

Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee members

Informal meeting held remotely using Microsoft Teams

10am on Wednesday 28 June 2023

NOTES

Present: Councillors David Staveley (Chair), Melanie Davis, Mark Crane, John Cattanach, Caroline Goodrick, Hannah Gostlow, Paul Haslam, David Jeffels, Steve Mason, Subash Sharma, Arnold Warneken.

Officers attending: Jos Holmes (Climate Change Policy Officer), Michael Leah (Assistant Director – Environmental Services and Climate Change), Adam Vaughan (Climate Change and Environmental Projects Officer), Will Baines, David Smith and Edward Maxwell (Democratic Services)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Mike Jordan, Phil Trumper and Steve Watson.

2. North Yorkshire Council Climate Change Strategy 2023-2030

Councillor Staveley welcomed everyone to the informal Teams meeting to make comments on the North Yorkshire Council Climate Change Strategy 2023-2030 document.

In introducing the strategy, Jos Holmes referenced the updates that have been made to the strategy following the public consultation period and the feedback reviewed from the recent Transport, Economy, Environment and Enterprise O&S Committee meeting on 25 May. It was also noted that work is still ongoing to revise, rewrite and reemphasise aspects of the strategy ahead of going to Executive on 18 July.

It was agreed to go through the strategy chapter by chapter for councillors to make comments on it. If a chapter is not listed, no comments were put forward on this section.

Members were also encouraged to submit more detailed comments to the officers to consider alongside the discussion points raised in the meeting today.

Foreword

(It was noted that any suggested changes to the Foreword would require the approval from Councillor Greg White as the Executive member for Managing Our Environment)

Comments raised

- There was a query around the inclusion of the question ‘Can we afford to tackle climate change?’ at paragraph 7 in the foreword. Should we instead be asking can we afford not to tackle climate change?
- Expanding the phrase in paragraph 3 ‘we cannot stop climate change’ to emphasise that we can only adapt as climate change is already happening
- No reference to maximising net benefits in the strategy

- More emphasis in the foreword that central government intervention and action is required to help all local authorities nationally to tackle this issue
- More positive language is required in the foreword to show that we can make a difference and take people with us as a council
- Emphasise that we are doing this to realise the benefits of taking action against climate change, regardless of the stance of other countries

In response, the Climate Change Policy Officer addressed each of the points raised and referenced parts of the foreword and strategy where the areas raised are covered, in particular drawing attention to the wrap around groups identified to bring people together on significant topics.

The Executive Member for Managing the Environment would be made aware of the suggested amendments to consider changes to the text.

It was noted that the importance of community engagement had been consistently raised as part of the public consultation process, so as a result this section had already been strengthened, as well as adding a new section under the 'Delivery of the Strategy' at chapter 6 to give it further emphasis.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Comments raised

- Under the bullet point section at page 7 around “opportunities to support our ambitions”, there is no mention of planning or minerals policy. It is understood that we have to be compliant with the NPPF when developing a Local Plan for North Yorkshire, but the opportunity to lobby for a stronger planning policy around climate change issues such as energy efficiency, electric vehicles and tree planting should not be lost.

In response, it was noted that the Local Plan and the importance of it is referenced on multiple occasions further down the document, particularly in chapter 7 on Mitigations.

In the discussion that followed, there was a consensus amongst committee members that the new Local Plan has a large part to play and should be strengthened wherever possible as it develops to help achieve the priorities of the climate change strategy.

It was noted that North Yorkshire Council is currently working with the existing Local Plans until a new Local Plan for North Yorkshire is ready for public examination.

- The inclusion of the 'just transition' throughout the strategy document was raised and discussed

In response, it was noted that the 'just transition' had been renamed following feedback received to become 'equality of opportunity' and is referenced to in the 'Principles' section as part of Chapter 5.

Chapter 2 - Climate Change Policy, Risks and Impacts

Comments raised

- Under the 'Risks to nature' section on page 8, a reference be made to rivers and their importance to local communities

In response, it was noted that the strategy currently talks about the loss of biodiversity, but it was agreed to look at this section again to consider expanding it to talk about loss of biodiversity and other habitats as well as marine habitats.

- Strengthen content on the role of the Environment Agency in inputting into planning applications and enforcement around issues such as water quality. The role of the Office for Environmental Protection should also be considered.

As the role and responsibilities of partners sits outside the NYC strategy and more with the York and North Yorkshire LEP 'Routemap to Carbon Negative', it was felt appropriate to follow this up with Environmental Health colleagues to clarify the role of the council around water quality.

- On page 9, add a reference to subsidence as an infrastructure impact

This suggestion was to be considered.

Chapter 4 – Ambitions and Targets

Comments raised:

- Reference included to the June 2023 report of the Climate Change Committee on 'Progress in reducing emissions'
- There was a debate around the period the strategy covers and whether 2030 referenced on page 12 was the right date to use.

There was a consensus amongst those present that the end date of 2030 should be kept.

Chapter 5 – Principles and Co Benefits

Comments raised:

- The strategy recognises the co-benefits of taking climate responsible actions "to ensure that our approach is efficient, effective and flexible." How will the strategy help to realise and produce these cross cutting co-benefits in areas such as Public Health?

In response, it was felt that the principles will deliver the activities within the strategy. The co-benefits will be delivered through the wraparound groups, looking at where activities will happen and the various touch points and linking those up.

The Beyond Carbon Board will also play a role in this to hold the different directorates of the council to account in the monitoring of their climate action plans.

Chapter 6 – Delivery of the Strategy

Comments raised:

b) Governance and Performance

- A skills audit is required so that we can look at the gaps we have and how these can be best plugged through training or other means.
- Risk management reference should be in order to understand the size of the risks involved.
- Ensure any performance metrics are understandable for the public in terms of explaining why we're doing things and create metrics that specifically show the NYC role and impact in delivering change
- Request that we engage, collaborate and cooperate to maximise the use of resource across not just the county but also across the country.
- Try to show the financial implications of a particular decision as part of the council reporting process so anyone reading can get a sense of the impact on it for them

c) Communication and Engagement

- Emphasise the importance of system change alongside the individual actions that people can take to have a bigger impact

d) Financing

- Greater emphasis should be made to the actions that can be taken quickly and rolled out at very little cost but can still have a major impact on tackling climate change whilst waiting for funding applications to be determined.
- Look at different options of financing projects beyond the traditional ways

All the points raised above were noted and to be considered for inclusion in the final strategy document.

Chapter 7 – Mitigation: decreasing greenhouse gas emissions

Comments raised:

(a) The Built Environment

- It was suggested to make reference in this section to the new North Yorkshire Local Plan and the need for greater house building standards for new build properties. It was noted that the way to do this is through Building Regulations and that pressure should be put on to MPs and the government to introduce these higher standards, as this will help us as a local authority to enforce them.

There is already reference within section 7(a) to ensuring new buildings are designed to be climate responsible and aim to influence national policy to improve standards and viability assessments for developments.

(d) Renewable energy transition

- On the 'Energy From Waste' at Allerton Waste Recovery Park it was asked if it is truly renewable, whether the carbon capture element is happening.

It was noted that energy generated from the energy from waste is still classed as renewable energy.

- A reference to District Heating was suggested.

This is wrapped up in section 7(a) i. around the need to “Decarbonise heating in buildings through low carbon technology and renewable energy.”

- The brown text example at page 22 suggests two former landfill sites operated by Yorwaste have the potential generate renewable energy through solar power generation. Have the required grid connections being secured?

It is referenced as a possibility, with funding applied for as part of Devolution Deal and is included as a potential future opportunity. The reference to lobbying partners to improve grid connections has been strengthened following feedback.

- A reference to the food waste strategy was also suggested

The Council position regarding food waste was to be checked to make sure that the strategy aligns with it. If an extra activity is required to be added, this could be best to sit within the action plan.

(e) Agricultural emissions

- There was a desire to be more forceful in our ambitions to reduce our agricultural emissions and engage more with the farming community to stress the importance of this. Looking at areas such as machinery, pesticides and the types of crops grown to consider what more can be done to support farmers in making these difficult decisions to help reduce emissions.

In response, it was noted that the role of North Yorkshire Council is limited in this area. The strategy goes as far as it can in seeking to influence and work with partnerships such as Grow Yorkshire. A series of farm energy audits are part of a current bid to the Shared Prosperity Fund and a study has been commissioned on the use of the county farm estate to support our climate change ambitions. There’s a commitment to supporting agricultural businesses to calculate and reduce their emissions and to increase and support innovation and food production through low carbon technologies.

General

Comments raised:

- Inclusion of data or a chart showing per capita CO2 emissions

This was to be included if the figures were available. It was noted this was included in the Climate Change Awareness training on line.

- Expanding the references to tree planting to include tree replacement in urban areas

It was noted that there is currently no distinction made between tree planting in urban and rural areas in the strategy document, but it does seek to carry out tree planting and co-ordinating this through a wrap around group. As part of this group, the replacement of urban street trees will be discussed.

- Consider a preference to work with companies with low carbon output as part of the strategy

The need to attract a low carbon economy was to be added to the Co-Benefits section to strengthen it.

- It was noted that engagement with the wider community is key, from school, parish/town councils to local groups
- The council should never be missing an opportunity to take action on climate change

It was agreed to strengthen the green box on page 16 in the final version around seizing opportunities for funding to expand it to emphasise taking action in any form.

- Link the climate change strategy, but also the whole Council Plan to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and using the same language

In response, the desire to speak in plain English to make the document easy to follow and understand was emphasised. It was agreed to consider the use of a supplementary diagram as an Appendix in a future version of the document to show all of the many linkages within the Climate Change Strategy back to the contribution to the UN SDGs. Discussions have started to consider how this could be done for the whole Council Plan document.

- The review of the strategy was discussed and the proposed approach endorsed (Twice per year to TEEE O&S, with an annual report to be taken direct to Executive)
- The strategy is a fluid document and as the legislation and levers change the strategy will change to recognise this.

The meeting concluded at 12 noon.