

Environment and Climate Change Action Plans: 2022 Update

Report number:	CAB/WS/22/040	
Report to and date:	Cabinet	19 July 2022
Cabinet members:	<p>Councillor John Griffiths Leader of the Council Telephone: 01284 757001 Email: john.griffiths@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Councillor Andy Drummond Portfolio Holder for Regulatory and Environment Telephone: 01638 751411 Email: andy.drummond@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p>	
Lead officer:	<p>Jill Korwin Strategic Director Telephone: 01284 757252 Email: jill.korwin@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p>	

Decisions Plan: **The decision 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, as detailed in Report number: CAB/WS/22/040, Cabinet:**

- 1. Reviews and notes progress against the Environment and Climate Change action plans and makes recommendations for any change to the actions and activities, as set out in Appendix A.**
- 2. Agrees the new actions to be added to the plan, as set out in section 2.14.**
- 3. Approves the Environmental Statement for the Council's 2021 to 2022 performance, included as Appendix B.**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 In September 2019, West Suffolk Council declared a climate emergency, having already established the Environment and Climate Change Taskforce (the Taskforce). The aim of the Taskforce was to make recommendations on the council's future role in protecting and enhancing the environment, both in the way in which it carries out its operations and through specific initiatives.
- 1.2 Following the Taskforce's extensive evidence gathering, engagement and analysis work, they presented recommendations to Cabinet. On 21 July 2020, Cabinet agreed an action plan, designed to implement the recommendations of the Taskforce, and to be taken forward by officers and overseen by Cabinet. Cabinet also agreed to a review of progress against the actions.
- 1.3 The recommendations to Cabinet covered two separate papers. The first as a list of recommendations on climate change issues; the second, a report setting out recommendations for environmental and biodiversity issues. The second paper also recommended that the council's climate emergency declaration be updated to specifically state 'Climate and Environment Emergency', which was duly agreed by Cabinet.
- 1.4 This report is the second annual report on progress in implementing the agreed actions and summarises some of the wider developments that impact upon the council's work in lowering carbon emissions and improving environmental impacts across the organisation. The report sets out how the council is adapting its approach to mitigate against some of these external factors, as reflected in the actions taken. It also includes the full Environmental Statement, an annual summary of the council's performance in regard to the environment and climate change (a summary of this statement is included in the Annual Report).

2. Progress against actions

- 2.1 The updated action plan attached in Appendix A shows the progress made in implementing the actions since July 2021.
- 2.2 Since the last update to Cabinet, there have been a number of external developments. Globally, inflation has risen significantly – with the UK and the USA experiencing an increase of 9.1 percent and 8.3 percent respectively. Economists date the start of today's global inflationary troubles to the coronavirus. Its spread was clearly an economic shock, with borders and businesses closed and factories shut down. This resulted in inflation through the consequent disruption of supply chains. The war in Ukraine, since 24 February 2022, has injected additional uncertainty into the global economy, impacting on energy and food, and causing added inflationary factors. In addition, China's 'zero covid'

policy, and resulting lockdowns in Chinese cities experiencing a new COVID-19 wave, have exacerbated supply-chain pressures, resulting in further inflation. It is also worth noting that inflation has also been caused in part by climate change – unpredictable weather events have disrupted supply chains and contributed to additional demand, such as the heat wave in India that has led the country to ban wheat exports.

- 2.3 Wholesale energy prices increased rapidly in the second half of 2021. Many consumers were protected, at least initially, by the energy price cap. However, the price cap increased by 54 percent in April 2022. The price cap is set to increase by a further £800 in October. In 2020, 14.5 percent of Suffolk households were fuel poor, compared to an England average of 13.2 percent. As a result of the price increases, and despite efforts made by Government to alleviate costs, it is estimated that they will lead to an increase in the number of households in fuel poverty of more than 50 percent. If reflected in Suffolk, that means around one in five households could be driven into fuel poverty by the end of 2022.
- 2.4 The burgeoning 'cost of living crisis', caused by rapidly increasing prices, places increased focus on the existing commitments in the plan to help alleviate and reduce household costs and make homes more energy efficient. A wider strategy to accelerate this work is being developed across Suffolk through the work of the Collaborative Communities Board and the Suffolk Climate Change, Environment and Energy Board (SCCEEB). However, West Suffolk Council's (WSC) efforts to reduce emissions and improve the environment are increasingly framed against the need to help meet the challenge of the cost of living.
- 2.5 The effects of COVID-19 have inevitably had an impact on the actions taken by the council and environmental outcomes. However, since the last update to Cabinet, there have been no further lockdowns and a gradual increase in office use, as the council transitions to an agile working approach. As such, there have been increases in the council's carbon footprint compared to 2020-21, reflecting the increased use of the office and other assets that have a carbon footprint. This had been predicted and was noted in 2020-21 environment statement so accordingly the figures have been compared with 2019-20 data.
- 2.6 Although many of the following indicators show an increase in carbon emissions, primarily due to increase in office use and reopening of leisure centres, emissions remain lower than pre pandemic levels showing progress towards the council's net zero aim. Further analysis can be found in the environmental statement (Appendix B):
 - a. Total emissions down 17 percent compared to 2019-20
 - b. Renewable energy generated up 41 percent compared to 2019-20
 - c. Total owned vehicle emissions down nine percent compared to 2019-20

- d. Business travel down 51 percent compared to 2019-20
- e. Total water consumption down 35 percent compared to 2019-20
- f. The recycling rate 82.34 percent, up nine percent compared to last year
- g. Total West Suffolk House waste down 56 percent compared to 2019-20
- h. During 2021-22, we held six Green Flag status parks
- i. Public electric vehicle (EV) chargers installed by WSC can support 67 EVs charging at the same time
- j. Energy delivered to drivers powered 353,170 miles
- h. 318 trees and 560 hedge plants planted during 2021-22.

2.7 The Carbon Budget agreed by Cabinet in 2020 is included in the environment statement. The net zero plan which formed part of the 2020 report illustrates potential routes to net zero by 2030. This is broken down into potential workstreams, such as reducing emissions from existing buildings, investing in renewable generation projects, and moving fleet to electric or hydrogen solutions. These are reflected in the strategic action plan (Appendix A).

2.8 The carbon budget periods are:

- a. April 2020 – Mar 2024 – steady annual emission rate of 4,675 tCO₂e (tonnes of CO₂ equivalent) per year
- b. April 2024 – Mar 2028 – steady annual emission rate of 2,484 tCO₂e per year
- c. April 2028 – Mar 2030 – steady annual emission rate of 840 tCO₂e per year
- d. Zero emissions in 2030-31.

For year 2021-22, the council is marginally above the carbon budget, with emissions standing at 4,743tCO₂e against the budgets allowed rate of 4,675 tCO₂e. Work planned for 2022-23 should bring the council back in line with its target reduction.

2.8.1 **Role of the Environment Management Group (EMG)**

The Environment Management Group (EMG) is the main monitoring and implementation body for environment and climate change issues across the council.

2.8.2 Over the course of the last 12 months, the EMG has developed to ensure that representatives from all relevant parts of the council, as well as Abbeycroft, contribute to the group. To further develop an inclusive working practice encompassing all of the council, and ensure that work is completed, the Housing workstream is taking a 'sub-group' approach. Meeting monthly and led by the lead officer for the Housing workstream, the sub-group involves a number of officers who work in

relevant areas and is proving effective in developing the workstream. This approach may be adopted by other themes.

2.9 **West Suffolk Decarbonisation Budget**

In February 2022, the council agreed a £9 million package of funding to support its target to be carbon neutral by 2030. The West Suffolk Decarbonisation Budget is designed to fund green initiatives to help tackle climate change and will fund the additional costs of electric vehicle replacements, fund additional improvements to buildings to improve their energy efficiency and reduce carbon as well as extending the successful Solar for Business scheme for West Suffolk businesses. Work is underway to commission the charging infrastructure to support a new electric vehicle (EV) fleet and new vehicles are on trial. The delivery of new vehicles has been delayed due to supply chain issues.

- 2.9.1 The creation of this new £9 million investment facility builds on the plans that are already being delivered. It will deliver environmental projects that are anticipated to deliver a 31 percent carbon saving on council operations by 2026, together with a financial return to the council of two percent, after allowing for borrowing costs.
 - 2.9.2 In addition, it includes a £100,000 per annum provision to support the switch to use Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) derived fuel in the larger diesel-powered fleet – such as freighters used to collect rubbish. No vehicle modifications would be required, and this would achieve carbon savings of nearly 400 tonnes CO₂e per annum as well as improving air quality. However, progress on HVO has been delayed due to procurement challenges and market uncertainty, but discussions are underway with potential suppliers.
 - 2.9.3 In total, the projects proposed under this new investment would deliver 2,279 tCO₂e savings per annum once fully implemented. This should mean that the council would meet its Carbon Budget target for 2026 putting the council on the right path to meet its net zero ambition by 2030.
- ## 2.10 **'Cost of living crisis'**
- A number of initiatives are being undertaken or adapted from existing actions in order to refocus decarbonisation and environmental improvement efforts to help alleviate the 'cost of living crisis'.
- 2.10.1 200 homes are expected to receive insulation upgrades by August 2022 – in the current tranche of Local Authority Delivery (LAD) funding. However, additional efforts are being made to better direct resources to where it can have the most impact, benefitting residence at particular risk in the 'cost of living crisis'. The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) commissioned Local Energy Asset Representation Modelling (LEAR), which was undertaken on Suffolk's housing and building stock, was completed at the end of 2021. The data gathered has been shared with

and utilised by the council. It is presently being combined with other data sources (such as information on fuel poverty and Local Authority Delivery scheme and green homes grant data) to identify priority areas for housing refurbishment – locations where issues of low-energy efficient housing, fuel poverty and other deprivation issues intersect. In this way, West Suffolk can identify priority homes or areas for improvement to inform funding bids and works. The Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) report, expected in August or September 2022, will further augment this information.

2.10.2 Similarly, Suffolk Solar Together work is seeing installations across Suffolk. Since September 2021, there have been 610 properties signed up to the scheme with 238 solar photovoltaic (PV) installations completed in Suffolk.

2.10.3 To provide alternatives to car travel, and thus alleviate the resulting cost of petrol, the council is continuing to promote active travel alternatives through the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, with the aim of doubling participation by 2025. To this end, the council has installed cycle racks in all our main parks and work is ongoing to investigate potential funding opportunities for the installation of EV charge points in these spaces.

2.11 **County wide work**

Council officers and members of Cabinet continue to play an active role in the Suffolk wide approach to tackle climate change, chairing both The Suffolk Climate Change, Environment and Energy Board (SCCEEB) and the Environment Portfolio Holders' Group.

2.11.1 Since the publication of the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan (SCEP), Suffolk partners have begun to deliver key actions as set out in the plan. Working groups for each of the plan's five themes have been established to take forward priority action delivery. This has led to the £1.5 million funding from the SPSL group beginning to be invested in a number of initiatives, such as:

- To ensure that the response across Suffolk is as coordinated between partners as possible and to ensure that shared work and responsibilities are supported, the SCCEEB have recruited a Climate Emergency Programme Manager to oversee the overall work programme.
- Recognising the need for active community engagement, and the central role that changing habits will make to reducing carbon emissions, the SCCEEB has recruited a Communications and Engagement Officer. This officer will oversee and coordinate all external communications and engagement work, ensuring that there is a consistent message across all Suffolk partners.

- Making proposals, totalling £380,000, including a £150,000 match-funding pot, for eight community-focused carbon reduction projects. [Suffolk Climate Action Community Match Funder – Green Suffolk](#)
- Launching the '[Low Impact Living in Suffolk](#)' campaign aimed at homeowners.

2.11.2 The SCCEEB is also working with the Suffolk Office of Data Analytics (SODA) to agree base line data and monitoring and reporting to support progress reporting and continued to progress stakeholder engagement.

2.11.3 The SCEPT recognised that collaboration and behaviour change would be a key approach to carbon reduction and in February 2022, the SPSL agreed to establish theme reference groups, providing a voice to interested stakeholders from the wider community (including Suffolk-based businesses) to broaden the influence and capability of the officer groups.

2.11.4 County-wide work has already led to beneficial cross-over with West Suffolk based projects. Warm Homes Suffolk was launched in January 2022. This initiative has been set up by councils in Suffolk to help households implement measures that reduce their fuel bills and also reduce carbon footprints, helping the county towards its target of Net Zero by 2030. The scheme has a funding pot of £2.7 million provided by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. By August 200 properties in West Suffolk are expected to receive insulation upgrades.

2.11.5 The EMG will continue to monitor Suffolk-wide actions and other external opportunities that may influence or benefit West Suffolk's activities as they arise.

2.12 **UK100 membership**

2.12.1 The council has also signed up for membership with UK100, a national network for highly ambitious UK locally elected leaders who are committed to cleaner, more powerful communities.

2.12.2 Membership further validates our commitment to climate challenges and provides an opportunity for collective advocacy to government, together with practical benefits of access to studies, peer support and networks. The council also qualifies for the UK100 Countryside Climate Network (CCN), which will link West Suffolk into other rural authorities for shared learning opportunities.

2.13 **Key Successes at West Suffolk**

In addition to securing the decarb budget, other successes against the taskforce action plan include:

2.13.1

Theme	Key successes
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In total, £11 million of funding secured to deliver energy efficiency improvements in low income and energy inefficient homes across Suffolk. The council will continue to deliver and promote the scheme until March 2023. By August 200 properties in West Suffolk are expected to receive insulation upgrades. Aiming to receive the Minimum Energy Efficiency report in August or September 2022. This will provide useful data, including performance and necessary outcomes to meet target.
Renewables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the council's first installation in 2012, we have installed 15,000 roof mounted solar panels, with an installed capacity of 5MW. • Mildenhall Hub is now opened and operational, with an additional 130kW PV system installed in the autumn of 2021. An 130kW PV was also installed on Vicon House. • In February 2021, an air source heat pump was installed at Bury St Edmunds bus station, as well as in Nowton park March 2022.
Travel and transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67 EVs can now charge simultaneously on council installed chargers and these delivered enough electricity to drive 353,170 miles. • A new West Suffolk EV public charging installation guide has been developed and agreed by the council. This guide seeks to provide a template for the installation of future public EV charging infrastructure across the district.
Council consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new e-learning course, Climate Change Awareness, has been produced and incorporated into induction materials for staff. This course benefits from materials produced as part of the main intern project in September 2021. • During 2021, new automated meter readers (AMR) have been installed at key sites, which will provide better quality data for baseline position. • Cabinet agreed a new environmental ask as part of the update to the council's Procurement Policy. An environment quality

	question will be included in all tenders and will require more detail with size (and risk) of contract.
Waste and recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The work undertaken to reduce waste rejections has achieved sustained reductions over the last 12 months. In April 2022, a rejection free month was achieved for the first time since 2019. This means that domestic practices have been positively altered since COVID-19 increased demand on waste services, resulting in more rejections overall.
Environment and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 318 trees and 560 whips have been planted across the district over the course of 2021-22, supporting the Queen’s Green Canopy campaign Council has made better use of technology in mapping and analysing assets. As part of intern project in September 2021, all water courses in West Suffolk have been mapped, improving our intelligence of blue assets. Work and engagement with community groups and residents continues to develop, with a number of initiatives and campaigns undertaken including the Red Lodge Heath volunteer group and the Bury Water Meadow Group. Since March 2022, the number of volunteers and the number of volunteer hours have been incorporated into our KPI targets, reporting on a quarterly basis.

2.14 **Potential new actions**

2.14.1 As work has progressed against the action plan, new opportunities or areas for development have been identified. Listed below are suggested new actions it is recommended are included in the Action Plan:

2.14.2 **Travel and transport:**

New action (under action 4.8): Establish a clear long-term vision for the council’s fleet – the aim is to ensure that an appropriate framework is in place to move to new technologies when they are available.

Altered action (under action 4.6): Explore options for using EVs within the [Vertas] pool car service and ensure that the number of vehicles is suitable to meet service demand.

2.14.3 **Council consumption:**

New action (under action 3.5): Building on the work undertaken to improve the councils carbon footprint by reducing emissions from digital activities, work with IT to investigate the viability of using a 'Green Host' and ensure that a green host is considered when the IT server contract etc. is up for renewal in 2023.

Altered action (under action 1.6): Incorporate communications into environment management, ensuring that regular internal communications are coming from this work; develop methods to monitor levels of awareness and activity among staff, as well as open 'conversation space' to allow for suggestions, ideas and intelligence from all areas of the council.

2.14.4 **Environment and biodiversity:**

New action (under action 6.2): Due to the increased costs of a viable glyphosate alternative, investigate the viability of how increased costs of alternatives can be met (such as weeding less frequently).

New action (under action 2.6): Investigate and develop business case for grounds maintenance equipment renewal with green equipment.

3. **Alternative options that have been considered**

- 3.1 The council has committed to work to achieve net-zero by 2030. This plan will continue to evolve as new technology and innovations develop to support this goal. At this stage no alternative options have been considered.

4. **Risks associated with the proposals**

- 4.1 There is an ongoing risk that the resources required to implement the action plan will not be available. However, this risk will be monitored by the EMG, with any opportunities for securing external resources monitored and pursued as appropriate, and Cabinet advised of any serious delays in implementation or resource requirements.

5. **Implications arising from the proposals**

Please note that the implications below focus on the outcomes of the action plan at present. As more detailed actions are developed (where appropriate) specific assessment will need to be undertaken to evaluate the implications of each action.

5.1 **Financial**

There are no specific financial implications arising from this

report. Where individual projects require investment, this will be a separate report.

5.2 **Legal Compliance**

No implications

5.3 **Personal Data Processing**

No implications

5.4 **Equalities**

The Taskforce expect that equality impacts should be positive as a result of their work, however this would need to be subject to further assessment based on each action.

5.5 **Crime and Disorder**

No implications

5.6 **Environment or Sustainability**

The recommendations will have a positive impact on the environment.

5.7 **HR or Staffing**

No implications from this report; further activity may require additional staff to support, and this will be subject to business cases or separate requests.

5.8 **Changes to existing policies**

The report reflects the changes to the Procurement Policy

5.9 **External organisations (such as businesses, community groups)**

The Taskforce's recommendations specifically state potential partner organisations that will need to be involved with implementing recommendations, such as Air Quality. Officers maintain a dialogue with partner organisations.

6. **Appendices referenced in this report**

6.1 Appendix A – Environment and Climate Change Action Plan – Updated

6.2 Appendix B – West Suffolk Environmental Statement 2021-2022

7. **Background documents associated with this report**

7.1 [CAB/WS/20/045](#) – West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Taskforce – Final Report

7.2 [CAB/WS/20/046](#) – Report of the Env and Climate Change TF – Environment and Biodiversity Emergency

7.3 [The Suffolk Emergency Plan – our journey to carbon neutrality.](#)