1. Everyone’s Essex

1.1 To protect our planet and ensure a sustainable future, we need to be carbon-neutral by 2050; we need to strengthen our resilience to climate impacts. And, to achieve these aims, we need to act now.

1.2 Essex County Council recognised early the imperative for local leadership on climate action, setting out a clear plan, backing it with money, and bringing together a broad coalition, willing to work together to achieve our joint aim. In 2021, ‘Everyone’s Essex’, the council’s ambitious four-year plan, established the clear ambition of creating a high-quality environment.

1.3 This was followed, in Nov 2021, by the cabinet’s adoption, in full, of the Essex Climate Action Commission’s recommendations 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. It was backed by a budget of £200 million to start delivering on these bold aims.

1.4 The range of projects underway is breath-taking, and the momentum generated will, in time, take us all forward towards our goal. We are extremely proud of our record of achievement so far.

1.5 However, we are working on a long-term plan in a rapidly changing world. Our planet’s changing climate is matched by a rapidly changing financial climate. Adjustments to our capital funding, as the council ensures its financial sustainability, along with an increased range of grants secured, mean that our Climate Action Plan needs to adjust accordingly.

1.6 The updated plan comes with unchanging ambition and unstinting resolve; borne out by the 25% increase in climate-related investment detailed in this paper over the first four years of the plan (from £200m to £250m).

1.7 The purpose of this paper is therefore to seek agreement to a revised, but no less ambitious, Climate Action Plan – bringing it into line with the revised
budget. The report updates the action plan and sets out a detailed breakdown of projects completed, those that are ongoing and new projects being taken forward. No projects set out in the original plan have been stopped, though some have been re-profiled; and new funding secured.

1.8 Delivering on our climate priorities is not only central to our net zero ambitions, but also accords strongly with other Everyone’s Essex objectives, notably around improving physical and mental health through active travel schemes enabling people to walk and cycle, and planting trees which increase green space. Our commitment to greener buildings helps level up areas in Essex, providing green construction jobs for Essex businesses.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Adopt the revised Climate Action Plan 2023-2025 as appended to this report.

2.2 Note that the plan includes investments by the Council funded from the existing Medium Term Resource Strategy (MTRS).

3. Background and Proposal

3.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 commits the UK government by law to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and achieve net zero by 2050.


3.3 In Nov 2021 ECC accepted the Commission’s recommendations and published its response to the Commission’s report in the ECC Climate Action Plan.

3.4 We committed to revising the plan on a regular basis. This report brings forward the updated plan, noting the work that has already been completed; and includes investment by the Council which is funded from the existing MTRS including external grant funding. The detail is set out in Appendix 1.

3.5 Essex County Council recognises the important role it plays – and must continue to play – in tackling climate change and improving the environment across the county.

3.6 In 2020, ECC established the independent advisory body – the Essex Climate Action Commission – to help advise on the steps we can take to tackle climate change across Essex. In July 2021, the Commission published its report, ‘Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral’, which set out a number of recommendations.

3.7 In November 2021, Cabinet endorsed the Commissions’ report in full and developed the first iteration of the Plan, supported by £200m of funding over four
years. This report updates the action plan and sets out a detailed breakdown of projects completed, those that are ongoing and new projects being taken forward. No projects set out in the original plan have been stopped, though some have been re-profiled; and new funding has been secured.

3.8 All initiatives in the draft Climate Action Plan are aligned with the strategic aims (and their associated commitments) of ECC’s organisation strategy, Everyone’s Essex. As an organisation, ECC recognises the importance of tackling climate change and improving the environment, in line with Everyone’s Essex.

3.9 Essex County Council recognises the fundamental importance of working in partnership with others to achieve our climate and environmental goals. We are committed to working with a range of partners including Essex Anchor Institutions such as local authorities, the NHS, and Universities, our local businesses and communities.

3.10 Where it is possible to do so, key performance aspects of ECC’s own carbon emissions are monitored and reported in the Climate Action Data Report. This report will be refreshed quarterly with the latest available data for each measure. (In instances where data are not available to us on a quarterly basis, the information from previous quarters will be carried forward).

3.11 We also produce an annual Climate Action Report to give updates on actions across Essex to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase climate resilience. This includes the latest modelled greenhouse gas emissions for the county as a whole. We will publish the next annual report in November this year.

3.12 We remain committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building a more resilient Essex. The revised detailed plan is outlined in Appendix 1. Key highlights include:

- Essex County Council has been awarded an A-rating for action on climate change in 2022 from the CDP (Previously the Carbon Disclosure Project) an international benchmark. We are the only UK county council to achieve this top rating – and we will continue to benchmark our performance each year.

- 240,000 trees have been planted as part of the Essex Forest Initiative to plant 375,000 trees over a 5-year period. We are working as part of the Essex Forest Partnership who are planting 1million trees by 2030.

- ECC is supporting the roll out of Government grants with over 15m in grant funding for fuel poor homes secured; with a further £24.8m secured this year from the Home Upgrade Grant Scheme, supporting grants of up to £10,000 for fuel poor homes across Greater Essex.

- We have supported substantial updates to the Essex Design Guide to ensure it remain at the cutting edge of best practise in low carbon, resilient planning guidance.
• We are investing over £15m in active travel improvements across six districts

• All new school buildings built by ECC since 2021 have been net zero in operation since 2021.

• ECC helped over 600 residents to source solar panels and battery storage at a discount, through a bulk buying scheme.

• We are investing c£18 to reduce the greenhouse gas emission from our own estate, over £11m of this is grant funded.

• We have launched a Sector Develop Strategy and Skills Plan both focused on supporting Essex businesses and residents to benefit from the opportunities that come with the transition to a low carbon economy.

• We have launched a Cutting Carbon Essex app to support residents to take action to cut their own carbon footprint.

3.13 The Action Plan does not remove any commitments from the November 2021 plan, other than those which have been delivered already. It adds in new commitments, sets out what has been achieved and sets out commitments from November 2021 which have yet to be delivered.

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 ongoing 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 the Organisational Strategy ‘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

Option 1: Do nothing

5.1 There would be no update to the current Climate Action Plan approved in November 2021 (ref: FP/177/10/21). This would not reflect ECC’s current budgets or ambitions and would leave the Council with an outdated plan.

Option 2:

5.2 Adopt the revised climate action plan as the current intention to respond to Climate Change

6. Issues for consideration

6.1 Financial implications

6.1.1 The Council’s commitment to climate change is emphasised by the significant increase in investment in the Climate Action Plan since the first plan was published in November 2021 of £50m (+25%). The committed investment has risen to £250m (from £200m, Nov 2021).

6.1.2 The Council has committed £211m across capital and revenue, an increase of £33m (18%) on the previous reported investment (£178m; Nov 2021). This increase in investment has been funded from ECC resources (£20m) and external grant funding (£13m). In addition to the Council’s investment in the Plan, the Council has unlocked significant grant funding for the County of Essex which is received and distributed by third parties (Southeast Net Zero Hub; £39m).

6.1.3 The table below sets out the investment by type of spend (revenue / capital) and by source of funding (ECC/ external grant) by financial year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECC Expenditure (£000s):</th>
<th>2021/22</th>
<th>2022/23</th>
<th>2023/24</th>
<th>2024/25</th>
<th>2025/26</th>
<th>Outer Years</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>17,323</td>
<td>23,901</td>
<td>25,485</td>
<td>18,870</td>
<td>9,182</td>
<td>1,455</td>
<td>96,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>19,580</td>
<td>25,281</td>
<td>25,995</td>
<td>20,439</td>
<td>22,481</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>114,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36,903</td>
<td>49,182</td>
<td>51,481</td>
<td>39,309</td>
<td>31,663</td>
<td>2,044</td>
<td>210,582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funded by (£000s):</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECC</td>
<td>28,858</td>
<td>29,995</td>
<td>38,692</td>
<td>30,732</td>
<td>27,399</td>
<td>2,044</td>
<td>157,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Grant</td>
<td>8,045</td>
<td>19,187</td>
<td>12,788</td>
<td>8,577</td>
<td>4,264</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>52,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36,903</td>
<td>49,182</td>
<td>51,481</td>
<td>39,309</td>
<td>31,663</td>
<td>2,044</td>
<td>210,582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Third Party Expenditure            | -       | 14,500  | 24,800  | -       | -       | -           | 39,300    |
| Total Investment                   | 36,903  | 63,682  | 76,281  | 39,309  | 31,663  | 2,044       | 249,882   |

6.1.4 Between November 2021 and March 2023 £86m has been spent by the Council against the original planned spend of £98m and a further £14.5m has been spent by the Southeast New Energy Hub against planned spend of £22.4m.
6.1.5 The Council’s investment commitment is fully contained within the existing MTRS.

6.1.6 There are 92 full time equivalent staff members delivering this programme (84; Nov 2021), an increase of 9.5%.

6.1.7 Please see Appendix 2 for the detailed financial summary.

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.

6.2.2 There has been no consultation on the updated plan but it sets out what the Council intends to do in response to the Climate Action Commission’s recommendation.

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 comprehensive 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

8.1 Appendix 1 – Draft Essex Climate Action Plan 2023-2025
8.2 Appendix 2 – Finance Summary Table
8.3 Appendix 3 – Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment
9. **List of Background papers**


9.3. Annual Climate Action Data Report