

Environment and Sustainability Panel

21 March 2023

- Present:** Councillor Molly Bloomfield
Councillor Michelle Burrows
Councillor Mark Goacher
Councillor Kayleigh Rippingale
Councillor Lee Scordis (Chair)
Councillor Michael Spindler
- Substitutes:** Councillor Lewis Barber for Councillor Sue Lissimore
Councillor Sam McCarthy for Councillor Arnold
- Also present:** Councillor William Sunnucks*

*attended remotely

86. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that: the minutes of the meeting of 31 January 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

87. Have Your Say!

Stuart Johnson attended the meeting and addressed the Panel in accordance with the Council's Have Your Say! arrangements. He welcomed the Council's plans to make it easier to walk, wheel and cycle in Colchester. The Panel was reminded that the Colchester Future Transport Strategy adopted by both Essex County Council (ECC) and Colchester City Council encouraged active and safe sustainable travel, and the Panel heard that Colchester Cycling Campaign supported the Council's actions to promote this and looked forward to the opening of secure cycle parking in the city centre. It was noted that many of the changes to promote active travel needed to be taken by ECC as the Highway Authority, however, the Council could assist by providing more secure cycle parking and bike hangers at dwellings. With regard to School Streets, Colchester Cycling Campaign felt that the approach taken by ECC was too timid, and the Winstree Road school street scheme had not achieved the desired result of encouraging more active travel that was needed to combat climate change and air pollution. More radical action was needed, and the Panel was requested to write to ECC to request a stronger approach to school streets and to ask that school streets were closed to traffic at school pick up and drop off times. Emily Harrup, Transport and Sustainability Joint Lead, advised that the secure cycle parking was currently being fitted out and would be open soon, and the provision of cycle hangers was a project which the Council was keen to look at in the future.

Rachel Matthews attended the meeting and addressed the Panel in accordance with the Council's Have Your Say! arrangements. She was part of a group of unaffiliated individuals who were concerned about environment issues and government policies. Given the advice received from central government had changed in the past, had the Panel members carried out their own independent research into the environmental impact into making the batteries for the proposed electric vehicles. The Panel heard that, according to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, in order to extract lithium, a single mine could use over 5,000 tonnes of sulphuric acid a day, extracted by the use of 3,000 gallons of water per minute and could produce over 350 million cubic yards of permanent waste. Cobalt was also required for rechargeable batteries and the Panel was reminded that at its last meeting, a panel member had asked that the Council use ethically sourced batteries. The Panel heard that as 70% of cobalt was mined by children, this was not possible, and no company could legitimately claim that the cobalt in any rechargeable battery in their products did not come from such a source. The Panel was urged not to support such exploitation, when there were alternatives to electric vehicles (EVs), and the spending of public money on any product containing a lithium battery would not be supported. Would the Council give its assurance that it would do what was right and not be pressured by government into action which did more harm than good. Ben Plummer, Climate Emergency Project Officer, confirmed that the Council had researched the environmental impact of producing lithium batteries and accepted that there were environmental issues associated with this. The Council's approach was to consider the life cycle of products which it used, and when considering the tailpipe emissions which electric cycles produced when compared to cars, there could be an overall environmentally positive impact. The difficulty in sourcing ethically produced batteries was acknowledged, but the Council did work with companies which demonstrated corporate social responsibility as part of their procurement processes. The restrictions which were being placed on the sales of petrol and diesel vehicles beyond 2030 by central government was something not within the Councils control and work was undertaken to align the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan with this. All actions contained within the Plan were subject to independent research with lay experts in the community and academics. In response, Rachel Matthews advised the Panel that there were alternatives to EVs, with the company JCB having developed a zero emission hydrogen engine. Options such as these should be considered ahead of EVs for the Council's fleet vehicles and busses and the Council needed to set an example by boycotting the use of unethically produced batteries.

James O'Flynn attended the meeting and addressed the Panel in accordance with the Council's Have Your Say! arrangements, and asked a number of questions of the Panel:

1. Was the Panel was able to voice the environmental concerns of residents to ECC on their behalf?
2. Could he be provided with the methodology used by the Council in calculating its emissions in tCO₂e, including the data used in the methodology published by EcoAct which showed how the figure was arrived at. Had this figure been independently verified?
3. Had the Panel calculated the amount of CO₂ that would be produced making EVs that would be used to replace the existing fleet?

4. Could the Panel provide the data used to calculate how many cars would need to be off the road to make a noticeable difference to air quality in Colchester?
5. Would the Council carry out a full consultation in respect of the proposed cycle lanes and electric cycle scheme, as he did not feel that a survey of 800 residents was sufficient?

The Panel was advised that a priority should be made to maintain and repair the roads of Colchester which were in an appalling condition, and not to spend millions on providing alternative transport routes for the minority or road users, no matter how well-intentioned this was. Mr O'Flynn advised the panel that according to the Office of Statistics, only a single death of a child with asthma had been attributed to air pollution in the last 20 years, and not the 4,000 deaths per year that had been recently referenced by the Mayor of London.

The Chair of the Panel advised Mr O'Flynn that although the Panel could write to ECC on their behalf, it would be more effective if residents contacted ECC direct via email or through contacting the relevant Cabinet Member whose details would be published online. The Climate Emergency Project Officer advised the Panel that the methodology provided by EcoAct was only used for estimating emissions associated with working from home, and the methodology used for calculating the Council's overall emissions was a greenhouse gas emissions calculator provided by Local Partnerships and the Local Government Association (LGA). Information on both these calculators could be provided, and was publicly available. It was intended that the Council's fleet would be replaced vehicle by vehicle, and EVs were considered to be more ecologically friendly than diesel ones. The Transport and Sustainability Joint Lead advised the Panel that ECC carried out more detailed air quality monitoring than the Council did, and had more sophisticated tools to do this. It was clarified that the 800 people who had been mentioned at the previous Panel meeting had not been by way of consultation, but was simply public engagement through talking to people at events. This information was not used by ECC when making decisions about the highway, but rather would be used to inform local Council projects. ECC had carried out a number of public consultations over the past few years which were publicly available and had been promoted in a variety of different ways. Government funding was specifically restricted in its use, and any grants that the Council was successful in being awarded were tied to specific programme and projects. A lot of the projects which the Council was running were geared towards encouraging shared ownership, meaning that there would be a better distribution of resources and associated reduction in environmental impact.

Cheryl Taylor attended the meeting and addressed the Panel in accordance with the Council's Have Your Say! arrangements. She posed a number of questions to the Panel:

1. Had the Panel considered the dangers of electric vehicles in their planning, and had a fire service approved safety plan been created for dealing with the fires?
2. The Panel heard that over the last 5 years, there had been over 500 fires in London caused by EV batteries, including cars, busses, scooters, electric bicycles and heavy goods vehicles. These fires were extremely difficult to put out, and necessitated the closing of buildings or areas for a period of time for

safety reasons. In the light of this, had a plan been developed to combat these issues if an EV fire were to break out in a multi-storey car park or at an EV charging station?

3. Had the Council formulated evacuation plans for a neighbourhood in the event of an EV refuse vehicle fire, and would it take responsibility for safely dealing with the polluted water which had been used to fight the fire?
4. Do the Council's existing safety measures meet up to the new fire regulations that are soon to be implemented with regard to EV fires? If not, it was requested that safety plans were drawn up with the fire service for the existing e-scooters and fleet vehicles, and remove these from use until an approved safety plan was in place. It was considered that the Council and its Officers had a duty of care to the public and any Officer or Councillors who authorised the use of EVs could be held personally liable.

The Panel heard that it was felt that EVs were a great danger to the public, and it was requested that the Council did not go ahead with any more vehicles of this nature, particularly as there were safer and greener options. The Climate Emergency Project Officer was not necessarily the right Officer to respond to these questions, but he believed that relevant risk assessments were carried out before the Council proceeded with any large project, such as the purchasing of vehicles, and it was right that any risks posed by EVs should be considered. Cheryl Taylor advised the Panel that she considered that there were safer alternatives to EVs, such as hydrogen engines, which were now coming to the forefront of the market.

Ian Drew attended the meeting and addressed the Panel in accordance with the Council's Have Your Say! arrangements. He considered that the Strategic Plan for Colchester for 2023 and onwards was based around what the Council saw as a climate emergency, in its quest to achieve net zero carbon emissions. He believed that there was other information that should be considered, and wondered whether the Council would proceed with its current strategy if it knew that man-made climate change was not true. He considered that the idea of 15 minute cities was a global initiative and was a template for a great reset with the final aim of rolling out 17 sustainable development goals under the guise of achieving net zero. The Green Party and other climate activists did not understand what the long-term implication of net zero were. The aim of Agenda 2030 was for absolute zero to be achieved by 2050, and this would mean no flying or shopping out of the United Kingdom with wood burners and other fossil fuel appliances removed from every home and no fossil fuelled vehicles, with only EV travel available for people and freight. He believed that this state of affairs had been planned since the 1970s, and would result in the requirement for digital identification containing all an individual's personal data by the end of the year, with a central bank and digital currency to follow. He thought that traffic restrictions were designed to generate congestion on the roads and cause pollution, which would in turn lead to movement charging and the encouragement for people to stay at home in 15 minute cities. Mr Drew stated that cameras were already being installed which would enable movement restrictions to be enforced and which would enable the movements of individuals to be tracked, and charges levied for exceeding a designated carbon footprint. He called for a public debate so that the people could decide what they wanted, which may not be a future forced upon them by central government.

The Chair of the Panel acknowledged the comments which had been made, but reminded the Panel that the Council had declared a climate emergency in 2019. Mr Drew was entitled not to believe in man-made climate change, but the Council did believe in this. It was confirmed that no plans were being discussed in Colchester for congestion charges or 15 minute cities. Those present who wished to set up a public debate to discuss the issue raised were welcome to do so, but the Chair did not consider that the Council would entertain this.

88. Waste and Recycling Strategy Update

The Panel considered a report setting out the progress of the development of the Council's Recycling and Waste strategy following the approach approved by the Environment and Sustainability Panel on 20 September 2022, in the context of other decisions made by the Council in light of the current economic climate and the agreement of a new Strategic Plan.

Rosa Tanfield, Group Manager, Neighbourhood Services, attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Panel with its enquiries. An independent consultant, Ricardo, had been appointed and who would be supporting Officers in developing the Waste and Recycling Strategy in the future. The report set out details of the difficult financial climate that the Council was working in, as well as some of the early decisions which had already been taken on changes to the Recycling and Waste Service, but which would be considered as part of the Strategy development in the future. The outcome of a consultation organised by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was awaited, particularly with regard to the consistency of household collections which would have a strong influence on the development of the Strategy.

In response to a question from the Panel, it was confirmed that no decision had been taken as to whether or not the Council would instigate charging for providing recycling materials, however, the Council was in a difficult financial position, and the possibility of levying such charges had already been discussed by Full Council, and would be considered as part of the development of the Strategy.

RESOLVED that: the contents of the report be noted.

89. Climate Emergency Action Plan – Summary of Progress

The Panel considered a report detailing key progress made with the actions within Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) over the past year.

Ben Plummer, Climate Emergency Project Officer, attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Panel with its enquiries. It was intended that considerations of environmental impact and sustainability were embedded throughout the Council, and not just contained within a small sustainability team. The CEAP was populated and monitored by Officers across the whole Council, and was aligned with other key Strategic Priorities of the Council such as supporting employment and business, together with other green agendas. The CEAP was integrated with city centre

development, such as the Masterplan and Town Deal, and supported the delivery of more sustainable transport means. Key to this work were the Council's partner organisations such as the Colchester Institute, the University of Essex, schools, businesses and community groups. The aims of the CEAP were broader than simply reducing carbon emissions, and other environmental improvements such as improvement in air quality and an increase in biodiversity would also be realised.

Some of the key areas of progress and achievements of the past year were drawn to the attention of the Panel:

- Work had been undertaken with an external contractor to identify decarbonisation actions at Council owned buildings.
- Electric vehicles (EVs) had been introduced.
- Work had been carried out to consider the feasibility of a solar park and microgrid to power the development at the Northern Gateway.
- Action had been taken to naturalise and support biodiversity on the Council's green spaces.
- Tree planting had been carried out in conjunction with community groups and charities.
- Innovative forms of travel had been supported such as e-cargo bikes and electric scooters.
- The Council had worked to support improvements to wayfinding and the travel infrastructure through involvement with projects such as 'fixing the link'.
- The air quality awareness and behaviour change campaign, CAREless had been successfully implemented.
- Communities had been supported to assist them in keeping local spaces litter free.
- Council staff had attended at community events throughout the year, using public engagement to better inform the implementation of future projects.
- Collaborative work had been undertaken with key institutions on climate change action.
- Working with local businesses to increase their access to skills and training to encourage and support learning about sustainability.
- Integrating sustainable thinking and behaviours within the Council itself.

The next steps to be taken under the CEAP had been identified, and were:

- With regard to the decarbonisation of the Council's buildings, a set of measures had been identified and a plan would be created setting out the costs and savings of each identified measure, and the proposed timeline of implementation.
- Increasing engagement and awareness on sustainable travel and air quality, which would be supported by a successful bid to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), increasing engagement with businesses and schools.
- The proposed secure cycle park would open, and would also host a shared eCargo bike hub allowing for the hiring of eCargo bikes for individual journeys.
- Signage relating to walking and cycling routes would be improved.
- A new Recycling and Waste Strategy would be developed.

- 3 new environmentally focussed Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) would be introduced
- Residents would be supported in obtaining grant funding to make energy efficiency improvements to their homes.

The Panel were advised that the actions contained within the CEAP were independently reviewed by Climate Emergency UK. All local authorities had been reviewed in January 2022 when Colchester City Council had received a score of 52%, above the average score of 43%. Rating was now taking place on the effectiveness of any climate action which local authorities had taken, and the results of this would be published in Autumn 2023. Following the Council's initial score of 52%, a thorough review had been carried out of the CEAP, and actions taken to improve this where possible in areas such as communication of the Council's aims and activities, and greater consideration being given to the impact of the Council's actions on inequalities.

In response to questions from the Panel, the Climate Emergency Project Officer confirmed that Officers had visited the Colchester Eco Festival, however, it was intended that a broader range of community events would be attended to seek as broad a range of views from the community as possible. Solar panels were present on some of the Council's buildings, and the level of coverage would be increased where this was possible. The Council was represented on the Town Deal Board.

A Panel member noted that hydrogen vehicles were being successfully used in Aberdeen, including a refuse vehicle, and considered that further research should be undertaken into this method of vehicle power before any large developments were undertaken to provide additional EV infrastructure. They were particularly concerned by the increasing proliferation of artificial grass in new build housing estates, and wondered whether there was anything that the Council could do to combat this. It was noted that The Climate Emergency Project Officer advised the Panel that he believed that the use of plastic grass had been included in the new biodiversity SPD.

Rosa Tanfield, Group Manager – Neighbourhood Services, advised the Panel that consideration had been given to the necessary balance between public access to Cymbeline Meadow and the promotion of increased biodiversity, and strong feedback had been received on this point as part of the Council's Woodland and Biodiversity Project. Plans were being developed which would ensure that the nature reserve would be enjoyed by people as well as increasing the biodiversity which was there. The Panel was advised that the Council had previously agreed a Fleet Transition Plan which set out how the Council intended to transition its fleet from diesel vehicles to vehicles generating as possible close to zero emissions by 2030. Within the Plan, the Council was open to utilising any technology which had been proven to be effective, and had been actively considering alternative fuels. The largest hurdle was the large heavy goods vehicle (HGV) fleet, and work was ongoing with other local authorities who had utilised different fuel vehicles to ensure that the most efficient use was made of public money when the Council wished to invest in new vehicles or technology.

In response to questions from a Panel member, the Group Manager – Neighbourhood Services explained to the Panel that the Council was the waste

collection authority, whereas Essex County Council (ECC) were the waste disposal authority, and there were legal obligations on both authorities in these roles. ECC gave the Council directions on how waste was disposed of, and the Council was part of an Essex-wide partnership with other local authorities and ECC which was governed by the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. This strategy was in the process of being reviewed, and would address both how material was collected and then treated. There would be an opportunity to feed into this review later in the year for Councillors and members of the public.

In discussion, the Panel wondered whether free cycle training could be expanded to more rural areas, noting that one of the largest barriers to people cycling more was a lack of confidence, which may be able to be addressed through training. Emily Harrup, Transport and Sustainability Joint Lead, confirmed that both the Council and ECC did have funding for free training, and there was therefore scope for more training, which was designed to improve confidence and safety on cyclists on the road. Any help which Councillors could offer in promoting the availability of this training would be greatly appreciated.

The Climate Emergency Project Officer confirmed that Leisure World did have a Heat Decarbonisation Plan which had been prepared with an independent consultant, and the Council was currently working to identify suitable options to tackle the high emissions from the site.

The Panel considered that thought could be given to expanding the Council's 'No Mow' initiative, in conjunction with Ward Councillors. The provision of additional cycle hangers would be supported by the Panel, together with cycle parking being provided at strategic locations such as multi-storey car parks where there was currently unused space. The expansion of the provision of free or subsidised bikes into areas of greater deprivation in Colchester was encouraged by the Panel, potentially working with schools to identify areas of need, although it was acknowledged that this was funded via the Town Deal. Julian Sanchez of ECC attended the meeting remotely and advised the Panel that the expansion of the Essex Pedal Power scheme was something which he would be keen to support if the necessary funding could be obtained. All opportunities for further funding and expansion of the scheme were being considered wherever possible.

RESOLVED that: the contents of the report be noted.

90. Air Quality – Schools Activity

The Panel considered a report providing an update on the activities being undertaken locally to change driver behaviour around schools to improve air quality.

Julian Sanchez, Essex County Council, attended the meeting and addressed the Panel. Essex County Council (ECC) was committed to creating the conditions for as many children as possible to walk, wheel or cycle to school to promote wellbeing and reduce traffic pressure around school gates and reduce vehicle emissions. Consideration had been given to different methods of implementing School Streets,

including volunteer marshal training and the use of movable bollards and fixed penalty notices, and ECC had developed its own School Street model for Essex. The ECC model recognised that an enforcement approach could be taken if this was what was wanted by parents and schools, however, it was initially intended to use rewards and incentives to encourage physical changes to be made around schools to raise awareness of drivers in the area, and increase road safety. Changes in behaviour and habits would be promoted through each school identifying the most effective solution for their locality. Over time it was intended to transform streets around schools to make it much more comfortable and safe for children to access their schools in a way that built consensus in communities and offered encouragement to travelling to school in a different way.

In discussion, the Panel wondered whether a tougher approach would be warranted if the evidence which had been gathered supported this, and it considered that engaging school children in the project would be important to its success. It was noted that although enforcement was an option, the preferred approach would be a gentle introduction of any changes to avoid a backlash, with the aim being to engage and encourage involvement in the scheme, rather than enforce it. Incentives were being considered as a mechanism of encouraging support for the scheme, potentially also involving businesses local to schools.

Julian confirmed that funding had been received to cover a small number of schools in Colchester, and that at the present time the focus was on information gathering about the different types of school and the trips which were taken to it. It was hoped that more funding would allow more schools to be involved in the future. The Panel heard that enforcement activity was considered to be the last resort, if all other methods had been trialled at a school, and problem parking was still an issue. Because funding had been limited, ECC had initially approached schools in certain areas and was now trying to expand the number of schools who would be interested in the scheme. Input from Councillors to assist communication with schools would be appreciated, and it was confirmed to the Panel that although funding was difficult, if a school was keen to trial some measures then funding would be found to support this. It was confirmed to the Panel that ECC did provide some school transport where pupils lived over a certain distance from a school. It was suggested that the Panel receive an updated report on progress made in a year's time. It was suggested that the Chair of the Panel write to the relevant Cabinet member of ECC on behalf of the Panel to request that every school in Colchester was required to provide an up to date Travel Plan.

Emily Harrup, Transport and Sustainability Joint Lead, attended the meeting to provide the Panel with an update on the Council's CAREless campaign. Statistics provided by Public Health England showed that pollution contributed to 36,000 deaths in the United Kingdom (UK) each year, with a total annual cost to the National Health Service (NHS) of £157m. There were 3 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Colchester, and 1 in 20 deaths in Colchester was linked to poor air quality, with children among the most vulnerable to health impacts from air pollution.

The campaign had initially started in 2019 following the receipt of DEFRA grant funding, taking an asset based community approach to a project designed to encourage behaviour change by raising awareness of air pollution and encouraging

drivers to switch off their engines. Over 3,000 residents, schools and businesses had been engaged, and the CAREless branding and campaign had been co-designed with an advisory stakeholder group. More funding had recently been received to support more focussed work to be carried out with schools, and a school's toolkit had been developed which linked in with the curriculum and contained ideas and activities, together with information on travel planning. The CAREless pollution team had carried a wide variety of activities with local schools to utilise the toolkit, including the loaning of air pollution monitors, conducting themed assemblies and actions around Clean Air Day in both 2021 and 2022. To date, there had been engagement of different sorts with approximately 28 schools, dependent on what the individual school wanted.

Phase 1 of the campaign had been evaluated in 2021, and it was found that 63% of carers/parents were aware of the campaign, 65% of drivers outside schools reported that they switched off their engines more than they had a year ago, with only 21% of drivers stating that they never switched off their engine. The next steps for the campaign included continuing to work with schools to build on its current momentum, with a view to securing its legacy once funding was no longer available. It was hoped to integrate walking and cycling more fully within School Street schemes through further development of the school's toolkit. Councillors were asked to help by providing funding where possible, and to use their community networks to help develop a network of volunteers to increase capacity and support localised action within their Wards.

The Panel was very supportive of the work which had been carried out, particularly the level of engagement which had been achieved with schoolchildren, and it was noted that this was something which Officers were very keen to develop and build on. It was considered important that effective communication was key to the continuing success of the campaign, particularly in relation to the significant health impacts associated with air pollution.

RESOLVED that:

- The Panel would support and help facilitate the ongoing educational approach to changing driver behaviour around schools in relation to engine idling and active travel.
- The Panel would support Essex County Council's plans for school streets and the CAREless Pollution campaign by:
 - o Providing funding where possible (particularly towards Healthy School Streets)
 - o Using community connections to help develop a volunteer network to increase capacity and therefore localised action
 - o Providing named contacts and introductions at local schools
 - o Encouraging schools to engage and take up the support offered

91. Work Programme

The Committee considered its draft work programme for 2022-23.

Matthew Evans, Democratic Services Officer, attended the meeting to introduce the report, and assisted the Panel in its deliberations.

The Panel was content that its future work programme be left for discussion at its first meeting in the new municipal year, subject to input and suggestions from Officers.

RESOLVED that: the contents of the work programme be noted.