



Climate and Environment Emergency Executive Panel

16:00 to 18:35

10 October 2023

Present: Councillors Hampton (chair), Stutely (vice chair), Champion, Fox, Lubbock, Oliver, and Stutely

Apologies: Councillor Padda

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Fox declared an other interest as a student at the University of East Anglia during item 3 (below).

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2023.

3. Norwich Climate Commission Progress Report and Future Plans – Presentation

(Asher Minns, Co-Chair of the Norwich Climate Commission and Executive Director, Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of East Anglia, attended the meeting for this item.)

Asher Minns introduced the presentation that updated the panel on the progress of the Norwich Climate Commission over the last 18 months and its future plans. The Climate Commission had been announced in November 2021, during the Glasgow COP26. The purpose of the commission was as a friend to help the city council on its missions around climate and environment sustainability and to support citizens on their pathway to net zero. The Tyndall Centre was established 23 years ago as part of a partnership with four other universities in the UK. The Climate Commission gave the Tyndall Centre an opportunity to put its theory into practice. The Norwich Climate Commission was part of the Place Based Climate Action Network across the UK.

In conclusion, Asher Minns said that government policy had focused on carbon reduction but there was a need for resilience and adaptation to climate change. Sea levels were expected to rise for the next millennia. The Tyndall Centre had been working on the analysis of the fourth UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, that was quantitative and better informed than previous assessments. He hoped that there would be funding to provide climate change risk assessment for Norfolk so that the appropriate responses could be made.

(The [presentation](#) is available on the council's website with the agenda papers for this meeting.)

During discussion, Asher Minns and the Environmental Strategy Manager answered members' questions on issues arising from the presentation.

The panel discussed the role of Whitlingham Broad as the city's equivalent of the London Flood Barrier. Asher Minns advised against complacency in that the broad provided an ecosystem that was slow draining and could absorb river water but needed to be enhanced to mitigate against rising sea levels and storms. In policy terms there was thinking about the risk and where that threshold of protection should be for the whole of the county. The Environmental Strategy Manager advised members that all development on flood plains had a statutory obligation to mitigate loss of the flood plain. East Norwich would have comprehensive and robust measures in place to mitigate flood risk that were subject to approval by the Environment Agency.

During further discussion on the flood risk to Norfolk from rising sea levels and development. Asher Minns said that developers and planners would need to respond to flood risk based on information that was held. In Havanna ground floor businesses were adapted to accommodate floods and be back in business within 24 hours. There was evidence there would be breaches of sea walls in Norfolk, and drainage of salt water and flooding into the Broads and river network. The Environmental Strategy Manager said that regarding the East Norwich development, there were good predictions of sea level rise. There were active discussions at county level and as part of the work of the Norfolk Climate Partnership regarding flood risk mapping to 2100 for the whole of Norfolk. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) required flood mitigation for the life of any building (50 years) and the risk was robustly protected by existing legislation.

During discussion on the "Twenty is Plenty" campaign, members considered that there needed to be better information available to drivers on the benefits of speed reduction and to extend zones across the city. Asher Minns commented on the importance of policies that were bottom-up and that considered that schools and particularly affected communities should be targeted. The reduction of speeds from 30mph to 20mph resulted in a 20 per cent decrease in particulates and a reduction in noise pollution. The barrier to an overall reduction in the city was also larger roads where there were heavy goods vehicles and higher speeds were permitted. It was considered that there was potential for the Norwich Climate Commission to request a student desk top study on the costs and impact of "Twenty is Plenty" and checking with the community what could be done to promote active travel.

Members commented on the Norwich Standard for housing to ensure that new developments were carbon zero and above the culminative standards and the minimum standard for sustainability and energy efficiency. Asher Minns said that the Cornwall Design Guidance for sustainable development passed the cost onto the developer. Members noted that local businesses were being approached regarding the retrofitting scheme to increase energy efficiency in council housing across the city.

General discussion ensued on air pollution, the predictions on increased mortality and health impacts, and the reduction of particulates. Asher Minns confirmed that

predictions were that the mortality rate from heat would be less than 20 by the year 2050. He advised members that particulates from exhaust fumes and brake dust from motorised vehicles had affected the whole planet, with particulates being found in the Antarctic. Health and wellbeing should be at the centre of environmental policies. Members noted that there had been a reduction in emissions in the UK since there had been less reliance on burning of fossil fuels and the closure of the coal mines. Local policies, including the city council's retrofitting programme and the implementation of energy saving measures, such as LED light bulbs, had made a difference. Norwich at times has higher pollution than London due to the location.

In reply to a question asking what was one of the most important things that could be done to address the climate and environment emergency, Asher Minns said that he would put environment right and centre of all policies and decisions; everything such as equality, income and sense of place fell off sustainability. He considered that everything should be looked at through an environmental lens.

Members commented on the work of the scrutiny committee on Air Pollution from Wood Burning (scrutiny committee 15 July 2021 and 9 September 2021), and noted that the council should consider introducing a smoke control area to prevent the use of wood burners, particularly as in most cases it was considered a life-style choice.

The panel also discussed food security in relation to climate and environment change and noted that agriculture was a large emitter of carbon emissions. Asher Minns commented that he had colleagues who were experts working on this on the changing patterns of weather and supply chains, and working to encourage net zero agriculture and food production. Agriculture was one of the largest emitters in the county. The soil in the Fens and much of the county was peat and released carbon when dry. Ideally it should be returned to wetlands to absorb carbon, some of the crops grown in the region such as sugar beet, were not the best use of prime agricultural land if it were to be resilient to climate and environment change, and food security. Members considered urban agriculture and the capacity of allotments to provide high yields. A member suggested that urban spaces should be reimaged as space currently taken up by roads could be used for urban agriculture. Asher Minns said that he did not consider that Norwich was more sensitive to food security than other areas. There was a lot that could be done to reduce food packaging and discussions needed to be held with companies with outlets in the area, which would reduce waste and the cost to the council to remove it. The city council could be an exemplar for surrounding district authorities.

Discussion ensued on the map showing the emissions on a ward-by-ward basis. Asher Minns explained that the wards showing as "blue" were those with the highest levels of deprivation and that Eaton's high emissions were related to the wealth of the residents. In reply to a member's question about reducing carbon emissions in Eaton, the Environmental Strategy Manager said that the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership had been awarded government funding study of the socio-economic barriers to retrofitting households across the county. It was widely recognised that the technology was available to reach targets. Each local authority had chosen a ward/division to provide further insight into the socio-economic barriers to retrofitting. The city council had selected Eaton and engagement would commence in the next couple of months.

RESOLVED to

- (1) thank Asher Minns for the presentation;
- (2) to invite Asher Minns back to a future meeting to present the findings of the fourth UK Climate Change Risk Assessment to the panel.

4. Global and Local Impacts of Climate and Biodiversity Change

The Environmental Strategy Manager gave the presentation and explained that it underpinned the formation of the council's forthcoming Environmental Emergency Response Programme (EERP), and set out its structure. He confirmed that the presentation reflected the council's agreed position on the various strategies. Since the adoption of the council's Environmental Strategy, the science and solutions had moved on so much in recent years, it provided a great foundation to work on, but a more detailed action plan was needed, taking into consideration the outcome of the carbon audit on the council's emissions. The EERP provided a comprehensive document which set out specific actions and milestones for delivering climate action strategies and plans for the council and city.

(The [presentation](#) is available on the council's website with the agenda papers for this meeting.)

During discussion, the Environmental Strategy Manager said that the first workstreams were to reduce carbon emissions work and confirmed that the adaptation and resilience strategy was informed by this work and would be included in the EERP. He assured members that work was going on around this as was usual with strategies in the two to three years before publication. There had been good work done on reducing emissions but not enough globally on adaptation. As an organisation the council would need to change the way it did things. The first principles should be how to reduce emissions and how the council could adapt. The second principle was around localism to see what the council could do within its influence to optimise what it could do in the city. On the matter of cost, it would take more work. The council has benefited from central government funding and whilst the numbers were low the experience had been useful to understand those costs.

A member commented on the difficulty that residents had accessing the EON funding for retrofitting and his concern that the standard of insulation was not sufficient and would need redoing in a few years' time. The Environmental Strategy Manager said that it would be unfair to use council tax funding for retrofitting privately owned homes. There was a lack of response from central government to support these schemes. The council could however signpost people to these grant schemes. The funding was often constrained by needing to be spent within a certain timeframe. One of the issues that the council noted that was there was a poor response to a targeted approach by residents because they could not believe that the scheme was free or left it too late to apply. Another barrier to uptake was that a whole house retrofit was required.

In reply to a question about ensuring that the council did not support the use of fossil fuels through its investments, the Environmental Strategy Manager said that under the council's Tier 3 emissions, the council's Procurement Strategy required those buying or selling services to the council or its capital investments share the council's values.

The Environmental Strategy Manager said that financing was a major barrier to retrofitting properties. The council had remained in touch with the Green Finance Institute, and he understood that there were mortgage providers considering offering a product to borrow against the house for retrofitting, which would be repaid when the house was sold. He said that he hoped that in a free-market economy that lenders would be prepared to provide funding for retrofitting. The post of Citywide Climate Change Action Plan coordinator was being appointed to ensure good practice and facilitate access to schemes.

In reply to a member's suggestion that those areas with low carbon emissions should be rewarded, the Environmental Strategy Manager said that in most cases this was due to deprivation. The council could target residents who could benefit from the grant system. The council had gained experience of retrofitting which could be applied more widely. A member commented that residents of private rented properties were excluded from schemes for owner occupiers or residents of social housing. Another member commented that private landlords who retrofitted their properties could benefit by its improvement. Members also noted that retrofitting was currently being considered by a scrutiny committee task and finish group.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank the Environmental Strategy Manager for the presentation;
- (2) note that members will be consulted on the Environmental Strategy Response Programme and the General Operations Climate Action Strategy and Plan at the next meeting.

CHAIR