

# **Questions for Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee**

**7 September 2021**

## **Question 1 from Sally Scott**

### **Re: Declaration of Climate Emergency and Carbon Literacy Training**

In July 2019 Wirral Borough Council was one of the early Local Authorities to declare a Climate Emergency. This Declaration affects every area of Council responsibility.

It is significant that The Declaration made by WBC in July 2019 includes a commitment to become a **Carbon Literate Organisation** - with all elected and employed members of the Council undergoing Carbon Literacy Training.

Two years on, it is increasingly clear that catastrophic, global climate change is already upon us, and academic climate researchers, meteorologists, and economists, in fact experts from many different disciplines are calling for an urgent **scaling up** of Climate Crisis Action. Action is needed at every level of society, with an increasing number of 'ordinary' citizens ready to do their part.

The Committee for Climate Change, who advise the Government, have stated very clearly that Local Authorities are well placed to play a major part in the action, as they have local knowledge and understanding of their area and are probably very well motivated to help their own residents – this was shown to be true during the pandemic and can be true again.

The importance of Carbon Literacy is that if Councillors, especially decision makers, need to be aware of the realities of Climate Change to avoid supporting ill-advised, and possibly, costly policies, which unintentionally making the Climate Crisis worse.

Council staff use procedures to ensure that Council's policies are in place, but if staff are not carbon literate bad-information mistakes will be made... There is a case for saying that all employed staff should be required to undertake professional training as part of their job.

As the Crisis deepens, Wirral Borough Council needs to become more active in fulfilling their stated commitment to Carbon Literacy.

The reality that finances are very tight for Local and Regional Authorities makes any significant contribution towards Climate Change a very big ASK – but with, or without, improved financial support, progress towards dealing with Climate issues requires a widespread and high degree of Carbon Literacy.

As a resident of Wirral I would like to know....

1. How many present WBC councillors have already undertaken, or are booked into, a Carbon Literacy Training course?
2. Is it possible to know which councillors have not yet taken, or signed up to, Carbon Literacy Training?
3. What proportion of WBC's employed staff have already undertaken, or are booked into, such a course?

4. What contractual precautions are in place to ensure that workers in companies contracted to work on behalf of the Council are required to operate in a climate sensitive way?
5. How will WBC mount a public information campaign about Climate Action to help members the public to appreciate Council strategies, which of course, need to be visible and verifiable?

Significant strides have already been made towards to the goal of the Council being/becoming Carbon neutral by 2030 ... however the increasing impact of Climate Change is here and now, the risk affecting everyone, everywhere.

**Carbon Literacy [as with other Information] should not be viewed as a party-political matter and Carbon Literacy is needed to slow the Crisis and mitigate the already-present change.**

**I urge this committee to take whatever steps are needed to fulfilling the Council's commitment to become a Carbon Literate Organisation**

### **Supplementary Question**

How will Wirral Borough Council mount a public information campaign about Climate Action to help members the public to appreciate Council strategies, which of course, need to be visible and verifiable?

### **Question 2 from Verity Smith**

The final paragraph of section 6.4 of W.B.C.'s 2010 – 2015 Beach Management Plan, published in September 2010, says

*"The Appropriate Assessment has to take into account the very small area of scattered *Spartina* growth that is to be controlled and the possible long-term and major impacts that a '**do nothing**' **policy** would have on the designated protected site. Using information provided by the reference '*Spartina anglica: a review of its status, dynamics and management*' and the fast colonization of areas of foreshore and associated issues with this species that makes it 'possibly one of the most controversial species worldwide' the most obvious choice of management at Hoylake is **to eradicate** this species before it spreads any further."*

Subsequent to this publication, please pinpoint the exact meeting, advice or publication where it was determined that *Spartina* was no longer a controversial species that needed to be eradicated?

### **Question 3 from Jeanette Hatter** Jeanette Hatter <jeanette@thepottingshedwirral.com>

How many members of the Committee have visited Hoylake / Meols beach in the past 3 months?

### **Question 4 from Charlotte Smith**

#### **Main Question**

It has come to light that the current state of Hoylake Beach is having a detrimental impact on the operations of the emergency services and therefore potentially putting lives at risk. The accumulation of sand for example near Kings Gap is an example of this. With this in mind will the Committee make provisions to rake and maintain the amenity beach between Kings Gap and the new Lifeboat Station to allow easy access for the Emergency Services. Basic legislative principles can be found under the Coastguard Act 1925. Local authorities do have the power to provide such provision under section 234 of the Public Health Act 1936.

### **Supplementary Question**

Please can you advise of the list of Stakeholders in regard to the beach and why you appear to be whitewashing them by referring them to an email inbox when we know that the Environmental Chair has a very poor record of engagement and rarely responds to enquires pertaining to Hoylake Beach. Except to refer to the Have Your Say Website which is now debunked as no one hardly ever receives a response from that as well.

### **Question 5 from Stephanie Thompson**

The Government Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs known as Defra, identifies a dangerous air pollutant associated with road traffic known as 'particulate matter'. This danger is expressed by this government statement "The strongest evidence for effects on health is associated with fine particles (PM2.5)"

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-air-pollution/health-matters-air-pollution>

For those unfamiliar, PM2.5 is 30 times thinner than the human hair and can penetrate the blood stream and even reach the brain.

Defra has also published the following statement, and I quote: "Exposure to high concentrations of PM (e.g. during short term pollution episodes) can also exacerbate lung and heart conditions, significantly affecting quality of life, and increase deaths and hospital admissions. Children, the elderly and those with predisposed respiratory and cardiovascular disease are known to be most susceptible to the health impacts from air pollution." <https://laqm.defra.gov.uk/public-health/pm25.html>

A Kings College London study published in January 2020 of the Liverpool City Region identified around 180 deaths on Wirral from PM2.5 air pollution and at the time the report received publicity from the BBC and ITV.

Before I say the next bit, for those unfamiliar with the word 'anthropogenic', it just means 'caused by humans'.

On the 26th April this year, Defra stated " . . . it is in the interest of the UK to measure concentrations of particulate matter as close to these sources of anthropogenic emissions as possible in order to effectively assess exposure to particulate matter that can (be) tackled via UK policies." <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/air-quality-statistics/concentrations-of-particulate-matter-pm10-and-pm25>

However, Wirral Council's 2020 Air Quality Annual Status Report states that there is only one PM2.5 monitoring point in the whole of the Wirral Borough Council area and that is at a 'park' in Tranmere.

Wirral people need the proper measurement of PM2.5, after which community consultations, expenditures and actions can be prioritised in the interests of human health. The death of each child and the death of each adult from air pollution also reflects a deteriorating quality of their life usually over many years, not to mention a major burden on the National Health Service – a service already under extreme pressure.

Therefore my question is:

Why is Wirral Council not urgently undertaking regular PM2.5 monitoring at schools during drop-off and pick-up times, and also at communities adjacent to busy roads, particularly in Birkenhead where the Kings College London study identified as one of “the most deprived and highest level of air pollution” areas in the Liverpool City Region?

[Maybe of interest to the Council: A group of academics ‘Transport for the North’ has developed systematic techniques that inform real-life modification of traffic flows to produce LTNs in towns and cities (see 21 minutes into the video): <https://youtu.be/RTXmIR2BU-4> It welcomes local authorities to join/participate in their work: [https://transportforthenorth.com/northern-evidence-hub/northern-evidence-academic-forum/?mc\\_cid=86fb792bf3&mc\\_eid=624d5054ed](https://transportforthenorth.com/northern-evidence-hub/northern-evidence-academic-forum/?mc_cid=86fb792bf3&mc_eid=624d5054ed)

### **Question 6 from Simon Jiang**

Can somebody in a position of responsibility PLEASE explain why there appears to be a degree of poor management and lack of consistency, even wastage, prevailing in the current borough-wide street light replacement programme being carried out by appointed contractors SSE Enterprise on the council's authorisation? The following are examples to illustrate this point - on some main roads, new columns are being put in which are the wrong height (usually smaller than they should be instead of a uniform height), whilst on others, columns with working lights have been cut down or removed prematurely even before their replacements have been installed, leaving that specific area without illumination. There are also many locations where lights - which have already been replaced the previous year - are now being replaced A SECOND TIME with new columns and lights, whilst elsewhere, other locations which have been awaiting new columns and lights for the best part of three to five years - and which have been repeatedly logged with the council as broken/faulty or even a safety risk - continue to be ignored.

There seems to be no logic to this randomness: renewing lights again which have already been changed the previous year, or leaving out obvious broken lights on one street when the rest have been replaced. Is this not a mismanagement and waste of resources, given that I was already informed that everything is done as a matter of priority? This makes absolutely no sense. Most frustrating of all, despite repeated and exhaustive attempts to get answers to these questions from departmental officials over the last 18 months, there has been no reciprocation, let alone communication, which is not acceptable.

With just a few weeks remaining before the onset of the darker evenings once again, and with the SSE contract drawing close to its completion, can I just plead with these officials to show a bit of common sense and rationale for once and to focus on imminent and urgent renewal of all of the logged outstanding locations [with old or damaged columns and broken lights, chiefly in the Liscard and Seacombe areas] which have yet to see even their first new LED replacements, let alone their second, instead of repeatedly attending to what is not broken!

**supplementary question:**

Over the last couple of years, I have spoken and engaged with many residents at locations where these oversights described in the first question have been noted and they too have expressed bewilderment and concern as to why these omissions have not been addressed in anything ranging from 18 months to four years. I have also urged them to contact the street light department and councillors directly themselves as all too often my queries have fallen on deaf ears. In most cases there have been no responses. Can you thus provide for once, an explanation to us residents as to why many street lights I have logged repeatedly with the council have been continually ignored in this way, leading me to suspect that these delays are wholly premeditated or strategically intended tactics to put off remedial work for as long as possible?

**Question 7 from Miles Jones**

Why is the survey of Hoylake Beach taking so long that by the time it reports, the beach may be beyond reclamation?

**Question 8 from Joanne Randles**

On the 21st November 2019 I emailed Councilor Elizabeth Grey, regarding my concerns about the excessive amounts of grass growing on Hoylake and Meols foreshores.

In her reply, she quoted to me that;

"The grass is almost all meadow grass, not spartina"

Today the entire length of the Meols promenade from the Hoylake RNLI station to Dovepoint is exclusively covered with Spartina growth and all within 2 years too and is continuing to spread unchecked in a north easterly direction towards Moreton shore.

My question is;

"What considerations were made by the Cabinet Member for Environment two years ago, the environment committee since, and have officers produced advice on the implications of letting Spartina spread unchecked with the possibility of Spartina spreading along the entire northern Wirral coastline and the likely impact it might have on the established wildlife of this coastline?"





**Question 9 from Julie Hunter:**

Wirral surrounded on 3 sides by 25 miles of coast which has sections assigned Special International, European & UK protected site status means that the council has a very complex management task. Actions taken or not taken within these designated areas could have long term & far reaching implications & repercussions.

Scanning the horizon of our shores I easily identify several hazards which need to be managed to protect this environment & its local communities for the future.

Can you give assurances that the council is preparing a transparent Coastal Management Plan to help keep coastal communities safe, healthy & happy & that it will incorporate some of the very unexpected relevant new science which is emerging now in light of COP26 that would help futureproof the plan.

**Question 10 from Wendy Bennett:**

Is the Council planning to consult & meet with bona fide groups in Hoylake as part of their Beach Management Consultation and if so, which groups and when will the meetings be?

**Question 11 from Joe Pennington:**

On the part of the Council's website devoted to Hoylake Beach Management, why is it not possible for contributors to ask questions and receive answers relating to Hoylake beach, whereas on the rest of the website this is possible?

**Question 12 from Neil Smith**

Please describe the education and training that environmental officers and committee members receive to ensure that they are up to date with the latest guidance and thinking and can therefore provide accurate answers posed to them through the "Have your say" portal.

Please also share the sources of the information used to provide this education and training.

**Question 13 from Caroline Wright**

We have reached a two-year anniversary of the cessation of the beach management plan, required "**to consider both conservation and the needs of residents**".

Councillor Elizabeth Grey has previously advised residents that a compromise could be negotiated with Natural England to rake a section of the beach, from the RNLI station to the old toilet block, but more preferable would be to the Kings Gap.

Given the time lapsed and detrimental effects on the community, will the Council give urgent consideration for this compromise to be negotiated and approved by Natural England before the damage is irreparable?

So the community and tourists can enjoy a sandy beach amenity area once again, as afforded to New Brighton and West Kirby.



### Question 14 from Nicola Verkade

I am a self employed business owner based in Hoylake running a short term letting company in the corporate and holiday letting sector, we have been severely affected by the pandemic and are desperately trying to recover and build our business going forward, the current disgraceful and unmaintained state of Hoylake beach has and is in my opinion having a direct negative effect on my business and other businesses locally as visitors are no longer coming with no usable, clean beach, footfall is down significantly and with less people and less money spent in Hoylake the economic impact is obvious.

My guests some of whom have visited for over 20 years are shocked and horrified by the current state of the beach and I cannot justify the councils actions to them when they say how beautiful it once was and yet how sad and neglected it is now.

We as residents and business owners expected our council to support us post pandemic and we feel incredibly let down and dismissed as our demands for a clean raked usable beach are continually ignored.

What assurances can you give me and other Hoylake business owners today that we are being heard and that plans to clear an amenity beach area are imminent, as a plan to delay this for another 12-18 months will be disastrous and potentially fatal to mine and other local businesses and Hoylake's economy may never recover.

### Question 15 from Kelvin Wright

Spartina is a pioneer salt marsh species rapidly spreading in Hoylake and Meols. Salt marsh is considered as a “sink” for global warming-causing carbon. However, recent research\* published on 05 April 2021 has established that half of global methane emissions come from aquatic ecosystems – including salt marsh conditions.

My question:

Given the above, in respect of the post study findings, following the independent evaluation, what are the hopes and aims of the Council on receipt of the evidence?

\*Rosentreter, J.A., Borges, A.V., Deemer, B.R. *et al.* Half of global methane emissions come from highly variable aquatic ecosystem sources. *Nat. Geosci.* **14**, 225–230 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41561-021-00715-2>