

COUNCIL MEETING

31 July 2023

PUBLIC QUESTION 1

Name of person submitting the question: Marvin Elliott

Member to whom the question is to be put: Councillor Rathbone Ariel

Question

Now that the Council elections have taken place, could I please bring to your attention The Climate Change Committees (CCC) 2023 report?

In the 2023 report, Lord Deben states that “Our confidence in the achievement of the UK’s 2030 target and the 5th and 6th Carbon Budgets has markedly declined from last year”.

Following on from some calculations I sent you previously. The report says that UK greenhouse gas emissions were 450 MtCO₂e in 2022. I believe this equates to 25,029,000,000m³ of CO₂.

In Lord Deben’s letter to the Prime Minister, he states that “During his eleven-year term as Chairman, his Committee have held the Governments’ feet to the fire on tackling Climate Change. It is their role to ensure the Government make good on legal commitments. His final assessment - Failure to act decisively!

In the Executive Summary the CCC says “recent experience on societal change following the pandemic has shown that substantial changes to behaviours are possible, although these have not been due to climate policy. It is essential that policies are implemented now, especially on home energy use. Information alone is not sufficient - it must be accompanied by implementation of policies that both make low-carbon choices easy, attractive and affordable.”

If the UK Government has failed to fulfil its legal requirements, do the public have a moral right to question the legal validity of Council Tax payments when their District Council have declared a Climate Emergency?

Answer

As part of the Council’s commitment to the climate change agenda and our Net Zero ambitions we recruited two new Climate Officers. The Green Team was established and set to work on projects to promote Climate Awareness and Action amongst staff, such as developing a Workplace Environment Policy and measuring and addressing staff travel emissions. In November 2022 the Council participated in a “Couch to Carbon Zero Sprint”, a 10 day initiative to promote lifestyle changes that support Net Zero.

Other environmental projects and initiatives in 2022/23 include:

- Creating an Urban Forest 1066 report detailing the number and condition of trees in Bexhill, along with a Tree Planting Strategy for Bexhill. The Council and our partners also planted 250 trees and 1,500 Whips.
- The Council's Community Grants application forms have been updated to include environmental considerations and impacts, £15k was ringfenced from the 2023/24 Community Grants Scheme for Reduce, Re-use and Recycle Grants.
- £500k from the CIL Climate Emergency Bonus Fund was awarded to the Village Halls Energy Project which will reduce the carbon emission of Community Halls across Rother.
- By January 2023, 95 households in the District had installed solar arrays via the Solar Together group purchase schemes that took place in 2020 and 2021. A further round took place in Spring 2023 and attracted a record number of registrants.
- In March we began an audit of 24 of the Council's larger green rural assets, with a view of providing a biodiversity baseline and future recommendations for their management to achieve ecological improvements.
- The Council has assessed the feasibility of installing electric vehicle charging points in Council owned carparks. Seven carparks are viable and a supplier has been procured.
- The Council's 'Rother Reduce Reuse Recycle Grants Scheme' has been launched.
- Climate Mitigation and Adaptation are key to the new Local Plan development and the Corporate Plan recognises the Climate Emergency as a key priority.

Officers are working on a refresh of the Environment/ Climate Strategy and the Climate Action Plan will be published later this year but the above demonstrates the Council is not waiting for the Action Plan and is already delivering Climate Action.

The Council made a pledge, to support the Council's aspirations as follows;

'Pledge to do what is within our powers, to make Rother District carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions.'

The pledge is not legally binding and there is no direct correlation with council tax setting.

The Council is using its powers to reduce emissions and will continue to do so.

This task could be progressed more quickly if there was more specific funding available but the Council continues to access external funding wherever possible whilst also identifying internal resources to help take forward this vitally important agenda.