

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY GROUP OPEN FORUM

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
MONDAY 22 JULY 2024**

Councillors Present: Stuart Gourley (Chairman), Nick Carter, Carlyne Culver, Paul Kander, Geoff Mayes and Martha Vickers

Also Present: Kofi Adu-Gyamfi (Service Lead - Climate Change) and Jenny Graham (Environment Delivery Manager), Elise Kinderman (Team Leader – Development and Planning), Ben Ryan (Clerk/Zoom Host), Jo Watt (Environment Delivery Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Richard Somner and Councillor Vicky Poole

PART I

11 Election of a Vice-Chairman for 2024-25 Municipal Year

Councillor Richard Somner was elected as Vice-Chairman for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

12 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Vicky Poole, and Richard Somner

13 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Gourley declared an interest, he was employed by the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), but as the Environment Advisory Group was not a decision-making body, he determined he would stay for the meeting.

14 Minutes of the Previous Meeting on 21 May 2024

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true and accurate record.

15 Business Decarbonisation Highlight: AWE Nuclear Security Technologies - Piran Borlase-Hendry (Biodiversity & Heritage Specialist)

Piran Borlase-Hendry (Biodiversity & Heritage Specialist) gave presentation on Nature Recovery at AWE:

- AWE's Environment, Social & Governance Framework
- Environmental Sustainability Strategy Themes
- Policy Background (Greening Government Commitments, Biodiversity Net Gain, National Policy Planning Framework)
- Targets and Areas of Focus
- Achievements so far

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- Next steps

Piran Borlase-Hendry was asked a number of questions and responded as follows:

- There was scope to extend surveys into invertebrates, plants, and fungi to increase understanding
- Staff engagement had been positive, some resources were unable to be used such as the explosives area.
- AWE would update environment targets in line with the Greening Government Commitments
- He would relay to AWE about starting conversation regarding infrastructure plans, and potential involvement in the Local Parish Climate Forum and Rural Business Forum.
- There was a large flood capture scheme near the Burghfield site, which should help to manage flooding.
- Where trees fell down and regenerated naturally, they would not be interfered with as long as they were away from fence lines, roads, and pathways.
- Silver birch trees would slowly regenerate alongside the pine trees to provide a good natural habitat with dead wood on the ground.
- Burghfield had rewilding with an Orchard towards Goring Lane.

Councillor Culver suggested emulating the Rural Business Forum and Parish Climate Forum structure for businesses.

16 **Sustainability Innovations in Building Construction - Ian Pritchett (Growth and Innovation Director - Greencore Homes)**

Ian Pritchett (Growth and Innovation Director – Greencore Homes) gave a presentation on Sustainability innovations in building construction:

- Carbon budgets and targets
- Embodied Carbon
- The journey so far
- Purpose and vision
- What is better than a Net Zero home?
- Sustainability targets
- The place around the homes
- The secret formula
- Carbon savings

Members asked a number of questions, and Ian Pritchett responded as follows:

- Best practice was shared through Bio Regional and Passive House Institute and the Good Homes Alliance.
- Greencore Homes would be prepared to work as contractors, partners, or developers.
- Other Councils' local plans had input from Bioregional and included embodied carbon, which could provide a roadmap for West Berkshire Council's next steps.

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- The industry was slow to change and spent a significant amount of resources resisting change rather than embracing it.
- Greencore Homes had finished a Community Land Trust Project in North Oxfordshire and would start on a site outside Didcot which would be easier to visit in the near future.
- Insulation materials contained either natural or man-made treatments that discouraged rodents eating them. The hemp was mixed with lime to discourage insects and vermin, the wood fibre contained boron salts, and the timber was treated with preservative.
- Low cement concrete was still used.
- Zero emissions cement was being developed and would be on the market soon.
- Greencore was not building higher than three stories but had projects that would be five or six stories. The cut off was 18 metres because of safety and fire legislation. Developments over 18 metres became disproportionately difficult.
- The cost of construction against a brick-built house was slightly more, but considered against the market set purchase price, there was no tangible difference between a house that used very little energy and one that used a lot of energy. House prices tended to be linked to size and location and could change over time.
- Compared to Taylor Wimpey, the carbon saving from a house built by Greencore would be nearly 300 tonnes over a 30-year period. Compared to a business it would be closer to 200 tonnes.
- A house could be produced with a lot of synthetic insulation which would increase its embodied carbon at the construction stage but would reduce its energy requirement during its life. The aim would be to focus on both to get embodied carbon as low as possible and operational emissions as low as possible.
- Greencore Homes stayed competitive by looking for land from landowners who had an agenda to be more environmentally friendly. While land could be bought on the open market, competing against developers who were building conventionally and cheaply was challenging. Working with the right landowners was step one, having a smaller profit margin was step two, selling to people who appreciate the net zero homes and housing associations who would be interested in an increased initial purchase price in return for lower running costs.
- Ian Pritchett suggested that there would be a green premium, and Greencore Homes was invested in demonstrating that
- It was possible to build Net Zero homes as low-cost affordable housing and was a big market for Greencore Homes.
- There was scalability in the plan for 1000 homes a year, at which point build costs would be more competitive.
- There were a number of limiting factors such as, access to land which was dominated by PLC house builders, landowners wanted a good profit margin, planning systems were overbearing with slow decision making, planning policy was out of date, funding, workforce, skills, training, education, stable economy and policies.

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- Bigger construction companies had a set building model, which rewarded shareholders, and a change to their building model would be a risk to their business.
- Greencore Homes wanted local councils to lead by example, with development projects, set the environmental bar high.

Emily Ashton-Jelley stated that embodied carbon had been investigated but was not deemed feasible to take forward at that stage, the policy focussed on regulated and unregulated energy only.

Resolved: Councillor Gourley to discuss with Planning Officer opportunities West Berkshire Council as a landowner had to set the environmental benchmark high.

17 **WBC Environment Strategy Refresh - Jenny Graham (WBC Environment Delivery Manager)**

Jenny Graham (WBC Environment Delivery Manager) gave an update on the following topics:

- The drivers for refreshing the Environment Strategy
- Key elements that a refreshed strategy will include
- Proposed timescales for approving a refreshed strategy
- Explaining the approach taken so far to refresh the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan

Members asked a number of questions, and Jenny Graham gave the following responses:

- Regarding the Green and Blue Infrastructure Framework, it was still on the plan, and some work had been completed on it.
- AWE was a good example of businesses that have gone through the planning system, the Council had worked with them on travel planning.
- There was an amended approach to travel planning for housing developments, developers were given an option of providing funding to the council for the Council to deliver travel planning measures for those residents.
- There was an investigation into possible sites for a secure cycle hub around Newbury town centre.

Resolved: Jenny Graham to investigate discussions regarding secure cycle hub in Newbury town centre and relay back to Councillor Vickers.

18 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would take place on 30 September 2024.

19 **Any Other Business**

No items were discussed under any other business

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(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 7.03 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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