

Environment and Green Investment Committee: Minutes

Date: 28 November 2024

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 12:03 p.m.

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

Present: Councillors Lorna Dupré (Chair), Nick Gay (Vice-Chair), Anna Bradnam, Steve Corney, Piers Coutts, Ian Gardener, Mark Goldsack, John Gowing, Ros Hathorn, Catherine Rae, Mandy Smith and Andrew Wood.

218. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillors Ferguson, Tierney and Count (substituted by Councillor Goldsack).

In relation to Item 5, Milton Household Recycling Centre Redevelopment, Councillor Bradnam declared that as the Local Member for the Waterbeach division, the Centre sat within her division.

219. Minutes – 3 October 2024 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

An updated Action Log had been circulated to the Committee and updates were noted at the meeting.

220. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

221. Community Energy Action Plan

The Committee was presented a report on an action plan to support community energy in Cambridgeshire. A stakeholder engagement exercise ran from July to September 2024 which received 140 responses, 82% of which supported the Council adopting the plan, though East Cambridgeshire District Council was not supportive of adopting the plan.

There were 11 actions in the plan. Six of these actions supported the development of community energy projects: setup of a community energy cooperative, funding for project feasibility and development studies, employing a community development officer, guidance and advice on how to develop typical projects, brokering relationships between community and local groups, and search for suitable sites for community energy projects. There were four actions on domestic energy efficiency: promoting grant uptake, raising awareness of innovative energy tariffs, supporting renewable

retrofit schemes, and promoting uptake of grants among private landlords. The final action was an education and awareness action where the Council would work with Cambridgeshire Carbon Footprints and Cambridgeshire Retrofit Hub in its delivery.

Action effectiveness would be monitored in terms of carbon savings, bill savings, grants secured, number of residents engaged, and number/capacity of projects brought forward. The budget remained as agreed in Full Council in February 2024 at £338k revenue budget over two years from the Just Transition fund.

The following issues were raised in relation to the report:

- Battery energy storage was discussed as work done by the Council on domestic energy efficiency. Its value would depend on the type and use of a building, including whether most of its energy use was at off-peak times.
- The community energy co-op would be intended to facilitate projects in communities that do not have the necessary skills or capacity. Furthermore, the education and awareness raising action looked to tailor opportunities for less affluent communities, such as the Warm Homes local grant and cheaper energy tariffs for those with smart meters.
- A Member queried whether the Council would enforce heating projects without encouraging an understanding of their benefits. It was stated that there had been a government consultation on the development of heat network zones and local authorities' role in delivering on them, however it was expected that more information would be available as this progressed.
- In response to a Member query about promoting insulation, officers explained that individual circumstances and building type would impact the effectiveness of insulation and heat sources. Though insulation upgrades had been promoted through the actional energy scheme and Cambridgeshire retrofit partnership, it might have been dissuasive to advise to insulate before installing a heat pump.
- Members praised the report and expressed support of local community energy projects, sharing examples where they had worked well, stating it would be good to enable communities to take energy projects into their own hands.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the responses and conclusions of the consultation on the Draft Community Energy Action Plan.
- b) Agree to the adoption of the Council Community Energy Action Plan, as set out in Appendix C of this report.

222. Milton Household Recycling Centre Redevelopment

The Milton Household Recycling Centre (HRC) redevelopment project started in 2020, when outline designs for the site were presented to the Environment and Sustainability Committee. Included were the bidders' tender costs showing that the capital costs were estimated to be in line with the budget allocation, allowing for 10% contingency sum.

The report also included a risk register detailing the types of risks and potential impacts after mitigating actions. Potential risks included changes in government/statutory regulations and fly tipping. The Council had discussed the importance of clearly communicating the site closure and alternative options to deter fly tipping.

Running in parallel was the Environmental Permit application required to operate the site, an amendment to the existing site permit.

The Committee was asked to agree the recommendations for the project to progress to the detailed design and construction, the temporary closure of the Milton site, and introduction of a booking system at the three nearest sites (Thriplow, Witchford and Bluntisham) to manage displaced volumes of materials during construction of the new site. The new split-level site design would improve the safety environment for residents and staff, remove the need to close the site while exchanging waste containers, and increase the capacity of the site for use by the growing population in Cambridgeshire. If approved, the approximate 42-week construction phase would start in September or October 2025.

The Chair invited comments from the Local Members.

Presented were comments from Councillor Thompson, representing Northstowe, who suggested the redevelopment of Milton HRC would represent a vital investment in waste management for the area. The plans would offer significant benefits supporting the needs of local residents. The proposed reuse shop would provide access to good quality items at low cost whilst supporting sustainability and economic benefits, which would align with the community's commitment to reducing waste and promoting sustainable practices. Councillor Thompson urged the committee to ensure clear education campaigns and communication about alternative arrangements during development to deter fly tipping and maintain environmental quality in the area.

Councillor Bradnam, representing Milton with the busiest HRC in Cambridgeshire, identified that it was a vital resource and expressed support for the new two-tier design. Though she had expressed concern about drainage, she had been reassured this would not be a problem with the new site. Councillor Bradnam emphasised that it would be positive to liaise with South Cambridgeshire District Council to provide as much support as possible during the transition. She also expressed concern over the potential impacts on the nearby reuse charity shop, Emmaus, suggesting that the new recycling centre might be charitably generous to allow Emmaus, which provided homes for the homeless, to continue operating. Officers clarified that items which had gone into the recycling centre would belong to the contractor, Thalia. However, the Local Authority could discuss this with Thalia and Emmaus to ascertain potential impacts and solutions that could be given to support Emmaus wherever possible. **ACTION REQUIRED**

Representing Histon and Impington, Councillor Hathorn spoke in support of the new facility, and identified the period of closure as the tension point in the development. She requested that Members be kept informed of the communication plan, particularly in South Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire, and Cambridge City, as well as acknowledging the cross-border relations with Suffolk and Norfolk which might also need to be involved. An officer clarified the signposted sites during closure would be the three nearest sites with booking systems in place. Suffolk and Norfolk had already been moving to a booking system. Officers suggested that with a timetable in place, the Local

Authority could move forward with communications with respective parties around the site closure including receiving input from district colleagues. ACTION REQUIRED

Arising from discussions of the report:

- A Member queried whether there was any indication of the volume of materials being redistributed to which of the three alternative sites, expressing concern that the redistribution might be unbalanced. Officers acknowledged the Local Authority could not categorically identify how much waste would be distributed to which sites, stating the Milton site had approximately 6-7k tonnes of material to be redistributed (pro rata), and that the booking system would aim to manage and accommodate this, encouraging users to be thoughtful about their approach and use of alternative sites.
- A Member commended the safety and ease of use of the HRC in Witchford and queried whether the new split-level site in Milton would be similarly constructed. An officer confirmed it would be similar, however would not be covered, explaining the reason for this was that the site was within the Cambridge Green Belt, and the design had to be sympathetic and maintain openness for this reason. This included wider impacts such as the need to reduce the use of lighting wherever possible.
- The booking system was raised by a Member, querying whether it might be removed if found that it acted more as a prohibitor than succour during the construction period. An Officer explained that the booking system used during Covid had to be updated to allow advancements to be made. Emphasis was on the flexibility of the booking system to prevent local residents being turned away, as well as preventing lengthy queues. Officers would ensure it would engagement with key colleagues to ensure that communications with the local communities would be clear and 'user friendly' at the point the system was required.
- Officers stated that conversations would be had with Thalia to identify redeployment of its staff during the reconstruction of the Milton site. ACTION REQUIRED

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the preferred option to proceed with construction of the Milton Household Recycling Centre (HRC) as set out in Section 3 of the report.
- 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 award and execute a contract to the successful Design and Build Contractor.
- c) Approve the temporary closure of Milton HRC and the introduction of a booking system for the three nearest alternative HRCs, for the management of additional traffic and tonnages while the Milton HRC would be temporarily closed for construction.

223. Cambridgeshire Flood Mitigation Programme Update

Officers presented a report on the update to the Council's Flood Mitigation Programme. This had been produced from a local flood risk management strategy, which prompted a review of priority areas for future schemes. This, along with investigations into flooding instances, fed into the priority areas taken forward as part of the transition plan.

The programme was broken down into three stages. Stage 1 included walking through priority areas with professionals from the highways framework and meeting with communities to identify flooding hotspots. Resulting from this, 18 locations had been identified, and 100 potential options had been put forward. Following a cost benefit analysis, 40 of these options had been discounted. Stage 2 reviewed the feasibility of the shortlisted options and put these into a plan. Finally, Stage 3 focused on the deliverability of the scheme, with the Local Authority's intention to commence with the 'quick wins' straight away and larger schemes possibly returning to Committee for approval depending on their threshold.

The types of schemes included simple remedial works, improving existing infrastructure, introducing new infrastructure, introducing landscape features upstream, building evidence for policy, and building a future programme with potential funding available.

Though locations had been identified with shortlisted options, the Council would be flexible with their plan depending on issues arising from work completed in July 2024, flooding which had occurred since the report, and issues highlighted by partner reports.

In response to the report:

- Officers clarified that the criteria used to draw up the list of risk areas was primarily focused on surface water flooding, with additional consideration given to access issues and damage to property. The Local Authority had also worked with other agencies, including the Environment Agency regarding their actions, and Anglian Water to identify the areas most affected. A Member raised concern over an area between Landbeach and Waterbeach which had previously experienced issues with flooding, noting that it had not been included in the report. An officer replied that no areas would be ruled out as future pieces of work could look into these.
- A Member queried whether officers would contribute to planning applications going forward to guide on possible flooding issues. It was confirmed that on local planning sites and major applications, the team would engage to ensure their comments would be submitted. However, regarding monitoring whether their recommendations were implemented, this would fall within the remit of the local planning authority. Should they be made aware that their comments had not been implemented, they would work together with the relevant authority.
- A Member identified that there were several advisory groups set up regarding flood reviews but queried who, if anyone, had monitored or overseen them. Another Member identified the reason for this was because Parish Councils were not empowered to raise funds to address issues of flooding, however flood groups could, therefore the groups and Parish Councils would sometimes work collaboratively. Officers confirmed that they monitored issues raised within the

groups and made connections where issues overlapped between multiple groups. Resolving matters raised was financially beneficial and provided more deliverability when working together with other groups, therefore the Local Authority would get involved with as many of those groups as practicably possible.

- The Chair identified the two separate types of groups set up: the community flood groups which were set up, supported and overseen by the Local Authority, as well as the groups resulting from the Anglian Water unilateral piece of work. It was suggested that it would be helpful to have a graphical representation or map identifying the areas covered by community flood groups or Anglian Water groups. ACTION REQUIRED
- In response to a Member query around flooding in community areas or private land which affected the individual's income, officers identified that there had been a number of areas where access to residences could provide a potential risk to residents' safety, more so than internal flooding. Where such residents or communities were isolated, this could impact access by emergency services. Such an example highlighted that no area would be out of the realm of consideration.
- An officer identified a piece of work which the Local Authority was involved with in collaboration with Anglian Water and the Environment Agency called 'Future Fens'. This looked at the long-term future of the Fenlands, including valuation of agricultural land.
- A Member queried whether the Local Authority could work together with navigation applications, such as Waze and Google, to inform on flooding improvement work and emergency flood responses for the safety and convenience of road users using navigation tools. Officers acknowledged there were set processes in place for managing diversion routes, however agreed to take the suggestion away regarding communication with navigation applications. ACTION REQUIRED
- Officers confirmed that developments could be reviewed if found that planned flood prevention systems were insufficient, however specified the need to differentiate between whether the plan genuinely did not work, compared with the perception that it did not work.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the progress made in relation to the Cambridgeshire Flood Risk Programme as set out in paragraph 3.1.1 of this report and the planned work for stages two and three of the programme set out in paragraph 3.2.1.
- b) Approve the recommended option to progress the proposed projects to stages two and three of the Cambridgeshire Flood Risk Programme based on the findings of the stage one work.
- c) Note that the medium and large schemes (defined in paragraph 3.6.4 of this report) would come back to the Environment and Green Investment Committee for approval before any stage three project is commenced.

- d) 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 authorise the delivery of small schemes (as defined at 3.6.3) in the programme including the procurement, award and execution of any contracts in relation to these projects.

224. Corporate Performance Report

The Committee was presented a report on the performance up to September 2024 (Quarter 2). Full indicators showed good performance regarding digital connectivity, exceeding the target around gigabit connections and close to target on superfast broadband. Indicators regarding planning measure around county matters showed excellent performance getting determinations within agreed timescales. The carbon indicator showed good progress (Scope 1 was on target to achieve the ambition for net zero by 2030, there was good progress made around Scope 2, and challenges around Scope 3 given it was a difficult target to achieve particularly around carbon from construction and the rural estate). The Local Authority was unable to provide an updated set of indicators regarding waste, however this would be available the next time this Committee would review performance.

The Committee received information on the revised performance framework (concerning strategic indicators in the future) which was previously agreed by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee and would start to be reported upon next time the Committee would review performance. However, it was stated there were two indicators being developed in relation to biodiversity and woodland cover.

The report also covered risk, integrated with performance and finances, of which three high risks were presented. The first high risk was in relation to finance for the whole directorate due to the overspend particularly around waste and delay in securing energy income. The Local Authority was building safeguards to mitigate future overspend. The second high risk stated was health and safety, due to the importance and potential impact should an incident occur. The Council would take further assurances to ensure health and safety was fully embedded in all operations. The third high risk mentioned was in relation to waste, particularly the waste strategy review which would remain a significant issue until the Local Authority could come to a decision around the future waste strategy, for which a final recommendation would be sought as soon as possible to bring the matter to conclusion in the upcoming Spring. Finally, a significantly reduced risk regarding sustainable drainage systems had been mentioned. There had been the potential of additional responsibility resting with local authorities, however the latest government information stated it was not their intention to pass this burden to local authorities, therefore the risk was downgraded until further information was known.

Following the report:

- Though acknowledging waste and recycling centres had experienced recovery, a Member queried the amount of household waste per head which appeared to have stabilised. Officers stated it had slightly decreased over time, though confirmed it had recently been stable, suggesting this had been because green waste would change from year to year. However, this report only covered Quarter 1, where Quarter 2 would be reported on at a later Committee.

- A Member outlined that energy use had been stated as a single line, however this encompassed electricity, gas and oil. Where electricity had increased and gas had decreased, the Member sought a breakdown. Decarbonisation led to a shift away from gas and increased use in electricity with renewable energy. A further review of the estate was needed to get it to the smallest possible size. This would optimise the estate and impact on energy consumption. In addition, a programme was in place to replace street lighting with LED lighting which would impact electricity use.
- Though acknowledging improved access to superfast broadband, a Member expressed concern over the cost of that access. It was explained that the Connecting Cambridgeshire team had supported communities by accessing applicable vouchers and that the digital inclusion programme worked to support individuals, however the Local Authority had limited influence regarding market dynamics.
- Members and officers discussed how a graph relating to indicator 226 displayed information regarding emissions which had increased and performance which had thus decreased. It was discussed that the critical point was the space below the line of trajectory. Officers agreed to review how the information was presented to identify whether it could be clearer. ACTION REQUIRED
- In response to a Member request regarding indicator 150B, officers confirmed it would be possible to isolate Fenland and provide a breakdown regarding recycling. ACTION REQUIRED

It was resolved unanimously to note and review performance and risk information outlined in this paper.

225. Finance Monitoring Report – October 2024

The report presented to Committee outlined the position as of October 2024 where the directorate had an overspend of £1.9m. Three of the key issues relating to environment and green investment which drove the overspend were summarised.

Contributing to the overspend were assumptions around timeframes for energy projects to be completed and generate electricity, thus creating an income stream to the Council. The most significant of these projects was the North Angle Solar Farm which had been connected and was starting to create an income for the Council by exporting energy to the grid. This income had not yet been factored into the year's budget assumption. Additionally, the St Ives and Babraham energy projects were stated as being on track for completion by the end of the financial year.

As highlighted in the risk report, waste disposal had also contributed to the overspend, though this period had seen a reduction due to the transfer of allocations from a waste reserve, contributing to the cost of additional waste disposal. However, the overspend remained as a result of securing additional resources to help with the strategy.

Finally, though energy projects remained on site and therefore their final positions could not yet be confirmed, there were no projections or forecasting of any overspends or slippage on capital.

Resulting from the report:

- A Member expressed concern over the £4.5m underperformance on energy projects against forecast plans. It was felt there was an issue with efficiency and the authority's ability to deliver the projects. Though it was acknowledged that there were some unforeseen costs incurred, concern was raised over the quality, timescale, and overall cost of the projects. An officer identified that the projects, having been commissioned several years prior, were currently being managed by a team who started only 18 months prior. Resulting from the projects, this team had a good understanding on the lessons learned from the two key issues: the way they were initially commissioned and putting the forecast into the budget. A revised structure was implemented as a result, where all complex projects would be managed by the head of complex infrastructure, and there would be careful reviews on whether these types of projects would be commissioned in the same way going forward.
- A Member highlighted that the historic projects which had been completed had yielded lessons, and there were no further projects currently in the pipeline. Having reviewed the community energy action plan, it was acknowledged this would be up to the next administration deliver. A Member suggested learning lessons from the previous projects was critical before taking on new projects, and that the framework around environment projects had changed on a national level, therefore there would be new routes around climate and clean energy to address.
- A Member noted the £2m overspend stated in the outturn variance 2024-25 report and queried how that would be brought back to a balanced position. An officer acknowledged that it would be optimistic to get to a fully balanced position, however significant mitigation to overspend had been made through income in other parts of the directorate reporting to other committees. This included enhanced controls over workforce requests and third-party expenditures, acknowledging it would be difficult to reduce some third party spends, particularly PFI contracts.
- A Member acknowledged that there had been significant challenges over the years in delivering energy projects, such as connectivity. However, lessons had been learned and progress made. The Council had the ambition several years prior to produce ground-breaking, visionary projects to support the energy network. She commended the resulting projects including North Angle Farm, St Ives, the Smart Energy Grid Project, solar panels on the Babraham Park and Ride, and more.
- Looking back at the Council's energy projects, a Member commended the previous administration which had been inventive and pushed the boundaries to take on the projects. Another Member felt that their complexity had not been fully recognised from the outset and queried whether the authority had learned and developed more realistic expectations for future projects. Officers stated that lessons had been learned through reviews conducted on all projects to ascertain risks and optimism bias. A Member emphasised the importance of reviewing the Lessons Learned report commissioned by the Council to identify where support structures had not been in place at the time of the projects' inception where their complexity, risk, and financial preparation had not been fully identified.

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

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

The Committee noted its Agenda Plan.

Chair