

# Update on the Work of the West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce

<b>Report No:</b>	<b>CAB/WS/20/009</b>	
	<b>Cabinet</b>	14 January 2020
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**Decisions Plan:** The decisions made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

**Wards impacted:** All wards

**Recommendations: It is recommended that Cabinet:**

- 1. Notes the progress made by the Taskforce to date and confirms support for the approach being taken, including the following proposals under consideration outlined in section 1 of Report No: CAB/WS/20/009:**
  - a. Explore ways we can reduce and measure our carbon use through systems used in the sector such as carbon budgeting, considering the aim to become a carbon neutral authority by 2030;**
  - b. Explore and embed where possible new ways of working and processes that are more environmentally friendly that could have wider benefits, such as cost savings or health improvements.**
- 2. Considers the following initial recommendations:**
  - a. Agree that the Taskforce Terms of Reference are updated to better reflect the working of the Taskforce and link to Council's declaration of a climate emergency and awareness of environmental challenges, as laid out in section 3;**
  - b. Agree to advise the Barley Homes Shareholder Advisory Group regarding future recommendations of the Taskforce;**
  - c. Agree the proposed objectives and amendments for the West Suffolk Strategic Framework 2020-24, as laid out in section 4;**
  - d. Agree that the West Suffolk Local Plan should include a specific strategic objective regarding the environment and climate change challenges, as laid out in section 4;**
  - e. Consider, and approve as appropriate, recommendations for the 2020/21 budget, as set out in Section 5, specifically for up to £18,000 to be available from the Medium Term Financial Strategy Reserve to meet the additional cost of purchase of electric vehicles.**



## **1. Background / Context**

- 1.1 In July 2019, Cabinet set up a taskforce to review environment and climate change issues with the purpose of making recommendations back to Cabinet on the further actions the Council could take to address climate change, including the potential for the Council to use its role to bring about lasting change across West Suffolk. The Taskforce was charged with taking an evidence-based approach and bringing recommendations back to Cabinet, as laid out in the terms of reference.
- 1.2 The Taskforce continues to meet and its final report, due later in 2020, will include further specific detailed costed recommendations of practical steps the Council can take to address climate change and biodiversity loss and a full report on the options and implications of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.
- 1.3 All recommendations of the Taskforce aim to continue and build on existing good practice and innovative projects, such as those outlined in the appendix to the terms of reference report agreed by Cabinet in July 2019. The Council has a strong track record for protecting the environment and reducing its impact on the climate as shown in the Annual Environmental Statement (Appendix B). It has one of the biggest council-owned solar farms and is a national leader in helping businesses reduce their impact by installing solar panels on their roofs. Up to the end of last year its Community Energy Plan (CEP) alone has invested £1.48 million into renewable energy projects across West Suffolk and generated carbon dioxide savings of around 1,000 tonnes.
- 1.4 This interim report updates Cabinet on the progress made by the West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce, setting out the issues and opportunities it is exploring, making recommendations to "*shape the direction of the Local Plan and Strategic Framework*" together with initial specific recommendations on purposeful actions the Council can take now.
- 1.5 In addition to these recommendations, the Taskforce has requested that services explore:
  1. The opportunity for the Council to adopt powers to enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for Private Rented Properties
  2. Review of Council performance against the British Standard BS855 as a basis for development of an environmental management system to track our environmental progress

## **2. Update on work of the Taskforce**

### **2.1 Governance**

The Taskforce is formed of eleven (ten since December 2019) councillors and reflects a mix of political groups as required by the terms of reference. One member of the Taskforce is from a rural ward.



2.2 The Taskforce has met four times and has agreed four principles for the way in which it should focus its efforts, given the scope and complexity of the challenges it is responding to and having regard to the Terms of Reference. They are:

1. Focus on West Suffolk area and work with Suffolk Partners to influence wider Suffolk action
2. Consider the Council's unique role as West Suffolk Council and the actions that only the Council can do, such as influencing others
3. Build on the visibility of existing valuable work of the Council
4. Develop recommendations that can be built into the existing work of the council.

### 2.3 **Assumptions and methodology**

The Taskforce agreed new ways of working at the first meeting and has been presented with the latest information on climate change and environment challenges in West Suffolk, Suffolk, nationally and internationally. Members agreed to take accountability for the development of ideas under the topics below.

1. Travel and transport
2. Renewables
3. Housing
4. Green spaces and Biodiversity
5. Accreditation and measurement
6. Waste

2.4 All workstreams are considering the possible ways to deliver, lead or influence long lasting change given the roles the Council undertakes being:

1. A community leader and influencer
2. An employer
3. A consumer/buyer of goods and services
4. A deliverer of services
5. A regulator and policy maker

2.5 The Taskforce is currently considering a range of options and will develop these into final proposals for Cabinet later in 2020. Initial recommendations are set out in Section 3, 4 and 5.

### 2.6 **Reducing carbon use and emissions**

Carbon neutral is defined by the Collins English Dictionary as an organisation or lifestyle that "does not cause an increase in the overall amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere." This term is commonly used alongside the ambition to become 'net zero', which for an organisation means that their total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would be equal to or less than the emissions they removed from the environment. This can be achieved by a combination of emission reduction and carbon off setting.



2.7 A commonly used approach for tracking an organisation's net emissions is developing a 'carbon budget' (a presentation tool rather than a financial budget as such) to measure the cumulative amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions permitted over a period of time, balanced with the reductions in atmospheric carbon from any carbon off-setting activities, to keep within a certain temperature threshold. This threshold is defined by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. One of the reasons this is preferred over other carbon reduction strategies is that all ambitions outlined are associated with a numerical value. This allows an organisation to set a baseline, identify the contribution of carbon-offsetting activities and break any agreed emissions target down into yearly cycles.

2.8 The Taskforce is currently exploring how a carbon budget could be developed in order to support any agreed emissions targets for West Suffolk Council and develop a carbon budget for 2020/21 initially. This will help the Taskforce meet the requirement in the Terms of Reference to '*develop and appraise options for the actions the Council would have to take to be net-zero carbon by 2030*'.

## 2.9 **Ways of working**

There are additional positive steps the Council can take through looking at the ways members and officers work. For example, the Taskforce are keen to explore how processes to support decision making, such as report-writing style and webcasting, can be adapted to support more digital working. This would support the ambition for West Suffolk Council meetings to become paperless in the future. The Taskforce will explore the implications so that any future recommendations for adapting ways of working are supported by evidence about how this could work. The Taskforce is also looking at how the Council can maintain biodiversity and deliver measurable biodiversity net gain within West Suffolk, delivering both environmental and health benefits.

## 2.10 **Community Engagement**

A 'Communications and Engagement' workstream was also agreed by the Taskforce to:

1. Support the implementation of recommendations from other workstreams, including any consultation to support decision-making
2. Build on the Council's existing work to raise awareness about climate change and environment issues across West Suffolk, and any social or economic co-benefits
3. Support ward members to have conversations with local residents and businesses about the priorities for their locality

2.11 The headline message for any communications is that the Council is stepping up and working with communities looking for the best way to respond to the emergency and challenges climate change, biodiversity and the environment face, referencing the best available evidence. The Taskforce wants to find



out the key local issues for residents, communities and businesses to support its work. There are a number of actions that can support this:

1. Targeted workshops with stakeholders – workshops on particular themes agreed important by the Taskforce.
2. Ward member toolkit: support ward members to have broad conversations with their communities – a toolkit to assist members with engaging with residents within their wards in respect of simple measures that they could do to help make a difference.
3. Public survey to support ward member engagement - to bring forward ideas/initiatives – environmental attitudes survey with separate questions for residents and businesses/groups/organisations.
4. Invite speakers from key community groups, charities or industry experts – are there any groups we should invite to speak to the Taskforce, or community groups that Taskforce members could engage with, such as through attending one of their meetings.
5. Promote existing work: showing what the Council is doing and what others are doing through ongoing press releases and a dedicated part of our website for these updates.
6. Ongoing internal communications campaign to make sure environmental issues and benefits highlighted in projects when publicising them.

Some specific recommendations to support this are included at Section 5.1.

## 2.12 **Suffolk-wide approach**

The Taskforce has linked up with the taskforces that have been set up by the other Suffolk councils to share learning, evidence and explore ways in which a collaborative Suffolk approach could deliver better outcomes. Supported by funding from the Suffolk Transformation Challenge Fund, initial work is being undertaken to undertake analysis of existing, publicly available data and related tools to provide a clear, evidence-based baseline of carbon emissions in Suffolk and develop indicative emissions reduction pathways in the context of the aspiration to make the county of Suffolk carbon neutral by 2030.

## **3. Recommendations: Proposed changes to the Terms of Reference**

### **3.1 Meeting arrangements**

Operational principles were agreed at the first meeting of the Taskforce and it is proposed that the 'Governance' section of the Terms of Reference is updated to reflect the following changes to meeting arrangements (see Appendix C):

1. Taskforce meetings shall continue to be scheduled to take place at council offices, *however members are welcome to join meetings via videoconference or Skype to reduce member journeys required.*



2. Meetings will be 'paperless' where it is possible for members to access the relevant reports and information online. Papers will only be sent to members when specifically requested.

### 3.2 **Climate Emergency**

Since the Cabinet decision to set up the Taskforce, the Council declared a Climate Emergency on 19 September 2019. This is not currently set out in the Taskforce Terms of Reference, but Council agreed that the Taskforce have responsibility for making recommendations to Cabinet about how it responds to this emergency and other environmental challenges. It is recommended that Cabinet consider the following text to be added to the 'Purpose of the group' section of the Terms of Reference:

*'As set out at the Council meeting on 19 September 2019, the Taskforce recommendations will be the first part of the Council's response to declaring a Climate Emergency across West Suffolk'*

- 3.3 A motion was also presented to Council on 19 September to consider all challenges for the environment and biodiversity across West Suffolk. This was also referred to the Taskforce for consideration and has been factored into the approach described above.

## 4. **Recommendations: Policy and Reporting**

### 4.1 **Environmental Statement 2018/19**

To support the environmental stewardship ambitions set out in the Terms of Reference, it is important that the Council is transparent about its current environmental performance and trajectory of key measures, such as carbon emissions, recycling rates, staff mileage claims, renewable energy generation and green flag status of our parks.

- 4.2 Previously, environmental performance has been published as a report to the Performance Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Taskforce feel it is an important statement of the Council's progress and recommends that Cabinet note the draft Environmental Statement 2018/19, attached in Appendix B and in following years the Environmental Statement is included in the Council's Annual Report, starting with the 2019/20 Annual Report.

### 4.3 **Barley Homes**

The Taskforce Housing and Renewables workstreams have both identified the opportunity the Council has to work with Barley Homes (and other house builders) to explore what is possible at each new site in terms of building greener homes. As a local authority owned building company, there are opportunities to drive lasting change in terms of the inclusion of renewable technology and environmentally sustainable planning features that benefit not just the environment but residents too.

- 4.4 As set out in the Barley Homes Business Plan 2019, future sites could be evaluated under the emerging themes of the current Council Taskforces,



including identifying how sites can be developed in the most environmentally sustainable way. The Taskforce seeks Cabinet's commitment to consider final recommendations in 2020 to advise the Barley Homes Stakeholder Advisory Group, supporting Barley Homes' existing approach to increase building efficiency by maximising the performance of the components and materials that make up the building fabric itself. The Taskforce recognises that Barley Homes is a separate legal entity that needs to balance a variety of factors when considering what is possible in terms of green credentials of new housing.

#### 4.5 **West Suffolk Strategic Framework**

It is recommended that environment and climate change should be a key part of the West Suffolk Strategic Framework. The Taskforce supports the proposed revision to the Council's vision to reference the environment and the proposed inclusion of a specific way of working of being "environmentally responsible". To add to this, the Taskforce recommends that the following objectives be included in the Strategic Framework, being considered by Cabinet on 14 January 2020 (Report No: CAB/WS/19/010).

- 4.6 Under the strategic priority "Growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc", add the objective: explore how we can work with developers, businesses and partners to ensure that we improve the green credentials of any new development.
- 4.7 Under the strategic priority "Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active" add the objective: maintain and enhance the green infrastructure in West Suffolk to deliver improved biodiversity and air quality and support the health and wellbeing of our local communities.
- 4.8 Under the strategic priority "Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in west Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas", add the objective: support the development of more environmentally sustainable homes and communities throughout West Suffolk, in a measurable way. This will include working with housebuilders and influencing the local plan and development control processes.
- 4.9 In addition to these initial recommendations, the Taskforce may suggest further detail to support and strengthen environmental references as they develop their work.

#### 4.10 **West Suffolk Local Plan**

It is recommended that the Local Plan includes strategic objectives relating to:

1. Climate change adaption
2. Climate change mitigation
3. Environmental protection and enhancement



This can be developed further as the plan develops but it is important that the Council sets out its ambition at this early stage to address these issues through the local plan process.

## **5. Recommendations: West Suffolk Council 2020/21 Budget**

- 5.1 Whilst the majority of recommendations from the Taskforce are under development, the following proposals have been identified to consider as part of the budget process for the financial year 2020/21. Given the urgent nature of responding to climate change and environmental concerns, the Taskforce don't want to delay action that can be taken now. A summary of the proposals is included in Appendix A, indicating where it is possible to offset additional cost through savings in reduction in consumption. These initial costs are marginal and should be met from existing budgets or external funding sources but are summarised below to show the positive actions the Council can take now. These are all in addition to work already planned such as installation of vehicle charging points and solar for business, and inclusion of renewables in new projects such as Mildenhall Hub.

### **It is recommended that the Council:**

#### **a. Purchases electric fleet vehicles**

1. In addition to the planned purchase of an ex-demonstration vehicle using receipts from sales of existing vehicles, it is proposed that another two electric cars or vans are purchased to replace existing vehicles that are coming to the end of normal working period. These vehicles will be based at West Suffolk Operational Hub and West Suffolk House.
2. This will deliver a reduction in carbon emissions from vehicle use and the Council will benefit from the reduction in running costs in the long term.
3. The additional cost of purchase of two electric vehicles over diesel vehicles will be £21,000 together with branding costs of £800; where possible the cost will be met from existing budgets and receipts from vehicle sales but it is recommended up to £18,000 is allocated from the Medium term Financial Strategy Reserve to fund the additional cost of these new vehicles.
4. Electric vehicles are expected to have an initial six-year life with the cost savings of at least £3,000 over this period. The GHG emissions are therefore expected to total 5.6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e over that period.

#### **b. Purchases green electricity for our buildings**

1. The purchase of electricity generated from renewable source would require an additional £2000 and removes 885 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum; assuming consumption stays the same. However, there are investment proposals in the emerging budget that would facilitate a reduction in the Council's annual consumption of electricity, which



means the move to green electricity should be accommodated within existing budgets.

2. The Council purchases energy through the Laser Framework so the change could be made by simply requesting that Laser purchase green energy on behalf of the Council.

**c. Plant additional trees on Council land**

1. In order to increase tree cover in West Suffolk, the Taskforce proposes that a new woodland area or tree planting schemes are established on Council-owned land. The Taskforce is currently looking at potential sites, and having regard to the funding that is available, it is working on the optimum site or sites where a plantation could be established. A specific proposal will follow but Cabinet is asked to support the concept of increasing tree cover in West Suffolk.
2. In addition, the Council will look to work with landowners across West Suffolk to identify other opportunities to increase tree cover.

**d. Community engagement – develop a Councillor toolkit**

1. As set out in paragraph 2.11, it is proposed that a set of materials and an online survey are developed to support ward members consult their localities. This can be carried out in house with the support from the Corporate Policy and Communications teams.
2. The toolkit would include production and design of promotional materials for local members, parish councils or communities to display to raise awareness about this engagement. This would include any social media design materials and films, if required, possible case studies highlighting the themes or actions people can take; Frequently asked Questions explaining what the Council is trying to achieve and how it declared a Climate Change Emergency; how people can get involved; blogs for local members as a template and designs for posters to be used locally explaining how people can engage or pass on their own ideas and tips.
3. It is expected this will help generate ideas for small to medium scale community schemes with an interest in protecting the environment or mitigating or reducing climate change impact. These ideas could then be shared with the relevant ward member to requests in their area to consider action going forward.
4. It is recommended that media and marketing production is developed as part of the Suffolk wide approach, and this recommendation forwarded to the Climate Change Partnership to develop further with costs being met through the Transformation Challenge funding.
5. These ideas could then be shared with the relevant ward member to requests in their area to consider as part of their locality budget or community groups could be signposted to other sources of funding, such as Community Action Suffolk.
6. It is recommended that Cabinet remind members that they have the opportunity to fund environmental related actions in their local community through locality budgets.

**e. Community engagement – hold a Greener housing forum**

1. The Taskforce is keen to engage housebuilders to raise awareness about the environmental agenda and the examples for good practice as well as the Council's ambitions on what environment aware development should be. An invite-only event could be held as part of a wider dialogue with the industry around delivery of homes, development and the Council's vision. The purpose of holding this targeted event is to further the environmental outcomes the Council wishes to see around development and bringing the housing industry into that process.
2. Raise awareness about the environmental agenda and how it is gaining momentum and outline potential opportunities for house builders such as being able to offer buyers more efficient homes, and;
3. Support the wider engagement around the local plan and the Council's aim to support the delivery of managed growth.
4. Invite ideas from industry experts about how West Suffolk Council can support building of new housing to higher environmental standards, aside from planning policy. At the same time hear from developers and housing industry about their challenges and opportunities and so better develop our policies.
5. Highlight the emerging vision we have of what good environmental practice looks like for development and how this may be encouraged through our planning process.
6. Showcasing exemplar practice elsewhere and how these may be introduced in West Suffolk.
7. This will be delivered as part of a series of Developer Forum events, and the costs met from existing budgets.

**f. Buy recycled paper**

1. The Taskforce would like to explore how the Council could reduce its impact on the environment from paper use. It is proposed that Council switch to more eco-friendly paper as an initial step towards this.
2. Due to the way paper use is recorded, the figures are currently produced from ratios recorded at West Suffolk House, as it represents 85% of paper usage in 2018. The Council spent £6,157.44 on A4 and A3 paper for West Suffolk House in 2018, amounting to 12,156.51 kg of carbon emissions.
3. It is proposed that different paper is sourced that has a reduced carbon footprint. To buy the eco-friendly, recycled paper there would be a 60.6% increase in the cost of paper, amounting to an additional £3,698.43 per year. However, this would reduce carbon emissions produced from paper use by 2 Tonne CO2 per annum or 17% of emissions relating to paper.



## **6. Alternative Options**

6.1 There are alternative options for some of the recommendations. These are explained under the relevant headings below:

6.2 Terms of Reference:

The Environment and Climate Change Taskforce Terms of Reference could remain unchanged and Cabinet could simply note the updated ways of working, link to the Climate Emergency.

6.3 Environmental Statement:

The 2018/19 Statement could only be viewed by the Taskforce and then a recommendation about the 2019/20 Statement could follow when the Taskforce makes its final recommendations.

6.4 Budget Proposals:

These initial Taskforce recommendations for the budget could be omitted from the budget proposals for 2020/21 so all proposals are delivered at one time as part of the final Taskforce report. However, this conflicts with the urgent nature of responding to the Climate Emergency, as declared by the Council in September 2019. Specific alternatives for these proposals are set out below:

1. The Council could continue to purchase non low-emission vehicles but misses the opportunity to reduce emissions from our fleet when going through the normal replacement of vehicles reaching the end of their usable life.
2. Council buildings could continue to be powered from standard energy and save money, until it is in a position to generate renewable energy itself. However, there are no guarantees if or when this would be achievable.
3. The Council could consult through the normal means with standard levels of promotion on websites, however this may mean that feedback is limited and the Council could miss out on key feedback on this cross-generational issue.
4. Do not hold a forum to engage housebuilders and focus efforts on lobbying government to review the National Planning Policy Framework instead.

## **7. Risks**

7.1 The overarching risk of making recommendations early in the duration of the Taskforce is they could be misinterpreted as representations of the priority areas for the Taskforce's final recommendations. Paragraph 2.5 sets out the methodology which should clarify that the Taskforce is considering a wide-range of options under thematic workstreams, which are in no way limited to the themes of governance, target-setting, measuring progress, existing housing energy efficiency and sustainable new homes discussed above.



## 8. Implications arising from the proposals

- 8.1 The implications for Barley Homes initiatives and the development of a Carbon Budget will be addressed in the later reports to Cabinet. The implications for the rest of the proposals are set out under the following headings where relevant:
- 8.2 **Environmental:** it is expected that the recommendations either have a positive impact or create an opportunity for a future positive impact.
- 8.3 **HR / Staffing:** there are no direct staffing changes at this stage, although the Taskforce are keen to take into account any resource implications when evaluating options for final the final recommendations in 2020.
- 8.4 **Financial:** the budget recommendations impact the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as outlined in paragraph 5.1 and further detailed in Appendix A. It is expected that these recommendations will be considered as part of the budget setting process for the 2020/21 financial year.

## 9. Appendices

- 9.1  
Appendix A - Supporting information for budget proposals  
Appendix B - West Suffolk Environmental Statement 2018/19  
Appendix C - Updated Terms of Reference Environment and Climate Change Task Force

## 10. Background documents

- 10.1 Proposal to Establish a West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce: ([Report No: CAB/WS/19/016](#))

[West Suffolk Council Environmental Project List: CAB.WS.19.016 Appendix A](#)

International Panel on Climate Change: Global warming of 1.5°C:  
<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> (November 2018):

New evidence outlined in this report suggests that “the window of opportunity for action is almost closed.” and describes the “enormous harm” that a 2°C global temperature rise will have compared a 1.5°C rise. Research summarised in the Panel’s report sets out that action within the next 12 years could limit the rise to 1.5°C. Leading climate scientists warn that even an extra 0.5°C rise on top of this could significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

