

# North Yorkshire County Council

## Transport, Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Thursday, 21st October, 2021 commencing at 10.00 am.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley in the Chair and County Councillors David Goode, Paul Haslam, Robert Heseltine, David Jeffels, Don MacKay, Andy Paraskos, Caroline Patmore, Clive Pearson, Matt Scott and David Staveley.

Officers present: Neil Irving, Assistant Director Policy, Partnerships and Communities, NYCC; Michael Leah, Assistant Director Travel, Environmental and Countryside Access Services, NYCC; Peter Jeffreys, Environmental and Countryside Access Services, NYCC; and Daniel Harry, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager, NYCC.

Apologies: County Councillors Karl Arthur and Roberta Swiers.

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**Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book**

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### **133 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2021 were taken as read and confirmed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **134 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest to note.

### **135 Public Questions or Statements**

No public questions or statements were received.

### **136 Update on the progress of North Yorkshire County Council's Carbon Reduction Plan - Report of the Assistant Director Policy, Partnerships and Communities, NYCC**

Considered – A report by Neil Irving, the Assistant Director Policy, Partnerships and Communities, NYCC on the progress being made with implementation of the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan.

The key points from the presentation are as summarised below:

- The plan was approved at Executive on 13 July 2021
- It has an aspirational target for net carbon neutrality by 2030 or as close to that date as is possible
- The focus is upon what the Council is doing and can do to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, which includes work done to date and work that is being planned
- Progress will be regularly monitored as part of the corporate performance management report that goes to Management Board and the Executive
- There is wider engagement with the LEP and district councils
- The focus is upon reducing electricity use as far as possible, ensuring that what electricity is used is from renewables and capturing and storing carbon dioxide
- The pandemic and the large scale move to home working has reduced the level of

carbon dioxide emissions

- Heating, lighting and travel are key areas of work. LED street lights have been hugely successful in reducing emissions
- One of the Council's biggest carbon footprints is residential settings
- Work is underway to look at the use of electric vehicles across the Council fleet
- Off-setting is an important element and the White Rose Forest will be significant in this regard
- The Brierley Group of companies are continuing to develop their own carbon reduction plans.

There followed a discussion, the key points of which are summarised as below:

- There were gains to be made from window replacement in schools but this was not always simple as schools are largely independent of the Council and cannot be subsidised
- There were concerns about the increasing use of Lithium batteries, as the move is made to using electric vehicles. There are environmental and social problems associated with the extraction and disposal of Lithium
- There are opportunities for organisations to share buildings and reduce the overall estate. This process was started with the 'one public estate' initiative a number of years ago but seems to have lost momentum. It will become increasingly important as the Council becomes a unitary authority in April 2023
- The gains to the Council made by increased home working during the pandemic may have been undermined by the increased emissions from multiple, individual properties that are less efficient than a large office space
- Query as to where the link was between the Council Minerals and Waste Plan and the Carbon Reduction Plan
- The use of hydrogen as a fuel had not been taken into account. It was accepted that there were some difficulties associated with the production and supply of this fuel but more could be done to look into this in the long term, particularly green hydrogen
- There may be opportunities to use closed landfill sites for solar farms, as the land has no other developmental use
- An inspiring vision that could be understood, shared and owned would be key
- A mixed economy of energy generation in terms of size and type was needed. Small scale, community-based renewables had their place alongside large scale solar and wind farms. Micro-grids are widely used in developing countries and could be relatively easily applied to villages in the county.

County Councillor David Staveley asked how the carbon dioxide emissions were calculated. He noted that a 'whole life' approach needed to be taken as the replacement of existing equipment or facilities prior to the end of their life, for a more efficient upgrade, may help reduce some carbon dioxide emissions but will have carbon dioxide emissions associated with disposing of them prior to their natural end of life. In effect, their carbon dioxide emissions per year of use has risen, due to the shorter period of use.

In response Neil Irving said that the calculations were complicated but that the need to take into account the 'whole life' of a product was important.

County Councillor Paul Haslam said that more could be done by the Council to specify what climate change mitigation measures it expected as a minimum from its suppliers.

Neil Irving said that this work was underway with the Council procurement team but that this needed careful consideration as it would have a disproportionate financial impact upon smaller, local suppliers who may be less able to absorb the associated increase in costs.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley asked whether the necessary electricity supply infrastructure was in place to cope with the increased demand over the next 10 to 20 years,

particularly in rural areas.

In response, Neil Irving said that the Council had not direct control over the electricity supply infrastructure but that they were able to speak with and lobby the relevant authorities.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley summed up and thanked Neil Irving for attending the meeting.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That Neil Irving comes back to the committee in 12 months to provide a further update.

**137 Update on reducing use of single-use plastics - Report of the Assistant Director Travel, Environmental and Countryside Access Services, NYCC**

Considered – A report by Michael Leah, Assistant Director Travel, Environmental and Countryside Access Services, NYCC updating the committee on the progress being made with reduction in the use of single-use plastics.

The key points from the report are as summarised below:

- The report outlining the process for the reduction in the use of single-use plastics, along with 16 specific recommendations, went to the Executive in March 2021
- With the majority of County Council employees working from home for the past 18 months, the use of single-use plastics has reduced significantly
- Some, limited progress has been made with procurement and a new purchasing strategy that helps to reduce the use of single use plastics
- The work on single use plastic reduction will be incorporated into the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan
- Recognition that there has not been the progress that would have been liked but this has been down to the upheaval caused by the need to respond to the pandemic. The creation of a new unitary authority may also have an impact upon progress.

There followed a discussion, as summarised below:

- Disappointing to see that no real progress has been made with the implementation of the 16 recommendations
- Whilst it is accepted that the response to the pandemic has meant that resources have been diverted to other areas of work and priorities, this cannot continue. There should be a renewed focus upon reducing the use of single use plastics across the Council
- There remains a high level of public concern about single use plastics and the Council has a leadership role to play and can help influence behaviour change.

County Councillor David Goode asked why the issue of PPE use during the pandemic had not been covered in the report. This was a major omission as this was the biggest source of single use plastics over the past 18 months.

In response, Michael Leah said that access to regular supplies of PPE over the past 18 months was key to the response to the pandemic and could not be avoided. The PPE could not be re-used safely and was not readily recyclable.

County Councillor Paul Haslam said that the report was an honest assessment of progress and whilst disappointing the open and transparent approach was welcomed. He asked whether more could be done at a local level, with small actions and initiatives that build up to effect major change over time.

Michael Leah said that there had been significant issues associated with keeping services going during the pandemic and the focus of the Council has completely shifted over the past 18 months.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley summed up and thanked Michael Leah for attending the updating the committee.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That a further update be brought back to the committee either independently or as part of the Council Carbon Reduction Plan.

County Councillor Matt Scott left the meeting at 11:00am

**138 Allerton Waste Recovery Park update - Report of the Assistant Director - Travel, Environmental and Countryside Services, NYCC**

Considered – A report by Michael Leah, Assistant Director Travel, Environmental and Countryside Access Services, NYCC updating the committee on the performance of the Allerton Waste Recovery Park.

Michael Leah introduced the report, the key points of which are as summarised below:

- The facility has been operational since 1 March 2018
- The site has a Mechanical Treatment plant, an Anaerobic Digester and an Energy from Waste facility
- The facility can receive up to 320,000 tonnes of residual household waste per annum from across North Yorkshire and York over a 25 year contract period
- An additional 50,000 tonnes of commercial waste per year is being taken from YorWaste. This will help ensure peak performance of the facility
- There have been some problems with the Mechanical Treatment plant, some of which are linked to the type of waste being processed
- The separation of recyclables from residual waste has been difficult at times and produced a low grade product for which there is little demand. Work is underway to improve the quality of the recovered recyclables and to find new markets for them
- The pandemic has impacted upon overall performance as staff have been obliged to self-isolate when they have tested positive
- There are always teething problems with a new facility and anything of this scale
- The Allerton Waste Recovery Park is in part an 'energy from waste' facility. The energy comes from bio-gas from anaerobic digester plant and electricity from the incineration of waste
- The plant has to shut down periodically to enable maintenance and safety checks to be carried out. When shut down, the waste is diverted to other sites and does not go to landfill
- The new, national waste management strategy that is due to be published in the next months will have an impact upon the type and amount of waste processed at the plant as the emphasis is upon reducing overall residual waste and maximising recycling at the kerb-side.

There followed a discussion, the key points of which are as summarised below:

- There is a risk that the collection and processing of waste is incentivised to enable the successful completion of the contract and the peak use of the plant, rather than focussing upon the reduction of waste and recycling generally
- The management of food waste is key. This involves work with households and food suppliers to reduce waste overall and then putting in place mechanisms to divert what is left from the residual waste system

- There is a need to ensure that the contract continues to deliver over its lifespan
- Modifying the behaviour of consumers and suppliers of food remains a big challenge
- The plant was controversial when first suggested and when the business case was being developed but it has since proved to be a great asset to the county.

County Councillor David Goode asked what the impact of the new national waste strategy would be upon the 25 year contract that had been entered into.

Peter Jeffreys, Waste and Countryside Services, said that there is a need to understand the impact of the new national strategy and its implications for how the plant works in the future.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley asked whether, when the plant is working at full capacity, all waste is diverted from landfill.

Peter Jeffreys replied that this was the case.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley queried whether the level of electricity generation from waste had yet achieved the target of 40,000 homes.

Peter Jeffreys that there were some minor build defects in the plant that Amey was resolving. Until this was done, the electricity generation would not reach its target.

County Councillor Andy Paraskos said that the national waste strategy would most likely focus upon reducing food waste and using the food waste that had been diverted from residual waste to generate bio-gas. This would then mean that more food waste was sent to the plant for processing. He asked whether the existing anaerobic digesters would have the capacity to absorb this.

Peter Jeffreys said that there was capacity to process 23,000 tonnes of food waste per annum and that this should be sufficient. The challenge will be making sure that the food waste is as clean as possible and sorted at the source. The residue left after the anaerobic digestion process would then be used as fertiliser, once it had been pasteurised.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley thanked Michael Leah and Peter Jeffreys for attending the meeting and summed up.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That an overview of the new, national waste strategy is provided to the 20 January 2022 meeting of the committee.

**139 Responding to the Rural Commission Report - hydro-electric energy generation in rural communities - Report of the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager, NYCC**

Considered – A report by Daniel Harry, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager, NYCC on small scale, community based hydro-electric power generation.

The key points from the presentation are as summarised below:

- The generation of electricity through hydro-electric power in rural communities was noted as an omission from the recently published Rural Commission report and recommendations
- The county has a number of rivers and tributaries that have the necessary ‘flow’ and ‘head’ to enable viable generation of hydro-electric power
- The feasibility of schemes varies significantly according to the setting and the infrastructure currently in place
- There are a number of financial, administrative and bureaucratic barriers in place to

- progressing small scale hydro-electric schemes
- Hydro-electric schemes tend to be adopted more quickly when undertaken by private landowners and when using the existing infrastructure on a river, such as a weir or mill race
  - Hydro-electric schemes tend to work better when part of a basket of renewable energy generation
  - The Council and the LEP have an opportunity to promote small scale, community owned hydro-electric power generation across the county
  - The technology is improving all the time and this may help create more opportunities.

There followed a discussion, the key points of which are as below:

- There are extensive rivers in the county that could be used for small scale hydro-electric power generation
- There are existing examples that could be learned from
- Feasibility studies are key and need to be done at the earliest stages. The Council and the LEP may have a role in identifying places where small scale hydro-electric power generation could be practicable.

County Councillor David Goode said that a recent attempt by a community group in Knaresborough to install a small hydro-electric plant was ultimately unsuccessful because there were too many barriers for them to overcome and a community group that had been highly motivated became dis-heartened. There was more that could be done to support such groups and help them undertake feasibility studies and then navigate their way through the various permissions needed.

County Councillor David Staveley said that it was important to look at the assets already in place along the county's rivers and start with the existing infrastructure. This would help reduce the need for complex and expensive building work. The river Ribble has a number of old mills along its length that could be re-purposed.

County Councillor Paul Haslam said that hydro-electric schemes could be incorporated in flood defence work. Also, that the public needed information and advice about what is possible and where to get help.

County Councillor Stanley Lumley summed up.

**Resolved:**

- 1) Daniel Harry to take forward the recommendations in the report and provide an update to the committee on progress.

**140 Committee Work Programme - Report of the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager, NYCC**

Considered -

The report of Daniel Harry, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager, NYCC asking the Committee to confirm, amend or add to the areas of the work listed in the Work Programme schedule (Appendix 1 to the report).

Daniel Harry introduced the report.

County Councillor David Jeffels asked that the discussion with Highways England took place as scheduled on 20 January 2022, as it was vitally important that some long-standing issues were addressed.

County Councillor David Staveley said that more needed to be done to ensure that the LEP was subject to robust scrutiny. The current arrangements, whereby an annual scrutiny session was held, were not sufficient.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That the Work Programme be noted
- 2) Daniel Harry to speak with Highways England and ensure attendance for the January 2022 committee meeting
- 3) Daniel Harry to speak with the LEP about scrutiny arrangements.

The meeting concluded at 12.20 pm.