

Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel
10 September 2024

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CLIMATE BIODIVERSITY CABINET PANEL held on Tuesday 10 September 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors H.Goldwater (Chair)
J.Weston (Vice-Chairman)
L.Crofton, R.Grewal, G.Moore, S.Thusu and M.Short

OFFICIALS S.McDaid, Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change)
PRESENT: E.Walker, Assistant Director (Public Realm)
O.Waring, Landscape and Ecology Manager
K.Murphy, Climate Change Officer
C.Cade, Governance Services Manager

14. APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lass for whom Councillor Short attended as a substitute.

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2024 were approved as a correct record.

16. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 9

No notifications of urgent business were received.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor Thusu declared an interest as a Hertfordshire County Councillor.

18. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

The Panel heard the below question from a member of the public:
"It has been discovered through Freedom of Information that Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council uses nearly 200 litres of pesticides within the Borough to control weeds. The chemicals used contain glyphosate which has been identified by the World Health Organisation as a probable human carcinogen. Many urban areas in Europe have been managed without pesticides for years now (including every town and city in France and Belgium).

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In the UK, Lewes, Brighton & Hove, Hammersmith & Fulham and Lambeth, Trafford and Devon County Councils have all adopted non-chemical alternatives, ranging from high-tech solutions such as hot foam machines to traditional methods including hand weeding and mulching.

We would like to ask if Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will commit to phasing out harmful pesticides in the Borough and use alternative, chemical-free weed removal methods for the health of residents, especially children, and to help biodiversity flourish?"

The below response was received:

"The Council uses glyphosate to treat hedge bases, obstacles in grass areas and shrub beds. It's also used to treat adopted highways including authority owned or managed garages and housing areas and surfaces. We use licensed operatives to apply glyphosate base herbicides and follow the HSC and DEFRA codes of practice. Currently there are no European or domestic based restrictions on the use of glyphosate-based products.

The appropriate assessments are in place for all chemicals used along with safety data sheets. All spraying activities are recorded in line with current legislation. Staff applying glyphosate are provided with PA1 and PA68 training to ensure that all chemical is applied accurately and without drift.

It is noted that the reduction or elimination of glyphosate products at other local authorities has had mixed results. Earlier this year, Brighton and Hove Council reintroduce the use of glyphosate, due to uncontrolled weak growth which was causing issues with pavements at significant cost to the Council. Cambridge City Council recently reversed a policy not to use herbicides due to significant issues and complaints following a decision to stop using chemical control. This is not to say alternatives should not be investigated, however, the consideration with the wider impacts of alternative methods can raise further issues.

A recent trial which was carried out following recommendation from Cardiff Council Environment Scrutiny Committee inquiring into the management of biodiversity and the natural Environment found that glyphosate is the most effective and sustainable weed control method currently available. The research which was undertaken in 2021 and 2022 use different methods of weed control, including a hot foam method, found that, based on costs, environmental, customer and quality criteria, the most effective and sustainable weed control method currently available for pavement weed control in the UK involves the use of glyphosate base herbicide.

Currently the existing arrangement is the most economical and effective weed treatment. The current non-glyphosate based treatments available have limitations in terms of effectiveness, number of treatments required, environment impacts and costs that can be up to 10 times higher. However, the Council is committed at looking at non glyphosate solutions. The first steps towards a reduction of glyphosate had been taken in 2022 when they use of glyphosate was reduced at the Council when making the play areas and public open spaces

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chemical free in these areas weeds are managed by strimming and hand weeding”.

19. CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE REPORT

The Panel received the Climate Change Update report and the details of the actions set out in the Council’s Net Zero Action Plan. Details of masterclasses and the Hertfordshire Climate Change & Sustainability Partnership were set out in the agenda.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- A Councillor asked what the allocation for the HERO scheme was. The officer confirmed that it was first come first serve and the details could be found on the Climate Hub.
- It was highlighted that the schools scheme would be very useful and it was asked whether feedback from the schools could be received. Follow up work would take place to enquire how many schools within the borough had signed up.
- Carbon reduction since 2005 had steadily been going down. It was asked for a cost analysis of the work which had taken place, and with another six years to go before the Council was meant to be carbon neutral at what point did officers feel the numbers would steady. Officers clarified that no cost analysis had been done and work would continue on how carbon emissions could be omitted or offset. Nature based solutions would be looked into rather than “carbon credits”. In general it would involve planting trees and vegetation and having input into the planning process to ensure new developments support the initiatives.
- It was queried how additional places for vegetation would be found.
- The Local Nature Recovery would be an opportunity to identify sites and potential nature trails which could be enhanced.
- It was suggested that developers could be asked to include solar panels on their developments.

The Panel noted the report the progress on the specific projects/actions within the Climate Action Plan, which is the main tool used by the Council to monitor the pathway to net zero as an organisation (2030) and as a borough (2050) and noted the wider benefits of such actions.

The Panel agreed the Council should publish the corporate and borough carbon footprints on the Council website.

20. THE COMMONS LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Panel received the Commons Landscape Management Plan report and presentation.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- A member highlighted that the report was very informative and they were impressed with the work which had taken place.
- A member highlighted that there were some issues with trees being fell due to pollution and development. It was queried how the felling and regeneration in the

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Commons are would take place. Officers confirmed that the management of woodland areas would maintain different aging structures to ensure sustainability, and natural regeneration.

The Panel noted the Commons Landscape Management Plan and unanimously recommended to Cabinet that a public consultation takes place on the Plan.

21. NEW EMISSIONS REPORTS PRESENTATION

The Panel received a presentation on the corporate and borough wide carbon footprints/greenhouse gases assessments. A copy of the presentation can be found in the agenda.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Members thanked the officer for the presentation.
- It was asked what were the underlying issues on waste in the borough. Officers confirmed this would be shared with the Panel at a later date.
- It was asked what the anomalies were in the borough. Officers confirmed there were a number of anomalies and these were being investigated. An example was provided, such as a heating system has a fault in in swimming centre.
- It was asked whether the drop in 2021/22 was impacted by Covid and working from home arrangements, and how this would affect the Council going forward. It was confirmed that COVID -19 did impact the 2021/22 data because the buildings were still being used less than pre pandemic. Moving forwards we would expect building energy use to be slightly lower in office buildings due to reduce occupancy and home working arrangements (less energy used for monitors and laptops etc) . However offices would still be occupied, so lights and heating would still be used.
- We can look to estimate emission from home working, however this would be a loose estimate based on staff working patterns identified the recent staff travel survey (carried out in November 2023). This could be included in a corporate GHG assessment as an additional scope 3 emission source.
- The frequency of changes to the way data was collected. The Council had continued to collect data in the same way for their corporate carbon footprint. Central Government had changed the way they collected their boroughwide data but had backdated the information so there is comparative data.