

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Climate Change Working Group** held remotely on Tuesday, 11 August 2020 at 9.30am.

Present:

Mr B Boyd	Mr A MacInnes
Mrs I Campbell	Mrs A MacLean
Mrs M Davidson	Mr D Macpherson
Mr C Fraser	Mr R MacWilliam
Mr J Gordon	Mr D Rixson
Mr J Gray	Mrs T Robertson
Mr D Louden	

Officials in Attendance:

Nicole Wallace, Environment Manager
Keith Masson, Climate Change Officer
Jackie Sayer, Engineer, Energy & Sustainability
Eddie Boyd, Energy & Sustainability Manager
Joe Perry, Climate Change Co-ordinator
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Also in attendance:

Anna Patfield, Planet Sutherland
Emma Whitham, Consultant, A Food Growing Strategy for Highland

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council.
All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Working Group.**

Mrs T Robertson in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Mr S Mackie.

2. Declarations of Interest

Item 4 – D Rixson (non-financial) and M Davidson (financial)

3. Presentation – Planet Sutherland

A presentation was given by Anna Patfield, Planet Sutherland. Areas covered included the key values of Planet Sutherland, carbon dioxide issues, estimated sea rise levels and flooding implications, actions undertaken, and mitigation and adaptation required for the future. The importance of clear messages, appropriate terminology (eg climate crisis/emergency rather than change), positive narratives and local resilience were emphasised. Attention was drawn to the need for Highland Council staff education and green champions.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- information was sought and provided on action required to tackle agricultural plastics, especially in relation to silage and carrot farming in Highland. A report on a recent survey of usage in Sutherland was anticipated the following week;
- it was suggested the press and media tended to favour negative stories or to put a negative spin on efforts to bring about change, and more work was required to encourage positive, encouraging news articles, for example encouraging more walking and cycling instead of car usage. With many dividing issues in society, it was important to find common ground for the public;
- the value of involving schools in projects was emphasised;
- two key areas that should be built on were community activity and capacity building, and efforts were required at both individual and organisation-level. Examples included reducing the use of hydrocarbons and oil and gas heating;
- reference was made to HIE's focus on export markets, and it was suggested effort was required to improve internal business;
- it was important future flood plains were fully taken into account in relation to Planning policy;
- a summary was provided of some Scottish Government initiatives including Climate Hubs to develop projects and source funding, and the development of the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network;
- it was vital that communication was undertaken with the public, for example via social media, on what projects were underway. The importance of making climate change action seem interesting and fun was emphasised;
- Planet Sutherland was a voluntary organisation and Anna Patfield a volunteer. Members suggested that given the importance of the work, it should not rely on volunteers, which could be unsustainable in the longer term;
- it was important that local climate change action groups were able to communicate and work together, and reference was made to the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network which brought groups together;
- the need to obtain revenue funding to support projects on an ongoing basis was challenging;
- reference was made to Earth Overshoot Day which could be an opportunity for the Council to publicise climate change issues; and
- in relation to projects to reclaim land from the sea, it was likely these were based on economic modelling rather than from a planetary perspective. The current economic model was unsustainable.

Members thanked Anna Patfield and **NOTED** the presentation.

4. Growing Our Future – A Draft Food Growing Strategy for Highland

Declarations of Interest

Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item in terms of being the Council's representative on the Lochaber Environmental Group, and Mrs M Davidson declared a financial interest in this item in terms of having a family gardening business, but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that their interest did not preclude their involvement in the discussion

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/8/20 dated 27 July 2020 by the Climate Change Officer.

Emma Whitham gave a presentation covering the background, vision and aims, action plans and areas of support. Key recommendations were as follows:

- Identify resources to support a Highland Food Growing Network;
- Work with Community Planning Partnerships to identify land available for growing and to encourage wider partner involvement in implementation of strategy;
- Get GYO into all schools;
- Create online GYO map and support for communities; and
- Creative approach in how we think about GYO and where it might take place - inspire communities.

Opportunities for the future included the Highland Good Food Conversation and the COP26 – Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration, with detail provided on both.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- the report was welcomed;
- it was hoped the development of an action plan for a better Highland food system would be completed sooner than by 2030;
- Covid concerns could impact on climate change initiatives, for example increased use of cars due to fears of using public transport;
- a wider variety of native hedging would be welcomed, as would communal green spaces in all new developments, and this should be incorporated into Scottish Government and Highland Council Planning Policy;
- attention was drawn to the poorer soil on the west coast, which made growing food more challenging;
- land ownership in certain areas could be dominated by a small number of large owners;
- concern was expressed about the vulnerability of important projects when reliant on individual volunteers;
- it was important the Highland Council encouraged projects, for example in schools or communities, and did not place unnecessary barriers or bureaucracy in the way of progress. Local Member involvement with projects could, at times, speed things up;
- consultation questions 6, 7 and 8 were personal in nature and would be better in a separate voluntary section;
- the set-up regulations around allotments and community gardens could be time-consuming and off-putting and information was sought on what could be done to encourage similar community projects. Council policies should presume in favour of projects in the first instance;
- the need for timely change of practices and mindsets was emphasised;
- Covid had highlighted the importance of food security and the usefulness of growing your own food. An integrated food growing policy was required;

- the issues required strategic commitment from the Council, Government and Community Planning Partnerships, rather than relying on pockets of dedicated communities and volunteers;
- the empowerment of local people was vital, as was feedback from them on projects being undertaken. Assistance should be provided where possible, for example to apply for funding or to co-ordinate volunteers;
- consideration could be given to working in partnership with similar groups in other Councils;
- it would be helpful if ongoing funding could be provided to projects that were working well rather than obliging groups, especially when voluntary, to reapply for funding to maintain projects;
- any food strategy should include food security and inequalities and should be at a high enough level and Highland-wide. An aim of the strategy would be to provide a more uniform experience across the Highlands; and
- growing your own food should be included on the school curriculum.

Members:-

- i. **AGREED** the draft Growing Our Future strategy should be made available for public consultation;
- ii. **AGREED** the Climate Change Working Group supports the principle of a Highland Good Food Conversation conference; and
- iii. **AGREED** to request the Highland Council Chief Executive contact her community planning partner counterparts in order to establish what joint resource possibilities exist to support the Growing Our Future strategy.

5. Just Transition Commission – Call for Evidence

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/9/20 dated 23 July 2020 by the Climate Change Officer.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- it was suggested the tone of the report in relation to the agricultural industry be modified to be more cooperative. However it was also pointed out that some pre-existing practices required to be challenged;
- it was pointed out that if staff were expected to continue working from home during winter, some incentives might be required, such as assistance with heating bills;
- in relation to section 3.1 of the report, there were Resource implications, particularly in relation to officer time; and
- meeting the net-zero economy targets in relation to the housing stock would be challenging.

Members **NOTED** the report.

6. Climate Change Workstreams

There had been circulated Report No. CCWG/10/20 dated 23 July 2020 by the Climate Change Officer.

During discussion, the following issues were considered:

- there was a need for improved communication around climate change and initiatives;
- a performance framework was required to set milestones and measure activity and outcomes;
- wider policy issues included community equality and the need for additional climate change staff, particularly at a senior level to ensure matters were given adequate attention; and
- it was important climate change issues were embedded across the organisation.

The Chair pointed out that in order to run the meetings more efficiently and give adequate time to all items in the time available, she intended in future to limit each Member to around 3 minutes per comment.

Members:-

- i. **NOTED** the contents of this report; and
- ii. **AGREED** an update on workstreams is presented as a standing item at future meetings of the Climate Change Working Group.

The meeting ended at 12.00