

Minutes of the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Working Group Meeting

Date	28/ 02/ 2024
Time	14:00 to 16:00
Location	Microsoft Teams
Present	Cllr Barry Mellor (Chair) (BM), Cllr Bobby Feeley (BF), Cllr Jonathan B. Harland (JBH), Cllr Martyn Hogg (MH), Cllr Delyth A. Jones (DAJ), Cllr Arwel Roberts (AR), Cllr Michelle Walker (MW), Cllr Peter Scott (PS), Cllr James Elson (JE), Cllr Paul Keddie (PK),
Apologies	None
In attendance	Supporting Officers: Gary Williams (GW), Helen Vaughan-Evans (HVE), Liz Wilcox-Jones (LWJ), Glyn Forsdick (GF), Joseph Muxlowe (JM), Howard Sutcliffe (HS), Huw Morgan (HM), Aileen Charteris (AC) (Minute Taker)

1. Welcome, Apologies and Introductions

Chair BM welcomed everyone and thanked them for their time.

No apologies to be noted.

2. Minutes/ actions from the last meeting and matters arising (Chair)

The minutes from the last meeting (10/11/24) were inspected and accepted (Proposer: Cllr Peter Scott, Seconder: Cllr James Elson) and the Actions table reviewed.

Two actions had been completed and one had been moved:

- Suggested items for climate strategy actions from the climate score cards have been completed.

- The letter from Lee Walters MSP was distributed with the previous meetings minutes.
- Action to explore opportunities such as charge gully has now been added as a public electric vehicle infrastructure action under within the Climate and Ecological Change Strategy.

3. Strategy Review Update (Liz Wilcox-Jones)

2023/24 review and refresh of Climate and Ecological Change Strategy

Feedback on the Strategy Document

Highlights included:

- We will keep the ambition of the previous strategy, whilst recognising the current pressures on service delivery
- The new strategy will be more outwardly focused, including,
 - Using our influence across the county to support adaptation and therefore increase resilience.
 - Education and support to increase nature recovery across the county.
- A technical appendix has now been included.
- The budget for the programme has been reassessed at 48 million (GBP) but a lot of work will be reliant on grant funding.
 - We have a current success rate of 36% in grant funding applications.
- Expected current timelines include:
 - Launch public consultation of the revised strategy in Mar/Apr 2024
 - Attend decision making committees in the summer with a view to adopting the new strategy by July 2024

Wellbeing Impact Assessment (WIA)

- The current WIA has a score of 27/30 with 5 positives and 2 neutrals.
- The updated strategy has turned some neutral sections of the WIA to positives.

Action – ALL Feedback on the updated strategy document and WIA to be received by March 15th

MH requested a way to prioritise actions within the strategy so that focus was on those actions which would have the most impact. MH said that that this should be done based on the public consultation. HVE agreed this was something we could look at. Prioritization would also be reliant on the availability and success with grant funding opportunities. GW reminded the group that many of the actions would give cost savings now (reduced energy usage etc), and in the future.

The group agreed that the document needs to remain readable and accessible to everyone. MH said the previous strategy using “postcards from the future” was not to everyone’s taste but was a way to show our vision in a simple way. DAJ requested communications were done for the strategy and any prioritisations. Officers assured members that the strategy review consultation will soon be open and that will be publicised. HVE urged members to make their community, town, and city councils aware of the consultation, especially as one of the new actions is support these groups to be climate positive and take actions on nature recovery.

JE highlighted the great public engagement we have with environmental events and the comms about them, that we are very healthy in this area. BM, AR, and PK celebrated the work of the Tree Nursery and that it was a brilliant place for community, town, and city councils to visit.

4. Energy and Home Insulation (Joseph Muxlowe FCC, Glyn Forsdick)

GF did a power point presentation to the group.

Key Points

- The team aim to meet Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C(75) by 2030.
- We have some properties rated A and B, but these are newer builds which have been built with energy efficiency in mind.
- Many of our properties have an EPC of C (69-80) or D (55-68). Improving these properties is difficult because of their age and build type.
- Properties with very low EPC ratings tend to be solid wall and using off grid forms of energy.
- Retrofitting 189 properties has improved them to EPC A, B or high C.

Councillors congratulated GF and the housing team for including many apprentices in recent retrofit work. This is great for the green economy and encouraging skills in local young people.

The group discussed how we can encourage private homeowners to take similar retrofitting actions. MH asked if there was a way of sharing our learning, especially where our housing stock is similar to a privately owned home and where the homeowners can't receive means tested support. DAJ asked how we can ensure new build homes fit green/alternative energy sources when built and that new buildings are completely compatible with those sources.

HVE clarified that the emissions from tenants' energy usage does not contribute to our carbon emission figures.

AR asked about a piece of land near Aldi in Rhuddlan which has been commandeered by a private resident. GR will respond to this question externally to the meeting.

AR also asked about the external appearance of bungalows in the same area. GR responded that the bungalows had not been on a previous painting schedule and that they weren't on any upcoming plans to be painted.

BF asked how we improve garage areas and if it is still worth keeping garages or if it would be better to build houses in these spaces. GF will respond externally to the meeting.

JM gave details of their role at Flintshire County Council and their administration of ECO4 Scheme on our behalf:

JM works for the Domestic Energy Team at Flintshire County Council

<https://www.flintshire.gov.uk/en/Resident/Energy-Saving/Help-With-Saving-Energy.aspx>

JM's team administer the ECO4 scheme on our behalf

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/benefits-grants-and-money-advice/adapting-or-improving-a-property/flexible-eligibility-statement-of-intent.aspx>

Key points

- Eligible homes under the ECO4 scheme are,
 - Within an area of multiple deprivation
 - Receiving a council tax reduction (not including single person discount)
 - Where a member of the household is vulnerable to the cold as defined in National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidance
 - A household which receives free school meals due to low income
- The team has supported 510 households. Eligibility has been split almost 50/50 between low-income households and households with a health need.
- The scheme will support householders to have retrofitting and might include insulation, solar panels, and heat pumps.
- The majority of homes will improve by 2 EPC bands, with the aim of moving to EPC C or above after work is completed.

- Protection is in place to ensure that contractors used on the scheme are thoroughly checked. Any contractor found cold calling to encourage a resident to take up the scheme, will be removed from the contractor list.
- Anyone not able to access the scheme is directed to Nest <https://nest.gov.wales/>

AR requested some more information in the form of leaflets or public events. JM said this is being discussed and planned at the moment.

BF mentioned that she had a good experience with a cold caller and work has been done on her home following it.

MH pointed out that support for energy efficiency in homes was needed across the board and for people not eligible for the EC04 scheme. JM explained that residents in Denbighshire can get advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), whereas the Domestic Energy Team provide that advice in Flintshire. If DCC were interested in having a similar service in Denbighshire, they were welcome to work with JM.

Action – AC to distribute the domestic energy teams' email to members.

BM – Thanked Glyn and Joseph for their time.

5. Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) (Huw Morgan and Howard Sutcliffe)

HM presented the attached presentation to the group.

Key Points:

- Eligibility to the scheme (Welsh Government: Sustainable Farming Scheme: Keeping farmers farming: Consultation briefing session)
 - Occupy and manage the land exclusively for 10 months of the year
 - Meet the universal actions for the farm
 - Provide 10% tree cover and 10% habitat (hedgerows, ponds, and scrapes etc)

- Although the scheme is being publicised as poorly received, there are some farmers who are happy with the scheme and already managing their land in a way which fits the scheme.
- Consultation for the scheme closes on Thursday March 7th and DCC could consider a response on behalf of our tenant farmers.

BF said that we need to listen to farmers as they look after land in the county and many of them believe that the scheme is unworkable. HM responded that the first minister has agreed to do an updated economic analysis of the scheme and that the best thing to do was make sure there is good uptake of the scheme.

JBH asked about the financial impact where a farmer is moving from BPS to SFS. HM explained that this is the most worrying part of the scheme, as there is potential that payments could reduce in this situation. A farmer joining SFS in 2028 will have their payments topped up to match the previous BPS payments, so that is an incentive to join.

MH felt frustrated that financial and political issues risked what was a good scheme in terms of nature recovery. Welsh Government (WG) have not provided mapped tree and habitat cover across Wales, but most of our farms in the AONB have 10% tree cover and 10% habitat with farms in other areas of DC being slightly lower. Many farmers are doing great work to increase biodiversity and carbon absorption on their land. PS said that most of the farms in Denbighshire had 8/9% tree cover already. HM said this was mostly true.

JM said that planting trees on farmland can devalue the land for farmers. AR pointed out that losing 10% of your land could be the equivalent of losing your pension. HM talked on our influence on tenant farmers, that as landlords we are unable to say what they should do with their farms, especially as tenancy agreements do not reference the climate and nature emergency. LWJ referenced the Agricultural Estate Review process, which will look at the content of tenancies on DCC owned farms.

Action – LWJ to contact GW and HVE to consider a response to the scheme's consultation on behalf of our tenant farmers.

6. Forward work programme and AOB

Next Meeting 10th July 2024.