

Questions for Executive Portfolio Holder for Communities, Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Council, Cllr Sandra Barr, regarding the Environment & Economy Select Committee Climate Emergency Scrutiny Review

1. Regarding your Portfolio area:

(i) What can be done in terms of ideas and funding, to encourage members to engage with residents, and support “green” pocket neighbourhood projects in wards. (Tree planting, communal garden projects, taking ownership of areas in the public realm)? Are we going to release our full cooperative potential, to see innovative and challenging green use of our public spaces?

Members will be aware of the Climate Change Annual Update discussed at Executive in October. This includes plans for our next phase of work which aligns with our approach to the development of Co-operative Neighbourhoods. Part of this approach is about working at a very localised street-level to encourage ideas on local initiatives to tackle climate change. This may include the development of local “green pockets” in neighbourhoods. I’ve been proud of the work that’s been progressed by ward Cllrs and community members in my own neighbourhood on developing a Community Orchard. I know we have a range of emerging initiatives across the town and I would like to see this continue.

(iii) How can our community associations and Stevenage based charities be encouraged to be “greener”?

The Cost of Living Crisis is forcing local charities including our community associations into making some difficult decisions. A number of these are going to be relating to reducing energy use. For a number of charities the ability to access funding to support upfront investment in carbon reduction measures is a challenge and we continue to advocate and lobby for their adequate support. We are currently working with the Social Inclusion Partnership to create a multi-stakeholder Co-operative to enable joint funding bids from local organisations.

(iv) Does Stevenage lack a centralised green project, such as the Triangle Garden Project in Hitchin, or Mudlarks in Ware? Do you see the mental and physical health benefits, and climate benefits of such projects, in enabling residents to work in nature-based projects? and

There are a range of green projects in wards across Stevenage which ward members across the town are supporting in different ways, ranging from support through LCB’s to volunteer days and community clear ups. This is encouraging as it demonstrates the appetite and need for such initiatives across the town, rather than in one centralised location. We particularly recognise the benefits of such activities to individual’s mental health and physical wellbeing. This is why the council continues to operate a successful Green Space Volunteer scheme across our parks and open spaces and support a Community Allotment for those who have worked through the No More Service. We are actively encouraging new initiatives with different partners. For example, we’ve recently started working with North Herts College on their community Allotment Project for Stevenage – This will see local students developing their skills in horticulture and bring wider benefit to local communities.

(v) Is there a list of climate projects happening at ward level, maintained by the Community Development team? Can Members access this, or information on funding green initiatives in their ward?

As part of the next stage of development of Co-operative Neighbourhoods teams will be reporting on a number of neighbourhood initiatives that support council-wide ambitions. This will include reporting on climate change initiatives, so access to this can be made available. I would encourage Members to discuss ideas with their Community Development Officer or Neighbourhood Warden or bring to their regular neighbourhood group meeting to enable project ideas to develop. Members are encouraged to think about how they utilise their own local Community Budgets to support such initiatives.

2. As an Executive Member of the Council do you think the issue yet has the priority it needs?

Whilst there is always room for improvement in any organisation, Councillor Simon Speller, Councillor Richard Henry and myself meet regularly with officers, on a Climate Change Progress Group and we all agree that a bottom up approach is extremely important in a town like Stevenage, as well as a top down Government funded projects.

Following our cooperative neighbourhood approach, we agree that including local small environmental groups is the way forward, but especially working with local elected ward members. There are no defined lines within portfolios on Executive and we recognise the overlap. We ensure we have regular updates on the impact of environmental issues to Exec. I sit on many outside voluntary groups who look at the environmental impact, as well as the emphasis in community wealth building. The environment and the economy are intertwined within our communities. And are a priority in everything I do. However, the autonomy of choice must come cooperatively with ward members taking the lead. I am always open to being contacted at any time irrespective of what colours you work under, we are stronger together. Our children's future on this planet is paramount and should be all of our lasting legacy.

3. E&E Select Committee Members may have further supplementary questions for you at the meeting.