

## Environment & Emergency Committee

**Present:** **Committee Members**  
Cllrs Pitt (Chairperson), Bolanz, Dunford, Goodman, Simonis and Slade

**In Attendance:** Town Clerk, Environmental Project Officer

**Absent:** Cllr Banks, S Smith

Minutes of the **Extraordinary** meeting of the **Environment & Emergency committee** held on **12<sup>th</sup> June 2024** at **6.15pm** in the Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots, PE19 2BH.

### Public Participation

There was one member of the public present. No member of the public wished to address the Council.

#### 001 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and noted from Cllrs Banks and S. Smith

#### ACTIONS

#### 002 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 003 Election of Deputy Chairperson

The Chairperson called for nominations for the position of Deputy Chairperson of the Environment and Emergency Committee for the 2024-25 council year.

Cllr S. Smith was nominated and seconded.

**RESOLVED** to elect Cllr S. Smith as Deputy Chairperson of the Environment and Emergency Committee for the 2024-25 council year.

#### 004 Minutes

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024 as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting subject to amending Cllrs Slade and Pitt were present.

#### 005 Climate Action Plan

Members received and considered the Climate Action Plan for recommendation to the Council.

The Environmental Project Officer introduced the Climate Action Plan, explaining that they were looking for the committee's recommendation of the Plan to the Full Council for adoption. This will give the officer authority to start actioning items within the plan and working to priorities.

The Chairperson guided Members through the key priorities highlighted in the plan, explaining that these are high-level areas officers will focus on, including;

- Developing a proper plan to deliver carbon net-zero and a clear understanding of what net-zero means and should include. For example, the inclusion of offsetting.
- Understanding scopes 1, 2 and 3 and how far we wish to address each scope.
- Outside of Net-Zero the plan includes actions on biodiversity.
- There is a mix of those priorities SNTC has direct control over and those which are more influencing others.
- The plan also puts in place a priority on communication and having others in St Neots participate in our journey by leading by example.

Members discussed a number of matters around the plan at length, key points raised included;

- Scope 3 is very reliant on actions outside the Council's direct control and is particularly challenging. It was not felt that this should be part of the 2030 target.
- Messaging and informing are going to be key. The Council needs to help make residents aware of its actions and those they can take.

Members debated the value of offsetting, including the following key points;

- Making a decision and steer on offsetting will help guide how the officer progresses.
- Concerns over offsetting might be addressed by taking greater control of the process, by for example planting trees ourselves.
- A Member commented that offsetting is greenwashing and should be avoided. Planting of trees is positive, but they do take some time before they offset carbon to a large degree.
- Tree planting is a medium-term fix as when trees die, they will release the carbon back into the environment.
- Another Member commented that while they agreed the Council will reach a point where reaching carbon net-zero won't be achievable by 2030 and offsetting may be a practical interim step.
- The Environmental Project Officer commented that buying carbon offsetting tickets was questionable, but working with the District Council can look at a variety of local natural carbon solutions. Using nature as a carbon sink is a way forward as the Council will never be completely carbon net-zero.

It was agreed it would be helpful for the Environmental Project Officer to produce an options report on offsetting to allow the council to understand benefits and negatives and agree the approach the committee want to take.

It was proposed that the Climate Action Plan be recommended to Full Council subject to;

- Adding a page number to the first footnote.
- Amending 'feel' to 'can feel' in the priority list.

Members went on to discuss the proposed CAP further. Discussion included;

- Navigation of the document, which was challenging due to its size. It was queried if headings could be added to each page, although acknowledged that this was time consuming. A Member commented that it was difficult to navigate the document and column headings on each page, or links throughout the document would be helpful.
- Once adopted the next point should be to produce an action plan for where we want to focus over the next year based on the priorities highlighted. It was suggested that the value grid plotting all actions which was contained within the plan should be used as the basis for this and the allocation of resource.
- Members debated the values of progressing quick to win actions, versus more challenging actions which might have higher impacts and benefits.
- Establishing the current base line and performance of the Council's buildings was key to moving forward and understanding options and impacts.
- The committee and its plans will impact other committees and the resources of the Council. Decisions need to be made in the wider context of Council's objectives and in partnership with relevant committees.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the Council adopt the Climate Action Plan and the priorities set out within it, subject to the following amendments;

- Adding a reference page number to the first footnote.
- Amending 'feel' to 'can feel' in the priority list.

#### **006 Date of Next Committee Meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next committee meeting would be 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024 at 7:15pm.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**