

PUBLIC

MINUTES of a meeting of **IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - CLIMATE CHANGE, BIODIVERSITY AND CARBON REDUCTION** held on Monday, 5 February 2024 at Committee Room 1, County Hall, Matlock.

PRESENT

Councillor W Major (in the Chair)

Councillors G Hickton, B Bingham, J Bryan, S Bull, M Ford, A Hayes and D Taylor.

Apologies for absence were submitted for Councillor D Collins and A Gibson.

Officers present: Councillor Barry Lewis (Council Leader, Cabinet Member - Strategic Leadership, Culture, Tourism and Climate Change), David Beard (Head of Projects), Glyn Dutton (Head Of Network Planning), Martyn Handley (Senior Project Officer), Chris Hegarty (Technical Lead - Bsip), Juliette Normington (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Susan White (Biodiversity Officer).

1/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2/24 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – to confirm the non-exempt minutes of the Improvement and Scrutiny - Climate Change, Biodiversity and Carbon Reduction meeting held on 4 December 2023.

3/24 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

4/24 DERBYSHIRE ROAD VERGES PROJECT

Councillor Barry Lewis, portfolio holder for climate change gave the committee a summary of recent work completed by the road verges project. The work had seen an increase in biodiversity and nature corridors across Derbyshire and was, on the whole, welcomed by the public however, the project was now facing financial issues and cost burdens.

Councillor Lewis was joined by Glyn Dutton, Head of Network Planning and Susan White, Biodiversity Officer who gave a presentation on the different challenges of urban and rural verge management. Verges in

towns and villages were cut fewer times than those in rural areas. The cut material would be collected, removed from site and disposed of elsewhere.

On the whole, the majority of people supported measures to improve biodiversity on highway verges with much discussion around visual appearance, safety, biodiversity emergency and statutory duties. Some Districts and Boroughs had made changes whilst others were constrained by local decisions. The agency agreements covered more than the management of grass verges with the Boroughs and Districts balanced the various outputs and co-ordinated with their own green space management.

Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions on the information given in the presentation. A number of queries were made regarding the cutting programme. Timelines for where and when cutting would take place were determined by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust who also had an input with localities over what was planted. It was recognised that it was difficult to envisage the results of seed planting and that local conversations were needed to educate the public regarding their appearance. Guidance was provided on which verges would be selected for diversity projects and it was recognised that local actions had affected some projects.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Lewis, Mr Dutton and Ms White for their report.

5/24 THE GREEN ENTREPRENEURS FUND

Martyn Handley introduced the report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting asking Committee to consider and review progress on the delivery of the Green Entrepreneurs Fund (GEF) and included an update on grants awarded and assessment of outcomes.

This was accompanied by a slide presentation which listed the types of businesses that had expressed interest in the scheme, the type of projects supported, the outputs being achieved and contributions to tackling climate change. Also highlighted were the many learning points taken from the project:

- The economy was leading to caution on investment;
- The change of the small grants criteria prompted an increase in demand for the strand which filled the gap left by the DE-Carbonise scheme closure;
- There was a noticeable gap in coordinated grant funding towards low carbon investment such as solar panels/ground source heat

- pumps/air source heat pumps;
- Lead times for project development were 6 months on average in part due to difficulties in the supply chain and caution in investment;
- The Scholarship scheme demand was slow, with a noticeable slowdown in 2023;
- Average scholarship funds were lower than anticipated at £838 per person;
- There had been significant amounts of CO2 saved; a full assessment would be completed when the scheme closed.

Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the report and additional information given in the presentation. It was clarified that the University of Derby worked with applicants from the beginning of the process right through to the end. Calculations on the amount of CO2 saved were also performed by the university.

The Chairman remarked on the excellent scheme and, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Martyn Handley for his report and presentation.

RESOLVED - to note progress on the delivery of the Green Entrepreneurs Fund including an update on the grants awarded and assessment of outcomes presented at the meeting.

6/24

IMPROVING DERBYSHIRE'S BUS NETWORK AN UPDATE ON THE BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Chris Hegarty introduced the report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting updating Committee on the implementation work undertaken on the various elements of the Bus Service Improvement Plan over the last 12 months and the plans for future works in the next phase of the project.

This was supported by a presentation that outlined Derbyshire's bus services and journeys and how the national bus strategy operated. A lot of work had gone in to developing the improvement plan which gave rise to six overarching objectives. The Department for Transport had provided funding totalling £47m but were very specific on how and what it could be spent.

Much of the work started last year, with attention on improved services, better value ticketing, real time information, transport hubs and bus priority measures. Some work would be continue into 2024 however, much of the work linked to the transport hubs scheme was beginning to be delivered with many linked to other improvement schemes.

Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the report and additional information given in the presentation. Mr Hegarty confirmed that not all services were on the real time system but this was improving and now allowed service providers to access the system. Franchising similar to that in urban areas would not be suitable to rural areas due to differing requirements and challenges.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hegarty for his report and remarked on the terrific work being undertaken around bus services. He recognised that the appointment of a mayor across the combined authorities may impact the service over the next 12-18 months.

RESOLVED to

- 1) note the work undertaken to implement the various elements in the Bus Service Improvement Plan over the last 12 months; and
- 2) note the work proposed for the coming year.

7/24

DE-CARBONISING THE CORPORATE ESTATE

David Beard introduced the report, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting, asking Committee to note progress on the plans to decarbonise the Council's estate and achieve Net Zero by 2032 or sooner; endorse the updated targets as noted in the proposed Carbon Reduction Strategy; to note the impact of the exceptional budget/cost control measures which would defer the delivery of carbon reduction and energy efficiency projects; and to endorse the proposal to progress the proposed solar farm at Williamthorpe.

The report was accompanied by a presentation which highlighted the reduction in energy consumption since 2022 and current predicted targets. Fuel use should primarily be 'green' by 2032 with low carbon emissions and fossil fuels being progressively replaced. Residual emissions would be offset by renewable energy generation. Funding for future initiatives was a challenge resulting in current carbon reduction projects being put on hold. It was proposed that a business case would be put forward to recycle capital receipts to fund future projects.

Mr Beard went on to explain the rationale around the development of the proposed solar farm at Williamthorpe Farm for which a new application for planning permission was required. The site already had the benefit of a secured grid connection and had been allocated capital funding. The development was expected to generate income to pay back

development costs as well as generate 3.2 million kWh of renewable energy per annum, providing 25% of the offsetting capacity required for carbon emissions associated with property. Measures had been taken regarding visual impact and biodiversity loss and the Climate Change and Environment Board had endorsed the recommendation to proceed.

Members of the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the report and additional information given in the presentation. It was confirmed that ecologists had undertaken the necessary assessments of the impact on the site.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Mr Beard for his report and presentation.

RESOLVED – to:

- 1) Note progress on the plans to decarbonise the council's estate and achieve Net Zero by 2032 or sooner;
- 2) Endorse the updated targets as noted in the proposed Carbon Reduction Strategy;
- 3) Note the impact of the exceptional budget/cost control measures which will defer the delivery of carbon reduction and energy efficiency projects; and
- 4) Endorse the proposal to progress the proposed solar farm at Williamthorpe.

8/24 WORK PROGRAMME

Members agreed the work programme for the April 2024 meeting and were encouraged to propose items for future consideration by the Committee.

The meeting finished at 4.37 pm