

**REPORT TO:** CABINET

**DATE:** 9 SEPTEMBER 2021

**TITLE:** HARLOW COUNCIL CARBON REDUCTION PLAN

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER:** COUNCILLOR ALASTAIR GUNN, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENT

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**This is a Key Decision**  
**It is on the Forward Plan as Decision Number I012851**  
**Call-in Procedures may apply**  
**This decision will affect all wards**

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- A** Cabinet approves the Carbon Reduction Plan for 2021-26 as attached to this report with a commitment to achieving a 15.6% reduction in carbon emissions from the Council's operations in the plan period, equating to a 50% reduction on the 2014/15 baseline.
- B** Cabinet agrees to set a target of achieving Net Zero by 2040 with a commitment to review this on an annual basis and seek to improve on this target as the development of carbon free technology enables that to happen.
- C** Cabinet agrees to receive a further report to set out how the Council, in exercising its community leadership role, can bring forward a broader Climate Change Strategy for the town.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

- A** Harlow Council has produced two previous Carbon Reduction Plans with the most recent one expiring in March 2021. In 2019 Parliament set in law a commitment for the UK reaching a position of Net Zero carbon emissions by 2050 and Harlow Council, in common with all other local authorities, will have to set out a plan to demonstrate how it will meet this aim. This Plan sets out some proposed actions for the next five years to take Harlow Council further towards

that objective as well as identifying some of the future decisions that will need to be taken to get Harlow to Net Zero. This Plan is identified as a Carbon Reduction Plan, rather than a Management Plan, as Harlow Council is now clearly on a journey towards Net Zero and is now setting some unambiguous targets in relation to this.

## **BACKGROUND**

1. In July 2019 a Full Council meeting passed a motion declaring a climate change emergency. The motion stated that:

“This Council believes that climate change is one of the most significant threats facing the world. One of the largest factors contributing to climate change is man-made emissions, especially those relating to the use of non-sustainable power sources. This Council recognises that action must be taken quickly in order to prevent climate change from causing irreversible damage to the planet. It also recognises the numerous social benefits which are brought about by reducing greenhouse gas emissions such as better air quality. This Council believes it is still possible to restore a safe climate and therefore declares a climate emergency”

2. To contribute towards this, the Carbon Reduction Plan will deliver further carbon savings from the Council’s operations in the period 2021-26. This plan focuses on measurable outcomes in the next five years that will help the Council work towards a Net Zero position in a planned and evidence based way.
3. The previous carbon reduction plan identified a baseline position of 2700 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e. This plan (2016-21) set a target of reducing this by 25%. By March 2021, carbon emissions had reduced to 1634 tonnes – a reduction of 39%. This was largely achieved by the switching of the Council’s electricity supplies to 100% renewable energy sources.

## **CARBON REDUCTION PLAN 2021 - 26**

4. To deliver further reductions in the Council’s carbon emissions will become increasingly more difficult as they are likely to involve commitment of expenditure, changes to some of the Council’s operations and the development of new technology which is as yet undeveloped or untested.
5. The attached Plan identifies a range of measures that can continue to make a significant impact upon the Council’s emissions. In particular this includes the replacement of current gas boiler systems with newer, more efficient, gas or low carbon fuelled systems, alongside the introduction of LED lighting into the Council’s buildings as well as the installation and use of photovoltaic panels to generate electricity. Implementation of these measures can make a reduction of 15.6% over the next five years.
6. To achieve carbon reduction in excess of this figure will require some significant decisions to be made. The biggest single contributor to the Council’s emissions is the use of gas boilers in its buildings, particularly the Civic Centre, Playhouse,

Latton Bush Centre and the Mead Park depot. As set out in the Plan, feasibility work is underway to identify when these buildings can be converted to zero carbon operations. It is unlikely that this can be achieved in the next five years as the technology is not sufficiently far enough advanced to deliver heating to buildings on this scale. Although this is possible for individual residential properties it is not yet the case for large commercial buildings in a manner that is cost effective.

7. Therefore, some replacement of these boilers will need to take place in the next five years and although these will be significantly more energy efficient than the current ones, they will still rely on fossil fuels. Given that there is a projected lifespan of 15 – 20 years for new boilers a target of achieving Net Zero by 2040 should be set. This is 10 years in advance of the Government's requirements. The Carbon Reduction Plan sets out a commitment that the Council will commission no new fossil fuelled boilers beyond 2025/26.
8. A further specific commitment in the Carbon Reduction Plan is that from 2022/23 any vehicles that the Council needs to purchase for its operation will be electric powered only.
9. This Carbon Reduction Plan is only the beginning of this process however and a broader Climate Change Strategy will be brought forward over the coming months. This will go beyond the specific actions that the Council can take to reduce carbon emissions from its own operations and consider what the Council can do to lead the town towards a zero carbon future. Considerable activity is already underway in this regard with the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town Sustainability Guide and the Council's own Design Guide setting benchmarks for low and zero carbon development. However, the strategy will seek to set out what more can be done and what the Council can do to work with its partners on a wide range of measures to tackle the effects of climate change. It will also seek to explore what is possible for Harlow to move beyond achieving net zero carbon and potentially achieving negative carbon through energy creation.
10. The Carbon Reduction Plan for 2021-26 take this process a step forward and makes a bold commitment to making significant reductions in the Council's carbon footprint.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)**

As set out in the report.

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning**

### **Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)**

The delivery of the proposed plan will require both capital and revenue investments in the future and, whilst some external support may be available in the form of grants to help deliver the schemes to deliver a Net Zero ambition by 2040, there will inevitably be a requirement for the council to consider the financial resources required when setting its future medium term financial strategies.

**Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Chief Executive**

**Housing**

As outlined in the report.

**Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

**Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)**

None specific.

**Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing**

**Governance (Includes HR)**

None specific.

**Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance**

**Appendices**

Appendix A – Town Plan, Consultation Draft

**Background Papers**

None

**Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

None