

Environment Sub Committee

Tuesday, 8 November 2022

Present: Councillor M Murphy (Chair)
Councillors G Bell, L Bell, B Burdis, M Fox, C Johnston,
G Madden, L Marshall and J Shaw

In attendance:
Councillor S Graham

Apologies: Councillors D Drummond and P McIntyre

E11/22 Declaration of Interests and Dispensations

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

E12/22 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record

E13/22 The role of Nature Based Solutions, Carbon Offsetting and Insetting in a Net Zero Plan

Consideration was given to a presentation which explained the concept of nature based solutions and how they had been incorporated into the Authority's Carbon Net Zero 2030 Action Plan.

The following measures had been included in the Net Zero Action Plan:

- Develop an offsetting/insetting strategy for the Authority;
- Build on the success of year 1 of the North East Community Forest through further tree planting and woodland creation;
- Develop existing and new projects to support insetting within the Authority workstreams and borough-wide emissions;
- Support the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy;
- Deliver the Biodiversity Action Plan and a range of biodiversity projects;
- Implement the introduction of the biodiversity net gain planning requirements

Funding for each of the measures had been obtained/identified and it was explained that initially these would be short term projects and in place by 2024, although it was noted that several of the streams had already commenced, including the delivery of the Biodiversity Action Plan and the work in relation to the North East Community Forest.

It was explained that Nature Based Solutions covered a variety of activities such as planting new forests, allowing forest regeneration following tree felling and improved forestry management. It also covered restorative agriculture practices including no-till agriculture,

crop rotation and improved livestock management as well as the conservation and restoration of peatlands and coastal wetlands and the restoration of seagrass meadows.

Reference was made to the steps taken to ensure that Nature Based Solutions were incorporated into local policy and decision making. It was explained that from 2023 it would be mandatory for planning applications to deliver a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain on development schemes, subject to certain limited exceptions. Reference was also made to the new system of Spatial Strategies for Nature which would be set up across England to drive forward nature recovery and identify areas for habitat delivery and enhancement. It was also explained that local authorities would have a duty to look strategically at their policies and operations every 5 years and assess the action they could take to further the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Reference was also made to the benefits that accrued from the planting of trees and new hedgerows in the Borough as part of the North East Community Forest. It was explained that trees and hedgerows contributed to localised cooling and reduced urban heat islands, which was particularly important in school grounds during hot weather. Trees and hedgerows also provided new habitats for wildlife, improved local air quality, improved the visual appearance of townscapes and assisted with surface water management, particularly in extreme weather events. It was also explained that the Woodland Carbon Code, which had been designed to provide reassurance about the carbon savings that planting trees in the Borough could realistically achieved by providing a carbon value for every tree planted. The Woodland Carbon Code was backed by the Government and was the only nature based offsetting scheme available to the Authority.

It was explained that Carbon Offsetting enabled organisations to compensate for any carbon emissions that they could not avoid or reduce by paying for a carbon credit. The payment enabled an equivalent volume of emissions to be reduced or removed elsewhere in the world. As it involved the use of public money this was not a relevant option for the Authority.

The Authority was participating, along with 30 other local authorities, in a leading UK Pilot project to develop an Authority Based Insetting approach although it was acknowledged that would be an option of last resort due in part to a lack of government guidance and an absence of national schemes which could be used.

Reference was made to the strategies in place and how they actually resulted in action to address the issues. It was explained that many of the strategies had action plans associated with the aims of the strategy and the action plans would be monitored by the Climate Emergency Board and a report presented to the Authority's Cabinet on an annual basis. Reference was also made to the action plan associated with the Biodiversity Action Plan which was reported regularly to the Committee.

Clarification was sought in relation to the use of ocean based practices such as the cultivation of seagrasses off the coast of the Borough. It was suggested that further advice be sought on the viability of such a scheme.

Reference was also made to the use of derelict land to provide a greener environment. It was explained that the Authority had a register of derelict land and that some of the land was identified for infill housing but other ex-industrial land had already been treated to improve the appearance of the land and to add value to the local community.

Clarification was sought in relation to the viability of schemes for carbon capture. It was explained that at present the costs of developing carbon capture facilities was prohibitive and therefore not viable

Reference was made to the siting of battery storage facilities to provide power to the national grid or other users. It was suggested that there was the potential for batteries to explode on occasion and therefore siting banks of batteries near to schools or petrol stations could be problematic. It was explained the safety of battery storage facilities would be considered as part of the planning process as planning applications would need to be submitted for large scale battery storage facilities.

The Chair thanked the officer for his presentation

It was **agreed** that the presentation be received