

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 11 March 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held ONLINE - Please see Agenda for details on 11 March 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Jeapes and Weekes.

72 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 2)

No Declarations were made.

73 REACHING OUR 2030 NET ZERO CARBON TARGET (Item 3)

The Chair introduced the meeting and set out the agenda.

The first presentation was from The Executive Member for Environment and Transport, they outlined some key achievements of the Council on reaching the Net Zero Carbon 2030 goal. These included, the decarbonisation of the Waste and Recycling Centre, this had now been fully de-gassed. An increase in Green Skills work which was fundamental to our ability to deliver climate action and support our local economy. There had been many Changes to our streets and creation of new spaces for greening; outside space is important for our residents' wellbeing and important in terms of our ability to adapt to a warming climate, the 900 trees planted so far this year help us provide cool corridors and shade in the borough. As well as helping the climate crises these achievements also provided jobs and encouraged a more active lifestyle. The council's recent work with public health has provided a clear perspective on the impact that climate change can have in protecting people's wellbeing.

Since declaring a climate emergency in 2019 and setting out Vision 2030 the council has been on a huge journey, scoping and delivering projects to support the ambition for a net zero carbon borough. Whilst adaptation was always a part of Vision 2030, the urgency of this has become increasingly clear. However, challenges remain, with Islington being 1 of 6 boroughs most susceptible to climate change urgent government support was needed. The council is increasing engagement, through the various workshops last year and with the introduction of the Islington Climate Panel this year.

The Director of Climate Change and Transport gave a presentation outlining how the Council plans to build a climate resilient Islington. In 2019, Islington Council declared a Climate Emergency, signalling a commitment to addressing the urgent challenges of climate change. By 2020, the council outlined its ambitious 'Vision 2030' aimed at achieving a Net Zero Carbon (NZC) Islington by 2030. The following year, in 2021, a dedicated NZC team was established, along with the implementation of a structured workstream delivery framework. As the program

progressed into 2022, significant strides were made in delivering various initiatives, with progress reported regularly through Islington's scrutiny process. By 2023, the focus shifted to ongoing program delivery and review, with heightened emphasis on engagement, including the establishment of the Islington Climate Panel to gather residents' perspectives on climate change impacts. Efforts also intensified to understand and address climate vulnerability factors, including individual, social, and environmental aspects. This involved working closely with Public Health to assess the potential impact of climate change on communities, reviewing strategies for adaptation interventions, and continuing efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Additionally, launching the Islington Climate Panel aimed to capture lived experiences and concerns regarding climate change, particularly among vulnerable residents, highlighting the council's commitment to tackling inequalities and fostering resilience in the face of climate challenges.

In the question-and-answer session, concerns were raised about the new BREEAM requirement as a condition of planning applications. It was understood that by raising the standard, the council aimed to improve net zero performance but feared it would have the opposite effect. A resident calculated that adhering to all requirements could add an additional £160k to every project, which could be manageable for larger projects but posed a significant barrier for smaller/domestic retrofit applications. In response, it was mentioned that the council had reviewed this and was about to publish new validation thresholds to remove this requirement for smaller projects.

Residents asked whether the shift away from the language of net zero indicated a departure from the ambition to achieve net zero by 2030. In response, Officers highlighted the extensive activity across the programme and emphasised the determination to maximize efforts within available resources. It was explained the change in language, stating that "net zero" was passive, while the new terminology reflected urgency and a broader approach to addressing climate change, including adaptation.

Queries arose over the recruitment of planning officers committed to supporting retrofit and conservation design guidance. In response, it was noted recruitment for one officer was unsuccessful and needed to be repeated, while resourcing issues for the second officer were being resolved internally.

Questions were asked about the selection process for e-bike hire parking bays, to which it was explained that they worked closely with bike hire companies and considered usage evidence and land uses to determine locations. It was further explained to questions on dockless bikes that geolocation technology was used. In response to questions on the Climate Panel, Officers explained the panel's selection through an independent process and highlighted their collaboration with other councils for sharing ideas and best practices. The Officers acknowledged communication challenges and highlighted the panel's role in understanding residents' experiences and improving communication. A resident mentioned Arup's digital tool U-Heat, in addressing the Urban Heat Island Effect, and offered its potential usefulness to the council. Officers expressed willingness to discuss the tool's utility with the planning team.

In breakout groups the following key points were raised during discussions:

1. Supporting Climate Action and Resilience in our Buildings

Support for grey water and water reuse was confirmed to have been included in the SPD, aligning with provisions in the local plan. Overheating had not been initially addressed in SHDF wave 1 but was being considered for wave 2, with some observations regarding inadequate measures in other councils. Despite not being covered by SHDF funding, overheating was being examined in capital works programmes, particularly considering Islington's heat-resilient buildings. Concerns had been raised about the suitability of slim glazing for Victorian properties, suggesting an update to window guidance. While Georgian properties in SHDF wave 1 had been considered for conservation, feedback on window guidance was being investigated. Alternative options like vacuum glass had been mentioned for energy efficiency. Opportunities for input into the SPD would continue through further consultations.

Upskilling efforts had been underway to address the lack of qualified labour force in the construction sector, with potential for resource sharing among boroughs. A roadmap for upskilling the in-house repairs team had been outlined. While London boroughs had operated differently, there had been an interest in aligning climate action measures to facilitate resource sharing. Internal staff within the capital team had been trained as retrofit assessors, indicating a commitment to utilising in-house resources. Challenges in retrofitting had included workforce shortages and funding gaps.

Partnerships with businesses and community groups had been explored to support climate action endeavours. 'Shade' had presented a business model for such collaborations, highlighting an upcoming roundtable event to discuss climate-resilient building ratings. Additionally, 'Greenpeace' had shared information about a high-temperature heat pump as a potential case study for low-carbon heat sources.

Planning for climate impacts, such as adapting guttering for heavier rainfall, had been recognized as essential for future resilience. Council members had emphasized the importance of avoiding the need for future retrofits by considering overheating risks from the outset of projects. It was emphasised the significance of adaptation strategies to manage unintended consequences of climate change.

2. Creating a Sustainable and Climate Resilient Local Economy

Discussion about the GLA's Retrofit Workplaces Accelerator, which initially targeted public buildings but was set to expand its scope soon. Participants noted the interest of the Anchor Institution Network in exploring the focus on public buildings and actively mapping collective plans to identify potential joint funding bids and procurement opportunities. Furthermore, there was an offer made to promote the Energising Small Business programme among relevant members within the community. The idea was put forward of utilising public buildings as cool spaces, as had been done with warm spaces in the colder months with examples such as the libraries, which not only offered shelter but also various facilities. Additionally, there was an exploration of potential linkages between the Anchor Institution Network with discussions about how they could be coordinated. The 'Impact Hub' expressed eagerness to assist with community engagement initiatives, potentially fostering

collaborations among architects to design more environmentally friendly buildings. Despite ongoing efforts, participants recognised the need for better promotion of climate-related initiatives, acknowledging the challenge posed by the overwhelming amount of information available. Suggestions were made to streamline activities for greater impact, with a focus on high-profile events to attract attention. Collaboration with 'ReLondon' on Circular Economy grants was welcomed as an opportunity to further sustainability efforts. Participants also discussed involving supermarkets more actively in spreading awareness about climate action and encouraging local businesses to shift towards providing repair services instead of selling new products. Finally, it was emphasised that understanding the priorities of local businesses and increasing the council's visibility at community events would be crucial in driving engagement and support for climate initiatives.

3. Climate Action and Resilience in the Public Realm

The problem was identified as climate impacts on the public realm, including issues like overheating and flooding, exacerbated by Islington's status as the densest urban environment. The prevalence of tarmac, paved surfaces, concrete, and brick buildings intensified these challenges, leading to competing demands for the same space.

As for solutions, strategies such as tree planting, Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs), creating people-friendly streets, establishing heat refuges with canopy cover, organising play streets, constructing flood defenses and engineering solutions, promoting residents' gardens, designing heat escape corridors, and developing pocket parks were considered.

However, various challenges were encountered, including the dominance of roads in the public realm, competing demands between people, green space, parking, shade, and housing, as well as limitations in council capacity. To address these challenges, a range of actions were proposed: including tree pit maintenance, community weeding, establishing parklets, repurposing parking spaces, championing the cause, recruiting business sponsors, community organizing and campaigning, raising the profile of people-friendly streets, advocating for infrastructure improvements, promoting local food growing, planning for flooding including critical infrastructure like NHS facilities, ensuring biodiversity in tree pits, integrating climate impact and public health considerations, promoting parks for health, exploring funding opportunities from entities like Thames Water, analysing climate risks through collaboration with the GLA and TfL, providing staff training, fostering wellbeing partnerships with a focus on community engagement, hedging around fencing, reviewing grass cutting and hedging trimming practices, and transforming concrete and tarmac spaces into rain gardens or parklets with park grass verges. Additionally, collaboration with the new climate assembly was seen as crucial.

In discussions about using space in Islington differently, questions arose regarding Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs), with a focus on maximising green areas for food growing initiatives like Edible Islington and the Octopus Nursery. Challenges included addressing issues of light, overheating, and water availability. Projects such as urban growing programmes and the creation of hedgerows and biodiversity along fences were explored, along with initiatives like bee walks to promote nature

in the neighbourhood. Participants also discussed revisiting the use of pavements to incorporate park grass verges and open soil, promoting greenery in urban spaces. Concerning flood planning, attention was drawn to surface water flood risks and the need for a comprehensive plan, especially for extreme weather events. The potential impacts on organisations like the NHS, particularly regarding accessibility to GP surgeries during flooding, were highlighted. Efforts to engage more people and discussions regarding the SUDs plan for the borough were discussed, along with the need for data review and risk assessment, including potential collaboration with entities like the Knowledge Quarter and ARUP for funding opportunities. Additionally, participants mentioned a recent report from the Mayor of London and GLA on flood risk management that should be explored.

In terms of collaboration, the importance of a wellbeing partnership focusing on climate resilience was stressed, along with the need for broader conversations and citizen assemblies organised. The potential for reclaiming road space through initiatives like stub streets and the importance of resources and education for community groups and individuals to get organised and involved were also discussed. Additionally, the idea of organising gardeners' forums to facilitate knowledge-sharing and collaboration was suggested.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and highlighted the importance of taking action against the climate crisis.

CHAIR