Minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce
(virtual teleconference)

27 May 2020 (6pm – 8.15pm)

Present: Councillors Matt Bryan (Chairman), Paul Bowers, Simon Eardley, Gillian Edwards, Jill Houlbrook, and Karen Shore.

Visiting Members: Councillors Elton Watson, Richard Beacham

Officers: George Ablett, Laurence Ainsworth, Morgan Jones, Andrew Lewis, 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 Richard Skitt (Mott McDonald), Danny Crump (Broadway Malyan) for Agenda Item 9.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bob Cernik, Gina Lewis and Christine Warner and the following officers – Charlie Seward and Lyn Brown

3. Declarations of interest

Councillor Gillian Edwards declared her membership of both Weaverham Trust and Weaverham Parish Council.

4. Minutes of the last meeting

Decided: That
(1) the minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce held on 27 February 2020 be approved; and
(2) the minutes of the Climate Emergency Taskforce held on 22 April 2020 be approved.

5. Public question time / open session

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

Colin Watson (Chester sustainability forum): Question – to meet agreed carbon targets we need clear accountability and reporting against these targets. How is the taskforce going to agree strategies with each of the key players to report against targets. The chair agreed to respond in writing.

Catherine Green: It is incongruous for the Council to declare a climate emergency and yet build an 800 place car park at the Northgate development. How can you justify a £70m car park when you've declared a climate emergency? The chair agreed to provide a written response.

Pierre Walthery: Extinction rebellion Chester are asking for the Council to use four key principles as the backbone of their actions.
- Be bold and ambitious - urgently prepare for the post personal car era.
- Make cycling and active travel a permanent part of Cheshire West and Chester's plans.
- Putting family needs at the centre of the cycling and active travel strategy.
- Inspire local people and set an example. Councillors and senior officers should engage in active travel.

The chair agreed to provide a written response.

6. Renewable energy and the school estate

Georgina Patel set out the potential for further use of renewable energy in the school estate. This will build on the PV provision already in place on existing schools, major projects and leisure centres, all supported through Salix funding. Salix has now evolved to create a decarbonisation fund and will offer further opportunities. Proposals are that solar power is considered as a primary consideration on all roof renewal works, alongside a detailed survey of the remaining 100 local authority schools to create a priority list for solar energy projects supported by a Salix recycling fund using £0.5m Council monies which would be matched by Salix. Delivery would be through Qwest.

The Chair welcomed the presentation and the fact that the proposal is in line with the cross party consensus.

Decided; that
i) The taskforce supported the proposals.
ii) Proposals should now progress in line with the Council's usual governance arrangements.

7. Update on the Climate Emergency Advisory Group

Andrew Lewis gave an update on discussions at the last Climate Emergency Advisory Group. These focused on the presentation that forms the next agenda item, which really engaged the group. Discussions focused on the fact that many of our transport networks have been underused during the pandemic, making it possible to see them as community spaces rather than just being for motor vehicles. There are exciting opportunities across the Borough but particularly for Chester.

8. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure

Sean Traynor set out the Council's approach to the development of the local cycling and walking infrastructure. The Council's Cycling and Walking strategy has been recently consulted on and is due to go to Cabinet in the Summer. Alongside this, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) are being developed focusing on our economic hubs.

Nationally, government are looking to renew the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, seeking to double cycling by 2025 and decarbonise transport. A new government report is raising a series of questions in this area and the taskgroup may wish to respond.

Immediate opportunities are around the £2bn national funding for active travel and emergency allocations to make infrastructure safer. We are awaiting an announcement on the allocation for west Cheshire and are preparing an online consultation where people can drop a pin on a map to flag places where change is needed. Temporary infrastructure changes are expected to be in place within the next week or so.

We have seen a huge drop in motor transport recently, with reduced congestion and improved air quality. The challenge is building on that.

Issues raised by Members:

Cllr Bowers suggested a correlation between high cycling figures and low bus use in west Cheshire and highlighted the importance of integrating active travel and public transport with existing local issues about putting bikes on trains and buses. Members discussed how potential routes are being identified and prioritised, with the need to ensure that all areas can benefit rather than just those where active travel is already common.

Sean Traynor confirmed that Government are positive about the use of electric scooters and are open to proposals on new rules to allow them to operate safely.

Decided; that

i)	The taskforce will submit a response to Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge. Sean Traynor will lead on this.

9. Transport Presentation

Richard Skitt (Mott McDonald) and Danny Crump (Broadway Malyan) gave a presentation on the Streets For All initiative which began in Greater Manchester but they are now looking to implement more widely. Streets For All is a movement for equitable streets. It is not anti-car, but about sharing streets across the modes so that streets are places for people, not just vehicles. The key learning points from the initiative have been:

- Streets are critical to clean, inclusive growth.
- Need to design for people, not modes.
- Buses are not the sexiest but are a massive part of the solution.
- We need to rethink how we measure success – it is not necessarily the number of cars moving along a road per hour.
- Need to future proof designs.
- Stakeholder knowledge is key – engage early and often.
- Agree KPIs and measures regularly.
- Bring together different modes. Engage with everyone in the same room.

The pair then outlined the A56 Hoole road study and immediate considerations of a vehicle dominated street. There approach would be to benchmark against what other, similar cities, are doing and then to: tidy up; de-clutter; merge functions; rethink traffic management; and recreate the street.

Finally they left the taskgroup with four questions
- Where are your priorities for inclusivity?
- Which existing proposed investments would benefit from this?
- What do good streets look like to yourselves?
- Do you foresee any problems with this?

Issues raised by Members:
Members welcomed the ideas set out and the exciting opportunity to rethink the ways in which people travel to, arrive in and move around Chester and our towns. It was recognised that some areas might struggle more than others to meet these criteria and the importance of engaging with stakeholders such as parish councils.
 It was also highlighted that this feels focused on urban areas and we must not miss the opportunity to integrate all areas in our overall strategies (with specific reference to extending the greenway to Frodsham).

Members were encouraged to feed specific suggestions for improving cycling and walking infrastructure through to either the LCWIP consultation (for permanent infrastructure) or transportstrategy@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk for pop-up solutions.