

Forward Plan reference number: FP/088/06/21

Report title: Acknowledgement of the Essex Climate Action Commission's Final Report - 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral'	
Report to: Cabinet	
Report author: Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader for Essex County Council	
Date: 29 July 2021	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report asks the Cabinet to receive the final report of the Essex Climate Action Commission, entitled 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral'. The Essex Climate Action Commission was set up to provide expert advice on climate change and to make recommendations on the actions to take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which are causing global warming.
- 1.2 The Cabinet has already responded to the interim report of the Commission. The full report will need to be considered in detail and the Council will need to respond to the recommendations.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree to accept and welcome the 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral' report from the Essex Climate Action Commission as at Appendix A.
- 2.2 Agree that a response to the Commission's Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral report is brought to the Cabinet meeting later in 2021.
- 2.3 Formally thank the Commission for their work in producing the final report.

3. Summary of issue

- 3.1 Climate Change is an issue facing the whole world. Without action to reduce or offset greenhouse gases that is causing global warming, temperatures are set to rise significantly. Such temperature rises will impact our very existence, including (but not limited to) our water and food supplies, land use, health and well-being and wildlife.
- 3.2 The UK has signed up to the 1995 Paris Agreement along with 193 other countries committing the world to act to hold global temperature rises to below

1.5°C and has enshrined in law a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050.

- 3.3. Net-zero is the state where there is a balance between the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by a human activity, and the amount which is removed by other means e.g. by the planting of trees that 'absorb' carbon.
- 3.4. Essex must take appropriate action and become net-zero by 2050.
- 3.5. In October 2019, the Council established the Essex Climate Action Commission to advise on ways to mitigate against climate-change and held its first inaugural meeting in May 2020. The Commission produced an interim report in November 2020 on recommendations of steps to take, to help Essex become net-zero by 2050. This was welcomed by ECC in November 2020, and formally responded to by ECC in March 2021.
- 3.6. At the March 2021 Cabinet meeting:
 - We adopted a policy to transform the Council's estate to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, creating an electric vehicle strategy for Essex and the setting up of a Net-Zero innovation network,
 - Cabinet asked officers to report annually to Cabinet on greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilience measures from ECC and from all sources in Essex
 - The Cabinet did not respond in detail to all the recommendations in the interim report as to do so required further work.
- 3.7. The Essex Climate Action Commission continued their work after the interim report. On 20 July 2021 the ECAC launched the Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral report, with their recommendations on the steps that need to be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move Essex to net-zero by 2050. Recommendations are grouped under core themes of land use and green infrastructure, energy, the built environment, transport, waste, and community engagement and include actions for adapting to an already changing climate.
- 3.8. The report builds on and supersedes the interim report. Some of the recommendations of the interim report are repeated in the report and the others have been reiterated and expanded upon. The report also adds in additional recommendations which were not made in the interim report as they relate to an issue which had not been considered at that time.
- 3.9. This report seeks acknowledgement of the Essex Climate Action Commission's complete report of recommendations and seeks ECC's approval to consider the report fully and provide a detailed response on the actions that ECC will take as a result, expected to be in Autumn 2021. This will carry forward and update the response agreed in March 2021 and respond to the additional or reiterated recommendations.

3.10 Examples of the positive action ECC has already taken or is taking:

- Our Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy, published in 2020, was awarded a Building with Nature Accreditation of Excellent, one of only eight local authorities to gain this.
- The Essex County Council Energy and Low Carbon team is delivering solar panels through their Empower project, funded by the European Commission. Danbury Park Community School is just one of the examples.
- School extension projects for Merrylands Primary, Earls Colne Primary and Beauchamps Secondary have been carried out using innovative modular forms of construction to reduce waste and carbon emissions, with more planned.
- We have designed and are now installing/constructing 3 net-zero carbon school buildings that are net-zero in use. This will give a saving to the schools' budgets so that more money can be spent on educating our children, rather than on energy bills. The schools are Clacton County High School, The Colne Community School & College, and Sweyne Park School.
- Two of the most energy-consuming sites in ECC's core estate have both begun a refit programme to help reduce their carbon emissions. Essex Records Office and Goodman House will benefit from LED lighting and control upgrades, decarbonisation of their gas heating with installation of two air source heat pumps, and 100kw of roof-mounted Solar PV combined battery storage.
- The Council's Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) programme provides grants for businesses of up to £20,000 for energy efficiency measures to reduce their carbon emissions, as well as funding to SMEs in the Low-Carbon sector to grow. Since the programme started in 2016, £2.6m has been awarded to 397 businesses with almost 3000 tonnes greenhouse gases equivalent emissions reduction. Funding is available until 2023.
- Our Green Homes Grants Local Authority Delivery scheme is supporting lower income homeowners across the county with free funding to upgrade their heating systems and go green.
- ECC is leading an innovative cross-border project to help local authorities in England and France transition to a circular economy – this project aims to increase recycling rates, reduce waste and encouraging lasting behaviour change.
- Our Stop. Swap. GO! Campaign to help residents out of cars and into active travel has reached over one million people.

- The 'Essex is Green' social media channels actively engage and inspire thousands of residents online to get involved and tackle climate change.
- Love Essex has a partnership with Freecycle, an online platform that allows you to give and receive items for free in your local area and supports promotional costs. There are now 20 local Freecycle groups across Essex, with over 70,000 members. In the last 12 months, 164 tonnes of 'stuff' were reused via the platform, saving an estimated 83.8 tonnes of CO₂.

3.11 Over the next year the Commission will be monitoring the implementation from Year One recommendations and provide regular updates as well as continuing to make further recommendations for actioning. They will also work on delivery plans with partners across Essex to drive recommendations from Year One forward. The Commission will be considering two new key areas for discussion: green growth for the future and green finance as both have significant impact towards making Essex net zero by 2050.

3.12 Alongside the report we will be producing advice packs for schools, businesses and residents in upskilling and educating them on what climate change means to them, what they can do to help to get to net zero by 2050 and links for further advice and support. All these packs are to be launched ahead of COP26 in November 2021, with exact dates yet to be finalised.

4. Options

There are two options to consider:

4.1 Option 1: Do not accept the report (Do Nothing)

Climate change is a global issue and will have a significant impact on Essex. ECC is already running a Climate Action programme in response to the recommendations in the interim report, work is underway to meet some of the recommendations, and the Leader of ECC has publicly committed to tackling Climate Change. To not accept the report that ECC commissioned, would greatly undermine the Council's public commitment to Climate Action and erode trust with Essex residents. This option is not recommended.

4.2 Option 2: Accept the report and respond to the recommendations in full at a future Cabinet Meeting (This is recommended)

It is recommended that Cabinet accept and welcome the report, prioritise the consideration of the recommendations and respond fully in Autumn 2021.

There are over 130 recommendations included in the report. Consideration later in 2021 will allow ECC the time to review the recommendations, review work that is in progress or planned, assess the impact of accepting each recommendation on both the Council and Essex residents and determine how best to incorporate them into a pragmatic ECC Climate Action programme that is appropriately funded and delivery monitored against.

5. Links to Essex Vision

5.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision

- Strengthen communities through participation
- Develop our County sustainably
- Connect us to each other and the world

5.2 This links to the strategic aims in the Organisational Plan, which are as follows:

- Strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
- High quality environment
- Health, wellbeing and independence for all ages
- Best start in life for children and families

6. Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 Decision FP/898/11/20 approved a drawdown from the Climate Change Reserve of £2.5m for additional resource (£2.1m) to support the reduction of emissions and building resilience in the ECC estate and more broadly across Essex, plus £400,000 of targeted capital investment.

6.1.2 With regard to achieving the Net Zero requirement for the ECC estate, detailed plans will be drawn up for future consideration. As such there is as yet no approval to spend outside of existing budget.

6.1.3 In financial year 2021/22 the Capital Programme details £8.7m of climate action and green infrastructure schemes, over the 4-year MTRS period £41.1m, the majority of which relates to LED Roll-out and Flood Management.

6.1.4 Over the coming months as the Essex Climate Action Commission report recommendations are considered in detail and an ECC Climate Action programme is developed this will include a full analysis of the associated financial implications that will be presented for consideration by Cabinet later in 2021

6.1.5 A full financial appraisal will support each of the recommendations at the relevant stage.

6.2 Legal implications

6.2.1 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 requires the council to have regard to the need to conserve biodiversity.

6.2.2 When responding to the recommendations of the Commission the Council will need to have regard to the interim response agreed in February 2021.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

8. List of appendices

Appendix A: Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral
(Essex Climate Action Commission Final Report of Recommendations)

Appendix B: Equality Impact Assessment

9. List of Background papers

None