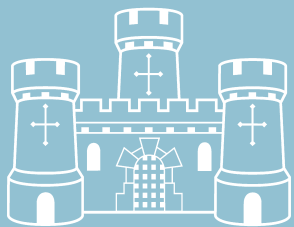


SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

ANNUAL
REPORT
MARCH 2022



NEWCASTLE
UNDER LYME
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Introduction by Councillor Trevor Johnson

Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling

The Council adopted its Sustainable Environment Strategy in December 2020. The Strategy is a landmark document that sets out the Council's commitment to the sustainable environmental future of the borough.

A strategy was needed to protect the local environment and achieve wider sustainability goals for the Borough. The release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere from human activity is changing the world's climate and the planet is warming up. Rising global temperatures in the long-term will create more extreme and unpredictable weather changes, rising sea levels, severe flooding and reduced water availability, all of which pose significant risk to human health, wildlife and ecosystems.

The stated ambition for the Council is to become an exemplar authority, known for both preserving and protecting the local environment for the present and future and for enhancing the quality of life of residents.

The Strategy recognises that being more sustainable and mitigating the effects of climate change will require changing the way we do things, looking at our own services and ways of working and taking direct action wherever possible, as well as encouraging, supporting and enabling others to do the same.

The Strategy also recognises that the pace of change related to climate change and policy direction is fast as well as the development of technology and best techniques to support these changes and become more sustainable as a Borough. It will be necessary to keep the Council's plans and targets as well as progress made under review in the context of this fast developing agenda.

There are 4 Priority Outcomes associated with the Strategy as follows:

- ❖ Reduce the reliance on the use of fossil fuels.
- ❖ Reduce carbon and other damaging emissions.
- ❖ Minimise waste and increase recycling.
- ❖ Offset residual carbon emissions.

Since the Council adopted the SES a significant event in the global sustainability agenda has been the UK hosting the 26th Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP26) event in Glasgow last autumn. The COP26 summit brought parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

At the conclusion of the conference, achievements were made under the following themes:

Mitigation: secured near-global net zero commitments including commitments to move away from coal power, halt and reverse deforestation, reduce methane emissions and speed up the switch to electric vehicles.

Adaptation & Loss and Damage: Record amounts of adaptation finance have been pledged, including committing to doubling 2019 levels of adaptation finance by 2025

Finance: Reaching the climate finance goal by 2023 at the latest, stopping international support for the unabated fossil fuel energy, private financial institutions and central banks moving to realign trillions towards global net zero and developed countries committed significantly increased funding to vital funds such as the Least Developed Countries Fund

Collaboration: accelerate collaboration between governments, businesses and civil society to deliver on climate goals faster.

Sustainable Environment Strategy progress

The Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES) is being delivered through an action plan which identifies a range of actions which covers an initial 5 years period. The main focus is on actions which relate to the Councils own activities and estate. In addition there are a number of actions which benefit the wider Newcastle under Lyme Borough.

The Action Plan and ongoing progress is regularly monitored through an SES Steering Group, Chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling.

A summary of SES achievements secured to date includes:

- ✓ A range of sustainability policy principles prepared and being fed into the Newcastle Local Plan, including green energy production, electric vehicle charging points, low carbon developments and consideration of a carbon offset fund.
- ✓ Council's procurement process modified to include consideration of suppliers carbon reduction plans as a quality measure.
- ✓ Introduced a whole service change for the Councils Recycling and Waste service including separate food waste recycling and increased recycling rates and participation in the process
- ✓ Refresh of the Sustainability pages on the Councils web-site
- ✓ Green transport pilot for town centre scooters completed
- ✓ Changed to an all-electric heating solution for Clough Hall Park pavilion
- ✓ Promoted staff green travel options including travel cards, cycle loans and car sharing.

- ✓ Progressed consortium low emission taxi and public electric charger infrastructure bid for NBC owned car parks.
- ✓ Invested in route optimisation technology for the Councils recycling and waste fleet to maximise fuel efficiency.
- ✓ Invested in 3 fully electric vans for the Councils pest control and dog warden services.
- ✓ Installed energy usage data loggers in 6 council buildings to ensure energy costs are minimised.
- ✓ Completed a review of energy efficiency opportunities for Jubilee 2.
- ✓ Secured a bid to Community Renewal Fund including feasibility study for solar generation at keele, smart LED street lighting and replacement fossil fuel heating systems support.
- ✓ Developed a tree planting strategy and plans agreed for first phase of planting (see further details below)
- ✓ Switched to green tariff for electricity and plans in place to switch to green gas tariff in 2022 for all Council owned buildings.
- ✓ Completed first phase of solar thermal PV panels at Knutton Lane Depot and progressing with a further phase.
- ✓ In 2020/21 the Councils carbon emissions reduced by 21.5% (593 tons) on the previous year.

UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Emergency Declaration

On the 16 December 2020, the Council, passed a motion adopting the UN Sustainable Development/Global Goals. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the world's call to action on the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing humanity and the natural world.

Progress has been made in terms of embedding these goals, and the contribution the Council makes and can make towards their achievement as follows:

- ✓ Every report brought to Council and Cabinet now highlights how each report dovetails with the UN Sustainable Goals and each report now includes the symbol(s) of the goals that it looks to achieve and makes a contribution to.
- ✓ Work has also began in the mapping of which of the 17 SDG's are most relevant to the Borough, (using the LGA and UKSSD Sustainable Development Guide) and where the Council currently contributes to those goals with the intention of being able in the future to consider where the Council focuses its resources and influence to achieve a greater contribution.

Climate Emergency declaration

In April 2019, the Borough Council passed a motion declaring a climate emergency. The motion contained a number of elements and the following positive progress has been made against these and in particular in strategic development:

- ✓ At the last Cabinet meeting the formation and participation in a new Staffordshire Leaders Board was agreed and the Leader of the Council was appointed as the Borough Councils representative.
- ✓ The purpose of the new Board is to ensure all Staffordshire councils work ever more closely with each other This positions the Council to better exploit a wide range of opportunities from the Governments Levelling Up

agenda and the development of a County Deal, with both climate change and waste/recycling being two explicit areas drawn out for joint working during 2022.

- ✓ A County wide Climate Matters Staffordshire Forum has been formed which the Council which is attended and supported by the Portfolio Holder and senior officers. All Staffordshire Councils take part and the Chair is an independent local person. The purpose of the Forum is to encourage and collaborate with a range of partners to drive towards a carbon neutral county.
- ✓ A Staffordshire Climate Leaders Group has been formed, consisting of partners from a range of public, private, educational and wildlife sectors. The Leader of the Council takes the leadership role on this group on behalf of the Council.
- ✓ A Staffordshire Joint Sustainability Board has been established. Chaired by the Leader of the Council in his Staffordshire County Council Cabinet Member role, and attended by the Councils Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling, this Board is set up to produce a Staffordshire Joint Environmental Sustainability Strategy
- ✓ With input from all Staffordshire councils and a particular focus on large countywide sustainability projects that could not be achieved without this level of buy-in and collaboration.
- ✓ Achieving carbon neutrality was a central element of the motion and this was subsequently considered and scrutinised by the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee, which made a series of recommendations in this respect.

Nature Recovery Declaration

In November 2021 the Council was the first in Staffordshire to adopt a Borough Nature Recovery Declaration in Full Council, acknowledging that we are experiencing a nature crisis with 41 per cent of wild species in decline nationally and 15 per cent facing extinction.

The Declaration also recognised that:

- Nature is in long term decline
- Nature provides us with vital support systems
- A thriving natural environment underpins a healthy, happy and prosperous society.
- The impact of climate change are driving natures decline
- Many areas of the boroughs work have an impact on nature and we have responsibilities to make decisions to protect and enhance nature.

To address the nature crisis the Council acknowledged that more space should be given to wildlife, existing wildlife spaces should be expanded, existing wildlife spaces should be improved as well as improving the connectivity between wildlife spaces.

A number of actions were agreed to support this work and progress has already been made with several of these as follows:

- ✓ Discussions are taking place with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust in respect of creating a Local Nature Recovery Action Plan that will sit under the umbrella of the Councils Sustainable Environment Strategy.
- ✓ The development of a Local Habitat Map that identifies existing habitats sites, priority areas for protection, improvement and expansion is being worked on as part of the emerging Borough Local Plan.

- ✓ Appointed the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling as the designated Cabinet Lead for tackling the nature crisis and the Executive Director of Operational Services as the lead officer for co-ordinating the Councils operations in relation to local nature recovery.
- ✓ Started to integrate the targets, objectives and outcomes of the declaration with the Sustainable Environment Strategy to make sure measures to tackle climate change compliment the principles of nature recovery.
- ✓ Investing in nature-based solutions has already started with the Urban Tree Planting Strategy, (see below) with large areas of urban Council owned land being designated as urban carbon capture areas and sites for native tree planting.
- ✓ A suitable on-line sustainability-training package has been identified that includes not only nature and biodiversity but also climate change and carbon reduction elements and will be rolled out to all Council staff and Elected Members.
- ✓ Through the network of local and Countywide sustainability groups and forums, nature recovery is already being recognised as a priority for both local and regional action.

Urban Tree Planting Strategy

On 7th July 2021 the Cabinet approved the Urban Tree Planting Strategy which set out its approach for the management and improvement of the urban forest of Newcastle-under-Lyme. It was resolved that:

- ✓ The proposed Urban Tree Planting Strategy be approved for immediate implementation and included in the Urban Forest Strategy when the review is completed.
- ✓ That Ward Members of urban wards in the Borough and local communities be asked to propose potential sites for tree planting in their wards.
- ✓ That opportunities to work together with local organisations and landowners be pursued.
- ✓ Investigations be made into opportunities to take part in the project to plant an Urban Tree Canopy as part of the celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.
- ✓ An Urban Tree Planting Action Plan be prepared to guide tree-planting projects and link in to the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy.
- ✓ The Action Plan represents a commitment to undertake tree planting on urban greenspaces well into the future, which will in time form a lasting legacy for future generations.
- ✓ A dedicated web page has been set up on the Council's website with information about the benefits of tree planting, details of the proposed phase 2 sites and inviting residents to let the Council know views on tree planting and any other suggestions for further nature recovery improvements.
- ✓ Tree Planting has been carried out in phase one of the Action Plan at Newchapel Recreation Ground and Sandy Lane, to coincide with National Tree week.

- ✓ A new dedicated web-site has been set-up to provide information on the planting proposals, emphasise the environmental benefits of trees in the community and allow residents to submit views on proposed tree planting sites.
- ✓ A consultation exercise has been completed for the 5 further tree planting sites included in phase 2 of the Action Plan and plans are well underway to complete this planting work.
- ✓ A further list of sites for consideration in the autumn/winter period this year has been agreed
- ✓ Cabinet have removed the 2 ha. limit to allow larger sites to be considered.
- ✓ A commitment has been made that the planting site in phases 1, 2 and 3 and future phases are designated as Urban Carbon Capture Areas in the Open Space and Green Infrastructure Strategy and considered for an appropriate designation in the developing Local Plan.
- ✓ At the time of writing this report, 17 primary schools have indicated that they will be participating in the Queens Green Canopy 2022 "Plant a Tree for the Jubilee" project, and intend to plant their trees by March 2022.
- ✓ Work is ongoing with other schools, with a view to the remainder of planting with interested schools taking place in November/December 2022.