

Environment & Emergency Committee

Present: **Committee Members**

Cllrs Bolanz (elected Chairperson), Banks, Dunford, Goodman, Pitt, Simonis and S Smith

In Attendance: Town Clerk, Environmental Project Officer

Absent: Cllrs

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment & Emergency committee** held on **14th January 2025** 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.

080 Apologies for Absence

No apologies received.

ACTIONS

081 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

082 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Environment and Emergency Committee meeting held on 12th November 2024 as a true and accurate record.

083 Action List

Members received and noted the action list for the committee.

The Environmental Project Officer provided an update on the biodiversity work to be undertaken at St Neots old cemetery as part of grant funding received from Huntingdonshire District Council. The diocese has confirmed that permission for planting of trees is not needed and as such works will start in March within this financial year.

084 Energise Reports Summary

Members received and considered a report summarising key information from the recent energy audits of Council buildings as completed by Energise. Members also received and considered recommendations on actions arising from the reports that should be prioritised as part of achieving the Council's Climate Action Plan.

A Member questioned the methodology behind the percentage progressions under the 'pathway' category. The Environmental Project Officer has queried this with the contractor to get a clear understanding of what the pathway percentage shows and what it is measured against.

It was clarified that figures against recommendations in the reports were indicative figures and not quotes. The Council will need to agree its priority actions and get quotes for those it wishes to progress. It was noted that some buildings will only reach net-zero with an allowance for offsetting.

A Member commented that all recommendations need to be considered in the context of cost benefit and where our resources are most effective.

A question was raised as to why insulation hasn't come up as a recommendation. The Environmental Project Officer was asked to get feedback from the company. It was highlighted that the temporary Council offices lost most heat through the floor, which would be hard to insulate. Members debated whether insulation of the temporary Council office floor should be explored and agreed that feasibility should be investigated by the Environmental Project Officer and Project Delivery Manager.

RESOLVED that the Project Delivery Manager and Environmental Project Officer undertake and report back to the committee on an initial review and feasibility on options to improve insulation of the Town Council temporary office building located at the Steve Van de Kerkhove Community Centre.

Members discussed the installation of solar panels on buildings as recommended by the building surveys. As part of this discussion Members debated how buildings with tenants, particularly a commercial tenant should be approached. The Environmental Project Officer was asked to get quotations for PV with and without battery storage. Battery storage would directly benefit the occupant and it was suggested that the occupant should then be asked to fund the cost of the battery if solar PV was installed and the battery option was wanted.

Following a detailed review of the recommendations arising from the energy audits the committee made the following recommendations;

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council progresses with the recommended carbon net-zero improvements for Council buildings identified as 'quick wins'. That funding for implementing recommendations be considered for allocation from the Council's earmarked reserve for Community Buildings.

RESOLVED that the Environmental Project Officer proceeds to get quotes for solar panels with optional batteries for Gate Lodge and the Museum and **RECOMMENDS** these quotes and the installation of solar panels on both buildings to the Operations Committee unless there are concerns with the quotes that require further consideration by the Environment and Emergency Committee.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that if solar panels are installed on the Gate Lodge and Museum the occupants of these buildings will be asked to pay for battery installation if this option is wanted.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that if solar panels are installed on Gate Lodge this is conditional on reagreeing the lease for the building.

RESOLVED that the Environmental Project Officer obtains quotes for replacing electric heaters with Air-conditioning at the Steve van De Kerkhove Community Centre and Gate lodge and to **RECOMMEND** the replacement and quotations to the Operations and Amenities Committee.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that if electric heaters are replaced with air-conditioning units at Gate Lodge this is conditional and reagreeing the lease.

RESOLVED to defer further consideration or recommendations relating to the Ex-Serviceman Club building to a future meeting following further review.

085 Eatons Centre Biomass Boiler

Members received and considered a recommendation on investigating replacing the biomass boiler at the Eatons Centre with an Air Source Heat Pump or alternative heating solution. The energy audit of the building made a recommendation on replacing the bio-mass boiler and Members noted the costs incurred by the council in fixing the boiler, which were significant over the last five years. Members also noted the difficulties the unreliable boiler created for the General Manager in the operation of the building.

Members expressed support for the recommendation and referred to the expense of running the bio-mass boiler and the air pollution it creates. It was noted that gas was not an option without creating a new gas supply for the building and that an initial quote had been received for electric boilers. While initial costs would be less for an electric boiler long-term running costs would be more. Members asked that any report and recommendation refer to these alternatives as well as a heat pump.

Members noted that a heat pump would require planning permission.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Council progresses transitioning the Eatons Community Centre heating to an air source heat pump and that further details and quotations are taken to the Finance and Governance Committee for further consideration. That reporting includes feedback or options around any alternative heating solution, such as electric.

086 Transition of Operational vehicles to EV

Members received a recommendation on replacing two operational vehicles and a ride-on lawn mower with plug-in hybrid or electric alternatives. The Environmental Project Officer advised the committee that a previous resolution recommending transitioning to electric vehicles did not fully account for the needs of the operation team, suitability of vehicles and the greater fuel usage of lawn mowers. Particularly, the electric vehicles on the market don't provide towing capabilities required. As such, officers are recommending a new approach on transitioning two vehicles to

hybrid vehicles, continuing to run the Ford Transit until a suitable alternative is on the market and investing in one electric ride-on lawn mower.

Members agreed that transitioning to hybrid alternatives was a positive and more cost-effective progression towards net-zero based on the low mileage of the vehicles and high fuel usage of the lawn mowers. Due to the low daily mileage of operational vehicles plug-in hybrids would allow the vehicles to run in electric mode most of the time. Lawn mowers usage of diesel is a significant carbon output by the Council and focusing on a move to electric lawn mowers will make a bigger impact on the Council carbon output and reducing pollutants in our green spaces.

Members discussed concerns around battery life for the mower and ways of helping to manage risks associated with this. Members acknowledged that purchasing one electric mower was a sensible approach to testing the equipment, its longer-term efficiency and usability before replacing more of the council's lawn mowers.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the Operations and Amenities Committee that;

- That the Council replaces the 2010 Ford Ranger with a plug-in hybrid box-van style alternative (preferably second-hand) which meets the requirements of the Operations team in terms of size, capacity, security, and towing functionality.
- That the Council replaces the 2013 Nissan Navara with a plug-in hybrid box-van style alternative (preferably second-hand) which meets the requirements of the Operations team in terms of size, capacity, security, and towing functionality.
- That the Council replaces one ride-on diesel lawn mower with a new electric ride-on lawnmower (minimum 74" deck).
- That the Council purchase and install two charges for vehicles (EVs and Plug-ins, 7.2kW)
- That the Council purchase special charger for lawn mower batteries.
- That the Council allocate up to £115,000.00 in funding for the proposed vehicle replacement.

087 Date of Next Committee Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next committee meeting would be 4th March 2025 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON