

Minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce (virtual teleconference)

22 April 2020 (6pm – 8.15pm)

Present: Councillors Matt Bryan (Chairman), Paul Bowers, Simon Eardley, Gillian Edwards, Jill Houlbrook, Gina Lewis and Christine Warner

Visiting Members: Councillor Andrew Dawson (agenda item 6)

Officers: Laurence Ainsworth, Lyn Brown, Georgina Patel (Qwest), Will Pearson and Sean Traynor

1 Welcome and introductions

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the teleconference meeting and introductions were made, in particular the Chairman welcomed Ashley Rogers (Commercial Director, North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council) and Phil McCabe (Development Manager, Federation of Small Businesses) for agenda item 7.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Karen Shore and the following officers – Andrew Lewis, Charlie Seward, George Ablett, Ben Cummins and Simon Skidmore.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

4 Minutes of the last meeting

Decided: That

- (1) the minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce held on 24 January 2020 be approved; and
- (2) the minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce held on 27 February 2020 be received for approval at a future meeting of the Taskforce.

5 Public question time / open session

The Chairman had been notified of two questions from members of the public wishing to address the Taskforce as follows:

Niall MacFayden asked the Taskforce the following:

- What is the Council doing/could be doing to maximise the benefit to the region from the recent budget announcements of 800m for carbon capture projects. Obviously we are in a crisis just now, but climate change will kill more people than covid-19 over the longer term. There is an opportunity for Cheshire West and Chester to be carbon negative by 2030 via CCS, if we

take the carbon from South Wales and bury it in the Hamilton field. We cannot achieve this by planting trees or regenerating peatland.

Colin Watson asked the Taskforce the following:

- In the recently approved Council budget, plans to tackle the Climate Crisis are a key priority. From the Budget Report 2020 para 11.1: "..... In addition, all individual capital projects are required to evaluate their impacts, positive and negative on climate change." The impact of the climate emergency on large capital projects was recently highlighted when the Third Runway at Heathrow was rejected by the High Court because it had not adequately considered climate change.
- Covid 19 is anticipated to hit the UK economy by 35 per cent (ref OBR 14 April) and bring about long-term changes in society. This will disproportionately hit the types of businesses operating in Chester. BHS remains vacant years after closure, as with several other large retail premises. Debenhams and Carluccio's are only a couple of a significant stream of businesses that have recently gone into administration, which will leave a growing number of premises in Chester empty for an indeterminate period.
- It is also noted that many other cities are removing car parks to meet clean air and carbon neutral targets in favour of public transport and active travel (San Francisco, San Paulo, Copenhagen, Zurich, Birmingham to name a few). The CEO of Cheshire West and Chester Council has suggested that car usage needs to reduce by 25 per cent to meet net zero targets. It appears that the retail boom is over, and the council needs to revise its strategy for post Covid.
- Will the council review the expenditure on the A51 and the Northgate to align strategy and expenditure to meet climate emergency objectives, clean air objectives, and the new economic and social realities post Covid which has proved that clean air and green spaces are paramount?

Taskforce discussion focussed on large projects such as the Chester Northgate Development, with some Members raising concerns and suggesting it might be sensible to pause given the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic and the impact on retail, restaurants and businesses. It was suggested that up to 40 per cent of restaurants were potentially not expected to reopen when lockdown restrictions were eventually lifted.

It was also suggested that more time was needed to assimilate the situation, the impact on businesses and perhaps build some contingency into timescales. There was recognition that small businesses would need huge support going forward and we would need to review what support could be offered, in which areas, and to help businesses take advantage of funding available to them.

Agreed: That

the Taskforce resolved to ensure that the Council offer its support to small businesses going forward and assist businesses to take advantage of funding available to them.

6 Discussion item – Council referrals: Notice of Motion and unsuccessful Budget Report amendment

The Taskforce considered two items which had been referred from full Council as follows:

- (1) Motion to Council – Climate Emergency: Helping schools and other public sector partners transition to low carbon sources of energy and to use energy more efficiently – Minute item 92, Council, 21 January 2020; and
- (2) Unsuccessful amendment to Budget Report 2020-21 – Agenda item 7, Council, 20 February 2020.

Councillor Andrew Dawson, as the proposer of both items to full Council, spoke at the Taskforce in relation to the items. He felt that the Council should look to be a leader in this field and act as an enabler to assist organisations to access funding to install solar panels on their roofs and reduce their energy bills.

Taskforce members were in the main supportive of this suggestion and agreed that a range of options needed to be explored in addition to solar panels, including wind turbines, and all avenues of funding should be explored, including the Cheshire Pension Fund.

In response, Georgina Patel, Qwest Services Energy and Carbon Reduction Manager, provided the following information:

- The Energy and Carbon Reduction Team (ECR) has produced a paper for the Climate Emergency Steering Group on the use of Salix Loan funding for energy efficiency measures, including Solar PV, in schools.
- Since 2011, the ECR Team has installed Solar PV in 41 schools (39 primary schools, two high schools) using predominantly corporate capital funding and Salix Loan funding. The financial cases to support the installations were based on the availability of Feed in Tariff, rates of which significantly dropped in 2016 and later ceased in 2019. An additional consideration factor for suitability being orientation and structure of school roofs.
- Solar PV has also been installed at Wyvern House, and working with Chester Community Energy, on Northgate Arena and more recently Neston and Christleton Leisure Centres.
- Central Government Salix Loan funding is available for energy efficiency projects across local authority estates. The funding supports over 100 energy efficiency technologies and application criteria is based on stipulated payback periods for the measures installed. The ECR Team has used Salix funding to support energy efficiency measures since 2010 on an individual case by case basis.
- Moving forward the ECR Team recommend setting up a Salix Recycling Fund for Cheshire West. This will be a ring-fenced fund with capital provided by Salix, and matched by the Council, to be spent on energy saving projects; the benefit of the fund being a greater flexibility of payback periods. The financial savings delivered by the projects are returned to the fund allowing further spending on additional projects, hence the term 'Recycling Fund'. The size of an individual Recycling Fund can range from £100,000 to

over £1 million. A typical fund size would be £500,000 with Salix providing half the funding.

Action:

ECR Team to undertake a desktop survey of schools for the potential of Solar PV system, additional PV systems and other suitable energy saving technologies, to determine the size of Salix Recycling Fund required for investment potential. To bring proposals back to a future Climate Emergency Taskforce.

7 Business – Presentations and discussion

The Taskforce received presentations from Ashley Rogers (Commercial Director, North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council) and Phil McCabe (Development Manager, Federation of Small Businesses [FSB]) on the role of Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs) in tackling the climate emergency and achieving carbon neutrality. The two slide presentations are attached to these minutes.

Ashley briefed on the FSB report for the Welsh Government “The New Normal – an Environmental Approach for SMEs” published in December 2019. The primary drivers covered were power, transport, air pollution and recycling/ waste. The report contained the FSBs environmental principles, the five actions SMEs can take and the five actions the government can take to facilitate decarbonisation, listed below.

Five actions SMEs can take:

1. Understand their own environmental impact, including their supply chain;
2. Consider energy efficiency improvements;
3. Aim for best practice;
4. Redesign the commute;
5. Prepare for changes to waste and recycling policy.

Five actions that government can take:

1. Provide an advice line for SMEs on environmental issues;
2. Consider including business premises in decarbonisation or insulation schemes;
3. Develop a long term EV strategy;
4. Deliver a clean air framework that works for smaller businesses;
5. Ensure new recycling and waste regulations understand the needs of SMEs.

Phil McCabe explained that a set of principles had been developed to help promote SMEs and it was recognised that with the right support, SMEs could contribute to green targets. Whilst it was felt the desire was there, it would be necessary to support them to capitalise on this. Phil confirmed that work was currently underway on the development of a web portal for SMEs to access.

The Chairman thanked Ashley and Phil for their informative presentations. In the ensuing discussion, Taskforce members raised the following:

- the need to have a starting point now in terms of businesses and assets to understand the economic mix

- recognition that a holistic approach was needed now that the world was increasingly inter-connected
- Cheshire was very well placed geographically in terms of connectivity
- in relation to electric cars, range anxiety was an issue but it was felt this would hopefully disappear as vehicles improved
- in relation to power supply, properties not owned by a business was felt to be a huge issue
- the cost implications of clean air zones was highlighted, although it was recognised the will was there
- similar concerns were expressed around the cost implication of a workplace parking levy and it would be important to support any transition
- zero rate loans to businesses to support them to transition to renewable forms of energy would be helpful
- support for businesses to gain environmental accreditation such as PAS 2060 was also suggested
- the Council was a large client in terms of procurement and a mapping exercise would be useful as well as a standardised offer
- we need to harness the benefits of less travel and working from home brought on by the new landscape of the covid 19 crisis
- the Chair suggested collaboration with the University of Chester around SMEs following a recent meeting he had had with Briony Robinson

Georgina Patel, Energy & Carbon Reduction Senior Manager, reported that Cheshire & Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) had commissioned a sub-regional business needs survey which was completed and published in 2017. The survey included some questions relating to environmental issues. It was understood that a new survey was to be commissioned by the LEP in the short term, therefore providing a potential opportunity to add some additional questions relating to the climate emergency agenda.

Taskforce members were encouraged to share any further thoughts and views on the Business topic, or any useful preparatory documents for the next meeting which would focus on Transport. This would ensure that there was an ongoing, live discussion on issues raised (will.pearson@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

Actions:

- Will Pearson to contact the Council's Business Growth Team to ascertain when the new Business Needs Survey is due to be commissioned.
- Will Pearson to circulate the Government's Decarbonising Transport Report "Setting the Challenge" to the Taskforce.

8 Any other business which the Chairman considers urgent

The Chairman raised the issue of the Local Electricity Bill which, despite the corona virus pandemic, was due to be introduced in Parliament on 28 April 2020. He explained that the Bill was being re-introduced as a Ten Minute Rule Bill by a number of co-sponsors and supported by a cross party group of 55 other MPs.

He further explained that 19 principal councils had resolved to support the Bill so far which, if made law, would empower local communities to sell locally generated

clean energy directly to local customers by establishing a statutory Right to Local Supply. This was currently impossible because of the huge setup and running costs involved in doing so.

The ultimate result of this would be:

1. Local communities and businesses could buy their electricity from a local energy company, instead of the big national utilities.
2. Building more local renewable energy schemes would be financially viable.
3. Local communities would gain economic benefits, such as more local skilled jobs and investment in energy efficiency schemes for local homes.

Action:

the Chairman contact all Cheshire West and Chester Councillors to request their support to lobby their MP to “Please support the Local Electricity Bill that will be introduced as a Ten Minute Rule Bill on 28 April 2020”.

9 Future meeting dates

The next scheduled meeting dates for the Taskforce were noted as:

- Wednesday 27 May 2020 Transport
- Tuesday 23 June 2020 Housing and Land Use
- Wednesday 15 July 2020 Offsetting and Climate Repair

Chairman

Date