

## **Cllr Neil Reeve, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change**

### **Report to Full Council 10 October 2023**

#### **This report reflects the highlights of the Portfolio from Late July to early**

#### **October 2023**

A general activity has been to draft the relevant portfolio items for the upcoming new Corporate Plan.

A second All Member Environmental Services briefing has held on 20 July 2023.

Regular scheduled meetings are being held with Officers. Cllr Pavitt is invited to those that address biodiversity matters.

I supported the Council Chair's charity bicycle ride through the Wards of Uttlesford.

I have attended various meetings of the Herts and Essex Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) which aims to improve our digital connectivity, This includes Charing the Digital Sustainability Special Interest Group.

I have been working on getting my Portfolio's input into the framework of the Draft Local Plan.

Below are summaries of the activities of the Environmental Services, Climate Change, and Biodiversity, and Air Quality work.

#### **Environmental Services**

On 11 September I attended the Essex Waste Partnership - Member Advisory Board, together with the lead Officer. The agenda included:

- Recycling and Waste Performance updates (data and statistics)
- ECC Waste Strategy 2024-2054. The Consultation for this has now gone live (13 Sept to 22 Nov 2023)
- Recycling Centre Bookings. A Consultation on this goes live on 9 Oct 2023 for 6 weeks). Note Uttlesford are in a small minority regarding proposed changes, since most Local Authorities are reporting severe queuing and other problems.
- Progress on the Food Recycling Project. This is being rolled out in Uttlesford in September/October 2023, aiming to reduce quantity of food waste being included with general waste going to landfill.

I have been active in trying to resolve the issues relating to a previous landfill site, South of the Flitch way on the border of Great and Little Canfield. There are a number of open enforcement issues relating to this site. There are also a range of Authorities/Agencies involved. I have been trying to arrange that the various bodies are working together in a coordinated way. The Environment Agency has issued an External Briefing Note dated August 2023 requiring the Landowner to take certain actions. It has been brought to the attention of the Health and Safety Executive.

On Friday 29 Sept I attended a site meeting in Leaden Roding with the Chief Executive and Ward Member Cllr Barker, and various residents, to resolve a green spaces issue.

Finally, as I indicated at the last Full Council meeting (18 July 2023), I acknowledge that there have been some unfortunate cases of lack of waste collection. Prior to 2023 this has been a very reliable service. This is not yet totally resolved. Officers are reviewing existing resourcing levels. A report detailing services pressures, and their mitigations, is being urgently prepared. Communication relating to daily problems is to improve. The Director joined me at an affected Parish Council (Little Hallingbury) meeting on 5 September.

## **Climate Change**

The following bullet points are intended to highlight progress, by our very active team, against the many actions being taken under our Climate Change Action Plan, and associated Biodiversity work, and the Clean Air Project. Note that some of these actions are aimed to directly achieve a result (e.g. reduce emissions, improve air quality etc.), whilst others are aimed at 'leadership by example', encouraging behavioural change, and embedding in the Council corporate structure. I will try not to be so detailed in future.

### **Climate Action Updates:**

#### **Biodiversity**

- Claire Tancell, Principal Ecologist joined UDC in August. Supporting local plan policy development and preparation for Biodiversity Net Gain implementation (*note: Government has now moved implementation date to Jan 24*)
- Preparing for the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy public consultation which is due to commence in November for 6 weeks. UDC have contributed to the biodiversity opportunities map. This was informed by feedback UDC received from residents via the district nature recovery survey undertaken in 2021/22
- Claire taking an active lead on water and river issues.

#### **Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme:**

- We are now open for applications for Round 2 of the Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme.
- Scheme open to community groups, town and parish councils. Grants from £1k up to £35k
- Projects that will reduce carbon emissions, or can be for nature/biodiversity projects
- Closing date midday 4<sup>th</sup> December. Webinar on Thurs, 12<sup>th</sup> October.

#### **Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants**

- Promoting HUG2 (Home Upgrade Grant) and ECOFlex (Energy Efficiency improvements). Referrals now coming through for ECOFlex and process working well. Will provide update in due course re: numbers of retrofit assessments and measures implemented.
- HUG2 referrals currently being directed to Energy Savings Trust until consortium portal open. UDC has £500k allocation/ 31 homes in district - CAB will be supporting us with identifying and supporting residents who meet criteria to apply.

### **Community Energy Uttlesford – taking the next step**

- Uttlesford are part of nationally funded Local Energy Advice Demonstrator programme.
- SW Community Energy will receive funding to deliver this programme over the next 2 years. UDC will be an active partner.
- Will mobilise clusters of rural and semi-rural towns, villages and communities, developing local supply chains to cut domestic carbon emissions, and in doing so create decarbonised, resilient communities.
- Programme will consider home energy efficiency, increasing the uptake of low carbon technologies such as heat pumps and exploring how we can supply our communities with renewable energy locally.
- Officer and Member workshop being planned for late November for key service areas including: planning, finance, economic development, communities.

### **Saffron Walden Clean Air Project**

#### Stakeholder Engagement

- Stakeholder Steering Group held 18<sup>th</sup> September – update on progress to milestones and also planned pollution awareness and public health awareness campaign for wood burning.
- Stakeholder meeting on Transport strategy due to take place November.
- Over 300 residents engaged through library event in September
- Over 800 responses to Air Quality Survey

#### Mobility Schemes

- EV Car Club Contract awarded to CoWheels - a community interest company [Saffron Walden | Co Wheels \(co-wheels.org.uk\)](http://SaffronWalden|CoWheels.co-wheels.org.uk)
- 1<sup>st</sup> vehicle bay @ London Rd – launching 16 October. 2<sup>nd</sup> vehicle bay @ Common Car Park – due to launch Jan 2024.
- All encouraged to sign up now and get free membership plus £25 driving credit.

#### Community Cargo Bike:

- Contract awarded to Peddle My Wheels 'Our Bike' scheme.

- Bike due to launch late November. Residents and businesses able to book via app.

Other:

- Bike Network/Bike Library will be out to procurement shortly. These schemes will launch/go live in Spring 24.
- Kidical Mass / Bike Event – Spring 24. Exploring opportunity to deliver big bang cycle event in the town.

Behaviours Change Projects:

- All Saffron Walden Schools engaged. Families are taking home handheld monitors and undertaking pollution awareness experiments in the town. Data being collected. News story to follow in October.
- Pollution Awareness. More than 12 businesses now engaged. Surveys being undertaken on employee travel, in addition to gathering data on freight and deliveries. Will be working with the Council as one of the largest employers in town. Anti-idling campaign due to commence in November.
- Wood Burning PH Awareness project. Air Quality Survey (over 800 responses), 584 respondents have a wood burning stove or fire. Very high level of wood burning in the town.
- Public Health Awareness Campaign being prepared and expect media and press coverage from mid-December. Will build towards 'Clean Air Night' event 24<sup>th</sup> January.

### **Carbon Literacy Training**

- UDC SMT (Senior Management Team)/CMT (Corporate Management Team) workshop held on 14<sup>th</sup> September. Very positively received. Follow on action plan being developed.
- A similar workshop for Members is due to be promoted shortly – this will take place virtually via Teams in November 2023.

### **Westminster Energy, Environment and Transport Forum**

On 18 July 2023, I attended and spoke at, a half day meeting of this Forum with Title 'Next steps for aviation decarbonisation and zero emission airports'. The session was Chaired by Baroness Foster of Oxtou, Vice-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Future of Aviation. This was in my capacity as Portfolio Holder. I will send the text of my Introductory Remarks, and final priority recommendations, to all Members.

### **A personal climate change note**

I am a Director and Trustee of the East of England Apples and Orchards Project (EEAOP), whose main orchard at West Raynham in Norfolk, contains two trees each of all the varieties (some 260) of heritage apple, pear, plum, gage and cherry trees from the 7 counties of the East of England, including Lincolnshire. I am very fortunate to have the space for a small orchard at home and this contains all the 36 varieties of Essex heritage apples, 3 pears and a plum. This has been a strange year: Very cold spell in the winter. Driest February ever. Wettest March for thirty years. Cool wet April. Warmest June ever. With continuous rain in July and August

(drizzle on St Swithain's Day). Wettest July ever. And recently the hottest September on record. Why note this? I didn't previously think that Climate Change would **quickly** alter the crops that we have grown. After this year I am not so sure. Whilst having the best pear crop for years, apples have been very poor, with large quantities spoiled by 'Brown Rot'.