

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Climate Change Environment & Growth

Held at 9.30 am on Wednesday 20th October, 2021 as a remote meeting via Zoom

Present:-

Members

Councillor Harriet Pentland (Chair)

Councillor Tim Allebone

Councillor Jennie Bone

Councillor Dez Dell

Councillor Anne Lee

Councillor Jan O'Hara

Councillor Elliot Keith Prentice

Also in attendance –

Ian Achurch

George Candler

Graeme Kane

James Loader

Carol Mundy

Amy Plank

Iain Smith

Raj Sohal

7 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

8 Members' Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited those who wished to do so to declare interests in respect of items on the agenda.

No declarations were made.

9 Minutes from Meeting held on 22 September 2021

RESOLVED that:

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2021 were approved as a correct record.

10 Destination Nene Valley - Nenescape

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Development, Infrastructure and Funding which sought to consider representation from North Northamptonshire Council on the Destination Nene Valley Board, and also outlined the importance of the visitor sector in the local economy. The report was marked 'item 4' on the agenda.

During discussion, the following principal points were noted:

- i. The title of 'widening the reach' in protecting open spaces was an ambitious but achievable target and recognised the harm that could be done to a fragile ecosystem. It would be beneficial for North Northamptonshire Council to actively work towards this target to allow the area to become a tourist destination;
- ii. Protecting tributaries had been omitted from the report, not all of which were maintained. There had been significant past pollution problems regarding waterways and impacting local wildlife, therefore it was viewed that the authority should investigate and consider these issues;
- iii. It was queried whether work had already been done to link 'green ways' (for transport) across areas in North Northamptonshire and if this work tied into Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). The Head of Development, Infrastructure and Funding explained to the Panel that the green ways were routes intended to connect areas, and that the aspiration of the local authority was to create a network across North Northamptonshire - connecting Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby etc. The LCWIP project had its own dedicated timescales;
- iv. It would be imperative to protect open spaces in collaboration with partners, such as the Environment Agency, and obtain sufficient funding available to carry out such work. Members suggested that the local authority should seek to apply for grant funding to help maintain spaces and look to make wild areas more amenable and accessible, perhaps by linking to planning policy, to promote a cleaner and safer society.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

11 Bus Strategy - update on consultation and Improvement Plan

The Panel considered a briefing note of the Assistant Director of Highways and Waste setting out the background to and key themes emerging from the recently closed Bus Service Improvement Plan consultation. The report was marked 'item 5' on the agenda.

During discussion, the following principal points were noted:

- i. Other local authorities had adopted interesting models, whereby local businesses in town centres with parking spaces paid an annual fee to the authority. These funds could be used to fund buses and other local transport facilities, as they would reduce congestion and air pollution. It was queried whether North Northamptonshire Council had considered such measures?

In response, the Assistant Director clarified that:

- ii. The level of engagement that the enhanced partnerships and bus service improvement plans had facilitated was significant, therefore, continuing to engage with operators formally was essential;

- iii. Other authorities, such as Oxford City Council, had carried out similar work and achieved success in engaging directly with local businesses, to drive usage of public transport services. North Northamptonshire Council would seek to establish a passenger representative board, to discuss issues with services and engage proactively with key stakeholders.

It was noted that the public consultation had now closed and that following the verbal update of emerging themes, the consultation responses would continue to be reviewed.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

12 Air Quality Update

The Panel considered a report of the Assistant Director of Regulatory Services on Air Quality in North Northamptonshire, which provided a position statement on current air quality, what was being done to manage and monitor air quality, and proposals for its improvement and raising public awareness. The report was marked 'item 6' on the agenda.

During discussion the following principal points were noted:-

The Panel was encouraged to see that areas did not exceed the upper air limits and considered that it would be important for the Panel to investigate factors affecting air quality, such as the trees strategy, electric vehicle charging points etc. Members raised several lines of enquiry into the report concerning:

- i. The discrepancy between the four areas across North Northamptonshire, regarding the equipment used to record air quality (Corby had 17, East Northampton 33, Kettering 39 and Wellingborough only 11). Members queried whether there was an intention to level this discrepancy and provide equal resources.
- ii. Whether the authority had considered implementing increased electric vehicle charging points across the area and produced a plan to meet demand, as more residents would purchase electric vehicles?
- iii. If anything could be done to encourage developers to install more environmentally friendly apparatus to heat newly built homes?
- iv. Whether air quality data had been skewed due to standing traffic, if there existed a density of monitoring stations along main roads and dual carriageways, with a high volume of standing traffic – areas such as Rushden Lakes retail park?
- v. It was noted that a monitoring site in Wellingborough had exceeded the threshold of forty micrograms per cubic metre in eight of the nine months of data available. Similarly, a site in Kettering had exceeded air quality

limits in six of the seven months' data. Members suggested that the Council should prepare an air quality action plan for these management areas, due to the existence of such historical data.

- vi. Whether there existed better technology available than diffusion tubes, to monitor areas immediately?

In response, the Environmental Protection Manager clarified that:

- vii. The authority had found itself in a transitional period, in the process of consolidating environmental protection work, aiming to reach a more balanced position across the entire North Northamptonshire area, to eradicate disparities between available resources;
- viii. This included the discrepancy in measurement equipment across areas resulting from prior sovereign council budgets. She assured the EAP that the authority was actively seeking to bring budgets together and calculate a net amount for the North. Nevertheless, rural areas would not require measurement equipment, as data would only be collected in areas with high volumes of traffic. The tube network would be reset to ensure monitoring was fairly measured;
- ix. The authority had continued its work to review vehicle and taxi policies around pollution limits, as older vehicles tended to produce greater air pollution;
- x. There was a shifting picture nationally regarding sustainable urban extensions and gas boiler technology. North Northamptonshire would follow the national lead and was in a position to publicise support and raise awareness around grants available to the public for this technology. There would be a need for officers to work more closely with planning policy colleagues to support this work;
- xi. From the DEFRA returns, there had not been any instances of pollution from the installations regulated by the Council. The authority had reacted to complaints and taken the necessary enforcement action;
- xii. Regarding the procurement of improved measurement technology, the authority would have to manage its resources and budget to pay for the tools available. Nevertheless, this could be explored.

Members emphasised that funding and the availability of necessary resources would be essential in regulating air quality and allowing the authority to achieve its target of being a 'green council'.

The Chair explained to members that the issue of air quality would be explored again, in comprehensive detail, at future meetings and that the EAP's comments on this matter would be fed back to the Executive.

Similarly, the Executive Director of Place and Economy assured the Panel that levels of resourcing regarding environmental matters was actively being looked at. He also considered that it would be valuable to invite a representative from DEFRA into the discussion, to gain a government perspective of how North Northamptonshire was performing and what the authority could do to further improve matters.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The report be noted; and
- b) That further consideration of the impact of air quality and proposals to improve this in North Northamptonshire be brought back to a future meeting.

13 Close of Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Climate Change, Environment and Growth Executive Advisory Panel would be held virtually, via Zoom, on Wednesday 17th November at 09:30am.