

## Environment & Emergency Committee

**Present:** **Committee Members**  
Cllrs Pitt (Chairperson), Banks, Collins, Dunford, Goodman, Slade and S. Smith

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

**Absent:** Cllr Bolanz, Simonis

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment & Emergency committee** held on **2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024** at **7.15pm** 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.

#### 050 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and noted from Cllrs Bolanz and Simonis.

#### ACTIONS

**RESOLVED** to co-opt Cllr Collins to the meeting.

#### 051 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 052 Minutes

- i) **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Environment and Emergency Committee meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024 as a true and accurate record.
- ii) **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Extraordinary Environment and Emergency Committee meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024 as a true and accurate record.

#### 053 Action List

Members received and noted the committee action list.

The Environmental Project Officer provided the following updates;

- The advisory flood leaflet was ready and would be shared with the new committee members before being distributed.
- The Biodiversity for all Grant was waiting for HDC to progress, Members noted that this needed to be done before February for seasonal planting reasons.
- The Environmental Project Officer will share plans for the old cemetery for which the funding has been awarded with the new committee members.

## 056 Energy Performance Certificates

Members received and considered the results of Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) for Council owned and/or operated buildings. The Environmental Project Officer introduced the report, which gave an overview of the recommendations arising from the assessments. The committee was advised that solar panels were not included in any of the recommendations. The Environmental Project Officer had queried this and was advised that the software produced recommendations with payback periods of less than 7 years, solar pv panels had longer pay back periods.

Members discussed the recommendations arising from the EPCs at length, commenting;

- That the Council needed them for its buildings, but it was difficult to see that the recommendations were measured against cost benefit.
- A key part of committee's work is to look at SNTC buildings and work out what could be improved. Cost benefit is an important part of this as it will give better understanding of what to prioritise.
- Eligibility of grants for heating systems could help make heat pumps more achievable on a cost basis versus benefit basis.
- Heat pumps could be more effective than solar panels for buildings such as the Gate Lodge when grants and cost benefit are taken into consideration.
- Including batteries in solar pv solutions may improve paypack periods.

Members felt that there was still value in having an external company carry out an audit of council buildings (owned and operated) and provide recommendations, action pathway and industry costs on which priorities could be based and more detailed quotes than obtained.

Members commented that it was important to understand the carbon stock and level of each council building and have cost of getting those buildings to an improved position through estimates from an auditing company. This would provide more understanding on scale of challenge.

The Environmental Project Officer expressed caution with engaging an external company to undertake such an audit based on the results of previous similar work arranged by the Council, which was not as detailed as the officer would have liked.

It was agreed that it would be better to commission reports or obtain examples of audit reports from potential companies so their value could be assessed prior to going out to engage companies.

It was agreed that the Environmental Project Officer investigate reports and quotes with other auditing companies, with Members acknowledging that they did not want to spend money on reports that don't help. Companies should be asked what information and data they produce along with examples of outcome reports.

It was agreed that the Environmental Project Officer would liaise with the Committee Chair and Deputy Chair in investigating further.

#### 054 Solar panels

Members received and considered a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Environment and Emergency Committee further consider and recommend an approach to solar panels in the wider context of the Council's estate. This arose from a request by a tenant of a Council owned building to partner with the Council on the installation of the panels.

Members commented as follows;

- As a public body the Council should actively support tenants wanting to improve the environmental impact of their companies. However, there needed to be a clear understanding of how this would work regarding Council tenants, costs and paybacks.
- The Council should look to improve environmental credentials of all buildings in its stock irrelevant of who owns it. However, where there is a commercial tenant, the Council should recoup energy savings by increased rent. An agreement on an amount whereby the Council gets a slower pay back and the tenant makes some savings would be the best outcome. However, it was acknowledged that lease lengths and break clauses do add a complicated factor.
- The Committee should consider and be clear on where it wants to prioritise its investment, would heat pumps for example have more impact than solar panels.
- Members debated the impact of heat pumps and the value versus benefit for certain buildings, noting any actions need to be accompanied with improving insulation. It was felt that the Committee had to consider and plan for all elements, not just solar panels and there should be a decision made on best value and biggest impact.
- The Council was more likely to be successful in securing grant funding for energy improvements.

The Committee commented that if the Council wants to move all buildings towards net zero by 2030 it needs a plan that measured the benefit of several solutions and that this should include supporting tenants to make improvements. This support should be commensurate to the situation of the tenant. A default solution may be from the Council to improve the buildings efficiency with a rent review and increase to pay towards such costs, with this coming from savings made by the tenants in utilities.

It was agreed that in the case of Gate Lodge heat pumps were worth investigating, as these may be more beneficial once grant funding is taken into account. However, it must be remembered the Council has 7 buildings it needs to consider and act on.

## 057 Carbon offsetting

Members received and considered a report on carbon offsetting options that the Council may wish to use in their efforts to work towards Net Carbon Zero by 2030. The purpose of the report was to help frame discussions on whether the Council should include offsetting as part of its approach to reaching carbon net-zero.

Members discussed the report at length, key comments raised included;

- If the Council is to include offsetting into its approach it should not leave this too late but should not rush into it if more local based actions might be better than offsetting.
- If the Council is a long way off carbon net zero at a certain agreed point, it may be that we need to look at its inclusion to help reach net-zero.
- Carbon offsetting will be needed to assist reaching net zero, but it would not be a solution.
- Recommendations on what good offsetting looks like are compelling. Locally planting trees is more measurable and impactful for a community.
- Public view needs to be considered; the first thing the Council takes action on should not be carbon credits.
- Buildings and transport are biggest focuses for the Council and this is where action should focus ahead of carbon offsetting.
- Use of environmental infrastructure should be considered, particularly where there are options for wetlands, noting that any actions should not significantly alter the biodiversity of an area by creating something that wasn't historically there.

It was noted that the Environmental Project Officer was working on a carbon accounting tool to calculate the Council's base carbon level. To have carbon accounting for physical use of the buildings and running of building then have base to do timeline. Reduce our emissions by certain amount, pair with priorities in CAP and put in timeline.

The committee agreed that it needed to come up with a recommended position on offsetting and what we are going to do about it. It was felt that the Council should press forward with actions to improve its building's efficiency and measure the impact of this before reviewing and making a commitment on offsetting.

Members noted the document and the information it provided and would revisit carbon offsetting as it continued to develop and progress actions set out in the adopted Climate Action Plan.

**058 Date of Next Committee Meeting**

Members noted that the date of the next committee meeting would be 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024 at 6:15pm.

**COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON**