

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

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

Thursday, 14th September, 2023

Present:- **Councillors** Andy Wait, Michael Auton, Anna Box, Jess David, Alex Beaumont, June Player, Saskia Heijltjes, Grant Johnson and Ian Halsall (in place of John Leach)

11 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

12 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor John Leach gave his apologies and was substituted by Councillor Ian Halsall.

14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

15 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

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

Malcolm Baldwin - Circus Area Residents Association – made a statement regarding 'The importance of Liveable Neighbourhoods to communities within our heritage environment'. A copy of this statement is attached to the minutes.

17 MINUTES

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

18 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Sarah Warren, Deputy Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Travel gave an update which covered the following:

- There have been positive outcomes on the Clean Air Zone as set out in the annual report for 2022
- We are trialing e-scooters and e-bikes from a new provider through WECA. We are seeking information on parking arrangements and long-term loan facility.
- 20 further experimental cycle hangers are going ahead across the authority. Many spaces have already been booked.
- We are working with WECA regarding the city region sustainable transport fund.
- Current consultation on Bristol to Bath safe route – all encouraged to respond.
- Regarding bus routes, unfortunately further routes were lost over the summer – there are many reports of buses not arriving. We are putting together a proposed North East Somerset bus network. The proposal is on the desk of the Mayor of WECA. We hope he will restore some routes.
- The Green Transportation Team is feeding into the Local Plan.

Panel members asked the following questions – *the Cabinet Member responses are shown in italics*

Councillor Beaumont asked if any bike hangers are planned for the east side. *The Cabinet Member explained that WECA are about the consult on a new set of locations, suggestions are welcome.*

Councillor David asked if the Panel can have an update on the storage of storage of e-scooters and e-bikes.

Councillor David noted that the Local Plan was on the Panel's future workplan.

Councillor Player asked about the parking issue with e-bikes and e-scooters. *The Cabinet Member explained that the trial period had been extended. She added that there was due to be a press release to advise people to contact the provider with any parking issues.*

Councillor Johnson asked if the Panel could have information on the Cabinet Member update prior to the meeting. *The Cabinet Member agreed.*

Councillor Johnson asked about the revenue from the e-bike and e-scooter scheme and why it does not cover other areas. *The Cabinet Member explained that discussions are ongoing with WECA. She further explained that, over time, the scheme may be extended – this will be in discussion with ward members.*

Councillor Heijltjes asked if vacancies in parking and traffic management meant that income was being lost. She also asked about vacancies in environmental monitoring and about the overspend in recycling. *The Cabinet Member stated that she would seek to get this information.*

Councillor Heijltjes asked if excess parking income is spent on sustainable travel projects like school streets and extended hours for Park and Ride bus services. *The Cabinet Member stated that she would seek to get this information.*

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member.

19 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY ON CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY PLANS

The Chair invited the Cabinet Project Lead, Councillor Oli Henman, to introduce the item. The presentation covered the following:

- Engagement is key to our work in tackling the climate and ecological emergencies.
- We undertake a wide range of engagement activity – some highlights from 2022/23
- Our engagement priorities for 2023/34 are focused around three key themes
- We are developing our ongoing programme of events. Upcoming events for autumn 2023
- Next steps

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Heijltjes stated that transport is the missing theme, she stated that one of the most powerful effects on the environment can be people's choice of transport. She asked if the Council can showcase travel choices – such as Councillors using e-bikes. She also suggested that Councillors based in the city of Bath be no longer eligible for free parking when attending Council business through MiPermit or free parking any time by using an outdated paper parking permit, unless they are a Blue Badge holder. She stated that she believes that this is an outdated policy and not in line with our Climate and Ecological Emergencies. The Cabinet Project Lead stated that he has tested an e-bike today, he agreed that more needs to be added to the engagement action plan regarding transport. He agreed about the Council showcasing travel choices but stated that members parking is beyond his scope. He stated that he would take away the point on parking and feed it back to relevant colleagues.

Councillor Box stated that a recent cross party group in Westminster concluded that there is not enough resource for Councils. She asked if we could lobby Westminster who are dragging their feet over their own policy. She stated that next year is an election year and she hoped for a more engaged future.

Councillor Johnson stated that most events are targeted at people with an active interest in climate and nature issues, he stated that the engagement strategy also needs to target people who may not be enthusiastic and do not currently engage. He stated that social media can be politicised and asked how this can be counteracted and turned into positives towards the Council. The Cabinet Project Lead agreed and stated an example of 'solar together' which is aimed at making solar more affordable – this is framed as a practical way to reduce bills rather than preaching a message. He agreed on the need for more community level conversations at rural and parish

level. He also stated that more decentralised and less formal meeting venues can be used for these conversations. He agreed that social media can be toxic and stated that the key for the Council team is to provide shareable and evidence based information. There is no silver bullet but transparency reduces the risk of misinformation.

Council Auton stated that there was a lot of focus on Bath. He stated that he is happy to work with the team with regard to Midsomer Norton where he runs a monthly farmers market and attends Town Council meetings. The Cabinet Project Lead welcomed these suggestions.

Councillor Player suggested that each ward is visited in liaison with ward Councillors who have connections to residents. The Cabinet Project Lead stated that this is the approach that will be taken in that each part of the authority will be targeted over the year.

Councillor David referred to the Green Open Homes scheme and asked if this could be extended to biodiverse gardens/rainwater capture etc. She explained that in Whiteway there is a front garden competition and also the Bristol & Bath Nature Festival was a brilliant event which could be extended to schools during week days. The Cabinet Project Lead agreed and thanked Councillor David for the suggestions.

Councillor Heijltjes asked about information and engagement regarding food waste (guidance on what people buy and how it can be disposed of) and how restaurants could showcase this and policies could show leadership on this issue. She also suggested that schools and parents could be united in projects regarding climate and ecological emergency. The Cabinet Project Lead stated that these were excellent suggestions that can be incorporated.

Councillor Player also suggested community partnership involvement and Bath in Bloom.

Councillor Wait asked about the ongoing issue regarding solar panels on Keynsham Civic Centre. The officer explained that the team are currently working to resolve a legal and technical issue on this. Councillor Wait was reassured and thanked Alistair Singleton (Councillor in the previous administration) for his work on this.

20 LIVEABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS UPDATE

The Chair invited the Cabinet Project Lead, Councillor Joel Hirst, to give an update. Councillor Hirst explained that he has been the Cabinet Project Lead since May and he reports to Councillor Manda Rigby. He explained that there is a balance between the administration wanting to move faster on this issue and the reality of the practical details. He explained that there are currently 15 schemes regarding Liveable Neighbourhoods. He outlined the policy objective which is health and wellbeing and safer travel routes. He stated that the issue of Liveable Neighbourhoods was discussed a great deal around the time of the election and the election outcome is seen as a strong mandate.

Regarding Residents Parking Zones (RPZs) Councillor Hirst stated that with the implementation of the Walcot/Snow Hill and Oldfield Park/Westmoreland RPZs, 7 in total have been completed (including during the last administration). He explained that the schemes are broadly cost neutral; the income is ringfenced and people apply for permits online while blue badge holders are free.

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Player asked about enforcement. The Cabinet Project Lead explained that the enforcement team had not been increased for a while so would need to look at this in the budget. Regarding the income, he explained that his understanding was that there are rules around excess income from parking schemes which mean it had limited use.

Councillor Player stated that it was important that residents so not feel they are paying for something that can't be monitored or enforced. She stated that at the moment the scheme is working but students had not started the new term yet.

Councillor Player asked how the permit cost was decided. The Cabinet Project Lead explained that he understood that there had been a market assessment on what was considered reasonable while looking at charges made in other authorities. He added that Bristol may be consulting on increasing their fees.

Councillor Heijltjes stated that she would have appreciated a paper for this item so that she could prepare. She referenced the scheme in Walcot and mentioned some boundary issues with Lambridge. She asked about future plans for RPZs. The Cabinet Project Lead explained that there is a meeting next week to discuss potential new schemes where they will work through requests. He will update the Panel further at their November meeting.

Councillor Halsall stated that there had been a lot of scepticism about RPZs – some people believe it is a cash cow so the information about the funding is useful and needs to be made clear. Councillor David agreed and explained that her ward had had overspill from the neighbouring RPZ – she asked if there was a plan to look at particular types of RPZ. The Cabinet Project Lead stated that the policy is on the website, it was not anticipated that the policy would be replaced soon.

Councillor Johnson stated that it would be useful to have prior information on items before the meeting. He stated that he did not have much connection with RPZs but acknowledged that parking enforcement is an issue in Paulton particularly at school pick up time. He stated that the enforcement issue is not just about Bath and RPZs.

Councillor Box stated that in Keynsham there are lots of houses with no drive so asked that Keynsham be considered in terms of residents parking. The Cabinet Project Lead stated that he was keen to hear about these issues where residents lose out so that they can be protected.

Regarding Liveable Neighbourhoods, Councillor Hirst stated that the aim is to improve residential streets. He stated that a lot of work has been done in the last 4

years - 15 schemes were identified (and co designed with the community) and 3 have been brought forward. The Council has invested £1million in the last 4 years and £6million funding from WECA is expected to be confirmed. Since May the priority has been getting schemes into action but it is a tight team and construction costs are rising, also Government rhetoric is pro motorist. He stated that he would bring a breakdown of future plans to the November meeting of the Panel – he stated that a full business case had to be completed for each of the schemes being brought forward. He stated that the hope was for 5 experimental schemes coming online and an evaluation of the 3 existing schemes. He stated that there were originally 15 schemes with another 70 suggestions from previous Councillors, he asked how the Panel think these should be prioritised. He also asked the Panel view on whether the ‘rolls royce’ level of community co-design should be maintained.

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Halsall stated that if the ‘rolls royce’ level of co-development increased delay maybe it could be scaled back to speed things up. Once schemes are implemented, residents will see the benefits.

Councillor Heijltjes stated that we must adhere to the criteria to confirm the WECA funding for the £6million. The Cabinet Project Lead agreed and stated that a business case will be completed.

Councillor Beaumont asked about schemes outside of Bath. The Cabinet Project Lead stated that the ambition was to extend to many areas but not as many schemes were proposed in North East Somerset. He believes this will change.

Councillor Player stated that the showcase schemes need to be considered as not all areas are the same. The Cabinet Project Lead agreed and stated that there are a range of areas in the 15 schemes.

Councillor David stated that engagement must to done to ensure people are with us but maybe the process could be streamlined.

Councillor Heijltjes stated that in terms of engagement it is very important that people experience the effects – planters can be cheap to remove. We should be bold – put in experimental interventions and then consult on what people think of the effect.

Councillor Halsall stated that it would be useful to review the 70 suggestions to check if they are all still relevant.

21 LOCAL FOOD GROWING DISCUSSION

The Chair invited Ceri Williams, Scrutiny Officer to introduce the item. The officer explained that the Panel can add value to the policy development on this issue and suggested a task and finish group be set up with a view to reporting back to the Panel at a future meeting.

Panel members agreed that a task and finish group would be the best way forward and asked that membership be opened up to other Scrutiny Panel members.

Councillors David, Player, Auton, Leach and Johnson registered their interest.

Councillor Box asked that the following be considered: an emphasis on preventative medicine and a framework around sustainability, bio diversity, carbon impact, economic viability and education. Please consider deprived populations.

22 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel noted the future workplan and the following points and suggestions raised:

- Update on storage/parking with regards to e-scooters and e-bikes
- Liveable Neighbourhoods and Residents Parking Zones update (November 2023)
- Task and Finish Group on Local Food Growing feedback report
- Rivers – current state of our rivers (and canal)
- Council house building and homelessness update
- Biodiversity/hedgerows
- Bath (and Oldfield Park) railway ticket office closure (a member briefing)
- Nature recovery
- Allotments/wild growth areas

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services