

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 23rd January 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Assistant to the Chief Executive

PORTFOLIO: Climate Change

SUBJECT: Climate Change Update

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on related activities aimed at reducing the Council's impact on the environment and reducing CO2 emissions from Council activities.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report and the ongoing work be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 CARBON FOOTPRINT

3.2 Since it started to measure its carbon emissions in 2006/2007, overall emissions have reduced in the Council's operations from 26,338 tonnes of CO2 to 8740 tonnes.

3.3 The Council was given guidelines by the Government in 2009, that public bodies would aim to reduce their carbon emissions by 30% of their 2009 carbon emission baseline by 2020. The Council calculated its baseline carbon emissions in 2009 as 26,825 carbon tonnes. In reporting year 2020, the Council had reduced its carbon emissions to 11,354 carbon tonnes. This was a reduction of 57%.

3.4 In 2017, the Government reset the baseline in the expectation that public bodies would reduce their carbon emissions by 50% by 2031. The Council's 2017 baseline was 14,811 carbon tonnes. In reporting year 2022/23, the Council had managed to reduce its carbon emissions to 8740 tonnes. This is a reduction of 40.9%.

3.5 In 2022/23 emissions were 9327 tonnes of CO2. For 2022/23, the overall emissions have reduced to 8740 tonnes, is a further annual reduction of 6.29%.

3.6 The above figures do need to take account of the fact that since the Council started to measure its carbon footprint in 2006/07 and

Academy Schools are no longer accounted for in the figures and Care Homes are now included in the figures and the ongoing decarbonisation of the grid has a beneficial impact on the figures. The Council is proceeding with the decarbonisation of its care homes with St Luke's and St Patrick's care homes planned over a two-year period.

Emission from specific Sectors CO2 (Tonnes)	
Fleet Transport	1465
Business Mileage	187
Street Lighting	992
Corporate & School Buildings	6096

- 3.7 In all areas, emissions have reduced with the exception of Fleet Transport.
- 3.8 It should be noted that while we continue to use fossil fuels for road transport the amount of co2 will continue to rise due to the ever-increasing requirements of Council operations. The Council's vehicle fleet mileage increases by circa 5.5% year on year.
- 3.9 Decarbonisation of the vehicle fleet will be extremely financially challenging firstly in terms of installing the necessary infrastructure and secondly acquisition of the appropriate vehicles/plant and machinery to ensure the road to net zero does not have a negative impact on operational efficiency. There is also a need to seek transitional funding from central government.
- 4.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN**
- 4.1 In April 2022, the Council adopted a revised Climate Change Strategy. The Action Plan covers the period 2022-2027 and provides a clear direction for the Council over the coming years. It sets a target to be net zero by 2040 and includes both short-term and longer-term actions. It provides an initial focus on decarbonising energy use by buildings, transport, waste and enhancing the Borough's blue/green infrastructure. It also seeks to embed climate change in council decision-making and seeks in the long term to develop partnership working as a lead into a borough-wide approach to tackling climate change. Whilst the Council has successfully implemented a range of actions aimed at reducing its carbon footprint capacity and the financial resources to implement projects remains a key challenge. A Climate Change Funding Bulletin is issued monthly to leads in each area which identifies potential funding streams that could be applied for to support the implementation of projects.
- 5.0 **KEY PROJECTS COMPLETED OR COMMENCED DURING 2023**
- 5.1 **Buildings**

- 5.1.1 We have undertaken 13 feasibility studies on Council Building to assess the decarbonisation process. Bids have been submitted to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme in respect of 5 sites in two separate bids. One covering St Lukes & St Patrick's care homes, the other covering Runcorn Town Hall, Picow Farm Depot and Kingsway Learning Centre. The outcome of bids will be known towards the end of January 2024.
- 5.1.2 An initial desk top study has been completed to assess 24 sites for the suitability of Solar PV. The initial study shows estimate that some 2,259kWp of solar PV could be installed on the roofs subject to roof studies and grid connections. The total cost of the programme would be circa £2.27m excludes any supervision and clerk of works activity that the Council may undertake at each site. Based upon the assumptions made in terms of the use of energy on site and exports sales, inflation, and debt repayments the programme would have a 14.3% IRR and an NPV of £3.33M after all costs. The study will be developing in the coming year into a rolling four-year programme of solar PV investment.
- 5.1.3 The Council has approved plans to extend the existing Solar Farm at the former St Michael's Golf Course, connecting it to the new Leisure Centre in Moor Lane, Lower House Lane, and Municipal Building. The project is also looking to provide EV charging infrastructure at the Depot and will provide a renewal source energy for the Air Source Heat pumps to be installed at the Leisure Centre, which will significantly reduce the carbon footprint of the building. The Council has approved funding and consultants have been appointed to support the development of a planning application for the extension and to undertake design work to enable bids to be invited. The Planning application will be submitted in early February with bids invited towards the end of 2024.
- 5.1.4 The existing 1MW solar farm and roof top solar schemes at the DCBL Stadium, Brookvale and Rutland House continue to operate within expectations and generate ongoing income streams. Some of the income from the schemes will be reinvested in the Building Decarbonisation Schemes highlighted in Section 5.1.
- 5.1.5 The Key Design features for new Leisure Centre were agreed and include no gas supply to building, with all plant powered via electricity with some coming from the Solar Farm when the work is completed.
- 5.1.6 Feasibility work is ongoing in respect of various options for rationalising our main office accommodation. A report will be presented to Council in 2024 with recommendations.

5.2 **Transport**

5.2.1 Four upgraded replacement EV charging points for both Lowerhouse Lane and Picow Farm depots have now been installed. This will provide a faster more efficient charge rate from the previous chargers. The extension of the Solar Farm will provide for the installation of additional EV charging infrastructure at Lowerhouse Lane and enable the Council to further consider the electrification of its vehicle fleet. A Feasibility Study to assess the introduction of low carbon emission vehicles at all Council sites that operate fleet vehicles / plant & machinery will be undertaken in 2024.

5.2.2 In late 2024 early 2025 we anticipate a new Electric Vehicle Charging point (22kw/50kw) to be installed in the Runcorn High Street area. The addition of a publicly accessible Charging Point, from which partial funding has been awarded from the UK investment Fund and compliments the Sustainable Transport corridor development on High Street which will see improvements to the Public Realm within High Street and a number of smaller interventions in neighbouring roads, as part of the wider Reconnecting Runcorn project.

5.3 **Climate Change Awareness**

5.3.1 The Council has embedded climate change in its decision-making process in a range of ways, this includes:

- The appointment of a Portfolio Holder for Climate Change on the Council's Executive Board.
- The establishment of a Climate Change Advisory Group of officers has been established to advise the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change.
- From February 2023, all Board reports include a climate change implications section.

5.3.2 The Council's Training Team has developed an e-learning Climate Change course for Officers and Members with a view to this been launched in early 2024. The short course is divided into short modules covering the global and local impact of climate change, what action Halton is taking and what can staff and members do to help?

5.3.3 The training is designed to be interactive and encourage staff and members to consider small changes in behaviour to help them reduce their own carbon footprint. Further training will emerge as more partnership working takes place.

5.3.4 To help keep people better informed on the Council's efforts to

address climate change, a dedicated space within the Council website was launched towards the end of 2022. The aim is to provide a single location on the Council website where actions on climate change can be found and where wider engagement can be encouraged in the future. Consideration will be given to how activities can be more widely shared with the public through for example a social media campaign/residents newsletter.

5.4 Open Spaces

- 5.4.1 The Big Halton Forest Project was launched during 2022. Addressing carbon sequestration is a long-term process, so it was agreed to initiate a step increase in tree planting as early as possible in the Action Plan. The result was the concept of The Big Halton Forest.
- 5.4.2 Up to 2030, the aim is to plant an additional 130,000 new trees across Halton above the regular annual planting of circa 1,500 trees. This will include Council owned land and other partners, including eventually the wider community.
- 5.4.3 The first planting season was the Autumn/Winter 2022/2023. The funding and management of the project is underway, with the first year's proposals expected to be met. To date the Council has secured around £300k towards the projects from the following sources:
- LCR Community Environment Fund - awarded circa £30k for planting of 2,000 trees and 3,000 bushes at Factory Lane, Widnes.
 - INEOS Environment Fund - secured £120k to be spent over 5 years as general support for the project.
 - DEFRA Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF). The fund is to enable more trees to be planted, particularly in winter seasons 2023/24 and 2024/25. Awarded £150k to be spent across those 2 years to meet staffing costs for 2 Officers to support the project.
- 5.4.4 Opportunities to secure further funding to deliver the Big Halton Forest remain on-going. Discussions with the Mersey Forest are at an advanced stage, and it is likely that they will become the major delivery vehicle with an interim arrangement put in place in 2024 and a formal rejoining of the Mersey Forest in 2025 onward.
- 5.4.5 Halton Borough Council will retain direction and decision making of the overall project.
- 5.4.6 This is beneficial to the Mersey Forest in increasing the hectares of

land transformed and to the Council in securing significant resources to make more rapid progress in the ambitions of the Big Halton Forest. This will include establishing a more local supplier, orchard development and engaging the farming community.

- 5.4.7 The recruitment of a new tree and woodlands officer in the autumn of 2023 along with the divisional restructuring will also ensure a more rapid development of the Big Halton Forest and other related works from 2024 onward.
- 5.4.8 The first major planting activity resulting from the Big Halton Forest project saw the planting of 2,000 trees and 3,000 bushes in Widnes in early 2023. The second phase of planting will see circa 12,000 trees planted in early 2024. Planting will take place on a combination of Council owned land, housing association, privately owned land, and within a school's grounds.

5.5 **Procurement**

- 5.5.1 To influence the supply chain to improve sustainability in the supply of goods and services all published tenders now include Social, Environmental and Economic considerations.
- 5.5.2 To encourage a locally Based Supply Chain the value thresholds to support local trading opportunities to SME's and VCSE's has been increased.

5.6 **Housing**

- 5.6.1 There are a number of projects that the Council is facilitating to help address Climate Change relating to private and social housing.
- 5.6.2 Since 2021, excluding ECO4, the Council has supported improvements in the local housing stock to encourage residents to access support and grants to improve the energy efficiency of their home, a dedicated space within the Council website was created in early 2022. To date, total Investment (Completed & Planned) is £13,818,980.41, of which (Government Grant secured) £5,841,712.09.
- 5.6.3 The total homes (Completed & Planned) include 890 Homes completed 538 (of which 497 confirmed EPC D - G) Homes planned 352 (of which 303 confirmed EPC D - G).
- 5.6.4 Three candidate Council owned sites have been identified for potential inclusion of a net zero demonstration housing project (Rutland Street, Runcorn Old Town; Priory Meadow, Castlefields; Kingsway, Widnes). This may also include a social value element to share the skills and understanding net zero construction technologies within the Council and with Local schools and colleges.

5.6.5 Any approval for incorporation of net zero demonstration project and the percent of potential homes this would cover, would be sought as part of the established Council land disposal process and would be subject to viability.

5.7 **Green Growth Projects**

5.7.1 The Council is also working with the Liverpool City Region on the Hydrogen Strategy for the Region.

5.7.2 Through the work of the Business Investment Team the Council has established a New Green Growth Network from Oct 2023. This is to support local businesses to secure the economic benefits from the transition to net zero.

5.8 **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)**

5.8.1 Halton's Delivery Plan against the UKSPF allocation includes a Green, Safe, Resilient Communities strand. Halton has been allocated funding for this strand of £301,059 over the next three years.

5.8.2 To date grants of circa 15k have been provided to local groups to improve green space, create wildflower spaces, and develop food growing initiatives.

5.8.3 Plans have been developed to improve the green space in Riddings Lane and the surrounding area.

5.8.4 Funding of 10k has been provided to support the Big Forest Initiative.

5.8.5 A contribution was made to the Eco Fest event held in Victoria Park in August 2023. It is hoped this will become an annual event. Funding grants of 54K were also received from the LCR Community Environment Funding delivery of a climate cafe in Victoria Park, a bike project operated by the local veterans' group and the Big Forest.

5.9 **Biodiversity Net Gain**

5.9.1 Despite delays throughout 2023 by central government, the early part of 2024 will see the Biodiversity Duty come into force on local authorities and other public bodies as a result of the Environment Act 2021.

5.9.2 This will include a review of the relevant council policies to ensure delivery of the duty and a local nature recovery strategy which is being developed with the Liverpool City Region.

5.9.3 The Council is also recruiting an Ecologist to assist with the development of the Biodiversity Duty.

5.10 **Planning**

5.10.1 The early part of 2024 will include a consultation on a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) note on Climate Change adaptation and mitigation to support the policies within the approved Local Development Plan.

5.10.2 Work will also commence on a revised Tree and Woodlands Strategy to compliment the Council's efforts to improve greenspaces and Biodiversity and residential and commercial development.

6.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The approach and policies adopted to date are consistent with overall objective in the Corporate Plan.

7.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Investment in energy efficient measures has the potential to reduce the Council's energy costs, reduce carbon emission and generate future income streams or the Council.

8.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

8.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None.

8.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Encouraging investment in energy-efficiency will benefit from lower carbon emissions, job creation, supply chain development and increased competitiveness and security of energy supply.

8.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Reducing CO2 can bring about improved air quality.

8.4 **A Safer Halton**

None.

8.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The transition to a low carbon economy can support the

development of the local economy. Ensuring that future economic growth is decoupled from the consumption of fossil fuels and the inevitable carbon emissions.

9.0 RISK ANALYSIS

Individual schemes would have to be assessed on an individual basis to develop risk registers for each measure.

10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None.

11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The actions within this report support the Council's response to the environment and climate emergency by promoting energy efficiency; limiting/eliminating fossil fuel use for heat, power and transport; limiting/eliminating waste and encouraging re-use of resources and encouraging procurement of local suppliers.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.