

MINUTES

MEETING: CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY WORKING GROUP

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| Date | 16 th November 2021 |
| Time | 14.00-16.00 |
| Location | Microsoft Teams |
| Present | Cllr Brian Jones (BJ), Cllr Graham Timms (GT), Cllr Tony Thomas (TT), Cllr Bobby Feeley (BF), Cllr Gwyneth Kensler (GK), Cllr Arwel Roberts (AR), Cllr Barry Mellor (BM), Cllr Joe Welch (JW), Cllr Bobby Feeley (BF) |
| Apologies | Nicola Kneale |
| In attendance | Supporting officers: Alan Smith (AS), Andrew Cutts (AC), Helen Vaughan-Evans (HVE), Andy Clark (ACL), Howard Sutcliffe (HS), Jane Hodgson (JH), Tom Booty (TB), Liz Wilcox-Jones (LWJ), Heidi Barton-Price (HBP), Tim Towers (TT), Tony Ward (TW), Tom Johnstone (TJ), Huw Rees (HR) Councillor Observers: Cllr Ellie Chard (EC) |

1. Welcome and apologies

Chair GT welcomed all to the meeting and noted apologies.

Warm welcome to Tom Johnstone as Strategic AONB Climate Change, G.I. and Catchment Officer

Farewell and best wishes to Tom Booty ahead of his successful appointment at Wirral Council and Helen Vaughan-Evans's maternity leave (Helen's last working day is January 13th 2022 and will be back in January 2023).

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Andrew Cutts will be seconded as Helen's replacement as Climate Change Programme Manager in Jan 2022 whilst Helen is on Maternity leave.

Group expressed thanks to Tom and to Helen for their work on this agenda.

2. Minutes and actions from the last meeting

Minutes of last meeting agreed as accurate.

Actions of last meeting on July 28th 2021 reviewed and update provided by HVE. See summary table below.

| ACTION | UPDATE |
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| <p>GT- As the Chair of the working group, to suggest to Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committee the opportunity for a written report from School Catering to go to Scrutiny in September/October 2021 regarding progress made on low carbon and reduction of single use plastics</p> | <p>COMPLETED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going to Performance Scrutiny on 27th January • Paper to be prepared by officers from School Catering |
| <p>HVE – to circulate the approved updated terms of reference to Group members and to democratic services.</p> | <p>COMPLETED</p> |
| <p>HVE – to include recommendation to continue the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Working Group into new Council (2022-2027) in the paper to Full Council (on forward plan for 22nd February 2022)</p> | <p>ONGOING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper going to Full Council on 22nd February 2022 • Draft of paper will be on agenda for working group review and edit at our meeting held 1st February 2022 |

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| <p>HVE - to mention accreditation achievement and additional indicated amendments in Ministerial letter.</p> | <p>COMPLETE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bronze award achieved 16th September • Certification lasts 2021-2024 |
| <p>BJ- to liaise with the Leader in sending the letter to the Ministers.</p> | <p>COMPLETED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter sent to Julie James MS and Lee Waters MS on 10th September from Cllr Brian Jones • Response received from Julie James MS on 13th October |
| <p>HVE - to include in agenda for next working group meeting a discussion around pesticide use in grounds maintenance and the Councils current policy.</p> | <p>COMPLETED</p> <p>On agenda</p> |
| <p>HVE- to feedback to TW the groups feedback and that group happy for TW to mention working groups support in consultation sector of the report template.</p> | <p>COMPLETED</p> |
| <p>TW- to draft Scrutiny paper accordingly.</p> | <p>COMPLETED</p> <p>Communities Scrutiny Committee held 9th September</p> <p>Scrutiny resolved the following:</p> <p>(a) <i>to confirm its support for the principle that residential/urban areas can be appropriate locations for wildflower meadows;</i></p> <p>(b) <i>to require officers to improve engagement and publicity with local members, city, town and community councils, and communities themselves in</i></p> |

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| | <p><i>relation to the project in their areas and its development going forward;</i></p> <p><i>(c) that ‘injurious and noxious weed’ species, such as ragwort, docks and thistles are controlled more effectively within the Wildflower Meadow sites;</i></p> <p><i>(d) request that officers liaise and work with colleagues from the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) and the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency (NMWTRA) with a view to ensuring that they all manage their grass verge and wildflower meadow areas in a similar way with a view to complementing each other’s approach and supporting the biodiversity and ecological health of the area whilst safeguarding the health and safety of road users;</i></p> <p><i>(e) to request that an update report on the progress made with the delivery and development of the Wildflower Meadow Project be presented to the Committee in 12 months’ time, and</i></p> <p><i>(f) to confirm that as part of its consideration it had read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.</i></p> <p>All the above recommendations were agreed unanimously apart from recommendation (c) which was approved by a majority decision.</p> |
| <p>HVE – to look into the possibility of providing forecast statistics for the Programme Key Performance Indicators in February 2022.</p> | <p>COMPLETED</p> <p>Not going to be possible</p> |
| <p>LWJ - Assess the tree canopy coverage at Denbighshire schools on their grounds and opportunities to increase to at least 20%.</p> | <p>ONGOING</p> |

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| | Ongoing exercise during calendar year 2022 to inform potential schemes for 2022 planting season |
| LWJ- to build in feedback and ideas received into the planning for the public facing events in Autumn/Winter 2021. | COMPLETED Summary of events/activities ran to be provided as a matters arising |
| HVE- change March meeting to February. | COMPLETED Next meeting scheduled for 1 st February 2022 |

Discussion from the actions from last meeting included:

- Julie James (MS) letter – impressed with speed of response.
- BJ – Lee Waters (MS) involved with active travel and has made visits to Denbighshire already and may come again. Cllr Brian Jones to keep officers updated on the opportunity of Lee Waters visit

ACTIONS:

- BJ - to keep officers updated on the opportunity of Lee Waters visit

3. Matters arising

Following Matters Arising discussed.

Climate and Ecological Change Programme Budget Entry in Council 2022/23 budget

Helen took the group through the proposed 2022/23 budget which included:

- Draft Council Budget 2022/23 is on agenda for Cabinet in January for approval
- Draft Council Budget 2022/23 is on agenda for Council in February for approval

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- If Cabinet and Council approve the Council Draft Budget in Jan/Feb 2022, £440,000 will be available for the Programme:
 - £233k for staff
 - 3 permanent posts to deliver the carbon reduction activity required within Building workstream (equivalent to 3 FTE).
 - Contribution to costs of 3 permanent posts to deliver the carbon reduction required within Waste workstream (equivalent to 1 FTE).
 - 1 permanent post and contribution to 1 permanent post to deliver the internal and external communication and engagement requirements to deliver the Behaviour workstream (equivalent to 1.5 FTE).
 - £207k revenue to pay for prudential borrowing to deliver projects across Buildings, fleet, land use, waste workstreams
 - Leverage a potential investment of £3.2m

COP26 Activity- Report Back

Liz took the group through the COP26 report.

Over the fortnight the following activities were carried out:

- Two public webinars – with nearly 25 signed up to attend
 - Becoming a Carbon Zero Community with speakers from: Centre for Alternative Tech, Friends of the Earth and St Asaph Eco Churches.
 - Business Breakfast with speakers from: North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council, The Rhug Estate, Anglesey Sea Zoo, Celtic Financial Planning Ltd
- Social media campaign
 - Shared information and promoted the council's climate and ecological change work each day based on the COP26 themes

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- Posts included:
 - East Rhyl Coastal Flood Defence Scheme
 - Denbigh's Passivhaus project
 - Our EV fleet and Eco taxi trial
 - Ysgol Dinas Bran greening project
 - Wildflower meadow biodiversity project
 - Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch COP26 video
- Engagement was strong with over 2,000 per post and a reach of over 65k people across Twitter and Facebook combined.
- Schools COP26 Resource
 - Bilingual pdf resource was circulated with schools containing information and educational activity ideas for schools to use and share via social media and the climate change email
 - Special thank you to Cllr Graham Timms for his valuable input and help in producing it

Developing Corporate Plan 2022-2027

Alan provided the group with a verbal update.

- Wellbeing assessment – Nicola's team great interest in natural environment and the climate.
- Cabinet and SLT workshop due to be held at the end of November to come up with a draft proposal for what the Corporate plan may look like. Recommended draft will then go through to the new Council to be agreed in May. Reassurance was provided that the climate and ecological change programme will be a big part of the new plan.
- GT – raised the need for climate change to be part of the council as a whole and not a separate department.

Group discussed the tension between climate/ ecology within council work e.g. planning developments

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- BJ/ GT/ EC – highlighted the need for clearer and more robust policies and standards on climate and ecological change to be in planning law

ACTIONS:

- HVE - to discuss and request some guidance from Paul Mead on how to support Councillors around planning decisions which appear to clash with the climate and ecological change agenda

4. Recommendations from the Audit Wales “Delivering Environmental Ambitions” Audit Report and the Council’s draft Management Response

Helen took group through the Audit Wales findings report.

Key Findings

- “The Council is making excellent progress in embedding its environmental ambitions”
- “The Council has moved quickly to embed its environmental ambitions in its strategic planning frameworks and has allocated significant resources, but the full cost of the ambition is not yet known”
- “The Council has communicated well with citizens, trying to inform, influence and change behaviours, and more comprehensive stakeholder mapping would further strengthen engagement”
- “The Council has worked hard to communicate and train both councillors and staff, and though understanding is developing well more detail is needed on what ‘ecologically positive’ means to the Council and how the ambitions influence everyone’s daily work”
- “The Council has put baseline measures in place using an established performance framework, reporting over the next year will help the environmental ambitions to embed and the measures to evolve”

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There is a need for more on understanding of the full cost, of mapping, for parity of the two goals (eco positive goal was seen as secondary), and an interest to see how the performance management progresses.

Discussions were had around school's engagement and how we can improve this given the findings of the report.

- BM – suggested getting the Governors involved. Also, suggested involving the Business Managers/Headteacher.
- AS – stated how important this area is and the need to be aware of the carbon and ecological agenda in these areas.
- GT – cost may be more in short term but in the long-term benefits will be greater for climate change and for cost savings.
- TJ – Informed the group that Ysgol Cilcain in Flintshire is the first net carbon zero school, useful as a case study.

ACTIONS:

- AS - to discuss with Geraint the opportunity to engage Governors on the Council's Climate and Ecological Change work/targets

5. Introduction and Progress Report on the Council's Ash Die Back Project

Huw introduced the project to the group and gave detail on how the ash die back scheme came about. Denbighshire has a high population of Ash in the county and the die back will have a significant impact on the landscape of the county.

Andrew took the group through a powerpoint presentation including the early findings that 75% of ash trees in the County are currently healthy and won't be felled.

Need to summarise Andrew's presentation including: Background, Life cycle, Pests and diseases, Ash and biodiversity, Survey and inspection and Action plan.

There were opportunities to ask questions

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Questions

TT- gave an update as Lead Member for Housing and Communities. Also asked if we looking to grow resilient trees? Andrew stated resilient ash trees are being grown but it will take time.

AR – asked for a copy of presentation and asked for it to be translated. Mentioned Rhuddlan nature reserve tree planting but issues with Elm disease. Asked what areas we are looking at that aren't in our control. Andrew confirmed Elm disease issues were being looked at in Rhuddlan and that the county land is monitored where possible but due to the size it is difficult to be aware of all potential land opportunities and issues.

Tim Towers – highways are involved in the early stages of progressing this and ensuring the biodiversity element is taken into consideration when managing the trees for highways purposes.

GK – discussed the fungus problem raised and asked what role can the council play that for private land holders. Andrew offered the Tree council have a website with resources for private landowners (<https://treecouncil.org.uk/>) .

TW – working towards having a draft Denbighshire Ash Dieback action plan to run by the lead member and council most likely to be taken forward now in the next Council term (May 2022 onwards).

JW- commended the approach taken by Andrew on this project and the findings that 75% of ash trees are actually very healthy and won't be felled. Disappointing to see healthy Ash trees being unnecessarily felled in other areas.

JW- updated the group that the County Tree nursery is getting up and running with seed collection underway to create local provenance species that will hopefully get rid of some of the bio-risks that may otherwise occur. Looking to give these out to communities etc and get volunteers and include training opportunities at the nursery.

TT – Highways agency have their own process to deal with Trunk roads and we have lessons to learn from their process.

AC – added it will be important to work closely with our neighbours to ensure the project is a success.

ACTIONS:

- HVE - to circulate Andrew's presentation with the minutes
- AC- to get presentation translated in Welsh and send around copy once available

6. Round table discussion around pesticide use in grounds maintenance and the Councils current policy

Tony took the group through the presentation.

- Weed growth is unsightly and can result in damage to the surface of roads and footways.
- It can also impede the flow of surface water into the highway drainage system.
- DCC use a weed spray treatment twice a year (usually March/April and July/August) on all urban roads throughout the County.
- Occasionally the scope of the works will increase to include other problematic areas.
- We used to treat weeds three times per year, but reduced to two in FY 2019/20.
- We have considered various approaches in controlling vegetation/weeds to reduce our reliance on the use of glyphosate based herbicides.
- We have found these approaches to be operationally unfeasible and cost prohibitive.
- There appears to be no direct chemical replacement for glyphosate and alternative treatments such as hot foams, acid, electricity and flame throwers are far less efficient in terms of material cost and labour involved in applying them.

Round table Discussion

GK – asked about the trial with Countryside and what was requested by Scrutiny for the wildflower project. Joel provided update on Scrutiny- confirmed the management of weeds

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within the wildflower project was a separate request and was concerned with the weed act requiring control of Ragwort, Thistle and Docks.

TW – added to say it was the wide-scale roll out the Countryside ‘eco-friendly’ trial for Highways that is the issue in replicating what was done.

HBP- asked to note initial version is dated May 2021 – what stage is this policy at? Has it been formally adopted? Tony informed it hadn’t been.

HBP- Are there any alternative solutions, e.g. in safe open spaces – involvement of the community? Tony stated is a question of logistics and resource, but these is potential to look at alternative methods.

AC- use of glyphosate is subjected to regular scrutiny. It’s not a new policy but there is a requirement to document what we are currently doing in order to source alternatives. There was a trial for hot foam recently but it was not deemed practical.

AS – suggested using pesticides is similar to the carbon home request where a costly method may be what is required to align with our eco positive goals. May have to do things differently depending on the area, for example using eco-weed control in Housing areas which are not large areas and perhaps a one size fits all approach is not what is required.

GT – requested assurance that officers are looking for alternatives is key.

TW – need to do a piece of work to calculate what the cost would be to introduce a different programme of work across the county to this in a more ecologically positive way. Action on Tony look into starting this piece of work across the county.

JW - Worthwhile sitting down with Streetscene to decide whether it is required to use these pesticides in all circumstances as there are likely to be areas where they are not required.

ACTIONS:

- TW- to carry out a piece of work to analyse what the cost would be to carry out more environmentally friendly weed control across the county.
- JW- to organise a meeting with Andy and relevant Streetscene representatives to discuss and ascertain whether pesticides are required to be used in all circumstances they are currently.

7. Net Zero Wales Plan – key aspects for public bodies

Helen took the group through the plan:

- Denbighshire County Council mentioned as best practice for its work to embed tackling climate and ecological change in its decision making and training staff as well as its work on the EV Taxi Pilot
- 13 policies & 1 proposal listed that Local Government will need to respond to/ enact
- 16 “asks” for Local Government to consider
- 17 commitments Local Government has made for 2021-2025

AS – confirmed we will be cross checking the areas we are expected to undertake for the Corporate plan.

GK – asked how DCC carbon footprint is that effected by the Rhyl flood alleviation schemes. Helen informed if we are procuring the work then it is within our supply chain carbon emissions footprint.

8. Forward Plan and Any other business

HVE took group through forward plan for 2022.

| Meeting Date | Possible Agenda Items |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1st February 2022, 14.00-16.00 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for Member induction post May 2022. • Review Corporate Plan draft prior to it going to Council • Approval of draft report to County Council on the Climate and Ecological Change Programme and Year 1 Delivery of Strategy to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Progress achieved to date (projects & activities) |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ recommendation to continue the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Working Group into new Council (2022-2027)○ Recommendations for new corporate plan○ Outline proposed plan for new Member Induction post-election |
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No further meetings scheduled.

Depending on outcome of February Council paper recommendation, further meetings will be scheduled following the outcome of the Local Election and nominations from political parties to Democratic Services for representatives for this group (2 representatives per political grouping).

BJ – asked where do officers see the agenda in the new corporate plan? Stated the need to have a record of where we see this agenda in the next council.

AS – stated it is a critical agenda and would be very surprised if it's not a major part of the new Corporate plan. Format is not decided yet but certain to be a major part, but does rely on what the new Councillors decide.

AOB

All wished everyone a Happy Christmas and expressed thanks again to Tom and Helen for their work.