

Environment & Emergency Committee

Present: **Committee Members**
Cllrs Bolanz (Deputy Chairperson), Cooper-Marsh, Dunford, Goodman, McNab-Grieve and Pitt

In Attendance: Town Clerk, Environmental Project Officer

Absent: Cllr Slade

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment & Emergency committee** held on **5th March 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.

040 RESOLVED to co-opt Cllr D Collins to the committee in the absence of Cllr Slade.

041 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and noted from Cllr Slade.

ACTIONS

042 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

043 Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the 9th January 2024 as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

044 Action List

Members received the committee action list. A Member asked that reference numbers are added to the action list, indicating a date.

The Environmental Project Officer had chased responses on the felling of trees at the Osiers as requested. A summary of responses received was provided in which it was confirmed the actions taken were within the scope of what was permitted. Members were asked to send any further questions they may have through to the Environmental Project Officer.

045 Repair Cafe

Members received feedback from the Environmental Project Officer on the first St Neots Repair Café.

A Member offered their thanks and congratulations to those involved. Members went on to comment on the positivity of the event and how well organised it was.

The Environmental Project officer advised the committee on the time and resource which was required to arrange and run such an event, which would ultimately reduce the time available to focus on the core areas of her role if it were to become a regular set up run by the Council. If the event is to run on a more regular basis it would need to be led by a community group, with support from the Council.

The Environmental Project officer outlined the main areas of work/responsibility;

- Arranging, securing planning for a suitable venue.
- Identifying, arranging, and getting commitment from repairers of different skill types.
- Taking and managing bookings, including matching bookings to repairers and making sure the repairers are happy to take on the request.
- Advertising and promotion.
- Insurance, event management plan and risk assessments.
- Refreshments (sourcing, setting up and managing on the day)
- Venue set up and pack down.
- Volunteer led and coordination.

The committee recognised the challenges in getting volunteers to support and run events and activities. The committee felt that the event should be run one more time, with a focus to trying to encourage a community organisation or volunteers to take on the ongoing running of the event. It was suggested that breaking the key roles down and reaching out directly to ask volunteers to take on specific tasks may make it easier to seek commitments.

It was also commented that if another event were to be run it would need to be done relatively soon to make the most out of the success of the first event.

It was agreed that the Environmental Project Officer would explore holding a second repair café further by reaching out personally to those involved, sharing what needs to be done and how it was done to see if a core group of volunteers can run the event with the support of the Council.

046 Emergency Plan

Members received and considered a report with queries around two particular areas of importance in the draft Emergency Plan which was due to come forward. The Environmental Project Officer explained they were looking for guidance from the committee on whether to address provision of sandbags and setting up of a community emergency response team in the Plan.

- i) HDC has confirmed they would not look to provide sandbags in the event of flooding and it was queried by Town Council officers whether this is something the Town Council wants to look at doing.
Members discussed sandbags in the event of flooding, and commented as follows;

- Sandbags are a last resort and are not that effective compared to barriers on doors.
- The Council would never have enough sandbags to distribute to those that might be impacted.
- It was queried how the council could prioritise sandbag distribution with the limited resources it would have.
- There would be storage issues.
- The EA's advice to those that live in a flood area is to prepare in advance.
- Individuals need to proactively plan for flooding events and take measures well ahead of any flooding occurring.

Members spoke in favour of sign posting, promoting flood prevention and sharing knowledge to help people prepare for flooding events.

It was suggested the council develop awareness material and undertake a letter/leaflet drop of those properties within flood areas. This should be prepared now for roll out in the summer. It was suggested the Council liaise with St Neots FLAG and the HDC Emergency Planning Officer.

It was noted that the Council held £5,000 in earmarked reserves for flood prevention which could be used to fund an awareness campaign, subject to approval by Council.

RESOLVED that Environmental Project Officer develop an awareness campaign on flood prevention and preparedness, including that the Council would not be able to provide sandbags in the event of flooding. That the committee would in principle support the expenditure of the Flood Prevention EMR for the costs of a leaflet drop.

- ii) Members considered the proposed inclusion of a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) in the plan. The purpose of a CERT would be to bring together volunteers and key individuals/roles in a WhatsApp group which could act as a central point for sharing and distributing information. The groups role would be focused around sharing and providing information from a local source and would not involve taking on any roles or responsibilities that sit with other authorities. To operate successfully the group would need to include key individuals from CCC, HDC and FLAG.

RESOLVED that the Community Emergency Plan include a Community Emergency Response Team and that this is taken forward for further investigation and liaison with other agencies who would need to be involved.

047 Climate Action Plan

Members received the draft Climate Action Plan, which they were asked to consider recommending to Full Council and identifying the priorities they wanted the Environmental Project Manager to focus on over the coming months.

A Member stated that working towards Net-Zero by 2030 is a big ambition as time progresses. Concern was raised over the Priory Centre and the energy efficiency of the refurbished building. As part of the estate the Council operates, this will be an important part of achieving the Council's goals.

A Member commented that the request from the Town Council when the project came forward was that the building be carbon neutral ready. As the design and development is progressed there are challenges around this.

Members commented as follows;

Members commented further on the plan, including;

- Getting buildings to Net Zero by 2030 and transitioning our fleet and tools away from diesel will make big impacts and should be a key focus with a time plan. While now might not be the right time to move to electric vehicles or mowers, it is important to set out a pathway.
- The plan needs to define whether the Council is looking at scopes 1, 2 and 3 or focusing on scopes 1 & 2. Reaching scope 3 is technically very difficult.
- There should be a policy on the Council's approach to the three scopes and offsetting.
- Reducing energy use and only using renewable energy sources was key.
- Moving fleet of vehicles to electric is also important and a formula needs to be devised based on cost, payback and suitability of vehicle.
- Bikes for staff is a great idea so this should be something that could be explored.

Members commented that the Council should recognise the 'big-ticket' items as things it wants to do in next 6 years and then work out how feasible they are.

20:37 – Cllr Macnab-Grieve gave apologies and left the meeting.

A Member commented that the priority focus emerging from the actions set out in the Plan are establishing moving buildings to clean energy sources and setting out a pathway and formula to inform how we move away from a diesel work fleet.

The Environmental Project Officer commented that they were happy to focus on these areas, but that they would like to continue to undertake other quick win actions identified in the plan around those priorities.

RESOLVED that the priority actions for the Environmental Project Officer to focus on are reducing scope 1 emissions to zero by defining a pathway to move buildings from gas to clean energy sources, reducing energy use across the Council and finding a pathway to move vehicles away from diesel.

Members reiterated that there were lots of positive actions in the Plan and it was recognised that officers have the agency to respond to things as they arise and undertake more public facing tasks.

Members asked that the Environmental Project Officer bring forward a report on actions other Councils were taking in relation to emission scopes 1, 2 and 3 and that the Council agrees its position.

048 EPC Reports

Members received and considered a report on required EPC surveys for Council owned buildings which would help inform actions to be taken in relation to improving the efficiency of each building, along with actions required in the Council's capacity as a responsible public building owner/manager.

Members discussed on use of the committee Carbon Neutral budget, with a member commenting that the surveys will help provide a baseline for energy efficiency of the Council's buildings and provide recommendations on actions to be taken to improve efficiency. Therefore, while the surveys are required as a matter of wider building management, there will be benefits to the committee and action plan. The results can act as a base line for the Council.

RESOLVED to approve expenditure of £2,105 from the Carbon Neutral Project budget for the undertaking of EPC surveys on Council owned buildings.

049 Date of Next Committee Meeting

Members noted that the date of the next committee meeting would be 7th May 2024 at 6:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON