

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2nd September 2021.

Chair: Joan Raine.

Councillors: William Patterson, Graham Simkins, Deborah Wicks, Darren Smith, Elaine Martin, Doug Lawson, Peter Baker, Mike Eyles, Michael Hanley, Mark Rudhall.

Report by Michael Hanley.

1. Report from Mark Rudhall (MR), Green Growth Portfolio Holder.

There has been very substantial growth in sustainable development, zero carbon housing and environmental enhancement. The council started from scratch but the pandemic interfered with progress. There has been success in electrical vehicle charging points. These are about to be rolled out. It is planned to build 3-5 zero carbon housing schemes. The houses will be sold as affordable housing. £500k has been raised to fund 28 properties to become more energy efficient.

Elaine Martin (EM) said she is a member of the zero carbon group and wondered why there had not been any meetings since April. MR said that there had been a problem with shortage of staff to organise the meetings. Deborah Wicks (DW) asked how many applications had there been for the Green Business Grant. 12 was the answer. DW: The 5 zero carbon houses will be more expensive than a conventional build so how will they be able to be sold at affordable prices. MR: A report is expected from the building contractor which will detail the costs. The houses will be built within budget. As to charging points, there have been delays as the previous charge point company supplier had pulled out.

I asked about charge points in Alston, as we have two at Tyne Willows which have been infrequently used. The present scheme is a pilot based on Penrith and Appleby and if successful, will be rolled out to places like Alston. It is planned that there will be on-street charge points for residential areas.

Further questions were asked about the creation of more dual carriageway on the A66 and how there would be a net gain in biodiversity, as was promised.

David Ryland (DR) asked about growing wild flowers on grass verges and plans for builders to encourage nesting by birds whose numbers have dropped dramatically in recent years (swallows, swifts, house martins and starlings).

DW asked about the plan to fell a large Weymouth pine at Voreda House (where the council plans to move to). MR said that it planned that young trees will replace this tree.

Joan Raine said she had suggested in the past that swift boxes be purchased and wondered if any progress had been made. MR said he would find out.

Mike Eyles asked whether the green credentials of a large number of Heart of Cumbria (EDC housing scheme from the previous administration) houses could be improved. DR talked about a recent housing development in Kirkby Stephen which incorporated sustainability. The houses have green roofs and sustainable paths and this should be the standard for future builds.

2. Performance Report from Amanda Yellowlees (Assistant Director of Customer Services and Performers).

A report was presented on all areas of the council's activities. A new constitution is being developed. DR asked where the new promotional video on Penrith was? AY said she would find out.

DW asked whether any councillor had seen the new arts development programme. She also asked how much it would cost. AY thought the cost was about £45k.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

EM asked about devolution of assets to parishes. Nothing has happened. Had the parish councillors, who had raised concerns' had any correspondence? It was thought not and this needed to be rectified.

4. Reports from Outside Bodies.

Several councillors report back from various outside committees (police, national parks, health service etc). I have been sending reports on Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee and Eden Health and Wellbeing Forum to the chair, Joan Raine, over the last two years. Councillor Raine wanted to present these reports as a model for any councillor attending Outside Bodies. Other councillors agreed that the reports were interesting and well constructed and that I should carry on in the same vein.