

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Special Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 16 March 2020 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor E Adam (Chair)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors O Milburn, B Avery, A Batey, D Bell, L Brown, J Carr, R Crute, S Dunn, J Higgins, R Manchester, M Wilson and M Wilkes

### **1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Coult, K Hawley, A Simpson, Mrs P Holding and Mr T Bolton.

### **2 Substitute Members**

Councillor M Wilkes substituted for Councillor A Simpson.

### **3 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **4 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

### **5 Climate Change Emergency Update Report**

The Committee considered the joint report of the Corporate Director of Resources and the Interim Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided Members with detail of the headlines from the Climate Emergency Consultation and progress on the further development of the identified range of measures necessary to achieve the new targets for carbon reduction by Durham County Council and detail of work undertaken to reduce carbon emissions countywide (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Mr S McDonald - Principal Officer: Low Carbon Economy and Ms R Farrow – Carbon and Energy Analyst: Low Carbon Economy were in attendance and provided Members with a presentation that highlighted the following points:

- Climate Emergency Response Plan
  - Consultation Outcome – it was noted that there had been a good response from the elected members survey. In addition, it was highlighted that groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Durham Road Block had also fed into the consultation as well as a number of schools to ensure that young people were engaged in the consultation process.
- Council Emission targets – including change
- Carbon Management Plan 2019-20 – Detail of successful work undertaken in last year, Council emission targets for 2025 and 2030, emission reductions by service area and area of focus identified in the Climate Emergency Response Plan
- Countrywide Emission targets and Actions
  - Countywide Emissions targets
  - Renewable Energy Capacity
  - 2019 Progress
  - Looking Ahead 2020
- Partnership Working

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and asked about looking ahead to 2020 and measurement, monitoring and targeting and that it was difficult to see in terms of looking ahead at projects to determine if they are the projects that will produce the required reductions in emissions. He asked what analysis of data suggested that these projects/areas are the areas that the council should focus on and what results will be achieved from these projects.

The Principal Officer responded that the detail was in the 'Climate Emergency Response Action Plan'. We need to focus on decarbonising heat, this is the big challenge. One of the key headlines that came through from the consultation was the need for more tree planting to neutralise emissions however this was not going to have a huge impact in terms on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions so the focus needs to be on other things such as decarbonisation via renewable electricity and the continuance of projects such as LED light replacement programme. Transport was also another key area of focus.

The Carbon and Energy Analyst indicated that these issues were included in the Climate Emergency Response Plan and probably the simplest way to consider this is that the focus needs to be on emissions and the ones resulting from burning fossil fuels including cars and central heating boilers. Heat and transport were the key areas.

The Chair responded why wasn't there more investment into solar panels and considering investment in solar panels on our buildings although he recognised that European funding was no-longer provided for the fitting of solar panels. He continued by asking why new gas boilers are still being installed into people's homes. He commented that he was aware that after 2025 planning regulations were coming in preventing the fitting of gas boilers so why continue to install gas boilers why not spend on fitting solar panels. He continued by agreeing that the other key area of focus for CO<sub>2</sub> omissions was transport and therefore the focus needed to be on these two areas to meet our targets.

The Principal Officer responded that in terms of solar panels the council had just installed its first solar farm at Tanfield and that originally Durham County Council did have permission for a much larger area but had been advised that it would cost £3 million to upgrade the substation, so it was unfortunately not financially viable. There was however still potential to expand the site and meet the energy supply of other buildings in the area, it was confirmed that the council does have a big portfolio of buildings. He continued that the Council was successful when the feed in tariff first came out and a number of buildings were installed with various levels of solar PV, however they still have a number of buildings that do not have solar PV and work is ongoing looking at these buildings. Other authorities are going further and have invested in big solar farms and installed solar panels on partner buildings. They were currently in discussions with the likes of Northumbrian Water to install solar panels on some of their buildings.

The Carbon and Energy Analyst indicated that electricity was expensive a lot more than gas and that PV projects made money allowing money to be spent on heat projects and whilst reducing carbon emissions.

The Principal Officer agreed with the Chair in relation to installing gas boilers in homes and that northern gas networks were piloting in areas and the putting in of a 20% mix of hydrogen, but how do you create that hydrogen, this was an issue as it is quite carbon intensive to create. He continued that other sources of energy are used when areas are off the gas network and there is a need to look at domestic dwellings holistically.

Councillor Wilkes indicated that there would be a fall in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions this year due to the public health crisis but as we come through this we needed to look and see what had been learnt during the process.

He then referred to public transport and commented that this caused a lot of problems in Durham City in relation to emissions and now that we have heard that the 2 relief roads will not be included in the plan which could have reduced pollution and congestion. The money to pay for these roads was coming from housing developers and it was important to ensure that Durham County Council receives the money from the developers that would have been paid towards the infrastructure to invest in public transport in the county. Councillor Wilkes continued that in order for

the council to hit the targets all new houses proposed in the plan need to be carbon neutral and developers were not going to pay to do this as the rules currently only require them to build to a certain standard. Discussions need to be undertaken to make sure all new housing was carbon neutral, this may have to be achieved nationally through legislation but locally the council needed to see what could be done to ensure as much as possible that new homes in the county are carbon neutral and that the council put in place the public transport and network improvements that are needed.

They council also needed to look at battery storage and he referred to the slide on the success of Tanfield Solar Farm that showed during the night the same amount of energy was used as previously and this could be stored. He suggested that maybe the council needed to spend some money on installing battery storage that other people could copy and for the authority to see how it worked and asked if this was something that the authority were looking at. The key thing was making sure all new developments were carbon neutral.

The Chair indicated that the authority was relying on government to push this legislation through as the authority could not do this on its own.

The Principal Officer agreed that getting developers to develop to better standards was difficult. In terms of battery storage this was something that Durham County Council was actively investigating at Tanfield. The authority also have an ERDF project; that had successfully got through round one bidding with round two in August. This was a solar farm and battery storage facility at Annfield Plain which was a £9 million-pound project. The project would fully decarbonise the Morrison Busty depot at Annfield Plain including the provision of charging points and electric heating at the site.

Councillor Wilkes sought clarification as to where the £3 or £4 million pound funding that was not coming from ERDF, was coming from.

The Principal Officer responded that this sum would be coming from invest to save as this would be paid back in approximately 12 years.

Councillor Manchester sought clarification on the distribution of funds for the community energy projects and commented that his ward was currently looking at a community energy project around mine water heating. He then indicated that they had only managed to find one company that would tender for mine water heating projects. He asked what was being done with the private sector to bring them on board to consider minewater as a feasible option. Residents had been asking about hydroelectricity, aside from the mine water and asked if options were being looked at for hydroelectricity.

Officers responded that in terms of hydroelectricity there are some opportunities and referred to the hydroelectricity scheme in the city centre and commented that you

needed a big drop for it to generate the electricity and make the scheme worthwhile so was not as easy as just putting it on a bit of river but was an excellent piece of technology.

The Principal Officer referred to a scheme that was being developed at Hexham and that Durham County Council would be watching this project. In terms of the mine water projects, Durham County Council went out to procurement for the Louisa Centre mine water project and got 4 companies to tender for the work and provided details of the company that was awarded the contract, which was a local specialist company. They also worked very closely with the coal authority on the project which was key as they are the experts and they managed the contract. The Officer indicated that it might be prudent to wait for a few pilot schemes to be up and running in particular the project at Stanley to allow lessons to be learnt.

Councillor Wilkes referred to Hydro and wind turbines over producing electricity and wondered if there were opportunities to use the wind power at night to pump water up hill to create a storage of energy.

The Carbon and Energy Analyst responded that these projects do exist and that there was one in Wales.

The Principal Officer indicated that they were looking at heat storage in mines and gave the example of Jade Business Park where there was a need for offices to be cooled, there is the Hawthorn shaft with heat from the mine put into the shaft and then used later.

Councillor Brown asked about planning regulations for the conservation area to be relaxed on solar panels as some properties had been advised that there were unable to install solar panels as they are in a conservation area. She then referred to the SOSCI project funding 100 charging points across the County with the focus of the project on rural areas and asked if funding at some point would be allocated money for terraced properties in the city centres.

The Principal Officer responded that the SOSCI project was mainly for rural areas, but they had some funding to deliver extra charge points in central locations.

Councillor Dunn asked about the possibility of battery storage at large factories to capture energy generated at night.

He then thanked both members and officers for pushing the climate emergency agenda. The research and views sought from public and members of staff and the changing of direction and attitude of so many people in the last year was massive. The development of the action plan, harnessing the views and opinions and then setting out a programme of works for the next 2 years to achieve the identified targets had been a huge step forward.

He then referred to the 2 graphs for council emissions and that it was great that the target had been brought up to 80% by 2030 but looking at the graphs if the downward trajectory for council emissions at the rate it was going then the council could be carbon neutral by 2030 and the county carbon neutral by 2040. He indicated that they needed to focus on the areas where Durham County Council controlled as some things were beyond our control and needed government support.

He then referred to the 1000 new homes being built in his division over the next 5 years and commented that it would be great to see a lot of these homes carbon neutral but developers would not change unless public pressure was put on developers to make these homes carbon neutral similar to the pressure put on supermarkets to stop using plastic packaging.

He then referred to investment and commented that the quicker they move then money would be brought in that could be invested in greener council estates and supporting businesses.

Looking forward vehicle replacement the more investment the council put into the 5-year programme and commented that the possibility of replacing vehicles earlier with electric vehicles and having the charging infrastructure in place, that investment would pay off not just in terms of fuel savings but also damage to the environment.

He was surprised that the report did not include the carbon offset of the 359,000 trees to be planted against the council's targets as this would have contributed massively to offsetting carbon emissions and would achieve carbon neutrality sooner.

He referred to the Joint Stocks site at Coxhoe and commented that gas was already being pumped out of the site with 2.5 m watts going into the grid this meant that the area would be an ideal sight for a solar farm that at some point could be used to generate income for the authority.

The Chair indicated that wider partners have a big part to play.

The Principal Officer indicated that in terms of joint stocks they have been having those conversations.

The Carbon and Energy Analyst advised Members that offset emissions had not been included in Durham County Council carbon emission reductions however they could be used to offset the remaining 20%.

Councillor Milburn referred to the under capacity of substations and commented that in her ward the former Eveready site had planning permission for housing development and expressed concerns that if the housing development goes ahead the substation would not be able to cope.

**Resolved:** (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee includes in its work programme for 2020/21 further progress updates on the Climate Emergency Response Plan and the Carbon Management Plan.