

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor J Herron

East Ward:

Councillor J Craigie (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs R Craigie

Councillor Mrs L Hellyer

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr R Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)

Mr B Garman (NDCC)

82. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor J McKenzie (East Ward – work).

There were no apologies received from Councillor Wootton, South Ward.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no Declarations of Interest.

84. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

85. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 November 2020 were approved and signed as a correct record.

(Vote – For: 4, Against: 0)

86. RESPONSE TO DEVON CARBON PLAN

The Chairman had provided Members with sight of a response that he had written for consideration. He read the following:

- a. Bideford Town Council welcomes the Interim Devon Carbon Plan and thanks all those that have clearly worked very hard in preparing the document. We are very supportive of setting a 2030 deadline, although we recognise that in the context of a COVID-19 pandemic and economic impacts from Britain leaving the EU might make this extremely difficult to achieve without significant and sustained help from Central Government.
- b. Bideford Town Council acknowledges the estimated costs of the transition and has already committed itself to spending 2% of its revenue up to 2030 on efforts to decarbonise and we will revisit this figure in the light of the estimate that a 2030 date would require an allocation of 6.6% from all economic units in Devon.
- c. We accept that decarbonising both transport and heating will massively increase the demand for electrical energy in the longer term, however we feel that the potential from the Taw and Torridge estuary for energy generation other than a barrage has not been sufficiently explored at this time. We therefore call on both the County and District Council, with all other interested parties that share the Northern Devon coastline to form a Sustainable Northern Devon Coastline forum as an adjunct to the decarbonising process.
- d. The addition of more sustainable energy also means that we need greater energy storage capacity, with our coastline providing an ideal opportunity to produce hydrogen for the national gas grid providing an export opportunity for the county. Internally to Devon, we also need to look at battery and compressed air storage alongside the more traditional hydro approach to storing electrical energy.
- e. The carbon budget and consumption approach is the correct one even though it highlights a significantly bigger problem in decarbonising than merely production figures. We believe that any period after 2030 where we are emissions positive should be netted out by a corresponding emissions negative period prior to 2050, such that we need to overshoot the carbon capture in the natural environment both land and sea to reduce the impacts of falling behind schedule at the early stages.
- f. Front loading small carbon emissions reductions buys us more time to fix the more challenging problems. More should be done to encourage fuel efficient driving in existing vehicles as the AA suggests average drivers can save 40% on their fuel spend by adopting more fuel efficient driving techniques. This not only helps save carbon but helps reduce the amount of money that flows out of the county and out of our local economy.

g. Behaviour change is indeed hard, and we need all sections of society to play their role in encouraging change. We recognise that fiction and stories play an important role in shaping the narrative around change and how appealing it becomes. To that end we will explore creating a short fiction or film competition for youths that have a connection with Bideford to encourage, both the creation of important short digestible narratives of the benefits of decarbonising and adapting to climate change and to encourage the creation of media skills that can lead to high value added industries developing in the area.

h. We acknowledge that for us to meet the energy needs of the future we are going to need more onshore renewable energy and as soon as COVID-19 restrictions permit we will encourage our neighbourhood planning group to adopt consultations to find appropriate sites for a range of sustainable energy technologies within our parish boundaries.

i. Further, we agree that local authorities are best placed in the immediate term to impact climate emissions by encouraging greater recycling and reduction of waste to landfill. Although, Bideford Town Council's Decarbonisation Committee has started some work on this area we find this interim report compelling enough to refocus more efforts along this line to start making a bigger immediate impact.

j. In terms of new industries that could and should be supported, we believe that the fishing industry which reportedly now has only 3 boats using the Appledore fish dock should be encouraged or incentivised to turn to seaweed farming as they have done extensively in Norway. We further suggest that looking at this urgently if we wish to take advantage of the research done in both Denmark and Italy on providing biogas into the gas grid from bio-digesting farmed seaweed. This helps reduce land use competition and has been shown to lock up more carbon into the environment, that are not easily released, such as into the deep oceans, than land based carbon offsetting does. It also enables us to reduce the net carbon emissions of the natural gas grid delaying the need to transition to newer electrical heating systems to a more manageable pace.

k. In order to meet the investment needs of the transition, we believe greater use of pension savings should be utilised in the local area and call on Devon County Council to instruct its pension fund to have a low carbon Devon investment trust that our parish can transfer its pension contributions as we believe that not only should our staff receive an adequate pension, but they should also be able to live in an environment where they can enjoy their retirement. By keeping these funds invested in Devon rather than schemes outside the area we believe that the additional economic benefits will provide a better economy in which to fund decarbonisation.

l. Further, we would call on the County Council Pension Fund to open itself to contributions from businesses and stakeholder pension funds to the proposed Devon low Carbon Fund so that those in work can contribute towards decarbonisation in our local area by paying into their pension fund for the future. In addition to helping the local and sustainable economy by putting investment back into our area, it will also enable people employed in all sectors to contribute more easily to making Devon a better place to live, work and stay.

Both Councillors Mrs Craigie and Mrs Hellyer praised the Chairman for his comprehensive work. Councillor Mrs Craigie asked that further explanation is given to paragraph d. with the sourcing of the Hydrogen. The Chairman agreed to provide clearer detail.

Discussion followed on recycling and the rate of recycling with concerns raised where more encouragement and take up was needed amongst the local community. Councillor Mrs Hellyer felt the Council should lobby this; Councillor Mrs Craigie agreed. It was confirmed that while TDC are the collecting authority DCC are responsible for the removal of waste.

Councillor Mrs Craigie advised that TDC are planning to build a new recycle centre; monies have been set aside, further funding streams are being investigated and land for purchase is being sought.

Following Councillor Herron's observation that a further 10,000 homes are to be built, with demand for service provision, Councillor Mrs Craigie confirmed that collection capacity had been reached; there are no more vehicles / manpower resource available.

The Chairman will invite the Waste and Recycling Manager, TDC to discuss Bideford recycling at a future meeting.

Further points raised included approval of the competition, seaweed harvesting (and uses for food, fertilizers and biogas) and the potential of the DCC Pension Fund to benefit local Devon. Councillor Mrs Craigie noted that the current target is for the Pension Fund to have seven per cent investment in sustainable development goals. There were further wider points raised on international investment, the limitations and poor returns of investing in fossil fuels for the future and the Lloyds of London Policy effective 2022 ramifications.

It was proposed by Councillor J Craigie, and seconded by Councillor Mrs Hellyer,

RECOMMENDED: That the above response, including amendments, be forwarded to all councillors with a request for any comment to be sent by E Mail to the Chairman for inclusion / consideration by 10 February 2021.

The Chairman will collate the document response, pass it to the Mayor and Town Clerk for final check prior to being forwarded as the de facto Bideford Town Council response to the Devon Carbon Plan by 15 February 2021.

(Vote: For: 4, Against: 0)

87. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY (CEE) BILL DRAFT MOTION

The Chairman asked whether Mr Garman should like to address the Committee on the item. Councillor Mrs R Craigie noted that he should have the opportunity having originally brought it to the Committee's attention.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Proposed by Councillor Mrs R Craigie, seconded and

RESOLVED: That Standing Orders are suspended to allow Mr Garman, to engage in the discussion.

(Vote – For: 4, Against: 0)

Mr Garman believed that the Bill was necessary, despite support for it had been turned down by TDC. The Government's target of Net Zero by 2050 is too late, he declared. The Bill is an opportunity to force the Government to take action. The Bill builds on the 2008 Climate Change Act to bring about a steady progress to Net Zero.

Mr Garman approved of the Prime Minister's ten point plan announced in November 2020 for the Environment – the green industrial revolution. Mr Garman endorsed the sales ban from 2030 of petrol and diesel engine vehicles and the expansion of off-shore wind facilities. But he believed there were massive gaps with no provision for on-shore wind turbines, solar and hydro / tidal power. Whilst £12 billion pounds had been earmarked only £4 – 8 billion was new money and relied on the private sector. He made comparison with the £27 billion allocated to road building, £106 billion to HS2 and £22 billion for new nuclear power (at odds with the Country being awash with nuclear waste).

He noted that a new coal mine had been opened in Cumbria, there are plans to build the largest gas power station. He also highlighted the reversal in policy on Bee killing pesticides.

Reiterating the need for the Bill he spoke of incorporating Citizens Assemblies to find solutions to problems and deliberate on more complicated issues removing the decision making from the politicians who are exposed to business lobbyists.

He spoke of ice sheets melting in Greenland and Antarctica, Himalayan Glaciers; a catastrophe is going on. There was a need for continuity in policy, an opportunity to arrive at specific targets without losing stimulus to the five year election cycle.

Councillor Mrs Craigie indicated support and a desire for the Council to write to Sir Charles Geoffrey Cox PC QC.

Members discussed "the protections and restoring of biodiverse habitats along overseas supply chains," the implications of a colonial bias, encouraging and informing peoples purchasing habits and those industries that produce worldwide items where common practices do not stand scrutiny.

Mr Garman spoke of honesty and transparency holding the Government to account where it had indicated a reduction of emissions (43%), yet after exporting the true figure is 12%.

Further discussion ensued on the true costs of goods (taking into consideration the environmental cost and introducing a border tax) and an opportunity to create jobs to produce items locally / nationally rather than import internationally.

The Chairman noted that in conducting the preliminary work for the Tree Strategy he learnt that Bideford would require an area five times over to be forested to deal with the amount of carbon emissions it currently produces. He concluded that we in Bideford are using five times the storage / absorption capability – very much over our allotted space.

The Clerk asked who was behind the Bill. He intimated that the Council was not political, yet Mr Garman's pronouncement appeared overtly political. He indicated that he had visited the CEE Bill Alliance website noting that a former International Executive Director of Greenpeace and secretary of Amnesty International was in support, Big Ask campaign, an offshoot of Friends of the Earth and Diane Abbot MP had involvement, too. While the Council had expressed support for Climate Change initiatives, and one would support a number of the points he felt that Members needed to be mindful of the overtly political machinations behind the Bill as a local Town Council.

Councillor Mrs Craigie indicated that it was a Private Member's bill and that it was open to all political parties. Both the Chairman and Councillor Mrs Hellyer indicated that the organisations listed were not political and stood for the general good.

Mr Garman indicated that North Devon Council has supported the Bill and stressed that it was not "political," that it provided the groundwork for some serious change adding that Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the Greens are the only ones that would promote this.

RETURN TO STANDING ORDERS

Proposed by Councillor Mrs R Craigie, seconded and

RESOLVED: That the Meeting return to Standing Orders.

(Vote – For: 4, Against: 0)

It was proposed by Councillor J Craigie, seconded and

RECOMMENDED: That the Council supports the Motion and writes to Sir Charles Geoffrey Cox PC QC encouraging him to work positively in Parliament on the Private Member's Bill.

(Vote: For: 4, Against: 0)

88. PROJECT ACTION PLAN

a. Reduction of single use plastics in Bideford.

Councillor Herron having spoken to two local supermarket managers concluded that there was much work for the general larger chains to do in moving away from the reliance and convenience of plastic packaging.

Local independent shopkeepers appeared supportive and it was felt they had more flexibility in their decision making.

Councillor Herron was appalled at the amount of recycling per household. He indicated that he, personally, collects between a ton and a ton and a half a day in his role as a recycling officer.

Discussion followed with Councillor Mrs R Craigie advocating the setting up of a Working Group – the four Members expressed agreement (to populate it). Members considered writing to local businesses and shopkeepers, inviting them to become involved and share their expertise. Posters could also be produced where shopkeepers can show support for the reduction of single use plastics but also indicate their initiatives. It was felt that Businesses of Bideford, the Town Centre Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce should be approached. A People's Assembly could also be created.

It was proposed by Councillor J Craigie, seconded and

RECOMMENDED: That a Working Group is formed to explore the reduction of single use plastics in Bideford. Councillor J Herron takes the lead and drafts a letter to local Businesses inviting them to participate.

(Vote: For: 4, Against: 0)

Councillor Herron agreed to arrange and host the first Meeting, via Zoom.

b. Project Action Plan.

Members had received a breakdown of projects and their current states.

The Chairman led discussion where it was agreed that cycling, fifteen minute economies and Hopper Buses would be added for consideration. Councillor Mrs Hellyer observed that people are currently discouraged from using buses although DCC continue to subsidise them (£5 million). She believed that "post-COVID-19" there should be a push for better transport provision.

The Chairman referring to the Devon Carbon Plan spoke about the provision and emptying of recycle bins throughout the Town. An approach would be made to the SF&GP Committee regarding the resourcing and engagement of the Maintenance Team. An appropriate licence for the disposal of the waste would be needed from DCC. The initiative would demonstrate to TDC the need for more facilities.

Discussion followed on waste / recycling disposal and the need for greater provision in the face of more housing development.

The Chairman indicated that he should like encouragement for more Community Compost; Councillor Mrs R Craigie agreed.

Members considered the Tree Strategy. Councillor Mrs Hellyer indicated that through social media correspondence Londonderry Farm had been identified as an area that could see tree planting. Difficulties faced, though included the number of developers involved and obtaining agreements. A request had been made to plant trees on verges in the Moreton Park area.

The Chairman related discussion with the Bideford Carbon Cooperative of elements for inclusion in the Tree Strategy and the forming of a Charity Organisation who could be in receipt of "gifted land," from Developers, on behalf of the Community, to ensure that the land is "wooded." Further, the forming of a Tree Voluntary (Council) Warden network to plant, establish and look after trees. The training of (Petroc) Volunteers to conduct Tree Surveys. He would bring costings to a future Meeting for consideration. Members expressed agreement.

The Chairman had provided Members with sight of a proposal to be sent to the SF&GP Committee that he had written for consideration. He read the following:

i. In order to demonstrate to TDC the savings that can be made through enabling residents and visitors to the Town to recycle their litter when in the centre of Town, we request that the SF&GP Committee permit the Maintenance Team to empty and take recycling from segregated waste litter bins to an appropriate recycling facility.

ii. We further suggest that in future the bins budget should be used to only purchase segregated/compartmentalised bins so that streams of recycling can be encouraged in street litter bins. Any PPE required by the Maintenance Team to transport recyclable waste is suggested to come from the existing bins budget as no new bins have been deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

iii. To allow the Decarbonisation and Environment Committee to seek agreement with respective landowners for the (re)placement of recycling litter bins in Victoria Park, the Quayside and Jubilee Square at a rate to sufficiently utilise the new bins budget in 2021/22. Other areas where significant visitors or shoppers are likely to be present will also be explored by the Committee as suggested to them by residents, businesses owners and councillors.

iv. The recycling bins and transport of recycling would only take place when agreement has been reached with either Devon County Council to accept the waste at Caddsdwn or with the District Council's recycling sorting centre.

v. The Town Council will also need to register as a waste handler with the Environment Agency and discussions with the Environment Agency have suggested that such activity falls within the scope of a license that has a zero charge. However, it might be worth considering getting a more comprehensive license at the cost of £156 every 3 years to enable us to learn from experience and make changes to the handling of recyclable materials where necessary.

Members expressed agreement; further discussion included the potential for local traders to sponsor bins.

The Chairman thanked the Members for their attendance and support. He concluded the Meeting at 8.25 pm.