

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2024

Present:

Councillor Caroline Smith (Chair) (in the Chair)
Councillor Frank Adlington-Stringer (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Neil Baker
Councillor Richard Beech
Councillor Tony Lacey

Councillor Graham Baxter MBE
Councillor William Jones
Councillor Fran Petersen

Also Present:

S Sternberg	Assistant Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer
D Thompson	Assistant Director of Planning
S Lee	Assistant Director - Regeneration and Programmes and SIRO
A Bashir	Improvement Officer
T Burdett	Partnership & Development Officer
M Rocca	Leisure Services
C Tooby	Leisure Services
S Moffatt	Sustainability Officer
T Scott	Governance and Scrutiny Officer
A Maher	Governance Manager

ESC/ Apologies for Absence

28/2

3-24 An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Deighton.

ESC/ Declarations of Interest

29/2

3-24 There were no Declarations of Interest.

ESC/ Minutes of the Last Meeting

30/2

3-24 RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2023 were agreed subject to the following points of clarification: On Min: ESC/22/23-24, Members requested further information on the Sustainability Officer and not also the Microsoft Teams Engagement Officer, as well as further information on a possible Clay Cross Railway Station.

ESC/ Draft Notes of the Local Plan Review Working Group

31/2

3-24 Members were reminded that Council had agreed to establish a Local Plan Review Working Group. The notes of this Group, it was explained, would be included on future scrutiny committee agendas for Members to consider and ask for clarification as appropriate.

The Assistant Director of Planning presented the draft notes of the Local Plan Review Working Group meeting on 1 November 2023.

The Assistant Director explained the background to the Review Group and what it had been asked to do.

The Working Group had been informed that although the Council's Local Plan was adopted two years ago, it had been submitted for examination in May 2018 and had been prepared in line with the provisions of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Since that time, the NPPF has had numerous changes including the introduction of the national design guide, the standard method for calculating local housing need and an increased emphasis on climate change. In response, officers had undertaken a desk top review of the Local Plan, which utilised the PAS assessment tool to identify if an early update of the Local Plan was likely to be necessary. The review suggested that the local plan was working well overall with the exception of a couple of areas of concern.

Members heard the current Government proposals were that 'new style Local Plans' should not take more than 30 months to complete.

The Committee was informed the Working Group's next meeting would include discussion on a draft action plan for evidence gathering, which would underpin a future iteration of the local plan, with the main areas of focus being: updated assessments relating to land availability to meet future housing and economic growth needs, biodiversity net gain and strategic flood risk.

Members felt that in some cases the Planning process should be more positive and helpful to people using it. The Assistant Director of Planning explained that the new Climate Change strategy was an example of cross working between Council departments and that there would be engagement with Parish/Town Councils to gather evidence relating to flood risk and how biodiversity net gain requirements could be met within the District.

Members enquired if the Council produced something similar to a 'design guide' document. They were informed that the Council had produced a 'Successful Places' document in partnership with Bassetlaw District Council, Bolsover District Council and Chesterfield Borough Council but that the development of design codes also formed part of the draft evidence base action plan.

Members were informed that the notes of the next meeting of the Working Group would be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED – That the notes of the LPRWG meeting on 1 November 2023 were noted.

ESC/ Performance Management

32/2

3-24

The Improvement Officer presented a report which gave progress on the strategies underpinning the Council Plan objective 'A great place that cares for the environment' for the period ending 31 December 2023.

The Improvement Officer explained some of the progress areas in Appendix 1, including the 2023 Annual Status Report, which documents the air quality

monitoring data from the calendar year of 2022 which had been compiled, submitted, and approved. During 2022 there were no reported exceedances of any Air Quality Objectives, including the annual mean NO2 objective.

Members were informed about how the Economic Development team were working with Network Rail, DfT and DCC to consider the next steps for the feasibility for Clay Cross Railway Station. Bus station improvements were also part of the Clay Cross Town Deal approval.

The Improvement Officer explained that graphs to show the Committee trends in the Performance data presented to them would be included in future updates.

Members enquired which Parish Councils Streetscene officers had visited. The Improvement Officer stated that he would investigate this with the Assistant Director of Streetscene.

RESOLVED – That progress against the Council Plan “A great place that cares for the environment” objective be noted.

ESC/ **Residents Survey**

33/2

3-24

The report to the Committee explained how the Council undertook a Residents Survey in November 2023 to help further understand resident perceptions of the local area and local services. A total of 3,269 responses were received and the results were being reported to each Scrutiny Committee.

The areas flagged up in the report as areas of importance relevant to the Committee’s remit were:

- Access to nature/open spaces
- Low pollution/clean air

Members referred to one of the criteria of importance in the survey being ‘affordable housing’ and asked exactly which areas the term was referring to. The Assistant Director of Regeneration and Programmes advised that this would be investigated.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

ESC/ **Cabinet Business**

34/2

3-24

The Governance Manager presented a digest of Cabinet decisions taken since 29 June 2023 and their relevance to specific committees. The digest set out key information for each decision.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

ESC/ **Policy Development**

35/2

3-24

The Chair explained that at the Council meeting on 9 January 2024, Council agreed to refer the following motion to Environment Scrutiny Committee for consideration:

“North East Derbyshire District Council, in line with its Climate Emergency declaration and in reflection of the local emissions reported in its own Climate Change Strategy, commits to: 1. Ensuring food and drink provided at all Council meetings and events is 100% plant-based. 2. Prioritising plant-based menu options wherever the Council has influence, for example in leisure centres. 3. Promoting and encouraging plant-based eating to residents through methods such as public awareness campaigns and the removal of meat and dairy advertising.”

Two officers from Leisure Services were welcomed to the meeting. The Chair explained that the Committee would have the opportunity to ask questions about the food options currently offered at the place both officers represented, which was Dronfield Sports Centre.

The Leisure Services officers explained that Dronfield Sports Centre had offered low-fat options and some of the butter used on its sandwiches was plant butter. The Centre had also fulfilled a request by someone for oat milk.

Members asked them about the vegan food alternatives the Centre offered and the possibility for more. The Leisure Services officers explained that the users of all of the Centres were given a customer Satisfaction survey, which could be used to gauge whether there was a demand for vegan or vegetarian options.

Some Members of the Committee felt that there was an untapped demand for vegan and vegetarian options, and making the shift described in the motion would have benefits to the health of residents. Other Members of the Committee believed that the motion’s wording was too harsh for those who were not vegan.

The Committee came to a consensus that the part of the motion about “Prioritising plant-based menu options wherever the Council has influence, for example in leisure centres” might not be possible based on what the Leisure officers told them, but a survey carried out at Leisure Centres would be able to measure the exact demand. Members felt that the survey would ask centre users actively using the cafés if they would buy vegetarian and vegan options. The survey would also include questions about buying food that was healthier, local and non-processed.

Members discussed in detail the part of the motion that stated “Ensuring food and drink provided at all Council meetings and events is 100% plant-based”. Some Members were concerned that setting the percentage at 100% would exclude those who were not vegan, and it would also be too demanding on Council staff to provide this at every meeting and event.

Following the discussion, a motion was moved by Councillor F Adlington-Stringer and seconded by Councillor F Petersen to amend the wording of “ Ensuring food and drink provided at all Council meetings and events is 100% plant-based” and then recommend it back to Council. The amended version was: “Ensuring food and drink provided at all Council meetings and events is made of half meat and fish and half vegetarian (with vegetarian having a slight majority).”

A vote was taken to accept this amendment and recommend the section of the

motion back to Council. The amendment and the recommendation both fell.

RESOLVED – That the Environment Scrutiny Committee recommend that a survey be carried out at the Council’s Leisure Centres to measure the demand for vegan and vegetarian options. That as part of this, the survey should ask centre users actively using the cafés if they would wish to buy vegetarian and vegan options. The survey should also include questions about buying food that was healthier, local and non-processed.

ESC/ **Work Programme**

36/2

3-24

The Governance Manager presented the draft Work Programme 2023/24 for the Committee. Committee Members were asked by the Chair to highlight with her any issues which they felt it would be appropriate for the Committee to consider in preparation for the May 2024 meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme 2023/24 be approved.

ESC/ **Updates to the Climate Change Strategy**

37/2

3-24

With the consent of the Chair, this additional item was added to the agenda.

The Programmes Manager and the Sustainability Officer presented an overview of the draft updates to the Climate Change Strategy that have been made in order to better align to the Council Plan 2023-2027.

Members referred to the ‘rethink’ wording being moved to the first page of the draft Strategy and asked what this term would link with. The Programmes Manager explained that the intention behind the use of the word was to communicate more effectively with residents about steps they could take at home.

Members referred to the bar graph on Page 33 of the Strategy and asked why diesel/petrol use was still high during the COVID pandemic years. The Programmes Manager explained that this graph include data for all of the Council’s vehicles, many of which still operated during the pandemic.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Strategy reflected the current Council Plan’s vision and priorities in a concise and clear manner.
- (2) That the updated Strategy title ‘Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’ better reflected the Council’s commitment to sustainable thinking.
- (3) The Committee noted that the monitoring approach now aligned with Government guidelines to aid transparency and cohesiveness.

ESC/ **Urgent Items**

38/2

3-24

None.

ESC/ Date of Next Meeting

39/2

3-24 The next meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 21 May 2024 at 3.30 pm.