



Environment and Sustainability Panel

Item
8

13th January 2022

Report of	Assistant Director of Place and Client Services	Author	Ben Plummer
Title	Community Engagement and Climate Emergency – Update		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out a summary of how the Council has engaged with various organisations and individuals in the community to deliver work responding to the climate emergency.
- 1.2 The Council engages with a variety of organisations to help deliver its work, and the work of partners, on the climate emergency. These include local businesses, charities, community groups, other local authorities, town and parish councils and more.
- 1.3 The Council engages with the community in many different ways, including to provide information, to collaborate, to share information, influence others, to advise and to network.
- 1.4 The Council will continue to work with communities to harness knowledge and strengths existing within them, and to expand the reach of our work so that more residents are aware of our work and can get involved with it

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 The panel note the contents of the report and provide guidance and feedback regarding the Council's approach to community engagement in relation to the climate emergency.

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 Council declared a climate emergency, setting a target to have net zero operational emissions by 2030. To achieve this target, and wider emission reductions in the borough, we also seek to achieve sustainability across a range of services (i.e., waste, transport, economic development).
- 5.2 This report outlines our approach to community engagement to support our work to tackle the climate emergency, giving examples from our workstreams. It then outlines some ways we aim to carry on and build on existing community engagement we have already carried out.
- 5.3 The approach to working with communities is strongly influenced by the Council's 'Communities Can' strategy. This strategy focusses on recognising the knowledge, skills and energy within communities and helping them to harness these to deliver action in their areas. This approach moved away from what problems need to be 'fixed' in communities, and instead focussed on the strengths existing in the communities already, and connecting individuals with one another to deliver greater impact. The approach also aims to be inclusive, enabling all people to have a voice and deliver what they would like to see where they live.

What do we mean by communities?

- 5.4 In this report we class many of the organisations and individuals and organisations we work with as coming under the term 'communities'. These can be identified specifically as:
- **Residents**
 - **Community groups** e.g. Clean Air Colchester
 - **Educational Institutions** e.g. University of Essex
 - **Local Authorities** e.g. Essex County Council
 - **Town and Parish Councils**
 - **Councillors**
 - **Charities** e.g. Essex Wildlife Trust
 - **Anchor Institutions** – Organisations that are locally based and have a strong stake and influence in Colchester. These can be quite ranging, for example from Colchester Hospital to the Colchester Institute. Some organisations may also fall under multiple categories (e.g. University of Essex is both an anchor and an educational institution)
 - **Businesses**

Why do we engage with the community around climate action?

- 5.5 There are several reasons the Council engages with the community around climate action. These are outlined below.
- **To consult** – Allow residents to give their views on the development of our projects and actions, through surveys and consultations. This also helps us to give an evidence base for our projects, but is not a truly participative approach to engagement.

- **To inform** – Keep residents/partners informed about our work. Keeping people informed helps us to stay accountable, and can provide inspiration for others to help us achieve our aims, or take action themselves. However, solely informing is only a one way exchange of information and does not allow for collaborative working.
 - **To collaborate** – Working together with residents and partners to develop actions and ideas that respond to the climate challenge. The collaboration approach recognises the value of knowledge and skills both residents and partners can have in our projects, contributing to and following an ABCD approach.
 - **To share and create dialogue** – Share information on our climate action and hear about how others have been doing the same
 - **To influence** – Feed into consultations, planning applications and policy development to ensure climate challenge and sustainability is considered.
 - **To advise** – Providing knowledge, training and infrastructure to give individuals a ‘helping hand’ in feeling more informed about the climate challenge, and enabling them to take action on the climate emergency.
 - **To network** – Creating connections between organisations and individuals to share expertise and knowledge and create more impact.
- 5.6 The report will go through each of these priorities in turn, outlining examples of how the Council has demonstrated engagement with against each one.

To consult

- 5.7 Conducting surveys with residents is an important part of our engagement on several projects. This gives residents the opportunity to give their views on our work, and also helps to inform our evidence base and how we deliver our projects in the future. The Council has run numerous surveys in relation to climate change and environment, with a few highlighted below.
- **Clean Air for Colchester surveys** – Numerous surveys and door knocking have been completed during the Clean Air for Colchester project, exploring resident’s knowledge of air quality and understanding what actions would help them to remind them to switch off their engines. Over 3000 people took part in engagement in the first phase of this work, and more have been involved in more recent engagement around the development of the shared travel hubs and home burning campaigns respectively.
 - **Colchester Borough Homes resident consultation** – A survey was completed with residents as part of the development of the new Housing Asset Management Strategy. This explored the priority residents put on tackling climate change and improving energy efficiency within the housing stock. This revealed that this is not a priority for most residents, and showed CBH and the Council that more work needs to go in to getting residents to understand the importance of works that will deliver reductions in emissions in the housing stock and how this will have the potential for social co-benefits (e.g. increased comfort, lower energy bills).
 - **Town Deal surveys** – Online surveys were completed as part of the Town Deal bid. This included questions on opportunities built on during covid, and how can Colchester become greener. Both questions brought answers linked to tackling climate change and greening the borough which have been considered within the development of projects as part of the final Town Deal bid that was put forward.

To inform

- 5.8 Providing residents and partners with information about our work on tackling the climate emergency is one of the key steps of our engagement. Keeping others informed helps provide them with knowledge about our work and keep us accountable to delivering it. This work may also provide inspiration for others, to either take further climate action, or collaborate with us on our work. There are two main ways we work to inform the community about our climate action.
- **Climate Emergency Action Plan** – The guiding document that outlines all our workstreams on the tackling the climate emergency. We will be updating the plan in 2022 to reflect new workstreams and highlight how actions have been delivered in 2021.
 - **Social media/online communication** – Through press releases, infographics, information on our website and social media we provide updates on our climate emergency work, including information on Council campaigns, key progress with actions and ways residents can take action for themselves, as well as support our work. This includes going through other channels, other than CBC communication platforms, such as through borough councillors, Town and Parish Councils and community organisations.

Case study: A-Z waste campaign

Between August-December 2021, the Council held an awareness campaign on social media, highlighting the different ways we can all reduce the amount of waste we produce, reuse materials and recycle more. Tips were given each week for each letter of the alphabet, such as Nappies (reusable), Ink cartridges and Make up wipes. The campaign included tips being given from local residents, as well as local organisations such as the University of Essex, East Essex Cloth Nappy Library, The Ink Bin and others.



To collaborate

- 5.9 The Council recognises that we need to work with residents and other partners to help deliver our projects. Coming together helps to increase the potential impact of projects and acknowledges the lay expertise and skills that residents and partners have that can help to deliver our projects in new ways and help build engagement within the community on the project.
- 5.10 Coming together to co-create the aims for projects and how they should be delivered is a key part of many Council workstreams. It has been beneficial to work with so many

partners in the borough that also have similarly ambitious aims to reduce emissions and their environmental impact.

5.11 Below are some examples of partners we work with, and how we have worked with them.

- **Essex County Council** – There are many projects led by ECC that the Council helps to communicate to its residents such as the Solar Together scheme and the free cycle training on offer. ECC also provide investment in sustainable transport in Colchester, so the Council is in regular contact with ECC to make the case for improvements in sustainable travel infrastructure in Colchester. We also link in with ECC and the Essex Climate Action Commission who are beginning to progress the work on the Climate Focus Area, where 81% of the land in Colchester is included within it.
- **Eco Colchester** – Eco Colchester are a key community group the Council collaborates with to help increase the reach of both our work and theirs. In 2021, Eco Colchester ran the Eco Festival 2021 which the Council helped to support the event, including using the eCargo bikes to transport festival equipment around the park.
- **Shared Travel Hubs** – The Council has funding to create two travel hubs where a variety of push bikes, electric bikes and electric cargo (eCargo) bikes will be available on a pay as you go basis for the community. One hub will be developed by the Council, with the other worked on by the community (supported by the Council). A working group has been assembled which will work on deciding the location for the shared travel hub, what bikes should be available in the hub and how the hub will operate (booking systems, payment mechanisms/amounts etc).
- **Woodland and Biodiversity Project** – This Council project has involved the community in the delivery of the project. Residents have been able to take part in tree planting and act as ‘tree guardians’ to maintain the planted trees. Tree planting days have been supported by Together We Grow CIC. Naturalist groups such as the Natural History Society have been able to advise the Council on suitable areas for planting based on existing habitats and biodiversity in planting areas. School children have also been able to design signage to be placed in areas where green spaces have been left to rewild, to explain how this process is benefitting biodiversity.

Case Study: University of Essex Challenge Lab

The University of Essex Challenge Lab provided the opportunity for Council officers and University academics to come together to brainstorm project ideas to tackle climate related challenges the Council faced.

The challenge lab process occurred over 2 days with 2 project ideas emerging. These ideas will be delivered between the University and the Council in collaboration, applying expertise from existing university research. The challenge lab, and the projects, have been funded through the Economic and Social Research Council.

The project is mutually beneficial for both organisations; university academics get to see their research applied in a real-life context, and the Council gets to receive academic expertise to deliver projects beyond the scope than would otherwise be possible.

Case Study: Clean Air for Colchester

This project has worked in collaboration with many individuals and community groups such as Clean Air Colchester, to develop the CAREless Pollution campaign that raises awareness of air pollution in Colchester.

Many individuals have been involved in a stakeholder group that were involved in developing the look and feel of the campaign. They have also had input into the design of materials such as car stickers, posters and a schools activity toolkit to help spread the message about the campaign in the community. Involving the community in the project now will enable them to take on the project in the future, increasing their capacity.

The CAREless Pollution campaign was recently nominated for the 'Consumer Engagement/Marketing Campaign of the Year' in the Edie Sustainability Leaders Awards.



To share and create dialogue

- 5.12 Many organisations in the borough and in the local authority space, are taking action to reduce their environmental impacts. As we are all trying to do the same thing, it makes sense to share our progress, challenges and solutions on this journey.
- 5.13 There are several forums and networks the Council is part of which provide a platform for this sharing to take place. These are outlined below:
- **Collective for Climate Action** – This is an online forum created for public sector colleagues to discuss action on climate change. There is a separate channel where local authorities can share what they're working on and ask questions to get support from other Council colleagues. Over 170 Councils are on this group, and it has been useful as a sounding board for ideas and exchanging advice
 - **Essex Climate Action Anchors working group** – A group of various 'anchor institutions' across Essex including University of Essex, West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, Colchester Institute and others, that will be co-ordinating climate action across Essex in 2022, providing a platform for discussion and creating networks between organisations.

- **One Colchester Delivery Board** – The Council has attended the monthly Delivery Board meetings to raise key projects of interest with attending community groups and organisations. The meetings are incredibly helpful for reaching a wide cross section of people who can help act as ‘intermediary communicators’ about Council projects, often being trusted contacts with the community.

Case study: Essex CO₂ Reduction Across Essex (CORE) Forum

This is a quarterly forum run by Essex County Council for all district and borough Councils to attend where key climate updates from Essex County Council are shared with all authorities. There is also the space for local authorities to share progress on their respective climate emergency plans.

The forum also allows for collaboration between authorities to create joint projects for delivery. For example, the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme bid emerged from this group.

To influence

5.14 As a local authority, the Council has important role in feeding into and influencing key consultations, strategies and decisions that will affect how climate change is tackled across Essex and in Colchester. Below are some case studies how the Council plays this role:

- **Planning applications** – The Council reviews planning applications for developments within the borough, suggesting where environmental improvements can be funded by developers through section 106 (s106) agreements. Improvements have included the installation of electric vehicle charge points, car club spaces, allotments and other green infrastructure.
- **Essex County Council Sustainable Travel workstreams** – As the Transport and Highways Authority, Essex County Council are responsible for directing investment in promoting active, sustainable travel in Colchester. The Council influences ECC, giving suggestions for where investment is best placed to support active travel in Colchester, for example through the creation of walking and cycling infrastructure.

Case Study: Helping the Borough’s businesses to reduce their carbon footprint

CBC is working in partnership with five other local authorities across north Essex under the auspices of the North Essex Economic Board to support businesses to understand their environmental impact and take steps to reduce it, showing the variety of benefits it can have for them.

This business support programme is being managed by the Colchester Business Enterprise Agency (Colbea) and runs for a year, fully funded, from February 2022.

To advise

5.15 Sometimes all an organisation may need is extra support through funding, expertise or materials to help deliver a project. The Council is often well placed to offer this help, whether through doing presentations or training individuals, being able to loan equipment or being able to offer funding to groups. Some of the Council’s projects that have offered help to the community include:

- **Colchester eCargo bike library** – Using funding from the Energy Saving Trust, the Council bought 25 eCargo bikes and 5 trailers, several of which are used by the Council. 10 organisations were also given the eCargo bikes/trailers for free (excluding insurance payments) to use for conducting their deliveries and operations. 6 other bikes and a trailer are available on short term loans, enabling others to get an understanding of how their organisation could use an eCargo bike for their work. The project also supported the set-up of the Colchester eCargo bike delivery project that makes eCargo bike deliveries for a variety of local businesses and charities in Colchester.
- **Colchester Association of Local Councils Presentation** – In Summer 2021, the Council held a presentation and Q and A for Colchester based town and parish councils to hear about the Council’s work on the climate emergency, and to share help as to how they could take action on their climate emergency in their areas. The session produced a lively Q and A with parish clerks keen to learn about more climate action they could take in their local areas. The Council also presented to the same group, giving an update on the e-scooter trial in Colchester.

Case Study: Multi Schools Council Essex Wide Green Day

The Schools ‘Green Day’ has been launched by the Multi Schools Council, an organisation where school council pupils across Essex are brought together to discuss key topics that matter to them, and to break down barriers and stigma around mental health and learning difficulties.

The group identified they would like to run an annual ‘green day’ for schools, so that students could learn more about environmental issues, hear what organisations are doing to take climate action and to hopefully take some environmental steps themselves.

The day ran for the first time in 2021, with the Council running activities such as a bug hunt and air quality awareness activities. In 2022, the Council will be supporting more schools in the borough and is helping to get local businesses and organisations to sign up to support the day in any way they can – whether through recording videos about environmental action they are doing, running talks on environmental action or providing funding to support the day!



To Network

5.16 As the Council collaborates and knows of lots of different organisations in the borough, it is in a good position to be able to link up organisations and individuals who may be able to offer support to each other and deliver greater impact. Below are some examples of how the Council has linked up organisations to deliver benefits:

- **Eco Colchester and Colchester Institute** – Eco Colchester had been running a water saving campaign in Colchester, offering tips and freebies for residents to cut their water usage. The opportunity for collaboration with the Colchester Institute became apparent

with the courses that it ran on plumbing. Since linking up these groups, Eco Colchester have been able to deliver talks to students on water saving, and the plumbing students have run a free workshop for residents on how to fix leaking taps.

- **Re-Cycle and Essex County Council** – Re-Cycle are a local charity who collect second hand and used bikes, fix them up and send them off to Africa for communities to use. It was identified that there were several bikes being left at the recycling centre in Colchester that could be taken by Re-Cycle. CBC contacts are putting the two organisations in contact to direct the bikes away to be reused by others

Case Study: Together We Grow CIC and Unity Primary Academy

Through the 'Go Green Schools' project the Council has run in collaboration with the University of Essex, a lot of environmental improvements have been made at the school, including setting up bird and bat boxes, planting trees and bulbs and running environmental education sessions.

It was identified that it would be beneficial for the school to continue to receive outdoor education sessions after the Council's project finished, both for environmental protection but also for the wellbeing of students which was noticeably positive when activities were taking place. During the project Together We Grow (TWG) CIC took part in delivering some activities, and an agreement was reached for TWG to continue delivering outdoor environmental sessions with the school, with supporting funding from a councillor.



Future work

- 5.17 There are several areas in which the Council will continue to deliver engagement work with communities to deliver action on climate change. Some of these are outlined below:
- An **update of our Climate Emergency Action Plan**, with further actions to tackle the climate emergency, plus more detailed case studies to show how key projects have been progressing
 - Plans to hold **Q and A sessions** with residents, community groups and other stakeholders on our Climate Emergency Action Plan, to enable to individuals to have their say on where there are opportunities to improve it, build synergies and increase understanding of how the Council intends to tackle the climate emergency.
 - **Increase support available to schools** in Colchester to help them to reduce their environmental impacts, including organising a range of local organisations to provide support and resources for the schools 'Green Day' taking place on 6th July 2022
 - **Exploring collaboration with Colchester Institute** to see where there may be opportunities for an apprentice to join the Council in the Sustainability, Transport and climate change team.
 - Help deliver projects to emerge out of the **University of Essex Challenge Lab**

- Climate change related engagement as part of the **development of new Council strategies**, including the Blue and Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Waste Strategy, as well as mainstreaming sustainability into the delivery of other projects such as the Town Deal.

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 directly links to the Strategic Plan 2020-2023 theme of 'Tackling the Climate Challenge and Sustainability'.

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.

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 report details how the Council is taking action on the climate emergency by working with a variety of different individuals and partners.