



Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item

7

24 June 2021

Report of

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Place & Client Services

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Title

Overview of the Sustainability and Climate Challenge stream and next steps

Wards
affected

All Wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Colchester Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and committed to become zero net carbon by 2030. This report sets out an overview of the Council's work to date of the key elements of the sustainability and climate challenge project while also providing information on forthcoming work for Councillors to be aware of.
- 1.2 One of the key pieces of work in the past year was a review to assess the need for a new strategy following expiry of the most recent strategy (2015-2020) and to align the content of the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) to the key pillars of the emerging strategy. The Climate Challenge and Sustainability Strategy ([PDF](#)) for consultation document is now published and available online. The revamped and updated [Climate Emergency Action Plan 2021-2023](#) is also available online and provides readers with enough information to understand each action.
- 1.4 Another key piece of work is to further develop the strategy by identifying an appropriate pathway for carbon reduction which includes carbon emission reduction milestones and key assets and strategies to be reviewed by the Carbon Trust. This will be available by October 2021.
- 1.5 Alongside this is the development of outcomes, targets and measurements of success for each of the eight themes included in the Sustainability and Climate Challenge Strategy. This will be done through an online workshop with select managers from each service area and companies and facilitated by the University of Essex through their Impact Acceleration Award. Once this has been completed, the external engagement on the strategy will be deepened through a range of consultations to more deliberative and participatory methods which the Council is assessing as part of its transformation process. These two pieces of work will be facilitated by the grant from the University of Essex and two separate workshops will be run with Council staff, partners and Councillors.
- 1.6 In addition to the co-created strategy development there is upcoming work looking to strength community energy work, as well as build the capacity of companies for a green recovery.
- 1.7 Also, there is emerging conversations with [Climate-Kic](#) on partnership in order to gain more opportunities for climate finance. These are some of the highlights alongside the 50+ climate emergency action plans which are detailed in the Appendix of the Progress Report.

2. Recommended Observations

- 2.1 To note the overview of the work the Council has done on the Sustainability and Climate Challenge portfolio of work including:
- the development of Sustainability and Climate Challenge Strategy for consultation document
 - a revised Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) 2021-2023
 - Upcoming areas of work – community energy and increasing financial support for the Council's carbon reduction and sustainability portfolio
 - A 2000-word overview of the Sustainability and Carbon Reduction work (see Appendix 1)

3. Reason for Recommended Observation

- 3.1 To ensure that all panel members are up to date on what the Sustainability and Climate Challenge portfolio of work consists of, progress so far, and its forthcoming items of work in order to inform future decision making.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 None

5. Background Information

- 5.1 In 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency, committing to become net zero carbon by 2030. A review of existing frameworks and documents was done, and a new framework was proposed for the Council's Climate Challenge and Sustainability Strategy ([PDF](#)).
- 5.3 A principal aim in undertaking a review of existing documents was to:
- replace the outdated Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2015-2020 which recently expired; and
 - create a separation between the strategic approach and the actions and detailed plans that sit beneath.
- 5.4 The [Climate Emergency Action Plan \(CEAP\)](#) was updated with new projects for the period of 2021-2023 as well as revamped according to the 8 themes of the emerging strategy. Progress on the CEAP will be highlighted in the Environment Sustainability Panel Meetings as a standing agenda item and will also be reviewed by staff and company members every six months to provide any new projects and remove those that have been completed. The updated CEAP has been designed and uploaded to the Council's website with detail of each action included.
- 5.5 The co-production of the strategy with staff and partners is another key area of work that is underway. The participatory nature of the approach allows for staff to embody the change that is needed in their work by providing a space to identify the outcomes, the targets and measurements of success of their set objectives for each thematic area. This will be further developed through the inclusion of carbon emissions reduction milestones identified by the Carbon Trust after a thorough update on the Council current emissions and technical advice on energy efficiency for key assets. Together this work will be available by October 2021.
- 5.6 In addition to the strategy development being co-produced by staff and partners, it will also be shared with residents and community-based groups. A communications and engagement plan is being developed to encourage social democracy and climate action. This is in line with the Council's Transformation process which has three key pillars: enabling community action, innovation and commercialisation. Moving all of these elements forward is a proposal by Officer and University of Essex staff for joint discussion and project development for community engagement for climate action. This will take place in August and a proposal to be ready by September. The external engagement on the strategy will be deepened through this project proposal with a set of agreed methods (i.e., Consultations, forums, citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting).
- 5.7 Another area of work that has begun is an investigation into the opportunity for the Council to support community energy provision. Discussions with Essex County Council, the Energy Hub and Colchester Energy Group (forthcoming). There are currently funds available for community energy, such as the [Rural Communities Energy Fund](#). In addition, there are opportunities to support local business in promoting energy efficiency through advice and support, see [LOCASE](#). Furthermore, [SELEP](#), are looking into the skills and supply chain opportunities arising from the Green Recovery and longer-term net zero transition. Together, this provides an important area of work to both move forward the Council transformation agenda, as well as its climate challenge in reducing carbon emissions through direct and indirect operations.

- 5.8 A further area of work under investigation is how to attract more climate finance to reach the goal of net zero emissions by 2030. Currently the Council is reducing emissions at 5% and if key emitting assets (Leisure World, Fleet and others) are decarbonised, there is still a gap to target. How the Council intends to bridge the gap and finance all the decarbonisation projects required alongside an offsetting plan is required now. Initial conversations with Climate-Kic to gain more opportunities for climate finance are underway. Looking at how we need to position Colchester Borough Council leading councils in the field of climate change and decarbonisation requires innovation in seeking investment and creating new business opportunities, for the Council, its residents and partners.
- 5.9. These are some of the strategic highlights which are more around the evolving approach and direction of work, alongside the 50+ climate emergency actions which are detailed in the accompanied Progress Report June 2021.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 The Climate Challenge and Sustainability and the CEAP will continue to recognise the importance of equality and diversity in all aspects of borough life. A full engagement for the strategy will be developed in the next quarter and will ensure it meets a high standard of equality and diversity. Work has begun with Colchester 360 to ensure that we reach a range of residents from across the borough.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The strategic framework outlined above and the programme of work the framework manages, underpins and contributes to all areas of the Council's Strategic, but particularly builds on the themes: 'Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability' and 'Creating safe, healthy and active communities'.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 No formal consultation is required as this document is a rearticulation of strategic priorities that have already consulted on. However, consultation and engagement will be a fundamental part of the strategy development and action plans.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 This update on the Council's approach and direction does not require any media. However, the emerging strategy and updated CEAP will be shared online and through communication channels at the appropriate time in line with the CEAP's newly developed communications strategy and plan.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 There are no financial implications directly related to the production of the update.

11. Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no community safety implications.

12. Health and Safety Implications

12.1 There are no health and safety implications.

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1 There are no risk management implications.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1 The Council has declared a climate emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. This report was delivered remotely to the Panel, highlighting the option to consider remote working to reduce travel emissions when possible.

Background Documents

A review of Council's existing key sustainability and carbon related strategic documents identifies there are a number of past and current documents that are background to this.

Key Climate Related Council Documents	
Climate Challenge and Sustainability, for consultation, 2021 (PDF)	Draft of the climate challenge and sustainability strategic themes including objectives. To be shared with partners, community-based organisations and residents for feedback and elaboration of objectives, targets, and measurements of success.
Strategic Plan and Strategic Plan Action Plan (2020-2023)	The plan sets out how the Council will address the key challenges facing the borough through five strategic priority themes. The Strategic Plan Action Plan contains the actions and is progress communicated bi-yearly.
Climate Emergency Action Plan (2020) (CEAP) and Updated 2021	Climate related actions aimed to reduce carbon emissions and promote sustainability in the borough.
Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report (annual) 2019	Emissions tallied up and available yearly in April.
Pathway modelling and scope 3 footprint analysis.	Baseline of Council emissions and pathway reduction suggestions for direct and indirect (scope 3) emissions. One off and fed into the CEAP 2020.
Overview of Colchester Borough Council Climate Challenge (2021) - Enclosed Appendix 1.	A 2000 word document highlighting the work on the climate challenge and sustainability from 2020-2021. This was submitted to the MJ awards and provides a good overview which is being used for various communication pieces.

Appendix 1: Overview of Colchester Borough Council Climate Challenge (2021)

Summary

Colchester committed to achieving net zero direct emissions by 2030, having already achieved 40% emission reductions (2008-2019) and 2019's further 5.4% reduction. Our [Strategic Plan 2020-23](#) embedded climate challenges as [priority actions](#). Behaviour change is emerging across all services and our companies; a new officer team, member panel, and working groups helped accelerate development, strategies and milestones. All reports now consider sustainability, and all projects assess carbon reduction. 2020/2021's investment included £20m in a renewable heat network, solar park, microgrid, fleet decarbonisation, office and affordable housing energy improvements, 'Future Homes 2025' newbuilds, active travel, woodland/biodiversity creation and youth empowerment.

Submission

Colchester Borough Council (CBC) has always been ambitious in tackling climate change. Over a decade before declaring [2019's climate emergency](#), CBC set a 2008 target to reduce operational emissions by 40% and achieved it by 2019. The new target, for net zero operational carbon emissions by 2030, follows the 2019 declaration.

[Action Plan](#) (initiated January 2020) led to further dedicated human resource with a Climate Emergency Officer and Sustainability and Climate Change Manager to drive a system change within CBC and [wholly-owned commercial companies](#). **To develop a comprehensive, clear and robust plan, setting out how aims will be achieved and measured**, CBC worked with the Carbon Trust (CT); establishing a baseline for scope [1, 2 and 3 emissions](#) (2018/19). The plan identified key projects to reduce emissions, mapped timelines and identified a ['gap to target'](#). Between 2018/19 and 2019/20, [CBC reduced emissions by 5.4%](#). Having identified 'hotspots', the top three emitters to tackle were our fleet, 'Leisure World' centre, and affordable housing stock.

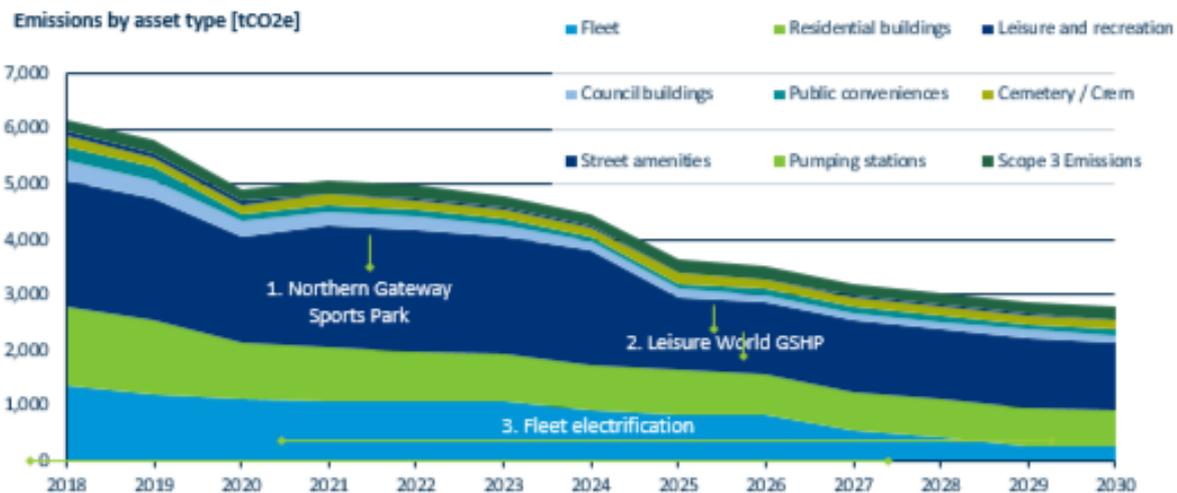


Figure ii. Pathway analysis of CBC's carbon neutral target to 2030. 'Step-change' projects include:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Fleet electrification | - 1,090 tCO ₂ e |
| 2. Leisure World GSHP | - 787 tCO ₂ e |
| 3. North Gateway Sports Park | + 337 tCO ₂ e |

Incorporating this, CBC produced a new [Strategic Plan \(SP\) 2020-2023](#); with a **strategy for sustaining climate emergency as a key priority for the authority's leadership**. The SP response to **Covid (and planning economic recovery)** also recognised carbon reduction opportunities to assist economic recovery, establishing 'tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability' as a key priority.

Embedding the climate emergency in strategic documents and Council governance was then reflected through the way we work as officers.

A new [Climate Challenge and Sustainability Strategy](#) followed the SP to provide focus on how CBC will achieve its 2030 target through 8 strategic objectives:

1. Reduce carbon emissions from our buildings and fleet
2. Producing renewable energy
3. Enhancing biodiversity and protecting our environment
4. Facilitating walking, cycling and sustainable transport
5. Providing sustainable waste management
6. Enabling partnership and community action for sustainability
7. Ensuring sustainable planning and development
8. Changing the way we work to achieve our climate commitment

These objectives were [collaboratively developed across CBC services](#) recognising that ways of working are key to achieving our 2030 target. This was achieved after creating a 'Climate Opportunities Working Group' across all services and wholly-owned companies. Strategy development includes engagement with key external partners, community organisations Parish Councils and residents to ensure a wider system change. This strategy is being delivered with the University of Essex; their expertise strengthening our strategy development, engagement approach and action plans. Our **strategies for engaging the community will therefore ensure that the response to climate emergency is understood locally.**

The 8 strategic objectives also shaped an updated Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) for 2021-2023, including over 50 actions. Monitoring progress against the carbon reduction milestones and wider CEAP occurs every [two months](#); and yearly with [emissions reporting](#). This work plan is overseen by an [Environment and Sustainability Panel](#) (established 2020); who are continuing to address our **challenging targets and interim, measurable milestones.**

Ongoing work with CT is establishing clear targets up to 2030, based on 2020 emissions data. In addition, a new Carbon Management Plan (CMP) detailing carbon savings and costs of planned and emerging projects is being developed (for 2022-2027). The CMP will sit alongside the annual Building Maintenance Plan to ensure that costing and carbon reduction are aligned and maximise energy efficiency opportunities within maintenance plans.

For new capital and revenue projects, a 2021 'sustainability and carbon reduction assessment' was developed, following iterative learning from 2020's 'climate emergency checklist', to include carbon emissions ranking and calculations. This focus is required to achieve the 2030 target; giving revamped guidance for all project managers. The assessment makes it possible to calculate carbon emissions for travel, fleet and building works, improving new projects from initiation stage, and assessing opportunities to assist the 2030 target.

In 2019/20, all CBC report templates were updated to include consideration of climate emergency impacts. In 2021 carbon emissions are then being introduced for all formal decision-making.

Success in tackling the climate emergency to date is demonstrated through our **innovation across the areas of energy, industry, buildings, transport, nature-based solutions, and climate leadership.** The flagship £6.9m [Northern Gateway Heat Network](#) will provide renewable energy through an 800kW ground-source heat pump, for 500,000sq.ft of commercial space, 350 homes, 300 elderly care homes and a health and medical campus. Using ground-sourced heat, pumped from a confined chalk aquifer, at this scale is an ambitious and innovative factor that led to the scheme being 1 of only 7 to be awarded funding by BEIS (£3.5m) in 2018/19.

During 2020, 5 boreholes were completed, tested successfully, and construction commenced on the first phase of pipes and inspection chambers. 'Phase 2' commenced in April 2021 with the contract to build the Energy Centre to be awarded in July to finish the network. The combination of CBC with (our wholly-owned) company Colchester Amphora Energy Limited (CAEL) meant that grant funding can be combined with Renewable Heat Incentive, improving the economic value of the finished network; in addition to the

significant social and environmental value it delivers. Colchester Northern Gateway Heat Network will deliver 5.5GWhrs of heat per annum when fully developed.

CAEL is already advancing further clean energy generation by developing a £5m solar farm and microgrid to provide renewable electricity. The 5.5 GWhrs a year will be used at nearby CBC assets, reducing existing consumption of other fuels (and consequent carbon footprint), providing an alternative electricity source. The renewable energy will be available commercially to other nearby property to create income, whilst further reducing our carbon emissions and running costs from CBC's estate. This innovation demonstrates the benefits of owning an energy company (expertise, emissions reduction, cost savings, ability to pioneer in low carbon growth).

Another central part of reaching our 2030 target is transitioning our fleet to become fully electric/use low-carbon fuels. Through advice from the Energy Saving Trust, CBC produced a first draft of its [fleet transition programme](#), with 15 electric vehicles (EVs) and 4 hybrid vehicles being procured in 2021; and several [eCargo](#) bikes already in use. Expert advice and experience (from Nottingham City Council) informed implementation of this strategy, with the installation of EV charge points on CBC's estate (charging points also being a CBC planning requirement on all new developments).

As an example of **how plans have been adapted in response to the COVID-19 emergency and the measures taken to identify synergies and mitigate associated risks**, a proactive project was identified to combine the climate challenge priority with the need to create new, additional, construction contracts to help local economic recovery from Covid with a [£4.5m package](#) of affordable housing energy efficiency improvements. The 'Climate Emergency Response Works' were identified in response to March 2020's lockdown and approved in July as a supplementary opportunity for investing as an immediate response to the pandemic.

The agreed improvements are being made to older, lower-performing (EPC rating) properties in Council-owned stock within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Works include retrofitting homes to increase energy efficiency, through cladding and insulation, replacement of gas boilers with air source heat pumps, and other works.

This is additional to a promise to create 350 new homes (2019-2024) that are now being built to 'Future Homes 2025' standards. The investment in new social housing helps balance the affordability to invest in 'non-income generating improvements' such as energy efficiency. Aside from the social value of these homes, over 25 years the rental return from each additional affordable home exceeds the related borrowing debt with current low borrowing rates of 1-2%. Adding reinvestment of 'Right to Buy' receipts, every new home built reduces long-term debts; making a viable 30-year HRA Business Plan that combines a new-build housing programmes with investment in environmental improvements for existing homes. This means all tenants (new and old) benefit from social (tackling fuel poverty), environmental (carbon reductions) and economic (cost vs. income) value.

CBC's affordable housing stock already has an average EPC of 'C', which compares very favourably when benchmarked with similar providers; but we are determined to keep improving. Currently 2,628 (44%) of 6,500 affordable home have rooftop solar PV and 185 homes were already fitted with air source heat pumps. The first new CBC-owned homes will be occupied in May 2021; all having air source heat pumps and no gas boilers, whilst we are introducing a 'fabric first' approach to ongoing housebuilding too.

Air-source heat and improved ventilation (replacing 30-year old gas boilers and recycled air conditioning) is also central to our 2021 [office refurbishment](#). This carbon-reducing project secured a £527k grant from the [Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme](#) as CBC plans for post-Covid working practices.

Waste also saw a fast response to Covid. The waste target is that residents reuse, recycle and compost 53% of all material. COVID-19 impacted the services by 1% as waste materials generated increased. However, an expected return to target in 2020-21 was delivered by using smart technologies (Dynamics 365) that identified hotspots where recycling rates are poor.

Another new initiative, CBC's [Woodland and Biodiversity Project](#) uses the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach; building on community 'assets' to ensure that the climate emergency is

understood, and actions created through resident participation. The project's aims evolved, from planting trees, to increasing biodiversity through changing green space management. CBC, Together we Grow CIC, Colchester Natural History Society and several local groups worked together in 2020; as residents, students and Parish Councils received 10,000 trees and shrubs from CBC's ([Trees for Years campaign](#)). Participants said they valued the opportunity 'to give back to the community' and 'make things a little better in Colchester' by increasing tree coverage in urban areas.

The [Management Policy](#) also included: 'no/reduced mowing'; phased removal of the use of glyphosate products to 'rewild' green spaces and promote the growth of wildflowers and support pollinators. Schoolchildren designed signage in green spaces, ensuring the change in approach is embraced by the community. With Wivenhoe Town Council and residents, a template was developed for other Councils as the value of green spaces during the Covid-19 pandemic was used to catalyse community involvement in the project.

Active travel also emerged as a key priority due to Covid and the economic recovery drive. A leading example, [eCargo bike delivery service](#) provided deliveries to the local food bank; 25 new bikes and 5 e-trailers were also made available for local businesses to avoid car-borne trips; demonstrating support through green local economic recovery. To date 3,428 miles of eCargo bike use has saved approximately 0.8 tCO₂e. A 'customer' fed back:

'The eCargo bike has proved revolutionary. It reduced the number of journeys using our pool vehicles, is really fun for staff to use and improves their health and wellbeing'.

Marc Yearling, Colchester General Hospital

CBC's eCargo bikes are part of success in delivering activities based on funding that led to us being awarded a third tranche of funding for sustainable modes of travel for 2021-22 ([£248K for e-bike, e-cars and more](#)). Additionally, CBC supported a 150 e-scooter trial in Colchester that has seen over 23,000 journeys and 124 NHS staff join a discount scheme. CBC's Defra-funded 'no idling', CAREless campaign has also been [a success](#) as we continue to improve air quality.

The 'Emergency Access Travel Fund' EATF gave Colchester significant investment for sustainable travel; new high-quality cycleways, liveable neighbourhoods, and new public realm being planned. New working space is being built to help local people in the 'knowledge economy' work locally post-pandemic, reducing commuting travel and air pollution. CBC's 'Fixing the Link' project also improved (train station-town centre) walking routes, whilst the High Street was semi-pedestrianised following lockdown. 2021's EATF adds focus on segregated cycle lanes and school streets.

CBC's strong partnership with the University also enabling collaboration with academics on several projects; recognise the importance of children and active youth engagement to achieve CBC's aspirations. 'Go Green Schools' aims to understand the barriers schools face to becoming greener; a project funded through the [Net Zero Innovation Programme](#), co run by the LGA and UCL.

These are just some examples of Colchester Borough Council's ongoing leadership in responding to the climate emergency.

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