



ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2024 -

Venue:	CPCA Meeting Room, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon	
Time:	10.00am	
Members Present:	Councillor Lara Davenport-Ray Councillor Nicola Day Councillor Lorna Dupre Mayor Dr Nik Johnson Councillor Martin Goodearl Councillor Mike Todd-Jones Emma Garfield	Huntingdonshire District Council (Vice-Chair and acting Chair for the meeting) Peterborough City Council Cambridgeshire County Council CPCA Mayor East Cambridgeshire District Council Cambridge City Council Business Board Representative
Apologies	Councillor Bridget Smith Tim Jones	South Cambridgeshire District Council (Chair) Business Board Representative

Minutes

1	Apologies for Absence Apologies were received from the Chair, Cllr Bridget Smith and Tim Jones, Business Board member. In Cllr Smith's absence the Vice-Chair of the Committee, Cllr Davenport-Ray chaired the meeting.
2	Declaration of Interests No declaration of interests were made.
3	Minutes of the previous meeting The minutes of the meeting on 31 July 2024 were approved as an accurate record. The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
4	Public Questions There were no public questions.
5	Forward Plan The Combined Authority Forward Plan was noted by the Committee.

6 **Great Ouse Valley Trust**

Graham Campbell, Chairman of the Great Ouse Valley Trust gave a presentation to the Committee (appended to the minutes) on the Trust's efforts to achieve national landscape status for the Great Ouse Valley

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The Great Ouse Valley, was a unique, tranquil landscape featuring rich meadowlands, wetlands and the internationally renowned Ouse Washes
- b) National Landscape status would provide benefits across economy, nature, health, and tourism for the area.
- c) The Great Ouse Valley Trust represented a broad coalition including parish councils, The National Trust, RSPB, local conservation groups, and recreational users.
- d) Woodland planting, meadow restoration, community workshops, and water quality monitoring had been some of the Trust's achievements to date. In addition, the Trust's workshops had engaged businesses, conservation groups, and councils, building community consensus and support across three regional divisions.
- e) Natural England, which was responsible for recommending National Landscape designations, had faced delays due to resource constraints which had left the Trust's application pending. As such the Trust was now exploring self-designation options such as 'Regional Park' as a stepping stone.
- f) To achieve the Regional Park designation collaboration with the Combined Authority, district councils, and other stakeholders was crucial.
- g) The Trust's grassroots approach, broad coalition, and deep regional knowledge made it well-positioned to lead the designation initiative. The Trust had researched other National Landscapes for best practices and funding insights.
- h) The Mayor expressed his full backing, emphasising the project's alignment with the Combined Authority's "Shared Ambition" initiative and acknowledging the Trust's inclusive, cross-county impact.

RESOLVED:

A. To note the presentation on the Great Ouse Valley Trust.

ACTION:

1. The Committee to explore avenues for formal support for the Trust's self-designation and National Landscape status efforts.

7 National Highways (A428 Environmental Enhancements)

Penny Rogers, Environmental Lead, Skanska and Anne-Marie Rogers, Senior Project Manager, Complex Infrastructure Programme, National Highways gave a presentation to the Committee (appended to the minutes) which gave an overview of the A428 and the environmental mitigation measures taking place.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Digital initiatives included a Geographic Information System (GIS) , which was a Adigital platform for real-time tracking of environmental risks, sensitive receptors, and ecological data, accessible via mobile, tablet, and desktop and a Positive Intervention App which was a mobile application for workforce members to report environmental and safety observations instantly, aiding in data-driven training and communication.
- b) Ther were regular toolbox talks and engagements with the workforce to reinforce environmental protocols and actions and workers were instructed to halt activities and consult with the environmental team if encountering unexpected environmental risks
- c) National Highways representatives assured members that learnings from the A14 and other projects were applied to the A428. Landscaping strategies had been adapted, and the agency had committed to regular publication of environmental data through Post-Operational Project Evaluations (POPE).
- d) National Highways confirmed plans to plant 78,000 trees and 200,000 hedges/shrubs. Public updates on biodiversity would be provided through various media, including social media and newsletters. They were committed to a biodiversity net gain based on the Natural England Biodiversity Net Gain Tool.
- e) The Mayor acknowledged the improved community engagement approach for the A428 compared to the A14, stressing the importance of involving local volunteer groups in biodiversity initiatives. National Highways committed to maintaining this engagement throughout the project.
- f) National Highways explained their soil stabilization strategy using vegetation cover and silt fencing near watercourses. Monthly surface and groundwater quality monitoring was conducted, with measures taken to reduce sediment runoff.
- g) An ecological team conducted thorough checks on soil mounds for wildlife habitation prior to reinstatement to ensure that stored soil was free of unintended ecological disruptions.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the presentation on the A428 environmental enhancements.

8 Director's Highlight Report

The Executive Director, Place & Connectivity, introduced the report which provided an update on the key activities of the Place and Connectivity Directorate in relation to Environment and Sustainable Communities.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Members voiced concern over prioritising reduced energy consumption over expanding carbon capture capabilities, stressing that reduction in fossil fuel usage should take precedence.
- b) The Mayor noted that while expertise on carbon capture infrastructure was essential, it may not be directly relevant to this region given geographical constraints. He advocated an approach of "reduce, reuse, recycle" and emphasised the necessity of balancing various climate actions.
- c) The Executive Director affirmed the importance of integrating skills and employment considerations into the Climate Action Plan and agreed to coordinate with the Skills and Employment Committee to explore green skills and employment opportunities as part of the Climate Action Plan
- d) The Local Growth Plan, which was in development, would integrate sustainability measures with climate change considerations. Plans for enhanced infrastructure resilience and water management would be a priority.
- e) Members stressed the need for improved water capture to balance seasonal water supply issues and support local agricultural needs. The Director agreed and highlighted the intention to bring Water Resources East to a future meeting for a detailed review of statutory water management plans.
- f) Officers confirmed that the Advanced Manufacturing initiative did encompass Green and Clean Technology which aligned the Local Growth Plan (LGP) with broader environmental objectives.
- g) Members expressed disappointment over the absence of explicit social housing provisions in the current draft of the LGP. The Director clarified that this draft was still under review with the government and partners, and language may evolve as discussions progressed. The challenges in the Social Housing sector, particularly in terms of councils' expenditure on temporary accommodation for homeless individuals and families, was acknowledged.
- h) The CPCA had actively participated in consultations on the national planning policy framework. While specific details of the proposed changes remained pending, the importance of collaboration across the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough region to adapt to any shifts in the planning landscape was recognised.
- i) The Infrastructure Delivery Framework report, which was later on the agenda, would address regional infrastructure needs. The ongoing collaboration among local Place Directors to address energy, water, connectivity, and biodiversity challenges as part of the local growth and infrastructure planning was highlighted
- j) The Mayor emphasised the unique position of the Combined Authority to tackle national and local challenges by bringing together representatives from across the County. He reiterated support for the Government's direction on devolution, especially in the areas of planning and strategic spatial planning. The Mayor also noted the positive track record in housing delivery within Cambridge City and Huntingdonshire and expressed optimism about the collaborative potential of local authorities to address environmental and infrastructure needs.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the content of the report

9 **Affordable Housing Programme - Update on Implementation**

The Housing Planning Manager introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress of the affordable housing programme.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Members raised concerns about unfinished work and unsatisfactory conditions at sites developed by Laragh Homes, a now-defunct company, and requested clarity on the Combined Authority's responsibility in ensuring the completion of works at these locations.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the update in this report.

ACTIONS:

- 1. Officers to provide a written update on developer liability and Laragh Homes' projects.
- 2. Further details on action steps for ongoing projects facing quality and completion challenges to be provided.

10 **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

The Executive Director, Place and Connectivity, introduced the report which updated the Committee on the current progress of the LNRS.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) A revised project timeline was presented, acknowledging the Steering Group's recent meeting, where additional work on mapping and interdependencies with planning authorities and land ownership issues had been identified.
- b) It was emphasised that thorough checks and validations, especially concerning biodiversity mapping, were essential before publishing, and these adjustments were expected to result in a delay beyond the pre-election period.
- c) Collaboration continued with local authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural Cambridge, the National Farmers Union, and Natural England.
- d) Natural England reported that only six of the 48 local nature recovery strategies nationwide were currently on target for March 2025 and indicated that a work draft would represent good progress.
- e) The Chair acknowledged the delay and expressed both disappointment and understanding of the need for accuracy given the Strategy's role in planning applications.
- f) Members recognised the project's complexities and shared their support for ensuring local and ecological expertise was incorporated at each stage.
- g) Monthly meetings with Place Directors would continue, with efforts to ensure that local knowledge and strategic considerations were fully integrated.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the update on the progress of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and updated timeline.

ACTION:

- 1. A finalised project plan to be shared with the Committee within two weeks, detailing the specific stages for approval and consultation.

11 **Infrastructure Delivery Framework - Final Draft**

The Executive Director, Place and Connectivity, introduced the report which presented the final draft of the Infrastructure Delivery Framework (IDF) report for consideration and amendments.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) It was confirmed that the IDF would integrate with Local Plans, and that workshops taking place with Place Directors on 20 November would further determine actionable steps, including business case development and feasibility studies.
- b) Members raised concerns about flood risk language, emphasising the need to consider not only maintenance but also substantial improvements in flood defences
- c) Members expressed interest in sharing insights from the report with their respective local authority officers, especially those working on local plan updates, so that the IDF's themes and priorities could be incorporated.

RESOLVED: (Unanimous)

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Dupre, the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved to:

- A. To recommend to the Board to approve the final report of the Infrastructure Delivery Framework (IDF).
- B. To approve the next steps of the CPCA working with Place Directors, across the constituent authorities to develop project concepts and an action plan to address infrastructure issues.

ACTION:

- 1. The language around flood risk to be updated to include both 'maintenance and improvement'

12 | **Climate Programme Delivery**

Jim Cunningham, Interim Assistant Director Delivery, introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on three key elements of the Climate Change Programme.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Concerns were raised regarding the 10% match funding requirement for the Opportunity Fund, which could present accessibility barriers for certain communities, charities, and environmental groups in the region.
- b) Requests were made to clarify the following:
 - whether officer time spent managing capital projects could count towards match funding.
 - the maximum level of administrative costs allowable for capital project funding.
 - whether natural capital could be considered as infrastructure capital referencing the Huntingdonshire biodiversity project as an example of capital being spent on nature
 - that constituent authorities were eligible to bid, as there was uncertainty about their inclusion in the report.
 - What the criteria would be for selecting projects if there was oversubscription
- c) Members raised concerns about the level of funding and whether the proposed £1 million fund was sufficient, given that the average project cost of £100,000 would only support 10 projects across the area. A suggestion was made to increase the funding to £2 million, with the understanding that any surplus could be rolled back if there were insufficient bids.
- d) Potential applicants would receive clear guidelines on what made a strong application in order to enhance the quality of submissions.
- e) An additional recommendation (D) was proposed for the committee to meet informally in January 2025 to review opportunity fund bids before they were presented to the Investment Panel in February.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note and endorse the approach to the further development of the Climate Action Plan review for 2025-30 and in particular to ensure the Plan is co- produced and co- owned
- B. To note the progress on developing the projects within the Climate Programme since the last Committee in July 2024
- C. To note the plans for the launch of the Opportunity Fund bidding round later this year.
- D. **To meet informally in January 2025 to review opportunity fund bids before they are presented to the Investment Panel in February***

*text in **bold** denotes an additional recommendation

ACTIONS:

1. Officers to follow up on the queries outlined in b) above to ensure clear guidance is provided
2. An informal meeting to be scheduled in January to review the opportunity fund bids before their presentation to the Investment Panel

13 **GSENZH Delivery of Warmer Homes – Local Grant Scheme**

Maxine Narburgh, Regional Director GSE Net Zero Hub introduced the report which outlined a proposed approach to determine whether the GSENZ Hub through the CPCA should act as Contracting Authority and Accountable Body for a consortium of local authorities in the GSE region.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The Chair asked that Action on Energy Cambridgeshire and Local Advice Energy Partnership – Peterborough (LAEP) be included on the work programme and invited to update the Committee on the Warm Homes project.
- b) Members emphasised the need to upscale efforts to adapt to the new government's initiatives and acknowledged the limitation of the current HUG scheme.

RESOLVED:

On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Day the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee resolved, with **4** in favour and **2** abstentions, to:

- A. i) Note the national issues with delivery of previous retrofit schemes that the GSENZ Hub have delivered, the reputational and financial risk to the CPCA and the GSENZ Hub.

ii) Agree to the GSENZ Hub undertaking a prompt engagement exercise with the Hub Board and consortia members alongside a risk assessment to inform a final decision whether to submit an expression of interest as the Contracting Authority and Accountable Body for the new Government's Warm Homes: Local Grant.
- B. Recommend to the CA Board to delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Connectivity to work with the Chair of ESC to evaluate the engagement evidence and outcome of the risk assessment and to conclude whether to submit an Expression of Interest as the application timeline requires decision between committee dates.
- C. Recommend to the CA Board that the 'GSENZ Hub is approved to apply on behalf of local authorities in the GSENZ Hub consortia to deliver the Warm Homes: Local Grant scheme'. On the condition that the outcome from recommendations A & B concludes this is the appropriate decision and to report this decision back to the CA Board.

ACTION:

1. Officers to invite Action on Energy Cambridgeshire and Local Advice Energy Partnership – Peterborough (LAEP) to a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the Warm Homes project

<p>14</p>	<p>Budget and Performance Report</p> <p>The Finance Manager introduced the report which provided an update of the financial position for 2023/24 and an analysis against the 2024/25 budget up to the period ending June 2024. It also provided the Committee with an update on the multi-year budgets within the 2025-26 Medium Term Financial Plan.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Clarification was sought about the rewilding programme referenced in the report and whether it was known by another name. b) As of June 30, no funds had been spent from the Nature and Environment Investment Fund but a forecast of spending a total of £1 million by March 31 remained intact. c) Members reflected on previous experiences with funding that, despite positive forecasts, were not utilised as planned. There was a collective interest in ensuring that capital funds were actively managed and directed towards climate action projects effectively. d) <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. To note the financial position of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Division for the financial year 24/25 to the end of the first quarter, June 2024. B. To note the current Environment and Sustainable Communities budgets within the Combined Authority's Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to provide the Committee with further details on the Rewilding Programme (referenced in the appendix) and the Nature and Environment Investment Fund.
<p>15</p>	<p>Work Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Committee requested that the following be added to the Committee's work Programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons Learned report on the Opportunity Fund (June/July 2025 meeting) This report would provide insights into how to potentially allocate more capital to similar funds in future financial years, particularly if the fund proves successful. • The John Clare Countryside Project and other related initiatives in the Peterborough area. <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A To note the Work Programme. <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to update the Work Programme with the items listed above.
<p>16</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 11 December 2024.</p>