

Environment & Emergency Committee

Present: **Committee Members**
Cllrs S Smith (Deputy Chairperson), Dunford, Goodman and Collins

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

Absent: Cllrs Banks, Bolanz, Pitt and Simonis

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment & Emergency committee** held on **12th November 2024** at **6.15pm** in the Eaton's Centre, 18 The Maltings, St Neots, PE19 8ES.

Public Participation

There were no members of the public present. No member of the public wished to address the Council.

071 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and noted from Cllrs Bolanz, Pitt and Simonis.

ACTIONS

072 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

073 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Environment and Emergency Committee meeting held on 10th September 2024 as a true and accurate record.

074 Action List

Members received and noted the action list for the committee.

The Environmental Project Officer presented the action list and drew Member's attention to the biodiversity grant, explaining there is a delay as a response is awaited from the Diocese of Ely seeking clarification on whether the ground is consecrated and if so, seeking permission to plant trees in proposed locations. The grant provider, HDC are aware of the delay and are happy to work within the Council's timeframes. Members queried whether the timeframes would impact on the right time to plant trees. It was confirmed that this could continue through to the start of spring.

075 Emergency Plan

Members received and considered a draft Community Emergency Response Plan for St Neots Town Council.

Members discussed the need to seek volunteers and contact details for roles within the plan. It was agreed this would be requested once the Full Town Council has approved and adopted the plan.

It was requested that the duties/roles set out in the report be condensed into checklists of tasks and that it is made clear who the action checklists are aimed at and who is responsible for action delivery.

Members asked that the plan be amended to include options for multiple deputy coordinators to be appointed/recorded and that tables be labelled.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that St Neots Town Council adopt the draft Community Emergency Action Plan subject to the following amendments;

- Condensing duties and roles into checklists and labelling/identifying who checklists are aimed at and owners of actions.
- Increasing the number of potential deputy coordinators and amending the table accordingly.

076 Budget Setting

Members received and considered a report from the Environmental Project Officer on budgets under the committee's remit. Members noted there was a current revenue budget of £10,000 for Carbon Neutral Revenue.

Members considered budgeted requirements for the 2025-26 financial year based on key work and objectives that the committee wished to focus on.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council allocate £10,000 for the Carbon Neutral Revenue budget in the 2025-26 budget.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that the Council allocate a £5,000 budget for biodiversity projects in the 2025-26 budget.

RESOLVED that the Environmental Project Officer be delegated management and expenditure of the Carbon Neutral Revenue budget and proposed Biodiversity budget.

077 Transition of Fleet to EV

The Environmental Project Officer introduced a report outlining feasibility around transitioning the council's fleet to EV.

A Member expressed concerns over changing the fleet as part of decarbonisation and whether the right vehicles were available that would provide suitable outcomes. Changing the entire fleet at this stage did not seem logical in their view.

The Project Delivery Manager advised that some specific equipment is hard to transition due to the lack of suitable alternatives in EV. The advice for these items would be to continue to monitor the market at this stage.

It was pointed out that the Council does have three older diesel vehicles which could be the focus of a transition. Such vehicles could be second-hand rather than new,

offering a more affordable and best value solution. This would allow the Council to start addressing its carbon emissions in a tangible way, while also allowing future flexibility as the EV and hydrogen market continued to develop. It was felt the question the committee needed to address was a recommended timeline for the Council to start transitioning vehicles.

The committee discussed the practicalities of EV vehicles, the benefits and challenges across the market with costs, range and batteries. It was agreed long range was not an issue for council vehicles, but ensuring it met the requirements and specifications needed.

A gradual approach to EV was considered the best option by addressing two older diesel vehicles in the Council's fleet as a priority in the next year. A third vehicle, a Ford Transit should be transitioned within the next two years.

Members felt second-hand vehicles would provide best value, subject to suitable vehicles that provided the Operations team with what it requires being available.

The Clerk commented that it was important that the Operations Team leader be fully involved with any recommendations on transitioning fleet and appropriate vehicles. The impact on the team's operation and service delivery must form part of any recommendations made.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council look to start a gradual transition of its fleet to EV by replacing its 2010 Ford Ranger and 2013 Nissan Navara within the next financial year and the 2017 Ford Transit within the next 2 years.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that when transition council vehicles to EV the preferred replacement will be with second-hand EVs subject to identifying suitable vehicles which provide the operations team with the flexibility and requirements it needs.

078 Strategic Projects

The Project Deliver Manager and Environmental Project Officer introduced four areas identified as key projects which should be included in the Council's strategic plan. These were agreed as:

- 1) Priory Centre and any associated buildings clean energy solutions.
- 2) Council buildings and retrofitting.
- 3) Fleet transition to electric.
- 4) Increasing biodiversity on Council assets.

The Committee discussed the four strategic focuses and considered timeframes in which these should be recommended for delivery.

Members commented that they did not feel confident in setting timelines for building retrofitting and biodiversity until the results of auditing was received and fully understood. A period of time would be needed to assess audits and agree actions. It was noted that building audits were being carried out and the Environmental Project Officer hoped these would be received in December.

Members feedback the following proposed timeframes to the Project Delivery Manager;

- 1) Priory Centre and associated buildings energy solutions – To be delivered over the next 24 months in line with the Priory Centre project.
- 2) Council Building Retrofitting – By March 2026 surveys to be completed and scope, actions, costs defined for buildings. Actions to be phased from April 2026 dependant on audit recommendation.
- 3) Two vehicles to be transitioned over the next year and a third vehicle to be transitioned within the next two years.
- 4) Biodiversity auditing, mapping and understanding to be completed within the next 6 months. Phasing of actions to be put in place from May 2025

The Project Delivery Manager would amend the draft Strategic Plan accordingly for recommendation to Council.

079 Date of Next Committee Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next committee meeting would be 14th January 2025 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON