

Environment & Emergency Committee

To: Committee Members

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

Copies: County Councillors – S Ferguson, K Prentice, S Taylor & G Seeff

District Councillors – L Davenport-Ray, S Ferguson, A Jennings, M Pickering, I Taylor, S Taylor & G Welton

Town Councillors (not a member of this committee)

Local Press, Town Council website

Agenda for the meeting of the **Environment & Emergency committee** to be held on **Tuesday 2nd July 2024 at 7.15pm** in the Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots, PE19 2BH.

Please be aware that meetings may be recorded and made available to the public. Your participation in the meeting indicates your consent to being included in these recordings.

Public Participation

There will be a 10-minute session before the meeting to allow any resident to address the committee on any matter appearing on the agenda for this meeting.

Members of the Environment & Emergency committee are hereby summoned to attend this meeting to consider the following business.

C Robson
Town Clerk

1. Apologies for absence

To receive Councillors apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of interest

To receive from Councillor's declarations as to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and/or Non-Statutory Disclosable Interests along with the nature of those interests in relation to any agenda item.

3. Minutes

i) To approve the minutes of the Extraordinary Environment and Emergency Committee meeting held on 5th March 2024 as a true and accurate record. Attachment 1

ii) To approve the minutes of the Extraordinary Environment and Emergency Committee meeting held on 12th June 2024 as a true and accurate record. Attachment 2

4. Action List

To receive and note the committee action list. Attachment 3

5. Energy Performance Certificates

To receive and consider the results of Energy Performance Certificates for Council owned and/or operated buildings.

Attachment 4

6. Solar panels

To receive and consider a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee that the Committee further consider and recommend an approach to solar panels in the wider context of the Council's estate.

Attachment 5

7. Carbon offsetting

To receive and consider a report on carbon offsetting options that the Council may wish to use in their efforts to work towards Net Carbon Zero by 2030

Attachment 6

8. Date of next meeting

To note that the date of the next Committee meeting will be 6:15pm on 10th September 2024.

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

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 **12th 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 7th 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 2nd July 2024 at 7:15pm.

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSON

ST NEOTS TOWN COUNCIL – ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

ACTION LIST 2024/25

The following Action List summarises outstanding resolutions and activities that are ongoing from the last Council and will continue to be worked on over the year.

ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCY COMMITTEE				
Project	Objective	Actions	Responsibility	Timescales
2024/25 Activities				
COMMUNITY EMERGENCY PLAN				
Community Emergency Plan for St Neots	To continue to develop and bring forward a completed, comprehensive Community Emergency Plan document for consideration by the Committee.	<p>Newly appointed Environmental Project Officer has reviewed current document and contacted relevant external partners to gather information required to complete the plan.</p> <p>Once responses are received these will be incorporated into the document and this will be amended and brought back to the committee for adoption.</p>	1) Env. Officer	Updated Plan to be brought to July 2024 Committee meeting
Solar Panels on Cemetery Gate Lodge	To obtain quotes and work with the tenant of Gate Lodge to bring forward a proposal on the installation of solar panels on the building, as requested by the tenant.	<p>The E&E committee previously expressed support for a proposal from the tenants of Gate Lodge (Council owned building) to look at a scheme to install solar panels on the building.</p> <p>Quotations were taken to the Operations and Amenities Committee for consideration. The Committee has referred the matter back to the Environment Committee asking for further clarity on a wider approach to solar panels across the Council's estate.</p>	1) Env. Officer	On Agenda

AGENDA ITEM 4

ATTACHMENT 3

ENERGISE REPORTS				
Progression of recommendations made within Energise reports for Council owned buildings	<i>Any outstanding recommendations from the Energise reports to be considered by new Environmental Officer as part of review and action planning</i>			
	Replace Eatons lighting with LED lighting as and when they fail.	As lights fail within the centre they are to be replaced with new LED lights. Rolling program.	1) GM Eatons	Ongoing as required
	Actioning recommendations within the reports	Environmental Project Officer reviewed the energise reports and provided a summary on relevance and actions to the Committee.	1) Env. Officer	Forms part of Climate Action Plan
BIODIVERSITY - NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT				
HDC Biodiversity Audit and Grant	Reviewing the results of HDC's audit and bringing forward opportunities / ideas that may arise from the audit	<p>Biodiversity Audit has been completed by HDC. Awaiting publication of resulting report. To review and see whether it provides opportunities for SNTC and the committee.</p> <p>Grant award confirmed and HDC will undertake works. Awaiting funding from HDC.</p> <p>HDC will provide timescales for works which will be reported to the committee. Works will most likely need to be undertaken in autumn.</p>	1) Env. Officer	Update to be brought to next meeting of the Committee
CLIMATE ACTION				
Climate Action Plan for St Neots Town Council	To continue to develop a climate action plan, with achievable and measurable actions for adoption and implementation by the Council.	<p>An initial draft plan was brought forward by the Chairperson for consideration. The newly appointed Environmental Project Officer will be developing the process and the plan itself in partnership with the Committee. The development of the Plan forms a key part of the role.</p> <p>The Committee is asked to consider recommending the plan for formal adoption.</p>	<p>1) E&E</p> <p>Env. Officer</p>	COMPLETED

ST NEOTS TOWN COUNCIL

Committee	ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCY COMMITTEE
Date:	2nd JULY 2024
Title:	ENERGY PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Contact Officer:	ENVIROMENTAL PROJECT OFFICER

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To receive and consider results of Energy Performance Certificates for Council owned and/or operated buildings.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the report.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee was previously informed that Energy Performance Certificates were required for our building assets, and that assessments were being arranged. The Committee resolved to approve expenditure from the Carbon Neutral budget to undertake the reports.
- 3.2 The assessments were undertaken by Beach Energy during March and April and all certificates and recommendations have now been lodged.

4. Information

- 4.1 The EPC gives recommendations for each building on actions the Council could take to improve the energy performance of the building. Common themes across the buildings are highlighted in the table below;

RECOMMENDATION	MENTIONS	
	HIGH IMPACT	MEDIUM IMPACT
Install air source heat pump	5	1
Improved insulation	-	2
Replace T8 lamps with retrofit T5 conversion kit	3	1
Improved secondary glazing	-	5
Install weather compensating/time controls for heating	-	6
Install reflective coatings or shading devices to windows	-	2
Carry out pressure test to identify/treat air leakage	-	4

4.2 An overview of the EPC ratings and recommendations for each building is set out below:

Address	Current EPC Rating	Potential EPC Rating (typical of existing stock)	Overview
20 School Lane, Eaton Socon, PE19 8GW (Ex-Serviceman's Club)	B	C (already exceeds this)	High impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install an air source heat pump Medium impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve cavity wall insulation • Install secondary glazing • Install weather-compensation controls to heating • Carry out pressure test to identify and treat air leakage
St Neots Museum, 8 New Street, St Neots, PE19 1AE	C	B	High impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None Medium impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace T8 lamps with retrofit T5 conversion kit • Improve cavity/internal wall and loft insulation • Install secondary glazing • Install reflective coatings or shading devices to windows
The Gate Lodge, Cemetery Road, St Neots, PE19 2BX (Kingfisher Funerals)	C	A	High impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace T8 lamps with retrofit T5 conversion kit • Install an air source heat pump Medium impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add time control, optimum start/stop, and weather compensation controls to heating • Carry out pressure test to identify and treat air leakage
Eatons Community Centre, The Maltings, Eaton Socon, PE19 8ES	A	A	High impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None Medium impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add optimum start/stop and weather compensation controls to heating • Install an air source heat pump • Install reflective coatings or shading devices to windows

AGENDA ITEM 5**ATTACHMENT 4**

6a South Street, St Neots, PE19 2BW (Volunteer Centre)	E	B	High impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replace T8 lamps with retrofit T5 conversion kit • Install an air/ground source heat pump Medium impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add time control, optimum start/stop, and weather compensation controls to heating • Install secondary glazing, or replace glazing and frames • Carry out pressure test to identify and treat air leakage
SVdK Community Hub Building A, Cemetery Road, St Neots, PE19 2BX (Man Cave)	D	C	High impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install air/ground source heat pump Medium impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add time control, optimum start/stop, and weather compensation controls to heating • Carry out pressure test to identify and treat air leakage • Install secondary glazing, or replace glazing and frames
SVdK Community Hub Building B, Cemetery Road, St Neots, PE19 2BX (SJA / Priory Centre)	B	C	High impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install air source heat pump • Replace T8 lamps with retrofit T5 conversion kit Medium impact actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add time control, optimum start/stop, and weather compensation controls to heating • Install secondary glazing, or replace glazing and frames

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The cost of the EPC's, which were a requirement for the Council to undertake have been agreed previously.
- 5.2 At this stage it is not possible to give an indication of costs which will arise associated to the recommendations from the EPC's. The Committee will need to consider these and if any will be enacted.

ST NEOTS TOWN COUNCIL

Committee	ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCY COMMITTEE
Date:	2 nd JULY 2024
Title:	SOLAR PV PANELS – COUNCIL APPROACH
Contact Officer:	ENVIROMENTAL PROJECT OFFICER / TOWN CLERK

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide the committee with a recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee on developing a plan for how the Council will approach solar panel investment across its estate.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee considers the following recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee and advises how it wishes to respond to the actions it would like the Environmental Project Officer to pursue.
- 2.2 **RECOMMENDED** to defer a decision on the installation of solar panels at the Gate Lodge until such time that the lease for the building is renegotiated and the Environment and Emergency Committee have brought forward a recommended plan on the Council's approach to solar PV panels and insulation across its buildings.
- 2.3 That the committee consider the recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee and how they wish to prioritise a plan for an approach to solar panels on Council owned buildings in the context of the adopted Carbon Action Plan.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee previously expressed support to work with the tenant of the Council owned Gate Lodge at St Neots cemetery, recognising the important impact solar pv panels could have on energy use across the Council's estate.
- 3.2 The Environmental Project Officer obtained quotes for the installation of panels and liaised with the tenant to bring forward a report and proposal to the Operations and Amenities committee, which has oversight of Council buildings.

4. Information

- 4.1 The Operations and Amenities Committee has referred the matter back to the Environment and Emergency Committee, citing concerns over using taxpayer funds to install panels on a building which

is let to a commercial organisation, with that organisation then benefiting financially from the council's investment.

- 4.2 The Operations and Amenities Committee were still in support of looking to implement solar PV panels in the future but have asked that the Environment and Emergency committee develop a proposed plan to solar pv panel investment across council buildings, so as to make a decision on The Gate Lodge in the context of the Council's wider approach.
- 4.3 There are potential limitations to how far the Council will be able to use solar pv panels across its buildings, in part due to the suitability of those buildings.
- 4.4 At present the Council has solar pv panels on the Eatons Centre and panels will be included on the refurbished Riverside toilets.
- 4.5 The Committee is asked to consider and advise on the approach it wishes to take to putting forward a plan on solar installation and whether it wishes to make the review of all Council buildings and the suitability and cost versus benefit of installing panels on each building a priority action.
- 4.6 Members should note that recent EPC certificates did not highlight the installation of PV panels as a recommendation for any of the Council's buildings, however the Environmental Project Officer is querying this with the surveyors.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There is no direct cost related to the recommendation from the Operations and Amenities Committee and that a plan is developed on the Council's approach to solar pv panels.
- 5.2 Costs arising from a proposed plan and any action it puts forward will need to be considered as that plan develops.

ST NEOTS TOWN COUNCIL

Committee	ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCY COMMITTEE
Date:	2nd JULY 2024
Title:	CARBON OFFSETTING
Contact Officer:	ENVIROMENTAL PROJECT OFFICER

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To receive and consider a report summarising information on carbon offsetting as requested by the Committee.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the report, but that any decisions on how to proceed with carbon offsetting are deferred until both current and projected (after mitigating actions) carbon calculations are completed.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee asked at the last committee meeting that they be provided with information on carbon offsetting.
- 3.2 The purpose of the report was to understand the opportunities and challenges of offsetting as part of discussing and deciding on the approach the Council will take to offsetting and whether it will be incorporated into its actions to meeting net-zero targets, and if so to what degree.

4. Information

- 4.1 Please see **APPENDIX A** attached to this report which outlines carob offsetting.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications linked to this report or the actions recommended within it.

6. Legal Powers

- 6.1 The action undertaken is covered by the Localism Act 2011, s.1 the General Power of Competence, for which St Neots Town Council is eligible and is a power of first resort allowing the Council to do anything an individual can do.

APPENDIX A

Carbon Offsetting

1. What is carbon offsetting?

1.1 Carbon offsetting is a process of compensating for greenhouse gas emissions by investing in projects that either reduce, avoid, or remove carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, equivalent to the residual emissions of an organisation, business, or territory beyond its value chain. Offsetting examples include buying carbon credits to plant trees, support renewable energy, or improve energy efficiency. Carbon offsetting projects can be located anywhere in the world, and they can vary in size, scope, and quality.

1.2 Each carbon credit equates to one metric tonne of either reduced/avoided or removed carbon dioxide (CO₂) by the project financed through this mechanism. Once the project is in place and the impact has occurred, a carbon credit can be issued and then retired, indicating that the purchasing entity has claimed the benefit, effectively making it an offset. Issuing and retiring carbon credits involves registering them in publicly accessible emission registries held by international standards and global exchanges. Each credit is assigned a serial number for transparency and accountability, preventing its use by another entity. Costs of carbon credits vary significantly depending on market demand and quality, but can range from a few pounds to several hundred pounds. The current nationally recognized non-traded price of carbon is £95 per tonne per year.

2. Why use offsetting?

2.1 As a planet we must decarbonise as quickly as possible. Current planned action from governments around the world will lead to overshooting required timelines advised by the IPCC and climate science. According to the Climate Action Tracker, all the global pledges and targets in existence will still lead to approx. 2.7°C of warming by 2100. Regarding policies on climate action in practice, it can lead to approx. 2.5°C – 3.5°C of warming. Governmental funding of low-carbon pathways are not enough on their own. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) says the finance gap currently stands at USD 4.1 trillion. The private sector is therefore a critical tool in mobilising capital, and this must be utilised in an effective way. Carbon offsetting wields a critical role in bridging these gaps and is an extremely valuable means to finance projects undertaking vital work to preserve and

restore habitats while contributing to sustainable development. However, it's imperative to acknowledge that while carbon offsetting is an essential component of the solution, organisations cannot rely solely on carbon offsetting to reach net-zero. The SBTi's Corporate Net-Zero Standard emphasises this point: net-zero is a long-term goal requiring deep decarbonisation of 90-95% of emissions and removal of the remaining 5 to 10% of residual emissions. However, organisations should not wait until just before their net-zero target date as solutions to remove residual emissions may not be readily available.

3. What are global offsetting schemes?

- 3.1 The most common global offsetting schemes involve ecosystem restoration, particularly tree planting schemes, but other schemes include small-scale renewable energy projects, and improved waste management (biogas, etc.). Socially responsible schemes also deliver benefits for local communities, such as clean water and sanitation services. Global offsetting schemes are also typically cheaper, providing cost effective and scalable options when looking at offsetting higher amounts of greenhouse gases.
- 3.2 Companies offering offsetting credits have come under fire for 'greenwashing' – selling credits for unsustainable and unethical projects. More regulation has come into play in recent years, requiring companies to have completed various assessments of their projects before being certified as meeting appropriate standards. Companies are required to have undertaken risk assessments and future projections of the efficacy and sustainability of their projects, and to have factored in socioeconomic impacts. Buffer reserves are also required to counter the effect of any unforeseen issues dramatically impacting a project (e.g., vandalism, significant fire). This involves keeping a bank of 'spent' credits in reserve that are never put on the open market, but which are held back for use in these circumstances only. The emissions reduction has already taken place in advance of these credits becoming available, hence they can be stored as 'surplus'.
- 3.3 There are a number of certification bodies which guarantee the quality and ethics of carbon credits, using standards set by the International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (ICROA). These include the Gold Standard, the Verified Carbon Standard, the American Carbon Registry, and Plan Vivo. Using projects which have certification from one or more of these ensures that any purchased carbon credits meet these minimum standards.

4. What are local offsetting schemes?

- 4.1 Local carbon offsetting projects, which take place in your own country or region, can have several advantages, such as boosting the local economy, strengthening community engagement, reducing transportation and logistics costs and emissions, and supporting local environmental and social issues.
- 4.2 Local offsetting works in the same way as global so can include improving/increasing biodiversity, funding small-scale renewable energy production, carbon capture, and improved waste management. There is scope to set up or support local offsetting schemes that aren't certified as long as the schemes are compliant with ICROA standards, as there is more transparency and accountability through direct contact.
- 4.3 Within St Neots and the immediate surrounding areas this could include enhancing our own biodiversity, supporting green energy initiatives (additional to grants already provided), contributing to peat restoration in the Fens, etc. Within the UK, there are also two Government-backed voluntary carbon standards: the Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code. These standards provide a framework for measuring and monitoring the carbon benefits of new woodlands and peatland restoration projects in the UK.

5. Criticisms of offsetting

- 5.1 Both carbon offsetting and nature offsets, including what many describe as “nature-based solutions”, are founded on assumptions of equivalence – that it is possible to trade off harm in one location with good intentions elsewhere. But it is clearly not the case for nature, if only because each habitat is unique and not replaceable.
- 5.2 Burning fossil fuels releases geological carbon from what is essentially a permanent carbon store. But capturing carbon biologically in natural habitats and ecosystems – by tree planting, peatland restoration and so on – is very different, because carbon may be retained for a much shorter duration (if the land is later exploited). The carbon offsetting market is dominated by this temporary biological capture of the carbon released by burning fossil fuels.
- 5.3 In addition, nature restoration risks being temporary because the solutions are all susceptible to damage, not least from habitat destruction and from the changing climate. Trees are increasingly less resilient to pests and disease outbreak, mangroves and salt marsh biodiversity will struggle to adapt to high sea level rises, peatlands are at increased risk of burning due to warming global temperatures, and

forest fires in North America are already releasing the same levels of carbon that offsetting companies have sold as credits to big corporations such as Microsoft and BP.

- 5.4 Other concerns include unsuitable planting schemes (e.g., planting the wrong species of tree), land-grabbing from indigenous communities leading to increased poverty and displacement, land-grabbing from agricultural land leading to increased food prices, and potential for fraud and corruption, as well as concerns about outsourcing responsibility rather than being accountable for our own actions and behaviours.

- 5.5 According to researchers from Lancaster University, if we rely on carbon offsetting and the hope of future technologies to extract carbon from the atmosphere, rather than reducing emissions at source, then up to 1.4°C extra warming could occur.

6. How to ensure offsetting is valuable

- 6.1 According to a team of researchers at Oxford University, there are four key elements to credible net zero aligned offsetting:

1. Prioritise reducing your own emissions first, ensure the environmental integrity of any offsets used, and disclose how offsets are used.
2. Shift offsetting towards carbon removal, where offsets directly remove carbon from the atmosphere (biological carbon sequestration, bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, direct air capture with geological storage, or converting atmospheric carbon back into rock through remineralization).
3. Shift offsetting towards long-lived storage, which removes carbon from the atmosphere permanently or almost permanently (as above).
4. Support for the development of a market for net zero aligned offsets.

- 6.2 Friends of the Earth adds that for carbon-offsetting markets to work reliably, every project would need to:

- be additional – unlikely to happen otherwise
- be permanent – preventing a similar amount of carbon dioxide being released elsewhere or guaranteeing to lock up carbon for hundreds of years
- not lead to emissions shifting elsewhere, like some other forest being cut down
- be agreed by local people

- not deter innovation
- only be used for genuine residual emissions, and not as an excuse to carry on business as usual or as a cheaper alternative to mitigation

Useful reading

University of Oxford (2020) The Oxford Principles for Net Zero Aligned Carbon Offsetting.

<https://www.smithschool.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/Oxford-Offsetting-Principles-2020.pdf>

Friends of the Earth (2021) A dangerous distraction – the offsetting con.

<https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/dangerous-distraction-offsetting-con>

EcoAct (no date) What is Carbon Offsetting? [What is Carbon Offsetting | EcoAct.pdf \(eco-act.com\)](#)