

Notes of the meeting of the **CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP** held as a Teams meeting on Tuesday, 22 November 2022 at 4.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor C A Vinson

Councillors: M Bates
S H Beer
P M Brivio
N J Collor
N S Kenton
K Mills
O C de R Richardson

Officers: Head of Assets and Building Control
Head of Commercial Services
Parks and Open Spaces Manager
Planning Policy and Projects Manager
Strategic Development Lead (Leisure)
Senior Natural Environment Officer
Principal Climate Change and Sustainability Officer
Planning Policy Consultant
Democratic Services Officer

20 APOLOGIES

It was noted that an apology for absence had been received from Councillor H M Williams.

21 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, Councillor P M Brivio had been appointed as substitute member for Councillor H M Williams.

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

23 NOTES

It was noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2022 were not available and would be considered at the next meeting.

24 DOVER DISTRICT LEISURE CENTRE - SOLAR PANELS

The Strategic Development Lead (Leisure) (SDLL) advised that there were plans to install 141 new photovoltaic panels on the leisure centre roof at a cost of £67,000. They would generate 60,000kw of energy and save 13,950 kgs of emissions per annum. There would be a saving of £10,950 in electricity costs per year, representing a seven-year payback period. As an update, she advised that the project had been put on hold pending negotiations with the insurer which had identified a fault with the existing panels during a random inspection. In response to Councillor S H Beer, she confirmed that the Council had worked with the insurer, Zurich Municipal, on the original panels, but a fire risk had been identified since

then. Investigations were ongoing and the team was working with Zurich Municipal on a solution to mitigate the risk.

In terms of costs, the SDLL explained that the operator was responsible for covering the utility costs of running the facility. Places Leisure would pay a percentage of the installation cost. If a new operator came in they would bear the cost of installation.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report be noted.

25 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The Planning Policy and Projects Manager (PPPM) explained that the Green Infrastructure Strategy (GIS) was a supporting document for the new Local Plan, underpinning its policies and objectives to 2040, as well as the actions of the Dover District Climate Change Action Plan. The Senior Natural Environment Officer (SNEO) presented the report and gave a presentation, advising Members that the GIS covered all the natural environment features of the district and identified the needs and opportunities across the district to protect, enhance and invest in green infrastructure. It also sought to ensure that there was a collaborative and integrated approach to planning for green infrastructure in new developments. Under the Environment Act 2021, there was a statutory duty on all Local Planning Authorities to achieve 10% net gain for biodiversity; this would be the subject of a supplementary planning document for the emerging Local Plan. It was proposed to take the GIS to Cabinet in the spring.

In response to Councillor N J Collor, the SNEO advised that the evidence base for the GIS had been prepared with Officers and experts and acknowledged that public engagement was needed. Councillor C A Vinson pointed out that if the document was due to go to Cabinet in March, with public consultation following that, the local elections in May would affect the publication of the adopted strategy. He was personally in favour of publishing the consultation document before the elections, but this was one of several issues that required discussions between now and May. Councillor S H Beer questioned the inclusion of improved health and wellbeing and sustainable places as outcomes of the GIS and Action Plan, arguing that these would involve a lot of work and be difficult to evidence. She suggested that it would be good to involve the towns and parishes.

Councillor N S Kenton lauded the scope of the GIS but considered some of the content to be rather vague and 'woolly'. More detail would be needed before presenting the document to Cabinet and if things were to be moved on quickly. In response to comments, the SNEO clarified that measurement of biodiversity net gain was based on a Defra metric, and proximity to the development site was one of the criteria. If a developer was forced to go further afield or nationally, the cost to them would be much higher. The PPPM added that there was a legal requirement for 10% biodiversity net gain, and the developer would be required to fund management and monitoring costs for a minimum of 30 years. In respect of Council resources, the SNEO advised that it was important to identify whether and how an outcome could be taken forward before confirming any actions associated with its delivery.

The Head of Commercial Services confirmed that his team was doing what it could to 'green' the infrastructure for which it was responsible, such as not mowing grass verges. Councillor Kenton asked whether there was confidence that developers would cover the costs of biodiversity net gain over 30 years, suggesting that they should be made to pay upfront or residents would end up covering ongoing costs.

The PPPM indicated that the supplementary planning document would probably need to cover such matters. Councillor Vinson commented that there was a lot of detail to be ironed out, including regarding consultation.

RESOLVED: That the report and presentation be noted.

26 TREE-PLANTING STRATEGY

The Head of Commercial Services advised that the Tree-Planting Strategy was part of the GIS and considered where trees should be planted, how they were managed and where green corridors could be created, amongst other things. Unfortunately, the Council did not own large expanses of land where woodlands could be planted. The Council's approach was that removed trees would always be replaced, wherever possible, and that native trees rather than imports would be used, not least because they could cope better with weather conditions. He added that ash dieback disease was still ravaging trees across the county.

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager (POSM) advised that the Council had made a commitment to plant 70 trees to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. Trees would be planted primarily in parks but also in some open spaces. Through visits and discussions, the list of potential sites had been filtered down and the trees were due to arrive the following week. Councillor Kenton stressed that trees should be planted in the right places to ensure that fallen leaves did not block gutters and drains and lead to flooding. He also questioned the number of trees proposed for Pencester Gardens and Connaught Park.

The POSM explained that urban parks were where trees could be most effective in combatting emissions. Connaught Park had grassland which was a factor in deciding how many trees to plant there. The Head of Commercial Services added that the team was working on a separate project for Pencester Gardens so more trees were likely to be planted in Pencester through that scheme. In response to Councillor Vinson, the POSM advised that there was a restriction on the use of the £15,000 received through developer contributions for the Aldi store in Deal. The trees had to be planted in Deal town centre where the Council did not own any land. Finding suitable land was not proving to be easy and there were challenges in relation to surfaces, barriers, etc which meant that the project could potentially become quite costly. The Head of Commercial Services undertook to promote the Queen's Canopy scheme on social media. In response to a suggestion by Councillor Vinson that the Sainsbury's/train station car park was a potential site, he advised that, notwithstanding that the car park was not technically in the town centre, the car park's joint ownership was a complicating factor. Furthermore, the existing trees there were in poor condition, probably due to the location. He stressed that urban planting was costly and £15,000 did not stretch very far. The POSM added that the long-term maintenance costs and liabilities associated with such schemes could be a headache as it was usually the local authority that would end up having to take these on. Councillor Kenton agreed that it had sounded like a good idea at the time, but asking local farmers to plant trees would have been more sensible.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

27 FOSSIL FUEL NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY INITIATIVE

The Principal Climate Change and Sustainability Officer (PCCSO) advised that the report had arisen as a result of a motion at the Council meeting in October relating

to the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative. Councillor Beer indicated that she was in favour of taking the motion forward. The Council had declared a climate change emergency and this was a global movement that was recognised. If it could be taken forward at a local level, there was every chance it would be taken seriously at Government level.

Councillor Vinson raised concerns about the Treaty's objectives, namely the ending of all new coal, oil and gas exploration and production, and a global transition to 100% renewable energy. The former would hand power to existing producers like Russia and the latter would rule out nuclear power which, whilst not renewable, was zero carbon and, in his view, had a role to play in meeting future energy needs. Councillor Kenton agreed, commenting that the war in Ukraine meant that the UK had to be self-reliant in energy production and nuclear power was a part of that. Councillor Beer pointed out that renewables were cheaper and much quicker to introduce than a nuclear reactor which could take 15 to 20 years to build. She argued that the three pillars of the Treaty were still appropriate. Councillor Kenton agreed that the deficit in gas supply could be made up by renewables quite quickly, but the UK did not have the capacity to do it using only solar and wind power. Councillor Vinson reminded Members that the role of the Group was to advise Cabinet on what it should be doing. This was a complicated area and more detail was needed before recommendations could be made to Cabinet and then Council.

RESOLVED: That it be noted that the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance, Digital and Climate Change would discuss next steps with Cabinet colleagues subject to further clarification/information provided by the Principal Climate Change and Sustainability Officer.

28

DOMESTIC ENERGY EFFICIENCY SCHEMES UPDATE

The PCCSO presented the report which provided an update on the Government's domestic energy efficiency schemes. She advised that several of the Government's short, sharp funding schemes had come to an end and other funding avenues would now be explored. Members were advised that 55 homes in Dover had been upgraded through three different schemes. Under the Solar Together Kent scheme, 70 properties had had solar panels installed. Due to supply chain problems, the scheme had been extended to February 2023. Councillor Vinson praised the PCCSO for her perseverance and success in navigating her way through these schemes which were complicated. These installations were making a difference to people's lives and were worthy of publicity. The PCCSO cautioned that people's expectations would need to be managed but undertook to work with the Communications and Funding Manager on publicity.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 5.37 pm.