

## **Council: 20 February 2024 - written response to question**

### **Item 8: Budget and Council Tax setting 2024 to 2025 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024 to 2028**

Councillor Charlie Lynch referred to Attachment G of this report, 'Net Zero Decarbonisation Fund – January 2024 Update', with specific reference to the figures quoted under the fleet intervention at Table G1, namely that for an investment of £1,160,000 to upgrade the fleet to electric vehicles, this was currently projected to provide a net return figure of minus £155,000, and a carbon saving of 85 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e, which he felt was disappointing.

He acknowledged that the carbon savings should be higher as the source of power would be from the Council-owned solar farm; however, he felt the electricity used would be sold to the grid anyway.

Councillor Lynch referred to a paper released by Cambridge University that had reviewed a series of carbon off-setting, carbon capture programmes. He stated that for £73, a tonne of carbon could be saved through various means.

In addition to carbon savings, Councillor Lynch also drew attention to public health savings that could be had. A joint health report produced by Bath and Oxford Universities had looked into how much positive public health impact there would be from implementing a fleet of electric vehicles. Councillor Lynch had calculated that for upgrading a fleet of 30 petrol vehicles to electric, there would be 20 times more value to public health by giving the equivalent directly to the NHS than the public health savings that would be achieved here. He considered there were far easier ways in which to improve the environment and public health than what was currently proposed by the upgrading the fleet to electric.

Councillor Lynch also considered that electric vehicles were becoming more economically viable year on year, and therefore felt this scheme should perhaps be delayed until it was more economically viable to proceed.

In conclusion, Councillor Lynch requested that the above be reanalysed to ensure the proposed investment in the electric vehicle fleet is good value for money and would achieve sufficient carbon savings and benefit to public health.

#### **Response from Councillor Gerald Kelly, Portfolio Holder for Regulatory, Governance and Environment:**

Thank you for the question on what is a huge and complex issue.

Public Health funding and the thrust of the Bath / Oxford report is fundamentally an issue for Central Government. Their funding choices are not for us to repair, although we do and will continue support Public Health's goals in improving residents' wellbeing. Reducing pollution is one of those goals.

The Cambridge report is one of many which makes clear the human and economic costs of pollution generated by motor vehicles, although it understates the issues for West Suffolk. It uses the UK averages for domestic car numbers and usage, and we have more than double the average number of vehicles per household, and correspondingly higher usage; both these figures are growing. We have a problem and an urgent need to address it; the question is around finding the optimal use of the funds to address the Environmental, Public Health and Economic threats posed by increasing internal combustion engine usage.

We do not see offset as any sort of practical solution. The demand for suitable land – particularly locally – through Biodiversity Net Gain alone may well use up supply. At the same time it fails to address the problem; rather it frankly pretends that we can carry on just as we are until, as Councillor Lynch appears to suggest, Electric Vehicles are so cheap, there will be a sudden switch. The move to EVs has to be an iterative process.

Infrastructure and the pressure to build homes away from jobs, shopping and leisure for the foreseeable future mean that there is no realistic prospect of reducing the increasing volume of vehicles on our roads; we have, particularly in rural areas, poor and worsening public transport arrangements, and walking and cycling alternatives are impractical. Were it in our gift to address any of these issues, that may halt or reverse the increase in car usage. But it is not, so the optimal use of the resources we have is to support and encourage the fastest practical way to change the type(s) of vehicle on our roads. Part of that is leading by example which is why the budget is as it is.

We are and will continue to be a prudent administration. All our expenditure is under constant review to ensure that it fits with our strategic priorities. While we have to consider offset in certain circumstances, it is by its nature the "least good" option, particularly when it only addresses part of a problem.