

# **PLACE, SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**FRIDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2023**

**PRESENT:** Councillor J.D. James (Chair) (In Person)

**Councillors (In Person):**

K. Davies                                      S.M. Allen                                      N. Lewis

**Councillors (Virtually):**

D.M. Cundy (In place of G.R. Jones)      T.A.J. Davies      D.C. Evans      T.M. Higgins  
D. Jones (In place of S. Godfrey-Coles)      B.D.J. Phillips      G.B. Thomas

**Councillors also in attendance:**

C.A. Davies, Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs & Planning Policy (Virtually)  
E.G. Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste and Infrastructure Services (Virtually)  
A. Vaughan Owen, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability (In person)

**Also Present (In Person):**

R. Carmichael, Rural Conservation Manager  
S. Rees, Simultaneous Translator  
R. Morris, Members Support Officer  
E. Bryer, Democratic Services Officer (Minute taker)

**Also Present (Virtually):**

R. Griffiths, Head of Place and Sustainability  
G. Pearce-Taylor, Nutrient Management Board Programme Manager  
G. Helier, Coed Cymru Officer  
J. Owens, Democratic Services Officer  
M. Runeckles, Members Support Officer

**Chamber - County Hall, Carmarthen. SA31 1JP and remotely - 10.00 - 11.45 am**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Godfrey-Coles, and G. Jones.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST INCLUDING ANY PARTY WHIPS ISSUED IN RELATION TO ANY AGENDA ITEM.**

There were no declarations of personal interest or of any prohibited party whips.

**3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Chair advised that no public questions had been received.

#### **4. A TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY FOR CARMARTHENSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL 2023-2028**

The Committee considered the draft Tree and Woodland Strategy for Carmarthenshire County Council 2023-2028. The Strategy was presented by the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability.

The strategy addressed the Authority's responsibilities for managing trees and woodlands as well as opportunities for new planting.

The Committee noted that the strategy was consistent with the Tree and Woodland Strategy Tool Kit for Local Authorities. Included as an appendix to the report was the Authority's Ash Dieback Strategy.

A number of comments/queries were raised. The main matters were as follows:-

- It was noted that the Authority was proposing the planting of 33ha of woodland per annum and a minimum of 10% on tenanted Authority farms. The viability of achieving this 10% target was questioned. The Rural Conservation Manager advised that the 10% figure by 2030 was consistent with the Welsh Government's voluntary new sustainable farming scheme. The 10% target was aspirational but that farmers who signed up to the new farming support scheme would have to abide by it.
- Concern was expressed about the planting of 33ha of new woodland per annum and the impact on the tenanted farms which were small in size. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability, assured the Committee that the strategy would be shaped by putting the right tree in the right place for the right reason. He said feedback would be welcome as the strategy was developed further. It was further noted that the 19% tree cover figure for council-owned land aligned with recommendations by the UK Committee on Climate Change and the Woodland Trust but was not statutory. There would also be a focus on tree planting in urban areas.
- It was asked how success of planting would be measured, such as the impact on the environment, animal and bird count. The Committee was advised that calculations for carbon capture would be used and that the whole spectrum of benefits would be looked at including the reduction of flooding and water runoff.
- The Committee stressed that the implications of planting woodland needed careful consideration as once planted the land was lost to farming and to the reduction of food production. The type of trees the Council proposed to plant would be important as ground under conifers was lifeless. It was stated that a high percentage of new broad leaf trees and shrubs would be planted but that some Scots pines, might be part of the mix for their landscape value. It was stressed that planting would be done sensitively on a site,-by-site basis.
- It was stated that broad leaf trees took tens of years to lock up carbon, and that there was a pressing climate crisis. The Rural Conservation Manager suggested that broad leaf trees may lock up more carbon eventually than conifers, which grew faster and that a cautious approach was required.

- In response to a statement that well-managed grassland sequestered more carbon than trees, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability advised he would welcome a discussion to consider the evidence to back the grassland assertion.
- An update was requested regarding the measures the Authority was taking regarding ash die back on private land. The Committee was advised the Authority could undertake work on behalf of the landowner should the tree pose a threat to the highway. The cost would be re-charged to the landowner.
- In response to a concern regarding the sale of private woodland and the potential for the felling of these trees, the Committee was advised that wholesale clearance of woodland was not permitted and that landowners would need to apply to NRW for a felling license.
- It was stated that young people were anxious about climate change and that the new tree and woodland strategy should be opened up to schools and the public more generally. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Decarbonisation and Sustainability re-iterated that the strategy includes community working. It was further stated that community engagement was a pivotal part of receiving grant funding.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Tree and Woodland Strategy for Carmarthenshire County Council 2023-2028 be received.**

## **5. PHOSPHATE LEVELS IN PROTECTED RIVERINE SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION - UPDATE**

The Committee received an update from the Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs & Planning Policy regarding the progress and work undertaken in responding to the impacts of phosphate pollution in protected Special Areas of Conservation.

A number of comments/queries were raised. The main matters were as follows:-

- In response to a query regarding why the River Taf wasn't included in the programme of work, the Nutrient Management Board Programme Manager agreed that excess phosphates was having an impact on all rivers however the focus was currently on rivers designated with SAC (Special Areas of Conservation) status. The Committee was advised that NRW (National Resources Wales) was responsible for attributing SAC status.
- Concern was expressed about the amount of chemicals required to remove phosphates and the complexity of resolving the issues. The Committee was advised that collaborative working would be required and that there were many nature-based solutions that could provide benefits resulting in improved air quality and reduction in flooding.
- The Nutrient Management Board Programme Manager highlighted that the Authority had created a calculator for developers to quantify how much phosphate their scheme would generate. The committee heard that the calculator has been accepted by the Welsh Government and NRW and was being rolled out to the rest of Wales. The calculator would assist developers to quantify how much phosphate their scheme would generate.

- In response to a request for clarification regarding the credit scheme, the Committee was advised that this was a scheme whereby developers would buy credits for new homes in river catchment areas affected by phosphate pollution. The idea is that wetlands and other nature-based ways of mitigating phosphates present in sewage and agricultural run-off and damaging to rivers would be created. The wetlands would then generate credits to be sold to developers as a means of mitigating the phosphate impact of new properties in river catchment areas designated as special areas of conservation (SAC). Credit trading would be an alternative to developers coming up with their own phosphate mitigation measures for their schemes.
- The Cabinet stated that they wanted to see less sewage discharge into rivers. In response to this concern the Cabinet Member for Rural Affairs & Planning Policy confirmed that 65% of the phosphate pollution in the Teifi was from sewage and that agriculture was not the problem. The proportion of phosphate pollution from sewage in the Cleddau was a lot less than 65%, and that the percentage wasn't yet known in the Towy. It was noted that Dwr Cymru are limited by their existing infrastructure and that an investment programme was in progress to reduce the discharge into rivers. It was also stated that the public could help in terms of what they flushed down the toilet.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Phosphate Levels in Protected Riverine Special Areas of Conservation Update be received.**

## **6. FORTHCOMING ITEMS**

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming items to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting scheduled to take place on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2023 and was afforded the opportunity to request for any specific information that Members may wish to include within the reports.

It was proposed and subsequently seconded that the CWM Business Plan be included on the Forward Work Plan.

**UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that:**

**6.1 the list of forthcoming items for the Committee meeting to be held on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023 be agreed.**

**6.2 the CWM Business Plan be added to the Forward Work Plan.**

## **7. TO SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 23RD JANUARY 2023**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2023 be signed as a correct record.**

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**CHAIR**

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**DATE**