



Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item

7

6 December 2023

Report of	Head of Sustainability	Author	Ben Plummer
Title	Essex Climate Action Commission Update		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Essex Climate Action Commission (ECAC) was created by Essex County Council (ECC) to be an independent group that could set recommendations for action on climate change and the environment across Essex. The group initially produced a report, 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral' which detailed these recommendations, and now act as an advisory body for reviewing climate and environment workstreams undertaken by ECC.
- 1.2 This report outlines some of the key actions being completed by ECC that has been fed back to the ECAC. It also outlines where Colchester City Council (CCC) has been involved with these actions.
- 1.3 The actions explained in the report include:
 - Creating business cases for offsite biodiversity net gain on ECC owned land.
 - Development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to outline ways to improve biodiversity across Essex.
 - Creation of the 'climate focus area' where pilot climate and environment projects will be conducted to accelerate action to reach net zero emissions across Essex.
 - Delivering funding and support for domestic energy efficiency programmes and community energy groups.
 - Creation of new waste strategies at both the ECC and CCC level to encourage waste reduction and recycling across Essex.
 - Developing net zero planning policies for new homes, that show the legal, financial and technical feasibility for building to this standard.
 - Creating a draft Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy to set out ECC's plans for installing charge points for electric vehicles where people will otherwise struggle to access charging.
 - Delivery of funding and support to encourage active travel across Essex, including new walking and cycling routes.
 - Enabling communities to access funding, support and training for them to reduce their environmental impact and create environmental projects.
 - Co-ordination of an Essex wide 'Climate Action Anchors Working group' to bring together large organisations across Essex to help create opportunities for joint climate action and knowledge sharing.

- Offering support and funding to local businesses and other organisations to help support a transition to a green economy, with new skills and jobs that respond to the challenge of climate change.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To note the work completed by both ECC and CCC in collaboration, and request any updates on projects and actions described in the report.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The report is for information only.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The Essex Climate Action Commission (ECAC) was launched in May 2020 and is made up of over 30 members including local councillors, academics, business people and 2 members of the Young Essex Assembly. The role of the Commission is to monitor implementation of climate and environmental action across Essex, provide advice on work priorities, encourage public engagement with the climate and environment agenda and support the adoption of climate and environmental policies at all levels of local authority in Essex.
- 5.2 The Commission developed the report "[Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral](#)" report which outlined plans and recommendations to make the county of Essex net zero by 2050 and to make Essex more resilient to climate change impacts like flooding, drought, overheating and more. These recommendations now form the basis of Essex County Council's Climate Action Plan.
- 5.3 The Commission now receives updates on work completed by Essex County Council (ECC), split up by different environmental themes listed in the Commission's report and that form the base of the [Essex County Council Climate Action Plan](#). For clarity, the ECAC now acts as an advisory group to steer action on climate change across Essex rather than being a body that takes climate action itself. Key progress and actions across each of these themes will be covered below, highlighting where Colchester City Council are working with ECC on these actions, are benefitting from the actions, or delivering similar programmes of work ourselves.

Land Use and Green Infrastructure

- 5.4 Delivering 10% minimum biodiversity net gain for new developments will become mandatory in early 2024. Developers can either meet their net gain requirement through carrying out biodiversity net gain (BNG) on site of the development, off site, through a national statutory credits scheme, or a combination of these. ECC have developed plans to improve habitats on two of their own sites for off site BNG. ECC will invest funding in these two sites to deliver habitat improvements and have identified the BNG credits generated through the improvements which can then be sold to developers who cannot meet their BNG commitments on site of development. CCC has started conversations with ECC about CCC owned land that could be put forward as offsite pilot BNG projects. These would be sites which have the potential to generate income through sale of credits to support ongoing maintenance of the habitats for 30 years minimum as required through the Environment Act BNG legislation. CCC are also working with ECC on developing a BNG supplementary planning document (SPD) for developers.
- 5.5 ECC are also developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as a required action from the Environment Act, which will outline areas of importance for biodiversity across Essex, identify where actions to restore nature have been taken and determine key areas for improving biodiversity and connecting these up. CCC will play the role of 'supporting authority' feeding in plans for biodiversity improvements across Colchester and changes in the Local Plan.
- 5.6 ECC have developed the '[climate focus area](#)' (CFA) in the Blackwater and Colne catchments, as areas where pilot activity for many environmental projects will occur that help deliver environmental land management practices. There are multiple aims of the CFA including that 30% of land in it is to be managed as natural green infrastructure and every parish to have a climate emergency strategy. There are multiple projects taking place in the CFA including a project looking at business cases for landowners to develop

BNG, soil carbon and woodland carbon projects, improving more farmland to deliver benefits to nature with creation of farm clusters and working with 3 parish councils (Tiptree and Wivenhoe Parishes participating in Colchester) in the area to develop nature plans.

Energy and Waste

- 5.7 ECC, working with the Greater South East Net Zero Hub, have secured £18.7m of funding from the [Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2](#) to improve properties where the fuel source is off gas, property inefficient and residents are on lower incomes. CCC has received an allocation of £2.16m and is marketing this scheme currently to get referrals. This builds on the back of Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme funding which has delivered £458,659 of improvements to homes in Colchester since 2021. ECC are also looking to deliver Energy Company Obligation Phase 4 (ECO4) flex funding throughout Essex through a shared agreement mechanism with all local authorities. CCC have also started delivery of ECO4 flex and Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS) flex, partnering with the National Energy Foundation and their 'Better Housing, Better Health' helpline service which is working to process resident enquiries and direct residents to appropriate support if they are not eligible for a grant scheme.
- 5.8 ECC are providing funding and supporting Community Energy South to deliver support for community energy groups in Essex. Projects being conducted by these groups include community renewable energy projects and energy efficiency advice and support programmes. [Community Energy Colchester](#) are working with Community Energy South on this programme, providing opportunities for residents to have low cost energy efficiency improvements for their home and other support for energy bills. The Council have recently started working with Community Energy Colchester to support residents throughout the Home Upgrade Grant application process as part of a pilot to see the effectiveness of community energy groups as messengers for increasing uptake of these grant opportunities.
- 5.9 ECC have been supporting renewable energy across Essex, providing access for residents to get discounted solar panels and battery storage for their homes through the Solar Together programme. They are also working to secure a community fund for energy projects as part of the development of the commercial Longfield solar farm.
- 5.10 ECC are developing a Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2024-2054 with the aspiration of Essex being a zero waste county by 2055. This work will overlap with CCC's work on creating a new Recycling and Waste Strategy. Through the 'Love Essex' brand, ECC have been supporting waste projects in the community by providing microgrants and hosting Freegle for items to be donated in the community. They have also been piloting ways to improve food waste recycling in Essex by providing more communications, food waste liners and more; Colchester was involved in this project in Summer/Autumn 2023.

Built Environment

- 5.11 ECC's Climate Action Planning Unit has been supporting local authorities on work to incorporate net zero and environmental commitments into planning processes. A headline piece of work has been carried out which demonstrates that it is financially, technically and legally possible for local authorities to mandate for developers to build net zero new homes by 2025. Expert support has been sourced from consultants and legal firms in order to determine this. A draft net zero policy is being developed by Essex, which can then be adapted by local authorities to introduce their own policies in their local plans.

- 5.12 ECC have also been developing guidance on building net zero dwellings, including appropriate design principles and including key technologies such as air source heat pumps. This is to be tested with a pilot in Essex for constructing 10 new homes that will be net zero in construction and in use.

Transport

- 5.13 ECC have developed a draft Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy which has been consulted on, to get feedback on installation of charge points for electric vehicles across Essex.
- 5.14 ECC have also created an Air Quality Strategy in order to comply with requirements in the Environment Act to help improve air quality in air quality management areas (AQMAs). There are 4 AQMAs in Colchester, and CCC have already been attempting to improve air quality in these areas with several successful Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) air quality bids to get grant funding which have developed projects on no-idling, air quality awareness, electric bike pay as you go hubs, electric cargo bike deliveries and more.
- 5.15 ECC have been providing support to help people to cycle through providing funding to run free bikeability training sessions for adults and families to increase their cycling confidence. CCC have been promoting this training, and requiring that residents complete the adult advanced cycle training in order to use the electric bikes in the city centre secure bike hub. ECC have also been providing support to the Essex Pedal Power project that is taking place across Tendring, Colchester and Basildon, where free bikes are being given to residents in order to increase access to cycling for leisure and work opportunities. Over 100 bikes have been given out in Colchester through this programme to residents in Greenstead with a further 600 available to give out.
- 5.16 ECC have also been working on planning the delivery of improvements to encourage active travel (walking, cycling, scooting etc.) across Essex by improving physical infrastructure to support this. For example in Colchester work is already being planned for active travel improvements between the city centre, University of Essex and Greenstead. ECC have also facilitated the electric scooter pilot in Colchester, which Colchester City Council has built on, partnering with TIER to introduce pay as you go electric bike hire in Colchester too.

Community Engagement

- 5.17 In order to raise awareness of climate change and the action we can all take to reduce our environmental impact, ECC have worked with [GreenRedeem](#) to develop the Carbon Cutting Essex app. This app provides blogs, quizzes and pledge ideas to help people learn more about environmental issues, and for completing activities they can get 'points' which can be used to enter prize draws or donated to charities.
- 5.18 ECC also provided the £500,000 Climate Action Challenge Fund to support 40 projects run by community groups, organisations and schools to tackle climate change. This funding helped organisations in Colchester to secure funding for their work such as Community Energy Colchester, Prettygate Schools and Stanway Fiveways Primary School.
- 5.19 ECC have also been training their employees in Carbon Literacy with over 300 employees now receiving carbon literacy accreditation. CCC has just launched an environmental awareness elearning course for staff to learn more about climate change,

and specifically the Council's projects and action to tackle climate change. A 4 hour carbon literacy course has also been arranged for many of the councillors to attend in early 2024.

- 5.20 ECC host the Climate Action Anchors Working Group, which brings organisations from across Essex including the Colchester City Council and other local authorities, University of Essex, Colchester Institute, NHS trusts to discuss opportunities for joint approaches to tackle climate change across Essex and to share knowledge on what we are all doing as organisations on this issue. Smaller working groups have been created to co-ordinate work on a variety of topics including fuel poverty awareness, air quality and understanding level of demand for public estate decarbonisation.

A just transition to a Green Economy

- 5.21 This is not a theme in the ECAC report, but will run through many of the actions identified within it and is addressed in ECC's Climate Action Plan. Tackling climate change provides the opportunity for new jobs, but there is a need for people to have the skills to be able to do these new jobs (known as 'green skills').
- 5.22 ECC have been setting out ways to identify and tackle the gaps in green skills needed across Essex. One element of this has involved ECC securing funding to deliver training partnering with The Retrofit Academy to train local installers and groups in housing retrofit training courses. This will help organisations deliver energy efficiency retrofit to the required Government standards and develop a local supply chain for completing this work. Colchester is one of the areas that have benefitted from access to this training.
- 5.23 There have also been grant schemes for businesses to enable them to make their operations more environmentally friendly or understand more about their environmental impact. For example, the 'Low Carbon Across the South and East' (LoCASE) programme running since 2016 gave £2.6m to 397 businesses across Essex, including several in Colchester. ECC have also recently launched funding for 'green entrepreneurs' to enable 18-30 year olds to pitch for seed funding to create a green business. CCC have promoted support available to businesses including that available from Colchester Business Enterprise Agency (Colbea), Colchester Institute through their carbon literacy programmes and advice and support provided through the Colchester Travel Plan Club.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 There are no equality, diversity and human rights implications of the report.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 This report includes many cross overlinks with themes in the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 including 'Respond to the climate emergency', 'Improve health, wellbeing and happiness' and 'Grow our economy so everyone benefits'.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 There are no consultation considerations.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 There are no publicity considerations.

10. Financial implications

10.1 There are no financial implications of this report.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

11.1 There are no direct health, wellbeing and community safety implications of this report.

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 This report details a variety of actions and projects being undertaken by Essex County Council, to which Colchester City Council overlaps and collaborates with them, on climate and environmental action. These actions aim to deliver net positive impacts for the environment and society, with these impacts considered as part of project delivery.