



## Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item

9

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2022

Report of	Assistant Director of Place and Client Services	Author	Ben Plummer ☎ 508965
Title	Summary of progress 2021/22		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report details progress that has been made with actions in the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan in 2021/22. A summary of the review of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan by Climate Emergency UK is detailed, along with key next steps for progressing the Action Plan in 2022 and beyond.
- 1.2 Key highlights from 2021/22 include:
  - Reported emissions reduction of 12.8% between FY 2019/20 and FY 2020/21
  - Transition to electric vehicles in the CBC fleet with 4 hybrid vehicles, and the installation of electric vehicle charge points in Council car parks
  - Beginning the creation of a business case for a solar farm to contribute to powering the Northern Gateway Development
  - Involvement of 400 volunteers in the planting of 20,000 trees on Council green spaces as part of the Woodland and Biodiversity Project
  - 100,000 miles travelled on eCargo bikes in just over a year through the Colchester eCargo bike delivery project.
  - CAREless Pollution campaign and no-idling signage help to increase awareness and action to improve air quality in Colchester
  - Investment in 4 smart waste bins as part of a trial to test the effectiveness of these bins for collection efficiencies.
  - Supporting the Eco Festival 2021, with over 3500 attendees to provide a good platform to advertise the Council's environmental projects and engage with residents.
- 1.3 The Council received an overall score of 52% for its Climate Emergency Action Plan, greater than the district average score of 43%. In the review of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, it was identified that the Council could improve significantly in the review sections 'Diversity and Inclusion', 'Education, Skills and Training' and 'Mitigation and Adaptation'.
- 1.4 Actions to respond to these 'gaps' in the Council's action plan are outlined in the report, including establishing clearer actions in relation to climate adaptation and adding in actions around the Town Deal and the Green Homes Grant scheme which relate to supporting vulnerable people to become greener (and to save money).

**2. Recommended Decision**

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to note the contents of the report and provide any guidance with regard to the progress of the action plan.

**3. Reason for Recommended Decision**

- 3.1 To ensure that the Panel is content with the progress made to date, and to provide any feedback on work carried out so far.

**4. Alternative Options**

- 4.1 Not Applicable

## 5. Background information

5.1 An update to the Council's original Climate Emergency Action Plan was created in June 2021, structuring it into 8 key themes and containing over 50 actions under these themes. Key highlights and progress under each theme is provided below.

### Reduce carbon emissions from our buildings and fleet

5.2 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Reported emissions reduction of **12.8% between FY 2019/20 and FY 2020/21**. Covid-19 impacted these emissions, but it did help us to understand the difference home working and a reduction in commuting can make to our emissions.
- Updating our **emissions pathway to 2030**, identifying the difference planned actions will make to our emissions and understanding where gaps exist for further emissions reductions to occur.
- Beginning the **transition to electric vehicles (EVs)**, with the purchase of 4 hybrid vehicles that arrived in January 2022, with 6 electric vehicles arriving in April 2022, and a further nine after that. EV charge points are also beginning to be installed in St John's Car park, which will be followed by Rowan House, to support this transition
- Development of a **Housing Asset Management Strategy**, which outlined the target for all Council owned homes to reach a minimum EPC rating of C by 2030.
- Start of the process to **rebuild Elfreda House to Future Homes Standard**, due for completion in May 2023.

### Produce renewable energy

5.3 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Furthering the development of the **Northern Gateway Heat Network** to the stage where post contract negotiations are underway for the contract award to build the central energy centre and network infrastructure to link the network to buildings that will be part of the Northern Gateway development.
- Budgeted £5.76m for the creation of a solar park and microgrid subject to a detailed business case being developed, which will contribute to powering the Northern Gateway development with renewable energy.

### Enhance biodiversity and protect our environment

5.4 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Planting of 20,000 trees on 11 different Council green spaces as part of the **Woodland and Biodiversity Project** during the Winter 21/22 planting season. Over 400 people have volunteered to help plant the trees. A further 23,000 have been delivered to parish councils, local schools and landowners. The project has managed to engage with a variety of stakeholders including town and parish councils, local schools, community organisations such as Together We Grow CIC and Refugee Action Colchester, and residents some of which have become highly involved in the project as tree guardians.
- Successful trials of **changes to mowing regimes and phasing out of glyphosate** on some Council green spaces. Wivenhoe Town Council also took part in this trial, identifying 150 different wildflower species and 3-29 more flowers in the unmown areas

compared to mown. The trials are being reviewed and will continue to be delivered in 2022.

## **Facilitate walking, cycling and sustainable transport around Colchester**

5.5 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Delivering the **Colchester eCargo bike library project** to promote eCargo bikes as a viable option for organisations and businesses to use for their deliveries and options instead of cars or vans. Over 100,000 miles have been travelled by project champions, Council officers and other organisations and individuals who have been using the bikes on short term loans. The launch of the eCargo bike delivery project has been significant for engaging with local businesses and charities in Colchester to arrange to make deliveries by eCargo bike for them.
- Increasing the awareness of air quality and the impact of no idling across Colchester through the **CAREless Pollution campaign** and signage trials to promote no idling. The CAREless Pollution campaign has engaged with businesses, schools, religious groups and has been shown at a variety of community events, earning it a nomination for the best 'Consumer Engagement/Marketing Campaign of the Year' at the Edie Sustainability Leaders Awards. Evaluation of the first 8 months of the signage trial show behavioural changes occurring, with a 9% increase in engine switch-offs in some locations.
- Progressing the creation of a **secure cycle park** in the town centre to provide a highly safe place for residents to store their bikes while visiting the town. Within the secure cycle park, will also be a shared bike hub for residents to access push bikes, electric bikes and eCargo bikes on a pay as you go basis. Both projects are hoped to be finished by late Spring 2022.
- Improvements and updates to the route from North Station to the Town Centre as part of **Fixing the Link** project. Plans are in progress to refurbish the Middleborough fountain, plant trees in planters, as well as replace the yellow flags that line the route.
- Supporting the development of the **Colchester Orbital**, with the creation of online maps showing the 14-15 mile walking and cycling route being produced.
- Facilitating the operation of the **e-scooter trials** in Colchester which have seen 250,000 journeys completed in the urban area since February 2021.
- Installation of 3 EV charge points at **Priory Street Car Park** as the start of a programme to support the use of electric vehicles in Colchester, with more charge points going in other Council car parks in 2022.

## **Provide sustainable waste management and support residents to reduce, reuse and recycle**

5.6 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Introduced programme to **reduce recycling contamination** and save time on waste collection routes by collecting cans and glass in separate containers
- Creation of a **community engagement team** to engage with residents and schools about waste reduction and recycling. The team have helped school children be involved in naming one of the Council's food waste vehicles, and are helping to restart the Council's Litter Warriors programme, with expansion to allow residents to carry out other tasks such as weeding of paths.

- Beginning the **investment in smart waste technology**, with the introduction of 4 smart waste bins in Dedham to help improve collection efficiencies and store more waste in bins. This will begin as a trial and the effectiveness assessed to inform future deployment.

## **Enable partnerships and community action for sustainability and low carbon development**

5.7 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Supporting Eco Colchester with the delivery of the **Eco Festival** in 2021. This event attracted over 3500 of attendees, and gave the Council a great opportunity to showcase its projects that are contributing to sustainability in the borough.
- Building up **collaboration with University of Essex** to help inform the development of our Council projects. Collaborations include on the Clean Air for Colchester project and Go Green Schools project, as well as through other one-off engagement projects such as through the University Challenge Lab.
- **Increase engagement with primary schools** to understand the challenges face in becoming greener, and carry out environmental engagement activities with one school in Colchester to enable staff and students to understand the benefits of outdoor environmental activity. Through this work, the Council has managed to link up the school with further ongoing support through Together We Grow CIC.
- Work with Community 360 and other **community-based organisations** such as Age Concern, Warm and Toasty Club and Citizen's Advice Bureau to promote some of the Council's projects and activities such as the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme funding to a wider audience.
- Deliver a presentation and Q and A session with the **Colchester Association of Local Councils** about the Council's work on the climate emergency, and how town and parish councils can be linked into this and take their own action to reduce their environmental impact. Regular communication now happens between the town and parish councils and CBC to ensure they are kept up to date with CBC projects and activities that they can publicise to residents.

## **Ensure sustainable planning and development**

5.8 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Creation of the **Planning Sustainability Checklist** to help planning staff assess the sustainability of planning applications going forward. This is useful guidance for ensuring planning applications are taking due consideration to the impact they can have on the environment.
- Working alongside the sustainable travel team, to ensure **s106 funding** has been allocated to accommodate and support sustainable travel as part of new developments. This has included the allocated of spaces for electric car clubs and electric vehicle charge points amongst others.

## Change the way we work to achieve our climate commitment

5.9 Key highlights from this theme include:

- Creation of the **Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Assessment** (and guidance) that has helped staff to provide further information on how their projects are reducing their negative environmental impacts and producing positive environmental impacts.
- Provided input into the development of **several key strategies** at the Council including the Housing Asset Management Strategy, Cultural Strategy and Communities Can Strategy.
- Developing the **Council's travel plan** through engaging with staff working across Colchester including Rowan House and Shrub End Depot, to understand how staff anticipate travelling to work in the future and to continue to work to provide support for staff to travel sustainably to work. Significant engagement has been carried out at Shrub End Depot, providing Dr Bike maintenance sessions, and providing staff with bike equipment and tools so that they can continue to cycle safely to work.

## Climate Emergency Action Plan Review

- 5.10 In January 2022, all local authorities in the UK received a rating of their climate emergency action plans and/or strategies by Climate Emergency UK. The organisation reviewed the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan against the content and actions outlined within the plan. This did not review the action that has actually been implemented in the plan, only that which has been written down within plans. Additionally, there is some action the Council has taken on the climate emergency that was not included in the the plan at the time of writing which may have affected the score (e.g. Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme). The Council's Action Plan received an overall score of 52%, higher than the district council average score of 43%. A detailed review of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, including where it did and did not score marks, can be viewed [here](#). All the Council Action Plan scorecards can be viewed [here](#).
- 5.11 Overall, compared to other Councils, CBC's action plan is less comprehensive in terms of the background information given about climate change risks and impacts specific to Colchester. This is one of the main areas in where the plan lost marks, as it was not communicated how the action plan linked to a CBC strategic approach to tackling the climate emergency. However, there were also more specific 'gaps' in the action plan which the review identified and are mentioned below.
- 5.12 The Climate Emergency Action Plan was reviewed against nine criteria which were:
- **Governance, Development and Funding** – Who leads, monitors and updates the plan? Is funding outlined for actions?
  - **Mitigation and Adaptation** – Have implications of climate change been outlined?, How have strategies and actions been set out to decarbonise and adapt to climate change in key areas e.g. heating, transport, energy generation
  - **Commitment and Integration** – How well has plan been integrated into existing policies/strategies? Are actions SMART?
  - **Community Engagement and Communications** – Who is involved in development of plan? How easy is the plan to find on website? Is a comms plan in place?

- **Measuring and setting emissions targets** – Are baseline emissions outlined? Are emission reductions prioritised over offsetting?
- **Co-benefits** – Does the plan consider climate action co-benefits and are these communicated?
- **Diversity and social inclusion** - Does plan outline the unequal impact of climate change on certain communities? How will it support vulnerable communities?
- **Education, skills and training** – Is training outlined for staff, councillors, public education and upskilling of the local workforce?
- **Ecological Emergency** – Does plan include actions to address ecological emergency? Are nature based solutions considered?

5.14 The Council performed strongest in the areas of Commitment and Integration, Community engagement and communications and co-benefits. This reflected the way that the Climate Emergency Action Plan has been integrated with existing Council plans and strategies, and how actions have been developed with measurable targets and timescales. The plan also outlines how it will collaborate with residents and partner organisations in the delivery of its projects, highlighting how the delivery of actions produces other benefits than just environmental ones (e.g. job creation, improved wellbeing, improved physical health).

5.15 However, the review identified where there are currently gaps in the action plan, particularly in the sections of diversity and inclusion, education, skills and training and mitigation and adaptation. This reflected that the current plan does not highlight how different residents will be impacted by climate change and how they will be supported. It also doesn't identify actions involved with climate education of the public, and upskilling of the workforce to support a low carbon economy. Additionally, the plan does not reference climate adaptation within it.

5.16 To address these areas and build upon existing actions, the Council is updating its Climate Emergency Action Plan. Below are some of the actions that will be added or brought out more clearly in the action plan:

- Clearly addressing how Council actions are addressing climate adaptation. This could be through expressing this clearly as part of actions, or creating a new theme on climate adaptation. Existing and future actions the Council will address in relation to climate adaptation include the plans it has for extreme weather and the management of green space to reduce flooding (with tree planting along the River Colne in the Castle Park).
- Identifying the grant support that the Council has through the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme to help residents on low incomes increase the energy efficiency of their homes.
- Inclusion of projects as part of the Town Deal within the plan. For example, the Heart of Greenstead work, that will involve the provision of bikes for residents in a deprived community to enable them to travel around and improve their health, and the work occurring to improve active travel routes between Greenstead, University and the Town Centre.
- Explore the development of climate emergency training for all new starters at the Council, so that they understand how action can be taken in their personal and work life to reduce their environmental footprint.
- Outlining in the plan how we will work with Essex County Council on several actions that they are leading on tackling climate change. The County Council has greater scope for

delivering larger projects that CBC as a district can support and take part in, enhancing the diversity and scope of action that can be taken.

5.16 Further actions will continue to be outlined and developed in response to the review.

## **6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**

6.1 This report has no equality, diversity and human rights implications.

## **7. Strategic Plan References**

7.1 All of the updates provided in this report contribute to the Strategic Plan 2020-2023 theme of 'Tackling the Climate Challenge and Sustainability'.

## **8. Consultation**

8.1 There are no consultation considerations.

## **9. Publicity Considerations**

9.1 There are no specific publicity considerations.

## **10. Financial implications**

10.1 There are no specific financial implications from this paper.

## **11. Community Safety Implications**

11.1 There are no specific community safety implications from this paper.

## **12. Health and Safety Implications**

12.1 There are no health and safety implications.

## **13. Risk Management Implications**

13.1 There are no risk management implications from this update.

## **14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications**

14.1 All of the Council's activities highlighted in the report contribute to reducing the environmental impact of the Council and/or the borough.