

**ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP held at ZOOM
on WEDNESDAY, 1 MARCH 2023 at 7.00 pm**

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

Officers in attendance: B Brown (Assistant Director of Environmental Services),
C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) and V Reed (Climate
Change, Lead Officer).

Also present: L Bowser (Principal Community Infrastructure Planner, New
Communities, Uttlesford), B Coleman (PJA), S Essex (Transport
Initiatives), Councillor P Gadd (Essex County Council; Saffron
Walden Town Council), R Jones (PJA), and H Taylor (Local
Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator Essex County Council).

ECC25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Smith.

There were no declarations of interest.

ECC26 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd January 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

It was noted that an update on the Climate Change action plan had been published and was to be considered at a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 2nd March 2023.

**ECC27 LOCAL WALKING AND CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN
(PRESENTATION AND UPDATE)**

Ben Coleman and Rebecca Jones from PJA presented the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). They said that the project would be focused on 3 main areas within the district; Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and the A120 corridor.

They said that there would be different strands of the project scope which included:-

- Strategic Cycle Routes, which would look at longer distance cycle routes within key settlements.
- Velo Villages to create better links from villages to local transport.

- Active Travel Links which would look at the feasibility of increasing network coverage of walking and cycling within the district taking into account the existing infrastructure.
- Quiet Lanes to calm and reduce the impact of vehicular traffic on rural locations.

Mr Coleman said that the current stage of the process was to gather information and data and to undertake their own analysis of demand. He said that the results would then be translated into possible networks and site audits would be undertaken. He said that finally the ideas would translate into designs and provide a prioritised list for walking and cycling within the district. He said that this was expected to be completed by July 2023.

The Chair said that the Council had declared a climate and biodiversity emergency which was a key challenge. She said that the main issue was to provide a genuine choice for sustainable travel and change behaviour away from car use, taking into account that the two largest towns did not have railway stations. She said it was essential that cycle and walking routes linked to the main employment hubs, the largest of which was Stansted Airport, and to the train stations.

Mr Coleman said that there were other counties with similar problems who were working on similar projects. He said that there was some optimism and the key was to provide choices.

Councillor Gadd introduced himself and said that he had joined the meeting in his capacity as an Essex County Councillor and the Leader of Saffron Walden Town Council.

He agreed to pass on the following information to PJA:-

- The potential cycle schemes that had been prepared and were being reviewed by Essex County Council (ECC).
- A strategic cycle route from Saffron Walden to Great Chesterford, linking into the research park and then connecting to Cambridge and the Genome centre.
- Details of the old railway line from Saffron Walden to Ashdon and beyond that could be re-opened as a cycle path.

He said that ECC applied the Cycle Infrastructure Design Guidance, LTN120, without discretion and therefore it was not possible to have cycle routes in Saffron Walden due to the suggested guidance that cycle paths were 3 metres wide. He said that ECC were also against applying a 20mph zone throughout Saffron Walden. He asked that discretion was used within the project to allow for more flexibility, to allow cycle routes and to recommend that the 20mph speed limit was used more widely.

Members discussed:-

- The lack of safe walking and cycling routes from Stansted Mountfitchet and Birchanger to Bishops Stortford, and particularly the issue of crossing the A120. The improvements at Junction 8 of the M11 which could provide a Pelican Crossing.

- The safety issues of cycling on ordinary routes and the key to wider usage of cycle routes by linking them safely to the guided bus route, Chesterford Retail Park and into Cambridge.

In response to Members questions the following comments were made:-

- ECC had so far been supportive to the work being carried out on the LCWIP.
- The National Cycling Network (NCN) did still exist and some sections went through Essex including the Flitch Way. These networks had been set up either using signage or change to infrastructure, but the maintenance had largely been left to the responsibility of private owners which had varied in quality.
- There were plans to look at and improve the NCN routes. Ms Jones agreed to check as part of the review.
- It was important to provide a choice and to fill in any gaps left by public transport.
- There were some villages within the district that would be used to explore the Velo Village concept; Clavering, Newport, Felstead, Fitch Green and Bannister Green. To investigate the feasibility of linking villages to public transport and to each other, to enable resource sharin and to look at improvements within villages to make them more walking and cycling friendly. This piece of work was conceptual at the moment and had not started.

The Principal Community Infrastructure Planner, New Communities, Uttlesford said:-

- ECC was engaged with the LCWIP.
- Maintenance was important and if projects went ahead that could not feasibly be taken on by developers, discussions would be needed to ascertain who was responsible for maintenance. She agreed to take this up with ECC.
- The July completion date for this work fed into the current Local Plan timetable which would provide more information on potential sites and growth areas.
- The former railway lines could be used across the district at Thaxted and Ashdon to Saffron Walden.

Councillor Driscoll said he would provide details about the Birchanger cycle track and the maintenance issues to the Principal Community Infrastructure Planner, New Communities, Uttlesford .

Steve Essex from Transport Initiatives explained that he had a contract to look at the Flitch Way and its links. He expected to complete this work within a month and would liaise with PJA to ensure that the 2 projects worked together to ensure work was not duplicated.

ECC28 ZERO CARBON COMMUNITIES GRANT

The Climate Change Lead Officer presented the report on Zero Carbon Communities Grants. She said that Councillors Caton, Pavitt and Pepper had assessed the 20 applications and a moderation meeting had taken place to short list the projects. There were 11 projects selected to receive grant awards in this round and applications had been restricted to the following themes:-

- Carbon emission reduction
- Biodiversity and
- Community engagement and behaviour change.

She said that all of the applications had been asked to show how they would evaluate and measure the impact of their projects; for the carbon emission reduction projects, this had to be quantifiable.

She said that the short-listed applications were scheduled to be heard at Cabinet on 16th March 2023 and all the applicants would then be contacted and feedback provided. The implementation of successful applications would be monitored and their stories shared via the webinar later in the year when the second round was launched.

The Chair thanked the Climate Change, Lead Officer for all her work.

In response to Members questions the following comments were made:-

- The successful projects were made up of 5 biodiversity, 5 Carbon emission reduction and 1 community engagement.
- The biodiversity projects included projects exploring grassed areas, pond clearance and wildflower meadow restoration.
- The carbon emission reduction projects included installing and supporting renewable energy, the installation of solar panels and replacement of street lighting with LEDs.
- The Community engagement project planned to support the rural community to decarbonise.
- The Climate Change, Lead Officer wanted to be involved in more partnerships, and she said that the schemes were a way to engage with the community and to be supportive of Climate Change action.
- The successful applications had good supporting evidence.
- Feedback to unsuccessful applications would be provided.
- The webinar and forms would be looked at again to make sure it was clear what was expected from the applications.

The report was noted.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24pm and restarted on Tuesday 14th March at 7pm.

ECC29 MEETING RECONVENED APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence for the reconvened meeting were received from Councillors Smith, Driscoll and Light.

ECC30 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN AND ESSEX LOCAL NATURE PARTNERSHIP (PRESENTATION AND UPDATE)

The Local Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator, Essex County Council joined the meeting and talked through a presentation on the Essex Local Nature Partnership, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) guidance pack.

She highlighted the following:-

- Essex County Councils' Local Nature Partnership (LNP) was launched in March 2022.
- There were 45-50 partners within the LNP chaired by Dr Simon Lister.
- The LNP was set up to drive positive changes within the local natural environment and to contribute to achieving the governments national environmental objectives on a local scale. It aimed to help the local area manage the natural environment for the benefit of people and nature.

The 4 targets which had been adopted were:-

- 50% sustainable farming.
- Increase natural green infrastructure from 14% to 25% by 2030.
- 1 in 4 people should be taking action for wildlife by 2030.
- Access to high quality green space for all.

The Local Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator said that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was a statutory requirement introduced in the Environment Act 2021 and aimed to drive actions for nature recovery. She made the following points:-

- ECC were the responsible authority tasked to deliver the strategy across the whole of greater Essex.
- The LNRS would underpin the wider Nature Recovery Network across the whole of England.
- The strategy was important to connect up spaces that already existed or where there was the opportunity for them to exist for nature.
- Further guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was expected March/April 2023.
- A lot of the data had already been collected in order to map the spaces and opportunities.

The Local Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator gave details of the Biodiversity Net Gain Working Group. She made the following comments:-

- A guidance pack had been produced.
- DEFRA had also released their response to the national consultation but it did not change the overall guidance substantially.
- Each district was working towards implementation by November 2023.

- The aim was to achieve 20% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) rather than the mandatory 10%.
- Extra funding had been confirmed of £16.7 million spread across every district.

The Local Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator agreed to circulate the presentation slides, along with her contact details and the BNG guidance pack to all councillors.

The Chair said that the emerging Local Plan was aiming for 20% BNG.

In response to Members questions the following comments were made:-

- Still awaiting DEFRA guidance on how the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) funding for agriculture works with these strategies. Land owners were not willing to commit because of all the unknowns, the guidance in February made no mention of ELMS.
- The Farm Clusters were a group of farmers who had come together to share practices on sustainability, creating spaces for nature and knowledge of current schemes.
- The North Essex Farm cluster had a series of events about water sustainability and winter bird feed.
- There were likely to be farmers from Uttlesford District Council (UDC) in that cluster and a recent questionnaire sent to the farmers within Essex had received 20 responses from farms within Uttlesford.
- The Local Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator said she would see what data she could extract from the responses that related to Uttlesford. There had been a specific question about how farms had been diversified. All the results of the survey were anonymous.
- It was intended that the LNRS would cross county boundaries and although there was not much guidance from DEFRA, the team at ECC were in touch with Hertfordshire, London and Cambridge as well as other counties. Suffolk and Norfolk Water were also involved.
- The 25% figure for the natural green infrastructure coverage had been adopted from the Essex Climate Action report which had been calculated using national and local data sets and had been verified. As COP had nationally agreed 30% the Local Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator agreed to ask the Land Use and Green Infrastructure team how that figure had been reached. She would feed back.

The Chair said there was a pocket of land in Thaxted owned by ECC that was being turned into a nature conversation area, joined up with another piece of land gifted under section 106 and left for rewilding. She asked that this was protected by ECC.

The Chair agreed to share with the group information on a recent biodiversity survey. The Local Nature Recovery Co-Ordinator agreed to keep in touch and share information on the progress of the LNRS.

The Chair thanked the speaker for her presentation.

The meeting ended at 8:25pm