

Environment & Sustainability Update, December 2023

Update from Environment and Sustainability Reference Group.
(ESRG)



Synopsis

The progress against the delivery of commitments in the Net Zero Carbon 2030 strategy will be reported on a quarterly basis through the council's Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee. The aim is to provide reporting of progress that is transparent, easily accessible to the community and ensures accountability to residents.

This report provides an up-to-date summary of overall progress and performance on the delivery of commitments set out in the Environment and Sustainability [Action Plan](#).

The progress updates on commitments are organised according to the five different programme workstreams that are responsible for the delivery of actions. These workstreams are:



Biodiversity



Housing (retrofit)



**Community and
Communications**



Planning and Regulation



Corporate Action

Notable tasks and projects

The following report is not a replacement for the adopted Environment and Climate Change Action Plan. Any new or revised actions agreed as a result of this update will be reflected in the action plan going forward. Once any potential next steps are agreed by the Group and/or Cabinet as applicable, timescales, resource implications, etc will be identified.

Workstream	Notable task or project	Update
Biodiversity	Increase tree cover	The application to the Local Authority Treescape fund was successful with a total grant of £27,000 being awarded. The grant will enable us to plant around 120-130 semi-mature trees to replace those which have had to be removed because they are either dead, dying or dangerous.
	Green Flag status	The Green Flag award process is now completed for 2023. West Suffolk gained 6 green flag awards – East Town Park, Brandon Country Park, Abbey Gardens, West Stow Country Park, Nowton Park & Aspal Close.
	Green equipment	East Town Park have purchased a new Stihl RMA 765v battery powered cut and collect mower. Electric excavator at Bury Cemetery has also been received.
Communities and Communications	Air quality community initiatives	Joint Suffolk bid submitted for DEFRA Air Quality Grant.
	Solar for business	40 businesses in pipeline for legal agreements. Proactive marketing therefore paused temporarily. Tenders completed for eight more sites.
	Reverse Vending Machines Pilot	Work being undertaken to scope pilot. Funding has been made available, including contributions from partners. Confirming suitable locations.

	Reduce waste and improve recycling	Resources and Waste Strategy (RAWS) update: Following delays, the Government has recently announced the key requirements for RAWS and 'simpler recycling'. Representations and responses to the latest consultation are being made through the Suffolk Waste Partnership.
	SCC Walking and Cycling funding	Bury St Edmunds East-West route design work allocated funding and currently under consultation and response is being prepared. It is one of only two routes outside Ipswich.
	Community events	Community networking climate change event held in Bury, 8 November.
Corporate Action	Green Travel Plan	Green Travel survey launched between 2 October to 5 November to inform updated Green Travel Plan for West Suffolk House (WSH).
	EV charging at depots	New supplier Drax has been identified
	Renewable Energy at Council sites	Following site visit with consultants a quote has been received for designing a new Ground Source Heat Pump (GSHP) heating system for WSH. Bid submitted to Sport England funding to cover various decarbonisation measures for leisure centres.
	Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund	An expression of interest form has been developed for first call on scheme - LED conversion of parish-owned streetlights. Engagement is taking place with parish and town councils to confirm interest in the scheme and organise initial scoping of streetlight improvement requirements (see update in achievements section below). Parishes are also being asked to suggest other uses of the fund.
Housing (retrofit)	Retrofit programmes	Funding secured from a number of government schemes that is delivering £13 million of Energy Efficiency measures to homes across Suffolk (for example, £1.8 million for social housing). Working through 'Warm Homes Suffolk' to promote and deliver through seven different schemes - low-income householders can benefit from these.
	Housing Improvement Loans Scheme	Awaiting launch for county wide scheme that is being procured by Suffolk County Council

Planning and Regulatory	Planning Application Checklist	Discussion around the emerging local plan policy has also highlighted the potential for an enhanced energy statement (referred to as a sustainability statement rather than a checklist), which is currently in development. However, the checklist would still be used for smaller development.
	Local Plan	Draft Submission policies (including ecology and landscape elements) have been reviewed by Local Plan Working Group and ready for consultation.

Overall summary of progress

Overview of the progress on delivery of commitments set out in the Action Plan since the last report to Cabinet.

Key progress highlights

- Work has commenced on the new actions agreed by Cabinet (and recommended by the Working Group), with good progress made on the Reverse Vending Machine Pilot and the Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund.
- In Newmarket, work to improve access along the Yellow Brick Road has progressed – paths have been extended, a bridge installed and opened to the public, and the guarded orchard has been surveyed.
- The results for 'Anglia in Bloom' were announced on the 20th September, with the following awards being made:
 - Bury St Edmunds (Visited by Anglia in Bloom judge)
 - Abbey Gardens – Best public open space.
 - Bury St Edmunds – Gold in Large Town award.
 - Nowton Park – Silver.
 - Brandon (Electronic application)
 - Brandon Country Park – Gold.
 - Burial ground – Silver.
 - St Peters churchyard – Gold.
 - The Wedge – Best floral display.
- Brandon was also in the national 'Britain in Bloom' UK finals and won two awards – the Town category and a Gold award.
- West Suffolk took part in the Recycling week (16-22 October), 'The Big Recycling Hunt' national campaign and the operations team have attended events in support of Suffolk School Skills Days in Haverhill, Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds, teaching children about recycling and showing them around a bin collection lorry.
- A new water KPI has been added to corporate performance monitoring.
- New signage has been added to West Suffolk House, Mildenhall Hub and Haverhill house, plus an intranet post will be published to inform staff on correct recycling practices.
- Local Plan is currently on track for submission and consultation in 2024.
- There will be a 'Safe Suffolk Renters' Stock Condition Survey in 2024.
- The Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund, agreed by Council on 26 September 2023, was formally launched on 16 October.

- The initial stage of the project is focused on engagement with parish and town councils – specifically, informing them of the details of the fund and asking them to complete “Expressions of Interest” forms.
- At least 18 council own streetlights. Of this number, as of December, seven councils have already signed up and two have indicated that they are not eligible for the scheme. The others are due to consider the scheme at upcoming meetings.
- Suffolk Public Sector Leaders have allocated a further **£1.96m** to deliver the Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan and we will continue to link West Suffolk initiatives to benefit from this.

Ongoing issues

- Finalising the environmental evidence base for the Local Plan will be a priority for the Council in this next reporting period.
- There also remains a strong case to include retrofitted housing improvements in any new Housing Strategy, ensuring that both existing and any new schemes are included within a new strategic vision.
- We are working through technical issues with suppliers to improve public electric vehicle charging.