

## London Borough of Islington

### **Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 14 March 2022**

Minutes of the Virtual meeting of the Special Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 14 March 2022 at 7.00 pm.

**546 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)**

None.

**547 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 2)**

None.

**548 TACKLING THE ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE EMERGENCY (Item 3)**

Cllr Tricia Clark, invited both the Executive Member for Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Champion and The Corporate Director of Environment and Regeneration to address the meeting and give a presentation, a copy of which is interleaved. The following main points were made:

Where are we now?

- Islington - the sixth most vulnerable London borough to climate change according to latest figures. The emergency is upon us and we are taking action.
- We have direct control over only 4% of the carbon emissions with indirect control for about 5% as a landlord to 25,000 properties.
- We must work together with our communities to achieve our goals. We will also need the support of government.
- Target: Reduce carbon emissions in Islington by 40% between 2005 and 2020
- Actual: total carbon emissions in Islington reduced by **45% between 2005 and 2019**
- Per capita carbon emissions fell by 58% despite a population increase in the borough of 32%
- Islington's reduction is above the London average of 39% and the national average of 36%
- Emissions decreased in all three main sectors - commercial, residential and transport

Buildings

- We are seeking to make all our council buildings more carbon efficient – with at least EPC rating B where possible.
- All council buildings now run on renewable energy

The green economy

- Moving away from ever increasing consumption and movement of people and goods

- Supporting a green recovery by expanding green job opportunities and skills, equipping our local businesses to go green, using environmental clauses in all our contracts

#### Developing the programme

- We have eight delivery workstreams, and have started to establish delivery teams to oversee and implement the commitments in the Vision2030 action plans
- We have recruited a net zero carbon programme team to support co-ordination and drive progress
- We have been delivering some of the commitments in the action planSpecial Scrutiny Discussion Groups
- Delegates were invited to participate in one of the following discussion groups. Below is a summary of key discussion points / comments from participants. Workstreams will use the content of these discussions to inform their work and engagement plans.
- We have **implemented the formal governance** arrangements for councillor scrutiny and engagement, borough partnerships and engagement and (sub) regional and national working
- We are **reviewing our governance** to establish community involvement and oversight
- We are **continuing to build on existing partnerships** across the borough, including closer working with our local Anchor Institutions and Islington Sustainable Energy Partnership
- We are developing London wide partnerships working with London Councils and the GLA. We are the **lead authority for renewable energy** on the London Council's climate change programme and we actively participate in the other priority areas such as Retrofit London, One World Living, Build the Green Economy

#### Investing in Net Zero

- Investing £46m on capital projects over the next three years (approved by Members on 3 March)
- Spending £2m per annum in revenue more than half of which is funded by Carbon Offset Fund
- Exploring how residents can invest in NZC in Islington ('Islington Greener Futures 2027' £1m)

#### **Group 1: Supporting and Encouraging Retrofit of Private Properties**

Discussion will be focussed on what property owners can do to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, and how do we as a council and community develop an effective package that will support and encourage people to invest in retrofit (information, advice, incentives (e.g. financial), confidence in materials/suppliers).

- Planning guidance is 20 years out of date – it is easier to build in garden and reduce green space than to make minor changes to roof to support insulation and solar panels
- Planning guidance does not place any value of environmental benefits
- Homes in conservation areas are some of the leakiest homes in our borough
- Resident advised no resources in Planning to update guidance
- Residents are an important part of the process – they are keen to co-design new planning guidelines
- No reference to EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) reduction and/or carbon reduction in planning guidelines
- Double glazing refused – seems to be case by case decision – residents want guidelines that they can work to, so they have a reasonable chance of success if they submit planning application
- The Supplementary Guidance is required urgently, and the council should wait until ratification of Local Plan
- Visual impact of solar panels vs climate emergency?
- Windows required by planning are expensive – residents cannot afford, lots of loops to go through if want to replace sash windows
- How serious is council about climate change (given above) and what can council do to help, especially if not well off
- What is objective: Retrofit as quickly as possible or create barriers to support conservation
- Discussion on Retrofit London – contractors, create jobs, contractors with Trustmark – non based in Islington
- Best time to retrofit is when resident is making other changes to building
- Ecofurb tool helps residents get an understanding of which measures they can make to their properties, including low cost and more expensive works. The council promotes the tool.
- Requirements to have expensive replacements for windows etc in conservation areas (e.g. Crittall windows) means many people cannot afford it
- Planning department needs to engage residents in rewriting policies
- No trustmark contractors in Islington to deliver Green Homes Grant measures
- Need more local companies upskilled

### **Group 2: The Billion Pound Challenge**

Participants will come away with a greater understanding of the financial challenge of Net Zero Carbon, the work being done to develop a NZC Financial Strategy for Islington and discuss how they can help us to develop our approach.

- The Green Finance Institute (GFI) were set up to bring together public/private industries. With buildings across all spectrums, they tackle ways to involve all stakeholders.
- Innovate UK help local authorities to navigate challenges of reaching net zero ambitions with more innovative approaches. Different local authorities have a range of financing powers relating to the size of population and location. They reviewed the development of pipelines and found a lack of knowledge

of finance options so have developed a one-stop toolkit with a report due at the end of the month.

- Climate bonds/CMIs (Community Municipal Investments) are alternative ways to access capital, allowing councils to tap into savings within the locality with the potential to scale up.
- The large scale of buildings energy retrofit using multi-technology measures needs acceptance from landlords. New arrangements need to be agreed with energy providers and residents.
- Energy savings insurance products can create confidence by writing efficient capital for long term arrangements
- A resident asked what the council are doing about green funding for projects not led by the local authority, as Islington only controls 9% of emissions [4% directly] yet it needs to facilitate the others to accelerate their decommissioning, mainly Housing and Commercial.
- Community energy groups like Power Up North London can help to deliver local decarbonisation projects for community buildings such as schools, community centres, GP practices and the like. How can we link up with the net zero carbon programme delivery team to support specific sites and to access finance?
- There are challenges to attracting the private sector so we need to show a return on investment. How might we access finance for projects that don't necessarily deliver a financial return? There is the need to find an appropriate tension point between carbon efficiency and financial efficiency: insurance takes risk away from landlord and resident.
- Page 44 of the Housing Retrofit Pathways Report quotes a figure of £1.31bn to get all housing in Islington to an average EPC C. Why is this different to the one in your slide?
- How to raise enough capital when low on income stream?
- Tallarna delivery structure was shared with the group showing a 4-5% cost to landlord/council, guaranteed savings backed by insurance; Financing 80%+ loan-to-cost; Benefits to residents = pay-as-you-save model addressing fuel poverty (day 1 bill reduction); reduced exposure to volatile energy prices
- A resident asked if we can scale up the CMIs? PFIs or any consideration of participatory city mode to generate business; we need innovation as old models are very restrictive. What imagination is being applied? The £1m CMI served as a proof of concept with other boroughs following our lead, e.g. Camden have now issued their investment
- University of Leeds provides data on how big the market could become on CMIs. £1m obviously won't address all the needs. Islington CMI is the first ISA-eligible. GFI see this as the future of how LAs will self-fund.
- A community group representative asked if savings from fabric improvements were included in Tallarn's calculation.
- A resident asked if it is within the Council's powers to raise money through business rates (and could private landlords start paying business rates for instance) and might council taxes (privately owned only with a sliding scale based on footprint) pay towards Net Zero? The Director for Environment replies that the council doesn't have power to raise money through business

rates as that is a central government function. When asked if this can be achieved through council taxes, he replied that the government sets a maximum amount that the council can increase council tax by so there is less flexibility than local authorities would like.

- Delivering on the ground improvements to street properties and flats including 36,000 properties with over 9000 leaseholders introduces debates about what it's reasonable to recharge. We need to change some fundamentals – even the law? - about what can be recharged.
- Statistics from University of Leeds highlight that if all 404 councils across the UK were to offer a CMI, the model could raise over £3bn for local Net Zero projects. <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/news-environment/news/article/4633/tackling-climate-change-through-local-investment> The Local Climate Bond market – specifically for crowdfunded debt - can grow to £3 billion. This was written before the updates on ISA eligibility.
- Powerup North London, community energy group delivering decarbonisation projects for community sites, can pilot/test/showcase new ideas for new technologies. Raising share capital through members of the public; working with community centre in Islington raising funding through grants to replace windows to triple glazed – financial model for this site show the measures don't deliver savings to back the capital. Can we work together on this?
- A resident asks if there is scope for 'polluter pays' concept, where the polluter (e.g. commercial business) pays a local carbon tax?
- A representative from Peabody Housing states that they are exploring energy efficiency, energy export and power purchasing agreements to create more headroom for investment. Adds the caveat that internal savings comes with a lot more reporting with its own costs attached
- A resident with a project management background suggests we can all work together to agree an outline plan, a timeline, the cost, decide who will finance it, with a broad timescale agreed to support the detail underpinning, to bring focus to the task at hand? To remember that Islington is trying to deliver Net Zero for the whole of the borough not just the council itself.
- Clarion have a large portfolio with Islington and can link sustainability priorities (linking 2030 challenge with 2050 target). The supply chain doesn't currently exist to deliver this on scale: we need the skills and prices may skyrocket due to demand being pushed.

### **Group 3: How can businesses go green in a post-Covid context?**

This session will ask what do businesses need to do to support a net zero carbon future? How can we collectively help to shape a delivery programme for this (training, advice, incentives, role of ISEP, other)?

1. What support do businesses need from the council, consumers, clients, others?
2. What do businesses need to do to support a net zero carbon future?
3. How can we collectively help to shape a delivery programme for this (training, advice, incentives, role of ISEP, other)?

- Impact of LTNs on vehicle-related businesses (e.g. driving instructors, tradespeople), how green skills translate here and how working class jobs will be impacted/lost.
  - Green jobs are not necessarily new jobs but an adaptation of existing skills. There will be impacts and businesses may need to consider how to adapt their approach but there can still be opportunities, e.g. tradespeople will be installing alternative equipment if they upskill. Alternative fuels and changes to delivery/travel planning will be needed.
- Why is this not a public meeting? Those without internet access are excluded.
  - It is a public meeting, but the reason for the virtual format was explained by the Chair in her introduction (social distancing restrictions are still in place within council buildings therefore it was felt that a virtual meeting would enable a higher number of participants access)
- Concerned about food waste. Can the council offer support to encourage businesses to take up recycling – perhaps a free trial to kick start the process. Once people realise it is easier than they thought they are likely to continue?
  - Yes, the council is keen to look at this. Considering options including a free trial period for businesses
- How can we transition the hospitality sector away from carbon fuels for their processes? They have a significant consumption in this area.
  - Council should use its licensing powers here to provide a stick as well as offering incentives and support. We should set deadlines for the sector, e.g. by XX date you must have reduced / meet these requirements or there will be penalties.
- Peer to peer mentoring/leadership was discussed to show businesses how they can reduce their impact / reach net zero.
  - The council should engage with early adopters, maybe there's a new network model – net zero chambers of commerce? Those who are pioneering new methods and technology can inform and shape the support that other businesses need. Requires active outreach to those ahead of the curve.
  - Michael Calderbank explained the fifty shades greener project: [Islington Restaurants Project \(fiftyshadesgreener.ie\)](http://fiftyshadesgreener.ie) This is supporting 25 hospitality businesses to test the support required. Initial feedback is that the project is pitched too high – need to learn and tailor the support to make it more accessible.
- Hospitality is just an example – need to look at all sectors and address on a sector specific basis. How many businesses is the scheme supporting? – need to scale this up.
  - The council can only do so much – if we do what we have always done, we won't change anything. Don't come up with an idea and try

to get people involved - need to change approach or we won't get the level of transformation needed. Peer to peer mentoring takes the pressure of the council and places it with those who are directly experiencing the transition. This can scale as businesses grow their networks – builds its own momentum.

- The council has found it difficult to identify businesses in the borough who can provide these examples – so look for examples beyond Islington. Bring the expertise in.
- ISEP is the main business network in the borough that focuses on tackling climate change. Gearoid explained the importance of tapping into local knowledge and expertise - in the case of the hospitality sector, there's already a few businesses involved in food sustainability initiatives like zero food waste and packaging reduction. We're hoping to organise a specific workshop/knowledge sharing session targeted to local food outlets and restaurants.
- Communication – council promotes schemes but these have very little reach to the relevant business communities. E.g. many businesses still not aware of grants. Can follow council publications and LinkedIn but still lots gets missed. All businesses are encouraged to sign up to the council business support newsletter: [Islington Council \(govdelivery.com\)](https://www.islington.gov.uk/govdelivery.com).
  - Are there other networks we can tap into to spread the messages further?
  - Would it help if we upskill our own staff across different departments to enable greater awareness and messaging to be delivered through a range of direct contacts rather than just business support teams – Yes 100%.
- IEEA event opportunity – have been offered meeting space this autumn and aiming to host a sustainable food fair/event in Sept, most likely at either of the Union Chapel back rooms. Would be great to work with the council on bringing people and experts together to help further this. Great idea – LBI to connect with them to work on event plans.

#### **Group 4: The climate impact of the products and services we use**

In this session, participants will consider opportunities to make sustainable choices when it comes to goods and services. Are there greener delivery options? What are some ways to avoid, reduce, reuse and recycle in Islington (a Circular Economy). We will discuss how we can best highlight to residents and visitors in Islington the impact of our choices.

##### Deliveries

- Possible solutions to the challenge of the large amount of HGV and LGV deliveries: shopping locally, bulk ordering, click and collect, distribution hubs and last mile delivery, switching modes to cargo bikes.

- Using the local high-street, facilitated through concepts like the 15 minute city (in Paris) is essentially 'self-delivery' and beneficial. Smaller regular trips rather than fewer big shops requiring car.
- Companies could ask customers if they would be happy with longer delivery time more
- Could allow different delivery companies to deliver only on certain days but this could be controversial

#### Service and trades vehicles

- Attendees raised that service, construction and trades vehicles also present a challenge and add to traffic, and it is difficult to tackle due to a lack of data on trades vehicles. One proposed solution was that using local services could help. This could be achieved through improved local communication (e.g. through use of social media groups like Next Door or Whatsapp ) of local trades people / companies and information / directories). People may not always think about where tradespeople are travelling from, can be very long distance. Good to use local for local economy and carbon emissions of travel.
- A representative from Clarion Housing Association said that organisations like the council and housing associations have a responsibility for these things through their procurement processes and who they contract – need to be asking suppliers how they will make their fleet sustainable and how they can go greener

#### Recycling

- The importance of education around recycling – what can and can't be recycled, information about shops that take refills and recycling, facts such as that items smaller than a tennis ball don't get picked up by the sorting equipment so can be disposed of in a way that could meet this requirement (I.e. balling up tin foil)
- We need to do blue skies thinking about how to improve recycling – there are social barriers to people recycling. Rates in Islington are only at 30% - we need to increase but can only do so by doing things differently. Should also be thinking about circular economy.
- Wales has 60% recycling rates, government is strict with local authorities there which might be reason.

#### Food waste and collection

##### Recycling/collection

- People don't have access to food waste recycling throughout the borough
- Council recycling officer - currently trying to roll out to estates without food waste. Food quarters have food waste. We are looking at different food waste recycling options for flats above commercial properties. Attendees were invited to give their views on different approaches to recycling.

- Food waste caddies – not just the problem of lack of caddies but people don't always use them – we need to understand the barriers and educate
- Could there be more distributed food waste processing (anaerobic digestion) at home sites?
- 60% of what is burnt at incinerators is food waste

#### Waste

- A 3rd of food production globally is thrown away. Improving recycling doesn't necessarily address this problem – it might address food waste, but overproduction and over-purchasing of food and the waste in the first place is the issue.
- Eradicating the issue of food waste needs to start from the beginning and with awareness of consumers when buying food – understanding of good practice and the size of the problem might help
- Could we make more use of food waste as food by increasing practice of using it for animal feed (legislation was changed during swine flu but not changed back) - to get more out of it as food again rather than just incinerator

#### Comms and education

- Often people don't know their behaviours are having bad impacts. Council can do a certain extent by banning behaviours but thinking about what more we can do to educate people to change behaviours, that they are just doing without thinking
- Could we get messages out in different ways - council workers high vis jackets, on bins
- Council officer responded a mix of things are required, we need to make things easy for people, and provide people with prompts at the point of use (I.e. when using the caddy)

#### **Group 5: Greening the Borough**

Participants will explore how community-led initiatives can support a more climate resilient future and what are the opportunities to get involved and shape a new greening programme.

- The topic question posed to breakout group 5 was how community – led initiatives can support a more climate resilient future. There were 15 participants including facilitators.
- Charlotte Glazier (CG) (Greening the Borough Programme Manager), Andrew Bedford (AB) (Head of Greenspace and Leisure) and Tony Ralph (TR) (Director Public Realm) facilitated the session.
- CG introduced Islington Greener Together, Islington Greener Together Champions, Islington in Bloom and a couple of other initiatives as part of the Greening the Borough programme.

- CG asked participants for their top three aspirations for the [community-led greening] programme. In summary, responses included:
  - Tangibility: the greening agenda is strongly linked to Net Zero – it is something people can see, whereas other aspects of moving towards net zero are less tangible. Greening really benefit to mental health/makes a difference to quality of life. Can we engage people with more tangible.
  - Expanding scope of investment: look at investment in hedges as well as trees (e.g. at parks and on estates)
  - Islington in Bloom - adjust priorities: opportunity to put more emphasis on biodiversity and carbon reduction
  - Community food growing: more investment, more promotion of it, more of it on estates
  - Increase wildlife, create green corridors, increase tree canopy cover to 40%
  - In borough/on site composting opportunities: composting opportunities are still up for being developed. We are working with Cranfield University working on new methods to introduce this into the borough. They have potential to be both self directed and facilitated
  - Invest in outreach and inclusive of a wide range of people
  - Organic (including food growing)
  - Gardening mentor schemes – pair new groups with established ones
  - Reclaiming waste spaces by creating green areas
    - Bin and waste storage spaces could be additionally utilised as green areas e.g. mini green roofs etc
  - Education about importance of green spaces, particularly for younger residents
  - Everything to be led by the climate emergency agenda; eco-centric; raising awareness about the impacts of the health crisis caused by air pollution and climate change.
  - Improving biodiversity - stop using bee killing pesticides; ban leaf blowers
  - Very local walking and cycling routes
  - Huge and continued positive impact that volunteers have had on Islington greenspaces
  - Bring together residents to benefit from greenspaces, ideally making sure everyone in a scheme can enjoy nature – neighbours feeling like they don't have opportunities to get together (tackle social isolation and improve mental health). Would like to see greater user of greenspaces.
  - Promote the mental health benefits of gardening
  - [For the council to] be brave in supporting residents when they have ideas
  - Parklets are an amazing way to tick many boxes, they are extremely valuable as a community hub, wellbeing, and engage people, as well as the obvious benefits from growing

- Participants were then asked what they thought the top three challenges for this programme are. In summary, responses included:
  - Challenge of engagement: reaching and involving a wide range of people
    - Engagement in the issues about air pollution and Climate Change can be very effective by starting with children and families. Children have a connection to nature that many adults have disconnected from.
    - Encouraging diversity and decision making in groups
  - Setting up groups and keeping them together (Islington Greener Together Champions will be a network)
  - Anti-social impacts on community green spaces that are easily accessible
  - Increasing biodiversity encouraging weeds and long grass, hedges
  - Funding, experts, insurance (NB on insurance LBI will retain space as owner)
  - Getting everyone, and their dogs, to respect the planting etc.
  - Identifying spaces in a borough where space is also in high demand for all manner of uses.
  - Some opposition raised around BBQs being allowed in parks in the summer not compatible with NZC agenda.
  
- The final questions participants discussed were around engagement and specific conversations they would like to see take place next.
  - Just an idea - maybe some of the volunteers with experience (e.g. from Arlington Square or <https://www.hilldrop.org.uk/gardening>) could "twin" with a new group on a nearby estate. They could give advice, and indeed plants!
    - Yes they do for Union Square and Packington Gardens that they're supporting. Perhaps that is a model that we can follow Friends of parks partnering with a local estate
  - It would be great to have a regular forum and a newsletter, or a section in the environment newsletter.
  - Any kind of creative workshops that will encourage younger people to get involved – reaching children can also engage parents
  - 'Seed bomb workshops' come to mind
  - Create mini green boxes on top of bins stores

The meeting ended at 08:47pm