

Climate Change Sub-Group
22 March 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CLIMATE CHANGE SUB-GROUP held on Tuesday 22 March 2022 at 7.30 pm Via Zoom

PRESENT: Councillors A. Hellyer (Chair)

G. Ganney, T. Jackson-Mynott, R. Lass, J. Quinton, P. Smith, and J. Weston

OFFICIALS Head of Planning (C. Dale)

PRESENT: Landscape & Ecology Manager (O. Waring)
Environment, Parking & Bereavement Manager (K. Roberts)
Parking & Playground Services Manager (E. Robova)
Communications and Marketing Manager (M. Sherry)
Environmental Protection Officer (T. Vincent)
Economic Development Officer (L. Devayya)
Energy Efficiency Officer (V. Appasawmy)
Digital Communications Officer (R. Vega)
Democratic Services Assistant (B. Taylor)

36. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

It was proposed and seconded by Councillors G. Ganney and R. Lass, and

RESOLVED:

That Councillor A. Hellyer be appointed Chair of the meeting held 22 March 2022.

37. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution of a Committee Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:

Councillor A. Hellyer for Councillor J. Lake
Councillor P. Smith for Councillor D. Richardson

38. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Lake and D. Richardson.

39. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2022 was approved as a correct record by the Chair.

40. WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL CLIMATE ACHIEVEMENTS

Members were updated from the Officers on the Council's Climate achievements since declaring a climate emergency. The council started a contract to use 100% green electricity which was implemented in April 2021. Officers stated that emissions were almost reduced to zero and exact figures of emissions would be available soon. Officers stated the focus would turn to reducing heating from gas and increase green electricity. Officers informed Members on the progress of the £2.4million decarbonisation project which looked to save 500 tonnes of CO2 per year and corporate property would meet the 2030 target of net zero. 16 EV charge points had been installed since January 2022 and a new bid had been submitted to increase the number of EV charge points. The council was working with HCC on the cycle and walking infrastructure plan and new cycle parking had been installed in both town centres and neighbourhoods. Officers stated that 318 trees had been planted for the Queens Canopy and 2000 trees planted around Blackfan Valley and the redesign of the Anniversary Gardens in WGC promoted biodiversity. The council was working in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire and Eastern New Energy to get affordable net zero housing. The Council had also partnered with Affinity Water to promote water saving in social housing. There had been 145 appointments, 57 visits and 13 refurbishments of water saving devices. Officers stated the ECO Flex and ECO Funding provided insulation to vulnerable homes and 5 homes had received funding. Members were made aware that the LAD2 grant scheme had taken some time to set up however the partnerships were there; in addition, a new sustainable warmth grant scheme would be launched in April 2022. Officers were expecting more public engagement due to the energy crisis. An update was giving on the ENE LED project stating that 165 711kg of CO2 had been saved so far from the scheme.

The following points were noted:

- Members were happy to see the good work the council was doing.
- Members wanted climate change information to be clearer and bigger on the website and felt there was not enough promotion of the grant schemes. Officers stated that the communication team were looking at increasing promotional activity and updating the website.
- Members asked other grant schemes were happening. Officers stated the LAD3 programme would start in April.
- The Executive Member highlighted the usefulness of the new Home Energy app that was promoted in the Spring edition of the ONE magazine.

RESOLVED

That the achievements be noted.

41. AIR QUALITY PRESENTATION

Climate Change Sub-Group
22 March 2022

Members received a presentation from the Environmental Protection Officer on Air Quality in the borough. The council has a legal duty to monitor air quality and a report was produced annually. Members were informed that levels were good in the borough and there are no air quality action areas as there are no enclosed spaces to trap pollution. Officers stated that they promoted green travel in planning developments and there was a consultation on all new builds having EV charge. Air quality impact assessments were undertaken at all large developments. Officers informed Members that Air Quality was monitored by diffusions tubes in 33 locations and 18 school locations which were checked monthly. Further analysis was done via a PM2.5 analyser and a Nitrogen Dioxide analyser which helped increase the monitoring network. Officers stated that air quality was still monitored during the lockdowns which gave a good baseline. Members were shown graphs of the air quality levels around the borough. The general trend was that air quality was improving in the borough and the latest data will be available at the end of the year to compare air quality levels from 2020 to 2022. Officers stated the Annual Status Reports from 2014 were available but unfortunately were unable to be uploaded onto the council website due to formatting issues with the DEFRA report. Officers informed Members of an Air Quality Alert scheme that was free for people to register with and residents receive alerts if air quality levels changed.

The following points were noted:

- Members asked if there anything the council could do about the DEFRA PDF. Officers stated they are working on fixing the issue but does not seem a way around it yet.
- Members sought clarification on the building regulations and whether it was every space or 20% would have EV charge points. Officers confirmed that every development that had parking spaces would need to include EV charge points.
- Members asked if the regulations would be in force for current applications. Officers stated that it would not be retrospective and would only apply to new development applications.
- Members asked if 'school streets' were an option to ease congestion and improve air quality around schools. Officers stated there were issues with diffusers at schools' average readings due to there being peak times. Officers confirmed they would encourage less congestion around schools.
- Members asked how the data collected from the analysers impacts residents and what the council receives for collating the information. Officers stated the council only received information from the analysers and it was a legal stipulation from DEFRA to show that the council was compliant with air quality monitoring.
- Members asked how the air quality alert system worked. Officers stated the alerts were based on readings from analysers in the borough.
- Members thanked officers for their work and were pleased to see there was no air quality action areas in borough.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be noted.

42. CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

Members received an update from the Communications Team which outlined how Officers were improving promotion and communication on Climate Change to residents. Officers stated they were presenting information that was engaging and digestible. Infographics were shown to Members of the types of messaging being used in the ONE magazine, the ONE website and social media outlets. Officers outlined their key objectives of awareness and engagement, future priorities and behaviour change. Members were shown the new Climate Change ONE WelHat webpage which had visuals and highlighted the achievements of the Council. Officers stated they would update the page regularly and they planned for a Climate Change spread in the summer edition of the ONE magazine.

The following points were noted:

- Members liked the messaging being used by the communications team and were pleased to see the progress.
- Members asked whether officers could team up with other groups to expand information distribution. Officers stated that is something they could consider, and they would look at joining Facebook groups.
- The Executive Member thanked Officers for the work undertaken so far. The Executive Member stated that communications were crucial and useful for residents and working across the county to increase messaging would be good.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

43. GRASS CUTTING LENGTH POLICY UPDATE

Members received an update from Officers on the length of cut grass. Officers stated that currently the grass was cut at 25mm and there was a request for the grass to be cut at a longer length of 75mm. There was an expected standard of maintenance and aesthetic in the borough, and this needed to be balanced against any benefit of allowing a longer cut. Officers stated longer grass would have biodiversity benefits and the RSPB recommend the grass cut to be 35mm to 50mm. Therefore, Officer proposed to cut at the longer length of 45mm.

The following points were noted:

- Members felt the update was good news and were pleased to help biodiversity in the borough.
- Member asked what flower and species would benefit. Member asked if there would be any seedings. Officers stated that the RSPB guidance stated grass growth wildlife would benefit including birds. Officer stated that they will monitor as this would be the first year at a longer length and would look at what else could be done after the first year.

Climate Change Sub-Group
22 March 2022

- Member asked about a mid-cut and gradual grass lengths toward woodlands and other areas. Officers stated they would take this into consideration.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

44. WHBC PROJECTS ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Members received a verbal update from Officers on the Council's own Action Plan. Officers stated this update followed on from the Achievements update. Officers informed Members of the progress made on major projects which included:

- The decarbonisation project had completed at Hatfield Swim Centre and works had started at Campus East and Campus West which should be completed in June.
- The solar panel bulk buy was waiting on HCCSP agreement.

All other projects were progressing as expected.

The following points were noted:

- Members asked about the timeline for extra EV charge points and whether the bid application was successful. Officers stated that the EV charge points were in the 2022-23 budget and would be completed by the end of the 2022-23 financial year.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted

45. HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP (HCCSP)

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 was held 10 March 2022 and received presentations from the Chair and lead officers discussing the progress of HCCSP and what future works would be needed. The feedback was being evaluated and a full report would be at the next meeting. Public Health gave a presentation on air quality and an update was given on the NHS green plan which was to reduce the carbon footprint and adapt practices to be more climate friendly. An update was provided from the sustainability officer group and funding for a co-ordinator and project officer for HCCSP. The adaptation subgroup gave an update and stated they would be providing training for members and officers.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

Climate Change Sub-Group
22 March 2022

The Executive Member for Housing & Climate Change gave her thanks to Officers for their hard work over the last municipal year, and welcomed the amount of work being undertaken on Climate Change, and the successes enjoyed, although not all this good progress had been immediately visible.

Meeting ended at 9.28 pm
BT