

# Environment and Sustainability Committee

Date: 11 March 2021

Time: 10.00 a.m. – 12.01 p.m.

Present: Councillors J Schumann (Chairman), T Wotherspoon (Vice-Chairman),  
A Bradnam, L Dupré, I Gardener, J Gowing, P Hudson, J Scutt, M Shuter  
and G Wilson

## 56. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

No apologies for absence were received.

The following non-statutory disclosable interests were made under the Code of Conduct:

Cllr Schumann declared a non-pecuniary disclosable interest in relation to Item 8 (Sunnica Solar Farm Development), as he previously expressed his opinion publicly on this matter and therefore withdrew from the meeting for this item.

Cllr Gardener declared a non-pecuniary disclosable interest in relation to Item 8 (Sunnica Solar Farm Development), as he was the Vice- Chairman of the Council's Planning Committee and therefore withdrew from the meeting for this item.

## 57. a) Minutes of the Meeting Held on 14th January 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th January 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

### b) Environment and Sustainability Committee Action Log

One Member questioned whether Action number 33. Northstowe Phase 3 A was completed and if the final report would be re-circulated.

The Action Log was noted.

## 58. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

Before the Investment Cases were presented to the Committee, the Programme Director, Climate Change and Energy Investment provided an introduction to the three key decisions. It was highlighted that previous research projects confirmed, that in order to achieve a green economy and Cambridgeshire's ambition to reach net zero carbon

emissions by 2050, a shift from fossil fuel transport and the decarbonisation of buildings would be necessary.

The Programme Director, Climate Change and Energy Investment highlighted that although the business cases were affected by supply chain challenges and increased costs caused by the pandemic, these new business models would support the transition from fossil fuel and would aid a green recovery by incorporating the impact of carbon and how to monetise carbon within a business case.

## 59. Schools Low Carbon Heating Investment Case – Investment Case

The Committee considered a report on the Investment Case for low carbon heating projects at Comberton Village College and The Galfrid Primary School. The projects would involve the Council installing and operating Ground Source Heat Pumps (GSHPs) at the schools and selling heat to the schools via 30-year Heat Supply Agreements. Although the projects were noted as dependent on securing Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) funding, requiring planning consent and would not offer a commercial rate of return, they would be of interest due to the substantial carbon savings on offer.

The Energy Investment Manager explained that due to the decreased level of RHI funding and the increases in capital costs, the term of the Heat Supply Agreement was extended from under 20 years to 30 years and would present a net financial cost to the Council. Despite the challenging financial position the projects would still present a substantial reduction in carbon emissions from the schools heating and would offer the Trusts 10% saving over their oil or gas heating costs, and in Comberton Village College's case would avoid the £774 000 capital cost to the Trust for replacing their oil boilers. Due to the extension to the term of Heat Supply Agreement, both Academy Trusts expressed concerns and stated that they would seek external advice on alternative options as well as would want a clear commitment that any over-performance on the projects would be shared with the Trusts.

The Energy Investment Manager highlighted the significant learning on the challenges of decarbonising schools, such as the current low costs of fossil fuels, lack of exposure to carbon costs within fossil fuel prices and requirement for planning applications for renewable heating options.

The Energy Investment Manager drew attention to the key risks and sensitivities of the projects such as the risk of slower than projected rise in oil prices which would result in a significantly lower return, or in case the projects would not go ahead the need to replace the heating system in both buildings with fossil fuel heating.

The Energy Investment Manager summarised, that the project was currently awaiting planning determination, confirmation from HM Treasury, approval from the Secretary of States for Department for Education and a confirmation from the Trusts whether they would wish to proceed.

Although Members thanked the officers for the updates provided throughout the project development via the Green Investment Working Group and expressed their support,

they requested that similar projects be presented in a single presentation format to aid decision making. **Action Required.** Members agreed that calculated risks should be taken in order to achieve the Council's commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and these projects would provide a base for future projects as well as lead by example to inspire future generations.

Members noted that the Trusts were still undecided whether to join the scheme or if the RHI funding would be awarded, therefore an amendment to the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Dupre in order to ensure that works would not commence unless specific conditions set out in recommendation (c) were met. The amendment was accepted by the Committee unanimously.

The Committee received a comment from Cllr Nieto as a local Member set out in Appendix A.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the investment case for the Comberton Village College Low Carbon Heat Network and The Galfrid Primary School Ground Source Heat Pump Project as set out in section 2.4.
- b) Note the key project risks set out in section 4.3 and the full risk register at Appendix A.
- c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Economy and Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Environment & Sustainability Committee and the Green Investment Advisory Group to sign contracts, **subject to planning consent and to acceptable agreements with the Schools, Trusts and Government Departments:**
  - i. with Bouygues for project construction and operation; and
  - ii. with the Cam Academy Trust and 'United Learning' for Heat Supply to the schools.

## 60. Civic Hub Solar Carports – Investment Decision

The Committee considered a report detailing the plans for the installation of solar canopies at the New Shire Hall Site. The Programme Manager - Energy Investment Unit drew attention to the foundations, ducting and electrical enabling works already installed on site, and confirmed that although planning permission was not yet granted, they would plan to complete the works coordinating with the initial occupation of the building. The Committee noted the overarching aim of the project to further improve the carbon footprint of the site by generating additional clean electricity that could be used to supply both the building and support Electrical Vehicle (EV) charging. It was confirmed that although the project would not offer a commercial return, it would deliver against the Council's environmental policy standards.

During discussion of the report, Members:

- Though supportive of the project, they requested further information about the ground conditions at the site causing difficulty with the installations of canopies. The Programme Manager - Energy Investment Unit explained that the foundations needed to be substantially larger and deeper in order to securely hold the canopies in place, therefore presented additional challenges.
- Sought clarification regarding the fluctuation of the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) interest rates and the calculated NPV. It was explained that funding for this project was unusual when compared to recent schemes as the Alconbury site had not secured additional funding from the HMRC Treasury under the Kocal Infrastructure Rate (IRL) and the funding level details of this would be distributed. It was further explained that the PWLB loan rate would be subjected to market fluctuations until the loan was taken up and caused differences within the report.
- Queried whether there were any plans to install on-street EV charge points near the New Shire Hall Site which could benefit the residents. It was advised that although there were no current plans to install these in Alconbury, the installation of charge points was underway in Cambridge City. It was requested that officers update the Committee of the project. Action Required

There was a general consensus that although the project was not offering any commercial return and the NPV could change from a positive value to a slightly negative one, the project would demonstrate the Council's commitment to improving energy usage and forward thinking.

An amendment to the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Wotherspoon set out in recommendation (c), in order to further stress the importance of this commitment. The amendment was accepted by the Committee unanimously.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the investment case for the installation of solar carports at the Civic Hub in Alconbury as set out in paragraph 2.2.1 of the report.
- b) Note the key project risks set out in section 2.3 of the report; and
- c) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Economy and Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Environment & Sustainability Committee and the Green Investment Advisory Group, to sign a contract with Bouygues Energies & Services for the construction and operation of the project conditional on a planning approval and the final business case demonstrating a ~~positive~~ **an acceptable** Net Present Value.

## 61. Babraham Road Park and Ride Smart Energy Grid Investment Decision

Members received a report setting out the business case for installing electric vehicle charge points at Cambridgeshire County Council sites for use by staff, fleet vehicles

and visitors. The presenting officer highlighted that the project was divided into two phases after the November 2019 Commercial Investment Committee's decision. Phase 1 would be a £6.2m capital project covering the installation of solar carports, EV charging infrastructure and an private wire from the Park and Ride (P&R) site to the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) customer base on the Addenbrooke's Hospital site.

This PPA would provide mutual benefit to both the Council and the PPA customer. The customer would be able to purchase the excess electricity generated by the P&R site at slightly reduced prices and P&R site would be supported by The PPA customer at times when direct electricity could not be generated from the solar panels. The presenting officer advised that the Draft Power Purchase Agreement was already drafted with a long term lease agreement from the PPA customer's side.

Members expressed support for the project and praised the officers for their thorough work to complete such a comprehensive report.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note progress with the project.
- b) Approve the investment case for the Babraham Rd Park and Ride Smart Energy Grid project as set out in section 3 of the report; and
- c) Delegate a final decision as set out in paragraph 7.3 of the report, to enter into a construction contract with Bouygues E&S Solutions to Executive Director of Place and Economy and Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of Environment and Sustainability Committee and the Green Investment Advisory Group.

## 62. CUSPE - Policy Challenge on How can we use community-based resources to jointly tackle the climate emergency within our communities?

The Chairman had agreed to take this item as a late report under the discretionary powers given to him under the Local Government Act 1972 on the following grounds:

Reasons for lateness – Due to staff re-deployment the completion of the document was delayed.

Reasons for Urgency- To enable the committee to be briefed on the findings of the CUSPE researchers.

The Committee considered a report detailing the ways to engage young people in the crucial matter of climate change, to discover their views and priorities and to explore how to build on the findings. The researchers evaluated the findings of the recently conducted Climate Change and Environment Strategy (CCES) consultation survey and found that only 371 residents had submitted a response and only 3 of which were under the age of 24yrs. The responders were not evenly distributed across the county. The main aims of the project were to present potential community engagement models

which would engage young people on the climate emergency, to discover how young people were engaging in the climate change action with the Council and to develop policy recommendations to address the issues found in Cambridgeshire. Online focus groups were established in schools and youth organisations as well as an online survey launched in both Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to gain understanding of how young people would engage.

The focus groups were engaged in three exercises to rank individual environmental priorities, to establish enablers and barriers, and to explore engagement models. Through these exercises the researchers found that individual priorities were different depending on not just individual circumstances but also whether an individual was based in an urban or a more rural environment. It was also found that to enable the community to champion eco-positive behaviours and promote this within their community, hybrid funding would be preferable as it would provide some funding base and would encourage further fundraising activities through community engagement and preserve some autonomy at the same time.

The survey supported the findings of the focus groups and highlighted that people had less understanding of the local environmental challenges compared to the global issues, however they all agreed the importance of local community involvement. With responses to the question on how young people would want to be engaged more with the Council, the research showed that young people would engage more through increased online communication offering information and events via varied social media channels. To keep dialogue fluid the suggestion of online surveys, focus groups and interaction in school would be beneficial. In conclusion the research found that there would be a huge opportunity to engage young people in community climate action as they were highly motivated to take action and would be able to influence their community throughout their existing networks if they were enabled to do so. In order to set up any successful community engagement model, the following key principles were identified:

- Diverse representation,
- Direct communication channels with the Council,
- Consistent financial support,
- Building wider relationships with the community.

The following recommendations were made by the research team in order to achieve engagement and to overcome the barriers such as cost, convenience, and the lack of authority over household decisions:

- Engage young people in climate action through a variety of approaches, such as youth environmental trusts set up in each Cambridgeshire district, community champions via school 'eco- leads' or via other youth groups,
- Building relationships with wider communities and engage them with event, educational programmes, work experience or projects,

- To set up dedicated grants for young people engaging in climate action,
- Hold regular focus groups and surveys collecting the views of young people, specifically on climate issues across Cambridgeshire,
- Improved Council social media presence with content specifically tailored to young people, including using young people as ‘influencers’ and agents throughout the process.

A Member queried whether the December 2020 flooding had affected the responses of the Focus Group. The researchers confirmed that the groups had met in October 2020 therefore the floods had no impact.

Members raised questions about the differences in the views of young people living in urban areas compared to rural areas and whether there were any contradictory views found. The researchers explained that priorities tended to differ between rural and urban areas. For example, air quality was given more weight by urban communities over rural.

Members thanked the researchers for the in-depth report, expressed commitment to take the policy recommendations forward and inform the researchers as an these were developed.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note and consider the findings and recommendations resulting from the Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange’s (CUSPE) Policy Challenge research into the question of how we can use community-based resources to jointly tackle the climate emergency within our communities

## 63. Sunnica Solar Farm Development

The Committee considered a report detailing the planning process once Sunnica Limited submit plans to establish an energy farm located to the east of the County. The site would span four local ‘host’ authorities, namely Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council. The proposed development was considered to be a nationally significant infrastructure project (NSIP), therefore an application for a Development Consent Order was required (DCO). As an NSIP application, the acceptance and examination of the proposed solar farm would not be determined by the District Council with input by the County Council but would be determined by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The County Council’s role was to scrutinise the applicant’s assessment of the NSIP proposals, as well as offer technical advice, local knowledge, and ensure that adequate public consultation was carried out. The officer explained that all four local authorities were working closely together to provide a co-ordinated consultation response. It was expected that Sunnica would submit their application to the Planning Inspectorate in the coming months. This would trigger the requirement to produce a number of documents to the Planning Inspectorate, each to tight deadlines, as short as 14 days.

A Member asked for a clarification on the purpose of recommendation (b) as to whether the circulated documents would be provided as for information or if they were able to comment on them. The Interim Assistant Director Environment and Commercial advised the committee that depending on the nature of the comments there would be an opportunity to provide feedback. For example, in drafting the Adequacy of Consultation report the four local 'host' authorities will look to append feedback from local groups which could include feedback from Members. It was highlighted that any comments included within the appendix would be publicly available. She also explained that recommendation (b) was included to align with an earlier NSIP decision and that it was important to maintain a consistent approach for all NSIP projects.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Delegate authority to the Executive Director: Place and Economy, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, to submit NSIP related responses to the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Cambridgeshire County Council and its regulatory functions, only on occasions where there is not enough time for a report to be delivered to the Environment and Sustainability Committee; and
- b) Circulate the draft response to Local Members and Members of the Environment and Sustainability Committee ahead of sign off and submission to the Planning Inspectorate, when delegated powers are used.

### 63. Finance Monitoring Report- January 2021

The Committee received the Finance Monitoring report for the Place and Economy directorate. The forecast showed a bottom-line revenue underspend of £323K. This figure reflected the grant received for Lost Sales, Fees and Charges due to Covid, however the expected grant for the additional cost of Covid- pressure related spending was not included. It was highlighted that this net Covid pressure was then offset by a £450K underspend on the waste contract, £544K additional income on Traffic Management and the £1m Street lighting adjustment.

Members questioned the reduction in the total amounts of waste collected and asked for clarification. The Executive Director Place and Economy advised the Committee that the decrease was most probably due to the decline in trade activity, however a more detailed response would be provided. **Action required.**

A Member expressed concerns about the number of vacancies in key posts within the directorate. The Executive Director Place and Economy advised that there was a future proposal to re-structure the senior management team and this would lead to further changes that would enable those posts to be filled.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the Finance and Monitoring report.

## 65. Agenda Plan, Training Plan and Appointments to Outside Bodies and Working Groups

The committee received a report detailing the Committee's Agenda and Training Plan as well as their Appointments to Outside Bodies and Working Groups. The Democratic Services Assistant highlighted that an extension of appointment to the board of the Conservators of River Cam in order to comply with the River Cam Conservancy Act 1922.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Review its agenda plan attached at Appendix 1;
- b) Review its training plan attached at Appendix 2;
- c) Note the extension to the term of the appointment to Conservators of the River Cam, as detailed in Appendix 3.

Chairman

Appendix A

Comments received from Local Member for Comberton, Councillor Lina Nieto

"I am thrilled that we are investing in Comberton Village College. It is imperative we tackle Climate Change by achieving our carbon net zero commitment and invest in our Environment. Nationally, the Government is fully committed to the Green Agenda and locally, we are leading the way in innovative ways to achieve this and make our contribution.

"I would also like to take this opportunity to thank CVC for participating in this transformative project that will make a difference not only to the school but the community as a whole.

"All of this just shows that individual actions can make a real difference, yet we must continue to work together to achieve our ambitious environmental vision"

Lina Nieto, County Cllr for Comberton