

Minutes of a meeting of the Climate and Environment Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Tuesday 27 June 2023



Committee members present:

Councillor Hollingsworth (Chair)

Councillor Kerr

Councillor Miles

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

David Butler, Head of Planning Services

Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Daniel Young, Principal Planner

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Mai Jarvis, Environmental Sustainability Lead

Rose Dickinson, Carbon Reduction Team Manager

Tristan Carlyle, Ecology and Biodiversity Officer

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Also present:

Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities

Apologies:

Councillor Dunne sent apologies.

1. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Hollingsworth declared that he was the Chair of Trustees of Cripsey Meadow Allotment Association, the largest allotment association in Oxford, which permitted the use of herbicides if needed. It was not a pecuniary interest; he made the declaration for reasons of transparency as one of the recommendations under agenda item 6 touched on issues that allotment associations in general may or may not permit within their rules.

2. Chair's Announcements

None.

3. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel **agreed** the notes of the meeting held on 09 March 2023 as a true and accurate record.

4. Climate and Environment Panel Work Plan

The Panel considered the provisional Work Plan and the list of suggested items for Scrutiny-commissioned reports at Appendix A.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the list of items at Appendix A had been scored and ranked in accordance with the TOPIC criteria (Timely, Oxford Priority, Public Interest, Influence and Cost). The Panel agreed to focus on areas where Scrutiny input could add the most value.

The Panel **agreed** to add the following items to the Work Plan and requested that the Scrutiny Officer work with officers to schedule the items throughout the remainder of the municipal year.

- **Tree Planting and Maintenance** – the current tree strategy pre-dated the Council declaring a climate emergency and did not mention climate change or climate mitigation; Oxford Direct Services (ODS) had also been established since the current strategy was approved. Piece of work around reviewing the existing strategy, inputting into a new strategy and looking at how the Council works across divides in relation to tree planting (County, City and ODS responsibilities/remits).
- **Energy generation/solar potential on Council buildings** – exact scope to be defined at a later date.
- **Air Pollution** – exact scope to be defined at a later date. Broadly to frame a discussion around the OxAir Air Quality Sensor Pilot recommendations and look at progress since the report was published; discussion around the Council's Air Quality Action Plan; possible look at indoor air pollution.
- **Retrofit** – more broadly than just on heritage buildings.
- **Council policies, projects and actions** – focus on two key areas: parks and green space management and the operational/action plans that stem from strategies; and biodiversity net gain management.
- **Waste** – review of changes to the structure of waste collection and disposal, after clarity is gained from Central Government on the proposals. *Possible item depending on timescales and whether the Scrutiny Committee wishes to review.*

5. Report back on recommendations

The Panel **noted** the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford
- Fleet Decarbonisation

6. DRAFT Carbon Reduction and Sustainable Retrofit Guidance for Historic Buildings Technical Advice Note

Cllr Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities introduced the DRAFT Carbon Reduction and Sustainable Retrofit Guidance for Historic Buildings

Technical Advice Note (TAN), which was intended to act as a helpful guide for residents who were thinking about retrofitting their home.

Daniel Young, Principal Planner added that the Local Plan 2036 set out the Council's specific policies which would be supported by the TAN; the TAN was one of many tools to assist residents in interpreting the policies within the current Local Plan 2036.

The Panel was advised that a key aim in updating the TAN from the previous version was to make it shorter and clearer, ensure alignment with the Council's net zero ambitions and help give applicants the best chance of their retrofit application being successful.

During discussion, the Panel raised a wide range of questions and noted the following:

- The Panel's scope for input into the TAN did not include veering into detailed technical discussion.
- Gardens were not within scope of the TAN; references to curtilage and gardens was more related to buildings within the garden or curtilage.
- The TAN would be updated again once the Local Plan 2040 had been approved and published to ensure alignment.
- The document included a lot of technical jargon and was quite densely worded, which would impact accessibility and usability by applicants.
- It would be useful to incorporate previous advice given to local community projects for reference.
- Assumptions had been made relating to customer experience which were not necessarily correct.
- The TAN had been shared with partners via the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) for feedback.
- The TAN included a number of institutional case studies and only one domestic case study; the inclusion of more domestic case studies would be useful.
- There were various examples of best practice from other local authorities that could be drawn on.
- The Council could do more to support retrofit applications and needed clearer messaging that it was committed to actively supporting applicants to go through the retrofit process.

The Panel **agreed** to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council reviews the language used in the TAN to ensure it is accessible to residents and incorporates a glossary to explain technical terms.
2. The Council includes more examples of successful domestic scale retrofit projects, including for non-listed buildings in conservation areas, as well as in listed buildings.
3. The Council challenges its existing assumptions around customer experience in relation to retrofit applications and seeks to engage with organisations and individuals who have gone or are currently going through the retrofit process to understand their experiences and feed those into the TAN and the broader planning process to improve usability and overall customer experience.
4. The Council reviews its existing Article 4 Directions to see whether they create unnecessary obstacles to applicants wanting to install carbon retrofit measures.
5. The Council, looking at the approach taken by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, considers using Local Development Orders to make clear that certain low carbon approaches will be approved by the Council.

6. The Council makes it clear in the TAN and broader messaging that it supports retrofit applications in heritage and conservation areas and will actively support applicants to go through that process.
7. The Council takes a much clearer approach to setting out for householders and applicants what its response will be to proposals for specific retrofit measures, being clear about how that might vary from conservation area to conservation area.

Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities; David Butler, Head of Planning Services; Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager; and Daniel Young, Principal Planner left the meeting and did not return.

7. Biodiversity Update [presentation]

Tristan Carlyle, Ecology and Biodiversity Officer delivered a presentation and highlighted that the narrative around the Council's thinking on biodiversity was unchanged, but the legislative framework was changing and so the Council was required to review resourcing and how it did things.

The presentation focused on a number of key areas, including Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and implementation; the Environment Act 2021 and the enhanced biodiversity duty placed on local authorities; the Nature, Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006; additional reporting requirements; the Local Nature Recovery Strategy; and the Biodiversity Strategy. *A copy of the slides is included in the minutes pack.*

Matt Whitney, Local Nature Partnership Manager delivered a presentation giving an overview of the Local Nature Partnership (LNP), progress to date and how the LNP interacts with the wider local strategic landscape. *A copy of the slides is included in the minutes pack.*

During discussion, the Panel raised a wide range of questions and noted the following:

- The 'Council as landlord' function should be included within the biodiversity baseline assessment exercise.
- The Council should seek to use its influence to promote a commitment to biodiversity among partners and local stakeholders.
- There was an opportunity for the Council to collaborate and exchange knowledge with others across the City, in the interests of promoting biodiversity.
- The Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) did not currently have a workstream dedicated to biodiversity.
- The Council should continue to seek out biodiversity best practice.

The Panel **agreed** to recommend to Cabinet that:

1. The Council ensures the inclusion of its function as both a residential and institutional landlord within the biodiversity baseline assessment exercise.
2. The Council seeks to collaborate and exchange knowledge with other local landowners and institutions in the interests of promoting biodiversity citywide.
3. The Council suggests a dedicated biodiversity workstream be added to the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership's existing workstreams.
4. The Council continues to seek out emerging biodiversity best practice in other local authorities.

8. Dates of future meetings

The Panel **noted** the dates and times of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.08 pm

Chair

Date: Thursday 7 September 2023

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.

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