



# Environment And Sustainable Communities Committee

**Wednesday, 29 January 2025**

Venue:	CPCA Meeting Room, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN	
Time:	10.00 am	
Present:	Councillor Bridget Smith	South Cambridgeshire District Council (Chair)
	Councillor Lara Davenport-Ray	Huntingdonshire District Council (Vice-Chair)
	Dr Nik Johnson	CPCA Mayor
	Councillor Lorna Dupre	Cambridgeshire County Council
	Councillor Martin Goodearl	East Cambridgeshire District Council
	Councillor Steve Tierney	Fenland District Council
	Councillor Mike Todd-Jones	Cambridge City Council
	Councillor Nicola Day	Peterborough City Council (attending virtually)

## Minutes

1	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>
	Apologies were received from the Business Board Representatives, Emma Garfield and Tim Jones.
2	<b>Declaration of Interests</b>
	No declarations of interest were made.
3	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting</b>
	The minutes of the meeting on 11 December 2024 were approved as an accurate record. The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
4	<b>Public Questions</b>
	There were no public questions.
5	<b>Combined Authority Forward Plan</b>
	The Combined Authority Forward Plan was noted by the Committee.
6	<b>Natural Cambridgeshire</b>
	Pamela Abbott, Director of Natural Cambridgeshire gave a presentation to the Committee (appended to the minutes). which introduced the organisation and gave an overview of their work and future plans.  During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Ms Abbott expressed her gratitude for the support of the Combined Authority, not only in terms of funding but also through contributions from constituent local authorities. This support had enabled the partnership to champion and celebrate activities across the region.
- b) The pressures on land and people, as well as the rapidly evolving local authority landscape and national infrastructure changes were acknowledged which only served to emphasise the importance of a Local Nature Partnership in facilitating collaboration and coordination of nature-related activities.
- c) The partnership produced two annual reports: a standard annual report and a broader document celebrating nature-related activities across all local authorities, statutory organisations, and environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These reports ensured that efforts for nature were effectively communicated and understood. Additional funding had been secured to support these initiatives.
- d) One of the organisation's key work areas, taking a lead with the County Council, was the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Strategy consolidated district-level ambitions for nature into a cohesive implementation plan and the vision was to create a wildlife-rich, resilient, productive, and sustainable landscape, which considered agricultural heritage and opportunities for biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- e) Public engagement on the Strategy has been extensive, with nearly 1,500 survey responses and contributions from 40 organisations, including faith groups, youth organisations, and libraries. Eleven events had been held with farmers and landowners to encourage engagement and collaboration.
- f) The partnership has administered a £1 million Fund for Nature with £900,000 allocated to community projects. 36 applications had been received, 31 of which were approved, covering both urban and rural projects.
- g) An additional £850,000 has been allocated for landscape-scale projects, exploring innovative funding mechanisms such as loans and revolving funds.
- h) The second tranche of the fund would launch on 4 February, with a webinar for farmers scheduled for 11 February.
- i) A proposal had been made for additional funding from the Combined Authority to support sustainable land use and outreach initiatives. The Partnership aimed to strengthen collaboration with farm clusters and landowners to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and access to funding.
- j) Legal and structural challenges in accessing funds collectively were being addressed through expert consultancy.
- k) A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) site list was being developed with the Wildlife Trust to ensure high-value nature projects received appropriate investment.
- l) A new business plan, commencing 1 April 2025, would focus on convening, listening, championing, and driving nature recovery.
- m) A baseline for the state of nature was being developed to track progress towards nature recovery goals.
- n) A project to restore lost species, including the Large Marsh Grasshopper, would engage local communities in conservation efforts.
- o) Clarification was sought regarding the use of loans rather than grants. The community grant fund remained a grant-based initiative, while the landscape-scale fund explored loans and innovative financing mechanisms to create a revolving fund. The legal framework for these financial agreements had been reviewed and approved.
- p) It was clarified that the funding of £50,000 operational revenue for Natural Cambridgeshire had not yet been received due to delays in the allocation process. However, an ambitious program had been set out for its use, including strategic communications improvements, enhanced engagement with council leaders and officers, and the production of the State of Nature report. Additionally, £12,000 was earmarked for the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) list of sites, subject to alternative funding availability.
- q) Officers confirmed that the funding had been approved and regular engagement around the business plan was taking place. The sustainable land use funding allocation had been held back pending further alignment with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- r) The need for greater engagement with Public Health and Integrated Care Partnerships to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits of nature was acknowledged as an area for development. It was agreed that further connections would be made with key stakeholders, including the Integrated Care Board, care homes, the prison estate, and other public bodies.

	<p>s) Clarification was sought on engagement with major infrastructure projects, such as East West Rail and the A428 development. It was suggested that greater collaboration with local elected representatives could strengthen advocacy efforts. It was confirmed that Natural Cambridgeshire was part of East West Rail's biodiversity working group and maintained dialogue with key stakeholders.</p> <p>t) The advantages of developing a regional BNG site list were discussed, with the benefits of cross-border planning and strategic spatial awareness emphasised. The list would highlight optimal sites for biodiversity net gain, ensuring funding was distributed effectively and aligned with regional conservation priorities.</p> <p>u) It was noted that the Natural Cambridgeshire website did not sufficiently highlight the Combined Authority's role in funding various initiatives. The Director committed to improving the visibility of this support in all communications.</p> <p>v) Further engagement with Network Rail was encouraged, given its role as a major landowner with significant biodiversity corridors. The Partnership confirmed it would seek further collaboration with Network Rail's environmental officers.</p> <p>w) The challenges of doubling nature in the region, particularly balancing agricultural productivity with environmental conservation, were discussed and it was acknowledged that engaging farmers and landowners would be crucial in achieving this goal, and sustainable financing mechanisms would play a key role. The increasing willingness of farmers to engage in nature-friendly practices was highlighted as a positive trend.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b></p> <p>A. To note the presentation from Natural Cambridgeshire.</p>
7	<p><b>Locally Determined Contributions</b></p>
	<p>Emily Bolton, from Cambridgeshire County Council gave a presentation (appended to the minutes) on Locally Determined Contributions.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <p>a) Members expressed concerns about how shifting national and local political landscapes might impact project outcomes, however the framework was designed to be adaptable to policy changes and therefore would ensure ongoing alignment.</p> <p>b) Governance mechanisms were being developed to ensure broad buy-in and alignment with the Combined Authority's Climate Action Plan.</p> <p>c) The Mayor encouraged collaboration with external bodies, including police, fire services, and the NHS, to enhance cross-sectoral engagement. Emily confirmed these organisations had been invited, and efforts were ongoing to strengthen collaboration.</p> <p>d) The Place Directors Group was actively involved to understand the issues and different perspectives and to ensure alignment across all constituent authorities.</p> <p>e) There were ongoing discussions on securing additional funding flexibility to extend work beyond June 2024.</p> <p>f) The Mayor and committee members emphasised the need for continued engagement and follow-up presentations upon project completion.</p> <p>g) There was a consensus amongst members on the importance of the Locally Determined Contribution Framework in aligning local climate efforts with national and international commitments.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED:</b></p> <p>A. To note the presentation on Locally Determined Contributions</p>
8	<p><b>Director's Highlight Report</b></p>
	<p>The Executive Director, Place &amp; 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.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p>

	<p>a) A query was raised regarding support for capital funding of community energy projects. While opportunities remained uncertain, the GSENZH Director was engaging with Great British Energy to explore possibilities.</p> <p>b) Peterborough City Council (PCC) was participating in the Heat Network Zoning Pilot Project, with draft heat network zones identified.</p> <p>c) Members discussed the potential legal constraints in the UK on heat zoning compared to European models.</p> <p>d) The winding down of the existing affordable housing program remains on track.</p> <p>e) The new partnership with Homes England focused on governance and planning at a strategic level.</p> <p>f) The Mayor affirmed that all future collaboration will be undertaken in coordination with constituent authorities.</p> <p>g) Uncertainty remained regarding the timetable and process for taking on strategic planning responsibilities. Given the evolving nature of local plans and governance frameworks, further clarity from the Government was required.</p> <p>RESOLVED: A. To note the content of the report</p> <p>ACTION: 1. Officers to contact PCC to schedule an update on the Heat Network Zoning Pilot Project for a future committee meeting.</p>
9	<p><b>Update on the Affordable Housing Programme</b></p>
	<p>Azma Ahmad-Pearce, Programme Manager introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress of the AHP.</p> <p>There were no follow-up questions from Councillors.</p> <p>RESOLVED: A. To note the update on the report.</p>
10	<p><b>Use of Grant for Heylo Units - January 2025</b></p>
	<p>Azma Ahmad-Pearce, Programme Manager introduced the report which provided an update on the remaining funding from the Stanground and garage sites project.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <p>a) Half of the remaining funds had been allocated to Stanground, with the other half available for further use. To ensure the funds were utilised efficiently, Halo, who were able to provide off-the-shelf accommodation solutions, had been approached.</p> <p>b) With the remaining grant, Halo was providing seven housing units, all located in Peterborough, ensuring consistency with the original funding allocation. The units were situated at Fletton, Folly, Haden Peaks, and Hampton Waters, with the latter two still under construction. Site visits had been conducted to oversee progress.</p> <p>c) A total of £230,000 from the grant would be used to acquire the seven units, with an average grant allocation of approximately £32,857 per unit, which was comparatively lower than previous allocations.</p> <p>RESOLVED: On being proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Todd-Jones the Committee resolved, by a majority vote with one abstention, to:</p> <p>A. Approve the use of £230,500 grant on 7 units of accommodation in Peterborough, with the units to be provided as shared home ownership by Heylo as part of the Affordable Housing Programme</p>
11	<p><b>Climate Programme Delivery</b></p>

	<p>The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report which provided the Committee with an update on three key elements of the Climate Change Programme. Jim Cunningham, Interim Assistant Director Delivery was also in attendance virtually to support on this item.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Independent assessors were evaluating the Opportunity Fund bids, with a report expected by Friday. The final decisions would be made by the Investment Committee on 10th March.</li> <li>b) The Chair and members expressed concerns about the Committee's limited role in the final funding decisions. Officers reassured members and committed to holding an informal meeting on 7 February to review applications and provide recommendations to the Investment Committee. A formal note from this meeting would be included in Investment Panel and Investment Committee papers. Consideration would also be given to ensuring committee representation at the Investment Panel meeting.</li> <li>c) The total funding requested from the Opportunity Fund exceeded £3 million, while the available budget stood at £1 million.</li> <li>d) Applications for the Opportunity Fund would be ranked based on strategic fit, value for money, and deliverability.</li> <li>e) The Committee discussed the feasibility of awarding partial funding to certain projects, with a preference for ensuring match-funding requirements were met.</li> <li>f) The Executive Director highlighted that additional capital could be considered if high-impact projects emerged.</li> <li>g) The Future Fens integrated adaptation project was under re-evaluation to ensure value for money and alignment with the Combined Authority's priorities. Further details would be shared after discussions with the project's Steering Group.</li> </ul> <p>RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. To note the progress on the Climate Action Plan review</li> <li>B. To note the progress on the Climate Programme and on funding projects in line with the Single Assurance Framework</li> <li>C. To note the update on the Opportunity Fund bidding round</li> </ul> <p>ACTION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Officers to set up a briefing session for Members to review the appraised Opportunity Fund Bids ahead of their presentation to the Investment Panel on 12 February. Comments from this session to be fed into both the Investment Panel and Committee.</li> </ul>
12	<b>Work Programme</b>
	<p>RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A To note the Committee 's Work Programme.</li> </ul>
13	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>
	The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 26 February 2025.