

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S
REPORT TO**

Cabinet
07 January 2025

Report Title: **Annual Report - Decarbonisation of the Council's Operations**

Submitted by: **Service Director – Sustainable Environment**

Portfolio/s: **Sustainable Environment**

Ward(s) affected: **All**

Purpose of the Report

To provide Cabinet with an update on the progress in decarbonising the Council's operational buildings and fleet, which forms a major part of the Council's approved updated Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES).

Recommendation

That:

- 1. Cabinet notes the progress achieved from 2009/10 in decarbonising the Council's operational buildings and fleet by 68.37% and 35% during the past twelve months.**
- 2. Cabinet refers the progress made to the Health, Wellbeing & Environment Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comments.**
- 3. Cabinet notes the key activities being undertaken by individual service areas currently and planned for 2025/2026**

Reasons

Following the production and subsequent approval by Cabinet of the updated Sustainable Environment Strategy (SES) the Council needs to monitor and review progress and plans towards the aims of the SES and report each year on the progress in decarbonising the Council's operational buildings and fleet.

To enable the Council to move forward with an up to date and evolving SES, to achieve its net zero target for its own operations by 2030.

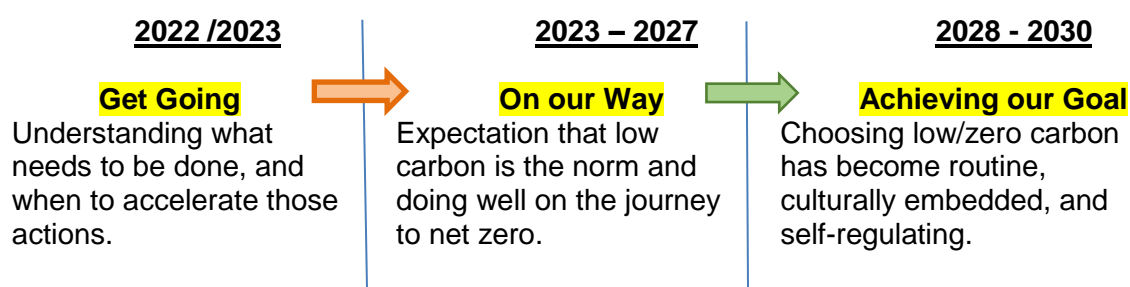
1. Background

1.1 The Council adopted through approval by Cabinet its revised Sustainable Environment Strategy in June 2024. 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 rolling ten-year fleet replacement programme.
- 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 which has now been built into the revised SES.
- 1.5** The SES 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 Roadmap shows 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.



2. Progress to Date

- 2.1** The Council has made significant progress in its journey to Net zero by 2030, and 2023/24 has seen the largest fall in Carbon emissions than any other year since monitoring of emissions began, thanks mainly to the full implementation of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) in its heavy goods vehicle fleet.
- 2.2** The current (revised) SES has a detailed action plan, which requires each directorate and service area within the Council to identify a range of actions, which will help in lowering carbon emissions as the Council moves to its net zero goals. The SES confirms the Councils commitment tackling climate change as follows:
- UN Sustainable Development Goals
 - Climate Emergency declaration

- Nature Recovery declaration
- Borough Tree Planting Strategy

2.3 In addition, and to support and formally monitor service directorates decarbonisation action and delivery plans, the Council has set up a 'One Green Council Board' using the successful governance arrangements for the 'One Council' project. The board had its first meeting in November 2024, and will be held on a quarterly basis moving forward.

2.4 It is worth highlighting the positive actions which have been developed by each service directorate as part of the revised SES action plan, which are positively reducing the Councils carbon emissions, notably:

Sustainable Environment SEWG:

- Procured four 3.5 tonne electric pickups for use by Streetscene, plus 1 electric powered van for the garage workshop.
- Transitioned all heavy goods vehicles to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) which has reduced this year's carbon footprint by 661.1 tonnes of CO₂e.
- Streetscene is trialling and sourcing electric mowers and chainsaws.
- Adopted and conducted the Grassland Management Strategy which saw the promotion of 18 long grassland sites having positive social, economic, and environmental impacts.
- Led the strong application for £3.8M of decarbonisation funding from Salix PSDS for Jubilee 2, results will be announced mid-2025.
- Supported successful bids for Britain in Bloom and Green Flag.
- Commenced a sustainability schools programme to visit and support schools to create Climate Action Plans and deliver on them.
- During 2024 the service has delivered Carbon Literacy training to almost 50 staff in the Council.
- Developed new webpages for sustainability, parks, and a new social media for both Streetscene and Sustainability.
- Developed a Tree Risk Management Strategy due for Cabinet approval in February 2025.

Planning SEWG:

- Embedded BNG into the new Local Plan and new housing development sites.
- Supporting the implementation of Transforming the Trent Valley Project, the Decarbonisation of Jubilee 2, and various strategies including tree planting, LNRS etc.

Commercial Delivery SEWG:

- Supported with the delivery of a £3.8M application for Salix PSDS funding for the decarbonisation of Jubilee 2.
- Led the decarbonisation of Kidsgrove Townhall and the Philip Astley Centre.
- Led the installation of Solar PV on multiple sites including Bradwell Crematorium, Kidsgrove Townhall and Keele Cemetery.
- Brampton Museum currently applying for funding from the National Lottery for net zero infrastructural upgrades.

Regulatory Services SEWG:

- Launching in January of 2025 the service has worked on a Business Sustainability Guide which will be available on the website to inform the borough's businesses about important sustainable actions, funding, and networks.
- Working on the County's Taxi Decarbonisation Project with the goals on a full hybrid then electric fleet.
- Working on the development of a new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP).

Neighbourhood Delivery SEWG:

- Procured an additional 2 small electric pickups to add to the exist 3 electric vans for use by MMF team.
- Supported successful bids for Britain in Bloom and Green Flag.
- Since the beginning of the Borough Tree Planting Strategy the service have almost planted 30,000 trees and await the consultation and adoption of Phase 6 for the continuation of tree planting.
- Currently investigating the feasibility of the electrification of the dog warden diesel van with the fleet & site team.

Strategy, People & Performance SEWG:

- Developing the Green Carbon Action Tracker to track the carbon and cost savings of various sustainable actions.
- Developing new tools to evaluate the sustainability of strategic reports.
- Led the introduction of a compulsory sustainability training module for all staff and are encouraging Carbon Literacy Training.

Information Technology Services SEWG:

- Programme of work underway to remove IT Data Centres from Depot and Kidsgrove.
- Programme of work underway to remove the physical telephony systems and desk phones in use across council sites.
- Improve operational efficiency through the CRM and data-led decision making, improving the use of field service and officer mobility.

Legal & Governance SEWG:

- Development of Green Procurement Strategy.

2.5 In addition, since Cabinet approved the Road Map to net zero, several 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.

2.6 Each year since 2009/10 the Council has monitored carbon emissions for its operational buildings and vehicle fleet, through analysis of energy use, both gas and electric, and fuel in terms of petrol and diesel used in its operational fleet. Carbon output from energy sources is calculated using standard metrics defined and published each year by the government. These metrics change each year as more energy, mainly electricity is produced from renewable sources.

- 2.7** From 2009/10 when the Council first started collecting carbon emission data to 2023/24 carbon emissions have fallen by **68.37%**.
- 2.8** For the year 2023/24 the Council's carbon emissions (scope 1,2, &3) fell by **35%** from 2010.9 tonnes to 1308.2 tonnes as compared to the same dataset in 2022/23.
- 2.9** Details of the reductions in carbon emissions from the Council's operations are shown in appendix 1.

3. Proposal

- 3.1** The 2024 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** As the Council reduces its energy requirements as part of its decarbonisation journey to net zero will see the added benefit of reduced costs associated with energy usage in the longer term. These scenarios will be modelled and reviewed as part of the One Green Council Board moving forward.
- 3.4** Monitoring of the actions within the SES will be undertaken through the 'One Green Council' Board at its quarterly meeting, and an annual report to Cabinet in October of each year, as well as being referred biannually for review to the Council's Health Wellbeing and Environment Scrutiny Committee (HW&E)
- 3.5** The SES 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 Council by 2030 and borough by 2050.

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 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, several 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 2024/2025 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 has recently made an application for SALIX funding to assist in the decarbonisation of the J2 leisure centre, which should be determined sometime in March 2025. 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. One Council

Please that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work.

One Commercial Council

We will make investment to diversify our income and think entrepreneurially.

The SES supports the development of commercial activities which help to deliver a sustainable borough and facilitate in decarbonising projects.

One Digital Council

We will develop and implement a digital approach which makes it easy for all residents and businesses to engage with the Council, with our customers at the heart of every interaction.

The SES supports the work programmes being developed as part of the One Digital Council initiative. Digital technology will play an ever-greater role in decarbonising the Councils operations and wider borough initiatives for citizens and businesses.

One Green Council

We will deliver on our commitments to a net zero future and make all decisions with sustainability as a driving principle.

12.

The SES, and its Delivery Plan form the basis and underpin the work of the One Green Council programme.

Key Decision Information

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.

13. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

There are several previous Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee reports, notably Cabinets approval of the revised sustainable Environment Strategy approved by Cabinet in June 2024.

14. List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – report and graphs detailing reductions in Carbon emissions 2023/24.

15. Background Papers

None