

Committee: Council

Date: Tuesday, 23
April 2024

Title: Climate Change Action Plan

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Neil Reeve, Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Climate Change

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Summary

1. Uttlesford District Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and we have pledged to take local action to prevent a climate and ecological catastrophe through the development of practices and policies which aim to achieve net zero carbon status by 2030 and to protect and enhance biodiversity in the district.
2. A progress report on the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) was presented at a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 31st January 2023. Concern was raised that there was a lack of clarity about whether the activities and initiatives in the plan were having the desired impact on the UDC net zero commitment.
3. A review of the CCAP was proposed and agreed, with an objective to develop a more focused delivery plan and updated set of actions. Following the Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Management Team agreed that an updated CCAP would be developed and agreed by 31st March 2024.
4. This paper provides a highlight report on the UDC Climate Change programme including achievements over the last 12 months and presents the proposed updated Climate Change Action plan for April 2024 to March 25, detailing key programme priorities, activities, and measures of success.
5. This report is to be considered at Scrutiny Committee on 16 April 2024 and the Committee have been invited to comment on the Action Plan. Furthermore, Cabinet are considering the report on 18 April 2024 for approval. The Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Climate has requested that the Climate Change Action Plan be brought to full Council for members information.

Recommendations

- I. To note the achievements and progress made delivering the UDC Climate Change Action Plan in 2023/24 as set out below.
- II. To note highlights, arising issues, follow-on actions, and the updated Climate Change Action Plan proposed by the Climate Change, Lead Officer, to be delivered April 2024 to March 25. *Appendix 1.*
- III. To note the updated Climate Change Action Plan.

Financial Implications

6. The Council previously agreed a specific climate change budget of £1,000,000 budget over 3 years.
7. To date a total of £842,000 of the climate Change Reserve budget has been committed or spent. Of this expenditure £300,000 was agreed to provide grants for community projects that will deliver on the Council's climate action priorities, via the Zero Carbon Communities Fund (note that in Round 2 funding of £84,371.15 was agreed from the Rural England Prosperity Fund for projects that met criteria for community net zero infrastructure. A total of £226,721 funding has been awarded as grants from the Climate Reserve Budget to date).
8. The Council are in receipt of a DEFRA Air Quality grant of £517k to deliver the Saffron Walden Clean Air project.

Background Papers

9. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report:

[The Council Climate Action Strategy and Climate Action Plan.](#)

Impact

- 10.

Communication/Consultation	<p>'Take Action on Climate Change' is a Corporate Priority. Progress against actions is overseen by the Corporate Management Team.</p> <p>Regular update reports are presented to the Corporate Management Team for direction and comment.</p> <p>The CCAP is underpinned by a robust supporting communication and engagement plan.</p> <p>The DEFRA Air Quality project reports to the Saffron Walden Clean Air Stakeholder Steering Group.</p>
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Community Safety	The health effects of climate change have grown significantly, with health threats from heat, flooding, and food security. Building community resilience and adapting to climate change are integral to the CCAP.
Equalities	Evidence suggests Climate change will disproportionately impact the most vulnerable in our communities. Scoping and delivery of climate change action takes account of a range of impacts including health and wellbeing and fuel poverty.
Health and Safety	n/a
Human Rights/Legal Implications	<p>2008 Climate Change Act commitment to bring all greenhouse gas emissions in the UK to net zero by 2050.</p> <p>The council also have responsibilities under the Environment Act, to protect our environment, clean up our air and rivers and boost nature.</p>
Sustainability	To successfully deliver the Council Climate Crisis Strategy all council committees must consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when making decisions; and develop and implement policies and strategies as required.
Ward-specific impacts	The council have a responsibility to lead and influence action on climate change and biodiversity restoration across the district.
Workforce/Workplace	<p>A new council operational 'Climate Change Board' has been agreed to oversee the delivery of UDC actions on Climate Change across all key services and teams.</p> <p>The Council Corporate plan includes a commitment to providing carbon literacy training for all staff.</p>

Situation

Climate Change Action Plan – Achievements

12. The existing CCAP describes actions that were due to be completed during the financial year April 2022-March 2023 with other actions marked as 'beyond this period or ongoing'. This action plan has been reviewed, and actions marked as 'closed', 'complete' or 'open' (see *Appendix 2*). We have highlighted actions within the plan that will be taken forward or updated in the new annual CCAP April 2024 to March 2025 (see *Appendix 1*).

Summary highlights of progress against the existing action plan as follows.

Decarbonisation of Council Operations

Over the last year we have achieved the following:

13. Successful Social Housing De-Carbonisation Fund (SHDF) grant application, securing over £3.8million in funding, which will deliver a programme of works and retrofit measures over the next two years to 276 of our most energy in-efficient homes. This is a two- year project that will deliver a measurable % reduction in carbon emissions whilst delivering improvements to energy efficiency that will benefit the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable residents.
14. In March we awarded a contract to commence the delivery of a Heat Decarbonisation Plan for the London Road and Canfield sites. This project will identify energy efficiency measures the Council can install that will deliver quantifiable % reduction in carbon emissions. Working with energy and architectural consultants, will also enable readiness for the Council to apply for capital grant funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation funding scheme which is expected to be open for applications in late summer/autumn 2024.
15. Two Carbon Literacy Training pilots have been delivered. In September a half-day in person workshop was delivered for senior managers, attended by 20 staff. In January this year, 15 Councillors signed up to an online training pilot which took place over two half days. The carbon literacy training pilots are now being evaluated and we will commission and deliver further training for officers in 2024/25.
16. We have set up a corporate account for the Co Wheels EV Car Club based at the London Road office, to enable staff to reduce their carbon footprint when travelling from this site to off-site work meetings and other work events. The impact of this project will be monitored through the Saffron Walden Clean Air project, including reduction in carbon emissions.
17. We purchased a Council electric cargo bike for staff to use to travel from the London Road office to off-site work meetings and events. The bike will initially be piloted at the London Road office as part of the Saffron Walden Clean Air project.

18. We have commenced and are due to complete a Travel Plan for staff travelling to the Saffron Walden Office as part of the Saffron Walden Clean Air project. The expected output is to develop opportunities for car share and mode shift where this is possible.

Air Quality and Sustainable Transport

19. The DEFRA funded Saffron Walden Clean Air project was launched and mobilised in February 2023. This project is being delivered over two years. The vision for Saffron Walden is for the town to be 'cleaner, healthier and greener' and for residents to see walking or cycling as their first choice for short in-town journeys. Alongside piloting of shared mobility schemes, the project is raising awareness of pollution from transport emissions and is also delivering a public health awareness campaign on the impacts of pollution from domestic wood burning.

20. In phase 1 of the project, we delivered a stakeholder engagement plan, including gathering feedback from residents and businesses on the opportunities for bike share schemes (over 200 respondents), and a survey measuring perceptions of air quality (850 respondents). We have delivered community engagement events, bike training for adults and children, and cargo bike try-outs. Research was also undertaken to inform the development of a procurement plan for the shared mobility schemes and behaviour change projects.

21. In October we launched the first [Co Wheels EV Car Club vehicle](#) at the London Road Car Park. The second vehicle is due to launch in April at The Common Car Park.

22. The first Wood Burning Public Health Campaign was delivered in January this year via local print media and online social media platforms, concluding with Clean Air Night on 24th January, a second campaign burst will be delivered in Dec 2024.

23. All 6 schools in Saffron Walden are engaged in a pollution awareness project including [anti-idling action](#), and a monitoring project with children and families invited to take home an 'air aware' monitor and diary. The project is supporting all schools to complete and progress a travel plan including Mode Shift Stars for schools. Grants have been made available through the project to support schools to implement measures that will encourage mode shift and active travel e.g. scooter pods.

24. To date 21 businesses/organisations in the Town have been engaged in undertaking a pollution awareness project, with 128 Travel Surveys completed. We are on track for 12 businesses to complete and publish a travel plan for their organisation, in addition to the creation of mode shift case studies that can be shared.

25. Phase 2 (Sept 23 to July 24) of the Saffron Walden Clean Air project implementation plan is in progress to deliver and complete the pollution awareness and behaviour change projects; complete the roll out of all zero emission transport pilots (EV car club, bike share, bike loan schemes), in addition

to completion of a Saffron Walden transport strategy (a draft document has now been received for comment).

26. On 9th April we will launch the shared bike network in the town, and a bike library loan scheme, and community cargo bike hire scheme. Community events are also planned, including free bike training, bike try-outs and a community bike ride and picnic, which will be taking place during the spring and summer months this year. A monitoring and evaluation plan is being developed for the shared mobility schemes, as these will be operational for the next 2-3 years.
27. The project has attracted interest from residents across the district who would like to see the Council focus on raising awareness of pollution in other settlements. In September we developed a proposal to replicate these projects and shared mobility schemes in other settlements and submitted a grant application to the DEFRA Air Quality Grant scheme. If successful, an 'Uttlesford Clean Air project' will be mobilised in May 2024. □

In addition to the above projects, we have also delivered the following:

28. In March, building on the learning from the Saffron Walden Clean Air project to date, a project was commissioned with [CoMoUk](#) to complete an appraisal of options and supporting evidence for the inclusion of shared transport models in new housing development. This will form part of the local plan climate and sustainable transport policy.
29. We have commissioned and overseen the delivery of the Uttlesford Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure plan (LCWIP), working collaboratively with Essex County Council. This project was extended in February, in order to complete additional work ensuring alignment to the draft local plan policy and growth sites. With support from Essex County Council a public consultation on the LCWIP will be delivered in late spring 24.
30. In December, we completed a data submission to Essex County Council to inform the Essex Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund business case. We have secured a funded project for Uttlesford that will deliver an increase in available electric vehicle chargers across the district to meet levelling up priorities and the needs of residents without access to off-street parking. Project allocation will be confirmed later this year along with phasing of project delivery.
31. In January we delivered an officer workshop with the Energy Savings Trust, commencing the development of a district wide EV strategy which will be produced in 2024/25.

Enabling Local Action on Climate Change

Over the last 12 months we have supported and enabled community action on climate change through:

32. Regular communication on climate matters, including funding and resources, via the council newsletters and social media platforms, and via attendance at the parish forum and community events.
33. We delivered Round 2 of the Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme. A webinar was held in September 23 to launch the scheme. 21 applications were received in December, and [15 grant awards](#) were awarded to community projects that will deliver reduction in carbon emissions, biodiversity restoration and enhancement and community engagement on climate change. To date the grant scheme has funded 14 net zero infrastructure community projects. A review of the Zero Carbon Communities grant fund will be undertaken in Q2 2024/25 to develop and agree a proposal for Round 3 of the grant scheme, subject to funds available.
34. We have delivered a quarterly Zero Carbon Communities newsletter (c.1500 subscribers), sharing updates on the Zero carbon community projects, climate resources and climate change campaigns.
35. We are delivering the government Home Upgrade Grant scheme (HUG2) through targeted promotion to eligible residents. The Council funding allocation is for 31 properties in the district to receive installation of energy efficiency measures within the next 2 years (value £500k). The council need to refer a minimum of 96 off-gas households to the scheme who meet the eligibility criteria, 55 referrals have been made to date. We are also participating in the government Energy Company Obligation scheme (ECO4 flex) and are providing the eligibility checks and declarations for applicants.
36. We have supported the growth of Community Energy projects in the district through coordinating and directing resources via the Zero Carbon Communities Grant scheme and other sources. Two internal workshops on Community Energy have been delivered, involving council officers and members, local partner organisations, Community Energy South and Essex County Council.
37. Community Energy Saffron Walden has been supported to deliver phase 2 of the Littlebury Energy project. Council grant funding has enabled direct support to householders, through appointment of a domestic energy community support worker to provide energy surveys and support residents to install retrofit measures via their own means or via available government grant schemes. The Council Planning Conservation Officer has partnered with this project to support improving consistency of advice on retrofit in listed buildings, using Littlebury as a case study.
38. In 2024 we will continue to partner with Essex County Council and Saffron Walden Community Energy, creating a partnership agreement that will support the latter to become 'Uttlesford Community Energy', and to strengthen and support the network of emerging multiple community energy groups and projects in the district.

Manage Waste in a Sustainable Way

39. We have participated in the development of the new Waste Strategy for Essex which will set out how we will reduce reliance on landfill, increase recycling and reduce waste over the next 25 years.
40. We have engaged with the Waste Resources Action Programme to undertake a review of our specific services to ensure that they align with emerging legislation and best practice. The review will continue in 2024/25 and include looking at how our services can be made more efficient against a range of measures including environmental performance.
41. We have participated in the Essex campaign to promote food waste recycling across the district providing compostable caddy liners to all households.
42. We continue to explore the potential to introduce recycling services for trade / commercial premises and these actions are reflected in the annual plan for 2024/25.

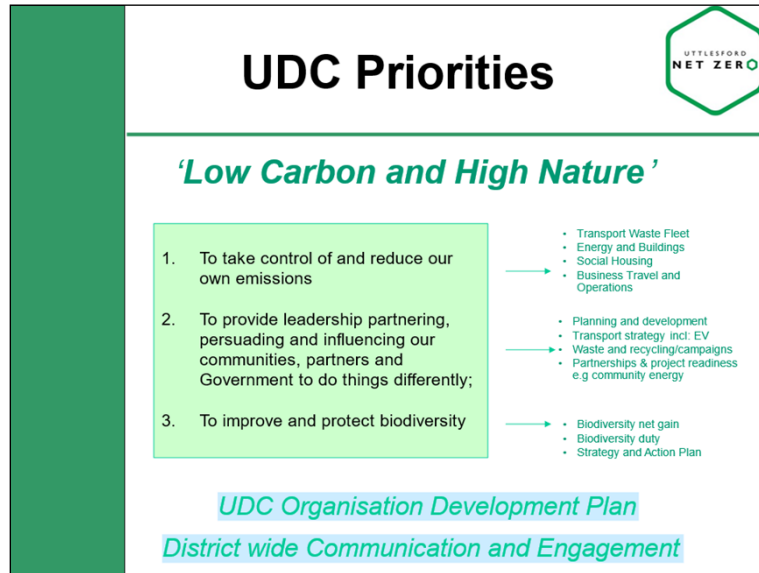
Planning and Development / Ecology and Biodiversity

43. The Planning Policy team are progressing the draft local plan policies that will set out the standards for net zero and sustainable building requirements in all new development, including green and blue infrastructure and transport.
45. In August, a Principal Ecologist joined the Planning Policy Team and commenced the development and implementation of priority operational systems and process, including delivering officer training in readiness to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain.
46. District biodiversity data and mapping has been shared with the Essex Local Nature Recovery Partnership to support delivery of the draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). As a supporting authority, the council will support the delivery of the public consultation on the LNRS which is expected to commence in early summer.
47. To date the Council Zero Carbon Communities, grant scheme has supported 13 community biodiversity and nature projects. This year projects include the development and coordination of the Roding Farm Cluster Group which will bring together farmers from the Uttlesford area to deliver collaborative projects to benefit the health of the Roding catchment; we have also funded 2 river restoration projects, in Newport and at Pounce Hall.
48. The updated CCAP for 2024/25 includes a detailed set of activities and tasks that will be delivered over the next 12 months to support both Biodiversity Net Gain implementation, delivery of Biodiversity Duty and improve the districts most degraded habitats, including how we will reduce pollution in our rivers and water courses.
49. The Planning team were successful in obtaining grant funding that has enabled the appointment of an Assistant Ecologist on a 6mth contract starting in March 24, to support the delivery of this rapidly expanding programme of work.

50. 'Low Carbon and High Nature' is at the centre of the updated annual CCAP 2024/25 and our community engagement on climate action, recognising that climate change and nature emergencies are 'two sides of the same coin'.

Climate Change Action Plan – Monitoring and Measurement

51. The updated CCAP 2024/25 is underpinned by the themes and priorities contained within the Council Climate Crisis Strategy as illustrated below:



52. In the updated Climate Change Action Annual Plan 2024/25 activities and tasks have been framed using the Council Corporate priorities, where possible.

52. A priority in the 2024/25 action plan is to develop and agree a Carbon Reduction Management plan, building on best practice in carbon and energy management. This plan will be crucial to achieving the Council commitment of Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2030. The aims of the carbon management plan include a robust framework to track carbon emission reduction, and more formal procedures and awareness of energy management responsibilities of all staff that have control or influence over energy, fuel, and water consumption.

53. To support the successful delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan and activities, the council have agreed to improve operational governance by creating an officer level 'Climate Change Board' that will provide oversight to the action plan and which will mitigate any arising risks to delivery. The first meeting of this group is due to take place on 4th April.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
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Gap in programme staff resources, leading to reduced capacity to deliver CCAP and complete the Saffron Walden Clean Air Project	2	2	Priority growth bid agreed to ensure Climate Team resources are made permanent.
Gap in staff resources leading to reduced service or team capacity to support or deliver critical decarbonisation projects e.g. social housing and estates	3	3	Monitoring and oversight by Corporate Management Team and Chief Executive Officer.
Lack of detailed scoping and clarity of outcomes for climate change actions which may lead to projects being delivered that do not contribute to the achievement of Council net zero carbon targets and/or climate change objectives.	2	3	Ongoing monitoring and review of actions and scope, with success measures. Develop and agree a Carbon Management reduction plan, with baseline data and identified projects that will deliver a quantifiable reduction in emissions.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.