

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 8 September 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors S Walker, (Chair), R Arundale (Vice-Chair), D Branson, D Coupe, S Dean (as substitute for Cllr M Storey), T Furness, B Hubbard, T Mawston and M Saunders

OFFICERS: S Lightwing, G Field, S Blenkinsop and R Horniman

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor M Storey

21/18 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

21/19 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 21 JULY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 21 July 2021 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

21/20 **MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL'S GREEN STRATEGY - SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Director of Environment and Community Services and the Environment Sustainability Manager were in attendance to provide an overview of Middlesbrough Council's Green Strategy as an introduction to the Panel's new topic: The Green Strategy and the Council's plans for increasing bio-diversity.

Middlesbrough Council had set out an ambitious ten year plan to develop a green agenda to rise to the challenge of global warming, and try to reduce it by its actions. The Council had three broad aims to make Middlesbrough a more sustainable town which were:

- To make Middlesbrough Council net carbon neutral by 2029.
- To ensure Middlesbrough as a town was net carbon neutral by 2039.
- For the Council to be a lead authority on environmental issues.

The Mayor's ambition was to make Middlesbrough a greener town with more trees and flowers. The Council had declared a climate crisis in 2019.

In 2012 Middlesbrough Council adopted the ten One Planet Living principles, which was a sustainability model based on the United Nations 17 sustainable development goals. As well as environmental improvements, standards and awareness, the principles included community cohesion, culture, wildlife, landscape, travel, the materials we use and the products we buy, as well as zero waste and carbon energy. The Green Strategy was based on the ten One Planet Living principles.

In response to the net carbon neutral ambition for Middlesbrough Council for 2029, measures had already started to de-carbonise the transport fleet and other assets. Tools were in place to measure carbon output, set carbon budgets, and introduce reduction measures. Various efficiency measures were already in place within the buildings estate but the Council needed to go further and consider more radical methods.

Moving towards greener transport was not just for the Council but for residents, and the UK as a whole. The government's aim was to have no new internal combustion vehicles on the roads by the end of 2029. The Council would work with public transport providers to enable their move to sustainable fuel use and develop the installation of an infrastructure to provide electric vehicle charging points across the town. The Council had already purchased five electric vehicles.

To increase and improve biodiversity the Council would create rich and diverse habitats and promote the use of parks and open spaces. This would involve community engagement, getting people involved in, and supporting, their local green spaces.

As an authority the Council had responsibility in relation to purchasing and where to procure services, what type of goods were purchased, and engaging with local suppliers. The procurement team was looking at the social model of engagement and making sure it had an impact in terms of the local community and business.

Recycling levels had fallen during the Covid-19 pandemic. The average amount of waste recycled had been at 33% for a number of years but had fallen to 28% recently. The Council had employed an Officer to work on the most challenging areas and do regular engagement programmes to try and improve recycling rates. The target recycling rate was 40%. It was highlighted that recycling rates were calculated on domestic household waste. A high number of people had been working at home throughout the pandemic and more domestic waste, which would ordinarily have been disposed of by people at their workplace, had been collected. The level of green waste collected had also risen. In addition, many items that were put into recycling were not necessarily recyclable because they were contaminated with food. Promotion of waste reduction and recycling via social media and education campaigns to raise awareness would help address this issue.

Community engagement activities and initiatives such as the Boro Champions and Green Spaces Forum were already taking place. The Council would continue to work with community groups and volunteers and schools and groups to promote greater environmental awareness and make Middlesbrough a greener and better place to live.

Middlesbrough food policy's aim was to work with the existing Middlesbrough Food Partnership through Environment City to develop and maintain a sustainable and fair food system. Middlesbrough was currently at silver level and aimed to become a Gold Sustainable Food place by reducing food poverty and insecurity and promoting food access. Middlesbrough would continue to be a Fair Trade Town and would establish a surplus food redistribution hub. There was also an ambition to engage people in farming on an urban scale with a Farm Start Scheme.

Cleaner air and access to green space and sustainable travel and food had significant physical and mental wellbeing benefits. A South Tees Clean Air Strategy would be implemented to improve air quality in Middlesbrough. A Beat the Street programme would be introduced for children to encourage them out of their homes. Building on existing practice and local initiatives the Council would explore the development of action zones around schools focusing on areas of environmental benefit, for example car free zones. Environmental opportunities for mental health and wellbeing through the expansion of green social prescribing opportunities would also be implemented.

In order to deliver the Council's objectives, a town wide Green Strategy Action Plan would be developed, led by individual action plan groups, based around the ten One Planet Living principles. Each Action Plan Group was led by a Head of Service and

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would produce their own Action Plan. Performance reporting and monitoring of actions and targets would be overseen by the Strategy Group, who in turn, would report to the Council's Leadership Management Team.

In terms of decarbonisation the two biggest producers were transport and homes. Working with a range of partners, businesses and organisations, as well as communities and residents across Middlesbrough, would be key to the delivery of the strategy.

Achievements during Year One of the strategy included:

- Public consultation – good feedback and supportive comments had been received.
- Formation of Action Plan Groups and individual Action Plans.
- Climate Action Middlesbrough – Middlesbrough Environment City had been awarded £1.5 million to develop an action plan for climate change. Community led and focussed projects were underway.
- Biodiversity improvements – tree cover had been increased, urban meadows created, bee hives had been installed, a new wildlife sanctuary and new grasslands had been created.

The importance of engaging with communities about how the Council managed green spaces in future was highlighted. A new mowing regime had been introduced in some areas of the town and it was important to keep residents informed of the reasons why green spaces hadn't been cut. 'No Mow May' allowed flowers such as clover and speedwell to flower and also had a positive impact on pollinators.

A carbon audit for Middlesbrough Council's vehicle fleet had been completed in 2020 which provided a baseline as to how much carbon was being produced and how this could be reduced by electrification or energy efficient vehicles. Five electric vehicles had been purchased and E to G charging stations had been installed at Resolution House. Any spare charge left in the vehicle batteries at the end of the day went back into the grid and this in turn provided an income to the Council.

An education and awareness programme had been introduced and the Waste Education Officer was currently working with schools to boost recycling rates. In addition to encouraging children to recycle, the programme encouraged them to pass good practice on to their parents. Four of the Council's refuse wagons had been wrapped with nature themes that promoted recycling and sustainability.

The next steps included:

- A Smart Carbon Tool to look at the Council's baseline carbon, where it currently stood, where it needed to be and the steps needed to make that change in terms of addressing the 2029 target.
- Launching a staff training module on climate change and carbon reduction in-house and from that to develop some Green Champions within the Council. Also to consider measures as an organisation in terms of energy reduction, water saving and recycling.
- A Big Green Week of action from 18-26 September 2021 – which was part of the climate action programme and engagement with the public.
- Engaging with partners, public, businesses and stakeholders across Middlesbrough terms of their own carbon reduction journey and how the Council could support that.

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- Other suggestions included having a dedicated ranger or countryside team in Middlesbrough to ensure that as projects came to an end the momentum on bio-diversity was maintained.
- Planning Net Gain would be a new focus for the planning system. Within any planning application if there was any detriment to wildlife that had to be substituted and improved by at least 10% in another location, ideally within the same local authority boundaries. This could be a key tool in planning developments and potentially something the Council could benefit from with the relevant expertise in place.

Reference was made to the amount of land available for development in Middlesbrough and how green spaces could be preserved. It was suggested that investment needed to be made into managing existing green spaces to increase biodiversity as development still needed to take place. An example was provided that if there was open space and no-one was using it, it might as well be a smaller space that was properly developed and used and had a biodiversity plan attached to it.

In relation to planning, it was suggested that anything that helped the Council bolster its policy framework by stating how Middlesbrough should be developed from an environmental perspective, would be useful. Planners and the Planning Committee could use that as a tool to defend areas and strive for higher standards and better quality developments.

During summer 2021 the Council had temporarily suspended its green waste collection service due to staffing issues caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. A Member asked whether there would be additional collections to cover those missed. The Director explained that tonnage levels would continue to be monitored to assess whether any additional collections were needed.

A Member also suggested that the green waste collection might have to change in line with climate change and the change in seasons – potentially with a later collection in November. Regarding changing to monthly grass cutting, it was proposed that litter picking on a frequent basis, rather than just before grass cutting, and clearing the grass from the footpaths afterwards, would be positive moves in terms of gaining public approval. A further suggestion was to implement a pilot scheme in one ward so that feedback could be provided and assessed.

As previously highlighted, one of the biggest carbon producers in Middlesbrough was transport. It was confirmed that the relevant Action Group would be focussing on de-carbonising transport and also improving transport links.

A Member asked how intent the Council was on ensuring that new housing developments were carbon neutral and what was being done to make existing housing more carbon friendly. Whilst the Government was keen to promote modern methods of construction and there were sound arguments for it, naturally the main house builders would only make changes when it was commercially viable. The urban living being developed at Middlehaven was an opportunity for the new type of housing and also a good selling point for the people that wanted to live there.

The Panel was informed that the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) was currently undertaking a piece of work to install electric vehicle charging points across the Tees Valley. Middlesbrough Council had already installed some charging points and would investigate other areas, such as parks, for installing more. In areas like Middlesbrough where electric vehicle take up had been slow, the infrastructure was lagging behind for people who had bought one and possibly there was not currently enough charging points to persuade people to buy electric vehicles.

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In terms of the target for Middlesbrough Council to be carbon neutral; this year was the baseline to calculate the Council's carbon level then plan how to achieve the target in 2029. There were two sides to achieving the aim, one was to reduce the level of carbon produced and the other was to increase the level of carbon capture.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and the information provided.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

21/21 **MIDDLESBROUGH REGENERATION POST COVID-19 SCRUTINY REVIEW - DRAFT FINAL REPORT**

The Panel's Draft Final Report on Middlesbrough Regeneration Post Covid-19 was presented.

AGREED that approval of the report was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

21/22 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 6 OCTOBER 2021**

The date and time of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 6 October 2021 at 10.30 am.

NOTED

21/23 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting that had taken place earlier in the day.

NOTED

21/24 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**

Pest Control

A Panel Member referred to a recent press article about Middlesbrough Council losing a pest control services contract with housing provider Thirteen.

The Panel had already undertaken a scrutiny review of the Council's pest control services earlier in 2021.

The Director of Environment and Community Services answered Members' queries in relation to the Thirteen contract, as well as the previous scrutiny recommendations, and confirmed that the Council would continue to provide a pest control service on its own land.

Members were reminded that they could put forward suggestions in relation to the provision of Council services as part of the budget consultation process.

NOTED