

Notes of a meeting of the Climate Change Working Group

Held on 23 September 2021, virtually via Zoom

1. Climate change planning policy

Members received a presentation on the Climate Change Planning Policy Scoping report. This exercise came as a result of actions within the Climate Emergency Action Plan which seek to further reflect the Council's climate and ecological emergency declaration in planning policy guidance where practical and appropriate. It was agreed that as a first step, a scoping exercise be undertaken to map out how existing planning policies and guidance contribute towards addressing climate impacts, and identify gaps that might exist which could be addressed through revised planning guidance.

It was noted that it has become necessary to review the Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) policy in order to reflect new information and changes arising from the national policy on climate change since the adoption of the SPD in December 2013. Any proposed changes to the SPD will have to be restricted so as not to introduce new policies that are not already within the Core Strategy or in any other part of the development plan for Woking, as per legal requirements. A schedule of the issues identified through the scoping exercise were presented.

It is the intention to begin the review of the SPD in autumn 2021 which will take approximately 9 to 12 months. This will include a consultation period with stakeholders, community groups and developers.

2. Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) update report

Members received an update on the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). The document summarised further progress against priority actions identified for 2021/22.

The group buying solar PV project 'Solar Together', attracted 700 expressions of interest from Woking residents. It was reported that this represented 10% of countywide interest. To date, 142 Woking residents had accepted their installation quotes and were ready to proceed to the next stage of the scheme.

The Woking Great Big Green Week takes place on 18-26 September 2021 – part of a national week of celebrating action on climate change. Woking Environment Action (WEAct) has been actively promoting their local programme of events including a Visioning Walk and an online climate debate involving the local MP Jonathan Lord.

A short video marking the first anniversary of the Planet Woking programme is to be released via social media highlighting key activities over the last year and thanking the community and stakeholders for continued support and engagement.

Attention was drawn to waste and recycling challenges currently experienced. Analysis has shown 40% of black bin waste could be recycled via another kerbside collection, 26% of which is food waste. Consideration will be given to communications to help prevent residents unwittingly placing incorrect items in the recycling bin which, as well as negative environmental impacts, has cost implications for the Council in dealing with contaminated waste streams.

3. Local climate bonds

Further to the adoption of the Renewable Energy Plan by the Executive at its meeting on 17 June 2021, research has been undertaken into the potential for a local climate bond to fund renewable energy projects.

It was noted that the Green Finance Institute, in partnership with Abundance Investments, had launched a pledge scheme for local authorities to set up local climate bonds within 18 months of COP 26.

The matter is also being considered at a county level, as part of a Green Finance Strategy, which might facilitate larger scale participation. The benefits and disadvantages of this finance model are also being considered as well as its affordability as compared to other borrowing facilities such as the Public Works Loan Board.

A further update will be brought to the working group when available.

4. Natural Woking update report

The Working Group received an update summarising delivery against the borough's Natural Woking biodiversity and green infrastructure action plan over the previous six months.

Highlights included mention of the joint Natural England and Woking Borough Council Great Crested Newt (GCN) project which is nearing completion of its fifth operational year. As a national pilot, it is important that lessons learned are disseminated for transparency and to help GCN district level licensing (DLL) elsewhere.

The Woking project team continues to work with Natural England in this regard. An article about the Woking pilot has also been published in the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management 'In Practice' journal this month.

5. ThamesWey update

The Working Group received an update report on the initiatives that the ThamesWey Environmental Projects team is currently undertaking.

Latest government figures show that the Green Jump Surrey project – a Woking-led consortium awarded government funding – has installed energy efficiency measures for the second highest number of households nationally.

The conversion of the 1970s 'Cornerstone' office building (also known as Elizabeth House) to provide new town centre apartments is in the final stages of construction. A south-facing portion of the pitched roof supports a solar photovoltaic array with a peak output of 21.6 kW. Four areas of flat concrete roof were transformed with a sedum green roof system.

ThamesWey's new corporate headquarters and energy centre in Poole Road is now being fitted out with full occupation expected in the autumn. The site hoarding has been removed allowing an unrestricted view of the striking building.

The first residential phase of the Sheerwater Regeneration project – known as Fairfax Place – has completed with units now on the market. It incorporates sustainable features such as a biodiverse podium garden, electric vehicle chargers and a large 70kW solar photovoltaic array.