

Climate Change Advisory Board

Monday, 3 April 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr John Burden (Chair)

Councillors: Harold Craske
Sarah Gow
Shane Mochrie-Cox
Diane Morton

Darren Everden Assistant Director (Transformation and IT)
Wendy Lane Assistant Director (Planning)
Saida Shaikh Climate Action Delivery Manager
Joshua Arthur Project Surveyor (Energy & Sustainability)
Finley Treadwell Career Graded Surveyor
Chloe Taylor Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

20. Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence were received.

21. Minutes from Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Climate Change Advisory Board that took place on Wednesday 12 October 2022, were agreed and signed by the Chair.

22. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

23. Climate Change Action Delivery Plan

The Climate Action Delivery Manager presented the Board with the Climate Change Delivery Plan for consideration and outlined the following key points from the report:

Priority 1: GBC - The Organisation

- The Cascades Leisure Centre was granted planning permission last month. The approved proposal included high sustainability standards, support for sustainable travel options with 23 spaces in the car park for the charging of electric vehicles, and 35 cycle parking spaces and active open space.
- There was work taking place to commence a Fleet Replacement Programme, which focused on the decarbonisation of smaller fleet vehicles.
- Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCVs) made reference to the vehicles being fuelled by low-carbon methods, and batteries were not the most effective means for this type of vehicle. There was development underway of new technology to operate these

vehicles, such as hydrogen fuel and e-fuels, but these were not currently on the market.

- The Sustainable Travel Policy included the Cycle-to-Work scheme. They had recently signed a contract with Halfords, and this scheme would be launched on the 01 May 2023. To date, 11 members of staff had registered early interest.

Priority 2: GBC – The Housing Provider

The Project Surveyor (Energy & Sustainability) outlined the following key points from the Priority 2 working group.

- The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – Wave 1 was progressing well. Since June 2022, 350 (out of 400) properties had been surveyed, with 200 of those receiving insulation.
- A bid had been submitted for Wave 2 of the fund but, unfortunately, was unsuccessful. Feedback on why the bid was unsuccessful had not yet been received.
- Water-saving initiatives within the housing stock had been explored with a water-saving consultant. The highest water usage was recorded at temporary accommodation, but with the proposed water-saving systems, a yearly sum of 292,000 litres of water and 9,840kWh of energy would be saved.
- The use of solar panels to power communal areas in the housing stock had been explored. Two blocks had been completed (Chantry Court and Carl Ekman House), saving a combined 9.5 tonnes of carbon.

Priority 3: GBC – The Community Leader

- Officers had been working to engage with local schools. The Council received letters from pupils of Springhead Park Primary School concerning climate change. The Mayor and a Council officer visited the school and addressed their queries, and awarded them as Climate Champions.
- Solar Together phase two scheme had saved 50 tonnes of Co2 within the first year from completed installations. The scheme was in such high demand that phase three of the scheme was launched in the last week of March 2023, and Gravesham was partnering with them once again.

The Climate Action Deliver Manager, the Assistant Director (Transformation & IT) and the Project Surveyor (Energy & Sustainability) fielded questions from members of the board and explained the following:

Priority 1: GBC – The Organisation

- It was made clear that Value Engineering did not mean cutting back on key principles or the sports and leisure offer but was making it more efficient and focused on elements such as office planting and roofing elements to reduce carbon emissions.
- The budget costs would be paid back over a number of years, and with good energy efficiency included within the build, the running cost goes down and makes it easier to pay back.
- Ground source heat pumps were being investigated as a method of heating the Leisure Centre. It was considered whether this could be filtered from the Lower Thames Crossing, should it proceed, to maximise the benefits for the local residents.

- Discussions were taking place with the Assistant Director (Operations) regarding research into the use of hydrogen fuel for RCV's, but there were issues to be overcome with this. They were still researching a suitable alternative fuel.
- Refuse Vehicles require replacement every 7 to 8 years. Within that time, there will be new technology for consideration.
- Another issue with replacing larger vehicles before 2028-29 was related to government changes to refuse collection. The requirements were not currently known and could change our requirements for new vehicles.
- The leading RCV companies (such as DAF and Dennis Eagle) were those manufacturing electric variants of the vehicles.
- Smaller vehicles in the fleet were already being replaced with electric vehicles.
- The Hybrid-Working Policy allowed staff to work from home 3 days a week and to be in the office for 2 days. However, this varies depending on the needs of the service and the preference of individual staff, but the limit remained at 3 days. There was a mixture of staff who were required to be on-site full-time. There were no members of staff working at home full time, which was due to a mixture of isolation effects, interactions with colleagues and the sharing of ideas. It was felt that this flexible approach was the best way to maximise the benefits of the Council.

Priority 2: GBC – The Housing Provider

- Officers received positive feedback from residents at Merston Court and Hermitage Road and have had their continuous support.
- There were 22 heat pumps within the housing stock and a number of air source units for integration once a boiler came to its natural end.
- In reference to action item 2.2.5, it stated that the LED programme for 2022/23 had been completed. However, phase two of the scheme was due to start, and there was a programme of housing stock listed for phase two, which included Pegasus Court.
- The Climate Action Delivery Manager agreed to amend the Delivery Plan to specify that there was a phase two of the LED programme, as well as amend the timescales to represent an accurate timeline.
- There was no indication of the total financial savings for the water-saving system, as the payback period was three years. After this, they would receive the total figure.
- The advice given by the water-saving consultant was great value for its money, and this will be rolled out long term.

Priority 3: GBC – The Community Leader

- We can only use our position of leadership and advocacy with the wider community, and engagement was taking place to connect with them to encourage changes at home to promote net zero and reduce the cost of living.
- The Climate Action Delivery Manager agreed to circulate the progress report of other councils in the Kent region of the Solar Together Scheme.
- In reference to action item 2.8.3 – The Gravesend-based charity was Ellenor Hospice.
- A wider management team group were leading on a community engagement project which will deliver in-person and digital resources for residents via a range of channels, such as the website and permanent/pop-up locations throughout the borough and linked to the events programme.

The Board noted the report.

24. Carbon Literacy Organisation (CLO) Accreditation Update

The Climate Action Delivery Manager updated the board on the Carbon Literacy Organisation Accreditation and stated that Gravesham Borough Council currently held a bronze badge. This was received in February 2023.

Work had started on the requirements for the silver badge. The plan of action was detailed within the report, but the following was highlighted:

- 15% of the workforce needed to be Carbon Literate (estimated around 75 to 80 officers), 48 officers had completed the training, and 31 were certified.
- Visual promotion of GBC's Carbon Literacy – The team was working with the digital team to provide this information on the website.
- The publication of one case study, which was currently being worked on.

The Climate Action Delivery Manager fielded questions from Members and explained the following:

- Members were encouraged to become Carbon Literate alongside the Officers of the Council.
- There were four levels to the accreditation; bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. Each level required a certain set of criteria to be fulfilled
- Within all reports that get submitted to a committee, there was a climate change implication section which must be filled out. It considered climate change in the same way that financial and legal implications were considered.

The board noted the report.

25. Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Update

The Assistant Director (Transformation and IT) presented members of the board with an update on the electric vehicle charging infrastructure since the last Climate Change Advisory Board and highlighted the following:

- A significant number of in-progress installations had been completed since the last meeting, and detail of the locations had been mentioned in the report.
- The electric charging bays at the new Connected Kerb sites had not yet been painted due to weather conditions. This meant that no active promotion could be made as enforcement of parking restrictions could not be made, but once they were painted, a full launch would take place.
- The Department for Transport regularly published league tables for the number of charge points per 100,000 of the population. Taking into account the recent installations by the council, Gravesham would be in fourth position in Kent and was now looking at how to increase further the number of chargers and where these could be placed.
- The Government Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure fund will only be accessible by tier one councils. Officers were working with Kent County Council (KCC) on how this can be brought to Gravesham. A meeting with KCC was scheduled to take place on Friday, 21 April 2023.

The Assistant Director (Transformation and IT) fielded questions from members and explained the following:

- Looking at the electric vehicle charging point map, there were large gaps seen between Gravesend town centre and Higham. Funding was available to parishes to implement electric charging points on their own land. Cllr Craske agreed to refer this message back to Higham Parish.
- In some locations where a charge point would be desirable, such as Camer Country Park, it was found to be cost-prohibitive to install charge points because of the local electric grid infrastructure. However, over time these conditions change, and certain areas that were previously not suitable become economically viable. It was an area which will be reviewed when circumstances change.
- Historically, KCC were not in favour of on-street charging points and were not keen to progress it, but this position was changing and may be considered in the future.
- The first electric vehicle charging point was installed within the borough in 2019. Recent changes to car park fees mean it was no longer possible to offer free parking to vehicles that were using charge points during the day when parking fees apply. However, parking remains free overnight and on Sundays.

The board noted the report.

26. Biodiversity Net Gain

The Assistant Director (Planning) presented members of the board with the Biodiversity Net Gain report and highlighted the following:

- Natural England developed the Biodiversity Metric. It used changes in the extent and quality of habitats as a proxy for nature and compared the habitat found on a site before and after development.
- The land developer needs to avoid a loss of habitat.
- The expectation is that it is delivered locally (on-site and then off-site, if so required), but there was understanding that this was not always possible, and as such the government was developing the option to buy statutory credits from the Government, with the Government using the money to invest in habitat creation elsewhere in England. The price of biodiversity credits will be set higher than prices for equivalent biodiversity gain on the market.
- The Government had advised that developers may be able to combine all 3 options to make up their BNG. The developer has to prepare a Biodiversity Net Gain Plan (BNGP) and have it signed off.

The Assistant Director (Planning) fielded questions from Members and explained the following:

- The system the government had set up does allow for a range of offer, but clear evidence needs to be given as well as a site-specific reason.
- Members discussed the importance of increasing knowledge on biodiversity to help educate residents on the value of having vegetation areas and the benefits.

The board noted the report.

27. Mission Zero, The Skidmore Net Zero Review

The Assistant Director (Transformation and IT) presented members of the board with the report detailing the Skidmore Net Zero Review. At the time of writing, the government had not responded to the review. However, within the last few days a response had been provided, the highlights of which were:

- #1 The government had acknowledged the concerns of numerous short-term funding schemes, which makes bidding confusing, and the lack of certainty makes long-term planning difficult.
- #2 In reference to the recommendation to set up an office for Net Zero Delivery, the Office of Energy Security and Net Zero had now been set up.
- #3 There should be a rebalancing to the cost of electricity away from links to wholesale gas prices and acknowledging the increasing supply to the grid from renewable sources. This would be complete by the end of 2024.
- #4 The development of a national solar power generation road map.
- #5 The government had declined to introduce a statutory duty for local authorities to reach net zero by 2030.

The board noted the report.

28. Any other business which by reason of special circumstances the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

The Chair gave his thanks to the long-standing members of the board who were not standing for election in 2023.

Thanks was given to all officers who had been involved in the Climate Change Advisory Board and for their commitment to making a difference.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9.02pm