

CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE
18 JULY 2023

Minutes of the Climate Change Committee of Flintshire County Council held as a remote meeting on Tuesday, 18 July 2023

PRESENT: Councillor Alasdair Ibbotson (Chairman)

Councillors: Gillian Brockley, Steve Copple, Mared Eastwood, Ian Hodge, Roz Mansell, Allan Marshall, Carolyn Preece, Dan Rose, Jason Shallcross and Sam Swash

SUBSTITUTES:

Councillor Rob Davies (for Chrissy Gee)

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Bernie Attridge and Councillor David Coggins Cogan attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS:

Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy
Programme Manager for Climate Change and Carbon Reduction
Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy)
Team Leader, Planning Policy

IN ATTENDANCE:

Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None were received

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2023 were approved, as moved and seconded by Councillors Rob Davies and Carolyn Preece.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be approved as a correct record.

11. CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAMME COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The Programme Manager thanked members for their feedback at the last meeting confirming that their suggestions were included in the appendix document. The particular focus had been on engagement with the public and identifying any restrictions they had concerning some of the changes which had to be made around decarbonisation. Members were referred to page 28 of the report pack which included a screen shot of two pages from the Action Plan

which gave examples of the types of activity, how the topics were identified, who the stakeholders were and what were the expected outcomes to ensure the council was achieving what was set out in the plan.

The recommendation was moved by Alan Marshall and seconded by Councillor Carolyn Preece. When put to the vote, the recommendation was carried.

RESOLVED:

To adopt the Climate Change Communication and Engagement Plan.

12. LOCAL AREA ENERGY PLAN UPDATE

In presenting the update the Programme Manager provided information on the first engagement workshop which took place in May 2022 with internal Officers and then referred to the second workshop with ARUP which took place two weeks ago. ARUP were contracted with developing the Local Area Energy Plan and the Programme Manager provided an update which she felt was important for the committee to consider and include any suggestions.

The slides were attached to the agenda but the Programme Manager highlighted specific slides for consideration and provided detailed information on the following:-

- What was Local Area Energy Planning?
- What is your local energy system?
- Baseline carbon emissions for Flintshire
- Baseline energy use - Sankey Diagram
- Demand breakout – potential strategic options

Councillor Allan Marshall referred to energy usage in homes and asked if any studies had been undertaken to highlight if it was more efficient for households to have the heating on all the time at a constant temperature rather than using the thermostat as on and off switch.

In response the Programme Manager confirmed that it had been demonstrated that having the heating on all the time with the thermostat set to a lower temperature was more economical than using it in large bursts of energy to heat an area at specific times of the day. This was the principle adopted with the heat pump system which heated an area to a certain temperature to maintain an equilibrium rather than the dipping and troughing of energy. This was a proven technique used with newer technologies

Councillor Marshall commented that it was essential that this was publicised to residents and that the proven studies were included as evidence.

Councillor Roz Mansell asked if this applied to large Flintshire County Council buildings and offices. She reported on meetings that she had attended in Mold and Ewloe where the rooms were very hot. Could a saving be made if the heating was turned down or off during the summer and if changing the heating

system had been considered. She felt that this issue was present in council flats too. The Programme Manager agreed to investigate this.

The Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) confirmed that the heating systems in County Hall and Ewloe had been switched off for a number of months. Controlling temperatures in different areas of County Hall was difficult as all the meeting rooms were located at the front of the building and were hot because of the glass and the fact that they were south facing. There was air conditioning in the rooms but if this was not turned on when people entered the room it did not allow time for the room to cool down, especially if the windows were opened. He did not think it was worth retro fitting anything at County Hall. Referring to Ewloe he confirmed that there were more options in terms of switching off the heating there and agreed to come back to committee on this.

The Chair asked if an email response could be circulated to members of the committee which was agreed by the Chief Officer.

Councillor Steve Cople referred to the reinforcement of the electrical network and asked what this entailed. He then moved on to wind farms and asked if the report had considered the quality of the power supply which would be flooded with harmonics. These grew to a point where they damaged sensitive equipment and he sought reassurance that mass wind type power would consider the effect of switch gear, fault ratings and running the system without damaging laptops or computers for example.

The Programme Manager confirmed that that level of detail would be included in final plan and that the stakeholders who were contributing to the plan included a distribution network officer who was able to advise on the grid capacity across the county. This would enable an understanding of what was needed in the county, how this could be facilitated within the existing infrastructure and where the investment focus was required to meet the demand over the medium to long term. The Stakeholders within the development of the plan would be able to contribute to the finer details.

Councillor Cople referred to the term finer detail with some of the technologies not in existence yet he asked if it could be highlighted that it was not just the physical capabilities but also the harmonic quality issue.

Councillor Allan Marshall referred to the network upgrades required to handle the additional power generated by solar panels on houses and provided an example of how the kw capacity would be generated. If the cables were too thin then the voltage would drop but if it was too high then it would take the generation into the other houses outside of their specification. The cables would need to be supplemented or changed to reduce the volt drop across that generation going into the network

The Chair felt it was important to note the limits of the council responsibility in this area. This was beyond the council's powers.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy confirmed that he had attended the workshop and was aware that Councillor Marshall had

mentioned geothermal energy and its potential particularly on the North Wales coalfields. This was highlighted and added to the possibilities for energy supply.

The Chair referred to the timeline and next steps and asked if questions from committee Members could be sent to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy. The Cabinet Member agreed with this approach and said that he would refer any technical questions to the Programme Manager.

13. FEASIBILITY OF BIOREACTORS FOR GRASS ARISING / FOOD WASTE PROPOSED BY COUNCILLOR ROSE

The Chair commented that there were no recommendations attached to this report and Members were requested to email any questions to Sarah Slater, Flintshire's Biodiversity Officer.

14. PLANNING CHANGES TO INCORPORATE REQUIREMENTS FOR PASSIVHAUS/SOLAR/EV CHARGING PROPOSED BY COUNCILLORS ROSE AND MANSELL

Adrian Walters, Team Leader, Planning Policy, introduced the report which set out the national and local policy context and identified the relevant policies within the Local Development Plan (LDP) in terms of sustainable development and Climate Change considerations.

In terms of Passivhaus he reported that there was no legislation or national planning guidance which required new housing to be of Passivhaus design. He provided information on how these properties were built and the high costs involved in comparison to traditional housing building and felt that developers would be reluctant to take this on as it was a relatively new concept. This could also influence buyers because of the higher purchase price and lack of understanding of what was involved in building these homes which was why these tended to be single developments. He commented on examples of public bodies or councils who had made available land for house building which was sold at a reduced or token rate to a housing association and had resulted in opportunities for Passivhaus type developments. At present these were very rare in terms of volume.

Referring to solar panels it was explained that there was no requirement under legislation or national guidance for solar panels to be incorporated within new housing developments. This was included within the Building Regulations under Part L with Planning previously having an input on renewable energy as part of housing development, code for sustainable homes, and information on this was included in the report. This slowed down the planning system so Welsh Government (WG) moved this into Building Regulations where it felt it sat more comfortably. The LDP had looked at renewable energy by undertaking a Renewable Energy Assessment following guidance from WG using the Renewable Energy Toolkit. This had identified scope across the county for solar farms and thirteen areas had been identified together with proposals for energy from waste developments. The Plan had a criteria-based policy which would allow it to assess any renewable energy type proposal which came before Council.

Referring to Electric Vehicle Charging (EV) points he said that WG required as part of commercial developments that 10% of car park spaces were reserved for EV charging. There were no requirement for housing developments and this was reflected in the LDP. Referring to the electricity grid capacity and connection points he said there would be issues if every house on a housing development at scale had vehicle charging points which would have implications on the sub stations and upgrades for the Grid.

WG had set an aim that new developments were carbon neutral by 2050 and it had identified the scope for council, public buildings and social housing to lead the way. The LDP had only recently been examined by the Independent Planning Inspectors and no recommendations were made by WG that the Plan was out of alignment with National Guidance. The LDP provided certainty to all concerned on what was required for new developments and to introduce new guidance now which was not backed up by National Guidance or Legislation would have implications and would result in objections from house builders with implications for affordable housing, education etc. He said National Guidance did not go far enough to give local planning authorities the tools to go further in terms of what was required for new housing developments. There was a lot of scope for the Council, as a landowner, to look at these measures as part of its own buildings and stock and where it acted as facilitator of new development working with land holders, new homes and housing associations setting those higher standards for renewable energy and energy efficiency

The Team Leader did not wish to appear negative in his responses it was just frustration with the system currently, but there were some positive messages.

The Chair referred to the formation of the next LDP and asked a number of questions around the introduction of policies for solar capacity on new developments. In response the Team Leader felt it had to be borne in mind that it was four years before the plan review was required and that changes could be made to the National Guidance by Welsh Government regarding some of these issues. Any changes would be robustly challenged by the house building industry in terms of viability if the council required a policy that solar energy was included on new developments. Any changes would have to be evaluated in terms of soundness with one of the tests being was it consistent with existing guidance which was what the Inspector would look at.

Councillor Rose referred to Passivhaus which had been in existence since 1988 with 30 years of international evidence supporting this and wondered if contact could be made with the Passivhaus Trust to provide more information to the Planning team. Referring to expectation of the energy assessment required for more than one hundred homes he felt this should be an expectation for all properties and that energy waste should not be allowed. He felt the objections from developers for profits should not rise above the impact on climate. He wondered if a letter could be sent to the Minister for Climate Change to outline the committee's frustrations in terms of Planning legislation around how far this could be pushed as far as solar panels and minimum standard of energy security were concerned. Not only for the climate but for people living in these properties and future generations.

The Team Leader accepted that Passivhaus had been around for a long time but the house building industry had developed its way of thinking over the decades and were resistant to change. It was going to take time to turn things around, unfortunately.

Councillor Sam Swash referred to a petition currently with Welsh Government (WG) asking them to legislate that all new developments in Wales came with solar panels, which the Minister had rejected. He did not envisage any progress any time soon which was concerning for the next LDP in four years' time. This highlighted the importance of this Council being bold in putting these requirements forward and that if developers wanted to challenge those requirements and the Welsh Government were to agree to those challenges, which would make the developers and the Welsh Government look bad, not the Council.

The Chief Officer (Planning Environment & Economy) said looking ahead to the future the Council *could* refuse a planning application because it did not include solar panels which would inevitably lead to an appeal against that decision. The Council did not have the Planning Policy status to support that refusal which would mean the Council would have to pick up the costs of the appeal having acted unreasonably. He felt the biggest driver in this was demand and if there was energy efficiency in solar panels then the customer of the housing companies would demand it. This was happening with some developers starting to include this within their pattern book houses in Chester with solar panels built into the roof. Hopefully, consumer demand would drive behaviour change from developers.

The Chair said it was all well and good when discussing customer demand to housebuilders but with the market as broken as it was there would be a situation where supply and demand was so out of balance that consumers still had very little power this area and it was up to the state, National or Welsh Government to take the lead and move on this.

The Chair commented that Councillor Rose had proposed an amendment to the recommendation to include writing to the Minister for Climate Change which was seconded by Cllr Swash

Councillor Marshall as the original mover of the recommendation accepted the change and this was also accepted by his seconder Councillor Eastwood

On being put to the vote, the recommendation was carried.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Members note the content of this report and the planning framework available to facilitate renewable energy development and carbon reduction via the planning system.
- (b) That a letter be sent to the Minister for Climate Change to outline the committee's frustrations in terms of Planning legislation around how far this could be pushed as far as solar panels and minimum standard of energy security.

15. UPDATE ON HYDROGEN HUB PROPOSED BY COUNCILLOR EASTWOOD

The report was provided by the Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation) who would be happy for questions to be emailed to the Programme Manager for a written response.

Councillor Mared Eastwood commented that it was great to see the Council was progressing toward the development of a Hydrogen Hub in North Wales. She would be contacting the Chief Officer regarding the renewal of the Council's fleet and whether an interim solution would facilitate buying a new fleet which was not ready for the Hydrogen supply when it came to North Wales. It was not preferable to use the Blue Hydrogen but it should be an important steppingstone for consideration even it was being trunked in from elsewhere.

Councillor Dan Rose referred to the review presented at the Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee and he raised concerns at the market creation to create a Blue Hydrogen hub saying it should go straight to Green if money was being spent on it. His raised questions relating to the funding pot, stipulations and suggestions made from that. It was agreed to provide a response to him.

Councillor Roz Mansell had some questions around wildflowers which she agreed to forward to the Programme Manager. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy commented that when the seeds were falling the flowers had to be cut with the arising collected and Sarah Slater (Biodiversity Officer) had confirmed that investment was being made in machinery to undertake this work.

16. UPDATE ON INQUIRIES

The Programme Manager confirmed that the Flooding and Clwyd Pension Inquires were now live and had been publicised. The closing date for the Flooding Inquiry was the 18 August with the closing date for the Clwyd Pension Fund Inquiry 4th August 2023. Submissions had been received via the climatechange@flintshire.gov.uk email address. The responses would be collated into two separate documents for the Committee to analyse and review once the closing dates had passed.

Councillor Roz Mansell referred to the ten wagons which had previously cleaned and emptied the grids and she understood that these had been reduced to two. She reported on the flooding in Celtic Street last week and felt that if the grids were emptied more often it would stop the flooding. If this could not be done, she asked if the Council could provide sandbags to residents to prevent the water entering homes. The Chair suggested that this be put in an email to the Climate Change email address to ensure that it was included in the Inquiry.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economy referred to the sensitive nature of the information which would be presented to the Climate Change Committee. He felt residents would be concerned if their streets were highlighted as an area which flooded and felt the submissions should be anonymised with no road names included.

The Chair clarified that the written submissions to the Inquiry would not be published anywhere within the report. The areas included would be the most affected areas highlighted by residents who had contacted the Council and to the flood maps published by Natural Resources Wales which highlighted the scale of flooding

17. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked Members if they had anything that they wished to add to the Forward Work Programme.

Councillor Allan Marshall recommended that the Committee watch Earth on BBC2 for the next few weeks.

The Chair requested that an invitation for a representative from the North Wales Councils' Regional Emergency Planning Service to attend a meeting to discuss contingency planning for extreme heat be included.

This was moved by Councillor Carolyn Preece and seconded by Councillor Dan Rose

18. MEMBERS OF THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press in attendance

(The meeting started at 2pm and ended at 2.58 pm)

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Chairman