

Full Council 8th October – Leader's Executive Statement

Title: The biggest single issue facing the world

Introduction

Climate Change is the biggest single issue facing not just Essex, but the entire world.

In July at the LGA General Assembly this Council supported an amendment to a motion on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals which recognised the growing number of local authorities to have passed climate emergency motions with cross party-support.

At Essex County Council we take the threat of Climate Change very seriously, and we prioritise action over words. We have already undertaken a raft of work in this area. Here are just a few examples.

We are:

- replacing streetlights with LEDs
- supporting residents to purchase solar panels, saving 300 tonnes of carbon in year one alone
- installing solar power on our buildings and Essex Housing developments, saving 258 tonnes of CO₂
- removing single use plastics from across the estate
- nearly 50% of our workforce is now using reusable coffee cups
- converting 60 buses to be to Euro VI
- encouraging residents to use public transport by improving the park and ride, installing electric vehicle charging and encouraging cycling
- we are also developing a Green Infrastructure Strategy
- we have created 63km of wild roadside verges
- protecting 1000 properties from flooding, often using innovative low carbon techniques such as Leaky Dams
- 90% of materials linked to our highways' works are being recycled
- We are using sustainable materials on highways, like the innovative, award-winning use of bamboo to protect structures.
- working to ensure new Garden Communities are sustainable. Our ambition is for tens of thousands of new homes, entire communities of the future built to be as energy efficient as possible

Climate Action

Despite all of these projects, which is by no means an exhaustive list, we recognise that this is still not enough! More needs to be done to make a difference.

While we recognised the importance of declaring a climate emergency at the LGA General Assembly. At Essex, we will take this a stage further, in the hope that it will

inspire others to do the same. I am pleased to announce – the first of many announcements in this speech today - that we are committing to – not a climate emergency – but a Climate **Action** Plan.

Allow me to explain what this means.

The Future

In May we passed a motion to set up a cross party group to investigate what further actions we could undertake to reduce carbon emissions and promote Green Infrastructure.

I am proud to announce today that we will go one step further than a working group and formally inaugurate an independent, cross-party **Essex Climate Change Commission**, which will meet for the first time later this year and be made up, not only of members, but of experts in the field as well.

In order to support this formal commission, I am pleased to announce a budget of an initial quarter of a million pounds, which will be assigned to the group to help fund initiatives.

Here is some of the work this Council has planned that I see this commission supporting:

We will explore changing the procurement rules requiring suppliers to adopt more stringent sustainable practices

We will be changing how residents travel, ensuring we prioritise and enable walking, cycling and public transport first

We will be aligning with Defra's Recycling & Waste strategy, ensuring we have Zero Avoidable Waste by 2050, the Commission could also explore how to achieve the government target on net zero carbon sooner than 2050

We will be supporting the Greening of Town Centres by setting up a Green Essex Network

This Commission will also support reducing our carbon footprint

- We will buy green energy and generate more of our own renewable energy
- We will take advantage of new innovations. An example of this: Essex Highways are exploring warm tarmac, - if rolled out across the country it would save at least 61,000 tonnes of CO2 - the equivalent of almost 300 million car journeys
- And this council is already trialling carbon neutral school buildings at four school expansion projects across Essex, with projects completing as early as next year!

I hope this demonstrates how seriously this Council takes this issue. As a further indication of the elevation of this priority Cllr Walsh's title will change, from today, from Environment and Waste to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action.

But this is still not enough,

- **I am thrilled to announce today that we are embarking on a million pound tree project. Known as the 'Essex Forest Initiative,' this will include planting 375,000 trees across the County over the next 5 years, equivalent to the size of 210 football pitches. This is expected to capture 60,000 tonnes of carbon. Another 300 million car journeys**
- In order to have a future, we must act in the present. In the Foyer outside of the Council Chamber is the first tree that will be planted as part of this project

In summary Chairman: Tackling climate change is not just the role of one person, or one administration, or one country. We are all responsible custodians for our world. But by working with staff, partners, businesses, residents and communities, we will lead on reducing emissions, energy usage and waste across Essex, while increasing the amount of green infrastructure we have.