



Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee – Draft Minutes

Wednesday 11 December 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 Councillor Steve Tierney Councillor Martin Cahn	Huntingdonshire District Council (Vice-Chair and acting Chair for this meeting) Peterborough City Council Cambridgeshire County Council CPCA Mayor East Cambridgeshire District Council Cambridge City Council Fenland District Council Overview & Scrutiny Rapporteur
Apologies	Tim Jones	Business Board Representative

Minutes:

1	Announcements, Apologies for Absence
1.1	Apologies were received from the Chair of the Committee, Cllr Bridget Smith and from Tim Jones, Business Board Representative.
2.	Declarations of Interest
2.1	No declarations of interest were made.
3.	Minutes of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee meeting on 25 October 2024 and Action Log
3.1	The minutes of the meeting on 25 October 2024 were approved as an accurate record.
3.2	The Action Log was noted by the Committee.
4	Public Questions
4.1	There were no public questions.
5.	Combined Authority Forward Plan
5.1	The Combined Authority Forward Plan was noted by the Committee.

6. Water Resources East

6.1 Daniel Johns, Managing Director of Water Resources East (WRE) gave a presentation to the Committee (appended to the minutes). which introduced the organisation and gave an overview of the regional plan for Eastern England.

6.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) WRE published its Regional Water Resources Plan in December of the previous year, outlining strategic actions to address water scarcity through demand management, leakage control, supply-side investments, and infrastructure projects. A progress report against this plan was set to be published in January, highlighting advancements in both demand-side and supply-side measures.
- b) Acute water scarcity pressures stemmed from environmental challenges, such as the health of chalk rivers, and high levels of economic and housing growth, as was seen in Cambridge.
- c) Current projections indicated a need for up to 50% more water than anticipated in Cambridge Water's existing management plan.
- d) Solutions included the development of strategic infrastructure, such as transfer schemes, reservoirs, and desalination plants.
- e) The Fen Reservoir project, with an estimated capacity of 50 billion litres and a capital expenditure of £2 billion, was progressing. Consultations and planning stages were underway, with Anglian Water taking the lead on financing and project management.
- f) Local authorities had begun negotiating tighter water usage standards for new developments, exemplified by projects like the Cambridge Research Hospital
- g) Household consumption and leakage levels were generally improving, aligning with long-term goals, and the COVID-19-related spike in water usage had subsided, returning to expected levels.
- h) Grey water use was encouraged but faced regulatory barriers. Currently, water companies were required to supply only potable water to households. Dual supply systems with colour-coded pipes were a potential solution, but proper education for plumbers and households was essential to prevent misuse. New housing developments should consider integrating dual supply systems, but widespread implementation would require regulatory changes.
- i) Peterborough faced similar water scarcity challenges to Greater Cambridge and should adopt tighter water efficiency targets in its local plans. New developments should aim for water usage standards below 110 litres per person per day, with future targets likely to tighten further. Peterborough City Council was not currently on the Water Resources East board but could join as a member to participate in meetings and webinars.
- j) Collaboration with internal drainage boards (IDBs) and stakeholders was essential for integrated water resource management. Collaborative efforts, such as the Fen Water Partnership, aimed to optimise water use and reduce pumping costs for IDBs by integrating reservoir projects and catchment-level management. The Association of Drainage Authorities was represented on the Water Resources East board
- k) Water-intensive industries, such as hospitals, research laboratories and data centres, must adopt sustainable practices to align with regional water availability.

RESOLVED:

A. To note the presentation from Water Resources East.

7. Fenland Soil

7.1 Megan Hudson, General Manager, Fenland Soil gave an overview of the work of Fenland Soil to the Committee.

7.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Fenland Soil was established in April 2021 with support from the CPCA in response to findings from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate Change and the Sixth Carbon Budget.
- b) Approximately 40% of Cambridgeshire's emissions originated from agricultural land use on peat soils.

- c) Fenland Soil aimed to manage peatland sustainably, reduce carbon emissions, and safeguard agricultural productivity.
- d) The organisation rebranded to “Fenland Soil” to increase accessibility and engagement with local farmers.
- e) Fenland Soil’s achievements have included the following:
- £1.1 million secured in additional funding for critical projects, starting with a Discovery Grant for opportunity mapping on peat soil.
 - Opportunity mapping conducted across various drainage board areas, covering 41,000 hectares, and identified pockets suitable for peatland restoration.
 - The UK’s largest wet farming trial delivered, achieving partial success in growing Chinese leaf cabbage and celery under wetland conditions.
 - Research initiated to understand water management in different types of peatlands.
 - Studies conducted to enhance biodiversity and hydrology in ditches, aiming to influence future policy on sustainable farming practices.
 - Farmer membership increased from 8 to over 45.
 - An economic report published identifying challenges and financial implications for transitioning farming systems.
 - Partnerships with lowland peat regions in the Northwest and Somerset established to create a unified voice for sustainable agriculture.
 - Recognition gained through media coverage in outlets such as *Farmers Weekly*, *The Times*, and *Tom Heap’s* book on environmental challenges.
- f) Future work for Fenland Soil would include expanding research to test mitigation measures for greenhouse gas emissions, supporting the creation of an accurate England Peat Map using data from Fenland Soil and exploring regenerative farming techniques and amendments to reduce emissions in areas where rewetting is not feasible.
- g) The team was open to exploring trials with non-food crops in the future to diversify the economic potential of wet farming practices.
- h) The upcoming conference, which aimed to foster networking among academia, policymakers, and farmers, addressing challenges and disconnects among these groups, was scheduled for the 28th and 29th of January.
- i) 45 farms were currently engaged in the initiative. Increasing farmer engagement remained a key target, alongside efforts to expand opportunity mapping for comprehensive land management. The government’s target of achieving 75% of land either restored or sustainably managed was discussed, with rewetting being the only well-researched method to date. It was agreed that further research and larger-scale trials using flux towers would be essential to evaluate additional mitigation strategies.
- j) Fenland Soil currently collaborated with 14 corporate sponsors but sought further engagement from larger organisations through green finance and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) efforts. The creation of a charitable arm was underway to access philanthropic funding and broaden financial support. The Committee expressed interest in facilitating discussions between the project team, the Combined Authority, and potential corporate partners to encourage greater investment.
- k) The Committee discussed the impact of farming practices on water resources, including runoff and pesticide use. The work being undertaken by Fenland Soil was identified as a key driver in promoting sustainable farming practices and improving water resource management.
- l) Carbon emissions from peatland remained relatively stable when peat remained deep and organic matter content high. However, as mineral soil mixed with peat layers, emissions gradually declined.
- m) Ongoing research, supported by Fenland Soil, had contributed to refining national emissions models. The understanding now reflected an S-shaped emissions curve, indicating sustained emissions even with reduced organic matter. The importance of addressing emissions from organic-mineral soils was underscored, alongside efforts to further study these dynamics.
- n) The controversial topic of rewetting was discussed. While rewetting remained a viable solution for specific cases, large-scale implementation across Fenland was deemed impractical due to extensive hydrological alterations over 400 years. The Committee emphasised preserving soil carbon and preventing emissions through sustainable land management rather than restoring peat-forming vegetation. Isolated restoration efforts would occur only where commercially feasible, supported by investments in biodiversity net gain (BNG) or carbon storage. The importance of balancing restoration goals with flood protection and water availability concerns was noted.

- o) The Committee reflected on the critical role of Fenland Soil in advancing soil management efforts. Without its contributions, the region would have missed out on £1.1 million in investment for Fenland-specific studies. Moreover, the organisation's grassroots approach had garnered trust and engagement from farmers, which might not have been possible with other stakeholders.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the presentation from Fenland Soil.

8. Director's Highlight Report

8.1 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.

8.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Members emphasised the importance of updates on the Local Growth Plan as this would allow for oversight of the project plan, timetable, and progress.
- b) Updates were sought on Ely North Junction, the A10, and the A47. The Director provided brief updates, referencing ongoing discussions with the Department for Transport (DfT) and partnerships with England's Economic Heartland and Transport East.
- c) The Director confirmed the integration of the findings of the Fenland Climate Change Risk Assessment into climate action planning and the Local Growth Plan, with further details to be shared in future meetings.
- d) The Committee acknowledged the initiation of a review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee into historical governance issues within the Affordable Housing Program.
- e) Updates were provided on available funding linked to Peterborough garage site developments and efforts to allocate remaining grants effectively.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the content of the report

ACTIONS:

- 1. The Fenland Climate Change Risk Assessment to be published on the Combined Authority's website and shared with local planning authorities.
- 2. Officers to include updates on the Local Growth Plan, the sustainability agenda, and the housing program on the agenda for upcoming committee meetings

9. Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Update

9.1 The Strategic Planning Manager introduced the report which updated the Committee on the progress of the LNRS.

9.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) The Strategy represented a new statutory activity, guided by both the regulations outlined in the Act and emerging guidance from DEFRA. The guidance evolved over time, which posed challenges in developing a comprehensive strategy.
- b) Since the last committee meeting, additional technical work had been identified as necessary to ensure a robust draft plan. This had been confirmed, and it was noted that the draft would not be ready for the February meeting as initially anticipated.
- c) The revised timetable proposed presenting the draft strategy at the June committee meeting. Following this, statutory consultation with supporting authorities, including district councils, the city and county councils, and Natural England, would take place. This would be followed by a public consultation period lasting eight weeks.

- d) To date, only one Local Nature Recovery Strategy had been approved nationally (in the southwest), with the majority expected to be approved by November next year. The current progress aligned with national timelines, although initial expectations had been more ambitious.
- e) Significant progress in technical aspects, including a recent mapping workshop with consultants, ecologists, and Steering Group members, was reported. Key challenges included establishing priorities for species and developing methodologies for identifying new areas of importance. While broad guidance existed from DEFRA and Natural England, no prescribed method had been provided, necessitating innovative approaches. The Committee was reassured by officers that substantial technical work continued to be undertaken, with ecologists focusing on refining methodologies.
- f) It was clarified that the Board had previously delegated authority to the Committee to approve the draft strategy for public consultation. Final approval of the strategy remained with the Board, and a request to delegate this authority would need to be made at a future Board meeting. The importance of including this in the Board's forward plan was noted.
- g) Members expressed disappointment at the delays but acknowledged the importance of getting the strategy right to ensure it served as a robust material planning consideration.
- h) The Committee supported the eight-week consultation period as part of the proposed timeline with Members emphasising the importance of timely delegation requests to the Board to avoid last-minute delays.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note that a consultation draft of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) will be presented to the Environment & Sustainable Committee for approval for consultation at its June meeting that follows the end of the election period in May.
- B. That the Committee proceed to oversee and approve a revised LNRS timetable with an eight-week consultation commencing July and target date of adoption by 31 December 2025.

10. Climate Programme and Opportunity Fund Update

10.1 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 answer questions.

10.2 During discussion the following points were noted:

- a) Aligning considerations of future growth with resource impacts, including climate implications, would be part of the development by the CPCA of a Local Growth Plan. It was noted that a workstream focusing on infrastructure—such as transport, water, energy, and climate—was in progress. The climate implications of any discussions related to the Local Growth Plan were being drawn out, and there was a critical dependency between the Climate Plan refresh and considerations of future growth. It was agreed that updates would be presented at the next committee meeting, including a presentation on the Local Growth Plan and findings from the Climate Action Plan review.
- b) The work funded by Innovate UK and led by the University of Cambridge on locally determined contributions to emissions reductions was referenced. This work was scheduled to be further discussed at the January meeting, alongside challenges identified earlier in the session, such as water and soil issues. A consolidated update would be provided at the next meeting to ensure alignment and comprehensive engagement with Local Growth Plan discussions.
- c) Progress on the Net Zero Villages initiative was discussed, highlighting efforts in East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. Expressions of interest for funding were set to open imminently. The Committee proposed an agenda item at a future meeting to summarise progress across all authorities to ensure the timely and effective use of funds.
- d) The Committee engaged in an extensive discussion on waste management, acknowledging cross-boundary challenges with household recycling centres. It was noted that some facilities faced increased pressure due to differing operational hours and policies in neighbouring authorities. Members highlighted concerns about access restrictions and the need for permits to limit usage to local residents.

- e) The Mayor emphasised the importance of a cohesive waste management strategy for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area. The absence of a specific fund for waste management within the Climate Action Plan was noted, and the Committee agreed to prioritise this issue, potentially engaging with partners at district and county levels. It was suggested that a representative from the RECAP group be invited to a future meeting to provide insights and recommendations.
- f) An update was provided on the schools retrofit program, funded in part by a government grant and supported by the Combined Authority. Although inflation and other factors had reduced the initial scope from 13 to three schools, the project was progressing. Members inquired about the potential for expanding the program to include additional schools, particularly given successful models in other regions.
- g) It was noted that The Fen Roads Trial (formerly known as Peat Affected Roads Trial) was scheduled for presentation to the Investment Committee on 16th December. A member suggested the report could benefit from a more consistent date structure, as it currently spanned multiple years, from 2024 through to 2029, making it difficult to track timelines for various initiatives. Officers acknowledged that some dates in the report may need to be cross-checked, and efforts would be made to provide clearer and more consistent information in the future.
- h) A master spreadsheet existed that tracked various projects and initiatives and provided up-to-date information.
- i) Communications between the CPCA and local authority communications teams were being strengthened to ensure that project delivery partnerships were more widely recognised and publicised.
- j) It was clarified that while the Opportunity Fund application process was live, larger projects went through an initial assessment and were then considered by the Investment Panel and Investment Committee.
- k) The Director of Place and Connectivity acknowledged that while there was an active communications plan for the Opportunity Fund, there was still work to be done to formalise a wider communications strategy for the climate program and confirmed that the issue was a priority, and more structured communications would be developed moving forward.
- l) The Opportunity Fund was targeted at not-for-profit organisations, excluding businesses, as separate funding opportunities for businesses had been made available in the past. The fund offered capital grants between £50,000 and £500,000, with potential increases for exceptional collaborative bids. The overall fund total was £1 million, with the possibility of requesting additional funding if necessary, based on the strength of the applications.
- m) Local authorities had been fully engaged in the process, and further information, including application forms, guidance, and links to past workshops, were available on the Opportunity Fund's website.
- n) The Investment Committee would consider whether further funding was required if high-quality projects exceeded the available budget.
- o) It was confirmed that a session to review proposed applications before they were submitted to the Investment Panel would be scheduled tentatively for Friday, February 7th.
- p) While 13 Expressions of Interest had been received so far, there was a potential risk that a large number of eligible applications could overwhelm the process, making it difficult to meet the proposed timelines. The team would do everything possible to ensure the timeline was adhered to, but committee members were made aware of this risk.
- q) Councillors raised the issue of the fund's effectiveness in mobilising local climate action and discussed the potential for increasing the allocation for future rounds if the current fund proved successful. It was suggested that the budget for the fund be revisited during the budget-setting process if needed, with a possible increase to £1.5 million.
- r) It was emphasised that the current fund was a capital fund, with money originally allocated by central government. There was discussion about whether unspent capital could be repurposed for other projects or rolled into future years. The importance of ensuring the funds reached local communities as quickly as possible was reiterated, especially in light of the current demand for climate action.

RESOLVED:

- A. To note the progress on the Climate Action Plan review
- B. To note the progress on the Climate Programme and on funding projects in line with the Single Assurance Framework

	<p>C. To note the update on the launch of the Opportunity Fund bidding round</p> <p><u>ACTIONS:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Officers to schedule an agenda item on the Net Zero Villages initiative at a future meeting to summarise progress across all authorities to ensure the timely and effective use of funds 2. A representative from the Waste Management RECAP group be invited to a future meeting to provide insights and recommendations. 3. Officers to further consider that the Opportunity Fund be revisited during the budget-setting process if needed, with a possible increase to £1.5 million.
<p>11.</p> <p>11.1.</p> <p>11.2</p>	<p>Overview of the Greater South East Net Zero (GSEnz) Hub</p> <p>Maxine Narburgh, Regional Director GSEnz Hub introduced the report which which provided an overview of the activities and objectives of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) concerning the Net Zero strategy. She presented slides outlining the key priorities and goals of the department, particularly the drive for commercial investment in Net Zero projects and the ongoing initiatives within the region.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ongoing projects such as the Cambridge decarbonisation initiative, the development of renewable energy tools, and support for local authorities in securing capital funding for public sector decarbonisation were discussed. b) Maxine provided an update regarding the government's Warm Homes Local Grant Scheme. After conducting a risk assessment, the Combined Authority decided not to proceed with the scheme due to high risk and complexities. Instead, the affected local authorities had been advised to join consortia or form their own consortia to access the funding. The Mayor had sent a letter to the Secretary of State regarding the concerns with the scheme's design, particularly in relation to its similarity to the HUG 2 program, which had faced implementation challenges. It was agreed that a copy of the Mayor's letter would be shared with the committee members for review. c) A statement was made to acknowledge the success of the HUG 2 programme within district councils, which had met or was on track to meet its targets by March. The program had been praised as one of the best in the country for collaborative working across districts. The Committee extended their thanks to the officers at district councils who had contributed to this success. d) It was suggested that a presentation from Action on Energy be included in a future meeting to summarise the collaborative efforts and achievements of the HUG 2 program and provide insights into its success. <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>A. To note the report.</p> <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A copy of the Mayor's letter to the Secretary of State regarding the HUG 2 programme to be shared with committee members. 2. Action on Energy to be invited for a presentation at a future meeting to discuss the success of the HUG 2 program.
<p>12.</p> <p>12.1</p> <p>12.2</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 budgets, up to the period ending September 2024.</p> <p>During discussion the following points were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Officers clarified that the project previously referred to as "Rewilding" was also known as "Sustainable Land Use Advice," which was expected to be more familiar to the Committee.

	<p>b) An update on the Nature and Investment Fund was provided, highlighting that, as of September, half of the allocated budget (£500,000) had been spent. The remaining funds would be reprofiled, with an updated expectation that the balance would be spent in the 2025-2026 financial year to allow partners more time to appraise and approve larger biodiversity projects.</p> <p>c) A committee member raised a question regarding the significant revenue reprofiled into future years for three specific projects, namely the Future Fens, the Non-Statutory Spatial Plan, and the Sustainable Infrastructure Project. The Committee requested clarification on the barriers that prevented the completion of these projects within the originally budgeted financial year.</p> <p>d) Offices provided further insight into the issues as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Future Fens Project:</u> Ongoing discussions with the Future Fens team had led to a re-evaluation of the funding role, with a shift towards a more facilitative approach, given that the project was already receiving funding from external sources such as Anglian Water and the Environment Agency. • <u>Non-Statutory Spatial Plan and Sustainable Infrastructure Funds:</u> The funds were allocated for placing standard technical infrastructure delivery frameworks. However, delays occurred, partly due to the impact of elections and the extended timeline for the infrastructure delivery framework, which was only agreed by the board in November. This delay necessitated the reallocation of funds. <p>e) Members expressed concern about the assumption that re-profiling was the correct solution when revenue had not been spent. They suggested that, by Quarter 3, it might be possible to reassess the value of these projects and reconsider whether re-profiling was indeed the most appropriate course of action. This would be considered for future monitoring reports.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>A. To note the financial position of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Division for the financial year 24/25 to the end of the second quarter, September 2024.</p> <p><u>ACTION:</u></p> <p>1. Future reports to include reassessment of project value if revenue has not been spent by Quarter 3.</p>
<p>13. 13.1</p>	<p>Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee Work Programme</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u></p> <p>A To note the Work Programme</p>
<p>14. 14.1</p>	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p>Wednesday 29 January 2025. (tbc)</p>

Meeting Ended: 1.00pm