

# **COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON**

### **THURSDAY, 30 MAY 2019**

**Councillors Present:** Adrian Abbs, Peter Argyle, Phil Barnett, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Graham Bridgman, Jeff Brooks, Jeff Cant, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Carlyne Culver, Lee Dillon, Lynne Doherty, Billy Drummond, Clive Hooker, Owen Jeffery, Rick Jones, Tony Linden, Royce Longton, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, Thomas Marino, David Marsh, Steve Masters, Geoff Mayes, Andy Moore, Graham Pask, Erik Pattenden, Claire Rowles, Garth Simpson, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart, Andrew Williamson, Keith Woodhams and Howard Woollaston

**Also Present:** Paul Anstey (Head of Public Protection and Culture), John Ashworth (Corporate Director - Environment), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Sarah Clarke (Head of Legal and Strategic Support), Tess Ethelston (Group Executive (Cons)), Olivia Lewis (Group Executive (Lib Dem)), Bryan Lyttle (Planning & Transport Policy Manager), Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)), Shiraz Sheikh (Principal Solicitor), Peta Stoddart-Crompton (Public Relations Officer) and Stephen Chard (Principal Policy Officer)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter, Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Jeremy Cottam, Councillor Gareth Hurley, Councillor Nassar Kessell, Councillor Alan Law, Councillor Martha Vickers and Councillor Tony Vickers

#### **PART I**

##### **23. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

##### **24. Council response to Climate Emergency Petition**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 3) which provided a response to the Climate Emergency petition containing 2,009 signatures which was submitted at the Executive meeting on 17 January 2019 by Councillor Steve Masters.

Prior to the discussion starting on this item the Chairman, Councillor Graham Pask, explained that in accordance with paragraph 1.4 (f) of Appendix C (Procedure Rules for Dealing with Representations) to Part 13 (Codes and Protocols) of the Constitution the procedure for dealing with this item would be that the petition organiser would have five minutes to introduce the petition and the petition would then be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. This time limit was specified in the Constitution and could not be extended during this meeting.

Councillor Pask continued by explaining that the Council had three options for dealing with petitions for debate:

1. To take the action the petition suggested;
2. Not to take the action for the reason(s) put forward in the debate; and
3. To commission a further investigation into the matter.

Members could propose one of the options which, if seconded, would be put to a vote. The vote on any proposal which had been seconded would take place at the end of the debate to ensure that Members could consider all comments prior to voting.

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Based on proportionality, the Conservative Group would be allocated eight of the 15 minutes, the Liberal Democrat Group six minutes and the Green Party one minute.

Councillor Pask concluded by drawing Members attention to the wording of the petition which was set out on the agenda:

*'We, the undersigned, petition the Council to Declare a Climate Emergency and work towards West Berkshire becoming net Zero Carbon by 2030*

*We call on the Council to declare a 'Climate Emergency' and:*

- 1. Pledge to make West Berkshire carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions;*
- 2. Ensure West Berkshire's economic leadership in the region continues by investing in renewable technologies and capitalising on the growth in renewable innovation;*
- 3. Call on Westminster to provide the powers and resources to make the 2030 target possible and work with other governments (both within the UK and internationally) to determine and implement best practice methods to limit Global Warming to less than 1.5;*
- 4. Continue to work with partners across West Berkshire and the wider region to deliver this new goal through all relevant strategies and plans;*
- 5. Provide an outline strategy by 1st June 2019 to ensure the transition to a zero carbon future by 2030 is initiated.'*

Councillor Pask invited Councillor Masters to introduce the petition.

Councillor Masters explained that when he started this petition in November 2018 there was a 12 year period to act decisively on climate change according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). He commented that it was unfortunate that it had taken five months for a debate and vote to be scheduled, however he thanked the new Council Leader for arranging for this to happen.

Councillor Masters continued by pointing out that the pressure applied by colleagues in the Green Party, the school strikers, and the Extinction Rebellion, had resulted in this debate tonight. He gave thanks to West Berkshire Green Exchange and West Berkshire Climate Action Network for the ideas that they had contributed to find ways to help solve this crisis.

Over the last few months the local media had highlighted that while the climate crisis is of global importance it is also very much a local issue. Councillor Masters explained that his research had revealed that West Berkshire had a woeful record for CO2 emissions compared to the rest of Berkshire, the south east and indeed the whole country. Opportunities to take action had been missed, and poor decisions had been made regarding public policy, transport and housing. This was not the fault of West Berkshire Council alone. For example, the requirement for all new homes to be zero carbon was axed thanks to the short-sightedness of the government.

If humanity was to survive on a global level, communities like West Berkshire needed to follow the example of the 59 other councils that had declared a climate emergency, including Conservative controlled councils, by showing leadership. A reducing in the carbon footprint would help to tackle the effects of climate change and improve people's lives with cleaner air, less congestion and improvements in health and wellbeing. This was an opportunity to change people's lives right now, as well as securing the future for our children and grandchildren. It was a 'win win'.

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So what challenges needed to be faced? The IPCC had warned that humanity had 12 years to take urgent action to prevent global warming from exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This figure was significant because scientists warned it was a tipping point - a point above which the effects of climate change accelerated, and humanity's ability to control them would be lost.

Humanity was already facing more frequent and intense floods and droughts, which would increase poverty and global migration as people leave areas of the planet where they could no longer survive. West Berkshire Council needed to wake up to the fact that this was not someone else's problem. Migration, food shortages and rising sea levels would affect this country. Councillor Masters believed all present could agree that something needed to be done.

Action by other councils across the country showed that there was a growing will to reduce the level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at a local level when national targets were not being met. This petition urged West Berkshire Council to take the same decisive action and embrace the ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.

There was insufficient action locally around sustainable transport, investment in renewable energy, local food production and sequestration of CO<sub>2</sub>. Taking action on these issues would help to reduce West Berkshire's carbon footprint and tackle health and social inequalities.

There were also economic opportunities for West Berkshire if there was support, and investment in, renewable energy. Imagination could be given to generating income through hydro, solar and wind power, Greenham Business Park could have a sustainable energy research and development centre of excellence, Newbury College could be training the next generation of engineering apprentices for these companies, thereby encouraging young people to stay in the area as the population aged and care needs increased. The Council's needs and aspirations were linked and could be solved through bold choices and imaginative plans. So in closing, Councillor Masters urged the Council to listen to the people of West Berkshire.

Councillor Masters proposed that the assembled Members vote on this tonight, that West Berkshire should declare a climate emergency and pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030. The Council should establish a working party of Councillors and Officers in June 2019 to begin work on a comprehensive and joined-up strategy to achieve this objective, in partnership with businesses and the community with a cross party motion to confirm this commitment at the next full Council meeting.

Councillor James Cole gave thanks for the petition. He agreed that West Berkshire Council should declare a climate emergency as there were many good reasons to do so as made clear by the Paris Agreement. This included rising global temperatures.

However, the petition as submitted could not be accepted in practical terms. For example, it would not be possible to provide an outline strategy by 1 June 2019. Regardless of this point, Councillor James Cole reiterated that the Council should set an example by declaring a climate emergency and would not hide behind a technicality. The action of a single local authority could make a difference on what was a cross-party issue.

Councillor James Cole continued by explaining that work had already started and this would be outlined by other Members. The Council would work towards the 2030 deadline, but there was a need to prioritise the actions taken. These actions to help address future needs would need to be balanced with the needs of today, particularly for West Berkshire's children and older people.

**MOTION:** Proposed by Councillor James Cole and seconded by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

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That the Council:

“Commission a further investigation into the matter that would be undertaken by a cross-party group of Members. This group would be charged with forming a Motion for consideration at the next Council meeting on 2 July 2019”.

Councillor Carolyne Culver wished to put forward a counter-proposal. She felt that the Council should declare a climate emergency at this meeting and pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030. The technicality of the June 2019 date should be ignored. There should be no further delay when considering that the petition was submitted in January 2019. This would enable the working group to move forward without delay.

Sarah Clarke, Head of Legal and Strategic Support, explained that the proposal of Councillor James Cole, seconded by Councillor Abbs, needed to be disposed of first.

Councillor Lee Dillon stated that he supported the aims of this petition 100%. He added his thanks to residents for their involvement in bringing forward this highly important issue.

He commented that it was a shame that there was only 15 minutes in which to debate the item when considering the level of public interest. However, he acknowledged that this was restricted by the Constitution.

As stated, Councillor Dillon supported the proposal, but there was not sufficient time at this meeting to do it justice and resolve a Motion. He agreed with forming a working group, which involved the necessary parties, to discuss ways forward in greater detail and to propose a Motion. Any Members with a specialist knowledge should be involved in what would need to be an ongoing debate.

Once a Motion had been agreed by Council, an action plan would need to be formed and this should involve local communities. A joint cross-party approach would send a clearer message to the Government of the importance given to this issue in West Berkshire.

Councillor Dillon concluded by making the point that between the time his parents were born in the 1950s and by the time his children reached retirement age, temperatures would see a 4°C increase if nothing changed in that time.

Councillor Dillon stated that he would vote in favour of becoming carbon neutral and this would be supported by the Liberal Democrat Group.

Councillor Adrian Abbs commented that he was particularly pleased to have been elected at this time as there was this chance at taking action on climate change.

While the wording of the petition did not allow the Council to declare an emergency tonight, the principals were supported. The Liberal Democrats were eager for real action to be taken and Members would work cross party to try and ensure that happened. As action was the really important thing, Councillor Abbs listed seven examples of activity that could be undertaken without delay:

- 1) Provide schemes to ensure 100% of residents and businesses used the most efficient lighting sources.
- 2) Continue to push the insulation approach, which West Berkshire was doing anyway.
- 3) Deployment of money saving power generation solutions based on alternative energy that could offset the power still consumed at Council properties.
- 4) Encourage residents and businesses to use Green Tariff Energy packages negotiated by West Berkshire that saved them money and provided energy with Carbon offset included.
- 5) Ensure all new homes included alternative energy generation sources.
- 6) Install electric vehicle charging points powered by alternative energy.

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7) Ensure any road plans maximised flow of traffic to reduce emissions.

This could all form part of a strategic way forward for West Berkshire and Government funding should be sought for its delivery. Liberal Democrat Members looked forward to action being taken during the coming years.

Councillor Richard Somner raised the importance, alongside acknowledging the concerns raised and accepting the need and desire for action, of taking the time to recognise the positive actions here in West Berkshire – whether they had been achieved already or were in progress, and whether they were in Isolation within this organisation or in partnership.

West Berkshire Council recycled or composted over 51% (51.8%) of residents' household waste. 84% of household waste was diverted away from landfill. The Council continued to take advice and guidance in this area for the future.

Changes in transport behaviours were being made through car clubs, electric vehicle charging points, improved cycling facilities at four of West Berkshire's railway stations and a reduction was being sought in queuing traffic on West Berkshire's roads to reduce issues from idling vehicles.

Funding bids had seen improvements in West Berkshire's highways network, park and rail facilities in Theale Station, Theale and Newbury stations with more to come, and improvements to the National Cycle Network Route 422 between Newbury and Ascot.

Strategies pushing for improved air quality were an integral requirement in many of the Council's policies and strategies. West Berkshire Council's Freight Strategy aimed to route Heavy Goods Vehicles away from Newbury unless they were loading or unloading. The Council was noted as being ahead of the game for its Sustainable Drainage Strategy.

The Council already had solar panels on the roof of the Market Street Council Offices with plans to extend this to other Council buildings. The Council would be participating in the Clean Air Day on 20 June 2019 and Councillors would see more information on how they could contribute in the coming weeks.

Partnership working was a vital factor in all of these matters, in particular the work undertaken across the Public Protection Partnership. Lobbying was also key, electrification to Newbury Station had only been achieved through lobbying.

Our local MP Richard Benyon had raised a petition for the UK to host the UN Climate Change Conference in November 2020. Councillor Somner urged all Members to support that petition, and to extend that to their friends, family and colleagues. There was no age limit, so children could take part and this was not a party political campaign.

Members; the Council's work, and aim to review, monitor and improve capabilities had been ongoing and continued to take place – those mentioned were just a snapshot.

Councillor Culver reiterated the point made by Councillor Masters that there was a 12 year period, set by Government, to act decisively on climate change. A climate emergency should be declared and not delayed by restrictions in the Constitution, particularly when considering that the petition was submitted in January 2019. Agreement had been given in principal by both Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups, and Councillor Culver remained of the view that a climate emergency should be declared at this meeting. She also highlighted the point that three Green Party Members had been elected in the District Council Elections and she felt this gave evidence of the strong public support to take action on improving the environment.

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Councillor Lynne Doherty commented how refreshing it was to see such a broad sense of agreement on this proposed direction of travel and in following the recommendations within the Climate Emergency Petition. She thanked Councillor Masters for bringing it forward.

Councillor Doherty explained that she was willing to declare a Climate Emergency, work toward a 2030 target for zero carbon emissions and use the Council's influence to lobby Central Government. There was acknowledgement that much had been done already in the local area and the Council had been proactive in its actions, as highlighted by Councillor Somner. Positive actions would continue to be taken.

However, the wording of the petition, as it currently stood, meant it could not be accepted as the Council could not commit to having a Strategy by 1 June 2019. She understood the frustrations raised that a climate emergency could not be declared at this meeting, but it was also the case that the Council was unable to 'pledge' on an area that was not all within the Council's control and it was uncertain who was included within the term 'economic leadership'.

Councillor Doherty did however propose to take the other option open to the Council to commission a further investigation into matter and was happy to work cross party to provide a suitable Motion based on the key points of this petition and the Motion submitted by Councillor Jeanette Clifford and agreed by this Council in March 2019. Such a Motion should be brought before Council at the next meeting in July 2019.

Councillor Doherty accepted and welcomed the leadership role that all Members had to play in protecting the environment for future generations, and while it might be necessary to wait to formally ratify such a motion until July, she did not believe that the Council could not also take some action in the meantime and added her view that the wait until July would not delay any actions.

In the short term, Councillor Doherty had, as requested, already created a Portfolio Holder responsibility for the Environment. She had also met with the young climate strike protesters and while she did not support their strike action, she was willing to assist them in forming a Youth Climate Panel that would be able to actively participate in decision making here in West Berkshire. Councillor Doherty would also support their efforts to raise awareness through an active media campaign highlighting to West Berkshire's residents the actions they too could take to work towards a target of zero emissions. The Council would look at how best to coordinate activities and encourage participation of all schools in West Berkshire.

In the longer term, there would be a requirement for all papers considered within this Council to include impact considerations on the environment and support would be given to holding an event, involving all interested parties, that would make recommendations to a newly formed Environment Board in the autumn of this year.

The Council had a good track record in protecting and enhancing the environment, and needed to work together as enablers to ensure that everyone could work towards the same environmental goals while maintaining a thriving local economy and protecting the interests of all of our residents.

Councillor Graham Pask returned to the proposal for the Council to commission a further investigation into the matter that would be undertaken by a cross-party group of Members. This group would be required to report back, at least with its initial findings, to the next Council meeting on 2 July 2019.

Councillor David Marsh was of the view that a vote should be taken on declaring a climate emergency at this meeting. He felt this could be added to the proposal made by

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Councillor James Cole which he supported. However, the need for immediate action should also be expressed.

Sarah Clarke restated the point made earlier that the Council only had three options to choose from. The Council had to consider the full petition wording before them and agree a proposal based on that. The seconded proposal of Councillor James Cole needed to be disposed of first. If that was not carried then an alternative proposal would be sought. However, a vote covering only an aspect of the petition was not permissible.

Councillor Marsh stated the view that the Constitution should be amended to enable petitions to be debated for longer than 15 minutes. He felt that the Governance and Ethics Committee should be asked to extend this timeframe and update the relevant sections of the Constitution. Sarah Clarke explained that such a proposal could be put to the Governance and Ethics Committee for consideration.

Councillor Pask made the point that this subject would return to the next Council meeting when a good deal more time could be given to the debate. There was not time to fully debate the petition at this meeting.

The Motion, proposed by Councillor James Cole and seconded by Councillor Adrian Abbs, was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

*(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 7.40pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....