



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

28TH JANUARY 2021

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION IN CONSULTATION WITH COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS (CLIMATE CHANGE CHAMPION)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Cabinet with the recommendations of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group, which met on the 16th November 2020, to consider reports on Nature's Assets, the Strategic and Local Development Plans and Energy Generation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the three reports considered by the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group on the 16th November 2020, which are attached to the report
- 2.2 Note the feedback and discussion of the Steering Group and;
- 2.3 Agree the recommendation of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group in respect of the Nature's Assets report:
- I. That the Director, Corporate Estates and the Council's Ecologist undertake a review of the publicly owned land, to identify those sites which are most suitable for peatbog restoration and the cost implications; with a report presented back to the Steering Group for its consideration.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To acknowledge the work of the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group and its recommendations.

4. THE CLIMATE CHANGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

- 4.1 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met on the 16th November 2020, where the following reports were considered:

4.2 NATURE'S ASSETS (APPENDIX 1)

The unique landscape and wildlife assets of Rhondda Cynon Taf means that the approach we adopt to the Climate and Nature emergencies should reflect these special circumstances. The Rhondda Cynon Taf landscape is rich in priority 'natural' habitats, undisturbed soils and peat bogs, all of which are important 'carbon stores'⁴. Members noted that the RCT population has one of the lowest ecological footprints in Wales (see appendix 1). The RCT area is also unusual in that a large area of the County Borough is in public ownership, including the Welsh Government forest estate as well as many Council owned sites, and large areas of green space associated with new developments. Therefore, in Rhondda Cynon Taf we have opportunities for natural solutions that are not available in other places.

Members acknowledged how fortunate RCT is to have a wealth of 'natural' carbon solutions due to its unique landscape, which is rich in undisturbed soils and peatbogs.

The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group considered the report of the Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services, which sought the Steering Group's feedback on issues relating to Nature's Assets and the climate and biodiversity emergencies. Members were provided with the proposed priorities for carbon storage, based on basic principles of the carbon cycle.

Members praised the officer for the informative report and acknowledged the plethora of biodiversity within RCT.

One Member was particularly interested in the natural regeneration of the woodland. The Member raised concerns in relation to the damage caused to tree saplings by mountain fires and questioned if there were mitigations in place to prevent it. The officer advised the Member of the 'Healthy Hillside Project' approach, which ensures conservation management/conservation grazing in areas which are not subject to wildfire problems, in order to maintain fern whilst promoting wildflowers, wildlife and woodland regeneration.

Members agreed that education and support of the community was a priority. The Chair emphasised the importance of education and spoke of the high profile campaigns involving the fire service and police service, which sought to educate young people on the importance of the hillsides and its wildlife.

Members noted that the most effective way to increase carbon sequestration in RCT would be to restore the many degraded peatbog and associated heathland and marshy grassland habitats that occur on the relatively flat hilltops above the valleys. Following a lengthy discussion, Members felt it would be beneficial for a review to be undertaken by the Director, Corporate Estates and the Council's Ecologist to identify those sites which are most suitable for peatbog restoration on land owned by the Local Authority and NRW. The review would consist of identifying the priority areas and the cost implications, in order to

present a report back to the Steering Group of the findings for its consideration. The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of planning ahead, should Cabinet agree to set money aside within the Capital programme.

4.3 STRATEGIC AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS - THEIR POLICIES AND COMMITMENTS TO ENSURING HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION AND BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE MINIMISES THE CARBON FOOTPRINT (APPENDIX 2)

Welsh Government have been committed to cutting emissions and transitioning to a low carbon economy for a number of years and in March 2019, published *Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales*. The publication seeks to maximise wider benefits for Wales, ensuring a fairer, healthier and more equal society. The plan *pulls together 76 existing pieces of policy from across the Welsh Government, UK Government and the EU where decarbonisation is integrated either as a direct outcome or a wider benefit*. Some are new policy, such as the Renewable Energy Targets and improved policy in *Planning Policy Wales (Ed. 10)*, where decarbonisation is a central pillar.

The Steering Group considered the report of the Director, Prosperity and Development, which set out what the Strategic Development Plan (SDP) and the Revised Local Development Plan (LDP) are required to address with regards to policies and commitments to minimise our Carbon Footprint; and the opportunities that would present themselves during the preparation and formulation of these plans, (particularly from an LDP perspective), to expand upon these standard requirements from an RCT perspective.

The Steering Group noted that the LDP would act as the land use expression of the Council's aspirations, including climate change and carbon reduction, which ensures that key elements are allocated. It was noted that the priority Peatbogs restoration areas identified could be allocated within the revised LDP, following the recommendation made by Members in respect of the report on Nature's Assets.

Members noted that the LDP could act as a persuasive document for developers to consider eco-friendly options moving forward. It was also noted that the City Region had agreed funding for electrical vehicle charging points for taxi and transportation services in the first instance; and that officers were undertaking an exercise to look at Council car parks to consider any opportunities for charging points.

4.4 ENERGY GENERATION AND RELATED ISSUES (APPENDIX 3)

Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has a long-established programme of investing in Energy Generation measures and amidst other initiatives, this has included the installation of renewable Energy technology with over 100 Solar panel arrays being installed across both Schools and Corporate Buildings totalling 1.58 MW.

The officers outlined the Council's current energy strategies, the potential expansion of renewable energy ambitions and current renewable energy projects, including the following initiatives:

- The Taffs Well Thermal Spring Project – the project is currently underway and when completed will make use of renewable geothermal/underground energy using water from the River Taff.
- Support was previously provided for the development of a community micro-hydro scheme at Clydach.

Furthermore, the Steering Group noted that the Corporate Estates Energy team had been investigating the potential of using RCT-owned land for the development of major renewable Energy projects for both Wind and Solar generation, with the assistance of the Welsh Government Energy Service.

The Steering Group noted that a range of energy options had been explored, such as wind, solar and hydro energy. It was pleasing to note the various ambitious and positive energy generation initiatives such as the potential wind farm installations, the development of Taffs Well Thermal Spring, which would produce energy for the local school and hub and the development of an Eco Park on undeveloped land at Bryn Pica.

Members did questioned how the estimated Carbon Benefit of 2,323 Carbon Tonnes per annum had been calculated. Officers confirmed that the figure had been determined by a standard calculation process in conjunction with the Welsh Government Energy Service. The calculation had been comprised by focussing on the carbon savings in use for the generated energy only, based on investment and not the embedded carbon in delivering the project up to that point. The Director recognised that the embedded carbon would need to be considered if the Council were to claim that the project would be Net Zero in its own right.

The Steering Group welcomed the detailed update and looked forward to hearing of the progress at a future meeting.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 5.1 In respect of the Nature's Asset report, relevance is place on the Environment (Wales) Act 2016t. Part One covers the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and includes the Biodiversity Duty (S6). This part also sets the context for policy and action for the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales. Part Two considers climate change and informs Welsh Government policy in this regard.
- 5.2 The proposals within the Local Development Plan report, would be considered through the preparation process of the statutory revision of the LDP.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no equality or diversity implications as a result of the recommendations set out within the report.

7. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

7.1 There are no Consultation implications aligned to the report.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

8.1 As the Nature's Assets report covers a number of new policy areas for the Council, there may be financial implications arising from future implementation. Some projects described, such as the 'Healthy Hillside' and 'Lost Peatland' projects have already obtained grant funding. There are likely to be some short-term Welsh government capital grant opportunities for 2020/21, in particular relating to Green Infrastructure. Where no funding is currently available, the Cabinet may require additional information before considering whether and how these issues should be addressed.

8.2 It is considered that any financial implications from Strategic Local Development Plan report will be associated with the formulation of the required evidence base for the preparation of the Revised LDP.

8.3 In respect of the Energy Generation update, all existing 'live' projects are funded through relevant cost centres and an existing enabling budget so there are no further financial implications aligned to the report.

9. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

9.1 The discussion of Natures' Assets contributes to the Council's priority to 'build a sustainable County Borough' as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2016-2020. It will contribute to the discussions about the next Corporate Plan for the period 2020 to 2024, which is likely to contain further consideration of the Climate and Biodiversity Emergencies.

9.2 Consideration of Natures Assets must reflect the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. In particular, this must be a long-term consideration, focused on preventative and precautionary action. It will contribute specifically to the Resilience and Global Responsibility goals of the Act, but in the longer term it could have implications for all the goals.

9.3 Preparation of the revised LDP will embrace the principles of the Corporate Plan, along with the wellbeing goals and five ways of working as identified within the WCFG Act. The revised LDP will also be guided by the aims and objectives set forth in the Cwm Taf Well-being Plan 2018-2023 entitled Our Cwm Taf. The revised plan will also be influenced by the cultural, economic, environmental and social well-being goals and objectives within Our Cwm Taf, where they relate to land-use planning.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group has set out an ambitious programme to enable the Council to make progress towards achieving the 2030 target.
- 10.2 On the 16th November 2020, the Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group met to consider reports on Nature's Assets, the Strategic and Local Development Plans and Energy Generation.
- 10.3 The Climate Change Cabinet Steering Group recommends Cabinet consideration consider supporting the content of the above reports.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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