

Forward Plan Reference Number: FP/177/10/21

Report title: Action Plan in Response to the Essex Climate Action Commission's Report	
Report to: Cabinet	
Report author: Councillor Peter Schwier - Deputy Cabinet Member to the Leader with responsibility for Climate Action	
Date: 24 November 2021	For: Decision
Enquiries to: Sam Kennedy - Director, Environment and Climate Action email: Samantha.Kennedy@essex.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 Everyone's Essex has a strategic aim of creating a high quality environment.
- 1.2 The Essex Climate Action Commission published its report 'Net-Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral' in July 2021, which set out a comprehensive plan for Essex to: reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 in line with UK statutory commitments; and to make Essex more resilient to climate impacts such a flooding, water shortages and overheating.
- 1.3 The report's recommendations are a comprehensive call to action for everyone and every organisation in Essex. ECC has a critical role to play, working in partnership with others to deliver a programme of action.
- 1.4 This report presents ECC's initial climate action plan. ECC will take action on its own estate, service delivery and operations, for example reviewing its core ways of working, building its first net zero school building and installing solar panels on its estate.
- 1.5 In addition, ECC is working on projects in partnership across Essex to develop a comprehensive, collective response to the report. Examples including the Net Zero Innovation Network with businesses and Universities, the roll out of the grant schemes to support upgrading of fuel poor homes and active travel schemes across the county. ECC is establishing a new climate group with Essex Partners, working with District, Borough and City Councils, local businesses, universities, community groups and residents.
- 1.6 Our plan is not exhaustive - the Commission's report has milestones and recommendations that stretch out to 2050. ECC will continue to develop its climate action plan in the future.
- 1.7 Our climate priorities also benefit other strategic objectives. For example, active travel schemes which enable people to walk and cycle, planting trees increases green space have important benefits for physical and mental health

for resident. A commitment to greener buildings helps to provide green construction jobs for Essex businesses.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree that Essex County Council fully supports the recommendations in the Commission's report Net Zero: making Essex Carbon Neutral.
- 2.2 Agree that ECC will work with partners across Essex to play its part in the delivery of the Commission's vision for a net zero, climate resilient county and that it will establish a climate action group with the anchor institutions to drive collective action across Essex on the climate agenda and help Essex deliver the Commission recommendations.
- 2.3 Agree the action plan at appendix A to this report.
- 2.4 Agree to earmark reserves funding to deliver the action plan as follows and note that the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Corporate Affairs will be asked to approve drawdowns when detailed business cases have been completed:
 - Everyone's Essex Plan Reserve £6.23m,
 - Climate Change Reserve £2.265m,
 - Transformation Reserve £695,000
- 2.5 Agree that ECC work to develop a zero landfill by 2030 policy, subject to an affordability and deliverability review, for all waste it is responsible for as the Waste Disposal Authority. ECC will develop a new Essex Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy in partnership with District, Borough and City authorities which will put greenhouse gas emission considerations at its heart.
- 2.6 Within the Everyone's Essex Plan Reserve, agree to request that Essex Housing Development LLP develops proposals to for the proposed residential units on the Hargrave House development to be a pilot scheme to be net zero in construction and net zero in use, as well as climate resilient for flooding, overheating and water scarcity. This requirement will be reflected in the development appraisal which is used to inform the value at which the site is transferred to Essex Housing LLP.
- 2.7 Recognise new burdens of £1.151m for consideration for approval within future years' Medium Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) and future budget planning requirements.
- 2.8 Note that cabinet members are committed to bringing updates, on a rolling rota basis, progress made in their own portfolios to address the climate challenge.

- 2.9 Instructed officers to report annually to Cabinet on the Council's greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilience measures. The first report will be for financial year 2021/22 and will be published in 2022.
- 2.10 Agree that an updated action plan should come back to Cabinet following publication of these emission reports.

3. Background and Proposal

- 3.1 Climate change is the single biggest threat facing Essex. The Climate Change Act 2008 places a duty on the secretary of state to ensure that the UK achieves Net-Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (referred to in the report ongoing as Net Zero). Essex continues to experience the impacts of a changing climate year on year with increasing levels of flooding, drought and overheating.
- 3.2 The Essex Climate Action Commission was announced in October 2019 by the Leader, and the inaugural meeting was in May 2020. The Commission's Interim Report, published in November 2020, set out the first suite of ambitious recommendations for Essex, which would enable a move towards Net Zero.
- 3.3 ECC published its interim [response](#) to the interim report in March 2021.
- 3.4 The Commission published their [Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral](#) report in July 2021, setting out a comprehensive plan for Essex to: reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 in line with UK statutory commitments; and to make Essex more resilient to climate impacts such as flooding, water shortages and overheating.
- 3.5 Whilst some of the Commission's recommendations are directed towards the activities of ECC, most are not. Many recommendations are for things largely beyond ECC's control. Some have relevance for District, Borough, City, parish and town councils other have relevance to businesses, residents, charities and community groups.
- 3.6 We need a wider system approach and we will need to work with partners and stakeholders; supporting businesses, residents and communities to take action; and lobbying Government for key policies, freedoms and flexibilities and funding support. ECC is working with District, Borough and City Councils, local businesses, universities, community groups and residents to drive collective action: everyone in Essex has a role to play.
- 3.7 A draft programme of action to respond to the Commission recommendations, is set out in Appendix A. The Cabinet is asked to support in principle the programmes outlined. This reflects a core commitment in Everyone's Essex – to a High-Quality Environment. This includes commitments to deliver on net zero targets, to deliver a step change in sustainable travel and support net zero and climate resilient new build housing and commercial developments, to

reduce waste and deliver a more circular economy; to help our communities be more resilient against flooding, heat stress and water shortages; and to work with communities and businesses providing advice and support to enable them take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build their own climate resilience. Key highlights in the current action plan include:

- 3.7.1 A commitment to embed climate impacts into decision making and procurement across ECC. This includes commitment to ensure its electricity procurement later this year is for renewable energy only.
- 3.7.2 A policy to transform its estate to have Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. A comprehensive property review is in train to inform future progress, and new funding of £3m has been committed to support this ambition.
- 3.7.3 A Net Zero Innovation Network, chaired by Victoria Hills, CEO Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) (which is working with a network of c50 Essex businesses and Essex Universities to drive innovation in climate action in Essex).
- 3.7.4 Development of a new Joint Municipal Waste Strategy developed in partnership with waste collection authorities across Essex, with climate considerations at its heart.
- 3.7.5 An Electric Vehicle Strategy which will work with partners to agree a way forward for EV infrastructure across the county.
- 3.7.6 A rolling flood resilience programme which will see £7.2m invested in flood schemes over the next four years.
- 3.7.7 The Essex Forest Initiative which ECC has committed £500,000 to plant 375,000 trees over 5 years. ECC continues to work with partners to deliver this. Collectively partners across the county as a whole have committed to plant a million trees by 2025/6.
- 3.7.8 A £500,000 Climate Action Challenge Fund which gives community groups grants of up to £20,000 to support their own climate projects
- 3.7.9 Support to establish community energy groups to enable communities to develop their own renewable energy projects.
- 3.7.10 Working with EALC to deliver a series of webinars to help parish councils reduce emissions and build climate resilience
- 3.7.11 A project working with children in Essex and Los Angeles (who face similar climate challenges such as water shortages and coastal erosion, and where the project enables children in both locations to understand the global nature of climate change) to co-create video games to increase children's engagement with and knowledge of the climate challenge.
- 3.7.12 A carbon literacy training programme for ECC Members and Officers.

- 3.8 ECC continues to work with partners across the public, private and community sector and with residents to support the fullest response to the Commission recommendations. by 2030. The annual reports on ECC estate and Essex wide emissions will enable ECC to track progress against the Commission recommendations; and will inform further development of the action plan.
- 3.9 One of the recommendations of the commission was to vastly improve the energy efficiency of new homes, making them net zero by 2025 and carbon positive by 2030. This is something that the Council can lead the way on as a result of its ownership of Essex Housing Development LLP. It is proposed that the Council will work with its LLP to produce plans for a net zero development at Hargrave House in Chelmsford. It must be recognised that as a pilot project this will involve extra development costs which will impact on the return which the development can provide to the Council as landowner. At this stage we are asking the LLP to work on a carbon neutral scheme and the proposal will come back to the Cabinet Member for approval.

4 Links to our Strategic Ambitions

- 4.1 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
- 4.2 Approving the recommendations in this report will set out ECC's initial climate plan both in response to ECC's strategic objective for a high quality environment and the Essex Climate Action Commission report Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral. This is a summary of the action to reduce greenhouse gases and increase climate resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions both within ECC and ECC contribution to action across Essex, working in partnership with organisations and communities across the county.
- 4.3 This report links to the following strategic priorities in 'Everyone's Essex':
- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
 - A high quality environment
 - Health, wellbeing and independence for all ages
 - A good place for children and families to grow.

5 Options

- 5.1 **Do Nothing** This would not be consistent with ECC stance on climate to date. ECC has publicly committed to the Climate Change Agenda, first by championing Essex's Climate Action Commission to drive change within Essex; by setting out its strategic commitment to the climate agenda in Everyone's Essex; and by committing substantial funding to ensure key Projects are delivered.

- 5.2 Agree the proposed actions and note the action plan outlined in Appendix A.** Taken together this represents a strong initial response to the Essex Climate Commission's Net Zero Report. Key features of the new investment include:
- 5.2.1 A new fund to support green space management on our highways to enable investment in greening our streets and urban spaces.
 - 5.2.2 A new nature recovery network to support delivery of a nature recovery strategy for Essex, and to work with farmers and communities to drive faster change in a Climate Focus Area in the Colne & Blackwater.
 - 5.2.3 A net zero pilot housing project from Essex Housing which will be net zero in construction and net zero in use, as well as climate resilient for flooding, overheating and water scarcity.
 - 5.2.4 A new climate action planning team to help us Build Back Better and to provide specialist expertise and work with and support the District Councils to raise the bar and address the Commission recommendations on new build development (housing and commercial) to deliver to a Net Zero standard.
 - 5.2.5 Updating our transport policies to align with climate change and place-making requirements. To help ensure we create the places people want to live, work and enjoy in the future.
 - 5.2.6 A new bus team, and further capital funds, develop our Bus Back Better strategy with partners across the county to deliver a step change in investment in public transport in Essex.
 - 5.2.7 A significant investment of £4.75m in new cycling infrastructure, alongside £3m to maintain and upgrade our existing cycle networks.
 - 5.2.8 Increased investment in communication and community engagement to support residents and businesses to take their own climate actions.

6 Issues for Consideration

6.1 Financial Implications

- 6.1.1 The action plan in Appendix A demonstrates a programme of activity costing £200.275m over four years. This breaks down to £101.786m capital and £98.489m revenue, including £10.424m (39 full time equivalent) of existing ECC staffing opportunity cost.
- 6.1.2 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. The new investment asks set out in this report are in addition to this.

- 6.1.3 ECC has already been successful in securing External Funding to support this agenda to the total value of £62.011m to 2025/26 (£54.558m capital and £7.453m revenue) and the associated project costs are set out in tables at Appendix A.
- 6.1.4 This report seeks new Revenue investment asks totalling £10.341m, including 45 additional full time equivalent staff, and the total project costs are separately identifiable in Appendix A. This is proposed to be funded as follows:
- Additional core funding to be considered in setting the MTRS from 2022/23 onwards of £1.151m
 - A draw down from the Climate Change Reserve of £2.265m
 - A draw down from the Transformation Reserve of £695,000
 - A draw down from the Everyone's Essex Plan Reserve of £6.23m
- 6.1.5 The Action Plan includes new Capital investment asks of £6.5m as set out in the total project costs and is separately identifiable in the Appendix A.
- 6.1.6 Please note that all funding commitments outlined, unless otherwise noted in Appendix A, will be profiled across 2022/23 to 2025/26.
- 6.1.7 The recommendations seek support in principle to the programmes recommended. Full financial appraisals will support each of the recommendations at the relevant business case stage for financial prudence and to address any further impact this may have on the MTRS. Funding will be approved subject to appropriate business case sign off.

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 Individual actions will need to be authorised in conjunction with the constitution. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 the Council is under a duty to have regard to the duty to conserve biodiversity. The aims of the recommendations of the panel are designed to minimise climate change and thus conserve biodiversity.

7 Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 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 – ECC's Response to 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral' Report
- Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment

9. List of background papers

Climate Action Commission Report: 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral'
<https://www.essex.gov.uk/climate-action>