Environment and Green Investment Committee: Minutes

Date: 20 November 2025

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 12:28 p.m.

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Bostanci (Vice Chair), Black, M Fisher, George, Green, Hathorn (Chair), Kerr, Manning, McDonald, Poulton, Rees, Seeff (substituting for Councillor L Beckett), Thornhill, Tierney and Wyatt

9. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillor Liam Beckett.

In relation to item 6, Councillors Tierney, Kerr, and Hathorn disclosed they were members of the RECAP board.

In relation to item 7, Councillor Seeff declared that as the Member for St Neots the Eatons, his ward would be marginally affected by the proposal.

10. Minutes – 12 June 2025 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2025 were agreed unanimously as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Action Log was noted.

11. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

12. Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

The report presented the final version of the LNRS from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), with the county Council acting as a supporting authority. The LNRS, introduced to the Environment and Green Investment Committee in June, was a statutory requirement under the Environment Act 2021 and a key tool in tackling the nature crisis in England, supporting the shared ambition to ‘double nature’.

The LNRS was in its final stages following a public consultation that closed on 11 September 2025, which showed strong support for its objectives and alignment with local priorities. However, concerns remained around funding, delivery mechanisms, accountability, and enforcement, which the Combined Authority planned to address in the next steps. The Council’s feedback included amendments to species and habitats and concerns about the potential impact on development land identified for nature improvements, which was an issue also raised by landowners. DEFRA guidance clarified that LNRSs would not require changes to land use or restrict development, and further national guidance was expected later in the year.

The LNRS was updated to reflect feedback and was endorsed by the Combined Authority's Growth Committee on 5 November 2025. It was scheduled to go before the Combined Authority Board on 26 November, after which Supporting Authorities would have 28 days to raise concerns before publication. Officers recommended delegating authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, to confirm the Council's support. All Committee Members were to receive the final LNRS after the Board meeting, with any changes highlighted.

In response to the report:

- Officers confirmed the strategy did not require the designation or development of any Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Special Protection Areas (SPA).

- A Member queried the practical implementation of the LNRS. While the strategy had strong public support and was considered highly ambitious, there was uncertainty about how it would be delivered on the ground. The CPCA met statutory requirements by having an LNRS, but detailed implementation plans and reporting mechanisms were still being developed. Future support from DEFRA was expected for delivery stages, and progress would be reviewed every three to five years. Public bodies would report biodiversity achievements under the Environment Act, and upcoming reports would include KPIs linked to the biodiversity and tree strategies. However, specific KPI data and reporting processes about the LNRS from the CPCA would be clarified, and officers would raise concerns about practical implementation with the steering group. **Action Required**

- The recent ban of neonicotinoid pesticides was raised, with a Member querying how this change might influence biodiversity and whether it could inform targeted planning. Officers acknowledged this pesticide had posed a significant threat to bees and noted that monitoring bee populations could provide insight, though establishing baselines would be challenging as it would rely on tenant farmers' practices, but since the chemicals had been banned, usage should cease. Officers agreed to seek further verification on whether this information was being recorded. **Action Required**

- Officers explained that on-site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), particularly in major developments, was considered important for improving the environment and providing green and public spaces. Local planning authorities determined how this was achieved based on their strategies and ambitions, balancing development viability with delivering BNG. The statutory minimum was 10%, with an aspiration of 20%. It was acknowledged that public access could sometimes harm biodiversity, especially in fragile areas, so a balance was needed between accessibility and ecological benefit. This often involved weighing on-site versus off-site solutions.

- It was acknowledged that delivering the LNRS would incur costs and initially had to be funded through existing operations. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) was identified as a key funding source, as proposals aligned with LNRS priorities scored higher and large planning schemes in Cambridge were expected to deliver BNG. Central government grants, such as the Local Authority Treescape Fund and the agricultural Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), were also mentioned as potential contributors.

While funding was not limited to LNRS priority areas, the LNRS was intended to guide how funding was secured and allocated.

- Officers identified key organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, NFU, RSPB, and National Trust which supported the initiative. In addition, it was set to go through district approvals with each deciding how to incorporate LNRS ambitions into their strategies, such as local plans or green infrastructure strategies. Local people also contributed, such as naturalist groups, and efforts were made to engage with local people to gain their views during the consultation period. It was expected the LNRS would meet everyone's requirements due to the healthy collaboration.

- Officers recognised the strategy had been developed in a top-heavy manner, emphasising the process had been defined by DEFRA to maximise engagement from across the environment sector. Members echoed this as a concern, suggesting the consultation did not include residents, small businesses and farmers as much as it ought to. Officers advised that many consultation responses were from individuals and local groups, and that the Combined Authority made efforts to receive local input, including reaching out to parish councils and hosting library events. To address this further, the team secured the Just Transition grant fund, enabling the launch of the 'Nature Recovery from the Ground Up' project. Officers began working with parishes in each district to create parish biodiversity plans that built on the existing strategy while incorporating local knowledge. Whilst some parishes and community groups were ahead in the project, others were unsure how to start. The plan was to use proactive parishes as case studies, arrange talks, and have project officers provide support and training, such as writing successful funding applications. In addition to delivering local projects, the plans would empower parish councils, build their evidence base to strengthen grant applications, and give them planning status.

- A Member addressed the importance of monitoring progress to support nature recovery and biodiversity while avoiding excessive control that could hinder growth or cause financial issues.

It was resolved unanimously to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Environment and Green Investment Committee to review the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's final version of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy and consider whether it would be appropriate to confirm the Council's support to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority as the responsible authority.

13. Climate Change and Environment Strategy (CCES) Progress Report and Annual Carbon Footprint for 2024-2025

The Council reported on the impact of its climate change programme, which focussed on progressing towards net zero and nature targets while supporting corporate ambitions. Key highlights since October 2024 included initiatives across climate and energy, nature and biodiversity, water and adaptation, highways and transport, corporate processes, and recognition through awards. The programme delivered significant reductions in emissions, with scopes 1 and 2 decreasing by 51% since the 2018–2019 baseline, largely due to measures such as decarbonising heating, property

rationalisation, and fleet vehicle transition to lower-carbon fuels. Scope 3 emissions had fallen by 32% from the baseline, despite a slight increase of 1% compared to the previous year. UK government data confirmed that Cambridgeshire area emissions reduced by 1.5% in 2023, aligning with national trends.

The seventh annual carbon footprint report was incorporated into the Council's Annual Risk report, along with the Council's progress in delivering climate change and environment strategy targets. The overall risk of missing these targets remained unchanged from 2024, reflecting that most quick-win actions were complete and more complex activities were still in progress. The Council had undertaken significant recruitment and capacity building during the year, which was expected to deliver benefits in future years.

An update was provided on the development of a new Climate Change and Environment Strategy, as the current version was due to end in 2025. The 2025 Quality of Life Survey reaffirmed that communities were concerned about climate change and expected the Council to lead in this area. The updated strategy aimed to reflect new priorities, address emerging challenges, and support preparations for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It was designed to strengthen understanding of the wider benefits of climate action, including improved health, reduced inequalities, enhanced resilience, and sustainable growth for businesses and communities. Changes to the strategy were informed by feedback from communities, parishes, and partners, with the intention for the updated plan to be presented to the Committee in January.

Emerging from the report discussions:

- A Member raised the need for a more ambitious approach to tackling scope 3 emissions. It was suggested that the Council should expect better quality responses, data, and detailed evidence from providers to create more reliable benchmarks. While acknowledging that the quality of data remained a significant challenge and often depended on the nature of the service provided, officers confirmed that key actions were being built into the new strategy to strengthen procurement processes and ensure the best possible information from the supply chain.

- The discussion highlighted that the biggest risks to not achieving the Scope 3 target were primarily due to uncertainty in obtaining reliable data and the complexity of a diverse supply chain, where some suppliers had limited capacity to implement changes. It was noted that many existing contracts posed a challenge, as significant changes could only be enforced during contract renewals, creating a time lag. Additionally, the Council had to balance its statutory duties, such as school place planning and building new schools, which contribute to Scope 3 emissions, against its sustainability ambitions.

- Officers confirmed that scopes 1 and 2 emissions were less than 1% (specifically 0.2%), while scope 3 accounted for about 180k tons of CO_2e, and the rural estate approximately 200k tons in addition to that.

- The significant challenge posed by the size of the rural estate and its contribution to carbon emissions was addressed. In the revised strategy, more substantial targets and measures would be included to address the rural estate, as it was considered the area where the Council could exert the greatest influence. Under the former administration, the Committee had decided to separate the rural estate from

monitoring to focus on areas where it could have more impact, while maintaining a separate strategy around the rural estate to come forward in the future strategy.

- It was highlighted that the Cambridgeshire peatlands, though fertile for agriculture, contributed heavily to the county's significant carbon emissions from land use. Officers acknowledged this was an area requiring ongoing research and had separated it out to give it focused attention. The Council had participated in DEFRA-funded pilots to explore solutions, and rural estate colleagues were involved in local initiatives like the Fenland Soil group, which united the agricultural sector, university sector, and the Council as major landholders. Efforts were aimed at understanding the problem and developing strategies, such as creating landscape mosaics and using environmental land management schemes to protect peat while maintaining agricultural viability. Acknowledging that the available data of the peatlands was around 40 years old, the Environment Agency developed and published a new England peat map to improve knowledge of peat locations, quality, and associated emissions with the aim to guide interventions and refine emissions. However, uncertainties remained, with some farmers disputing the map's accuracy. Consequently, efforts continued, particularly in Fenland, to gather more localised data for better-informed local actions.

- Officers explained that scope 2 emissions could be reported using either location-based or market-based methods. Under the market-based approach, emissions reflected the supplier's tariff, so the Council's use of a zero-carbon electricity tariff resulted in reporting zero emissions, while other organisations' on a different tariff might have emissions that varied based on their supplier mix of carbon intensity.

- Concerns were raised about the data implications, moral considerations, and energy consumption associated with the use of generative AI. Officers recognised that AI had the potential to cause problems if not properly understood and confirmed that the Council was actively working to get to grips with this emerging area to manage its risks effectively.

- An officer noted that a linear progression model had been used for monitoring purposes, acknowledging that the actual trend might eventually tail off, though the exact curve was not yet known.

- It was recognised that funding posed a significant challenge, but there were also opportunities to offset costs. For example, the schools' energy efficiency programme had delivered nearly £6 million in savings since 2014. Additionally, the Council had leveraged approximately £4m of Just Transition funding to attract around £18m in external investment for project delivery. While large sums were involved, the approach focused on using Council resources strategically to secure greater external funding.

- In discussing global warming and the experts' expectation that the world would exceed the 1.5° threshold by 2100, an officer confirmed that the new strategy would address both climate risk management and adaptation to ensure resilience for communities and the Council while continuing to deliver services effectively.

- A Member expressed overall support for most of the environmental ambitions outlined in the report, stating their desire for a clean, green environment with healthy people and healthy nature. However, the Member noted their consistent opposition

to net zero targets, arguing that such policies could harm families by creating financial insecurity, which in turn contributed to illness, poor health, limited educational opportunities, and lower living standards. They also raised concerns about claims relating to reducing income and health inequalities and emphasised that measures should demonstrate clear financial and health benefits. Conversely, regarding energy costs, another Member highlighted the “perfect storm” of record-high wholesale prices alongside investments in green measures. They acknowledged short-term concerns but emphasised that improving energy efficiency and reducing reliance on wholesale costs were essential for long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

- One Member argued that green tariffs were misleading, as the electricity grid is a mix of energy sources, and suggested prioritising cheaper tariffs to free funds for supporting vulnerable people. Another Member acknowledged this concern but emphasised that backing green energy produced domestically was vital for long-term energy security and sustainability, and that the Council should lead in supporting the market.

It was resolved to:

a) Approve the annual Carbon Footprint Report as a record of the Council’s known greenhouse gas emissions for the financial year 2024-25, as outlined at section 14.1.

b) Approve the annual Climate Change and Environment Strategy (CCES) Progress Report for the period October 2024 - November 2025, as outlined at section 14.2.

14. Recycling in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (RECAP) Resources and Waste Strategy and RECAP Waste Management Design Guide

The report outlined two key waste documents produced in collaboration with Peterborough City Council and the city and district councils of Cambridgeshire. The first was the RECAP Resources and Waste Strategy, which replaced the county’s statutory Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. It acknowledged the baseline of current waste technologies and contracts, addressed changing legislation, and explored future opportunities for efficiencies. The second document replaced the existing RECAP Waste Management Design Guide. It was linked to the Council’s Minerals and Waste Local Plan and provided guidance on waste management infrastructure for new developments, including requirements and Section 106 payments through the planning system. The recommendation was to allow both documents to proceed to public consultation from 1 December 2025 to 26 January 2026, with engagement of key parties to align with the Council’s statement of community involvement. Following consultation, both documents were intended to return to the Committee in 2026 for consideration and adoption.

In response to the report:

- One of the aims of the Design Guide was to improve access to bins and bin stores in new residential developments, which had been challenging for collection authorities. An example of this was the clearer guidance for developers on planning underground waste storage systems, involving large bins installed

beneath pavements for residents to dispose of waste, which were later collected by hydraulic vehicles. The guidance aimed to help developers understand where and when such systems were appropriate and encouraged early engagement with district planning authorities. It was noted that residents' feedback on issues they experienced, even without solutions, would be valuable for the consultation. The plan was to circulate the consultation through RECAP partners, social media, offices, and the RECAP website to maximise engagement.

It was resolved unanimously to:

a) Approve the statutory consultation of the Draft RECAP Interim Resources and Waste Strategy 2025-2031 and the updated Draft RECAP Waste Management Design Guide.

b) Approve the publication of an updated Cambridgeshire Minerals and Waste Development Scheme to reflect the decoupling of the emerging Draft RECAP Waste Management Design Guide in the timetable, to allow a consultation and refresh of the document to take place sooner.

15. East Park Solar Farm NSIP Proposal

The Committee received an update on Brockwell Energy's proposal for a solar park located on the Cambridgeshire-Bedfordshire border, which included cable routes and a battery energy storage system. The scheme was at the pre-examination stage and had been accepted by the Planning Inspectorate. The next step was for the applicant to announce the registration period, allowing interested parties to submit relevant representations, although the dates were not yet confirmed. Though the decision-making authority for the project rested with the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Council was required to submit timely responses to both the Planning Inspectorate and central government throughout the process, with deadlines often at short notice. For this reason, it was being recommended that the Committee delegate authority to approve the final response to the application, including relevant representations following the Committee's discussion, and to address any further requests for information relating to the application.

Upon discussion of the proposal:

- A Member expressed concern about solar farms being developed on grade 1 and grade 2 agricultural land within the 769 hectares proposed for the scheme. It was noted that the applicant had conducted land classification surveys, which were included in the application, and consultations had shared related information. The scheme aimed to balance the impact on agricultural production with the benefits of renewable energy generation. The rural estates had been consulted and could be impacted by the scheme, and officers agreed to ascertain whether any rural farms would be impacted by this particular scheme. **Action Required**

- Officers explained that a cable route would be installed mainly through farmland, with the cable buried at a depth allowing continued agricultural use afterward. The installation at each point was expected to be brief, and promoters were encouraged to coordinate timing with farmers through land agreements. One minor road north of the substation would need to be crossed, and options such as boring underneath

rather than digging up the road were being considered.

- A Member queried how much energy storage (in megawatt-hours) was proposed. An officer agreed to find this information and share with Members. **Action Required**

- Cambridgeshire officers had been working collectively on the matter with officers from Bedford Borough Council and Huntingdonshire District Council during the statutory consultation, focusing on gathering public and community feedback. They also emphasised the importance of collaborative discussion on governance structure, distribution to communities, criteria, and the fund's purpose.

- A Member expressed that this project threatened nature restoration efforts and had concerns over to loss of arable farmland in this proposal and suggested that this be raised by the Council. Conversely, another Member suggested that large-scale solar farms were generally less harmful to biodiversity than intensive farming, as they allowed for more diverse crops, often used less productive land and supported energy self-sufficiency without threatening food supply.

It was resolved to:

a) Endorse the key themes identified at the Statutory Consultation stage to raise in the County Council's response to the application as part of the Relevant Representation.

b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Environment and Green Investment Committee, to approve the final response to the application following the Committee's discussion, and for future requests for information in relation to this application to meet the deadlines as set by The Planning Inspectorate.

16. Corporate Performance Report

The report outlined that the Council's performance management framework set out how its Strategic Framework, including vision and ambitions, would be delivered through performance indicators allocated to policy and service committees. For the Environment and Green Investment Committee, four key themes were highlighted. First, carbon indicators mirrored the detailed carbon footprint report previously discussed. Second, waste indicators reflected the Council's responsibility for waste disposal (though not the entire system managed by district councils), noting there had been a reduction in waste collection in the year due to a drier summer, but recycling rates and landfill disposal remained higher than desired. Third, strategic responsibilities around planning matters, particularly nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), showed good performance with timely responses. Finally, digital connectivity indicators demonstrated improved gigabit connectivity, though a gap persisted between urban and rural areas, and a revised programme was being developed with the Combined Authority to address rural connectivity in the following year.

Members noted the officer responses to their queries:

- A Member noted that some indicators had short commentary and missing paths to green and requested more narrative around measures and related initiatives in

future reports. It was explained that certain indicators were contextual and outside direct responsibility, but that the strategic framework and performance indicators were being reviewed.

- The Council acknowledged its corporate responsibility to procure goods responsibly and ensure compliance with the Modern Slavery Act, particularly when sourcing equipment from other countries. An officer confirmed that the Council fully opposed slavery, had adopted the Modern Slavery Act, and implemented measures through procurement processes, including requiring suppliers to have similar anti-slavery statements and provide evidence of compliance. It was noted that oversight of this matter fell under the Assets and Procurement Committee, however the officer agreed to provide a response outlining the Council's Procurement Policy and its approach to managing relationships when procuring from other countries. **Action Required**

- Members noted that rural areas faced significant challenges with gigabit-capable broadband requiring intervention and alternative solutions in future phases of the programme. Officers acknowledged that the Combined Authority was prioritising this issue and agreed to update the Committee once plans were agreed. A Member highlighted the 4% gap in urban connectivity, potentially linked to unadopted roads, and officers agreed to provide a written response detailing the causes of this gap and any planned measures to address it. It was requested that the connectivity data be broken down by symmetrical and asymmetrical connections to reflect differences in upload and download speeds. **Action Required**

It was resolved unanimously to scrutinise and comment on performance information and act, as necessary.

17. Finance Monitoring Report – October 2025

The report provided an update on the Place and Sustainability (P&S) directorate's budget position relating to Environment and Green Investment as of period six. At this point, the directorate was forecasting an underspend of £2.6m, contributing to mitigating the Council's overall financial position, which had reported a forecast overspend of £12.3m at period six, prompting all directorates to implement actions to reduce expenditure.

The P&S budget relating to Environment and Green Investment comprised infrastructure and project delivery, which managed energy projects and was accountable for associated income, and environment planning and economy, which included the waste budget. Some significant issues highlighted were linked to underspends achieved to mitigate budget overspend. These included a forecast underspend in waste disposal, driven by reduced tonnages, maximising energy-from-waste facilities and lowering costly landfill use.

However, the report also noted challenges with Council-commissioned energy projects, particularly solar farms. While the North Angle Solar Farm was completed and exporting to the grid, income was lower than anticipated due to grid curtailment, limiting the amount of power which the grid would accept. Action had been taken with UK Power Networks to minimise this impact, and future income targets would be adjusted accordingly. Additionally, £485k from the Just Transition fund was returned to the

corporate centre after efficiencies reduced the funding requirement for climate and environment strategy projects, further contributing to the directorate's underspend.

Finally, the report flagged risks associated with household recycling centre capital projects. The Council was reviewing options to address these risks and intended to report back to the Committee once a management approach had been agreed.

It was resolved unanimously to review and comment on the report.

18. Agenda Plan, Training Plan and Appointments to Outside Bodies and Internal Advisory Groups and Panels

It was resolved to note the Agenda Plan and Training Plan.

Chair