

Topics: Climate Commission for Cornwall and IOS; Local Area Energy Plan; Retrofit Company; Elevated Local Energy Efficiency Standards, Food Security; Lendology

Present:

Cornwall Council (CC):

Cllr Linda Taylor, Lead CC

Cllr Martyn Alvey: Portfolio holder for Environment and Climate Change

Nick Haywood: Program manager for the carbon neutral team (reports to MH)

Cornwall Climate Action Coalition (CCAC):

John Carley

Andrew Stott

Tom Pine

Karen Jeffereys

Apologies: Mark Holmes: Manager: Carbon Neutral Cornwall Team; Environmental Adaptation Service; Nature Recovery Team

i. Introduction by CCAC

- Cornwall Council gave an update on the Cornwall Climate Commission
- The chair of the University students Union is a commissioner and hence there is representation from academia
- **CC** although not a voting member expect to have an input into the commission

1. LAEP

The Cornwall Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) has been on track for the last year, and we are aware of various activities within this process.

Question 1: Could you provide us with a very brief update of what is happening within the LAEP process and a timetable of when it is to be published?

- **CCAC:** It is noted that updates on LAEP are available on the hive, which is indicating that progress is at stage 3 or 4.
- **CC:** we have successfully appointed a new person into the Carbon Neutral Team part of whose job will be to maintain the Hive. They start in early August. Regarding the LAEP the evidence base has been received from consultees. This will be used by our consultants to produce the modelling. There are 5 scenarios to be taken forward using the modelling that City Science have developed:
 - **do nothing;**
 - **balanced pathway:** aligned to the national net zero and adopted by government;

- **maximum electrification:** i.e. if we electrified everything and tested the grid capacity;
 - **technology transition:** Looking beyond traditional technologies and onto looking at the unique technologies available in Cornwall, so, floating offshore wind, biomethane, deep geothermal;
 - **accelerated transition:** This is seen as the fastest route to decarbonisation and includes a blend of both technology and societal shift. So higher take up of active travel & public transport. Higher acceptance of renewable technology, including ground and air source heat pumps.
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- **CC:** Work is being undertaken now and that will form the action plan. On the 9th August CC are expecting the draft LAEP from our consultants.
 - Between the end of September and mid-late November we will be looking at going out to public consultation.
 - **CCAC:** Can we assume the public consultation will be online and or will involve the community in other ways?
 - **CC:** We are still firming up exactly how we will facilitate the public consultation, but we expect to run a survey, some online events and will be reaching out to certain functions and forums for face-to-face exchanges. In addition, we will interact with the Climate Commission.
 - **CC:** All our groups are made up of volunteers who are heavily committed timewise. Often with consultations it is easier if a particular network works up a response collaboratively. However, we want to know if a collaborative response will carry as much weight as the total of each small group responding individually?
 - **CC:** The collaborative approach is excellent but when responding, breaking the consultation topics into its individual sectors will be preferable. I.e. housing, transport, renewable energy and industry. If the response represents a well-established network that would certainly carry weight as long as we know that it is a collective view and the numbers of people behind it.
 - **CCAC:** There does not seem to be anything on the Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO), or mention of the likes of Mitchell and Webber who are doing a lot of work around this area? Also, could CCAC get access to the draft before it goes out to public consultation?
 - **CC:** HVO will be recognised within the energy mix and regarding the CCAC request for early sight of the draft we will see if this is possible. On the 20th Sept the all member briefing will be on the draft LAEP and the plans for consultation, so any early disclosure of the draft LAEP could not be before this. This would not be much before the consultation release date.

2. Retrofit Company

At the last meeting on the 14/03/2024 it was mentioned that the Council are reviewing options for setting up an arm's length company to undertake retrofit. A key objective being to overcome the barriers presented by compliance with regulations and paperwork that the CC require. The Council has acknowledged that with its own retrofit company these barriers would be surmounted because they would be both the customer and the supplier.

One significant obstacle to progressing on establishing a retrofit company is the government's practice of short-term funding and or funding via bids or project by project. What is needed is an assured long-term funding stream.

A prospective change of government in the near future may be a cue for redoubled efforts to lobby for structural change to local government funding streams.

Question 2a: What are the latest developments in reviewing the virtues and practicalities of setting up a retrofit company?

Question 2b: What might be the scope of its operations?

Question 2c: Is multi-year funding on the wish / lobby list for the Council to press for through UK100 and the Local Government Association. Also, on the back of the conference that the Council attended, where it spoke to policy makers about the shortcomings of disjointed funding for retrofitting, might the Council use the retrofitting issue as an example to get across the importance of assured funding generally in connection with properly enabling Local Government functions?

- **CC:** The Council has member-based representation on the Local Government Association (LGA) Local Infrastructure Net Zero Board and one of the things being pursued is fairer funding. Also, there needs to be a joined-up partnership with private enterprise.
- **CCAC:** This is why we keep returning to the concept of an arm's length retrofitting company. An entity that is not directly part of the Council might be able to attract more private funding.
- **CC:** Corserve are looking to enter this market. In this connection there has been some internal restructuring going on.
- **CCAC:** Albeit not with all the companies, but some retrofitting work done via grants etc has not been up to the mark! The expectation must be that Corserve could not do any worse!

3. Elevated Local Energy Efficiency Standards

Some improvement in building standards is already in force. However, in a statement by Baroness Penn made on the 13 December 2023 it was made clear that: "the Government does not expect plan-makers to set local energy efficiency standards for buildings that go beyond current or planned buildings regulations".

Backdrop to this prescription includes:

- The prospect of a change of government by the end of the year;
- Focussed criticism of this position by a number of bodies such as Naomi Luhede-Thompson, CEO at Rights Community Action and Good Law Project's Legal Manager Ian Browne, whose Project is heading to the High Court to demand housing that tackles fuel poverty and the climate crisis;
- Olivier Vergnault's 22/8/22 report for Cornwall Live: According to a study by environmental campaign group Friends of the Earth, the Duchy is the third local authority in the country for the number of neighbourhoods which are worst impacted by soaring energy prices behind Birmingham and Bradford, but the first county authority;
- Plymouth and West Devon. A November 2021 appeal decision in Dartmouth where the Inspector said:- 'It seems to me folly to build new houses now that will commit the owners to potentially expensive and disruptive alterations as the UK moves to decarbonise the heating of its housing stock';
- Committee on Climate Change: Building new homes. "New homes should be built to be low-carbon, energy and water efficient, and climate resilient".
- The Climate Change Committee (CCC) report in 2020 that most Local Plans require "significant revision" if net zero is to be delivered. In 2021 the CCC recommended that a "net zero test" be applied to planning. And in 2022 the CCC reported that local government "is still not sufficiently supported" with "insufficient progress" made on reforming planning standards;
- Provision within the Ministerial Statement for Local Authorities to go beyond national construction standards IF they are able to demonstrate viability and use the government's preferred metric, the Target Emissions Rate (TER), which is based on carbon emissions.

Lancaster City Council attempted to go further than national government by setting out that by 2028 all new developments must be net zero carbon from day one rather than zero carbon ready.

One of the key advantages of the EIU metric is that it ensures energy efficiency as well as carbon reduction, meaning it tackles fuel poverty (i.e. the cost of heating a dwelling) too. By only concentrating on emissions as TER does, a house could be part-powered by solar panels but still leak heat and be expensive to run.

Question 3a: In connection with the oncoming review of Cornwall's Planning Policy starting next year, will the Council work with UK 100, the Local Government Association and also liaise with Lancaster City Council, over pressing the incoming government for the planning reforms necessary to allow revision to planning policy, to be meaningful in terms of creating a key part of the framework for net zero?

Question 3b: As part this exercise will the Council promote and press for the preferred option of wrapping prospective new planning policies around Energy Intensity Use (EIU) reduction instead of Target Emissions Rate.

- **CC:** It is clear that national planning policy itself could change significantly within the next 12 months, so as you suggest lobbying is needed through the LGA / UK 100 for it to be the shape we want it to be. With our climate change DPD it was going slightly further than national planning policy in some areas.
- **CC:** The flipside of the challenge, accepting the need for more houses, is who is going to build them. The volume that are being suggested for Cornwall by which ever government is in power is way beyond the capacity of local builders. Within the housing construction you have effectively got 3 separate markets:
 - **Small** business building a house as a bespoke project for someone with a plot of land;
 - **Medium** sized local firms, Kingsley spring to mind, take on ten, twenty house small developments;
 - **National scale** housebuilders. Unfortunately, in Cornwall we are reliant upon the Wimpey's Persimmon's and Wayne Homes of this world who have the capital behind them to go and knock out 2-300 property developments.
- **CC:** If we made it too difficult for the national scale housebuilders they simply would not build in Cornwall. They have got land available to them, banked or through either purchase or auction. They can pretty well build where they choose. Unless there is a national level playing field where there is the same challenge wherever they are in the country, we cannot risk putting ourselves up to be an outlier and so putting our future housing stock in jeopardy by being too prescriptive over what they can do! Also, we have a real shortage of companies to work with one of the registered social landlords and they have the will to take on something particularly locally nuanced.
- **CCAC:** We hear what you say but think the time is right to push hard to develop progressive planning policy. Yes, it needs to be as nationwide as conceivably possible, but we would call for courage when it comes to the local approach and to say, 'the Wimpey's and Persimmon's of this world that haven't been building the best and so we will challenge you'.
- **CC:** The fact remains there is a serious housing need, which is being aggravated by thousands and thousands of building applications that have consent, but are just lying there - "land banking"! When we begin to develop Langarth we need a quality requirement on housing and that is something we should be forcing through every developer who wants to come and work with us.
- **CCAC:** We would love to see an advertising campaign or thrust through the media to explain that a house that costs £5,000 more to buy is going to cost £2000/year less to run for ever so what sort of idiot would not want to buy it. Come the new government we need to get in quick and start pushing for that in collaboration with our fellow authorities, the Climate Commission, UK 100 etc.

4. Food security, land classification and qualification of support for solar farms

This issue was debated by Full Council on Tuesday 16th April. The debate centred around whether to commission research to explore the economic role of grade 3 land (with a particular focus on that which is already identified as grade 3b or is likely to be if otherwise unclassified) in the Cornish context to ensure that planning policy and subsequent decision making is able to establish the right balance between use of land for agriculture and solar farms. The motion was carried! Details of when the research will commence, who is to do it and by when its findings will be disclosed, are awaited.

Support for renewable energy as a participant in CO2 mitigation was not in question during the debate and this sentiment is carried forward with this question. What is in question are the qualifications and caveats that should operate to condition this support!

It is understood that the sponsoring facts behind the debate included:

- That 60% of farmland in Cornwall is tenanted leaving the owners free to scope out solar as a steady income stream, likely above the respective Farm Business Tenancy rates;
- Agricultural Land Classification 3b covers, according to Cllr Pascoe, 90% of Cornwall, so leaving constraints to solar farms restricted to principally higher end environmental designation and lack of grid access.
- Grade 3b land in Cornwall is more productive than Grade 3b in Yorkshire. It can be double cropped each year. Important in the context of oncoming food insecurity, as exposed by bad weather this last winter reducing yields of for example spuds, cereals and grassland in Cornwall and making food imports precarious.

The debate exposed shortcomings in the Climate Emergency Development Plan Document (CEDPD), when it was stated that it had 'missed a trick by being too specific in saying only the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) should be protected'. The National Planning Policy Framework defines best and most versatile land as grades 1, 2 and 3a in its glossary.

Question 4a: Will planning policy revision, which it is understood is to commence next year, lead to a new Local Plan that captures the purpose of the CEDPD, or will the CEDPD itself be revised?

Question 4b: With the motion in the debate voted to go forward, namely to commission research to explore the economic role of grade 3 land with a particular focus on that which is already identified as grade 3b, will the Council recognise that its findings need to form an essential part of the evidence base for the oncoming review of planning policy, and in this context will the reference to best and most versatile (BMV) land in the existing CEDPD be abandoned?

Question 4c: Is there an anticipated date by which the revised Local Plan / CEDPD will progress to public enquiry?

- **CC:** Our CCDPD was very much an interim document, mid-way between our local plans and there to bolster up the local plan with new policy around climate change. The 24month period 2026-27 is the time frame for the new local plan coming into being. Public examination of the prospective new local plan is expected to run from May 2027.
- **CC:** Regarding question 4b there are a fair few farmers within the Council membership and a growing concern around large scale solar going on productive farm land and that general balance between food supply and energy supply. Land classification is something of a blunt instrument that does not really drill down to certainly individual field level. There is no single document that definitively said what grade each field in Cornwall is. What is widely accepted is that we are pretty short of land that is 3A and above and the vast majority of our farmland is 3B which is pretty good for growing grass, making silage and grazing livestock on. It is not so good, particularly with modern farm machine, to cultivate for horticulture. But where some of that 3B land can become cultivated the climate in Cornwall means in term of its productivity it is even more productive than some 3A land because you can get 2 crops out of it in a growing season. So, it is all is a bit nuanced in terms of what land is best for arable and in the national planning policy there is no definition as to best and most versatile (BMV). Within the DPD we used the phrase BMV which perhaps tied our hands somewhat in recognising the true value of 3B land, which is something we would hope to put right in the new local plan.
- **CCAC:** Regarding the research, mandated at Council on the 16th April, we wonder when it is likely to start, who is going to do it and how long it will take before the findings are released?
- **CC:** The Head of Planning, Louise Hood, has advised that they have already started to put feelers out. The instruction to research will likely be with one of the academic institutes and in terms of timeline the aim is to balance the time it is going to take to do it right with the start in earnest of the local plan. Initial findings are expected at cabinet in Sept. What Phil Mason, Head of Planning & Regeneration at the Council said in a very public meeting was that the research will not change the planning policy, but it will carry significant weight. I guess that until we start to see some appeal decisions come out of the Bristol Planning Inspectorate, I do not think we will know where we are going on this.
- **CCAC:** We assume that whoever sets the terms of reference for the research will want its findings to be structured in a way that provides for things like the sequential test. It can then inform the debate that leads to new policy drafting.

5. Lendology

Lendology is a non-profit making SME. Working on behalf of their council partners, Lendology offer a loan service to homeowners to help them make their homes safer, warmer, and more secure, while also improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions. Since 2005, Lendology CIC has lent over £23million of local council capital to improve private sector housing. Loans are available across Cornwall for eligible

homeowners looking to invest in home energy efficiency measures and retrofit. The interest rate is set annually by the council. The current interest rate for homeowners in Cornwall is 4%. Everyone living in this area will receive the same interest rate, regardless of the loan amount, loan term or personal circumstances. The interest rate is fixed for the term of the loan.

This project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Cornwall Council has been chosen by Government as a Lead Authority for the fund and is responsible for monitoring the progress of projects funded through the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Question 5: We welcome the relationship with Lendology in Cornwall, and would like to know what support will be given by Cornwall Council to the organisation, with what controls, what measures of success, and for what period?

- There was no time to answer this question

Latest reports from Carbon Neutral team :

- **Carbon Neutral Cornwall Annual Report 2023/24**
<https://letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/reports-and-reviews> listed as [View Carbon Neutral Cornwall 5 year update](#)
- **Cornwall Council Emissions Inventory Report 2023-24.** June 2024
3425598751657f631022078090cb856b_Carbon_Neutral_Cornwall_Annual_Report_2023-24
- **Cornwall Council website**, quick link to the reports and reviews page on the Hive: This brings together key Cornish reports, including links to the action plan, inventories, performance reports and DPD.
<https://letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/reports-and-reviews>

Useful Background Reading

- Link to PCAN: What is a local climate commission? Place Based Climate Action Network (pcancities.org.uk) <https://www.pcancities.org.uk/what-local-climatecommission>

- Notes from previous meetings between members of CCAC and CC:

- 2022-2024

<https://www.cornwallclimateactioncoalition.org.uk/meetingcouncilnotes.html>

- Prior to Oct 2022:

<https://www.cornwallclimateactioncoalition.org.uk/meetingswithcornwallcouncil.htm>