

# West Suffolk Environment and Climate Change Update Report: 2024

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| <b>Report number:</b>      | <b>CAB/WS/24/038</b>   |              |
| <b>Report to and date:</b> | <b>Cabinet</b>   | 23 July 2024 |
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**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 Cabinet:**

- 1. confirms its commitment to addressing the Climate and Environment Emergency and, in particular, to reaching net zero by 2030 in respect of Council operations.**
- 2. Approves the review, and implementation, of the action plan as set out in sections 2 and 3 of Report number CAB/WS/24/038, together with the draft plan at Appendix A.**

## 1. Context to this report

- 1.1 In 2019, West Suffolk Council set up an Environment and Climate Change Taskforce and declared both a climate and environmental emergency. That taskforce made recommendations to Cabinet and an action plan was agreed. The council committed to achieving Net Zero in respect of its own operations by 2030. The action plan was then reviewed annually and reported to Cabinet in July.
- 1.2 In June 2023, the Leader of the Council announced a new working group to review the existing action plan, and in particular to consider additional actions the council could take to support and encourage West Suffolk residents and businesses to address the climate and environmental challenge.
- 1.3 Since then, the working group has become the Environment and Sustainability Reference Group (ESRG), chaired by Councillor Julia Wakelam, which reviews the progress of key tasks and projects of the Environment and Climate Change Action Plan, the council's performance and Annual Environmental Statement.

## 2. Progress against actions

- 2.1 The agreed action plan is structured under the following themes:
  - **Communities and Communication.** The Committee on Climate Change reports that, to achieve carbon neutrality, 62 percent of emissions reductions will come from behaviour change. Technological change alone is not enough; residents and businesses need to be encouraged and supported to make positive changes to their behaviours. This section recognises the importance of all parts of West Suffolk being involved in the plan and for communications and engagement to take centre stage. One of the objectives of the second phase of Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund grants (approved by Cabinet on 9 July 2024) will be to start a large number of community conversations about, and raise the profile of, energy saving measures.
  - **Corporate Action.** This section brings together the activity that the council is taking to address its own environmental performance, for example in regard to fleet electrification, less use of resources and decarbonisation of its buildings and our role in waste collection.
  - **Existing Housing.** Housing remains a key issue, with over 25 per cent of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions across Suffolk coming from homes. Poorly built and insulated homes contribute the most as well as adversely impacting house dwellers' health and pockets. Whilst planning and building regulations can address the standard of new homes that are built in West Suffolk, the council should do more to support homeowners to improve the efficiency of existing housing stock.

- **Planning and Regulatory.** This theme focuses on the key role of planning, building control, licensing, housing and environmental health play in addressing climate change.
- **Environment and Biodiversity.** This theme brings together all activity that protects and enhances West Suffolk’s natural environment, including land owned by West Suffolk Council.

2.2 Overall, we are trending away from the use of natural gas to electricity. When comparing electric energy to natural gas, there are several factors highlighting the environmental benefits of electric energy.

- Electricity has lower CO2 emissions, particularly as the energy grid converts to renewable generation, whereas natural gas entails a combustion process, which emits CO2.
- In addition, the natural gas extraction process can have significant environmental impacts, including water contamination and habitat disruption, while renewable energy sources have a smaller environmental footprint once installed, as they do not require ongoing extraction of fuel.

The ongoing shift towards renewable electricity further enhances its environmental benefits, making it a more sustainable choice in the long term.

2.3 In addition, Suffolk County Council has successfully completed the conversion of the final 500 or so West Suffolk Council (WSC) owned streetlights to light-emitting diode (LED) technology. The resulting emissions savings from this conversion have not yet been incorporated into the current emissions savings metrics. This significant achievement marks the completion of a comprehensive streetlight upgrade initiative for West Suffolk Council that began last year and was extended to the conversion of parish and town council owned lights through the Decarbonisation Initiatives Fund. Suffolk County Council (SCC) has also been converting its streetlights. By March 2025, the aim is that all council-owned streetlights in West Suffolk will be LED.

2.4 The draft 2024-2025 Action Plan is included as Appendix A. In considering the current plan and current challenges there are a number of specific opportunities the ESG want to highlight, and these have been included in the draft plan.

2.5 **Carbon emissions show a slight increase, although they remain lower than pre-pandemic levels. Further analysis can be found in the Environmental Statement (Appendix B).**

- **Total emissions up 1.3 percent compared to 2023-2024**
- **Renewable energy generated up 68 percent compared to 2019-2020**
- **Total owned vehicle emissions down 12 percent compared to 2019-2020**
- **Business travel down 47 percent compared to 2019-2020**

- **Total water consumption down 3.4 percent compared to 2019-2020**
- **The recycling rate 73 percent, down 5 percent compared to last year**
- **Total West Suffolk House waste down 64 percent compared to 2019-2020**
- **During 2023-2024, we held six Green Flag status parks**
- **Public electric vehicle (EV) chargers installed by WSC can support 70 EVs charging at the same time**
- **Energy delivered to drivers powered 421,490 miles**
- **136 trees and 600 whips planted during 2023-2024.**

- 2.6 The Carbon Budget agreed at 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/hydrogen solutions. These are reflected in the strategic action plan (Appendix A). As this work progresses, the aim will be to develop the carbon budget further, allowing us to breakdown carbon targets in more detail across the key emissions areas, and develop more precise targets for each.
- 2.7 The carbon budget periods are:
- a. April 2020 – March 2024 – steady annual emission rate of 4,675 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/year
  - b. April 2024 – March 2028 – steady annual emission rate of 2,484 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/year
  - c. April 2028 – March 2030 – steady annual emission rate of 840 tCO<sub>2</sub>e/year
  - d. Zero emissions in 2030-2031.
- 2.8 For year 2023-2024, the council is in the second period of the carbon budget. Emissions stand at 4,979tCO<sub>2</sub>e against the target budgets to be achieved 2028 of 2,484tCO<sub>2</sub>e to maintain trajectory to net zero. The data shows that a key contributor to the increase in emissions is from the council's leisure operations delivered by Abbeycroft Leisure. There has been a 0.5 percent decrease in emissions from council activity and a 4.6 percent increase in emissions from Abbeycroft Leisure compared to 2022-2023. A review of all leisure centres is currently underway to identify building improvements that will address emissions. The council had identified a range of improvements and made an application to the Government's swimming pool fund in 2023-2024 but was only awarded £35,000 to deliver some filtration improvements. Proposals will therefore need to be brought forward as part of the council's Net Zero Investment Fund as budgets allow.
- 2.9 It is also worth noting that the council's waste collection vehicle fleet is projected to increase in the coming year due to new government 'Simpler Recycling' requirements. These regulations, aimed at improving waste

management practices and recycling, have placed an additional operational burden on waste collection services. Consequently, to comply with these standards, the number of waste collection vehicles needed is expected to increase. Given the challenges of collecting waste in a rural area, this growth in the fleet size will likely lead to higher overall emissions, highlighting the need for balancing regulatory compliance with sustainable practices to mitigate environmental impact.

## 2.10 Key Successes at West Suffolk

In addition to securing the Decarb Budget, other successes against the taskforce action plan include:

| Theme                         | Key successes   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Housing                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over the course of 2023-2024, 151 homes, under Flagship, have been retrofitted.</li> <li>• Over 2023-2024, the Home Upgrade Grant scheme has delivered the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10 properties completed.</li> <li>○ 34 applications approved (works progressing)</li> <li>○ 150 applications awaiting approval from contractors/ awaiting start date.</li> <li>○ Total Investment £121,658.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The proposed Housing Strategy includes housing improvement commitments that includes retrofit.</li> </ul>  |
| Communities and Communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over the course of the year, the council has been involved in numerous national, regional, and local campaigns, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Food Savvy – 23 October 2023 for four weeks social media and advertising campaign.</li> <li>○ Glass – ‘Its better in the bank’ refresher in January via social media.</li> <li>○ Suffolk School Skills Days in October 2023 – The team attended events in Haverhill, Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds. Teaching children about recycling and showing them around a bin collection lorry.</li> <li>○ Food Waste Week (18th - 24th March 2024).</li> <li>○ Stop Food Waste Day (24th April) social media campaign.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Planning and regulation       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The emerging Local Plan has a strengthened Environmental Policy.</li> <li>• A new tree strategy and green infrastructure policies were developed and submitted to the Local Plan process.</li> <li>• The Planning team will recruit a new Ecologist post over the summer 2024.</li> </ul>  |
| Corporate action              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New water KPI added to corporate performance monitoring in October 2023.</li> </ul>  |

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|                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New signage has been added to West Suffolk House, Mildenhall Hub and Haverhill House. In addition, an intranet post was published in January 2024 to inform staff on correct recycling practices. The waste and recycling intranet page has also been updated.</li> <li>• The decarbonisation fund has been used to install a variety of energy saving measures across the council’s estate including Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP), low energy hand dryers and LED lighting. In June 2024, ASHP and PV were installed at 6 Aspal Way, Beck Row.</li> </ul>                           |
| <p>Environment and biodiversity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secured £27,000 from the Local Authority Treescape Fund to plant 112 semi-mature heavy standard trees. The grant funding also covers three years’ worth of watering and aftercare.</li> <li>• Completed projects include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Bridge and Access Project in Newmarket.</li> <li>○ Stripped and replanted the Trevor Hagger Gardens in Mildenhall, with certain amenity greens also enhanced.</li> <li>○ Landscaping work in Rought Avenue, Brandon as well as work to improve access by the Lake in Brandon County Park.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

### 3. **Potential new actions**

3.1 As work has progressed against the action plan, new opportunities or areas for development have been identified by the Environment and Sustainability Reference Group (ESRG). Some of these actions will support the wider reduction in emissions across West Suffolk, while others focus on the council’s own operations and emissions and will contribute to the accelerating carbon reduction to meet the trajectory to net zero. Listed below are suggested new actions it is recommended are included in the Action Plan.

#### 3.2 **Communities and communications**

NEW ACTION: Funding monitoring process - Establish a process to collate and monitor internal and external funding that supports climate change or environmental initiatives.

NEW ACTION: Green taxi fleet - Review emission requirements as part of the wider evaluation of the taxi policy.

#### 3.3 **Corporate action**

NEW ACTION: Fully scope potential process to phase out council usage of gas, considering financial needs and timescales.

NEW ACTION: Develop a business case to end the use of Combined Heat and Power plant (CHPs) in all council leisure centres to be ready for the first of the current contract end dates in 2028 and/or align with the current refurbishment project for Bury Leisure Centre.

NEW ACTION: Explore costs, opportunities, and implications for a mixed freighter fleet.

#### 3.4 **Environment and biodiversity**

NEW ACTION: Scope project focused on cleaner waterways - Working in partnership with local groups to consider ways to ensure waterways are clean and free of waste.

#### 3.5 **Housing**

NEW ACTION: Ensure that all decisions are underpinned by evidence and performance measures are put in place. Make good use of data sources including from Suffolk Office of Data Analytics' Environment and Housing reports.

NEW ACTION: Scope methods to better utilise data to support the improvement and retrofit of current homes and buildings in West Suffolk.

#### 3.6 **Planning and regulation**

NEW ACTION: Scope and explore opportunities to require more stringent building standards than the national standard to ensure efficient buildings in advance of next local plan.

NEW ACTION: Scope and explore more efficient land usage – specifically investigate the possibility of building higher in order to maximise efficiency of space in building.

NEW ACTION: Look to develop and adopt Climate Adaptation Plans to ensure that new buildings are able to deal with the effects of climate change – such as flooding.

NEW ACTION: Review planning approaches related to active travel, including consideration of pedestrianisation of some town centre areas and developing existing links between WSC and Suffolk County Council, as the authority responsible for highways and public transport.

## 4. **Alternative options that have been considered**

- 4.1 There is no “do nothing” option. The ESRG members are all aware of national and international reports and events, in particular the reports of the [Climate Change Committee \(theccc.org.uk\)](https://theccc.org.uk).

## 5. **Consultation and engagement undertaken**

- 5.1 The ESRG has not undertaken business or community engagement.

## **6. Risks associated with the proposals**

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

## **7. Implications arising from the proposals**

- 7.1 Financial - There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Where individual projects require investment, this will be a separate report.
- 7.2 Legal compliance- No implications
- 7.3 Personal data processing – No implication.
- 7.4 Equalities - The working group 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.
- 7.5 Crime and disorder – No implications
- 7.6 Safeguarding – No implications
- 7.7 Environment or sustainability - The recommendations will have a positive impact on the environment.
- 7.8 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.
- 7.9 Changes to existing policies – No implications
- 7.10 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) - The working group's recommendations specifically state potential partner organisations that will need to be involved with implementing recommendations. Officers maintain a dialogue with partner organisations.

## **8. Appendices referenced in this report**

- 8.1 Appendix A – Environment and Climate Change Action Plan Update
- 8.2 Appendix B – Environmental Statement 2023-2024

## **9. Background documents associated with this report**

- 9.1 14 January 2020 Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/20/009](#)

Cabinet – 23 July 2024 – CAB/WS/24/038

- 9.2 21 July 2020 Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/20/045](#)
- 9.3 20 July 2021 Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/21/032](#)
- 9.4 19 July 2022 Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/22/040](#)
- 9.5 19 September 2023 Cabinet Report number: [CAB/WS/23/039](#)