

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

### **MINUTES OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING**

Monday, 16th January, 2023

Present:- **Councillors** Karen Walker, Joel Hirst, Shelley Bromley, Paul Crossley, Grant Johnson, Ruth Malloy, Lisa O'Brien, Ryan Wills and Dr Kumar

#### **59 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **60 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Democratic Services Officer drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **61 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no apologies for absence or substitutions.

#### **62 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

#### **63 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

#### **64 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING**

Nicolette Boater made a statement to the panel regarding the item on 'Climate Annual Report & Ecological Emergency Action Plan' a copy of which is attached to these minutes. There were no factual questions from the Panel in relation to the statement. Cllr Warren agreed to meet Nicolette to discuss the points she raised in further detail.

Cllr Hardman submitted a question regarding Odd Down Park and Ride. The question and answer were circulated to Panel members in advance of the meeting and are attached as an appendix to these minutes.

#### **65 MINUTES**

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

## 66 CLIMATE EMERGENCY ANNUAL REPORT AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

Cllr Warren, Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel, introduced the item and drew attention to the progress and achievements over the last year as detailed in the Climate Emergency Annual Report and the new Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

Jane Wildblood, Strategic Manager: Climate & Environmental Sustainability, gave a presentation on the Climate Emergency Annual Report which covered the following:

- Climate Dashboard 2022
- Climate Action: Progress in Buildings
- Climate Action: Progress in Transport
- Climate Action: Progress in Renewable Energy
- A Focus on Achievements
- Community Engagement Highlights
- Route Map Projected Milestones 2023-2024
- 2023-24 Key Climate Actions
- Renewable Energy Focus:
- Acceleration of renewable energy delivery
- Climate Action & achieving net zero carbon 2030: Our asks of central government

Panel members commented and asked questions as follows (*Officer or Cabinet Member response shown in italics*):

Cllr Crossley asked the following questions:

- (1) How could Bath & North East Somerset Council (B&NES) encourage the downward trend in private car journeys which had started during the Covid pandemic? *This was an ongoing challenge for both the Government and local authorities as car journeys had started to return to pre-pandemic levels. B&NES was looking at investing in infrastructure as well as other options such as converting Park and Ride sites into multi modal interchanges and workplace parking levies.*
- (2) Was more information available on the Government's timescale for requiring Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to have Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) C rating and minimum energy efficiency standard (MEES) requirements EPC D rating. Was there a risk that landlords would not make the required improvements? *The target date was this year and the MEES requirement would apply to all types of other buildings being let. There would be no public money available for private landlords to make improvements for HMOs although funding and grants would be available for social housing. It would be a national standard that landlords would be expected to*

*comply with before renting out property. Further information on the detail would be made available.*

Cllr Hirst stated that he welcomed the report and the progress made since the last annual update and asked the following questions:

- (1) How soon could the Park and Ride sites be redeveloped into multi modal transport interchanges? *Council officers were currently undertaking feasibility work and speaking to national grid operators. There were issues relating to the connection of solar rays to the grid which may require a battery storage solution. The timescale would probably be a couple of years rather than months due to the complexity of the work.*
- (2) How could residents be persuaded to opt for greener carbon negative heating systems and move away from the use of fossil fuels? *There was practical advice on the B&NES website, but it was a challenge to encourage people to switch due to the cost and disruption of installing alternative heating systems. B&NES was working with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) to develop the Retrofit Accelerator which would provide an easily accessible support service for homeowners who want to retrofit their property. There were also obstacles within the industry such as a skill shortage of people available to install heat pumps.*

Cllr O'Brien thanked officers for the report and noted the progress made. She asked the following questions:

- (1) What were the details of the 6 sustainable projects identified under the heading of decarbonising transport which had secured £125m funding? *Information on the "City Regional Sustainable Transport Plan" was available on both the B&NES and WECA websites and schemes included the Bristol to Bath A4 corridor, Bath Sustainable Transport, Somer Valley links to Bristol and Bath and Liveable Neighbourhoods. B&NES was mindful of the importance of engaging with communities in developing these projects.*
- (2) The capital cost of redeveloping the Pixash Lane site had doubled. Where was the money coming from? *This was a mixture of borrowing to invest, Government and other grant funding. Capital costs were not met by Council Tax.*

Cllr Bromley made the following comments:

- (1) In relation to the proposed redevelopment of the Park and Ride sites, there needed to be a media campaign to attract local residents. There was a perception that the sites were for visitors to Bath and local residents also needed to be persuaded to use alternatives to the private car when visiting the city centre.
- (2) There had been a lot of recent coverage in the national media about the harm caused by woodburning stoves in terms of pollution which was damaging both to users and the local environment. It was important for local residents to be made aware of this when considering

wood burning stoves as an option for heating their homes. *This comment would be passed onto Cllr Rigby as the Cabinet Member responsible for air quality.*

Cllr Johnson raised the following comment and questions:

- (1) A lot of the achievements in the annual report referred to WECA projects rather than B&NES projects. The report was also lacking clear targets and timescales which were required to measure success. *The WECA projects were joint with B&NES and in addition to the joint projects were specific B&NES achievements such as the Local Plan Partial Update (LPPU) which would help achieve climate emergency targets.*
- (2) B&NES had cut funding to supported bus services in North East Somerset but not in Bath. How could a Bath-centric approach be justified and how could the Council meet transport targets while withdrawing funding to rural services? *B&NES had lobbied WECA for demand responsive transport in the North East Somerset area and as this was not an option in Bath, supported services had been retained.*

Cllr Wills asked the following questions:

- (1) Has B&NES also lobbied WECA about the cutting back of the 178 service which impacted on villages such as High Littleton? *B&NES had lobbied WECA and there would be a new service supporting High Littleton.*
- (2) What was the timescale for the Liveable Neighbourhoods projects which were not part of the 15 prioritised for development? *Work was continuing on the 15 pilot projects and community engagement was a key part of this work. There was no timeline for other projects but progressing the scheme was a high priority.*

Cllr Malloy asked the following questions:

- (1) In terms of increasing renewable energy, would wind turbines be considered where appropriate? *Work had been undertaken to map constraints and identify areas of potential. There were a number of constraints, not only Bath being a world heritage site but also approaches to Bristol Airport and issues relating to visibility. Once the LPPU was approved, the information would be available on the B&NES website and the new policy direction would open up opportunities in the market.*
- (2) In relation to decarbonising buildings and retrofitting older buildings, has B&NES considered working with Bath Preservation Trust to build up its data base? *B&NES did work closely with Bath Preservation Trust but the collection of data was a challenging issue. An EPC was only required when a home was being sold and so homes that had not been on the market for a long time would not have an EPC. Data was a key element of the WECA Retrofit Accelerator project, and the housing team was helping to build up data in relation to different house types.*

The Chair asked the following questions:

- (1) In relation to decarbonising the council fleet, how many vehicles needed to be upgraded, at what cost and did the Council have the capacity to charge electric vehicles? *This was a challenging area, and it wasn't possible to give an accurate answer about costs or number of vehicles. The costs would vary depending on the type of vehicle and it was important for B&NES to consider the most cost-effective way of decarbonising its fleet. The Waste Team was looking at interim hybrid solutions.*

Stuart Gardner, Nature Recovery Manager gave a presentation on the Ecological Emergency Action Plan which covered the following:

- An Ecological Emergency
- Examples of what has been done so far
- Development of the action plan
- The “what”: Vision and Priorities
- The “how”: Action Themes
- Priority Actions
- Focus for 2023

Cllr Hirst commented that as the action plan was at an early stage, it was important to learn from the Climate Emergency Action Plan in terms of tightening up on timelines and deliverables. He asked the following question:

- (1) Although the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements in the LPPU would protect areas being developed, was the Council doing enough to protect sensitive sites from being developed? *BNG was not intended to give developers permission to destroy habitats and replace elsewhere but rather to be used as part of a mitigation hierarchy. The aim was to avoid damage in the first instance and only where this was not possible, to use BNG. Nature recovery network work was being carried out to identify ecological corridors with a view to avoiding development of identifying mitigation works in these areas. B&NES was also looking to see if the 10% BNG figure could be increased.*

The Chair commented that when B&NES was looking to identify sites for development, it was important these sites were assessed to be suitable.

Cllr O'Brien asked the following questions:

- (1) Local Members had received a detailed presentation in 2019 from the Avon Bristol Avon Rivers Trust on suggested improvements to the River Chew including works to remove the weir located in Keynsham Park. As work was planned to replace the nearby footbridge, could work on the weir be undertaken at the same time? *B&NES was working with the Trust and water companies to support them in developing their 5-year action plans and getting projects aligned. A new project manager was in post and would be able to*

*give an update pulling all the elements together. The suggestion raised by Cllr O'Brien would be passed on to the appropriate officer.*

- (2) In relation to the 30% target for land protected for nature by 2030, did the measurements relate to volume of land or quality in terms of ecological value? *The 30% target was based on scientific evidence relating to ecological networks. Further work was required to identify where B&NES was in terms of meeting the target. There would be a combination of locally managed sites, sites managed under stewardship and BNG all which would require management schemes.*

Cllr Johnson welcomed the layout of the report and asked the following questions:

- (1) How accessible would the state of nature framework be for local residents/community groups and Parish/Town Councils to use to progress their own commitments? *The Local Nature Strategy was important for these groups to identify key habitats and suggest nature improvements. Parish and Town Councils had been given advice on creating a template for Local Nature Action Plans at the Parish Liaison meeting in November.*
- (2) Was there any more detail on the 4 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) mentioned in the report which were in decline? *3 of the SSSIs were designated for geological interest and the other was a relatively small site designated as calcareous grassland. The SSSIs were monitored by Natural England and monitoring had been sparse since 2010, but more resource was now available to allow B&NES to work with Natural England to assess the sites with a view to bringing them into a good state.*

Cllr Crossley asked the following question:

- (1) Why was there no reference to private gardens in the action plan? *This would be picked up in communications and engagements with local residents which would give advice on how they could bring nature into their lives. This would be a key theme on the website which was due to be launched in the spring. There was also ongoing work with Avon Wildlife Trust and the Natural History Consortium who were developing information packs for community groups in preparation for the Festival of Nature. In addition, the WECA Pollinator Panel was looking at developing small grants which would be available for community groups.*

Cllr Malloy raised the following comment and question:

- (1) As there were no parish councils in Bath, it was important to work with community groups e.g., Wild About Bath and ensure they could access available information and funding.
- (2) In addition to protecting ecological corridors when considering new developments, was anything being done to protect ecological corridors from being eroded when residents turned their gardens into parking spaces? *This would be flagged up to planning colleagues to check policy was robust in this area.*

Cllr Bromley asked the following question:

- (1) Can you give more detail on farming clusters? *These were farmer led schemes which brought farmers together to look at shared issues. B&NES was looking to work closely with these groups to consider issues such as ecological corridors, nature recovery and sustainable farming.*

Cllr Wills asked the following question:

- (1) The report identified 2 out of 18 waterbodies which were in a good condition. What was the status of the other 16 and what were the issues preventing them from being in a good condition? *There were a variety of issues e.g., agriculture pollution, urban pollution, and obstructions, e.g., Keynsham weir. Not many of the waterbodies were in poor status, most were moderate. B&NES would be working closely with other bodies to bring the waterbodies up to good status.*

The Panel **RESOLVED** to recommend that the Climate Annual Report and Ecological Emergency Action Plan be included on the workplan for the appropriate Scrutiny Commission in the new administration.

#### **67 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

There was no Cabinet Member update.

#### **68 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Panel noted the future workplan.

The meeting ended at 6.20 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**