

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Climate Change Environment & Growth
Held as a Remote Meeting via Zoom at 9.00 am on Wednesday 27th April 2022

Present:-

Members

Councillor Harriet Pentland (Chair)
Councillor Jennie Bone
Councillor Anne Lee

Councillor Tim Allebone
Councillor Emily Fedorowycz
Councillor Jan O'Hara

Officers

Sue Bateman
George Candler
Valerie Finke
Greg Haynes
Rob Harbour

Senior Planning Officer
Executive Director – Place & Economy
Economic Development Officer
Climate Change Officer
Assistant Director – Growth &
Regeneration
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Associate - WSP
Principal Property & Projects Manager
Democratic Services Officer
Principal Planning Policy Officer

Also in attendance – Councillor Graham Lawman

48 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dez Dell – Councillor Emily Fedorowycz was in attendance as a substitute.

49 Members' Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

50 Minutes from Meeting held on 16 March 2022

RESOLVED that:

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2022 were approved as a correct record.

51 Biodiversity Net Gain

The EAP considered a report by the Senior Planning Officer, which outlined the implications of biodiversity net gain.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- Members queried what could be done locally to begin work on the net gain project, prior to November 2023, in encouraging developers to submit their biodiversity plans.
- Regarding the enforcement of net gain targets, members recognised that proving responsibility and measuring biodiversity was difficult, as well as time consuming. Therefore, it was questioned how the authority would ensure that developers and residents would be held accountable.
- While acknowledging that establishing biodiversity net gain targets was a 'step in the right direction', one member expressed concern that seeking net gain after the development of land would produce a decline in results. The member queried whether the authority should require biodiversity gain before the commencement of land development, to ensure targets would be achieved before the fact.
- One member expressed concern at the fact that those homeowners were to be exempt from biodiversity gains targets. They posited that if homeowners sought to construct extensions to their properties, they should also be subject to targets, to allow for gains to be achieved in every area.
- While members supported the Officers' aspirations for 10% biodiversity net gain, they queried how this would be quantified, since most developers would not have specialist knowledge of gains metrics. Members reiterated their desire that targets would not become a 'tick-box exercise' in response to legislation.

In response, the Senior Planning Officer clarified that:

- Mandatory net gain targets were expected to begin in November 2023, however there was a possibility that they could be delayed until 2025. While North Northamptonshire Council had an existing policy, which determined biodiversity net gain, the authority had never enforced a specific target. Nevertheless, officers assured members that until mandatory targets would come into place, they would continue to monitor biodiversity net gain. Monitoring requirements would be built into conservation covenants and would require site deliverers to monitor and report levels of net gain. Developers would subsequently be required to report to the authority, which, alongside ecological support, would verify the correct figures.
- The purpose of the local authority's implementation of targets was to achieve a genuine enhancement in biodiversity net gain. In order to establish a strong foundation for achieving these targets, prior to the commencement of land development, it would be important to choose development sites correctly and avoid the most sensitive areas. Once sites had been developed, the authority would ensure that they deliver an enhancement. Nevertheless, the Senior Officer acknowledged that the metric of measurement was not perfect.
- Subjecting homeowners to the same targets and metrics as land developers, for home extensions, was considered to be unreasonable. However, through local policy, the authority could implement lesser requirements.

- North Northamptonshire Council did not view biodiversity net gain as a ‘tick-box exercise’.

RESOLVED that:

The EAP noted the report.

52 Corby Station Link Road & Smart & Connected Corby Project (to follow)

The EAP considered a presentation by the Economic Development Officer, which provided information regarding the Corby Town Fund. In June 2021 North Northamptonshire Council was awarded funding of £19.9M for four projects in Corby.

During discussion, the principal points were noted:

- One member expressed concern that Oakley Road was a busy, congested area, in which school students often congregated, and that trains passing through overpasses presented safety risks.
- Another member acknowledged that a wheelchair access ramp had not been considered for the car park and expressed concern that the authority would not be complying with its public sector equality duty.
- Members queried whether the actual surface of underpasses would be improved or if only the lighting would be changed.

In response, the Economic Development Officer clarified that:

- The speed limit on Oakley Road would be reduced to 30mph, due to the narrowing of the road lanes. Railings on the dual carriageway would also be replaced with new ones.
- Officers had carried out several equality impact assessments and looked into North Northamptonshire Council’s accessibility policies. Having done this, the authority had considered the cost and benefits of implementing a wheelchair ramp in the car park and decided not to proceed with the installation. Nevertheless, the Economic Development Officer assured members that officers would again look into including a ramp, in accordance with the requirements of the Disability Act.
- Access to the bolts of sheets covering the surface of the underpass would need to be maintained. Since there was little graffiti and damage to the surface of the underpass, which was regarded to be in good condition, work would be limited.

RESOLVED that:

The EAP noted the report.

53 Close of Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Climate Change, Environment & Growth Executive Advisory Panel would be held virtually, via Zoom, on Wednesday 18th May 2022 at 9:30am.