

COUNCIL
17TH DECEMBER 2020
PUBLIC QUESTION REPORT

1. Question from Claire Kirby

It's good to see Shropshire Council starting to address it's Corporate responsibility vis a vis the climate and ecological emergency.

Wouldn't the Council's finite resources be better deployed addressing the much more significant climate and ecological consequences of its decisions on planning and transport policies especially bearing in mind that Shropshire is one of 18 English councils who despite having declared a climate emergency are at the same time given road building a very high priority contrary to what we know about the additional carbon generated by new roads?

RESPONSE: Dean Carroll Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Services and Climate Change

Shropshire Council is one of the key founders and supporters of the community-led 'Shropshire Climate Action Partnership' (SCAP) which is currently preparing a Strategy and Action Plan to start to address wider carbon performance in Shropshire. Shropshire Council will use its statutory and regulatory roles to support a wider improvement in carbon performance wherever it can and is working with highways contractors to measure and reduce carbon emissions from both road building and maintenance so that informed decisions can be made. The Council has already published positive proposals which will influence the design and location of new development as part of its draft Local Plan Review. However, a significant proportion of the standards which apply to planning and road building in the county are the product of national policy and legislation over which the Council has no direct control.

2 Question from Colin Sheward

Has Shropshire Council set any special measures to assist and aid the local sheep meat industry - farmers and processors etc in the event of a no brexit deal? (particularly concerned re tenant farmers and small businesses like hauliers).

RESPONSE: Cllr Steve Charmley Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Assets, Economic Growth and Regeneration

Officers have been engaging with the National Farmers Union (NFU) as part of both the Economic Task Force and more broadly as part of the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) that has been provided to the Council by government to support businesses through the COVID-19 national lockdown and moving forward over the next 12-15 months.

Of course, with the Brexit negotiations being so fluid the precise impacts are difficult to assess. We have been looking specifically at a range of Brexit impacts through these forums and through the use of these grant funds we will look to support in areas where we can make a meaningful contribution.

We are also delivering business support through events and workshops that is being delivered jointly by Marches Growth Hub Shropshire and Shropshire Chambers of Commerce focusing on Brexit. This doesn't necessarily drill down to the very specific nature of the query but hopefully highlights that we are working with businesses to ensure they are ready for Brexit and will continue to well into the new year once we have the details of the terms of leaving the EU.

3 Question from Jamie Russell

We thank you for declaring a Climate Emergency in May 2019.

In August, the CEE Bill Alliance launched a campaign for the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill which was presented to Parliament on 2 September. This is a Private Members' Bill written by scientists, lawyers and activists; it is gathering support from a broad range of campaign groups, businesses, charities and individuals. The bill has the potential to become the most significant move forward since the Climate Change Act 2008 (which also notably started as a Private Members Bill). At the time of writing, 81 MPs have supported the Bill with co-sponsors from across the political spectrum including Labour, Green, Liberal Democrat.

In summary, the bill will set an emergency path for the UK to follow in order to meet the commitments agreed to at the Paris Climate summit in 2015. The key objectives of the bill are ensuring that the UK plays its fair and proper role in limiting global temperatures to 1.5°C; and actively conserving the natural world. Full details of the CEE Bill and the background to it, can be found at: <https://www.ceebill.uk/>

Are any Shropshire councillors willing to consider the attached motion and table it at the next meeting of full council? Thank you

[Copy of the proposed bill – this is supplementary info only and not part of the question]

Motion to Support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill

Preamble

Humans have already caused irreversible climate change, the impacts of which are being felt in the UK and around the world. Global temperatures have increased by 1 degree Celsius from pre-industrial levels. Atmospheric CO2 levels are above 400

parts per million (ppm) and continue to rise. This far exceeds the 350 ppm deemed to be a safe level for humanity.

Without more significant and sustained action, the world is set to exceed the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C limit between 2030 and 2040. Therefore the current UK target of net zero by 2050 is not satisfactory. It is too little too late.

The increase in harm caused by a rise of 2°C rather than 1.5°C is significant. This is described by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C published in October 2018. According to the IPCC, limiting heating to 1.5°C may still be possible with ambitious action from national and sub-national authorities, civil society, the private sector and local communities. The costs of failing to address this crisis will far outstrip the investments required to prevent it. Investing now will bring many benefits in the form of good jobs, breathable cities and thriving communities.

Council notes that

- i. This council has declared a climate and ecological emergency;
- ii. Many local authorities have established Citizens' Assemblies that are playing an important role in assisting them in their plans to achieve net zero by 2030 or before; and that
- iii. There is a Bill before Parliament—the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill (published as the "Climate and Ecology Bill")—according to which the Government must develop an emergency strategy that:
 - a. requires that the UK plays its fair and proper role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions consistent with limiting global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial temperatures;
 - b. ensures that all the UK's consumption emissions are accounted for;
 - c. includes emissions from aviation and shipping;
 - d. protects and restores biodiverse habitats along overseas supply chains;
 - e. restores and regenerates the UK's depleted soils, wildlife habitats and species populations to healthy and robust states, maximising their capacity to absorb CO2 and their resistance to climate heating;
- f. sets up an independent Citizens' Assembly, representative of the UK's population, to engage with Parliament and Government and help develop the emergency strategy.

Council therefore resolves to:

- i. Support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill
- ii. Inform the local media of this decision;
- iii. Write to local MPs, asking them to support the Bill; and
- iv. Write to the CEE Bill Alliance, the organisers of the campaign for the Bill expressing its support (campaign@ceebill.uk).

RESPONSE: Cllr Dean Carroll Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Services and Climate Change

I would not be recommending Council to support it at this time and in its current form. Whilst I support the general steer and many of the early statements there is too much about the Bill that I believe to be flawed in order to support it. As I'm sure the supporters of this question are aware Shropshire Council has already encouraged the Government to declare a Climate Emergency and when we declared a Climate Emergency as a Council in May 2019 we also instructed the then Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State to ask them to be ambitious in their plans for carbon reduction.

4. Question from Christine Welch

Following a Freedom of Information request, it has been revealed that the Pension Fund Committee does not know the full list of companies that the Shropshire County Pension Fund invests in. Given this, how does Shropshire Council know that its pension fund is not being invested in holdings that contravene its investment policies? For instance, would Shropshire Council be happy if it was revealed that its pension invests in gambling companies, arms companies linked to war crimes, retailers using sweatshop labour, or adult entertainment venues? If it doesn't know where the money goes, it could be in anything.

RESPONSE: Cllr Peter Nutting, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy

This question was raised and answered at Pension Committee on 4 December 2020 and I would refer interested parties to that response rather than repeat it. That response clarified that the majority of the Pension Fund's investments are held in pooled funds with monthly reports detailing the current value of units held, not the underlying investments. The Pension Fund does not invest in any companies that contravene its investment policies. And to reiterate; overall responsibility for managing the Pension Fund lies with the Pension Committee not Shropshire Council.

5. Question from Peter Welch

I am very pleased that Shropshire Council declared a climate emergency and more recently has asked SCPF to divest from fossil fuels via a council motion.

The pensions fund has now made a Climate-related Financial Disclosures report public. The report includes analysis of pension investments under scenarios of 2°C, 3°C and 4°C of global heating.

Is the council as shocked as I am, to read in the report that global heating of 2°C, 3°C and 4°C is considered as viable scenarios for life and finance, when scientists are saying that the world as we know it will be breaking down at 2°C?

Does the council consider that keeping global heating to 1.5°C or lower, in line with the Paris agreement, should be one aim of both SCPF investments and council investments? Thank you.

RESPONSE: Cllr Peter Nutting, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy

A similar question was raised and answered at Pension Committee on 4 December 2020 and I would refer interested parties to that response rather than repeat it. That response clarified that the Fund's asset allocation is assessed against three climate change scenarios to allow the Fund to better understand the climate change risks and opportunities it faces. At the time of the tendering process in 2019, data limitations meant the service provider had not yet developed a 1.5°C scenario. It is likely that a 1.5°C scenario will be developed as climate change models are updated to consider such a scenario. In relation to Shropshire Council I would like to confirm that we are committed to achieving Carbon Neutrality and the need to keep global temperature rises below 1.5c is one of the key reasons behind that.

6. Question from Stephen Mulloy

In May this year, Planning Practice Guidance (PPG - 077) was updated and says that:

"Where any of the policies in the Statement of Community Involvement cannot be complied with due to current guidance to help combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the local planning authority is encouraged to undertake an immediate review and update the policies where necessary so that plan-making can continue".

It goes on to say "The local planning authority should then make any temporary amendments that are necessary to allow plan-making to progress, and that continue to promote effective community engagement by means which are reasonably practicable."

This was further emphasised in the Chief Planning Officer's letter of July 2020 sent to all local planning authorities which said " local planning authorities should consider the practical measures needed to ensure fair participation is possible"...in plan making.

There is already concern that the council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is only now being consulted upon at the end of the plan making process, suggesting this is just a 'tick box' exercise, so can I ask if any review or update of the SCI took place in the early part of this year to ensure that those compromised by Covid 19, and without electronic means of communication, were still able to engage in the plan making process?

RESPONSE: Cllr Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services

Shropshire Council considers that the currently adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) remains an appropriate and robust document to guide how the Council seeks to engage the public on the Plan making process, having taken into account the impacts of Covid 19. Equally it is considered the public consultations the Council has undertaken on the Local Plan since March 2020 have allowed sufficient opportunity for public engagement, including those without access to electronic communication. The current review of the SCI (currently being consulted on until February 2021) seeks to further support this position and to offer the public an opportunity to comment on how the Council engages communities and other stakeholders in the future on all planning matters, including on subsequent reviews of the Local Plan.