

Appendix A

Harlow Council Climate Change Strategy

Position Statement - March 2022

Next Steps to Net Zero: Harlow Council Climate Change Strategy

Harlow Council has made its commitment to Net Zero clear, both through its 2019 declaration of a climate emergency and latest Carbon Reduction Plan, which set out for the first time a target for the Council to achieve Net Zero from its own operations.

The reasons for this commitment are universally accepted but merit restating. Human activity and the way we fuel it are filling the climate up with warming elements, such as carbon. It has become clear that this is causing significant and costly damage to the climate, affecting people across the world. It is changing at a pace that means we must race to mitigate and adapt our economies, and ways of life.

Harlow Council will achieve a great deal through meeting its existing commitment of reaching Net Zero by 2040. However, it also has a civic obligation to consider what responsibilities it has towards the town as a whole and Harlow's transition to Net Zero. The Position Statement and forthcoming Climate Change Strategy it builds towards therefore engages with the Council's position as a community leader and the opportunities it will have to support residents, businesses and the town as a whole to meet the challenge of climate change.

The stakes are high. That starts with reducing the environmental harms climate change is causing but also applies to the way in which the transition itself is managed. If we get it wrong, Net Zero risks being costly for the residents we serve, including for future generations who have made clear their expectation that political leaders of today address climate change.

However, by embedding climate change into all that we do, from how we regenerate the town centre and our housing stock through to how we look to improve Harlow's transport links, safeguard our environment and work to foster a supportive environment for local businesses to thrive, we can get climate change right.

If we can achieve that, we will succeed in making Harlow a town that is fit for the future

**Alastair Gunn,
Portfolio Holder for Governance**

Background

1. It is widely accepted that human activity has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land and that as the pace of climate change will bring unacceptable consequences globally. Working towards net zero emissions of greenhouse gases is essential. In June 2019, the UK committed to reach Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. This is quantified as a reduction of at least 100 percent on the carbon

emission levels compared to 1990. This will mean eliminating emissions where practicable, minimising the remainder, and offsetting the residue. National policies will cover activities such as carbon budgeting, investment in green skills and jobs, and engaging citizens to identify and prioritise actions that can be taken to achieve Net Zero.

2. Harlow Council passed a Full Council motion in July 2019 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.”

Following this declaration, Harlow Council’s Cabinet (September 2021) agreed to set a target of achieving Net Zero by 2040, with a commitment to review this on an annual basis and to seek to improve on this target as the development of carbon free technology enables this to happen.

3. Without effective action to combat climate change it is clear that Harlow will face increasingly disruptive weather, damaging homes and businesses, flooding streets, and disrupting transport and communications affecting livelihoods; that it will be more difficult and costly to keep homes warm in winter and cool in summer; that food supplies will be disrupted by the effects on agriculture; and that the native species of plants, trees and animals that make up the natural world that we recognise, will not survive here.

Our current position

4. Since 2010/11, the Council has been measuring and reducing carbon emissions from its operational activities through three five-year Carbon Management/Reduction Plans. Whilst this has been successful in reducing emissions of the Council’s operational assets and fleet by ~40 percent, it does not seek to address the wider carbon emissions of Harlow.
 5. The Tyndall Centre at the University of Manchester has produced Carbon Budget Reports of recommended climate change commitments for UK local authority areas that are aligned with the commitments in the United Nations Paris Agreement, informed by the latest science on climate change and defined by
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science based carbon budget setting. The results in the report show that for Harlow to make its fair contribution to delivering the Paris Agreement's commitment to staying “well below 2°C and pursuing 1.5°C” global temperature rise, then an immediate and rapid programme of decarbonisation is needed. To stay within the recommended carbon budget Harlow will, from 2020 onwards, need to achieve average town wide mitigation rates of CO₂ from energy of around -11.9 percent per year.

6. As part of its community leadership role, Harlow Council is seeking to develop a broader Climate Change Strategy for the town as a whole, which is to be known as “Next Steps to Net Zero: Climate Change Strategy”. The strategy will not only seek to set out how Harlow Council can achieve Net Zero through its own operations but also to outline how it can influence the wider community and local economy to deliver quantifiable reductions in emissions for the town. The Climate Change Strategy will outline achievable targets, identify aspects that are currently unquantifiable and highlight areas where further support and influence is required to help deliver the Net Zero targets. The targets will be set against the emissions reductions outlined in the Tyndall Centre Carbon Budget Reports.
 7. The Position Statement sets out seven key objectives relating to achieving Net Zero that will be included in the Strategy.
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The “Next Steps to Net Zero: Climate Change Strategy” will cover the following seven objectives:

- 1. To achieve Net Zero emissions from the Council’s operational buildings, land, vehicles, and services, including those provided by service delivery partners**
 - 2. To achieve Net Zero emissions from all homes and the built environment within Harlow**
 - 3. To reduce consumption of resources, reduce waste and increase reuse and recycling in Harlow**
 - 4. To adopt good stewardship of the natural environment across the town to support both climate change adaptation and mitigation**
 - 5. To achieve a significant modal shift towards more sustainable means of transport**
 - 6. To promote reduction of emissions by businesses to Net Zero, supported by a successful green economy**
 - 7. To lead and encourage local communities, partners and stakeholders to reduce their emissions and contribute positively to meeting the challenges posed by climate change**
8. The order given to the objectives above reflects the degree of direct control available to the Council. However, the Council is committed to taking a strong community leadership role in relation to climate change and achieving Net Zero, influencing and supporting behaviour change among residents, businesses, and partners around their climate impacts through homes, buildings, transport, work food and use of resources.
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Seven Objectives: Current Work and Key Challenges

1. To achieve Net Zero emissions from the Council's operational buildings, land, vehicles, and services, including those provided by service delivery

9. Current work:

- Plans in pace to achieve carbon emissions from operational activities by 2040 include;
 - No new fossil fuelled boilers to be fitted into operational buildings after 2025/26
 - No new internal combustion powered vehicles to be purchased after 2022/23
 - Achievement of Net Zero from domestic waste and recycling operations during the lifetime of the next contract from 2029.
 - Working with HTS to achieve Net Zero from operations by 2040 and to identify a potential 12 percent saving during the lifetime of the current Carbon Reduction Plan.
 - Fitting solar panels to Council buildings.
- The Council has recently adopted new procurement standing orders that support the use of local suppliers which can reduce the level of emissions of a contract due to reduced travel.

10. Key Challenges:

- More detailed understanding of the existing baseline of carbon emissions from each of the Council services will be needed.
 - Technologies and techniques to help reduce carbon emissions are at early stage in development and it is not always clear which technologies will be the best options in the long term.
 - Replacing natural gas used for heating with carbon free technology
 - Replacing the Council vehicle fleet with carbon free technology
 - An understanding of the Council's supply chain carbon footprint must be developed to assess the impact of procured goods and services.
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2. To achieve Net Zero emissions from all homes and the built environment within Harlow

11. Current work:

- For the Council's Housing Stock, we are establishing the baseline energy efficiency ratings dataset and preparing to bid for government funding for retrofit upgrades to stock.
- The Council's District Heating boilers have been upgraded reducing emissions.
- A pilot retrofit scheme to include solar panels, upgraded insulation and heat pump heating is being developed for Council housing.
- Encouraging a "fabric-first" approach through adoption of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) Sustainability Guide, to make it a material consideration in determining planning applications.
- Minimising resource use in new developments through Local Plan policies which refer to the Sustainability Guide.
- Consulting on amendments to the Council's Design Guide to ensure that it fully reflects current regulatory requirements
- Participating in a Community Renewal Funded pilot project with Retrofit Academy and ECC which includes research on energy efficiency ratings of housing stock within Harlow and free retrofit training for local residents and businesses.
- Heating the Learning Centre at Pets' Corner, insulated by its straw bale construction, using a renewable-fuel pellet boiler.

12. Key Challenges:

- Upgrading the Council's housing stock of over 9,000 homes will be a substantial undertaking.
 - Over 70 percent of homes in Harlow are privately owned. Homeowners will need to design and fund their own retrofit upgrades to properties.
 - Availability of sufficient skilled retrofit staff and construction companies locally to undertake scale of retrofit required.
 - Although new build housing is much more energy efficient than older stock; even so it will require additional measures to achieve Net Zero status.
 - Many residents with limited means will be unable alone to carry out the upgrades needed to make heating affordable and carbon free.
 - Spatial planning standards must be maintained whilst delivering Net Zero in the Built Environment.
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3. To reduce consumption of resources, reduce waste and increase reuse and recycling in Harlow

13. Current actions:

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- Regularly promote recycling, green waste and food waste services in the Harlow Times.
- Regularly intervene where we find contamination of recycling.
- Educate young people and promote re-use and recycling habits through Crucial Crew annually.
- Will achieve Net Zero from operation of the waste collection service during the lifetime of the next contract, from 2029.
- Support ECC Love Essex “Don’t bin your food” and “Love Essex, Not Plastic” campaigns to help reduce food waste and single use plastics.
- Support the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations that run local food banks which help reduce food waste.

14. Key Challenges:

- Waste strategies have historically focussed on disposal and recycling: better use of resources by designing out waste and reusing materials must come into closer focus
 - Although overall waste per household in Harlow remains low, recycling rates have ceased improving in recent years.
 - We need to encourage better separation of recycling: some 10 percent of the annual collection is rejected as “contaminated” with the wrong materials.
 - Currently a limited range of items can be economically recycled. While the range collected might be extended, if these materials are of no value in the market doing so would lead to increased costs and emissions.
 - Market pressures in the recycling sector result in challenges to the achievement of high levels of recycling and re-use of materials.
 - The Council can only influence private commercial and industrial waste generation through its community leadership role.
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4. To adopt good stewardship of the natural environment across the town to support both climate change adaptation and mitigation

15. Current actions:

- Supporting the Essex Forest Initiative by completing local tree planting schemes in Harlow with community participation.
- Bidding for funding from the Local Authority Treescape Fund to support future tree planting schemes.
- Including local tree planting schemes in the Council Capital Programme.
- Working with HTS to ensure that the environmental impact of products and methods used as part of its main activities are properly assessed.
- Increasing biodiversity and improving wildlife habitats in Harlow, including doubling floral verges and the re-establishment of native meadows.
- Working with volunteers to help maintain key green spaces within the town such as the Town Park, Pardon Wood and the Stort Meadows actively supporting their biodiversity and improving carbon retention on the soil.

16. Key Challenges:

- Establishing robust data baselines can be difficult.
 - Greater understanding of the complexities of the impacts of different approaches to stewardship of the natural environment is needed.
 - Balancing competing demands on open space for leisure, amenity, and biodiversity.
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5. To achieve a significant modal shift towards more sustainable means of transport

17. Current actions:

- Maximising the opportunities from HGGT to improve active transport links.
- Updated Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan identifying the priorities for the cycle routes across the town.
- Installing first phase of electric vehicle chargepoints in car parks.
- Developing a scheme for new Sustainable Transport Interchange within the Town Centre through the Towns Fund programme.
- Working with Garden Town partners to develop a new sustainable transport system for Harlow

18. Key Challenges:

- Adoption of sustainable means of transport will require a substantial behaviour change across the community.
 - Additional baseline data and research is required to understand how the ambitions for modal shift can be achieved.
 - The uptake of low emission vehicles and other sustainable transport will require the development of significant policy at a national level within which the Council can work.
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6. To promote reduction of emissions by businesses to Net Zero, supported by a successful green economy

19. Current actions:

- Reducing transport emissions by promoting local procurement of goods services and local supply chains through “Harlow Winning Business”, a Community Renewal Funded local procurement project.
- Ensuring better opportunities for local suppliers through revised contract standing orders being embedded across the Council’s organisation.
- Promoting funding and Net Zero support for businesses via the Harlow Business Forum.
- Encouraging local businesses to develop Green Travel Plans including using conditions linked to planning applications where appropriate.
- Promoting the development of skills and training to support the green economy and reduce carbon emissions by working with Harlow College and other local training providers
- Promoting the free training available through the Community Renewal Funded retrofit project to local businesses and residents to help develop the skills required to deliver the retrofit of homes to deliver Net Zero.
- Ongoing promotion of LOCASE (Low Carbon Across the South East) grants for businesses.

20. Key Challenges:

- Little baseline data available detailing carbon emissions from businesses.
 - The Council can only influence carbon emissions from businesses through its community leadership role
 - The forecast nationwide skills gap to support a switch to a green economy.
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7. To lead and encourage local communities, partners and stakeholders to reduce their emissions and contribute positively to meeting the challenges posed by climate change

Current actions:

- Promoting ECC led schemes such as Essex Energy Switch and Solar Panels.
- Working with energy hubs to promote and deliver home retrofit schemes e.g. Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery schemes.
- Promotion of a school/college green day via the Youth Council.

21. Key Challenges:

- Difficulties in enabling a shift in attitudes and behaviour given socio economic factors affecting Harlow residents.
 - Getting the right information to local communities about how they can act.
 - Building community engagement and communication programmes that inform, empower and build the capacity of local communities to make positive changes.
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Developing the Strategy

22. Whilst the Net Zero target has been set, along with the timeframe for achieving this, further data is required to develop the seven key objectives so that tangible actions, opportunities and threats are identified. It is clear that the key objectives are complex; that in some cases there are not yet sources of baseline data or agreed methods for measuring impacts. Knowledge and understanding about what is best practice, and which are the most appropriate technologies and approaches to support the reduction of emissions and respond to the challenges of Climate Change will evolve and change over time. Therefore, the Strategy should be viewed as a living guide to facilitating New Zero targets and should be reviewed and updated regularly as we move towards 2040.
 23. The actions to be identified will be evidence led in order to help the Council to better understand the resources required so that it can meet the objectives.
 24. Over the coming months a small officer working group will be working on further research and the drafting of the “Next Steps to Net Zero: Harlow Council Climate Change Strategy”. This work will feed into the Cabinet Policy Development Working Group. The aim is for the final strategy to be adopted in the 2022/23 municipal year.
 25. It should be noted that in some cases (though not all), investment in activity to help achieve Net Zero may also result in savings which have the potential to be reinvested in other activities to support the delivery of Net Zero.
 26. Harlow Council is keen to ensure that residents businesses and partners current and future will benefit from a successful Climate Change strategy. Communication and engagement with residents and businesses will be a key priority throughout the journey. Whilst the Council will be custodians of the strategy, its success will depend on the engagement of all stakeholders across the town.
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