

REPORT TO: CABINET POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP

DATE: 7 OCTOBER 2021

TITLE: CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY – SCOPING REPORT

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RECOMMENDED that:

- A** The Cabinet Policy Development Working Group is recommended to discuss the report and make suggestions for the further development of the Climate Change Strategy prior to receiving a final draft report in January 2022.

BACKGROUND

1. This report sets out early thoughts on the development of a Climate Change Strategy for Harlow Council to be discussed at the Cabinet Policy Development Working Group on 7 October. Further work on the strategy will be undertaken following this meeting to prepare for a final draft to be presented at the January 2022 meeting of the Working Group before being presented to Cabinet.
2. The report builds on the adoption of the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan 2021-26 which set some ambitious targets and commitments. In particular, this Plan committed the Council to:
 - a) Achieving Net Zero carbon emissions from its operational activities by 2040;
 - b) Delivering a 50 percent reduction in carbon emissions from 2014/15 baseline figures;
 - c) Fitting no fossil fuelled boilers into operational buildings after 2025/26;
 - d) Buying no new carbon emitting vehicles after 2022/23;
 - e) Achieving Net Zero from its waste service during the lifetime of the next contract from 2029;
 - f) Working with HTS to help them achieve Net Zero by 2040 and to identify a potential 12 percent saving during the lifetime of this Plan.
3. The Carbon Reduction Plan identifies a requirement to reduce carbon emissions by a further 284 tonnes in the five year period and provides an action plan for how this will be achieved. The Plan acknowledges that some actions are still to

be identified as technology changes and also that further reductions will become progressively more challenging.

4. Although the adoption of this new five year plan is a significant step on the journey to Net Zero, it is only part of the solution. The Carbon Reduction Plan only identifies actions that the Council can directly control through its operational activities. There are a wealth of other activities that the Council can undertake, and encourage others to undertake, to combat climate change. These actions may not all be directly measurable, but they will be important in influencing attitudes and changing behaviours. The Plan also does not capture the Council's activities in managing its housing stock as these are reported separately. A broader Climate Change Strategy for Harlow will need to bring these issues together in one over-arching document.
5. A Climate Change Strategy will therefore need to address two issues:
 - a) What are the actions Harlow Council can take to tackle the effects of climate change?
 - b) What does the Council need to do to develop its role as community leader to work with, and to support, other organisations in the town as well as businesses, residents to help them to tackle climate change?

Broader Context

6. In June 2019 Parliament set in law a commitment to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050. This is quantified as a reduction of at least 100 percent on the carbon emission levels of 1990. In order to meet this target the UK government is taking a broad approach which includes carbon budgeting, investment in green skills and jobs and engaging citizens to identify and prioritise actions to achieve Net Zero.
7. Under the Climate Change Act 2008 (the 2008 Act), the Government must set five-yearly carbon budgets, twelve years in advance, from 2008 to 2050. A carbon budget places a restriction on the total amount of greenhouse gases the UK can emit over a 5-year period. The UK is the first country to set legally binding carbon budgets. In 2011 the first 'Carbon Plan' was issued which sets out how the government will meet the carbon budgets set from 2008-2027. The plan includes actions to achieve low carbon buildings, transport, industry, energy generation as well as actions relating to land use and waste reduction.
8. A citizen's assembly (Climate Assembly UK) was formed in 2020 and produced a report entitled 'The Path to Net Zero.' The report shows how a representative sample of the population believe the UK should meet its Net Zero emissions commitment with detailed recommendations across ten areas including: how we travel; what we eat and how we use the land; what we buy; heat and energy use

in the home; how we generate our electricity; and greenhouse gas removals. Parliament will use the report to support its work on scrutinising the Government's climate change policy and progress on the target.

9. In August this year, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its latest report – 'Climate Change 2021 – The Physical Science Basis'. This received widespread coverage and stated that "it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land" and at a rate that is unprecedented in the last 2000 years. A range of scenarios were outlined in the report, all of which see significant continuing increases in global temperatures in the coming decades. It concludes that working towards achieving at least Net Zero is essential.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

Range of Actions to be Included in the Climate Change Strategy

10. Carbon Reduction Plan

- a) The Council needs to ensure that it delivers against the targets set out in its Carbon Reduction Plan 2021-26. As outlined above, there is still more work to be done in relation to this. A key part of this ongoing work will be working with HTS to enable them to also achieve Net Zero by 2040. Decisions will also need to be made on boiler replacements in a number of the Council's buildings over the next few years – these decisions will have the biggest single impact upon the Council's operation carbon emissions.

11. Using the Planning System

- a) The Council is in a strong position to use its powers to influence building design in the town so that new developments are increasingly working towards achieving carbon neutrality at least.
 - i) The Council has already adopted the Harlow & Gilston Sustainability Guide as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. This sets out a series of standards and aspirations for the construction of new buildings and includes a checklist for developers to follow to identify how they will meet these standards. This guide is already seen as a model for others to follow in the Garden Town community and will need to be regularly updated as technologies change thinking on sustainability becomes more mainstream.
 - ii) The Council is currently consulting on some amendments to its Design Guide. This picks up changes in legislation that have occurred since the last Guide was produced in 2011 and includes a section on Climate Change. This provides guidance on how to

design buildings and implement landscaping which will prevent overheating and provide natural cooling, the consideration of natural lighting and ventilation in new properties and the implementation of rainwater harvesting and grey water-reuse. The Guide is likely to be adopted at Cabinet in December 2021 and will then also become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. However, it is intended during 2022 to develop a new Design Guide and this will provide a significant opportunity for the Council to set some high aspirations and standards to be achieved for new development in the town over the next decade and beyond.

12. Housing

- a) The Council is the landlord for more than 9,000 properties in the town and this provides both one of the most significant challenges and opportunities in terms of managing the impacts of Climate Change and contributing to the reduction of emissions. As part of a corporate approach to tackling climate change, and in the role of community leader, the Council will need to identify what is possible and by when in relation to its housing stock as part of a Climate Change Action Plan.

13. Environment Management

- a) The Council has a significant opportunity to both make an impact, but also to influence others, in the way that it manages the environment of the town. Some progress has already been made in this area through an increase in tree planting and the encouragement of greater biodiversity in locations such as Parndon Wood, the Town Park and the River Stort nature reserves. The piloting of some wildflower planting has also raised awareness of the impact of these measures.
- b) The measurement of the carbon impact of these activities is notoriously difficult and as such they were not included in the recent Carbon Reduction Plan – it was important that this was evidenced-based and measurable. However, it is widely acknowledged that improving biodiversity, even at a local level, can make an impact on CO₂ levels and the Council will commit to a more expansive programme in the coming months and years. A report will be submitted to Cabinet in November with a more detailed programme, but activities that the Council will look to pursue as part of a broader Climate Change Strategy will include:
 - i) Implementing the first wave of the installation of electric vehicle charging points and developing a programme for broadening this out into residential areas.
 - ii) An expansive tree planting programme as part of the Essex Forest Initiative.

- iii) Implementation of a programme of increasing bio-diversity and the range of habitats for wildlife in the town. This will include protection for key sites in the town as well measures such as increasing wildflower planting.
- iv) Working with HTS to phase out the use of environmentally damaging products as part of its regular activities.
- v) Working with the Harlow & Gilston Garden Town to develop and implement a programme of stewardship for new communities that protects and enhances the natural environment and creates a model for its extension into the town's existing communities.
- vi) Develop a methodology for measuring the impacts of the above measures.

14. Other activities to be considered

- a) Earlier versions of the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan included a range of measures that are important to implement, but are not directly measurable in terms of reducing carbon emissions. This is because they are part of a wider national or international issue or because they are not directly attributable to Harlow Council operations. However, these measures should still be developed as they will have consequences for influencing behaviour change. Additionally, there are some high level strategic activities that the Council should engage in or lead that will have a significant effect on managing Climate Change.
 - i) Improving recycling rates across the town. Harlow has relatively low levels of recycling, in part because of the relatively high level of flat block accommodation which traditionally have lower levels of recycling. Working with the Council's waste contractor, steps will need to be put in place to change recycling rates and this should be a significant part of a new Climate Change Action Plan.
 - ii) Working with partners to develop a new Sustainable Transport system for Harlow as part of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town.
 - iii) Development of carbon neutral strategies for the Council's Regeneration programmes.
 - iv) Develop measures to encourage more children to walk or cycle to school.
 - v) Elimination of all single use plastics from the Council's activities.

- vi) Use of the Council's procurement policies to ensure more goods are purchased locally reducing transportation and to require the Council's suppliers to work towards Net Zero targets.
- vii) Explore the potential for Traffic Regulation Orders to prevent vehicle idling.
- viii) Installation of public water fountains to reduce the purchase of single use water bottles.

Community Leadership

15. As well as developing a range of actions for the Council to implement, a Climate Change Strategy must also identify the Council's role as a Community leader and set out what the Council can do to encourage others to follow its lead. This should include as a minimum:

- a) Publicising the work that Harlow Council is doing to combat climate change.
- b) Develop a Harlow Climate Change Forum to bring together key organisations in the town to work together on producing an action plan.
- c) Encourage others to make specific Climate Change pledges.
- d) Encourage other 'Anchor Institutions' to use their procurement process to make an impact on carbon emission.