's contributions to the support fee and 20% (9,706) of households downloading the app over the next three-year period.

24. WHBC CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Members received a verbal update from Officers on the Council's own Action Plan. Officers gave an overview on the larger actions. Officers informed Members that since April 2021 the Council had been using 100% green electricity and the council had zero electricity emissions. Furthermore, decarbonisation projects was being undertaken at Hatfield Swim Centre. Campus East and West decarbonisation works were awaiting planning permission. Officers updated Members on the ENE LED light scheme stating that 13 business had switched to lower carbon lighting options. Officers stated that £150,000 was budgeted for Climate Change actions and £50,000 was allocated to SME LED lighting projects with £7,086 spent so far. £8,000 was earmarked for HCCSP fees, £10,000 for the walking and cycling plan, £2,600 for the electric car scheme and £2,600 for the biodiversity baseline. £76,800 remained in the climate change reserves.

The following points were noted:

- The Executive member stated a revised action plan table would be provided with only current and future actions on. Officers stated that this would be easier to understand how the larger projects were coming along.
- Members sought clarification on what was meant by “Fabric first approach” and whether it applied to new council homes or retrofit solutions to current council homes, or both. Officers stated they would provide Members with an answer in due course from housing development officers.
- Members asked about the Estate Management Scheme solar panel review and when it would happen. Officers stated that the new Estate Management Scheme Member Group would meet before the end of the calendar year, and this would be part of their responsibilities.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

25. HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP (HCCSP) - UPDATE

Members received a verbal report from the Executive Member (Housing and Climate Change) as the Council’s representative to the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP). The Executive Member informed Members that the latest HCCSP meeting received a number of presentations and updates. The first was from the HCCSP officers’ group on three priority areas (Water, Biodiversity and Carbon Emission Reduction). The Executive Member stated a communication network had been created across the county to share messages and campaigns. HCCSP held an online event in early November to launch the four action plans (Water, Biodiversity, Transport and Carbon Emission Reduction) with numerous presentations and had a panel discussion with a Q & A session. The Executive Member stated the behaviour change group focussed on campaigns and interventions in order to make long lasting behaviour change in regard to sustainability. The Executive Member informed Members of an upcoming Eco-fair at County Hall which would help encourage and assist businesses to reduce their emissions. An update was given on the environment bill and the county wide approach to biodiversity net gain which would have an impact on developments. Updates were given on the transport strategic action plan and an update from Three Rivers on COP26 and green homes grant.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

26. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

Climate Change Sub-Group
23 November 2021

26.1. GRASS CUTTING LENGTH POLICY

Councillor T. Jackson – Mynott requested a report in changing the length of the cut grass from 25mm to a minimum 75mm. It was stated that 75mm would not mean meadow grass length. It was suggested that the change would be cost free, and the only change would be of the blade length. Furthermore, the benefits would be immediate and would encourage better flora and fauna biodiversity across the 2,659,197 metres squared of grass verges across the borough. Member felt the council could get ahead in protected biodiversity ahead of Spring 2022 and it directly relates to the biodiversity action plan.

The following points were noted:

- Members expressed support in biodiversity gains.
- Members stated that they had received complaints about the areas the Council had encouraged the grass to grow longer. It was stated that the grass would still be kept neat, and it would benefit biodiversity. Furthermore, Members suggested an educational campaign could be introduced alongside any changes in order to inform residents of the benefits to alleviate any complaints.
- Members stated that behaviour change could have a positive impact and education would help residents understand.
- It was suggested that whilst there will always be resistance to change, often those that are supportive of change do not voice their support. Therefore, change should not be avoided due to complaints that are likely to be received, especially if appropriate communication could be used to allay any misunderstanding or negative perceptions.

RESOLVED:

That Officers consider the issue and return to the Group with relevant thoughts and proposals for the Group to consider.

Meeting ended at 9.15 pm
BT