

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY GROUP
THURSDAY, 16 MARCH 2023**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors G Williams (Chairman), J Murray (Vice-Chairman), G Dickman,
Mrs C Jeffreys, R Jones, R Mallender, F Purdue-Horan and R Walker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D Burch

D Hayden

E Leddy-Owen

P Phillips

T Coop

Service Manager - Neighbourhoods
Communities Manager

Team Manager for Environment
Community Engagement

Senior Ecology and Sustainability
Officer

Democratic Services Officer

APOLOGIES:

Councillors L Healy

39 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Mallender declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to 2.8 on the
Carbon Management Plan 2022, as he is employed in the EV charging
industry.

40 **Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023**

Councillor Jones highlighted that a question raised by the Vice Chair with
regards to the Youth Forum item and her suggestion of a collective group of
headteachers from the secondary schools had not been addressed. The
Service Manager – Neighbourhoods explained that the representative from
County Council was not aware of a collective Group, however he would follow
up on this and advise the Group in a separate note after the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023 were approved and signed by
the Chairman

41 **Carbon Management Plan**

The Communities Manager provided a brief introduction and reminded the
Group on 20 March 2020, Cabinet agreed a target to become carbon neutral
by 2030 from the Council's direct operations and adopt a Carbon Management

Action Plan to monitor progress against the target emissions.

The Group noted the Carbon Management Action Plan sets out how the Council will seek to drive carbon behaviour change through its policy and regulation work and to actively influence residents and businesses across the Borough.

The Communities Manager referred to the Council's Carbon Management Plan 2022, which was attached as an appendix to the report, and highlighted the 8 main themes:

1. Property Assets
2. Fleet and Transport
3. Contracts and Procurement
4. Policy and Regulation
5. Waste and Recycling
6. Operational Activities
7. Community and Business
8. Offsetting

It was noted the Carbon Management Plan was a living document which provides an action plan and overview of activities. A number of case studies were shared as an appendix from Green Grants, an energy efficiency scheme in partnership with Nottingham Energy Partnership (NEP), Eon Energy, Thrift Energy Group and the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The Team Manager for Environment delivered a presentation to highlight some of the projects recently completed.

Rushcliffe Country Park Net 0 Visitor Centre and Conference Suite

An innovative and enhanced amenity building, including an air source heat pump system, solar panels, EV charging point and a Changing Places site. The venue can be hired externally to create income and is being enjoyed by officers as an alternative healthy meeting space.

Bingham Arena and Bingham Enterprise Centre

Recently opened, the leisure centre has a low carbon construction, with solar electric and air source heat pump creating combined heat and power across the site. The building has a 2000 litre water harvesting tank which is used to flush the toilets providing significant savings. The Group were asked to note that Bingham Arena has a 78% Carbon reduction from a traditionally constructed leisure centre.

Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium

Not yet completed the crematorium boasts a technically Net 0 gain through REGO (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin), 30kWh solar electric system to cover off the majority of the lighting and office equipment, an electric cremator, green roof and emission filtering system and biodiversity

enhancements throughout. This is an innovative approach, whilst being compassionate and respectful for all users.

The Team Manager for Environment provided the Group with details of the Local Authority Delivery 2 and the more recent Sustainable Warm Competition (LAD 3 and Heating Upgrade Grants (HUG)), advising that to date £2m had been drawn in to 77 properties identified in East Leake. The Communities Manager added that Officers looked at the worst energy rated properties across the authority with ratings of F and G and advised the Group of the shared case studies attached as an appendix to the report.

The Team Manager for Environment advised that the Council had agreed a 2 year programme to decarbonise Cotgrave leisure centre and had been awarded £1.2m from SALIX a Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme 3b spread over years, which the Council hopes to run in line with the Council's own renovation plan for the popular family pool and leisure centre.

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer advised the Group of the Council's review of ecology and sequestration projects such as no mow schemes, woodland sites and land acquisitions, including the intended development of enhanced tree planting schemes to include large landowners, and to require Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as a minimum standard in respect of planning legislation. The Communities Manager, added, that the Carbon Management Plan initially looks at the Council's operations, including Council owned green spaces, fleet vehicles and buildings and any changes that can be made to enhance biodiversity and benefit residents lives.

In concluding the Team Manager for Environment advised the Group of future areas to be considered, including:

- A Borough wide energy, fuel, water and transport data mapping
- Develop and retrofit decarbonisation for Rushcliffe Arena
- Work with social housing providers to maximise national grant schemes under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)
- Identify devolution opportunities and work with regional partners
- Continue to enhance biodiversity and ecology

Councillor Butler asked a specific question relating to the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) Schemes and asked whether the Council had a role to play for general private homeowners wanting to make environmental improvements to their homes and to help prevent bogus scheme operators. The Team Manager for Environment explained that the LAD schemes are joint ventures with Eon and Nottingham Energy Partnership and are generally means tested, and therefore pick out the most vulnerable households. In addition, the Team Manager for Environment steered Councillors to Cost of Living Workshops funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), which provide helpful advice for residents on the cost of living and budgeting. The Manager for Communities expressed that the Council were focusing on its own operations in order to meet Cabinets agreed target to be carbon neutral by 20230. Members asked specific questions relating to

Councillor Walker complimented officers on the excellent work achieved at

East Leake referring to the case studies provided and asked a specific question in relation to the data used in selecting properties that might benefit from other similar schemes going forward. It was noted the properties in East Leake were social housing and how might privately owned properties benefit from LAD or similar schemes in the future. The Team Manager for Environment explained that information is gathered from national annual emissions data, a public document which provides information on property energy ratings and fuel emissions, adding that the intervention funding specifically targets those properties with an energy rating of below D. The Communities Manager explained that fuel poverty was a challenge with more and more households experiencing difficulties paying for fuel, adding that LAD2 will continue to feed through to 2050. The Group were reminded that the Council has committed to reducing its own emissions by 2030.

Members complimented officers on the excellent work achieved so far and were pleased to see a full programme of work going forward.

Councillor Jones asked had the Council considered what other authorities were doing to promote solar energy by way of collective buying schemes and quoted Kent County Council, 'Solar Together in Kent' as an example. The Communities Manager explained that the Chief Executive attends an N2 Energy Strategy Group which provides collaborative working across the D2N2 authorities, looking at opportunities and schemes on a large scale.

Councillor Jones referred to reference 4.11 on the Carbon Management Plan 2022, Policy and Regulations and asked why the Council were not insisting on carbon reduction policies and guidance for developers by way of solar panels and rainwater harvesting, on all new developments. The Team Manager for Environment advised that there was currently no legal requirement for developers to include this, the Council can provide a supplementary planning guidance to encourage developers to provide carbon reduction schemes, but legislative changes would need to be made to the National Policy. Councillor Jones provided Ashford Borough Council as an example where carbon reduction changes were being implemented. It was noted that the Council's Planning Policy were working on a collaborative process for policy change across the County.

Councillor Mallender highlighted the issue of flooding and was encouraged by the idea of saving areas of land for trees, particularly in urban areas, suggesting that paved/tarmac surfaces should be discouraged in new development schemes, providing an opportunity to increase biodiversity and address flooding.

Councillor Mallender suggested that solar panels on roofs was to be encouraged wherever possible adding that this should be pushed back to Government for legislation.

In respect of 2.8 on the Carbon Management Plan 2022, Develop a strategy for further EV charging points across the Borough, Councillor Mallender declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was employed in the EV Charging industry.

The Communities Manager advised that the Council were looking at improving

EV charging across Council properties and strategic positioning along A roads.

In respect of 1.10 on the Carbon Management Plan 2022, 'consider business case to purchase empty homes', Councillor Purdue-Horan asked why this had been removed from the plan. The Communities Manager explained that the plan up to 2030 focuses on Council owned properties and operations. The Service Manager – Neighbourhoods added that this was an item for scrutiny in itself and has been added to the Work Programme for the meeting of Communities Scrutiny Group in July 2023.

Councillor Dickman commented on the carbon used in producing building materials such as concrete, bricks and steel and suggested developers be steered to using more natural products such as local stone and wood. The Communities Manager advised that the newly completed Bingham Arena and Rushcliffe Oaks were procured using a design guide, which included the use of low carbon materials and locally sourced materials where possible, adding that natural materials would come down to cost and affordability for the Council.

The Chairman referred to 2.2 on the Carbon Management Plan 2022, 'investigate and replace/upgrade small vans vehicles with electric powered vehicles' and asked whether pool cars could be considered for planning and environmental officers who need to travel within the Borough for work. The Service Manager – Neighbourhoods advised that a specialist consultant has been appointed to work with the fleet to conduct a review which will inform the council on the most appropriate and cost-effective ways to decarbonise the existing fleet. However, it was noted that in respect of refuse vehicles there isn't anything on the market that covers the mileage-range the Council vehicles have to make across the Borough. In addition, the Service Manager – Neighbourhoods advised that the Government is expected to announce new legislation for the collection of food and garden waste, which may require changes to refuse vehicles going forward and it would be prudent to await this as there is the potential for funding to also be made available. The Group were advised that a roll out of smaller electric vehicles could go ahead relatively quickly depending on availability and in line with the capital replacement programme.

It was **RESOLVED** that the communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) Considered and endorsed the progress to date of the adopted carbon management action plan; and
- b) Provided comment and contribution towards the emerging carbon management actions for 2023/24.

42 **Environment Policy**

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer presented the report of the Director – Neighbourhoods and delivered a presentation on the Council's Environment Policy for the period 2023-2028.

The Group were asked to consider whether the updated Environment Policy

meets the overarching aims of the Council in relation to the environment in which it operates.

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer explained that the Environment is one of the Council's strategic priorities and as an employer and a provider of services, the Council needs to ensure its activities do not harm, but positively enhance the environment and by adopting the Environment Policy as set out in the report it will assist in the direction of other policies, procedures and working practices, including the influence we can have on the community through our own actions.

The Group were reminded of the Council's commitments 1 -7 as follows:

1. Environmental Improvement
2. Legislation
3. Energy and Water
4. Waste Management and Recycling
5. Environment Protection
6. Use of Materials
7. Planning and Transportation

With two additional commitments derived from Motions passed at Council:

8. Natural Environment
9. Climate Change

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer explained that delivery of the policy would be various officers and Council services, including Planning Policy, Planning and Growth, Environmental Health, Property Services and Streetwise.

Members expressed how pleased they were to see the additional commitments and acknowledged the Council has a legal duty and moral responsibility to protect the environment now and for future communities.

Councillor Mallender asked a specific question in relation to a baseline for where the Council needs to be looking to make improvements and whether there were any records of animal habitats that have been affected or destroyed due to environmental changes, (providing the absence of hedgehogs in urban areas as an example). The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer informed the Group that there are only limited historical records on animals, with wild birds better recorded, and that the baseline would need to be developed.

Councillor Mallender in response expressed this gives the Council a great opportunity for increasing biodiversity by reintroducing absent or declining species.

Councillor Mallender suggested ecological surveys be done on areas before any development starts and prevent land from purposefully being degraded for development. Councillor Mallender requested that developers should be discouraged from putting up solid fencing and encouraged to replace marked boundaries with new hedgerows. The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer

explained that in relation to land being degraded for future development the Council can use aerial photography from 2022 as a baseline.

The Group also noted the Council's commitment to increase hedgerows across the Borough by 40%.

Councillor Jones raised concerns in relation to the development at Sharphill, where subsoil/topsoil has been removed for landscaping and tree planting, thus removing the health of the original habitats of birds, insects and small animals. The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer advised that there was no legislation in place ensuring and improvement of biodiversity when Sharphill was granted planning, going forward biodiversity checks will be made prior to development with follow on checks during and after development has commenced. In addition, under new legislation and planning policies, biodiversity will be supported by conditions imposed on developers at the planning stage. It was noted that under new legislation developers have to demonstrate biodiversity net gains to the planning authority.

The Group questioned, how would Officers/Councillors know if these policies were being met and where is the detail of each policy and how are they measured. The Communities Manager explained that the Environment Policy is the umbrella policy, and any detail would be picked up by other policies sitting within it.

The Group agreed this was a starting point that requires the support and commitment of developers and communities too and that the Council can only encourage and educate communities to do their bit to improve and preserve the environment in which they live now and for future generations.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) Reviewed the updated draft Environment Policy
- b) Made suggestions to officers where the draft Policy does not yet meet the needs of the Council
- c) Recommends the Council adopts the updated Environment Policy

43 **Work Programme**

The Chairman presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services, which detailed the proposed Communities Scrutiny Group work for 2023/2024.

It was **RESOLVED** that Communities Scrutiny Group consider its Work Programme and that the following item for scrutiny was agreed.

July 2023 (TBC)

- Review of the Empty Homes Strategy and Council Tax Implications

October 2023 (TBC)

- Future Topics TBC

January 2024 (TBC)

- Future Topics TBC

March 2024 (TBC)

- Future Topics TBC

The Chairman noted that the Work Programme was light on items going forward and the asked members of the Group to submit a scrutiny matrix for any items they wish to be considered for scrutiny.

The Group noted that this was the last meeting of Communities Scrutiny Group for 2022/23 and that the membership is likely to change with new elected Councillors potentially bringing fresh ideas to be considered.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

CHAIRMAN