

Chichester District Council

Full Council

20 July 2021

Public Questions and Answers Sheet

Question from Lucia Withers and 62 others:

The following questions are from 63 undersigned individuals, many of whom attended the CDC Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) progress meeting hosted by Extinction Rebellion Chichester on 6 June 2021. They are submitted collectively to demonstrate the continued high level of interest and concern around CDC's progress towards implementing its CEAP, and to call for accelerated action and greater public engagement on it.

It is two years since the CDC declared a climate emergency (19 July 2019); 18 months since the initial CEAP was approved (January 2020); and more than six months since the final plan was approved (January 2021). Presentations by Council Officers on 6 June highlighted the significant number of actions that have been taken over the past months to implement the plan. However, most were focused on internal processes and/or achieving greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) reductions from CDC operations. While action on this front is commendable, CDC GHG emissions only account for around 1-2% of emissions in the district. It is therefore of serious concern that 18 months into the five-year CEAP, little or no progress appears to have been made on implementing actions that relate to area-wide targets, and there is still no coherent strategy which sets out what needs to be done to achieve 10% year on year area-wide reductions of GHG to 2025.

The logic of declaring an EMERGENCY is that urgent action should be taken. We believe that the climate emergency should therefore be treated on a par with the response to the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As with the health crisis, the climate emergency presents new challenges and will require different ways of working that take account both of what the CDC can influence directly, but also where it needs to lead and inspire others to play their role and/or to work collaboratively with others.

Either way, urgent action is needed -- as noted in the December 2020 Climate Change Committee's report, "Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget" (whose author briefed the CDC in March 2021), "*Actions taken now locally will grow the pipeline of projects, jobs and skills to scale up delivery of zero carbon buildings and transport, waste reduction and low carbon land use. For local authorities, this does not entail focused emissions cuts in separate sectors, but means transforming whole places towards Net Zero, working with residents, communities and businesses to deliver the right changes and investments for the area.*"

Questions to the Cabinet Member for the Environment:

- According to presentations on the 6 June, CDC divisional annual services plans have been reviewed for their carbon implications and guidance developed on factoring climate change in to CDC decisions. *In the interests of transparency, will the CDC publish the reviews of service plans so that we can be assured that all plans support, and do not in any way undermine, GHG-reduction targets. Further will CDC make it mandatory that all council decisions, not only factor-in climate change, but actively support GHG reduction targets?*

- Transparency, communication and public engagement will be fundamental to achieving the levels of change needed to come close to reaching GHG emission reductions in the district, yet, the 6 June event represented the first public update on the CEAP since its adoption, and was initiated and hosted not by the CDC but by Extinction Rebellion Chichester. *Will the CDC commit to facilitating regular (three monthly) meetings to update the public on the CEAP and its implementation, that could also act as a forum for engagement and dialogue with local climate/environmental groups, activists and others to support the further development and implementation of area-wide plans?*
- Under the CEAP, the CDC committed to holding a Citizens' Assembly in 2021 as one of the core elements of the area-wide strategy. We were informed on 6 June that research has been done but no information was provided on when this action will be implemented. *Please provide details on when the Citizens' Assembly is expected to take place and what format it will take? If it is not now scheduled for 2021, please explain why not?*

Answer from Cllr Plant:

Responding to climate change is a top priority for the council and we have already started to deliver a number of projects from our adopted Climate Change Action Plan. We are working closely with our partners and are carefully reviewing the delivery of each project with the council's Environment Panel. Alongside this, West Sussex County Council has been developing a Climate Change communications campaign that all district and borough councils plan to use. This campaign will be heavily promoted through all of our communication channels and will target various stakeholder groups.

The climate change communications campaign is not the sole means of engagement. We are establishing a renewable energy working group and have had discussions with employers about how to bring them together to identify how they can work together to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These discussions are focussed on action, implementing projects to reduce emissions. If there is local support, we are also proposing as part of the engagement campaign, to run practical workshops for residents giving them the opportunity to talk to experts about various carbon saving technologies that might be suitable for domestic properties.

As we have explored other areas' experiences of Citizens' assemblies, some of the feedback has made us re-consider the approach in the Action Plan. Assemblies are primarily useful for providing feedback to the council decision makers, from an informed and representative group of people. When it comes to raising general awareness, this is at best a side-benefit. The one off nature of the event is also a concern and these points underlie the proposal for the alternatives options for engagement which will be presented to Cabinet for approval. As well as the actions already outlined above, we will be utilising the Council's existing Let's Talk Panel and targeting specific demographics to get a better spread of individuals engaged on climate change; utilising existing communication routes such as those for the Local Plan Newsletter and formalising the holding of twice-yearly public meetings on the progress under the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

We believe all these approaches will enable us to have ongoing conversations with a wider base of residents and businesses and by involving a wider audience will be more effective. They will be recommended to Cabinet, which will make a final decision at its meeting in September.

We will make our regular updates on Action Plan progress available, and these will include all the operational projects from the Council's Service plans that have a climate change implication to them. The template for Committee Reports has also been amended to ensure that the climate change implications have been considered for all project and new policy proposals. All key future decisions for the Cabinet are detailed within the Council's Forward Plan which is on our website.

We should not discount action to reduce the Council's own carbon footprint as a means to lead and inspire others – demonstrating what can be done. We have secured an investment of £1.3m to reduce carbon emissions from Westgate Leisure Centre and are also evaluating and prioritising further action across our estate and vehicle fleet.

With regards to transforming whole places towards Net Zero, we cannot achieve this alone, other public sector organisation, private sector employers and, crucially, central government will have to set out their plans for decarbonisation in order for a whole District target to be achieved.

Question to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive:

We recognise that achieving the area-wide target was always going to require national and regional action but the target was set because it was recognised that CDC could nevertheless play a leadership role, working in partnership with local organisations and communities to drive progress towards it. *In the absence of any regular community engagement, a plan for a Citizens' Assembly or any alternative means of galvanising public support for change, is the Council's corporate leadership really committed to this target? What resourcing is being provided to meet it, and is it sufficient? How does this compare with other Council priorities?*

Answer from Cllr Lintill read by Cllr Taylor:

Yes, the Council's leadership are committed to leading action on both the Council's internal carbon emissions target and the District target. Yes, we are putting resources in, and I welcome your acknowledgement that we need others to also lead and work alongside us. Tackling the Climate Emergency is one of the key priorities in our new Corporate Plan. However, we are still in a pandemic and the Council has many urgent and competing priorities, and so over the summer we are considering all the options in order to set a sustainable budget that delivers the range of actions our District needs. Without unlimited resources, it is especially important that we succeed in winning funding from outside the Council. We are doing just that - £400,000 for tree planting, £185,000 for improving the energy efficiency of households in fuel poverty with £364,000 more to come. As Cllr Plant has already outlined, we are investing in our own estate and fleet vehicles and alongside the range of methods for engagement and dialogue with local residents, interested groups and businesses, we aim to strike the right balance between action and communication.

Question from Deborah May read by Nick Bennett:

Councillors will have noticed that there is a silent protest outside the Council offices today. One of the main concerns is the dreadful state of the water quality in Chichester harbour, and the discharges of raw sewage into the harbour by Southern Water. Only last week Southern Water (SW) were fined £90m for discharges between 2010 and 2015. Yet still these discharges persist.

Just this week a young local family had a child hospitalised after playing near one of the discharge pipes. There are numerous reports of sewage floating in the harbour along with sanitary products. Is this what we really want our harbour to look like? As I write this on 13 July, SW has discharged for a total of 49.98 hours from 2 locations in Chichester harbour - so this has been continuous since sometime yesterday. It just isn't good enough. The discharges are not timed to coincide with an outgoing tide, and so the releases just get washed back up the harbour. There are also no notices warning residents and visitors about reporting sewage to the Environment Agency - this should be speedily rectified.

So - the law and heavy fines don't really affect Southern Water as it persists in releasing untreated sewage into the harbour, which is illegal if done on an almost continual basis. Directors are not held personally liable, and so the practice continues. What could CDC do to stop this ruination of our harbour?

One solution could be to STOP allowing planning permission for new homes, as it is clear that SW cannot legally manage the sewage it already has. More homes = more sewage. It's quite simple really.

Someone has to take a stand. Would CDC consider saying to central government "We won't build any more new homes until Southern Water can effectively and legally manage the sewage they currently have"?

I don't see how anyone in government could object to this stance. If CDC continues to allow further housing, knowing that there is a huge issue with legally disposing of sewage, councillors are actually aiding Southern Water's illegal sewage-dumping activity. So my question is, Please could CDC take this above suggestion of limiting the number of new homes seriously, and undertake to come up with a solution - perhaps in partnership with Natural England and other agencies. We really can't have any more homes built until sewage can be properly disposed of - legally! No more excuses. No more passing the blame to someone else.

As a resident of CDC, I am fed up with the rapidly declining state of the water quality in Chichester Harbour and demand that something more be done. Agencies must find a better way to work together so that companies do not run rings around government and local government, creating a mockery of the rules and flouting common sense to the detriment of our environment.

Deborah May

Answer from Cllr Taylor:

Southern Water is the statutory sewage undertaker responsible for collecting, conveying and treating wastewater. As such Southern Water has a statutory duty to serve new development and to meet environmental criteria set by the Environment Agency. Investment is planned in 5 year periods and is informed by the Local Plan – this means that Southern Water's business planning and bids to OFWAT for funding to deliver new infrastructure take account of additional development proposed in Local Plans, and are reviewed on a 5 yearly cycle.

CDC officers have been working closely with both Southern Water and the Environment Agency to agree a position in relation to future provision of waste water treatment and to understand if the significant environmental constraints in the area will limit or delay the treatment that Southern Water can provide. Southern Water will be considering all the options through preparation of their Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP). CDC officers are fully

engaged in this process so that emerging outcomes can be used to inform the Local Plan ahead of the DWMP being finalised.

When planning applications are considered, if further infrastructure improvements are required to support the development, this will often be secured as part of any planning permission, however it is for the statutory sewage undertaker to make necessary adjustments to their network.

In addition to this, Southern Water and the Environment Agency agreed a Position Statement in 2018 which limits new connections to Apuldram Waste Water Treatment Works.

The Environment Agency (EA) issues permits to Southern Water for the regulation of their treatment works that discharge to the harbour. The treatment works are obliged by the EA permits to report sewage discharges to the harbour. As such to suggest that the public should also report sightings of sewage would only duplicate the information that the EA already receive.

However, Southern Water has an on-line notification system, called Beachbuoy. Beachbuoy (southernwater.co.uk) This is available free to the public, is very accurate, shows live data on pollution events and from the exact locations shown on the map.