

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 09 April 2024

Climate Change Working Group report on Carbon Sequestration and Woodland creation - Cabinets response

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Considers the Cabinet response to the recommendations of the Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation report as per the decision made during the cabinet meeting on 17th January 2024.
- b. Approves of the response or confers observations appropriately.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Climate Change

Summary

What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?

1. Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee are asked to consider the Cabinet response to the recommendations of the Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation report as per the decision made during the cabinet meeting on 17th January 2024.
2. The executive response to be approved or any observation to be conferred back to Cabinet.
3. We would ask the committee to consider the importance of taking a holistic approach on Carbon Sequestration and bear in mind that some scenarios may need further consideration into the impacts that options may have on the wider delivery of our statutory services.

Report

Background

4. On 17th January 2024 Cabinet received the Climate Change Working Group report – Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation. Following discussion, a decision was made that an executive response to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the recommendation(s) of the Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation report be provided within two months of receipt of the report.

Current Position

5. The Cabinet welcomes the report from the Scrutiny Working Group. It agrees that Woodland Development has the potential to deliver significant benefits to the County and its residents including in relation to Carbon Sequestration, and that is why the creation of new woodlands is very much part of the Cabinet's future plans. To deliver this the Cabinet will be considering how best this can be achieved and considering where opportunities can best be utilised for this purpose balancing the benefits of different land uses and the suitability of individual land holdings for those various land uses. The Cabinet also recognises that Carbon reduction is always a better option than Carbon sequestration and will continue to challenge itself on its projected residual carbon emissions in 2050 to ensure that its projected residual emissions are reduced to the smallest amount possible.

Key Considerations

6. Whilst cabinet accepts 4 of the 6 recommendations provided by the report, consideration has to be given to:
 - a. R1 - That the Cabinet be requested to consider the amount of carbon sequestration that can be achieved on SCC land to mitigate residual carbon emissions from SCC's carbon footprint that will be present in 2050.
 - i. **Cabinet Response** Accept in Part –
The "LUC – Zero by Nature study" – confirms the amount of carbon sequestration achievable on the SCC property portfolio, excluding Highways assets is enough to mitigate the "residual" carbon emissions from SCC carbon footprint. This report also details the amount of carbon already stored within the rural portfolio, which need to be kept stable. Within the Climate change action plan an estimation on the residual emissions in 2050 from SCC activities has been made, which

is reviewed annually. Wider discussions are ongoing internally to ensure all aspects have been considered.

b. R3 - That Cabinet be requested to consider cessation of disposal of Council owned land /County farms already on the asset disposal list until it has been considered for inclusion in the concept model.

i. **Cabinet Response** – Do Not Accept

The capital receipts from the sale of property assets make an important contribution to funding the Council's Capital Programme to fund school improvements, improve roads etc. Consideration therefore needs to be given to whether a moratorium on land disposals would impact the Council's future plans before approving a moratorium on asset disposals.

Conclusion

7. With such an important County Council decision, to achieve our Net Zero commitment, it is important to take a holistic approach on Carbon Sequestration. Collaborative working and cross directorate discussion will be needed to ensure all aspects have been considered.

Link to Strategic Plan

8. Whilst the Climate Change Working Group report on Carbon Sequestration directly links to one of SCC's strategic priorities namely to 'Tackle Climate Change, enhance our environment, and make Staffordshire more sustainable,' Cabinet's response also bears SCC's overarching pledge in mind: 'Live within our means and deliver value for money'.

Community Impact

9. N/A

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Cabinet Report - Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation

Appendix 2 – Carbon Sequestration and Woodland Creation for Net Zero Recommendations and Executive response.

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