

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 13 July 2022 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Alan Preest
Cllr Susan Williams	Cllr Phil Awford
Cllr Chris McFarling (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Sajid Patel
Cllr Gill Moseley	Cllr Vernon Smith (Chair)

Officers in attendance: Colin Chick, Philip Williams, James Blockley and Jason Humm

Apologies: Simon Excell, Cllr David Gray, Cllr Dr David Willingham and Cllr Dom Morris

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2022 were approved.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Chris McFarling and Roger Whyborn declared ownership of an electric vehicle, due to the forthcoming discussions on the electric vehicle charging rollout.

Cllr Phil Awford declared an interest as Chair of the National Flood Forum and as a representative for the Wessex/Severn Wye at the Regional Flood Defence Committee, in relation to item 5.

4. ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINTS

4.1 Steve Lowe, ULEV Programme Manager, gave the attached presentation and members noted the following points:

- There were a number of council strategies which reinforced the need for EV charging infrastructure (shown on slide 2).
- A contract had now been procured with Chargepoint for the next 3 years and would focus on on-street charging points. The contract provided an end-to-end service for the deployment phase, including identifying the best sites. This contract could also be re-used by other councils in Gloucestershire.
- The first phase was to identify the correct sites. A number of tools would be used to do this which were listed on slide 4. It was noted that there was an increasing appreciation of the need for charging points now.
- Slides 5-11 showed an idea of the first proposed sites, focusing around the more densely populated areas within each district. It was noted however that there were a number of towns and villages in the rural districts that solely relied on on-street parking as well, even though they had lower population density.

- The site surveys had begun in Cheltenham and Gloucester for the first stage of the rollout and the rest of the county would be scheduled for the summer months. The surveys were vital to truly understand the logistics for each proposed site.
 - Slide 13 outlined the process for finalising the on-street locations.
 - In addition to the on-street Chargepoint programme, the Government had also announced the opportunity to bid for LEVI funding. GCC's bid was outlined on slide 14 and focused on 40 rural towns/village hubs, positioned at starting to address the rural issue. It was expected the funding result would be announced around mid-August.
 - The final work stream was the Staff Fleet Migration, details outlined on slide 15.
- 4.2 The process of registering an interest by residents was available online and the request would then be added to the prioritisation list. This had been sent out via a press release and through the Parish and Town Council distribution list.
- 4.3 A member challenged the current prioritisation strategy reflecting that the overall goal for the county was to reduce the need to travel in the first place, especially by car. This would be arguably easier to achieve in more densely populated areas through other transport means. Whereas residents in rural areas had more of a need to use electric vehicles and therefore the priority for charging points should be there, rather than in our towns and cities.
- 4.4 This point was appreciated by officers and taken on board. It was confirmed that population density was not the only factor used to determine prioritisation and it should be considered that the carbon emitted from transport was much higher in rural areas. The advantage of keeping the heat maps up to date as the roll out continued was being able to see areas that were significantly far away from any provisions. The process had to be transparent and officers able to justify the locations selected, as well as residents being aware if their area was already on the prioritisation list etc.
- 4.5 It was added that many market towns in rural areas had no available parking in the centres and vast pockets with no access to charging. They had heard of police officers running out of power due to this. Noting that the LEVI funding mentioned in the presentation for the 40 rural sites was not guaranteed, there would need to be some way of addressing this within GCC's own rollout.
- 4.6 Members noted that all other councils in the county could use GCC's contract provisions to supply their own charging points. It was recognised that many of the public car parks for example were owned by districts and therefore GCC had no direct authority over those to install charging points. There had been a survey of GCC owned premises to see whether any of these sites would be appropriate to provide public charging but unfortunately, due to many of them being secure areas, this had not been fruitful.

- 4.7 It was confirmed that the programme was aiming to provide 1000 charging points over the 3-year contract period, which on average would mean 3 double charging ports per location (depending on the site requirements). It was likely most would be fast chargers as this would be enough for resident to charge overnight but not too much that it would overload the grid. There were no set timescales for the next phase at the moment, but the contractors were read to go as and when. The cost to residents had been set at a maximum per KW hour in the contract but noting this may increase slightly due to the pressures on energy supply at the moment. Officers were conscious that residents were not put at a disadvantage cost-wise if they did not have their own driveway to charge from.
- 4.8 On questioning, it was confirmed that there had been no additional cost to replacing the fleet vehicles. A lot of them had overdue leases for example.
- 4.9 It was noted that the rollout focused solely on residents, and it was questioned what the vision was for those visiting or travelling through the county. It was advised that the Council's 'customer' was residents and the government/OZEV funding available only covered residential supply. This was not a programme that GCC could deliver alone, it would rely on all partners, including private businesses to be involved and supply where they were able.
- 4.10 A member asked whether GCC had considered any mitigation for supply issues during the rollout. It was advised the contractors were confident they had the supply they needed, and there were regular meetings taking place on resource etc. Rather than the hardware being an issue, it was actually having the supply of local labour available to do the installations.
- 4.11 An action was taken to provide an update on the situation with local planning authorities ensuring charging points were a planning condition for new developments.

ACTION: Philip Williams

- 4.12 There was a discussion around making sure the charging points were financially sustainable. The set-up costs would not be met by users for any years and therefore it would be sensible to target users that were most likely to use the points, highlighting that many communities were currently unable to afford an electric vehicle. Officers acknowledged that it would be some time for the upfront costs to be recovered, but it was simply something that had to be done to get the market started. The day-to-day cost of the chargers would be met by a couple hours of charging a day and the market would reduce, with second hand vehicles becoming available in the future. Even with the rising cost of energy, it was still a lot cheaper to run electric over petrol vehicles.

5. NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT

- 5.1 James Blockley, Principal Flood Risk Management Officer, had been invited to give the Committee a presentation on Natural Flood Management (NFM). Members noted the following:
- In its simplest term, NFM was a flood risk management methodology that sought to emulate and augment the way nature dealt with the flow of water through a range of natural processes.
 - This could be done, for example, by; increasing roughness to slow water down, putting obstructions in the way, increasing losses or holding water back to be released at a controlled rate.
 - Various techniques would be used to achieve these interventions, for example, land use change such as restoring habitats, multiple smaller interventions such as dams or larger schemes such as reconnecting flood plains etc.
 - The benefits of NFM did not just lie within flood management, but also biodiversity and carbon capture as well as health and wellbeing due to residents feeling reassured the flood risk was being managed etc.
 - It was important to note that NFM worked best as a part of a ‘toolbox’ of measures.
 - The success of NFM had been measured by constant monitoring, before during and after interventions and by looking at successful projects.
 - An example was given of the Stroud NFM project which had been a huge success and was increasingly being used as an example of best practice. The scheme involved 750 individual interventions, which had resulted in 25% of the catchment now draining through NFM and 1m peak river level reduction.
 - Slide 5 outlined the challenges that remained for NFM. It relied significantly on people to talk to landowners, communities, effective monitoring etc. The interventions themselves were not expensive, it was more the resource needed from officers to get to the installation stage.
 - The criterion on government funding often centred around the number of homes better protected. This was a difficult thing to measure through NFM and would be better to take into account all the added benefits when assessing funding levels.
 - Liability also played a big part in the success of these interventions. As many completely relied on the landowner’s permission, they often worried about the interventions failing and becoming liable for community flood events.
 - The final slide explored what was next for Gloucestershire in this area, which included:
 - Understanding the upstream NFM potential to reduce the level of water coming into Gloucestershire during heavy rain, before spending a lot of money on concrete alleviations in the lower catchments where the flooding happened.
 - Continuing to build on partnerships and networks, a collective effort on this issue would be much more beneficial rather than GCC working in isolation.

- Building on GCC's officer resource. There had recently been approval to recruit a full-time member of staff to look at NFM project development. This would fill a massive gap in the team which had been needed for a while now.
- 5.2 In response to a question, it was advised that the team were not yet working actively with the county farms estate. They were focusing their efforts on existing schemes but this was something, once the new NFM officer was in place, that will be able to come forward.
- 5.3 Members noted if there was a particular flooding issue they wanted to evaluate to see if NFM could help, they should speak with the flood team at GCC or partner organisations such as the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) or Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.
- 5.4 The Committee thanked the officer and his team for all their hard work.

6. RESTORING OUR RIVERS TASK GROUP

- 6.1 Cllr Awford, Chair of the Restoring our Rivers Task Group, presented the Group's final report to the Committee. Members were reminded that this task group resulted from a motion to full Council back in September 2020. Although the group were very conscious that the Council's ability to bring about significant change was somewhat limited, that said, members from across the council engaged fully which resulted in a very productive and in-depth piece of scrutiny.
- 6.2 The next steps would be for the recommendations to go through Cabinet and Council and, via the county MPs, to feed into the Environment Bill.
- 6.3 A member stressed that the key going forward with this piece of work would be to lobby the MPs and push for levies on water companies to be reinvested into environmental improvements, as well as making sure our sewage systems had enough capacity to prevent future spilling.
- 6.4 It was requested that Environment scrutiny were kept up to date with the recommendation's progress annually.

ACTION: Add to work plan

- 6.5 There was a discussion about the potentially irreversible damage that was currently happening to the rivers and that ongoing monitoring of pollution levels was vital. It was noted that the Group were limited in what they could deliver directly but reassurance was given that they would not be sitting back waiting for updates.
- 6.6 A member asked if it would be possible to have a map, like the one provided on page 57 and 58 of the reports pack, to cover the rest of the county.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

ACTION: DSU to explore

6.7 It was agreed that a paragraph would be added to the report to reflect the Committees want for recommendations to be actioned with urgency, where it was possible for the task group to influence.

6.8 The Committee thanked the members involved for the hard work and extensive report provided. There was unanimous support for the report to move forward and be presented to Cabinet and full Council.

7. WORK PLAN

Members noted the future items in the attached work plan and made the following additions:

- Improving Gloucestershire's Bus Services Task Group report
- Strategic Estate Plan Task Group
- Sheep mess clear up in the Forest of Dean
- Restoring our Rivers Task Group progress report

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 12:23.