

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

Cabinet
04 June 2024

Report Title: Refresh of the Council's Sustainable Environment Strategy

Submitted by: Service Director – Sustainable Environment

Portfolio/s: Sustainable Environment

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To provide Cabinet with a refreshed and updated Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES), taking into account progress in the SES action plan and the recommendations of Road Map to net zero for the Councils Operations and Estate approved by Cabinet in October 2023.

Recommendation

That:

- 1. Cabinet approves the refreshed Sustainable Environment Strategy and associated delivery plan.**
- 2. That Cabinet refers the refreshed sustainable Environment Strategy and associated action plan to the Health, Wellbeing & Environment Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.**

Reasons

Following the production and subsequent approval by Cabinet of the 'Road Map to Net Zero' the Council needed 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 with an up to date and evolving SES, in order to achieve its net zero target for its own operations by 2030.

1. Background

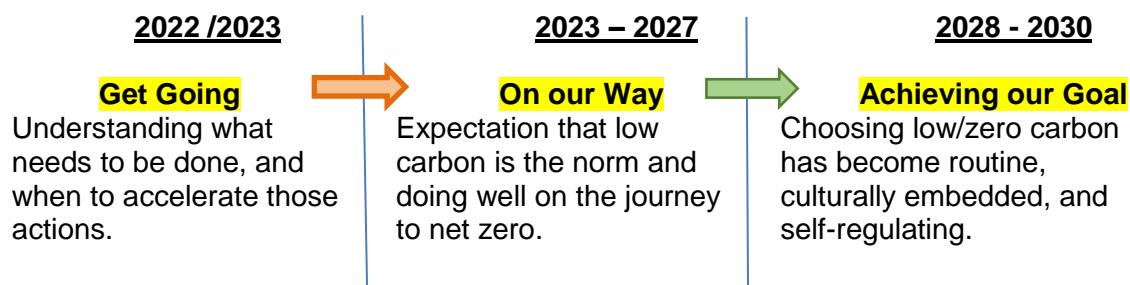
1.1 The Council adopted its current Sustainable Environment Strategy in December 2020. The Strategy was a landmark document setting out the Council's commitment to the sustainable environmental future of the Borough and is an over-arching strategy, under which a range of other linked and related plans 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.



- 1.7** With the Road Map approved work has been undertaken to ensure its recommendations form the basis for a revised SES and associated Action Plan for the Council, to achieve its net zero target for its operational buildings and fleet.

2. Progress to Date

- 2.1** The Council has made significant progress in its journey to Net zero by 2030, in particular the production of the Road Map to net zero approved by Cabinet in October 2023.
- 2.2** The current SES has been delivered through an action plan, which identified a range of actions, which covered the initial 5 years period, which has now ended. 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

2.3 It is worth highlighting the positive actions which have been commissioned and or completed as part of the original 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 Councils own carbon emissions by 43% since 2019.

2.4 In addition, since Cabinet approved the Road Map to net zero, a number of other initiatives, which build on the refreshed SES, have been approved by Cabinet, notably the Council's Tree and Bio-diversity Management plan, and the councils Grassland Management Strategy.

2.5 It is also worth noting that 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 Staffordshire Sustainability Board's base pledges
- Signed up to and supported a countywide 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.

2.6 Since Cabinet's approval of the Site and Fleet Decarbonisation Roadmap in October, the Council has made extensive progress in decarbonising its owned buildings this includes:

- The electrification of Knutton Lane Depot with the additional installation of solar which will cover the entire roof area (to be completed in 2024), the transition of half the office into leased space for better use and transitioning Environmental Health Team to Castle House and undertaking feasibility studies to discover the fabric, ventilation, heating & cooling, lighting upgrades that the building needs to be more energy efficient.
- Jubilee 2 Leisure Centre has begun the process of decarbonisation through the installation of more LED lighting, a pool cover, and research into heating the pool facilities with a Deep Green database (recycling energy off the heat the database produces).
- Transitioning the Market Office in town to a warehouse rather than office space which has now created a space that doesn't need any more net zero interventions.
- Decarbonising Kidsgrove Town hall through Air Source heat Pumps, LED's and more energy efficient smart controls and ventilation.
- Upgrading old leased buildings such as the Philip Astley Centre (23-24 Merrial Street) with net zero interventions to be more energy efficient and completely electric.

3. Proposal

- 3.1** This updated SES and Delivery Plan sets out a framework for collective action on climate change to achieve the Council's ambition to become net zero for its own estate and operations by 2030, and the borough by 2050. The Council, the residents, the businesses and visitors all have a collective responsibility towards solving climate change.
- 3.2** This Strategy and Delivery Plan benefits the health and wellbeing of the local environment, society and the economy in the borough. The borough will be able to reduce emissions and increase biodiversity through a set of actions tied to four different themes:
- Built Environment & Energy
 - Travel & Transport
 - Natural Environment & Sequestration
 - Engagement & behaviour Change
- 3.3** Each of the 4 listed themes within this strategy have proposed actions connected to solve issues that have been proven to contribute to climate change and the degradation of our local environment, community and economy. The actions listed in the delivery plan of this strategy range from actions that need to occur to reduce emissions, increase biodiversity, increase health and wellbeing and lower costs for the benefit of all.
- 3.4** This document will act to push the Council to drive forward the actions listed in the delivery plan. The document itself is a living document which means it will evolve and learn overtime as actions are achieved or new actions are created with a goal for a sustainable and net zero borough by 2050.
- 3.5** The Council will endeavour to engage as much as possible with the community to ensure the actions that are taken are inclusive and sets out a framework for collective action on climate change to achieve the Councils' ambition to become net zero by 2030 and the boroughs ambitions of becoming net zero by 2050.
- 3.6** The Council will endeavour to engage as much as possible with the community to ensure the actions that are taken are inclusive and holistic.
- 3.7** The revised SES has a number of objectives to drive the actions need to achieve the main aims of the strategy and delivery plan, namely:
- Facilitate the development into a net zero Council by 2030, through the Councils built environment and fleet.
 - Facilitate the development into a net zero borough by 2050, through the decarbonisation of housing businesses and transport
 - Promote the natural environment in the borough to increase biodiversity, carbon sequestration and storage
 - Develop a service focused strategy and delivery plan in the Council to engage council staff and deliver service owned actions.
 - Engage with residents, businesses and visitors through online and physical communication networks to create sustainable behaviour change within the borough.

Please see the full action plan document "Sustainable Environment Strategy Action plan 2022-2023 Updated Progress Oct 23" in Appendix 1.

- 3.8** The governance and accountability of this strategy and delivery plan will be dependent on the sustainable environment working groups that feed into and from the plan as well as a bi-annual review of the plan by the Health, Wellbeing & Environment Scrutiny Committee and an annual review by Cabinet.
- 3.9** Each Council service will have a sustainable environment-working group to aid and drive forward the actions in the delivery plan to ensure those services are responsible for the transition towards a more sustainable future in the borough. Upon a bi-annual review by the Scrutiny Committee, the strategy and plan will be updated with new information, action progress and other additions. Each subsequent year the strategy and delivery plan will be updated, with new information, action progress and other additions, and then taken through the corporate decision making process.
- 3.10** In total there are eight working groups, each focused on different directorates and services within the Council. These include:
- Commercial Delivery
 - Regulatory services
 - Neighbourhood Delivery
 - Sustainable Environment
 - IT & Digital, Legal & Governance, Strategy, People 7 Performance
 - Planning.
 - Recycling & Waste Operations
 - Streetscene
- 3.11** These working groups will identify relevant actions from the main delivery and service plan for the working groups to progress and achieve in collaboration with relevant service leads and the Sustainable Environment Services. Once done these will be reported, with progress being updated in the main strategy and plan during the next occurring quarterly review. Working groups will meet monthly with a service lead working group that meets quarterly to ensure good communication between services and the implementation of actions by their deadline.
- 3.12** To ensure this Strategy and Delivery Plan continues to stay relevant until 2050 it will be constantly updated and reviewed. This includes updates to different actions as well as the addition of actions where the need is identified. This allows for an accountable and impactful document that can lead the Council and borough towards a more sustainable future.
- 3.13** A copy of the updated SES is shown in appendix 1 of this report, and the associated Delivery Plan is shown in appendix 2 of this report.
- 3.14** It is also proposed that Cabinet refers the progress update to the Health, Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.

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

- 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 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 are no financial and resource implications arising directly 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 approved by cabinet in October 2023 identified capital expenditure of £7.4 million is required up to 2030 to decarbonise the Councils 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 Councils existing ten-year fleet replacement programme. These sums have now been built into the Councils capital programme moving forward.

- 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 Budget 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 contribute wherever possible to the Councils capital reserves for this area of expenditure. The Council is currently making an application for SALIX funding (see appendix 3 for details) to assist in the decarbonisation of a number of its frontline operational buildings, namely the J2 leisure centre, the Councils depot on Knutton Lane, and the Council crematorium. If successful, this funding 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.

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, notably Cabinets approval of the decarbonising RoadMap in October 2023.

13. List of Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1 – Refreshed Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES)

13.2 Appendix 2 – SES action / delivery plan

13.3 Appendix 3 – Salix Decarbonisation schemes statement 2024.

14. Background Papers

1. None