

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 7th December, 2023

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

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

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Ms. C. Shortt, Monitoring, Learning and Reporting Officer;
Ms. B. Roddy, Project Support Officer – Climate;
Mrs. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. M. Quigley, Adaptation and Resilience Advisor;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Long.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th November, 2023 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported

Variation to Minutes

The Committee noted the following variation to the minutes of 9th November, 2023 under the heading:

Kerbside EV Proposal

The representatives from BT Openreach agreed also to undertake to work with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) with regard to the design and/or evaluation of the technical trial.

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Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership

The Committee agreed to the allocation of £30,000 from within the City and Organisational Strategy Budget to develop a food strategy including a comprehensive city-wide and communication plan as part of the Council's food strategy and vision.

Embodied Carbon - Reimagining Construction
[Presentation - Dr Siobhan Cox,
Senior Lecturer School of Natural and
Built Environment, Queens University]

Dr Cox attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.

The Committee was provided with an overview of embodied carbon in the context of the construction of buildings. Dr Cox reported that embodied carbon was used from the extraction of materials, operation and refurbishment of buildings culminating in the end of life and demolition process.

The Members were provided with a timeline in connection with each stage of a building's life cycle, including details of the carbon emissions associated with each stage of that process. The Committee was informed that embodied carbon represents approximately fifty percent of the total carbon associated with the life cycle of a building and that globally embodied carbon represents approximately eleven per cent of greenhouse gas emissions associated with new construction.

Dr Cox reported that the World Green Building Council suggested that by 2030, new buildings, infrastructure and renovations to buildings will have approximately forty per cent less embodied carbon with significant up-front carbon reduction and that all new buildings would be required to have net-zero operational carbon.

The Members were informed that currently there were numerous methods used to measure embodied carbon stating that the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) had set out a detailed methodology to calculate whole life carbon from the early design stage through to the project design and project completion. Dr Cox reported that the built environment data base was being used to collect data on carbon emissions and stated that professional bodies were being requested to use the database to estimate the carbon produced in connection with potential development projects and for that data to be shared with other professionals to heighten awareness around embodied carbon.

The Committee was informed that embodied carbon targets were being put in place across Europe to evaluate and reduce embodied carbon. Dr Cox reported that there are a number of targets that could be considered which are targeted at different parts of the building. She stated that it was ambition for buildings to reach an A++ rating by 2050.

Dr Cox emphasised the importance attached to measurement in regard to embodied carbon and the increased use made of recycled materials in the construction process. She referred also to the opportunity to re-purpose existing buildings and of the need to optimise the design of buildings in reducing embodied carbon.

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The Committee was provided with opportunities for the Council to show leadership in this field. Dr Cox referred to the current committed capital programme currently £300 million and the possibilities to calculate and set targets for its embodied carbon production. She referred to opportunities to substitute timber for steel and make use of less virgin materials. The Belfast Stories project was highlighted as a possible development proposal which could be considered for its embodied carbon assessment.

A further area for consideration was the current building control regulation and Council planning policy manifesting in the Belfast Local Development Plan. A reduction in the demolition of building was highlighted as a further area for consideration and the opportunity to re-configure building design allied to modifying the current use of buildings.

A Member referred to the opportunity for the Council to become a civic leader in the area of embodied carbon reduction to make greater use of recycled materials and of the need to publish its results.

The Climate Commissioner confirmed that the Council was exploring ways to measure embodied carbon as part of its draft local development plan and was engaging constructively with the Department of Physical Programmes as part of that process.

A Member asked a further question in regard to liaising with developers in regard to exploring re-use of existing buildings as opposed to demolition and a preference for new build construction. Dr Cox highlighted the need to raise awareness of carbon calculation and the benefits associated with more simplified building design features.

Dr Cox stated that it was important that developers were encouraged to consider embedded carbon as part of their industry standard specification. A Member suggested that the Council might wish to consider how other local authorities, including Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds had approached the problem of reducing embedded carbon.

The Climate Commissioner stated that she would report back to the Committee after consultation with other UK authorities and on the measures under consideration to manage embedded carbon as part of the Belfast Stories development project. The Climate Commissioner agreed also to consult with the Department of Physical Programmes requesting that they work in partnership with Queens University Belfast (QUB) to explore ways in which the Council could reduce its embedded carbon footprint as part of its future capital development programme.

The Committee noted the contents of the presentation and the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Dr Cox for her detailed and informative presentation and she departed from the meeting.

Passive House Standards at Erne Campus
[Presentation – Dr Barry McCarron,
Head of Business Development, Southwest College]

Dr McCarron attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.

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Dr McCarron referred to his role as chairman of the Passive House Association of Ireland and reported that the Erne Campus was the largest passive premium building in the world and that passive house standards was now a global enterprise and provided the Committee with arrange of passive house standard located throughout the world. Dr McCarron reported that the United Nations had recommended passive house design be adopted since 2007.

The Members were informed that forty percent of global emissions was attributed directly to buildings and that there were seventeen sustainable development goals with passive house standards meeting eight of those goals directly and eleven indirectly. He reported that passive house design was the fastest growing building standard and best energy standard in the world. Dr McCarron referred specifically to a developer who was building that two hundred and fifty home to passive house standard in the city currently.

The Committee was informed that there were five passive house standards within the building construction industry. Dr McCarron highlighted the importance of insulation and referred to the key areas of insulation in regard to floors, roofs and walls, with particular attention to thermal bridging points. The Committee was informed of the requirement to undertake triple glazing as standard and ensure that buildings were airtight.

Dr McCarron informed the Committee that the Erne campus used a combination of bio-oil micro-chip and air to water heat pump technology. He referred to the air-quality within the building which was comparable to the quality of the external air and the requirement to ensure sufficient battery storage for period when the sun failed to generate sufficient energy. He stated that the cost of the building equated to thirty million pounds which was £3,552 per m².

The Members were informed that the project members had attended numeral internal events in recognition of their passive house development including Cop 26 and Cop 27. Dr McCarron reported that £300 million pounds of passive house development had been identified in Belfast and that it was cost effective approach, over the long term, given that all existing buildings would require to be retro-fitted if the UK was to meet its climate emission targets.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to the comparative costs of a passive house design building compared to a standard build, Dr McCarron stated that the costs were comparable with standard building costs. Dr McCarron reported that the Belfast building control regulations dictated the uplift in connection with passive house design.

A member raised a further question in regard to the payback period associated with passive house design and construction. In response Dr McCarron reported that the Erne campus was anticipated to secure a saving of two million pounds over a twenty-five-year period. In response to a further question in regard to the Council and its intention to undertake the Belfast Stories development, the Climate Commissioner stated that the project had not adopted one particular standard of passive house design, but agreed to report back to the Committee on how the development would be undertaken in terms of its emissions and embedded carbon output.

The Committee noted the information provided by Dr McCarron and thanked him for his informative and detailed presentation.

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**Retain: Sustain programme and short film on
tackling eco anxiety in the wider Belfast Community
[Presentation - Lise McGreevy, Photographic]**

Ms. McGreevy attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.

Ms. McGreevy informed the Committee that she had been employed as a visual artist over the past 10 years with a commitment to the promotion of peace, a shared future, equality and now climate change. She stated that she was working collaboratively with Queens University Belfast (QUB) as their first 'Artist in Residence'. The Members were informed that her current project proposal was focused on reduce and recycle which should be a fundamental objective for both the business sector and public institutions.

She highlighted the opportunities and advantages of the potential cost benefits to schools and young people through her recycle and reuse initiative. She explained that her concept was based on the principle that all end-of-life and near end-of-life materials had the potential to be recycled with the cost benefits being redistributed to those most in need.

To that end, she reported that she had devised a sustainable programme called Retain/Sustain and that its aim was to assist those companies which adopt the pilot scheme to reduce their recycling costs while promoting their corporate responsibility by helping local communities. She stated that she was actively encouraging global companies to use Belfast as their recycling base with the longer-term objective of those companies adopting the scheme on a global basis and thereby becoming more sustainable and economically viable.

Ms. McGreevy reported that it was her intention to promote a joint venture between the business sector and primary schools in partnership with QUB to undertake a pilot programme working with Espresso. The pilot programme would involve Espresso providing schools with their end-of-life and near end-of-life coffee machines and coffee pods which would be used in schools. She stated that the saving made by using the coffee machines could be directed back into the education system and assist schools in maintaining their education services. The Members were informed that based on the success of phase one of the project proposal, phase two would involve working directly with four schools to assess the viability of the project.

In response to a question from a Member as to whether the scheme was currently operational and if an assessment had been undertaken as to the potential savings for school budgets, Ms. McGreevy stated that no projection could be made until completion of phase one and that the project was a new concept.

In response to a further question on when the project was anticipated to reach a global audience, Ms. McGreevy stated that it would be dependent on the success associated with the pilot study. In response to a further question on funding requirements, Ms. McGreevy reported that she had secured £1,300 to fund the pilot project which would be used to cover the pilot facilitation fees and that phase two involving four selected schools would follow after completion of the pilot study. Ms. McGreevy stated that she was requesting funding from the Council to facilitate phase two of the scheme after completion of phase one.

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The Committee noted the information provided by Ms. McGreevy and informed her that any funding application would be considered in the context of all funding applications made to the Council and would be considered in the context of a business plan which would be set against an agreed funding criterion.

The Committee thanked Ms. McGreevy for her presentation and she departed from the meeting.

Local Development Plan
[Presentation - Kate Bentley]

The Director of Planning and Building Control provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's role as planning authority in the delivery of sustainable development. She reported that climate change and resilience formed a central role in the formation and application of planning policy. The Members were informed that planning policy was required to strike a balance between economic, environmental, and social considerations and of the need to ensure that the right development was undertaken in the right place and at the right time.

The Committee was informed that plans, policies and programmes had been subject to strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal over a considerable period and that the Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) was a key delivery component of the Belfast Agenda. She stated that the objective was to help guide and implement sustainable development over the next fifteen to twenty years.

The Director stated that there were two parts to the LDP namely, the Plan Strategy, which had been adopted in May 2023 and the Local Policies Plan which would look at the allocation of land and zoning within the city. She reported that the Planning Act of 2011 directed that any planning determination must be made in accordance with the LDP unless material considerations determined otherwise, which established the primacy of the LDP in the planning led system.

The Committee was informed that the Plan Strategy contained a number of strategic policies covering a range of areas, including growth and sustainable development, climate change, mitigation and adaptation, which were key elements within the planning strategic policies.

In terms of growth and sustainable development, the Director reported that there were a number of policies, one in particular setting out the growth ambitions contained within the Belfast Agenda, and which needed to be sustainable. She referred specifically to the delivery of thirty-one thousand homes by 2035 and the support of an additional sixty-six thousand inhabitants within the city. The Director emphasised that development required to be sustainable and in the right place. She confirmed that the LDP sat within the context of the Regional Development Strategy.

The Members were informed of the range of strategic policies which were relevant to green and blue infrastructure, and which supported environmental resilience and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The Director referred to the one hundred and seven operational plan strategy policies in addition to seventeen supplementary planning guidance documents.

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She highlighted specifically some of the operational policies, including flood risk, the accommodation of new homes, mitigating environmental change and sustainable drainage systems. The Members were provided with a timetable for the adoption of the LDP Local Policies Plan and the many challenges which required to be addressed as part of that process.

In response to a question from a member in regard to flexibility of planning policy in the face of a change in emphasis, citing the reduction in the level of office space within the city, the Director stated that policies were long term and the LDP required to have a level of flexibility to accommodate behavioural and social change, including a change in planning priorities.

In response to a further question in regard to embedded carbon calculation being incorporated with planning policy, the Director stated that there was currently a policy within the planning process to make that request but it could not be required as part of the planning process. She stated however, that the planning supplementary guidance could be adjusted, over time, if it was considered necessary to amend it to make other such requests.

The Committee noted the information provided and thanked the Director of Planning and Building Control for her detailed and informative presentation.

**Update on the Belfast Carbon Disclosure Project
Submission 2023 and UK Score Cards
[Presentation Claire Shortt,
Monitoring Learning & Reporting Officer, BCC]**

The Committee considered the undernoted report on the Belfast Carbon Disclosure Project:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To update members on the recent award of A status to Belfast through the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) cities reporting framework and the results of the UK Climate Score Cards.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to note the 2023 CDP award of A status to Belfast, which follows the 2022 award of A status and the 2021 CDP award of B status to Belfast, and to support the annual submission by Belfast through this internationally recognised carbon and climate reporting framework. The Committee is also asked to note the scores for Belfast in the UK Climate Score Cards rankings.

3.0 Main report

Background - Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP)

3.1 In July 2021, the Council made the first annual submission to the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), with an update provided to

Council in October 2021 and December 2022. The submission was undertaken to support baselining of activity and emissions in Belfast, and to enable full participation by Belfast in global climate action campaigns such as the Race to Zero, the Cities Race to Resilience campaign, Cities Race to Zero campaign, the Global Covenant of Mayors, and the WWF One Planet City competition. All of these campaigns require members to have made a submission through a recognised reporting mechanism, of which CDP is the most well-known. The survey consisted of multiple questions across themes such as, waste, transport, energy, emissions, climate risk and vulnerability, adaptation, mitigation, public health, planning and finance.

- 3.2 Belfast has been recognised by CDP as one of 119 cities across the globe that is taking bold leadership on environmental action and transparency, despite the pressures of a challenging global economic situation. The process has been designed to encourage and support cities to ramp up their climate action and ambition, CDP's Cities A List is based on environmental data disclosed by cities to CDP-ICLEI Track. A clear momentum in city climate disclosure and action is building – over 900 cities (939 in total) received a rating for their climate action from CDP in 2023. In 2023, just over one in ten cities scored by CDP (13% of such cities) received an A.
- 3.3 A city submission to CDP illustrates the level of ambition, activity and transparency each city adopts. Belfast has made its submission public in all three submission years to ensure maximum openness and transparency around our plans. The Belfast submission in 2021 was the first time Belfast had participated in CDP, and we were congratulated on having achieved a B ranking at such an early stage. In 2022, our second submission achieved an A ranking and this ranking has been preserved in 2023.
- 3.4 Along with the projects mentioned in previous submissions such as the Belfast Net Zero Carbon Roadmap (2020), One Million Trees, Living with Water Programme, UPSURGE and the Belfast Tidal Defence Project, the submission this year also included evidence such as the updated Belfast Agenda, the Met Office Heat Maps and the Local Development Plan. The current development of the Climate Action Plan was also highlighted in this submission along with the progress towards a Local Area Energy Plan. Projects such as the solar PV potential in the city and the work around the circular economy helped maintain this year's A ranking.

UK Climate Score Cards

3.5 Climate Emergency UK assessed all UK councils on the actions they've taken towards net zero. The scorecard assessment consists of 91 questions or less, depending on council type, across 7 different sections, created in consultation with over 90 different organisations and individuals. Each council was marked against these criteria and given a right to reply before the scores underwent a final audit. This work was completed between January and August 2023 and results were announced November 2023.

3.6 Belfast scored 43%, ranking number one in N. Ireland with the average ranking in the region being 21% this year. The councils are scored on themes based around building and heating, transport, planning and land use, governance and finance, biodiversity, collaboration and engagement and waste reduction and food.

The link at appendix 6.2 illustrates Belfast's scores across each of the categories and compares them across all other councils.

The questions are answered using information gathered by volunteers that is published and collected through FOIs to councils. This is then combined, and councils get a right to reply to its accuracy.

In 2023, Westminster Council received the highest score in the UK and Thurrock Council received the lowest.

4.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**

4.1 There are no financial and resource implications.

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

5.1 Any good relations or equality implications will be identified as part of the Council's screening process."

The Committee noted that information contained within the report and congratulated the climate team on their dedication and hard work resulting in the achievement of an 'A' ranking in the carbon disclosure project including the impressive results attained within the UK climate scorecard.

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**Tree Cutting at Orangefield Playing Fields –
Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager**

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided the Committee with an update on the unauthorised tree felling which had been undertaken by contactors, acting on behalf of NIE, at Orangefield Park in May 2023.

The Committee was informed that NIE has accepted blame for the incident, highlighting a communication failure between NIE and the external contractor. The Members were provided with a written statement from NIE setting out the circumstances surrounding the tree felling and the measures they would be putting in place to repair the damage, including a new tree planting scheme, on site, at no cost to the Council.

A Member referred to a similar incident which had occurred previously and highlighted the lack of consultation with residents and the frustration and anger which had been generated in that local community.

A Member requested that future agreements be strengthened, and that guidance be sought from the City Solicitor in regard the enforcement powers available to the Council to prevent a future occurrence.

In regard to a question from a Member in regard the cost of the restoration work at the park, the Neighbourhood Services Manager agreed to ascertain the costs and report back to the Committee, he agreed also to research from the estates section and the bio - diversity officer, if and when similar incidents of unauthorised tree felling had taken place throughout the city, and what the impact had been for wildlife, specifically in relation to Orangefield Park.

A Member suggested that it might be beneficial to consult with both elected representatives and the local community before any similar operation was undertaken. The Neighbourhood Services Manager assured the Committee that lessons had been learned from this unfortunate incident and that future operations of this nature would be undertaken under Council supervision.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Committee agreed that its next meeting be held on Thursday, 11th January, 2024 at 5.15 p.m.

Chairperson