

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 11th April, 2024

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks,
T. Brooks, Collins, M. Donnelly, D. Douglas,
McCabe, McKeown, Smyth and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the High Sheriff, Councillor S. Douglas and Councillors Carson and McAteer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th March were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Climate and Nature Action: A Vision for the Connswater Community Greenway [Presentation - Jacqueline O'Hagan from EastSide Greenways]

The Committee was advised that Ms. J. O'Hagan from Eastside Greenways was in attendance to provide a presentation and she was welcomed to the meeting by the Chairperson.

Ms. O'Hagan outlined the role of Eastway Greenways as a subsidiary of Eastside Partnership. She provided an overview of the areas covered and the status of the Greenway and rivers pre-development and the achievements and outcomes following regeneration.

She advised that the Greenway had been completed in 2017 and a strategic partnership entered into with the Council to co-manage the Greenway. She stated that the aim now was to maximise the potential of the Connswater Community Greenway as a catalyst for the ongoing physical, social and economic regeneration of East Belfast.

Following a consultation and engagement exercise, a report was produced with seven recommendations such as: to eliminate emissions through a modal shift, network expansion, energy saving and energy generation; to capture carbon through wetland expansion, tree

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planting and soil improvement; strengthen resilience with a planting strategy, flood management and greenway neighbourhoods; and to build biodiversity by undertaking habitat surveys. It also included raising awareness by holding events, producing signage and artworks; to nurture research through testing and developing; and sustain activity by maintaining/growing capacity of local skills.

She concluded by stating that the idea of the vision was for partnership working and to bring people together who were working in these areas.

Ms. O'Hagan then answered a number of questions from the Members, following which the Chairperson thanked her for the presentation and she left the meeting.

Noted.

**Belfast Festival of Learning week
22-27 April – theme 'Our Planet'**

The Members were reminded that Belfast had joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2018 in recognition of the City's commitment to promoting and encouraging lifelong learning for people of all ages. Within The Belfast Agenda, the Council had a vision that the city should be a great place for everyone to live and providing lifelong learning opportunities is a core part of this. Learning has the potential to transform lives for the better- it can build better relationships and help enhance quality of life for everyone in the city.

Belfast had been awarded a UNESCO Learning Cities Award for outstanding learning in 2021. Whilst Belfast continued to play its role as a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities as well as a member of an All-Island Network of Learning Cities, it was felt there was a real opportunity to build on Belfast's Learning City status and to bring city stakeholders together to reenergise our focus and maximise the opportunities presented. It was important to recognise that it was not about creating new initiatives but rather connecting and enhancing existing programmes and initiatives as well as aligning policy ambitions across multiple partners. A Learning Cities Leadership Group currently existed and comprised representatives from QUB, UU, BMET, BHSCT, PHA, Education Authority, Libraries NI, community partners and the Council.

Festival Learning Week (22nd-27th April 2024)

A key focus of the annual programme of work had been a 'Festival of Learning' which was a week-long programme of free interactive and engaging events. The festival showcased the range of learning opportunities that already existed in Belfast. Council officers had worked closely with community partners to develop an inclusive programme of citywide learning events to take place as part of a week-long festival of activity from 22nd April till 27th April 2024.

Given the significance of the climate challenges facing the city the theme for this year's Festival of Learning Week was '**Our Planet: Climate Action**'. The festival would deliver free events across the city which promoted citizen awareness of, and engagement in initiatives focusing on lifelong learning in the context of the local and global climate emergency. This would align with the focus of the UNESCO's 6th Annual Conference on Learning Cities (2024) which was 'Learning Cities at the forefront of climate action'.

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Funding of £10K had been secured through the Public Health Agency in support of the delivery of the Belfast Festival of Learning. An additional £10k match funding from Council had been agreed through the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and funded through available in-year budgets within City and Organisational Strategy.

A meeting had been scheduled with the Director of Communications and Public Relations UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning on 12 April to discuss further opportunities to build on the opportunities for lifelong learning with Council Officers.

The Committee:

- i) Noted the planned Belfast Festival of Learning launch event on Monday 22nd April 2024 (recognised worldwide as Earth Day), 11am-1pm in 2 Royal Avenue and consider attendance;
- ii) Agreed to help raise awareness of the week-long programme of free events which are available during the Belfast Festival of Learning Week (22nd April – 27th April 2024); and
- iii) Noted that the focus of this year's Belfast Festival of Learning will be 'Our Planet: Climate Action'.

Local Area Energy Plan (LEAP)

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- I. To present the draft Local Energy Action Plan (LAEP) and Queen's Island Decarbonisation Plan to elected members.**
- II. Note the contents of the reports and the proposed outline priority decarbonisation projects (domestic retrofit, heat network, solar PV on public buildings, solar car port with EV charging and oil boiler to heat pump transition) and near-term actions to progress the LAEP and the two modelled scenarios for Queen's Island (a Heat network and Solar Photovoltaic Carports.**
- III. Note that the 'Belfast Net Zero pathfinder' project provides the funding to enable BCC to immediately progress the LAEP and the Queen's Island Decarbonisation Plan by developing two of the priority projects identified in these plans: 1) heat network, and 2) a solar PV project.**
- IV. Note that the Climate Team are currently working with Climate NI to develop a proposal to secure up to €120k**

from a new funding programme Pathways2Resilience which has become available through Horizon Europe to support the development of climate adaptation and resilience for the city.

- V. An update will be brought back to elected members in due course.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Give approval to:

- I. establish a LAEP delivery group to support the delivery of decarbonisation projects across the city;
- II. establish a community of practice to ensure that the data generated by the modelling is fully utilised by key stakeholders across the City (eg QUB and UU).

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

A place-specific approach to delivery is critical to achieving a timely and cost-effective Net Zero as each place has its own unique geographical, socio-economic features and challenges. For example, Belfast's dependence on imported fossil fuels - gas and oil to heat buildings and on petrol and diesel for virtually all its transport needs means that we spend over £300m on energy across the city every year – set to rise to c.£466 million per year or more in 2050. Belfast also has unique geographical features including access to the sea and 10km of waterfront as well as being located over a porous aquifer with Sherwood Sandstone which has above ambient temperatures which could be used to support low carbon infrastructure.

- 3.2 A Local Energy Action Plan (LAEP) assesses the unique characteristics of Belfast as part of the net zero transition and uses place-based data and network system modelling to identify the most cost effective and impactful pathway to achieving net zero for the city.

- 3.3 The Energy Systems Catapult (ESC) were appointed in February 2023 to develop a LAEP for the Belfast area while also providing an Energy Decarbonisation Plan specifically for the Innovation District of Queens Island. This is a foundational piece of work for Belfast to help attract external funding and investment into the city and will feed into the wider business case for potential LAEP roll out across Northern Ireland.

3.4 The LAEP approach was developed by ESC to provide decision-makers with the detailed information needed to support informed investment decisions that enable a cost-effective transition to Net Zero.

3.5 The approach uses whole system modelling with local stakeholder knowledge to deliver a comprehensive, data-driven and cost-effective plan for decarbonisation based on the unique characteristics of Belfast's buildings, transport systems, local industry, energy generation and distribution assets, geographic and spatial constraints, and social factors including fuel poverty.

3.6 The process brings together the public and politicians, businesses and regulators, energy networks and local authorities, to help towns and cities decarbonise their energy systems on the path to Net Zero.

3.7 **Objective**

The overall objective was to develop a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) for the city of Belfast and a Decarbonisation plan for part of the Innovation District, Queens Island with two intended outcomes:

- A facilitated, collaborative and coordinated transition towards becoming carbon neutral by 2050 with the plans and actions of stakeholders contributing towards a collective goal; and
- an optimised, cost-effective, transparent and evidence-based pathway to achieving the target.

3.8 **Key outputs**

The draft LAEP (attached at Appendix 1) includes the following key outputs:

1. *The Pathway* sequencing all of the interventions within the LAEP that set out the area's proposed route to net zero including near-term and long-term components;
2. A '*plan on a page*' illustrating focus zones, priority actions, and areas of energy network change;
3. *Visual focus zones* for all the prioritised activity associated with the main components of the proposed energy system;
4. *Five outline priority projects* to take forward;

5. *Breakdown of investment* to decarbonise the local area aligned to the main energy system components; and
 6. *Next steps* - near-term activities and actions needed to progress the LAEP.
- 3.9 The outputs will determine network system choices, the level of investment required to transition to a net zero energy system, high level project identification and required policy changes.
- 3.10 The decarbonisation plan is a whole energy system approach to considering how Queens Island can achieve Net Zero over time eliminating the use of fossil fuels on site and replacing with a decarbonised alternative, while also considering the knock-on impacts on the other systems in place. The draft LAEP and the Decarbonisation Plan for Queens Island (Appendix 2) have been presented to the local energy consortium highlighting the most effective pathways to achieve decarbonisation in the city, accounting for the local development and growth plans.

3.11 Local energy consortium

The work took place over one year and involved a diverse group of stakeholders in the city's energy system with oversight from a Steering group comprising: BCC, NIE, SONI, Phoenix Energy, NIHE, NIGS, the Federation of Master Builders, NI Water, Consumer Council, DFE and DAERA.

3.12 LAEP outline priority projects

Through a combination of modelling and wider factor analysis with local stakeholders, five outline priority projects were identified for near term implementation. These projects were proposed on the basis of delivering a significant impact against Belfast decarbonisation ambitions. These include:

- a High Temperature District Heat Network in City Centre which aims to connect multiple anchor loads from public buildings during phase 1, then connecting to domestic buildings in phase 2;
- a Domestic Retrofit pilot that targets a mixed tenure, low-income area with EPC ratings D-G;
- a Solar PV on Public Buildings project providing a total of no less than 1MWp of renewable electricity for local consumption;
- Solar Car Port with EV Charging;

- an Oil to Low Carbon Heating Transition project that seeks to replace existing oil heating in domestic and non-domestic buildings with low carbon heating technologies such as heat pumps.

3.13 Modelled Scenarios for Queen’s Island Decarbonisation Plan

- Heat network (Belfast Met, Citi Gateway, Titanic Belfast, PRONI, Titanic Hotel)
- Solar Photovoltaic Carports (Odyssey and Catalyst)

3.14 Next steps

The ‘Belfast Net Zero pathfinder’ project will develop two of the priority projects identified in these plans: 1) heat network, and 2) a solar PV project. The project is funded by Innovate UK and will run for one year from 1st June. See Appendix 3 for more information. The Climate Team will also establish:

- a LAEP Delivery group to maintain momentum, commitment and collaboration around delivering the LAEP; and
- a community of practice to ensure that the data generated by the modelling is fully utilised by key stakeholders across the City (eg QUB and UU).

3.15 A report will be brought back to update elected members in due course.

3.16 Funding Opportunity

A new funding programme has become available through Horizon Europe that will help support the development of climate adaptation and resilience for the city. The Pathways2Resilience project is run by Horizon Europe and aims to increase the resilience of European regions and communities.

3.17 The programme seeks to empower regions and communities through systems innovation and capacity building towards climate resilience and can provide up to €120k to each participating region to co-design a vision of a climate resilience future and innovation to ensure long term impact.

3.18 This current call which closes on 6th May aims to support 40 regions across Europe throughout 2024 and 2025. Applying for this call will provide access to networks, learning and capacity to help progress climate adaptation planning for the city, which is in

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line with the Northern Ireland Climate Adaptation Plan which is entering its third cycle.

- 3.19** The Climate Team is currently engaging with Climate NI and DAERA on the role of local councils and Pathways2Resilience will provide more support to build more resources and capacity for this work if successful in securing funding. The Climate Team are currently working with Climate NI to develop a proposal to the fund. A further update will be brought back to elected members in due course.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.20** The funding (£150K) secured from Innovate UK will be used to progress two of the outline priority projects.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.21** There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.”

The Committee agreed to:

- I. establish a LAEP delivery group to support the delivery of decarbonisation projects across the city;
- II. establish a community of practice to ensure that the data generated by the modelling is fully utilised by key stakeholders across the City (eg QUB and UU); and
- III. to invite representatives from Edinburgh City Council to present to a future meeting of the Committee on their experience in the development of Saughton Park as a model for the production of green energy, including their development of geo-thermal energy as part of their green energy mix.

Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to update Committee on the progress of all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which the Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Climate and City Resilience Committee:

- Note the updates to all Notices of Motions and Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for and
- Agree to the closure of Issues' Raised in Advance 277, 278, 316 and 324 as referenced in Appendix 1 and paragraph 3.4 below.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 At Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 25th October 2019, the following Notice of Motion was agreed:

“That this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting, detailing the following:

- 1. Date received**
- 2. Notice of motion title**
- 3. Submitted by which Councillor**
- 4. Council meeting date**
- 5. Committee motion is referred to**
- 6. Outcome of committee where Notice of Motion will be debated**
- 7. Month it will be reported back to committee**
- 8. Other action to be taken.”**

3.2 Following a review exercise, a new database containing all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance at Committee was created and quarterly reporting to Committee commenced in March 2021.

Appendix 1 is the latest quarterly update showing all active Notices of Motions and Issues Raised in Advance which the Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for.

3.3 Closure of Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance

At Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th November 2020, it was agreed that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:

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- Notices of Motion which contained an action(s) that has been completed; and
- Notices of Motion have become Council policy.

3.4 The Climate and City Resilience Committee are asked to agree that the Issues' Raised in Advance as outlined below are now closed:

Category 1 Recommended Closures:

- ***New Ireland Forum and Citizens' Assemblies (Ref 278) -***
This Issue Raised in Advance called on the Council to write again to the Taoiseach's office regarding the establishment of a New Ireland Forum for the 21st Century, alongside a series of comprehensive Citizens' Assemblies, to examine the practical, social and economic aspects of a New Ireland. The Council wrote again to the Taoiseach Office on 23 January 2023 and as of yet no reply has been received. Therefore it is recommended that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed.
- ***Felling of trees in Orangefield Park (Ref 316) –*** This Issue Raised in Advance relates to the felling of approximately one hundred and seventy trees in Orangefield Park by contractors, acting on behalf of N.I.E. The Member requested to be furnished with information on the circumstances surrounding the decision to fell the trees, the agreement which was in place between the Council and N.I.E., the cost of the tree restoration programme and what legal redress the Council might have in the matter. At the Dec 23 Committee an update was provided by the Neighbourhood Services Manager on learning from the incident and changes to working practices associated with the tree cutting undertaken by contractors, working on behalf of NIE. Therefore it is recommended that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed.
- ***Proposed agenda items for future meetings (Ref 324) –***
This Issue Raised in Advance requested that consideration be given to the inclusion of four agenda items for discussion at suitable future dates. Two of the four themed presentations requested (Passivhouse and Embedded Carbon) were included in the Dec 23 Climate and City Resilience Committee. The other two items requested relate to active travel which is covered by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee. Therefore it is recommended that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed.

Category 2 Recommended Closures:

- ***Energy Efficiency Education Programme for Citizens (Ref 277)*** – This Issue Raised in Advance made a recommendation that Belfast City Council should develop an energy efficiency campaign to educate and inform citizens around how to conserve energy use and attempt to reduce the financial pressures households will face, working alongside relevant partners in both government and the community sector. In 2022 an Energy Efficiency Campaign was run through the Community Planning team, producing advice materials, delivered in a targeted manner through community services, advice centres and outreach teams. A similar approach was taken during the 23/24 winter period, including energy efficiency guidance and tips being included in the 2023/2024 ‘Cost-of-Living Support Guide’. This work will be reviewed with the aim of developing resources that can be delivered on an ongoing basis and in a targeted manner. Therefore it is now recommended that this Issue Raise in Advance is now closed.

3.5 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no additional financial implications associated with this report.

**3.6 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.”

The Committee noted the updates to all Notices of Motions and Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for and agreed to the closure of Issues’ Raised in Advance 277, 316 and 324 as referenced in Appendix 1 of the Notice of Motion Database.

The Committee agreed that the New Ireland Forum and Citizens’ Assemblies (Ref 278) be retained in the Notices of Motion and Issues’ Raised in Advance Database and that a further letter be sent to the newly appointed Taoiseach, Simon Harris TD, regarding the establishment of a New Ireland Forum for the 21st Century, alongside a series of comprehensive Citizens’ Assemblies, to examine the practical, social and economic aspects of a New Ireland.

Chairperson