

Agenda Item IMD19

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: 2022/19

TITLE	Decision on publication of a Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan - Lindsay Ferris
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	20 December 2022 David Hicks 1 at 11am
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

To agree a Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement to encourage higher sustainability standards from development.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan:

- 1) approves the Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement, contained in Enclosure 1;
- 2) agrees that it form a material planning consideration when determining planning applications.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

WBC declared a Climate Emergency on 18th July 2019. The declaration set out the commitment to play as full a role as possible in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030.

Planning decisions made now will have long term consequences for our communities and the environment. Ambitious planning policies to respond to the Climate Emergency will be proposed within the LPU. In the intervening period, it is not lawfully possible to set new standards. It is possible, however for WBC to incentivise higher sustainability standards by formally adopting a position which confirms that responses which go beyond adopted policy will be considered positively in the planning balance when determining planning applications.

The purpose of the Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement (CCIPPS) is to formally confirm that the Climate Emergency and the delivery of higher sustainability standards will be material when assessing planning applications.

It should be recognised that the CCIPPS is not in itself planning policy and is not part of the statutory Development Plan. It is an explanatory document, which will serve as a tool to encourage and justify higher sustainability standards being sought. However, it cannot mandate requirements beyond adopted policy.

Background

Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) current policies are set out within the Core Strategy local plan (2010) and the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) local plan (2014). Both local plans look towards the year 2026. These plans were prepared with the intention of promoting the sustainable use, conservation and disposal of resources while mitigating and adapting to climate change. At the time of their preparation there was an expectation that all new homes built after 2016 and new non-domestic buildings built after 2019 would be zero carbon through national actions. The Government subsequently decided to abandon these plans.

WBC is in the process of producing a new local plan, known as the Local Plan Update (LPU). The LPU will put in place a spatial strategy and set of planning policies to manage development over the longer term, replacing the Core Strategy and MDD local plans. The LPU is at a consultative stage of preparation with adoption not expected before 2024. In the intervening period, the emerging LPU carries only limited weight when assessing planning applications.

WBC declared a Climate Emergency on 18th July 2019. The declaration set out the commitment to play as full a role as possible in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030, leading by example as well as by exhortation. Amongst other things, the declaration committed WBC to produce a Climate Emergency Action Plan. The declaration of a Climate Emergency has led to an increased appreciation and prioritisation of sustainability. It is recognised that 2030 is fast approaching, and therefore action must be taken in the short term.

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

Planning decisions made now will have long term consequences for our communities and the environment. The Climate Emergency is undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges that humanity has ever faced, and the planning process is an important mechanism to help address the causes and impacts of climate change.

Ambitious planning policies to respond to the Climate Emergency will be proposed within the LPU. In the intervening period, it is not lawfully possible to set new standards. It is possible, however for WBC to incentivise higher sustainability standards by formally adopting a position which confirms that responses which go beyond adopted policy will be considered positively in the planning balance when determining planning applications.

The purpose of the Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement (CCIPPS) is to formally confirm that the Climate Emergency and the delivery of higher sustainability standards will be material when assessing planning applications. The CCIPPS makes clear that WBC will expect, as a minimum, that development proposals contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation by applying adopted policies to their best effect. It is also an expectation that development proposals play their part and go beyond current requirements to be more aligned with emerging local and national policy. Where development proposals demonstrably go above and beyond adopted policy requirements, this will be weighed positively in the balance when assessing a development proposal. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate compliance with

these aims through their Sustainability Assessment (or Energy Statement) as required by our Local List.

The CCIPPS contains sections on the Climate Emergency position within Wokingham Borough; introduce the national legislation and policy context; outline the policy position in the existing development plan; consider the emerging local planning policy position; and finally concluding on what is expected of development proposals. A brief summary of each section is provided below.

Climate Emergency

This provides the background to WBC's declaration of a Climate Emergency in July 2019. It introduces and summarises the key priorities in the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), which all to a greater or lesser degree are impacted by decisions on planning proposals. The key message of this section is that the Climate Emergency and CEAP are material considerations for planning purposes and should be recognised by applicants and decision makers.

National legislative and policy context

This section summarises the key legislation and policy relating to climate change and the planning system. This includes:

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004)
- Climate Change Act (2008)
- Planning and Energy Act (2008)
- Neighbourhood Planning Act (2017)
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Planning Practice Guidance
- Future Homes Standard
- Future Buildings Standard

There is a clear legal duty and policy basis for plan making and decision taking to contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change which should run through all planning decisions. All of the above, and other relevant legislation and best practice guidance, should be inform planning proposals and decisions.

Existing development plan policy

In this section, the principal policies relating to climate change and sustainability within the Core Strategy and MDD local plans are summarised in Table 1. This includes a status column against each policy, setting out whether or not further policy clarifications are required to take into account any material considerations which have arisen since the policy was originally adopted. Where a policy clarification is not required, the existing policy will be applied as written until superseded by the LPU. Where clarifications are indicated as being required in the status column, details of those changes or revisions are provided in Table 2. This sets out the clarification or interpretation considered necessary in light of the Climate Emergency and other material considerations that have arisen since adoption of the relevant policy. It also provides the justification for the proposed clarification. The aim of this section is to therefore ensure, as a minimum, that existing policies are applied to their fullest effect.

Emerging local planning policy position

This section signposts to the wide range of emerging policies contained within the [Draft Plan \(2020\)](#). It also sets out that where the more stringent standards in emerging policy, as compared to adopted policy, can be achieved, this will be encouraged.

Conclusion

This section draws together the key messages from preceding sections before concluding on what is expected of development proposals. It makes clear that 'green washing' will not be acceptable and that existing recognised assessment methods will be encouraged, especially those with post occupancy monitoring requirements, in order that promised performance is realised in practice.

It also cautions that the statement does not, and cannot, override the general presumption in favour of sustainable development which has multiple dimensions. In short, delivering net zero operational buildings does not override other planning concerns, such as avoiding isolated development in the countryside where there is limited sustainable access to services and facilities.

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)	Nil	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The purpose of the recommendation to agree the CCIPPS is to encourage higher sustainability standards from development. The recommendation carries no financial implications itself – it seeks to set out and explain additional requirements for applicants.

The implementation of the CCIPPS will not lead to increased costs in the determination of most applications, however there may be occasions when specialist input may be deemed necessary, which will be covered from within existing budgets.

Cross-Council Implications
No cross-council implications arise as a result of this consultation exercise.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An Equalities Impact Screening Report was produced and is available on request.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Resources and Assets	No comments
Monitoring Officer	No comments
Leader of the Council	No comments

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Enclosure 1: Climate Change Interim Policy Position Statement – December 2022 Climate Emergency Declaration Climate Emergency Action Plan National Planning Policy Framework Core Strategy (2010) Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014)

Contact James McCabe	Service Place
Telephone No Tel: 0118 908 8333	Email james.mccabe@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank