

Notes of the informal E&E Select Committee, 17 01 22 on Zoom

Attendance:

E&E Members – Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchel (Vice-Chair), Judy Ashley-Wren, Doug Bainbridge, Stephen Booth, Wendy Kerby, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead and Simon Speller

Officers – Zayd Al-Jawed, Steve Dupoy, David Thorogood, Jonathan Sayers, Stephen Weaver

1. Apologies – Cllr Adrian Brown, Cllr Claire Parris
2. Cllr Wendy Kerby's Excel ideas for grouping Members mind mapping suggestions – Members thanked Wendy for her excel document that regrouped the suggestions from Cllrs Kerby, Speller and Mead into one document which highlighted 7 suggested areas to focus on:
  - (i) Strategy re tree management & P&D (Strategic)
  - (ii) Lead by example, even if the benefits are small by acting appropriately in Council offices, plastic bottles, drinks cups etc. (Quick wins)
  - (iii) Consider how to represent the progress of the strategy? Gantt chart, target lines, KPIs etc.(Strategic)
  - (iv) Communications plan needed with channels, calendar, key messages, campaigns etc. Suggest starting with a campaign on the reduce your heating by 2 degrees (Strategic)
  - (v) Review Council activities to ensure carbon friendly practices are truly embedded. (Strategic)
  - (vi) Engage with young people via schools, Youth Mayor and Mayor's activities. (Distinct Project)
  - (vii) Promoting the 20 Minute Neighbourhood theory and willingness to encourage local businesses and tap into big business. These items feel like a workshop that needs to be facilitated externally to tease out some tangible actions. Possible HEART (focus on adaptations only, in their view we are past the point where behaviour can affect significant climate change) or Mutual Gain (a neutral facilitation company who facilitated the Climate Emergency Panel – circa £5K) or another external organisation to facilitate? (Distinct Project)

It was agreed that this document should be used as a lead for possible local recommendations for the review, in addition to other recommendations that have emerged so far and will throughout the review.

Re area of focus (vi) - Contact with local Schools/Young People/Mayor -  
Cllr Doug Bainbridge reported that he had made contact with the Head teacher at St Nicholas School who was very enthusiastic about working together with the Council regarding the Climate Emergency. The St Nicholas head teacher recommended linking with the Head Teachers Forum in Stevenage.

Re area of focus (i) – Strategy with tree management & P&D Committee –  
Cllr Speller suggested that this be picked up by Planning Officers and David Thorogood to agree a way forward and break down into actionable steps.

Re area of focus (iv) – Corporate Communications plan - Members agreed that the more recent bespoke communications plan (since September 2021) on the Climate Emergency have been really helpful. However, with regards to more general corporate communications it was felt that this was lacking and Members would like to know what the strategy for this is? A broader more holistic approach was required. It was suggested that some examples of what the Council is doing would be helpful such as saving 400,000 sheets of paper, and showcasing examples of good practise of local residents, similar to the public health Stop Smoking campaign, such as ‘we are walking to school’, ‘using less single use plastic’ etc. as a peer learning example not the Council ‘preaching’ to residents.

Re area of focus (iii) - Consider how to represent the progress of the strategy? As well as a possible way to show progress a high level Gantt chart was suggested and another Member suggested a Fishbone chart. This should be a recommendation in an interim report of the Committee as something to respond to as a matter of urgency.

Re area of focus (viii) – Promoting the 20 Minute Neighbourhood theory

The Chair of the Planning and Development Committee, also a Member of the E&E Select Committee agreed to work with Zayd Al-Jawed to include this as a theme review of the next version of the Local Plan. Members were generally in agreement with promoting the concept of 20 Minute Neighbourhoods, where residents could walk to all of the necessary amenities such as local shops, GP and dental surgeries, primary and secondary schools etc. A Member suggested that the theory works if the services on offer are all of a similar or high standard, but breaks down if people go further afield for schools and other local services.

The use of Allotments - Engage with gardening clubs to see if they can support education for people growing vegetables at home. Cllr Doug Bainbridge asked if the Stevenage Allotment Association could be promoted town wide via the SBC website or other communication channels such as a dedicated Facebook page?

Cllr Sarah Mead suggested that interviewees be asked why the Council’s actions/plans were taking so long to materialise as in her view there didn’t appear to be a great deal of urgency about the response. In her view the small changes mattered and there were still things that could be addressed that fall into this category such as paper and plastic use at the Council. Zayd said there had been a number of quick wins in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The speed and scope of response is a matter of resources, if the Council wishes to move faster than it would need to prioritise more resources towards it and this would mean doing less of something else.

Cllr Stephen Booth suggested that the Council should consider engaging a third party company to undertake a drone infrared heat loss survey of the entire housing of Stevenage (private and social housing) and this could be addressed when the Committee interviews the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr Jeannette Thomas. (In terms of the Council's Housing Stock, accurate estimates for the cost of retrofitting the stock would be picked up during the HRA business plan refresh in the summer, which would provide a detailed look at stock condition surveys).

It was agreed that there should be an item on this at the E&E Select Committee on 16 02 22.

3. 16 Feb E&E Select Committee meeting

- (i) Questions for the Leader – Members agreed that the questions set were at the right level and they were keen to set the questions in advance which would lead to some written responses being given ahead of the meeting on 16 Feb which would lead to a discussion/supplementary questions at the meeting.
- (ii) Questions for the Youth Council – (it was commented that they looked like the generic questions for Portfolio Holders – following the meeting the Scrutiny Officer circulated a separate set of questions for the Youth Council as the wrong set had been circulated previously, the questions re-circulated are far more orientated to young people).

4. Next steps – The updated mapping exercise for the review was noted.

5. Briefing notes re recent impact on micro businesses in the neighbourhood centres from CV19 Omicron (previously circulated via email) from Mena Caldbeck SBC Business Relationship Manager and Dave Armitage, Co-operative Neighbourhood Management.

It was agreed that this matter should be looked into as a potential work programme item for 2022/23 as there was a suggestion that there may need to be a reappraisal of what can be offered to these micro-businesses based in the neighbourhoods.