

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP held at ZOOM, on TUESDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor L Pepper (Chair)
Councillors M Caton, R Freeman, B Light and R Pavitt

Officers in attendance: B Brown (Assistant Director - Environmental Services),
C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) and C Fiddy (Climate Change Project Officer)

Also present: E Gildea (Resident)

ECC4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor G Driscoll and J Richards, NFU County Advisor.

ECC5 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting held on 8th September 2021 were approved as a correct record.

ECC6 ALLOCATION OF FUNDING AND ASSOCIATED GOVERNANCE PROCESS

The Chair introduced the meeting and said that the Climate Crisis Action Plan would be going to the Joint Executive Team on Friday 12th November and then to Scrutiny Committee on the 23rd November.

She said she wanted this meeting to be an opportunity for open debate on how to spend the £1m funding put aside for climate change related projects.

She wanted the budget to be spent on something that had a long-term impact and outlined the biodiversity benefits, she said this could be one project or a number of different projects.

Councillor Freeman said that £1m would not go far and he thought that it should be spent on one or maybe two projects under the Council's direct control. His ideas included Woodland, Arboretum or Biodiversity projects. He said there would need to be a fixed term consultation to gather public views and the project needed to progress quickly.

Councillor Caton said that the next step following this meeting should be an options analysis to ensure that the Council could clearly see what it was getting for the money spent and how it would reduce emissions. He said that there were government initiatives that could increase the amount of funding available.

In response to a question from Councillor Light, the Climate Change Project Officer said that only £9k of the budget had been spent so far and that was on 3 surveys from Common Place: -

- Biodiversity survey – completed with a very high response
- Active Travel survey – commissioned but not yet completed
- And one other that had not yet been used.

She said that the phasing of the funding within the budget was one third each year for three years, she said the spend might be phased differently depending on when it was required.

She said that there were numerous options on how the money could be spent and asked that Members gave feedback to guide the decision making progress on what they thought was most important and most needed. She said that in the district transport was the biggest carbon emitter but was the responsibility of Essex County Council (ECC) and the next largest emitter was the housing sector.

Councillor Caton said that his top priority would be the energy efficiency of the housing stock, which would provide both environmental and social benefit. He said a large proportion of lower income families lived in private rented accommodation, and therefore it was important to encourage private Landlords to make the investment needed to provide the environmental and social benefits.

The Climate Change Project Officer said that the Government had different levels of energy performance certificates for private rented properties and the standard required for these properties was due to be raised and could then be enforced. She said she would be undertaking a project to find out how many properties in Uttlesford District Council (UDC) did not meet the higher standard and she would then contact the Landlords to pursue the issue with them. She said it would be a low cost way to start the project.

Resident, E Gildea said he had three initiatives in mind: -

- To endorse home insulation, publicise smart meters and gain leverage with Landlords.
- To encourage the switch to electric vehicles which would require on street charging to support people in smaller houses and flats, without places to charge their vehicles. This would be in collaboration with ECC.
- To turn the green space around the Castle back to wildflowers which would help biodiversity and save on the cost of mowing.

Councillor Light said as a member of the Museum Management Working Group there were development plans around the Museum and Castle which would require some of the green space to remain for events. She said that there were plans to make some parts into Wildflower Meadows and she would be willing to take the issue forward.

She said it was critical that the funding was used for long term strategic projects which would have a lasting effect. Her ideas were: -

- More green spaces
- Retrofitting social housing – she thought this could be done from government grants and the housing revenue budget.

- Energy Networks focused on green energy.
- Waste disposal energy creation.
- All new homes to be environmentally sustainable through Planning and the Local Plan.
- Green transport in conjunction with ECC and other private transport companies.
- She said that Electrical Vehicle (EV) charging points were being funded by private companies and did not need to come from the budget.

Councillor Pepper said there were already charging points owned and installed by UDC on the Common, leisure centre and 8 on London Road.

The Climate Change Project Officer said that there were some concerns over EV charging as some charging points were profitable and some not. They needed to be packaged up so that the ones which were needed but not profitable were also delivered.

Councillor Freeman said that as part of the Planning Committee process all new builds required EV charging points or at the minimum the duct works completed. He also requested that all new properties were made heat pump ready and said this should also be included as part of the Local Plan.

Councillor Pavitt said that the Local Plan should include wildlife and river corridors and green space, and he said it was important to draw up policies now that would feed into the Local Plan. He also said that new wetlands linked to reed beds and natural sewage treatments would help to overcome the sewage problems. He said it was important to act now to get these ideas into the Local Plan.

Resident, E Gildea said that he would support funding to help the initial set up of community energy networks, as residents had tried to set up but without much uptake or support. He also suggested an electric bike trial was set up, to allow people to see the benefits before deciding to purchase.

The Climate Change Project Officer responded to the points raised: -

- Common Place had agreed to export the mapping data from the recent survey and Natural England had developed a mapping system countrywide. She said that the plan was to import UDC's local data into the system. She said she was working closely with ECC on the main nature recovery network map.
- Community Energy initiatives were being investigated and this might need some initial funding.
- She had some concerns about District Heat Networks as they tended to be run by private companies, there was no real transparency and fuel costs could rise without much control for the area it was serving. She said they needed to be closely controlled.
- There was a possible electric bike trial, initially funded by S106 money from ECC.

Councillor Light said that she thought that communities needed to take some risk in terms of setting up heat networks she said the district should be as innovative as possible.

In response to Councillor Pavitt, the Climate Change Project Officer said that because Saffron Walden was in an 'air quality management area' grant money had been applied for and this would fund an advertising campaign in the district to stop idling cars.

Councillor Pavitt also said that shop owners were wasting energy by having their doors open and once the need created by the Covid restrictions no longer applied this needed to stop.

The Chair said that Councillor Driscoll had asked that she put forward his idea to retrofit parish and town council buildings, using solar panels and electric charging points.

The Chair said she wanted to spend some of the money on biodiversity and green projects from the initiatives highlighted in the recent survey.

The Chair agreed with Councillor Caton who said that it was important that the initiatives were spread throughout the district in a balanced way.

In response to a question from E Gildea the Climate Change Project Officer said that calculations for the carbon footprints of both UDC and the whole of the district were taking place.

The Chair said the switch to a green tariff at UDC had been a big achievement. She suggested that an advert was put into the local papers highlighting available grants and guidance from the Council. She said she was getting out into the district with a pop-up stand to talk to residents about what UDC wanted to achieve.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and said that the next step would be to create a list of options from the comments made in the meeting. She thanked E Gildea for his contribution and for his Green Week and Bell ringing initiatives.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm.