

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

Cabinet
17 October 2023

Report Title: Review of Environment Strategy & Road Map to Net Zero.

Submitted by: Service Director – Sustainable Environment

Portfolio/s: Sustainable Environment

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide Cabinet with a progress update towards achieving the aims of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy and to consider the recently produced Road Map to net zero for the Council's Operations and Estate.

To note the progress in reducing carbon emissions from the Council's Operations and Estate by 50% over the last ten years.

Recommendation

That Cabinet

- 1. notes the progress made in the various facets of the Council's Sustainable Environmental Strategy and other linked initiatives.**
- 2. Notes the 50% reduction in the carbon emissions from the Council's Operations and Estate over the last 10 years.**
- 3. That Cabinet considers the findings and recommendations of the Road Map to Net Zero and builds them into the Action plan for an updated Sustainable Environment strategy moving forward.**
- 4. That Cabinet refers the progress update and 2023/2024 Action Plan to the Health, Wellbeing & Environment Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.**

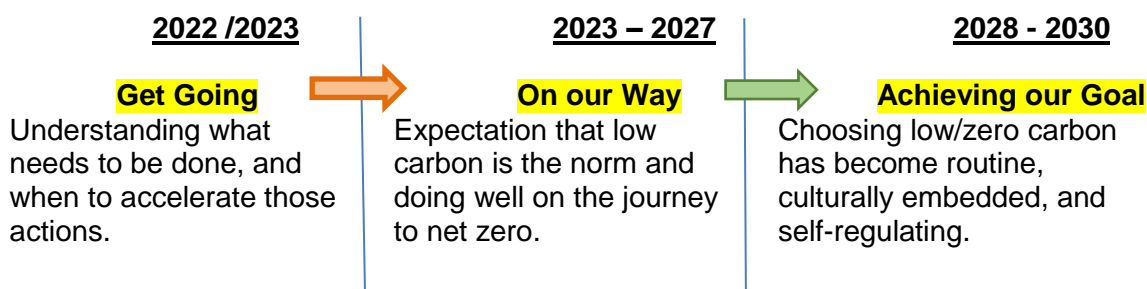
Reasons

To review progress and plans towards the aims of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy and linked initiatives including the Council's Nature Recovery plans, Urban Tree Planting Strategy, UN Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Emergency Plans.

To enable the Council to move forward to achieve its net zero target for its own operations by 2030

1. Background

- 1.1 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 and is an over-arching strategy, under which a range of other linked and related plans and initiatives sit.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 In early 2023 the Council commissioned expertise in development of a costed Road Map to Net Zero for the Councils own operations and estate to reach net zero by 2030. Operational buildings have had in-depth surveys and analysis undertaken over the summer, looking at the fabric of the buildings, heating and lighting infrastructure, current insulation, and energy consumption. In addition the Council’s vehicle fleet has been subject to an in-depth analysis, which includes the ten year fleet replacement programme. Extracts from the report for analysis undertaken for the Councils buildings and fleet are shown in appendix 2 and 3.
- 1.4 Development of the roadmap provides a strategic overview of the key priority areas for action and milestones needed for NULBC to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.
- 1.5 The Roadmap does not set out the ‘how’, ‘who’ or the actions needed to achieve the milestones – this is important to stress. It is a strategic framework to help assess what is currently in place and what is needed to get to where The Council collectively needs to be; and then to monitor progress over time.
- 1.6 The NULBC Roadmap has been commissioned to show that the net zero target can be realistically met, through a wide range of implemented measures and changes to reduce carbon emissions in the Councils own estate and operations, and can be adopted at scale and pace over the next decade across the Borough.



- 1.6 The Roadmap will form the basis for a revised Sustainable Action Plan for the Council, to achieve its net zero target for its operational buildings and fleet.

2. Progress to date

2.1 The Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES) is currently being delivered through an action plan, which identifies a range of actions, which covers an initial 5 years period which is coming to an end. There are a number of linked plans and initiatives that have been agreed and adopted by the Council as follows:

- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Climate Emergency declaration
- Nature Recovery declaration
- Urban Tree Planting Strategy

2.2 The commissioned roadmap has identified the areas where the Council needs to take action in reducing its own emissions to net zero. The report focuses on the two largest contributors to carbon emissions, our buildings heating and lighting, and our operational vehicle fleet. These areas fall into scope 1 and 2 of our responsibilities under the Climate Act 2008.

2.3 The SES action plan has been updated, detailing progress, made to date, and is attached to this report as an appendix 1.

2.4 It is worth highlighting the positive actions which have been commissioned and or completed as part of the SES action plan, which are positively reducing the Councils carbon emissions, notably –

- Introduced the use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel, as a clean alternative to diesel in its HGV fleet, reducing carbon emissions for those vehicles by 90% during the first 6 months of 2023.
- Planted 14,947 in the first four phases of the urban tree planting strategy over 21 sites.
- Provided sustainability training to all employees and members of the Council, and begun looking into enhanced carbon literacy training for Scrutiny, Cabinet and senior managers
- Reduced the Council's own carbon emissions by 43% since 2019, and by 50% over the past 10 years.

2.5 In addition the Council is an active partner in the Staffordshire Sustainability Board (SSB), made up of senior members and officers with responsibility for sustainability and climate change for all ten local authorities in Staffordshire. Through its work with the SSB, the Council has supported and contributed to the following initiatives developed and recommended by the board. –

- Achieved all ten actions of the SSB's base pledges (see appendix 5)
- Signed up to and supported a County wide communications plan for climate change action, and hosted a 'Carbon Bubble' event in Newcastle town centre in May 2023.
- Signed up to and supported the County Councils Electric Vehicle (EV) strategy
- Signed up and supported the County Councils Climate Change Adaptation Strategy.

3. **Proposal**

3.1 Cabinet notes the progress made in the various facets of the Council's Sustainable Environmental Strategy (SES) and other linked initiatives. The table below presents the current

achievements of the SES Action Plan since its implementation. The “#” represent the different actions in the SES Action Plan Progress Tracker.

Sustainable Environment Strategy Progress



Overarching

- Continued engagement with Keele University focused around their Smart Energy Network Demonstrator (SEND) and Hydrex to act as a case study for NuLBC. (#10 & #32)
- Joined Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) and APSE Energy to share and learn best practices in the sector. (#11)
- Commissioned and completed a Net Zero Roadmap for the Council's built estate, which will drive an updated Sustainable Environment and Decarbonisation Action Plan in April. (#12, #27, #34 & #40)
- Created a dedicated full time Environmental Sustainability Officer. (#13)



Minimising Waste and increase Recycling

- The Council and all Staffordshire authorities agreed on base pledge and work programme as part of SSB (Staffordshire Sustainability Board) where NuLBC is the second highest performer for recycling. (#30)



Sustainable Environment Strategy Progress



Reducing our Reliance on Fossil Fuels

- The Council is supporting initiatives such as cycle routes developments like at Keele roundabout. (#15)
- The Council introduced a salary sacrifice scheme for EV's for employees. (#16)
- The Council received a bid from LETIS (Low Emission Taxi Infrastructure Scheme) to develop 8 rapid electric vehicle charging point within the Borough for taxis and completed the installation of electrical vehicle charging points in NuLBC managed car parks for customer use. (#17)
- The Council formally adopted the County EV Strategy January 2023. (#18)



Reducing Emissions

- Through route optimisation with Streetscene Operations, the fleet has seen a 20% reduction vehicle use for litter bin emptying, making operation more cost effective and energy efficient. (#22)
- The Driver CPC and ECO Driving programs has been agreed for 2023/2024 and aims to increase driver positive behaviours and well-being. (#23)
- The Council set to effect behaviour changes and optimise energy usage with data captured by Wi Bees Data Loggers. (#24)





Offsetting Carbon Emissions

- The Council have planted 14,947 trees in the first four phases of the Urban Tree Planting Strategy over 21 sites. (#33)
- Completed CRF (Community Renewal Fund) Bid projects including LED street lighting and a community building energy efficiency. Currently working towards a Keele solar energy generation park. (#35)
- 36 social houses have been decarbonised. (#36)
- Sustainability training has been provided by the council for all staff with Carbon Literacy Training being developed for further interested and senior staff of NuLBC. (#39)



Please see the full action plan document “Sustainable Environment Strategy Action plan 2022-2023 Updated Progress October 2023” in Appendix 1.

- 3.2 That the scope 1 and 2 emissions recommendations emanating from the roadmap are agreed and built into the councils revised SES moving forward, namely –

Operational buildings Heat Decarbonisation (See Appendix 2 for background information)

- To reduce the energy (electricity & gas) consumption and demand of the Councils built estate with energy efficient interventions such as...
 - Fabric upgrades (Double glazing and insulation)
 - Heating (such as air source heat-pumps) and DHW (Domestic Hot Water) upgrades
 - Lighting upgrades from Incandescent to LEDs
 - BEMS (Building Energy Management Systems) and energy metering upgrades
 - Fan, motor and pumps upgrades
 - Behavioural changes

All achieved within the built estate by our 2030 net zero goal (with additional offsetting if needed).

- To increase the renewable energy supply of the Councils built estate through the installation of solar PV on owned buildings by our 2030 net zero goal. Where gas still needs to be used (such as Bradwell Crematorium) offsetting should occur to reach net zero.
- To use the Faithful & Gould (F&G) Heat Decarbonisation Roadmap to drive net zero initiatives within the district of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council to decarbonise all buildings and sites by our 2050 net zero goal.

Vehicle Fleet Transition (See Appendix 3 for background information)

- To transition all the Councils vehicles (such as light and heavy commercial vehicles) and assets (such as tractors and mowers) in the Councils fleet from fossil fuelled

vehicles to zero emissions vehicles (ZEVs) by our 2030 net zero goal. The fleet should all be transitioned to electric vehicles unless there is an opportunity to use other better renewable technology/energy such as hydrogen.

- To responsibly operate and maintain none transitioned and transitioned vehicles in the Councils fleet to ensure long life and cost effectiveness.
- To increase charging infrastructure and implement a Charge Management System (to optimise and manage electrical loads) at the relevant sites (such as the Knutton Depot) for newly transitioned fleet vehicles (light and heavy commercial).
- To optimise fleet utilisation by rationalising the fleet through utilisation, energy use and productivity surveying.
- To use the Everergi Fleet Transition Plan to drive net zero initiatives within the district of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council to decarbonise all transportation by our 2050 net zero goal.

Biodiversity and Nature Recovery

- To continue and expand the Urban Tree Planting Strategy to drive carbon capture and offset emissions that are leftover from technological upgrades of the built estate and fleet.
- To include Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in all new developments the Council undertakes to ensure the net gain of biodiversity in the areas we develop.

Governance and Planning

- To implement a dynamics planning framework (embedded in the SES and Decarbonisation Action Plan) for site and transport decarbonisation to ensure an accountable and achievable timeline of assigned actions that can drive the Council to net zero by 2030 within its built estate.
- In line with the new SES Action Plan, to ensure Biodiversity will be a strong priority within the action plan and will be embedded within all actions in the updated action plan.
- To ensure that all service directorates whether directly or indirectly involved in the sustainability and decarbonisation of the Council, will be included in the revision of the SES Action Plan to ensure their own strategies, plans and staff have sustainability embedded within their services. Examples of this include procurement creating a sustainable procurement policy for the entire organisation and its services, planning embedding sustainability into new Local Plans and strategies and HR facilitating a commuting to work sustainably campaign.
- To review and apply for funding opportunities to drive the Councils heat decarbonisation and vehicle fleet transition goals to become a net zero council. Funding opportunities are available from a multitude of government supported organisations such as Salix Finance, mentioned in the Heat Decarbonisation Roadmap.

- 3.3 Taking account of the recommendations of the roadmap process together with the review of actions completed as part of the SES that a revised and updated SES is brought back to Cabinet in April 2024.
- 3.4 The roadmap will become a decarbonisation project plan prioritising initial 'quick wins' to embed the project and direction of travel.
- 3.5 That Cabinet refers the progress update to the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.
- 3.6 As part of the work in revising and updating the SES a carbon budget will be established in line with best practice. Current investigations suggest tools like the Staffordshire Business and

Environment Network 'Carbon Footprint Tool' may be the most effective tool available at this time.

- 3.7 The revised Sustainable Environment Strategy (which includes the decarbonisation project plan as the action timetable) needs to be alignment with the Medium Term Financial Strategy, Asset Strategy and regeneration projects moving forward.
- 3.8 The revised Strategy will also need to align with Landscape management and land holding management (including parks, open spaces and so on) with regard to implementing biodiversity net gain and adaptation requirements.

4. Reasons for Proposed Solution

- 4.1 The Sustainable Environment Strategy sets out the Council's ambition to be an exemplar local authority in both caring for, and enhancing our environment. Adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change means changing the way we do things for the long-term benefit of the Borough.
- 4.2 To evolve the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy, as a 'living' document with linked plans and initiatives with particular focus on its journey to net carbon zero.

5. Options Considered

- 5.1 There is no other option to meet the statutory challenges posed by the legislation.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 6.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 has the following provisions:
 - Carbon targets and carbon budgeting - The Act places the government under a legal duty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% below 1990 levels by 2050
 - The Committee on Climate Change - The Act also establishes the Committee on Climate Change, an independent, expert body to advise government on the appropriate level for the targets, budgets, and on matters relating to mitigation and adaptation. The Committee will submit annual reports to parliament on progress towards the targets and the government must respond to this report.
- 6.2 Councils Duty to reduce carbon emissions - There are currently no statutory requirements for local authorities to set or negotiate targets to reduce their own or area wide emissions. However the Borough declared a Climate Emergency in April 2019 and committed to reach net zero for its own operations by 2030.
- 6.3 In 2020/2021, the Council reduced carbon emissions associated with its operations by 21.5% or 593 tons. It will be noted that this reduction will in part have been achieved during the Covid pandemic. Through the One Council programme, the Council is working to ensure that some of the working practices utilised during the pandemic are built into the Council's core business model.
- 6.4 All Local Authorities also have a "biodiversity duty" under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

- 7.1 There are no adverse equality impacts identified as a consequence of this report. Specific actions contained within the proposed revised SES Decarbonisation Action Plan will need to consider any equality impacts on a project by project basis.
- 7.2 However, a number of the UN Sustainable Development Goals which the Council is a signatory to relate to issues of social justice and fairness.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1 There will be financial and resource implications arising from this report.
- 8.2 However, the Council has formally recognised a climate emergency and in doing so it acknowledges that there is a real need to act now and plan in how to tackle the environmental threats posed by climate change. This need to act will require a balance to be found between the prioritisation of funding for projects and the duty to be accountable for the way in which public funds are used.
- 8.3 The Roadmap has identified capital expenditure of £7.4 million is required up to 2030 to decarbonise the Council's operational buildings. Costs for replacement fleet utilising zero and ultra-low emission vehicles, estimated at £10.76m, have been confirmed as being adequately covered under the Council's existing ten-year fleet replacement programme budget. Further work is underway to ascertain the impact on future capital expenditure from carbon offset.
- 8.4 The Council recognises that it will need to make bold decisions where there is a good business case to deliver the right outcomes for our residents and businesses that consider both financial and environmental returns for that investment. The return on investment (ROI) for many of the projects required is demonstrably quicker as the required technologies become more widely used.
- 8.5 To make further progress on this agenda, the 2022/2023 approved Council budget includes the provision of £100,000 within the Borough Growth Fund to enable tree planting within urban greenspaces, preparation of a roadmap to achieving a net zero Council and progress schemes and initiatives contained in the SES Action Plan.
- 8.6 External funding will continue to play an important part in allowing projects to come forward and the work detailed earlier in this report in respect of the Community Renewal Fund is an example which needs to be followed more widely. Officers have recently made a public Sector Decarbonisation Fund (PSDF) bid for energy reduction measures at the J2 Leisure centre, if successful this will achieve significant reductions in energy, which has seen significant increases over the last year or so, as well as a reduction in carbon emissions.

9. Major Risks

- 9.1 There are overarching risks of inaction in respect of the Council's response to the environmental threats caused by:
- rising carbon emissions (reputational damage, potential statutory penalties from carbon reporting requirements),
 - climate change (excessive urban heat impacts, excess deaths, flooding, air pollution etc.),
 - habitat loss (failure to meet statutory Biodiversity Net Gain in developments),
 - plastic pollution (poor quality water and increasingly toxic soils)

- poor use of dwindling natural resources (increased pressure on fuel costs).

9.2 As a result, Councils around the UK and Governments around the world are responding to these threats and public calls for a robust and rapid reduction, and mitigation measures as well as reigniting environmental strategies. Many have declared Climate Emergencies with the aim of accelerating action to achieve carbon neutrality, consider how to mitigate the effects of climate change and change how resources are used.

9.3 There are growing expectations that Councils take a leading and decisive role in this respect and there are reputational risks to the Council in not acting positively.

9.4 Any risks associated with specific projects contained within the proposed Action Plan will be assessed and considered on a project-by-project basis.

9.5 That forthcoming or future projects may not have sufficiently been screened for their carbon impact during planning stages, and negate the investment made in other carbon reduction projects.

9.6 A specific detailed risk register for this aspect of the Council's work will be presented to Cabinet.

10 UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

10.1 The Sustainable Environment Strategy and linked initiatives will support the realisation of the aims of UN SDG 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 & 15.



11 Key Decision Information

11.1 Approval of the report is considered a key decision as it impacts on all Wards in the Borough. It has been included in the Forward Plan.

12 Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

12.1 There are several previous Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee reports.

13 List of Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Sustainable Environment Strategy Progress on action plan Report
- 13.2 Appendix 2 – Site Heat Decarbonisation Background
- 13.3 Appendix 3 – Vehicle Fleet Transition Background
- 13.4 Appendix 4 – Extract from Corporate Risk Assessment system (GRACE) for decarbonisation.
- 13.5 Appendix 5 - SSB Base Pledges

14 Background Papers

- 1. Urban Tree Planting Strategy
- 2. Sustainable Environment Strategy
- 3. Sustainable Environment Strategy Action Plan 2022-2023
- 4. Climate Emergency Motion
- 5. Natures Recovery Motion
- 6. UN Sustainable Development Goals