



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in
David Hicks 1 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40
1B Non **THURSDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2024 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', with a long, sweeping tail.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 21 February 2024

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide independent “critical friend” challenge and to work with the Council’s Executive and other public service providers for the benefit of the public. The Committee considers submissions from a range of sources and reaches conclusions based on the weight of evidence – not on party political grounds.

Note: Non-Committee Members and members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in line with the Council’s Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be viewed live using the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/xiUYjtoMAgl?feature=shared>

This meeting may be filmed for inclusion on the Council’s website. Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council’s control.

Our Vision
<i>A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business</i>
Enriching Lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion excellent education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background. • Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to enable healthy choices for everyone. • Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of. • Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.
Providing Safe and Strong Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people. • Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care. • Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish. • Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.
Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future. • Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy. • Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity. • Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.
Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future. • Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, to support and enable our Borough to grow. • Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment. • Help with your housing needs and support people, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.
Keeping the Borough Moving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways. • Tackle traffic congestion and minimise delays and disruptions. • Enable safe and sustainable travel around the Borough with good transport infrastructure. • Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.
Changing the Way We Work for You
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be relentlessly customer focussed. • Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers. • Communicate better with customers, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough. • Drive innovative, digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.
Be the Best We Can Be
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice. • Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working. • Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business. • Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient. • Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough. • Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors

Andy Croy (Chair)
Norman Jorgensen
Ian Pittock

Chris Johnson (Vice-Chair)
Graham Howe
Charles Margetts

Michael Firmager
Catherine Glover
Alistair Neal

Substitutes

Andrew Mickleburgh
Andrew Gray
Laura Blumenthal

Jane Ainslie
Pauline Helliard-Symons
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Anne Chadwick
Clive Jones
Shahid Younis

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
37		APOLOGIES	
38		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	5 - 10
39		DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest.	
40		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions. A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this Committee. Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions	
41		MEMBER QUESTION TIME To answer any Member questions.	
42	None Specific	CLIMATE EMERGENCY BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT & GREEN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT To scrutinise progress on business engagement and green skills development activities within the CEAP.	11 - 20
43	None Specific	PROCUREMENT UPDATE To consider an update on progress against the Procurement related elements of the CEAP.	21 - 30
44	None Specific	ACTION TRACKER To consider the regular Action Tracker report.	31 - 34

- 45** None Specific **WORK PROGRAMME**
To consider items for inclusion in the Committee's work programme for 2024/25.
- 46** Barkham **BARKHAM SOLAR FARM UPDATE** **35 - 54**
To scrutinise an update on the Business Case for the Barkham Solar Farm.
- 47** **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**
That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for parts of the previous item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

CONTACT OFFICER

Neil Carr Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Tel 0118 237 9561
Email neil.carr@wokingham.gov.uk
Postal Address Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.10 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Andy Croy, Chris Johnson, Catherine Glover, Graham Howe, Norman Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Alistair Neal, Ian Pittock and Shahid Younis

Other Councillors Present

Stephen Conway and Sarah Kerr

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Andrew Collins, Climate Emergency Specialist
Rhian Hayes, Assistant Director, Economic Development and Housing
Andrea Jenkins, Communications, Engagement and Marketing
David Smith, Development and Planning Manager
Resh Thorpe, Climate Emergency Officer

27 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Michael Firmager.

Shahid Younis attended the meeting as a substitute.

28 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

29 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Andy Croy and Ian Pittock declared personal interests in Item 34 – Barkham Solar Farm Update – as they were both members of the Solar Farm Programme Board.

Sarah Kerr declared a pecuniary interest in Item 34 – Barkham Solar Farm Update – as she was employed by SSEN.

30 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

31 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

32 CLIMATE EMERGENCY ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 13 to 27, which gave details of the emerging Climate Emergency Engagement and Communications Plan.

Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services) attended the meeting, supported by officers, to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that effective communications and engagement with local communities was essential in making people feel empowered and invested in the Climate Emergency and the targets in the Council's Action Plan. The aim of the Engagement and Communications Plan was to ensure that residents and visitors to the Borough were aware

of the journey to a carbon-neutral future. The Plan would sit alongside the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) and would be a guide to working with stakeholders on communication and engagement initiatives.

The Council's Climate Emergency Team would coordinate delivery of the Plan, working alongside Council services and would provide quarterly reports against relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This would include updates on the aim to prioritise engagement with under-represented groups who were likely to experience the more immediate impacts of climate change. It was also proposed to provide a six-monthly update report to the Committee.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

What progress was being made in relation to engagement with the business community? It was confirmed that the Council's business team worked with the Climate Emergency team to engage with local businesses. Two business engagement events had been held and a business newsletter had been developed. An event had also been held for registered housing providers to consider the retrofitting of homes. The Council carried out an annual business survey which asked about business needs and the steps they were taking to address the Climate Emergency. The Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) had also established a Net Zero taskforce.

In relation to measuring success, when would KPIs relating to the Action Plan be submitted to Members? It was confirmed that progress against the targets in the Action Plan would be reported on a quarterly basis. This included data on social media hits. The data would be used to highlight areas in the CEAP requiring greater focus. Progress against the KPIs would be submitted to the Committee. It was also noted that the Climate Emergency Newsletter included case studies giving details of local groups who were reducing emissions.

Members noted the difference between "push" and "pull" communications and asked for details of the Council's approach. Push communication involved sending out information such as leaflets and social media posts. Pull communication involved information that residents could passively access at any time, such as the Climate Emergency content on the Council's website. The Council was keen to use new techniques and to think outside the box, for example in engaging with hard to reach groups such as residents without access to the internet.

It was important to raise the profile of the Council's actions and to give examples of local leaders acting as role models. What checks and balances were in place to ensure consistent messaging and avoid "green-washing" (overstating the evidence to make the organisation appear greener than it actually is)? It was confirmed that all communications were checked to ensure consistency and to avoid green-washing.

Members gave an example of individuals and families who had developed their own Climate Emergency action plans. It was suggested that this could be developed into a public competition with prizes and lots of positive publicity. Officers agreed to take this suggestion away for further discussion.

The Solar Together scheme was considered to be positive. Members noted that self-interest was important in nudging people to take action, e.g. helping the environment and saving money at the same time.

What support was WBC providing to Town and Parish Councils, for example in putting solar panels on the rooves of local buildings? It was confirmed that WBC was looking at solar panels on buildings and school properties. Progress on this could be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

What was being done to harness the enthusiasm of young people for positive measures to tackle the Climate Emergency? It was confirmed that officers had attended school assemblies and the My Journey team continued to promote green travel options. The Council was also working on measures to reduce the use of cars in the school run. It was noted that the Government had asked all schools to develop a CEAP by 2025 and to identify a sustainability lead.

In relation to housing, it was noted that a sustainability event was planned at Gorse Ride. Would this be extended to other neighbourhoods? What steps were being taken to engage with private landlords? It was confirmed that the Council had good links with residents at Gorse Ride – the event would be open to all tenures. It was also intended to arrange events in other parts of the Borough such as Norreys. Officers were also exploring the options for engagement with private landlords on potential efficiency measures.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Sarah Kerr and officers from the Climate Emergency team be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) Member comments and suggestions be fed into the development of the Climate Emergency Engagement and Communications Plan.

33 BARKHAM SOLAR FARM UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in the Supplementary Agenda, which provided an update on the delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm.

Stephen Conway (Leader of the Council) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions supported by David Smith (Development and Planning Manager – Commercial Property), and Ian Gough (Energy Manager). Councillor Conway confirmed that Sarah Kerr was stepping away from the Climate Emergency Executive Member role as she had accepted a job with SSEN.

The report stated that delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm had previously been progressing on the basis of a formal offer received from SSEN in April 2022 to connect to the grid by 2026. In April 2023, Wokingham Borough Council was advised by SSEN that connection to the Grid could not now be achieved until 2037. This was due to upgrades required at the transmission level before the project could connect to the grid. Following intensive negotiations, the Council was now in receipt of a connection offer from SSEN for August 2026. The latest connection offer represented a significant and positive step in delivery of the project. The Council's contractor (Bouygues E&S) had remobilised and, over the next few months, would be completing survey and design work ready for discharging the planning conditions.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points and questions.

The report stated that the business case for the project would be updated to reflect the new SSEN Grid Connection Offer together with the design progression and changes to the market. An update would be submitted to the Committee's meeting in February 2024. It was noted that, at this point, the project still looked financially healthy for the Council.

Members referred to the number of development projects in the Barkham area including the solar farm, two SEND schools and new housing developments. The Committee had requested an update report on the plans for coordinating and mitigating the impact of new development in Barkham at a future meeting.

In relation to Grid Connection Offer, were there any changes to the previous offer? It was confirmed that the offer was subject to due diligence by Council officers. The offer had to be accepted by 22 December 2023. Some points of clarification were being discussed including the cost of connection.

In relation to the future development of solar farms, what issues might impinge on the Council's plans? It was confirmed that the CEAP included the provision of further solar farms. Potential sites would be included in the Local Plan Update. Further update reports would be made to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Stephen Conway, Ian Gough and David Smith be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) progress on the delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm be noted;
- 3) an update on the Barkham Solar Farm business case be submitted to the February 2024 meeting of the Committee;
- 4) an update report on the coordination of new development projects in the Barkham area be submitted to the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in early 2024.

34 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme for the remainder of the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the scheduled meeting of the Committee on 9 January 2024 be cancelled;
- 2) an update on the emerging Local Plan be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee;
- 3) potential Agenda items for future meetings include engagement with the business community, domestic heating, retrofitting and CEAP KPIs;
- 4) further ideas for Agenda items be submitted to the Chair or Neil Carr in Democratic Services.

35 ACTION TRACKER

The Committee considered the regular Action Tracker report.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker be noted.

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Agenda Item 42

TITLE	Climate Emergency Business Engagement & Green Skills Development
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 February 2024
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framalocco

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Climate change poses a significant threat to our community. Increasing temperatures and more extreme weather events have negative consequences on every member of our community, and disproportionately affect those that are most socially vulnerable.

Making businesses feel empowered and invested in the climate issues that we face and seeing themselves as being part of the solution will help us to work towards achieving our target to become a Carbon Neutral Borough by 2030. This will also have positive implications on the economy, health and quality of life of our community.

RECOMMENDATION

1. For the committee to provide comment on the business engagement activity within the Climate Emergency Action Plan and green skills development.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

An update on the business engagement activities within the Climate Emergency Action Plan and the work around developing green skills.

Background

Businesses are a critical stakeholder group in driving forward the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). Several actions within the CEAP have a business-engagement focus;

- **1A.1.5** Support local businesses, including commercial property owners, to transition their commercial fleets to EV. Also to encourage employees to switch to EV for private use.
- **1A.2.1** Engage businesses to promote home and remote working when possible.
- **1A.2.2** Promote Liftsharing schemes/opportunities through My Journey to help individuals and businesses develop bespoke travel policies
- **1A.4.4** Increase the uptake of cycling from local businesses by promoting the Love to Ride programme
- **1B.2** Support the transition of business vans to cargo bikes
- **2.2.2** Support local businesses and VCS to reduce their energy usage and carbon emissions and uptake of green energy
- **9.1.1** Implement a Wokingham Borough Council Climate Emergency Communication and Engagement Plan

The Economic Development, Climate Emergency and Transport teams work closely together by sharing information, training opportunities, upcoming events and identify opportunities for collaborative working. Articles related to climate emergency and relevant projects from other priorities within the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) are also included in the Business Matters newsletter which has over 9,000 subscribers.

Following best practice research from other local authorities, the Economic Development and Climate Emergency teams are also looking to work with SMEs and voluntary sector organisations across the borough to help them to reduce their carbon footprint. The first step in this process is to identify business' carbon emissions, and we are working collaboratively with Reading University to help with this.

Reading University Partnership

Through the work of the strategic partnership established with Reading University, we have been able to explore projects that support our shared vision for sustainable business growth. Detailed below are some of the projects that present opportunities to support SMEs in working towards carbon neutrality:

- Developing an introductory level carbon toolkit to assist Wokingham businesses and voluntary sector organisations in understanding their emissions and formulating effective mitigation strategies.
- Delivery of a Business Conference at Reading University. This would consist of seminars, business networking sessions and inviting organisations that offer climate change support to businesses.
- Creating a Welcome to Wokingham business brochure to be shared with the University's business tenants. This brochure would support businesses to access key advice from a range of local support, including sustainability advice.

Support, Resources and Events

1. A leaflet (appendix 1) with tips and information on how businesses can reduce their emissions around energy, waste, travel, and other areas has recently been developed by the Climate Emergency team. This leaflet will be used by the Economic Development team to share at local SME business events along with other relevant information.
2. An online business knowledge section on the Wokingham Borough Council website is currently being developed. This section will include a range of information and links to local and national schemes, to help businesses reduce their carbon footprint whilst also saving money.
3. In April, the Climate Emergency team are leading a workshop for Involve, a local charity that supports and collaborates with other charities in the borough. As part of this workshop, Involve are being supported to develop their own green team and climate emergency action plan. Tools and knowledge will also be shared to empower Involve employees to share skills with other voluntary sector organisations across the borough that they support.
4. The Solar Together scheme, offering both solar panels and battery storage was delivered in 2023 with a strong business uptake and a second iteration of the scheme is planned for 2024 following this success.

Transport | Active Travel

There are several business-related actions within the CEAP associated with transport. These are predominantly driven by the My Journey team who have a dedicated business-engagement officer.

1. Active travel is promoted to businesses through a number of initiatives;
 - Bike maintenance workshops
 - Cycle training
 - Dr Bike
 - Led rides
 - Electric cargo bike hire – Shinfield Parish Council has already covered 1,000 miles using this bike
2. The recent workplace cycling scheme, Love to Ride was delivered across 126 companies.
3. There is a dedicated business page on the My Journey website which identifies the support it can provide to encourage active and sustainable commutes to work. This website will be highlighted in the business support pages on the Climate Emergency section of Wokingham Borough Council's website.
4. The My Journey team are in the process of putting a business case together to launch a lift share scheme in April this year.
5. All Wokingham borough business parks have travel plans. Currently, any new business developments are required to produce a 5-year travel plan. The My Journey team are currently in the process of formalising receiving S106 money from new business developments in lieu of asking developers for travel plans. This will provide funding to enable the My Journey team to plan and deliver more

targeted behavioural change interventions in and around business developments.

Transport | Electric Vehicles (EVs)

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) recommended the revocation of two of Wokingham's Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), Twyford Crossroads and the M4 in June 2023, due to lower levels of nitrogen dioxide being recorded. An increase in electric vehicle usage is one factor that has been attributed to these lower nitrogen dioxide levels. Initiatives that have been undertaken and are planned to encourage a shift to EV includes;

1. In 2021 there was a public consultation that included identifying barriers that prevented people from switching to EVs and to clarify where they would like to charge their EVs should they have one. Large businesses within Wokingham were invited to take part in the consultation.
2. On the My Journey website, there is a FAQ document which has information about available grants for businesses that may help towards the installation of charge points.
3. The Climate Emergency team collaborated with The Energy Saving Trust to deliver a free webinar as part of the Climate Emergency COP28 events in November last year. The webinar provided businesses and voluntary sector organisations with information on how to change their fleet to electric, as well as information for employees looking to change their personal cars to electric. The Climate Emergency team is looking to host more of these webinars in the future, with more promotion to increase attendees.
4. There are ongoing discussions with LET's experience electric (an EV experience company) to hold an event that showcases electric vehicles and infrastructure solutions to business stakeholders, and residents in the borough.
5. There is a new Net Zero and Electric Vehicle project manager at the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Wokingham Borough Council are working with the LEP to gain knowledge and advice in helping with the transition to electric across the borough. The LEP project manager is also trying to coordinate the deployment of the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) charge points among the Berkshire local authorities to ensure the delivery of a comprehensive charging network.

Green skills and jobs

Improving skills for low carbon transition is a milestone included within action 8.2.2 of the CEAP.

Green jobs are hard to define and are often misinterpreted. The LSE [Are green jobs good jobs? \(2021\)](#) identifies three categories:

- Green new and emerging (GNE) – these are new jobs that are needed to help transition to a sustainable economy, an example would be Wind Energy Engineer.
- Green enhanced skills (GES) – new skills and tasks are created within existing jobs to enable organisations to become more sustainable. An example would be

a Marketing Manager, the job is the same, but the subject, language and campaign required might be different.

- Green increased demand (GID) – transitioning to a sustainable economy creates a greater demand for their existing skills. An example would be a material scientist.

Short term opportunities

The transition towards net zero will require thousands of jobs in construction and installation with particular focus on (GNE) retrofit, energy efficiency and electric vehicle infrastructure.

1. In order to ensure our residents are able to access these opportunities we are working with the LEP to promote Skills Boot Camps. The current courses are available for anyone over the age of 19 years and are free to learners even if they are currently employed.
 - a. Green Skills for Electric Vehicles
 - b. Green Skills for Cycle Maintenance
 - c. Green Skills: Retro Fit - is currently over-subscribed due to high demand.
2. Newbury College and Langley College have expanded their offer in recent years to include [Electric and Hybrid Vehicle Training Centre at Langley and a Renewable Centre at Newbury](#). These new centres will deliver a range of apprenticeships and higher education programmes to meet the green skills demand. We promote and raise awareness of these to our residents through our existing communications channels.
3. The [Berkshire Opportunities website](#) run by the LEP provides information on the energy and environment sector in Berkshire, highlighting green jobs and training available locally. This resource is shared with our job seekers and partner organisations.

Long term opportunities

It is anticipated that when net zero is achieved, there will still be high long-term growth in green jobs including in the Construction and Information and communication sector.

Green Literacy

Green or Sustainability Literacy is “the theoretical knowledge that allows someone to understand the intricate relationship and conflict between humanity, development, the environment, and natural resources” (<https://www.ucem.ac.uk/whats-happening/articles/sustainability-literacy/>). The understanding of these new concepts and vocabulary are key to embedding green skills in every job. There needs to be a shift to embed sustainability in all jobs and sectors, instead of seeing green jobs as something separate. Embedding these skills in education will equip our younger generation to be successful in the labour market. Schools will be provided with resources on green skills as part of the school’s engagement work within the CEAP.

In addition to supporting the above educational partners The Economic Development team have;

- Worked with our local Jobcentre Plus who ran a Green Jobs Fair in November. This event was supported by the Economy team in reaching out to suitable businesses.

- Worked with Reading Buses to support recruitment of new drivers. There's a recognised shortage of drivers in the borough, and through targeted recruitment events we have sought to promote this as a career.

Plans to support Green Skills in the near future;

- The Economic Development team will be working with colleagues on the Barkham Solar Farm project to ensure employment and skills opportunities for local residents (linked to an Employment Skills Plan). This will provide a mechanism for us to arrange site tours to enable children to learn more about how a Solar Farm operates.
- Through our continued work developing Employment and Skills Plans for large development sites we will seek where possible to include educational activities for our schools that showcase sustainability being delivered in a practical setting.
- The Climate Emergency team and Economic Development team are currently building their understanding of the extent of any retrofitting skills gap in the local area and once this is fully understood the team can assess next steps.
- As part of the strategic partnership with Reading University, the team are working with schools to support the development of their climate emergency action plans. Schools will also be provided with resources on green skills and opportunities through the Climate Ambassador scheme that Reading University are leading on.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Na	Na	Na
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Na	Na	Na
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	na	na	na

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

Addressing the climate emergency through the delivery of business engagement activities requires commitment from a number of council departments.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Yes, Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken into account. Climate changes affects every member of our community, particularly the most vulnerable people. Tackling the climate emergency, minimising emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change will have positive impacts on the health and quality of life of our residents.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

As referenced in the report, a number of CEAP actions are achieved through the business engagement activities.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

List of Background Papers

Appendix 1 – Business Engagement Leaflet

Contact Mhairi Adams

Service Place

Telephone No 0118 237 9347

Email mhairi.adams@wokingham.gov.uk

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10 Top Tips to Be a Greener Business

improve productivity, save money, reduce
carbon footprint and much more...

1. Carry out an energy audit

An energy audit is a great way to assess how much energy your business uses and find ways to reduce your consumption. Speak to your energy supplier or carry out an audit yourself for free. Visit: www.cse.org.uk (search community buildings)



2. Energy efficiency grants & schemes

Many government schemes offer loans, grants or subsidised energy-saving measures to support small businesses with reducing their impact on the environment.

Find out more here: www.ofgem.gov.uk (search energy grants)



3. Install a smart meter

A smart meter can help you to track energy usage, costs and identify areas of where you can save energy within the business. It won't cost you anything. Speak to your energy supplier to find out more or visit: www.smallbusiness.co.uk (search meters)



4. Switch to LED bulbs

Switching to energy efficient LEDs consume around 80% less electricity than normal light bulbs saving money on your energy bills. Find out more here: www.carbontrust.com (search lighting overview guide)



5. Insulate your building

Insulating your building improves energy efficiency keeping the cold out and the heat in helping to reduce your energy bills. Find out more here: www.businessclimatehub.org



6. Install renewable energy



If your looking for a more energy-efficient alternative to cut your energy bills why not try adding solar panels. Solar Together Berkshire is a scheme enabling small businesses to install panels and battery storage at a competitive price.

Visit: www.solartogether.co.uk/wokingham



7. Empowering sustainable travel



Wokingham My Journey promotes active and eco-friendly commuting for businesses across the Borough. Find out more here: www.myjourneywokingham.com/businesses/



8. Try our e-cargo bikes

Businesses in Wokingham Borough can loan an e-cargo bike for free. It is a greener way to take goods to clients or customers for those multiple short trips.

For more information email: myjourney@wokingham.gov.uk



9. Electrifying your fleet

When compared to a fuelled car, an electric car can be driven for as little as 1 pence per mile compared to a fuel car and with fewer moving parts there are less service costs and no nasty emissions into the air.

Visit: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk (search SMEs cars)



10. Minimise waste

Waste disposal can cost businesses lots of money. Several organisations offer free waste audits to businesses to help work out where your waste is coming from.

Find out more here: www.fsb.org.uk (search waste)



SHARE YOUR STORY

Would you like to feature in our next newsletter? Tell us what you are doing to tackle climate change and the savings you are making by emailing us at: climate.emergency@wokingham.gov.uk

TITLE	Procurement Actions Update – Climate Emergency Action Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 February 2024
WARD	Non-Specific
DIRECTOR	Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources and Assets – Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) declared a climate emergency in 2019 and committed to do as much as possible to reach **carbon neutrality by 2030**.

WBC has a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to review the report and note:

- 1) How the CEAP targets and climate emergency commitment are being incorporated in the Council's procurement processes.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides a progress update on the actions taken by the Corporate Procurement Team to enable the CEAP Action Plan.

Procurement Report on CEAP Updates

The minutes of the Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 25th September 2023, required Procurement to return to the Committee to follow up the matters raised and discussed at the meeting.

The actions within the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) are aspirational and stretching. The Council are also continuing to work to ensure they understand the wider implications of any requirements. As an example, embedding unachievable standards may at least in the short-term stop smaller local businesses from being able to tender or win contracts with the Council. This may then also hinder their own development or investment towards a more climate sustainable approach.

Actions and milestones within the CEAP may therefore be reviewed and updated to reflect further understanding, as markets develop, and as new approaches/technologies are embedded into business solutions. This is to ensure there are defined deliverables that progress can be measured against. Any changes will be tracked and clearly communicated as part of the annual progress report. These changes will then be presented at Full Council in September 2024 for approval.

0) Procurement officers report back to the Committee, within 6 months, with examples of success in embedding the Procurement actions in the CEAP.

Procurement has begun to embed Climate Emergency measures into its procurement processes and has targeted high value and relevant climate impact projects initially. There have been some initial successes and valuable involvement from the Climate Emergency (CE) Team.

As examples the CE Team have contributed to the following procurement projects:

Residential Waste Wheeled Bin Tender: a tender and contract for 67,000 wheeled bins as part of the Councils new waste collection. The CE team were involved in the initial data gathering, specification development, and scoring methodology and bid evaluation.

Evaluation was on an 80% price and 20% quality and within this quality element the Council defined their requirements. The specification required that the bin manufacture and deliveries were made in the most environmental method to ensure minimal carbon footprint, including a desire for blended or reprocessed plastics to be used.

Quality questions asked bidders to explain where and how the bins were made i.e. closed loop, the composition of blended or reprocessed material to the industry standard and asking where the bins were made. Bidders with more environmentally friendly answers received higher scores.

The contract was awarded to IPL Plastics who manufacture the bins in the UK and was the cheapest bid, and other bids from around the world were received were not cheaper and didn't meet the tender quality requirements.

Toutley East Land Supplier Consultation: The CE team formed part of the pre-market supplier engagement meetings. A PIN notice was issued inviting any relevant and suitably qualified suppliers to respond and were subsequently invited to a 1-2-1 meeting to discuss options the Council were looking at, including aspects of housing construction and green energy measures.

During the 1-2-1 the CE team were able to ask direct questions to suppliers to understand what market options were currently available and being used on a mass house building scale and allowed the wider project team to better understand price and cost implications. It is anticipated that the CE team will be involved with any future procurement processes.

Future Procurements

Due the size and complexity of the following projects, project meetings have kicked off for an anticipated 2025-2026 tendering process and the CE team are included at these meetings and will be fully involved in the creation of the specification, evaluation requirements and scoring elements.

- New residential Waste collection contract
- Highways Maintenance contract
- Street Cleansing Contract

The Procurement team will continue to develop the approach with the CE team to ensure they have sight and input on relevant procurement projects moving forward, replicating the process for the Wheeled bins tender.

Procurement Options Analysis Paper

The Procurement Options Analysis Paper has been updated and now directs service areas to consider engaging with the Climate Emergency team.

To start the procurement process service areas are required to fill an option paper in for all procurements over £50k (total contract value), and all options papers above £100K contract value are reviewed at the Strategy Procurement Board (SPB) held on a monthly basis. Membership of SPB includes Section 151 officer and Directors.

The Procurement Options Analysis Paper ask service areas to consider and answer the following questions before being reviewed by the Strategic Procurement Board (SPB):

- **Have you assessed your project against WBC's Climate Emergency Agenda?**
- **Have you engaged with the CE Team?**

This acts as a reminder to service areas to consider climate emergency in their commissioning and procurement decisions, and for procurement to enable the CE team to be included and for Directors to be more aware of the wider commissioning decisions.

Climate Emergency Questionnaire

In progressing the climate agenda, it is critical we understand the potential impact of requirements on costs but also how such requirements might impact on certain companies such as local small and medium business enterprises being able to bid for works. In order to do this, and to allow the Council to define appropriate standards in the future, we are proposing to gather data on where companies are in relation to climate impacts where they are bidding for works

The CE team and Procurement team have worked jointly to begin a 12-month information gathering exercise which will be incorporated into the Procurement process. A Climate Emergency Questionnaire has been developed (see Appendix 1) and is currently being introduced into the procurement tender documents with targeted questions to better understand the readiness of our suppliers with taking on Climate Emergency measures.

The questionnaire (See Appendix 1) will not currently count towards supplier evaluations and tender scoring but can be used as a gateway to later introduce a version that will allow this to happen. This is a data collection exercise for benchmarking in order to establish effective and proportionate measures in the future within our services and suppliers.

- 1) **Procurement Officers provide a specific update on CEAP Actions and**
- 2) **Procurement officers provide a general update on the remaining CEAP actions, including actions and timeframe to improve the targets with a Red RAG status;**

Within the following CEAP action points the following work has been undertaken:

8.1.1. Include a drafted approach to sustainable procurement within the review of the Procurement Strategy.

The Procurement Strategy has been signed off by full Council in 2021 with the objective of supporting climate emergency and is currently implemented within all procurement processes. This includes working towards embedding the Climate Emergency Questionnaire into tender documents, with a future aim to use this data to develop how we can further set and evaluate appropriate carbon reduction measures and carbon neutrality.

The Procurement Strategy already includes the following aspirations:

- Goods contracts will consider whole-life costing including disposal.
- Service and work contracts will include carbon neutrality or reduction measures either directly or indirectly by their design.
- Procuring in line with business needs and climate emergency targets.
- Achieve sign-off of strategy/Implementation and communication of strategy with CEM.

The current approach is to take each procurement on a case-by-case basis and consider appropriate whole life costing considerations, carbon reduction measures then including any relevant specification requirements or contract clauses to reflect this.

Procurement are working with service areas and the CE team where possible to drive this forward where measures are proportionate and relevant to the procurement process and contract subject. This is reflected in both the specification and evaluation process.

8.1.2 Develop a sustainable procurement culture and associated skills for green procurement

- Design of an e-learning module training people in green procurement techniques.
- All staff in council who procure to complete training.

The Climate Emergency team have developed an optional eLearning module, available for all Council officers to complete. This learning module, has the opportunity to be developed in future to include even more specific procurement guidance, depending on the results of supplier's submitting the Climate Emergency questionnaire, noted above.

8.1.3 Assess suppliers on sustainable procurement standards.

- Evaluation of all suppliers to promote sustainability proportionate to contract and financial constraints.
- Use of the standard SQ/ inclusion of a pass/fail phase in all contract evaluations.
- All buyers/ commissioners taking embedded carbon into account when purchasing goods and services.

- Performance Team to name the top 20 carbon producers from our suppliers, encouraging competition between suppliers which may generate other benefits in terms of efficiency and cost savings.

The Procurement team and CE team are working together, and where possible are implementing points in 8.1.3, on a case-by-case basis.

The Climate Emergency Questionnaire (Appendix 1) which will be issued within the tender documents (SQ section) to all potential suppliers and will inform the Council of bidding suppliers' current readiness for implementing climate emergency measures. These responses will be reviewed by the CE team and it is hoped it will enable the Council to move to a scoring tender mechanism which is both proportionate to the size and type of contract and the financial implications of doing so. The potential effect on SME's, Charities and local businesses and the general market interest in the Council's contracts will need to be considered during this process.

Currently tender evaluation with pass/fail criteria in the SQ section of a tender is incorporated on a case-by-case basis depending on the service, size and market interest. The questionnaire includes questions on their embedded carbon for suppliers to answer.

8.1.4 Implementation of sustainable procurement KPI's amongst suppliers

- Consult with stakeholders, including local and national business during the development of Council's sustainable procurement policy through a consultation event.
- All buyers/ commissioners embed carbon KPI targets into all suitable council contracts.
- Provide clear and detailed instructions to suppliers on the council's sustainability requirements.
- Contracts have sustainability KPI's included where suitable to contracts scope and will be performing within the green threshold (or equivalent) for these KPI's.

The Council is unlikely at this time to develop a Council Sustainable Procurement Policy due to the complexity and variety of all Council wide contracts and any high-level policy would unlike to give detail. The Procurement team continue to embed the principles laid out in the Procurement Strategy (including those mentioned in 8.1.1). The long-term ambition of the CE team is to develop a specific sustainable procurement policy, which is at very early stages and would follow a review of the questionnaire results.

Procurement is working with service areas to incorporate KPIs into tender requirements and contracts and where appropriate include climate impact /sustainability KPIs will be considered, this is again on a case-by-case basis. KPIs are owned and managed by the service area and need to be measurable and attainable. Where appropriate the Climate Emergency team are able to provide guidance and support where required.

Initial collection of supplier data will be captured in the Climate Emergency Questionnaire and this will inform and enable future development of sustainable policies and KPIs. This would also need to link into corporate Council policies on Social Value and Climate Emergency.

8.2.1 Adopt a WBC Social Value Policy

- Draft the WBC Social Value Policy.
- Consult with businesses and SLT
- Implement communication of policy via CEM

Internal workshops have been held and a draft policy has been created. The policy is due to be agreed at Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in April. Once agreed, the policy will be communicated and rolled out. This action is owned by the Insights, Strategy and Inclusion team.

8.2.2 Promote local skills and employment

- All buyers/ commissioners to impose SME/ local supply targets on suppliers including reporting back of SME/ local supplier subcontracting and carbon reduction.
- Improve skills for low carbon transition including supporting those in traditional 'high carbon' industries to retrain.
- Performance Team name the top 20 suppliers supporting scheme.

Some work has been undertaken that has focused on improving skills for low carbon transition, this has been led by the Economic Development team and includes:

- Skills bootcamps and local colleges that offer training on low carbon jobs are promoted to businesses.
- Employment Skill Plans record locally employed staff that are generated from Council projects.
- As part of the University of Reading partnership, there is a focus on supporting schools developing their own climate emergency action plans. Green skills and jobs will be promoted to pupils within our secondary schools as part of this engagement.

The Council in the longer term will continue to focus on supporting SM s as part of the Procurement process and which could also include support on carbon reduction and implementing climate emergency measures.

3) Officers investigate the impact and suitability of the Council adopting ISO 14001 to support the CEAP;

ISO14001 is the international standard for an Environmental Management System (EMS). The standard provides a framework for implementing sustainable practices across an organisation.

It can lead to enhanced environmental performance; improved compliance and the process of environmental risks and opportunities being embedded within an organisation. Introducing ISO14001 could provide a benchmark longer term for Wokingham Council's suppliers. There were also disadvantages that were identified when exploring the feasibility of introducing ISO14001. It can be time and resource intensive; other organisations have had to employ external consultants to help achieve the accreditation. It can also require comprehensive documentation, developing and managing these documents can be a big burden on staff.

More information is required - specifically about local authorities that have introduced ISO14001 - before a recommendation is made for Wokingham Borough Council. This is to understand any ongoing costs and the benefits associated with introducing ISO14001 within a local authority context.

The Council continues to report on its own emissions through the CEAP and is implementing a number of changes to reduce its own emissions, detailed more thoroughly in the latest CEAP progress report.

4) Procurement officers investigate measures to tighten up Procurement contracts and report back to the Committee;

The Procurement team and CE team are working on tenders and contracts with Service areas and the inclusion of climate emergency measures is based on a case-by-case basis at the point of project strategy and developing the specification of requirements, KPIs and evaluation questions. The Council's contracts conclude the tender process and always include the specification, bidders' response to the evaluation questions and the KPIs, all of which do incorporate climate emergency measures where possible.

The information gathering exercise as part of the Climate Emergency questionnaire will be reviewed over the next 12 months and will inform the Procurement and CE teams if any additional future requirements are needed in the procurement process and contracts.

5) Procurement officers seek to develop a specific overarching Procurement Climate Emergency policy to underpin the Procurement and Contract Management process.

Given the potential complexity and variety of all Council wide procurement contracts, a high-level policy itself would be unlikely to go into detail but would follow the existing principles mentioned of doing as much as possible and demonstrating that sustainability considerations are incorporated within decision making. This would therefore also likely follow the review process.

At this time there is no plan to develop a Procurement Climate Emergency Policy as this would need to follow the Council's own corporate policy to enable a joined-up approach on a council-wide scale and to ensure a "golden thread" approach is taken.

6) The language in the report be strengthened so that the CE team "requires" action rather than "encourages" action.

There is now an additional check step involved in the procurement process, through the Procurement Options Analysis paper mentioned above. Meanwhile future actions such as a potential Council Sustainable policy would further support this.

The Procurement team and CE team are implementing as many Climate Emergency measures as possible in procurements and futures contracts, however the team undertake procurements exercises for Council-wide services including Adult Social Care and Children's Services and deal with a variety of suppliers from SME's, local businesses, charities and the voluntary sector. These considerations need to be reflected at the start of any procurement exercise including embedding Climate Emergency requirements into the tender process and subsequent contracts and therefore wording needs to reflect this. Current legislation requires fair and equal treatment of suppliers, proportionality and consideration given to overburdening SME's.

Summary / Next steps

Procurement and Climate Emergency are working together to drive more focus from our suppliers on carbon neutrality. It is critical that the Council fully understands market operators' abilities and position, with regard to those standards, as implementing unachievable measures will hinder parts of the business community from bidding or winning work, impacting the ability of the Council to deliver or afford key services and stifling certain business operators.

A key first step is the Climate Emergency questionnaire being introduced for suppliers to complete as part of the tender process. There will be a 12-month review of this data to understand more about our suppliers, and to guide the most appropriate next steps.

Whilst this review is being undertaken two Climate Emergency focused questions within the Procurement Options Analysis paper will guide service areas to consider Climate Emergency when developing their procurement strategy.

There will also continue to be a case-by-case review of our procurement activity and contracts, and Procurement will continue to focus on acting as a gate keeper in identifying any services/contracts that need the CE team's direct input in the tender process. There will be a continued focus on suppliers that have opportunities to do more.

A further update will be provided once data has been collated through the Climate Emergency questionnaire and clear next steps have been established.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. It is, therefore, imperative that Council resources are focussed on the vulnerable and its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	nil	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	nil	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	nil	NA	NA

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Setting climate standards may increase costs to the Council and impact its ability to deliver key services to residents. Climate standards will be further developed with understanding of cost and service implications from feedback from tenders.

Cross-Council Implications

Public Sector Equality Duty

Climate Emergency – The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham borough by 2030

List of Background Papers

See Appendix 1 – Climate Emergency Questionnaire

Contact	Service
Telephone No 0118 974 6000	Email
Date	Version No.

APPENDIX 1: Climate Emergency Questionnaire

For information only.

1	<p><u>Net zero commitment.</u> Does your business have a net zero or emissions reductions target? <i>(If part of CCS this is an automatic 2050 target).</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments
2	<p><u>Carbon reduction plan.</u> Does your business have a carbon reduction plan to achieve the above? <i>If yes, please attach a copy or summarise</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments
3	<p><u>Measuring emissions.</u> Does your business measure its Scope 1 and 2 emissions? <i>If yes, please attach a copy of this report.</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments
4	<p>Are whole life emissions included within this? <i>For example, embodied emissions.</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments
5	<p><u>Social value.</u> Within this proposal does all work and materials conform to our social value policy and minimising any negative effects of such? <i>If possible, please provide examples to demonstrate where this has been applied.</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments
6	<p><u>Certification.</u> Does your business have any environmental certification? For example, BS EN ISO 140001. <i>If yes, please outline which and to what extent.</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments
7	<p><u>Supporting the local economy.</u> Is your business located within the Wokingham Borough Council Boundary? Or as part of this contract will you be utilising any businesses/contractors which are based in Wokingham? <i>If yes, please explain.</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments
8	<p><u>Contract Sustainability KPIs.</u> If applicable will your proposal be able to meet the KPIs regarding sustainability within the tender specification? <i>If yes, please detail how.</i></p>	Yes/No	Comments

Climate Emergency O&S Committee – Action Tracker 2023/24

Climate Emergency O&S Committee – 23 May 2023		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Task & Finish Group Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging Climate Emergency Business Strategy be submitted to a future meeting • Officers to lobby Government over “green skills” shortages • Committee supports an independent carbon audit of the CEAP – refer to Audit Committee • Congratulations to officers on progress against the Task & Finish Group recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed • Completed • Completed • Completed
CEAP and the LPU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further report on emerging policy direction and links between LPU and CEAP • Member briefing/training on the LPU and importance of embedding CEAP Into LPU • Officers seek to include provisions in LPU re the delivery of high speed broadband • Officers continue discussions with EA on “downstream” measures aimed at reducing risk of flooding • Congratulations to officers on progress in embedding CE measures into LPU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update report on LPU in 2024 • Completed
CEAP Traffic Reduction Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress noted – further update reports in due course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed

Climate Emergency O&S Committee – 11 July 2023		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
CEAP Fourth Progress Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments and feedback from the Committee to be used to modify the CEAP prior to submission to Council in September • Officers congratulated on revisions to CEAP layout and content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed • Completed

Work Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing Agenda item on solar farms progress 	• Completed
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Climate Emergency O&S Committee – 25 September 2023		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
Procurement Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement officers report back to the Committee, within 6 months, with examples of success in embedding the Procurement actions in the CEAP; • Procurement officers to provide update on CEAP Action 8.1.1. – include a drafted approach to sustainable procurement within the review of the Procurement Strategy; • Procurement officers provide update on the remaining CEAP actions, including actions and timeframe to improve the targets with a Red RAG status; • Officers investigate the impact and suitability of the Council adopting ISO 14001 to support the CEAP; • Procurement officers investigate measures to tighten up Procurement contracts and report back to the Committee; • Procurement officers seek to develop a specific overarching Procurement Climate Emergency policy to underpin the Procurement and Contract Management process; • Language in the report be strengthened so that the CEAP team “requires” action rather than “encourages” action. 	• Ongoing - progress report to Feb 2024 meeting
Barkham Solar Farm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O&S Management Committee be asked to consider arrangements for future scrutiny of the Barkham Solar Farm project; • Officers be asked to develop an overarching view of the impact of the solar farm and other construction projects in the area, involving local Members and the community liaison group; • Community and Corporate O&S Committee be requested to scrutinise the impact of the relevant construction and transport plans on the local area; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed • Report to Community & Corporate O&S • Completed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant contractors be requested to share details of the plan/s for bringing materials to the relevant sites, taking into account the impact on the local road network; • Revised timeline for the Barkham Solar farm project be reported to the Committee as part of the regular update report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing • Ongoing
Work Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing Agenda item on Barkham and other solar farms progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed

Climate Emergency O&S Committee – 12 December 2023		
Agenda Item	Action	Update
CEAP Engagement & Communications Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate Member comments into draft plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed
Barkham Solar Farm Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress on project noted • Update Business Case to Feb 2024 meeting • Report on coordination of new development in Barkham to the Community & Corporate O&S Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed • Completed • Completed

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Agenda Item 46

TITLE	Barkham Solar Farm Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 February 2024
WARD	Barkham;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

PURPOSE OF REPORT

Climate Emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested an update on the business case and progress of the Barkham Solar Farm.

At its meeting on 14 March 2024, the Executive will consider a report providing a Progress and Business Case update on the project.

A draft of the 14 March Executive report is appended to this covering report. Please note that the Executive report will be inclusive of financial information to be considered in Part 2 papers. That financial information has also been included in the Part 2 information submitted with this report.

RECOMMENDATION

To note the update on the business case and progress on the delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The attached Executive report is in two sections:

- Part 1 – Provides a progress update on the delivery of the solar farm and a high level summary of the business case update
- Part 2 – Provides detailed financial information which is confidential by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Members are requested to scrutinise the attached report and Part 2 information and make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Executive. Any recommendations from the Committee will be reported to the Executive at its meeting on 14 March 2024.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£285k	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£2m	Yes	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£18m	Yes	Capital

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The financial business case for the solar farm was considered and approved by Executive in July 2021 and by Full Council in September 2021.

The MTFP identifies an equalised net surplus, after capital financing costs, of circa £1m per annum from the Barkham Solar Farm. The project is forecasted to exceed this provision.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

The net income from the Solar Farm will be introduced into the Council's annual budget using an equalisation reserve.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken. The Initial Impact Assessment did not identify any potentially negative impacts upon persons with protected characteristics.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Generation of renewable energy through investment in solar farms is identified as a key priority under the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). The delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm is a specific target identified therein.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

By Virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

List of Background Papers

Draft Executive Report

Part 2 – Barkham Solar Farm Capital Costs (Jan 2024)

Part 2 – Barkham Solar Farm General Fund Income and Expenditure (Jan 2024)

Part 2 – Notes and Assumptions

Contact David Smith	Service Commercial Property
Telephone No Tel: 0118 974 6230	Email david.smith2@wokingham.gov.uk

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TITLE	Barkham Solar Farm Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 14 March 2024
WARD	Barkham
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing - Stephen Conway

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Barkham Solar Farm Business Case and progress report following the conclusion of the procurement process.

The delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm is identified as a key priority of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

The project will also generate a considerable net income for the Council over 25 years which will be introduced into the Council's annual budget using an equalisation reserve.

Climate Emergency Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered this report and its content at their meeting on 29 February 2024. Executive are asked to consider their recommendations on this topic.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive

- 1) Note the update to the Barkham Solar Farm business case and progress report as detailed herein.
- 2) Considers the recommendations from Climate Emergency Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 29 February 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The financial business case for the Barkham Solar Farm was initially considered and approved by Executive in July 2021 and by Full Council in September 2021. At a Special Council Executive meeting on 30 June 2022, both Executive and Council approved the procurement business case for the contractor. In approving the procurement business case the Executive further resolved that an updated business case and progress report will be reported back to the Executive following the conclusion of the procurement process. This report sets out the progress report and an updated business case.

Full planning permission for the project has now been secured and, following extensive and positive engagement with SSEN and National Grid, the Council are now in contract with SSEN for connection to the grid in Summer 2026. A contractor has been appointed

and the project is now progressing through detailed design. Main construction of the solar farm is expected in Spring/Summer 2025, for first operation in 2026.

The current forecasts identify a capital expenditure of £25.18m, and a net income (after running costs and capital financing costs) of £68.52m over the 25 year life of the development (equal to £2.74m per annum on average).

The forecasted net income compares extremely favourably against the £480k per annum identified when the Executive/Council considered/approved the business case in 2021. The forecasted returns also significantly exceed the £200k per annum threshold that allows for delegation of decision making around the final extent and configuration of the Solar Farm to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Finance Officer) in conjunction with the Lead Member.

The MTFP currently identifies an equalised net surplus, after capital financing costs, of circa £1m per annum from the Barkham Solar Farm. Based on the current forecasts, the scheme would deliver (and exceed) the current MTFP expectations.

PROGRESS REPORT

In response to the rising concern over the urgent need for action, in 2019 Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) declared a climate emergency. The Council subsequently published its Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), which is subject to ongoing monitoring and review. Renewable energy generation remains a key priority of the CEAP and the Barkham Solar Farm is a specific project/target identified therein.

The financial business case for the Barkham Solar Farm was initially considered and approved by Executive in July 2021 and by Full Council in September 2021. Since that time the industry has experienced considerable inflation in build costs and interest rates have risen. At the same time however there has been an unprecedented rise in energy prices. Whilst it is therefore evident that the solar farm will now cost more to build than was forecasted back in 2021, the forecasted returns to the Council have significantly improved also.

Full planning permission for the project was secured in January 2022 and in May 2022 the Council received a grid connection offer from SSEN for connection to the grid by 2026.

At a Special Council Executive meeting on 30 June 2022, both Executive and Council approved the procurement business case for the contractor and delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and the Executive Member of Climate Emergency and Residents Services, to implement the strategy. At the meeting the Executive further resolved that an updated business case and progress report will be reported back to the Executive following the conclusion of the procurement process; hence the reporting herein.

The Council appointed Bouygues (now Equans) early in 2023. They have initially been appointed on a Pre-construction Services Agreement (PCSA) contract for surveys and design works only. Once completed, it is intended that Employer Requirements will be formulated into agreed Contractor's Proposals and a contract sum agreed upon using an open book tendering process to arrive at a 'best value' proposal for WBC (the Employer). Award of the main JCT Design & Build Contract for the Stage 2 construction will follow.

The project therefore had been progressing in good faith against the grid connection offer received from SSEN. However, in March 2023 SSEN advised WBC that they could now not connect the solar farm to the grid until 2037 due to up-grades to the grid required at transmission level. This put the project at significant risk.

Extensive and positive engagement with SSEN and National Grid followed; culminating in WBC receiving a revised connection offer of August 2026. In January 2024 the Council formally accepted the offer and the connection date is now in contract. The project is therefore once again progressing for delivery in 2026. The agreement to a 2026 connection date mitigates a significant risk to the delivery of the project.

Equans had stood down pending resolution of the connection issue with SSEN and National Grid. They have now remobilised and are in the process of undertaking survey and detailed design work under the Pre-Construction Services Agreement. Planning submissions will follow in due course pursuant to the various planning conditions; with the final contract sum for construction to be agreed between Equans and the Council

towards the end of this year. Main construction of the solar farm is expected in Spring/Summer 2025, for first operation in 2026.

The currently anticipated delivery programme for the project is as follows:

Survey / Design Work	Ongoing
Parish Council and Stakeholder Up-dates	Mar/Apr
Submission to planning – Conditions – First Tranche	Apr/May
Submission to Planning – Conditions – Second Tranche	July
Agree contract sum with Equans and enter into construction contract	By end 2024
Initial Construction Works	Dec/Jan 24/25
Main Construction (2-3 months)	Spring/Summer 25
Off-site Grid Connection Works (SSEN Works) (6-9 months)	Tbc
Grid Connection / First Operation	Summer 26

THE FINANCIAL BUSINESS CASE

The business case has evolved over the life of the project as costs and values have changed.

The original business case for the solar farm was approved by Executive and Council in Summer 2021. An updated financial business case was subsequently presented to, and supported by, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 5th October 2022.

The table below sets out the historic financial forecasts for the project, as reported in Summer 2021 and October 2022; together with the current (January 2024) financial forecast for the project shown in the right hand column. Note: figures in red/brackets indicate income/surplus, figures in black (without brackets) indicate expenditure:

	Summer 2021 £m	October 2022 £m	January 2024 £m
Capital Expenditure			
Capital cost	20.28	26.85	25.19

General Fund - Income and Expenditure			
Revenue income	(59.37)	(126.50)	(129.17)
Revenue operating expenditure	14.42	19.48	19.01
Revenue operating surplus	(44.95)	(107.02)	(110.16)

Repayment of capital expenditure	20.28	26.85	25.19
Interest costs	12.68	13.01	16.44
Revenue surplus after financing costs	(11.99)	(67.16)	(68.52)
<i>Average surplus per year</i>	<i>(0.48)</i>	<i>(2.69)</i>	<i>(2.74)</i>

A breakdown of the forecasted Capital Costs of the project, together with the General Fund Income and Expenditure forecast, is included at Part 2 of this report.

The Council is advised by LHW Partnership who are a specialist consultant with extensive experience in the delivery of low carbon energy projects. The forecasts presented in the business case therefore have been developed using expert advice, provided by an external consultant with significant experience in this field.

The business case for the project makes assumptions around the export price of the energy and annual fuel price inflation across the 25 years of the project – as is set out in the Part 2 papers. Sensitivity testing around these assumptions is also included in the Part 2 papers.

The returns indicated above compare extremely favourably against the £480k per annum identified when the Executive/Council considered/approved the business case in 2021. The forecasted returns also significantly exceed the £200k per annum threshold that allows for delegation of decision making around the final extent and configuration of the Solar Farm to the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Finance Officer) in conjunction with the Lead Member, as per the 2021 Executive/Council approvals.

The MTFP currently identifies an equalised net surplus, after capital financing costs, of circa £1m per annum from the Barkham Solar Farm. Based on the current forecasts, the scheme would deliver (and exceed) the current MTFP expectations.

Additionality

Whilst business rates are included in the business case as a project expenditure, the forecast does not record any of the revenue that WBC will receive corporately through the retention of business rates payable by the Solar Farm. WBC could retain up to 100% of business rates paid against renewable energy projects; in which case the Solar Farm could potentially generate circa £2m of additional revenue to the Council over the 25 years of the facility.

In addition, for the purposes of the business case, it has been assumed that all electricity generated will be exported directly to the grid via an electricity supplier under a Power Purchase Agreement. The forecasts, at this time, do not seek to take into account further additionality as may be achievable through 'sleeving' the electricity output through a licenced supplier direct to WBC's operational portfolio. This would allow WBC to regulate its own energy prices to a greater or lesser degree. Where the solar farm equates to 73% of WBC's overall corporate Energy consumption, and with the recently experienced hike in energy prices, this has potential to capture significant operational savings to the Council.

These opportunities will be explored and progressed in greater detail with the relevant Members as the scheme progresses through to delivery. The ultimate decision on what WBC do with the electricity will be partly dependant on government and grid developments on energy pricing over the coming year(s). LHW and WBC officers will review this as it develops; with a view to making decisions at the relevant juncture. The Council will need to be guided by the best 'payback' opportunity in this regard.

NON-FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF THE SOLAR FARM

The past few years have shown how reliant the UK remains on imported fossil fuels, with costs soaring due to disruption from the war in Ukraine and increased demand from other countries. By generating renewable energy locally and putting it back into the grid, schemes like this have a significant part to play in securing sustainable power supplies, stabilising the costs of energy, and helping protect residents from further cost of living crisis in the longer term.

Contribution to CEAP targets

Target 2.1.1 - Deliver the installation of a solar farm in Barkham with the capacity to generate in excess of 29 MWp of energy.

The Barkham Solar Farm is an integral part of the CEAP; comprising a specific target therein estimated to contribute a carbon saving of 6,121 tCO₂e.

In addition to delivering against target 2.1.1 of the plan, the project will also contribute towards the Council meeting the following CEAP targets:

Target 1A.4.5 - Develop the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to be Borough wide and implement 50% LCWIP by 2030.

The Solar Farm project will provide a new Greenway from the southern boundary (linking into the existing Greenway running along the northern boundary of California Country Park) up to the northern boundary of the site. This section of Greenway will be the first segment of a new Greenway Route identified in the LCWIP and intended in time to connect the Arborfield SDL into Barkham and then beyond into Wokingham as part of the Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

Target 4.1.2 - Deliver small-scale woodland planting on council estate in existing parks and opens spaces sites to improve carbon capture and biodiversity net gain.

The Barkham Solar Farm project includes a 2.66ha band of woodland planting along the southern boundary of the site which will include the planting of circa 5,800 new trees in the 2024/25 planting season. The Solar Farm woodland planting will be a continuation of (and in addition to) the 7.7ha of tree planting (approximately 7,000 new trees) proposed under the Covid Memorial Woodland project on the adjacent site (see Executive resolution of 21/03/23).

In addition, new tree planting has already been provided at the site in the form of a new fruit tree nursery and further tree planting will be brought forward as part of the wider Solar Farm landscaping proposals – final details of which will need to be developed over the coming months and submitted for approval under the conditions of the planning permission.

In terms of the fruit tree nursery already planted, the Council worked with Freely Fruity (a local charity) to identify and provide the land on the site, secure the necessary consents and enter into lease. Freely Fruity supports community groups, schools, Town and Parish council's, etc, in providing free fruit, vegetables and more recently have been donating fruit trees across the borough to deliver new community orchards. The trees they have planted are contributing to the council's tree planting target and all food grown on site is donated to local food banks and other charities.

Other (Non-specific CEAP) Benefits

Through grassland enhancement and woodland creation, as well as hedgerow improvements and new hedgerow planting, the project will provide a significant uplift in biodiversity at the site. A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment submitted at the time of the planning application indicated potential for an uplift in area based habitat units of 162% and in hedgerow units of 63%; which is well in excess of the 10% biodiversity net gain generally expected with major planning applications. Final details of the biodiversity net gain at the site will be measured and recorded in due course following the finalisation and approvals of the detailed design of the landscaping proposals.

In addition to the above, prior to the commencement of construction an Employment Skills Plan will be developed with the contractor and in consultation with the Council's Economic Development Team. The intention of this plan will be to explore how the project can provide opportunities for local employment, training, apprenticeship, and/or other vocational initiatives to develop local employability skills.

KEY PROJECT RISKS

Grid Connection:

The delivery of the project and the commencement of operation of the solar farm (and the revenue to the Council thereafter) is subject to the scheme connecting into grid. At this time the Council has entered into a contract to connect to the grid in 2026. The Council are however beholden to SSEN for delivery of the connection. The project team will continue to work proactively with SSEN to facilitate this connection date – and explore opportunities to potentially bring that date forward if achievable.

Inflating Costs:

The business case has been informed by market experts and a prudent approach to pricing has been taken at this stage. Final construction costs will not however be fixed until the construction contract is awarded towards the end of this year.

Fluctuating Energy Prices/Revenues:

Electricity prices will be influenced by government and grid developments on energy pricing over the coming years. The approach to energy prices adopted within the financial forecasting – as is set out in Part 2 – has therefore been prudent.

Sensitivity testing around the assumed electricity export prices and annual fuel inflation across the 25 years has been included in the Part 2 papers. Whilst the financial information looks extremely positive, it nevertheless remains that a number of risks sit outside of WBC's control. The Council therefore remain prudent in the assumption of circa £1m per annum currently included within the MTFP.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£285k	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£2m	Yes	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£18m	Yes	Capital

Other Financial Information

The financial business case for the solar farm was considered and approved by Executive in July 2021 and by Full Council in September 2021.

The MTFP identifies an equalised net surplus, after capital financing costs, of circa £1m per annum from the Barkham Solar Farm. The project is forecasted to exceed this provision.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

None

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The project has been subject to extensive stakeholder consultation as part of the planning process. Further engagement with stakeholders will occur, including setting up a community liaison group, as the scheme progresses through to delivery.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken. The Initial Impact Assessment did not identify any potentially negative impacts upon persons with protected characteristics

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Generation of renewable energy through investment in solar farms is identified as a key priority under the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). The delivery of the Barkham Solar Farm is a specific target identified therein.

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

By Virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

List of Background Papers
PART 2 – Barkham Solar Farm Capital Cost PART 2 – Solar Farm General Fund Income and Expenditure PART 2 – Notes and Assumptions

Contact David Smith	Service Commercial Property
Telephone Tel: 0118 974 6230	Email david.smith2@wokingham.gov.uk

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