

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMISSION

MINUTES of the Environment Scrutiny Commission held on Wednesday 20 January 2021 at 6.30 pm at Zoom

PRESENT: Councillor Jason Ochere (Chair)
Councillor Graham Neale (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Tom Flynn
Councillor Margy Newens
Councillor Leanne Werner
Councillor Renata Hamvas
Councillor Adele Morris
Jeremy Leach

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllr Johnson Situ, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Planning & Transport,

OFFICER SUPPORT: Chris Page, Climate Emergency Director
Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny Project Manager
Juliet Seymour, Planning Policy Manager

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Graham Neale and Tom Flynn.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION

There were none.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. REVIEW: PLANNING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Ann Griffin, a member of Southwark's Design Review Panel, Director of Architects Collaborative and Mina Hasman , Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, who is group lead for the Cross-Industry

Ann Griffin started by saying she recognised Southwark as an ambitious borough.

She referred to the wider context. Currently reducing operational carbon is the current key focus however as buildings get more efficient this improves so it is important to also concentrate on embodied carbon. Embodied carbon is particularly significant at the build stage, in maintenance and at end of life.

The Circular Economy is increasingly recognised as important, however there is a tendency to pay lip service rather than considering reuse and how a building might be recycled at the end of its lifetime.

Ann highlighted a how a range of inconsistent and misaligned regulatory functions and policies, which are working to different standards, for example planning and development control, make it more difficult to set coherent environmental standards. Permitted development also causes problems.

The GLA recently set a price of £95 per tonne and it is difficult to work to different prices. However Southwark need to get to a position where carbon is met 'on site', by ensuring that buildings are made of the right materials.

Three integrated steps were recommended:

- Planning: consent to high pre construction carbon conditions on paper that achieve net zero.
- Utilise Building Control to ensure planning standards are met on site. This is innovative and practical, ensuring that buildings actually meet the carbon standards set down on paper. Ann warned that there is too much value engineering and exploitation of loop holes that mean standards are not

achieved. A completion certificate ought to be required with Building Control issuing this, coordinated with Planning.

- External stakeholders and community are engaged. Ann noted the progress here with the Climate Strategy and stakeholder engagement, and gave the example of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods.

She emphasised the importance of the above three recommendation being fully aligned.

Mina Hasman, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, who is group lead for the Cross-Industry Climate Framework presented on the framework role in educating, integrating and building capacity across different disciplines to deliver net zero by 2030 and tackle the ecological crisis.

The chair then invited comment and questions:

- Mina and Ann said they saw Southwark as an ambitious borough because the council declared a Climate Emergency very early and because of the establishment of the Environment Scrutiny Commission.
- A Completion certificate would build on the existing work of Building Control, who currently have a role assuring standards, but work to lower ones. The recommendation builds on this advising that Building Control adopted this role, which is clearly defined to developers and enables checking that the carbon standards set down in Planning have been met. Other boroughs are considering a similar step, and have been doing so for the last several years but this has not yet been implemented.
- Completion certificates were part of the Future Homes policy framework proposed by the early Coalition government several years ago, but were not realised at that time.

Planning officers update report Juliet Seymour, Planning Policy Manager, prefaced her presentation on the report circulated in advance by explaining that colleagues are checking through a completion process, which happens at the point of allocation of street name and then yearly. Building Control and Planning are in the same management team and liaise regularly.

The chair then invited comment and questions:

- Anthesis Consultants, who are top rated environmental consultants, have been working with the council over the last year. They been delivering popular staff training events, are available to advise planning officers, and are reviewing a randomly selected number of planning applications. The next stage is assessment of delivery.
- Officers reported that initial viability testing suggested that saving a ton of carbon is likely to cost more than the newly adopted GLA price of £95 a tonne, so they are considering a possible sliding scale.
- One of the Carbon Offset aims is retrofitting housing .Housing have looked at estates to assess what needs to be done and the cost of getting houses from SAP energy rating D or E to B or a C. This information is available and of interest to understand what work is needed across various categories.
- There was a question about the environmental credentials of certain buildings, such as ones built of glass. Officers encouraged members to look at the GLA guidance: Be Seen. (<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/implementing-london-plan/london-plan-guidance-and-spgs/be-seen-energy-monitoring-guidance>) as this will be the London wide framework that Southwark are keen to work within. Southwark's energy policy will be available in draft form.

Southwark Planning Network, Paula Orr and Richard Lee presented with reference to the report circulated with the agenda.

Southwark Planning Network commented that they agreed with the Planning Officers proposal and said it would be possible to bring through amendments now to the New Southwark Plan (NSP), rather than waiting a year. They added that environmental proposals brought up in October had not been taken up in the revised NSP, even though housing ones had.

In regards to the Circular Economy they said that Southwark is top of the league of demolition, and this includes council housing, schools and community buildings. Instead they proposed that Southwark ought to aim to be top of the reuse table.

Southwark Planning Network said it is disappointing that not much

has happened with Community Energy apart from a few projects in Great Estates. The previous scrutiny report had good recommendations on this topic that need to be activated straight away. Community Energy can be used to tackle fuel poverty and be part of setting up decentralised network.

They commended the LTN principles but said implementation has been woeful and advocated engagement with residents groups to improve delivery.

The importance of protecting green space and extending biodiversity was emphasised; loss of trees are a great concern. The NSP only talks about protecting not extending green space and ought to include food.

They highlighted the good proposals in the Climate Strategy and said these ought to be fully integrated into the NSP.

On cost they suggested that the question is switched to consider the health environmental and resource costs, and if we can allow development to negatively impinge on these. .

The chair then invited comment and questions:

- Community Energy can catalyse change, and this is another significant benefit in meeting the Climate Emergency.
- Members asked if rates of council house demolition are highest in Southwark because the borough was badly bombed and therefore put up new housing which was of poor quality. Southwark Planning Network responded that high rates of demolition refer to projects in the pipeline from 2019, although there are also high rates of council house demolition in the past, and cited the recent GLA London Assembly member Sain Berry report: Estate redevelopment in London:
Have things improved under the current Mayor?
(https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021_01_estate_redevelopment_in_london_data_sian_berry_am.pdf)
- Intensification of existing buildings was mooted as a potential solution. Southwark Planning Network said that they have investigated new build sites and found lots of places around Bermondsey, but the proposals that have come though are not well supported, for example high towers or demolition of existing buildings. They proposed using different benchmarks to assess buildings and proposed alternative metrics, not just commercial, for example increases to social and natural

capital .They advised that there are tools that can be used to do this.

6. INTERVIEW WITH THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE EMERGENCY, PLANNING & TRANSPORT

Cllr Johnson Situ, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Planning & Transport, was interviewed on his portfolio. The following topics were covered:

- Overview of Climate Emergency strategy, including recent actions.
- New Southwark Plan - process to amend and strengthen with reference to the Climate Emergency.
- Engagement with the community on the Climate Emergency plans, with reference to Citizens Juries
- Pace of delivery of the Climate Emergency Strategy , with reference to the anticipated action plan, and delivering high environmental planning and building standards
- Carbon Offset Fund - process for spending including make up of the planned decision making body.
- Carbon pricing - how arrived at the 50% raise to £95
- Urban Greening Factor implementation
- Council housing and council services meeting high environmental standards
- Emission based parking charging plans
- Community Energy and potential for roll out in the Climate Emergency action plan

RESOLVED

Officers will provide an update on:

- The make up of the body of members and officers deciding the Carbon Offset Fund allocation and spend,

- The timescale for the emission based parking charging to come into effect.

7. CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY AND WORK PROGRAMME - UPDATE

The report was noted.

8. TRACKING ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMISSION REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

This was noted.

9. WORK PROGRAMME

The workplan was noted.