

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 18 November 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Autun Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice Chair), Doug Bainbridge, Adrian Brown, Wendy Kerby, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris and Simon Speller

Start / End Start Time: 06.00 pm

Time: End Time: 08.10 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Julie Ahsley-Wren and Stephen Booth.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 21 OCTOBER 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the committee meeting held on Thursday 21 October 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMY ENTERPRISE AND TRANSPORT - CLIMATE EMERGENCY SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Chair welcomed Councillor Lloyd Briscoe, the Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy Enterprise and Transport to the meeting. Councillor Briscoe had been invited to the meeting to be interviewed by Members of the Committee about the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan in relation to the transport and business impact on the climate change.

The Assistant Director for Planning and Regulatory provided an update in relation to the Climate Change Action Plan. He updated Members on the following key issues:

- Four key areas of carbon emission which included the transport and businesses impact on climate change, e-taxi licences, EV charging in neighbourhood centres and business and focused SME climate change support.
- Transport and Storage had been consistently rising since early 2000, and only dropped during the pandemic when compared to supply energy and manufacturing.
- The Council was working closely with the local taxi drivers and taxi companies to see how Council could support them to reduce their carbon emission.

- The Council would encourage taxi drivers to have electric cars and use renewable energy.
- The Council was currently bidding for the 18 new double bay charging points in car parks across Stevenage. It would cost about £112k. The Council would provide a contribution of £12k and the remainder would be funded by Central Government. The consultation of the charging points would be carried out over the next 2 months and the roll out should be by mid-2022.
- The Council was considering to re-starting the e-car club in 2022 after the funding had been withdrawn during the pandemic.
- Big businesses had set targets for improvements. Hertfordshire County Council had committed to net zero emission by 2030.
- The Council to engage with SMEs to support them by sharing knowledge and joint bids.
- The Council was considering £8k grants for local businesses for climate change improvements. These bids take time to arrange and require match funding.

A Councillor asked how many public members had been in the e-car club before it closed during the pandemic and what were the numbers for officer use of the cars? Officers agreed to provide Members with this information. It was suggested that when the Council branded e-car club relaunched that some thought should be given to rebranding making it clear that it is for public use, even if it is just for public use in the evening as the former scheme had been, as the old branding made it look like they were just for use by the Council.

The Business Relationship Manager provided an update on how the Council engaged with over 300 businesses and the opportunity for shared learning. The following key updates were provided:

- The Council sent out regular business updates to businesses across Stevenage concerning grants, access to new markets and other general support information.
- Currently there were two grant funding schemes available to businesses. Grants of up to 20k were available for the Eastern New Energy Programme to support energy efficiency and investment in renewable. Grants of up to 5k were also available for the energy efficiency and for upgrading equipment.
- Officers were considering an event in February next year together with other providers including Hertsmere, Welwyn and Hatfield and St Albans Councils with the Planet Mark, Carbon Battle Bus, that had been used at COP26 in Glasgow and was on a “Zero Carbon Tour” of Britain, to raise awareness of funding opportunities, promoting sustainability and new technology and general support available to businesses. The Herts Chamber of Commerce and the Herts Growth Hub will be involved in this event.

All of the big Gunnels Wood Road businesses are targeting 2030 for net zero and they are about 5 years ahead of us in their journey to net zero.

SME’s have the most to learn and as such the Business Relationship Manager was looking to work closely with them to provide them with the support they need to make their businesses lower carbon.

Local businesses were sharing best practise with one another regarding the retro-fitting of their premises to low carbon buildings, an example of this was the retro-fitting of the Institution of Engineering and Technology 1989 building at Faraday House, Stevenage.

In response to question by a Member, the Community Partnership Manager advised that there were support available for the local businesses to measure their carbon emission through the Herts Growth Strategy.

The Portfolio Holder for Business Enterprise and Transport advised Members on the following key issues in regards to the climate change emergency:

- The Council was working to double the number of EV charging points available at Council assets in 2022.
- The Business Support Team was actively engaged with local businesses to support them and raise awareness of funding.
- Hertfordshire County Council expressed interest in a Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) scheme which would provide Stevenage with 30 new electric buses to help reduce carbon emission.
- The Council was working to support improvements to public transport and provide a cheaper and more frequent transport system fit for purpose similar to London.
- The COP26 conference was acknowledged as an opportunity for action and with optimism about the future.
- As portfolio holder he was engaged with the residents on matters of car park permits in Old Town, and car park restrictions and enforcements in Roebucks and Chells.

In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Director for Planning and Regulatory advised the Committee that the Council was committed to reduce emission where it could including promoting of solar panels.

It was **RESOLVED** that the climate change update be noted.

4 **INTERVIEW WITH HEART COMMUNITY GROUP (HERTFORDSHIRE ENABLING AND ADAPTING FOR RESILIENCE TOGETHER)**

The Chair welcomed Kimberley Hare from Heart Community Group and her Team to the Committee meeting. Kimberley Hare had been invited to the meeting to be interviewed by Members of the Committee about their feedback on the Council's Climate Change Strategy September 2021. Kimberley Hare provided the following key updates to Committee Members in relation to the Climate Change Emergency:

- It was possible that a more extreme disruption could be unravelling and even a societal collapse as a result of inaction on climate change.
- Extreme disruption was possible to the usual way of life; similar to what was witnessed during the Covid19 pandemic.
- It was time to prepare in order to reduce suffering. Prioritise adaptation to increase local community resilience as well as mitigation.

- HEART offered free support for people who had developed climate anxiety and eco distress and helped people to reconnect.
- Twin focus on awareness education advocacy and also contributing to community resilience.
- The challenge faced were not limited to climate change, and also included the collapse of bio diversity and eco systems, economic fragility, increase in social justice and a crisis of disconnection and polarisation were possible.
- People should understand the vulnerability of the modern society; the World had left it too late to prevent the climate crisis. People should adapt to the worse climate chaos coming their way.
- HEART described climate change as a real public health threat, a national security threat and also a moral emergency and possibly an existential threat.
- It would also threaten food security as the UK imported over 80% of its food consumed.
- The Ministry of Defence had a large number of personnel currently engaged full time in planning for a severe breakdown.
- Climate migrants could be a major climate challenge, as climate disasters displaced more people when compared to wars in 2020.

Kimberley Hare informed Members that she and her Team would like to support and were happy to offer workshops for Members and members of the public free of charge. She advised Members that the Committee could draw an action plan for the Council to implement and build on the resources already located for the climate change. She praised the Council for the work already taken place on reducing emission and targeting net zero, and invited Members to broaden that vision to prepare and adapt now to create climate resilience communities.

Members agreed to undertake their own mind mapping exercise reflecting on the input from HEART and send these to the Scrutiny officer with possible quick wins that the Council could consider towards its Climate Change Strategy. The Chair thanked Kimberley Hare and her Team for their detailed presentation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the adaptation and community resilience update on climate change be noted.

5 **MAPPING EXERCISE DOCUMENT FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY REVIEW**

The Committee requested that they receive a copy of the full Climate Change Citizen's Panel report (not just the executive summary) for their next meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that

- (i) The mapping exercise document be noted;
- (ii) It was also agreed that a further consideration be given to the evidence of the Executive Portfolio holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport;
- (iii) The offer by HEART community group to make a further presentation or work with a wider group of Members be accepted; and
- (iv) Given the size of the review and the number of issues emerging, it was likely that an interim report would be required before the end of the Council Municipal Year.

6 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

7 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

CHAIR