

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Wokingham Borough Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan Fourth Progress Report September 2023</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Council on 21 <sup>st</sup> September 2023
<b>WARD</b>	All;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Giorgio Framaliccio – Director of Place and Growth

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) Fourth Progress Report outlines the progress made up to this point on the actions being taken towards the commitment of playing as full a role as possible in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030. The targets within the plan significantly contribute towards addressing the climate emergency, in terms of reducing local emissions, whilst simultaneously improving the quality of life for all residents through a variety of measures including reduced energy costs, better air quality and improved active travel infrastructure.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Council notes:

1. The progress made in the Climate Emergency Action Plan fourth progress report, which covers the period May 2022 to May 2023.
2. The new format of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, including significant design changes to make it a more effective engagement and communication tool.
3. That a more ambitious approach will be required in some areas going forward to enable Wokingham Borough Council to play as full a role as possible in achieving a carbon neutrality by 2030.
4. That this remains a live document and continues to be updated as more details become available to support decision making.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

This Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) fourth progress report summarises the Borough's current carbon emission profile and the Council's progress towards its 2030 carbon neutrality goal for the last 12 month period (May 2022 to May 2023).

The CEAP comprises 10 key priority areas for carbon reduction, and over 100 actions that the Council has committed to deliver to achieve its 2030 goal. The progress report contains full details of the actions and their associated outcomes, milestones and the latest status update, alongside anticipated costs and expected carbon savings.

Wokingham Borough's carbon footprint is currently 505 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2020), with a remaining shortfall in 2030 of 240 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e after all the actions in the Plan are implemented. Therefore, if the Council is to meet its 2030 carbon neutral goal, further actions and resources, as well as strategic embedding of climate emergency considerations across the organisation are needed, alongside discussions on carbon offsetting for residual emissions. Further actions will come at a financial cost which creates significant challenge for the Council at a time when it faces rising inflation, interest rates and demand for statutory services.

The CEAP is a working document and a planning tool that allows us to understand where the Council is heading from a carbon emissions point of view, and to implement new actions accordingly. Hence, the Plan will continue to be updated annually and change over time as many of the actions will develop and new actions will be identified.

The CEAP fourth progress report, as well as a document outlining the carbon accounting methodology and carbon savings calculations are attached to this document.

## **BACKGROUND**

Following the Council's climate emergency declaration made in July 2019 the CEAP was adopted. The CEAP identifies 10 key priority areas for carbon emission reductions, to enable the Council to reach carbon neutrality by 2030. These are: Transport, Renewable Energy Generation, Building Retrofitting, Carbon Sequestration, Schools, Waste & Recycling, New Developments, Procurement, Engagement, and Council specific actions. The CEAP includes over 100 actions that the Council has committed to deliver to reach its carbon neutrality goal.

Each year, a progress report is produced to update the Council on the progress made around the delivery of the actions. To increase the strength and transparency of the Plan, the progress report is externally and independently reviewed by experts at the Council Climate Scorecards and the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), an internationally accepted process used by many large cities and companies.

This is the fourth year that the CEAP progress report is brought to Council. It covers progress made by the Council over the period May 2022- May 2023. The report also includes updated projections of the Borough's emissions to 2030.

This year's progress report incorporates the recommendations of the 2022 community deliberative process. As part of this process, in early 2022, 60 representatives from various stakeholder groups from across the Borough came together to identify barriers and propose solutions to the Council's carbon neutrality transition. Alongside this, in late 2022, a residents' survey titled "Let's Talk Climate" was delivered, that provided the Council with further insights into barriers that our community faces when making daily decisions which impact their carbon footprint. The recommendations from the stakeholders' groups and residents' survey were discussed with officers and incorporated into the CEAP actions, and also used to draft a "vision" for a carbon neutral borough that is now included in the CEAP.

To better monitor and evaluate the delivery of the CEAP actions, in March 2023, monitoring groups have been established to cover the 10 strategic priorities of the CEAP. Through these monitoring groups, the Climate Emergency team regularly captures updates on each CEAP action and identifies and addresses delivery barriers. The CEAP remains a living document and a planning tool, with new project ideas being incorporated throughout the year to deliver maximum carbon savings.

The CEAP fourth progress report has also been reviewed and noted by the climate emergency Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2023, addressing a number of questions and making changes based on constructive feedback. This included changing the wording towards carbon neutrality, rather than net zero, and improving the accessibility of the document.

The following paragraphs outline the areas for celebration as well as the areas for development that the Council should be aware of when reviewing the Plan.

### **Areas for celebration:**

- Emissions trajectory - As of 2020, the Council's overall emissions went down from 557.8 to 505.7 KtCO<sub>2</sub>e, representing a fall of over 52 KtCO<sub>2</sub>e. This was largely from travel and commercial aspects (Over 20kt each), primarily attributed to the pandemic and lockdowns. While this is a larger than expected decrease in this particular year as a result of these external factors, the overall downward trajectories over the long term are not significantly affected.
- Greatly simplified design: the CEAP has been fully revamped for improved accessibility, engagement and understanding.
- Inclusion of adaptation actions. Whilst the CEAP remains a climate mitigation tool, there is a need for the Council to start adapting to manage and mitigate the impacts of climate change that the Borough is already experiencing. For the first time ever, an action has been included in the CEAP to support the development of an adaptation plan for the Borough.
- On-street charging scheme figures well beyond expectation following initial pilot, so carbon savings have increased.
- Carbon savings associated with reduction in waste not just recycling, which is the main goal of the waste strategy.
- Greater focus on businesses. Targets specific to businesses have been included in the plan, to ensure the Council works with and supports businesses to understand their carbon emissions and decarbonise their operations and infrastructure.
- Two significant energy schemes launched in 2022/23: launch of the Solar Together scheme in partnership with the other Berkshire Local Authorities, that will hopefully reduce emissions from private homes in the Borough. Similarly, the Council successfully applied to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and received £292k to bring around 110 social homes to an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C by 2025.
- Development of a climate change communications and engagement plan to maximise stakeholder involvement in the Council's climate work.

#### **Areas for development:**

- The CEAP actions are not sufficient to deliver carbon neutrality by 2030. Further actions and resources, as well as strategic embedding of climate considerations across the organisation are needed in order to reach carbon neutrality. Similarly, discussions around the Council's position on carbon offsetting should take place imminently, in order to prepare for a scenario where offsetting is utilised to offset residual emissions. The affordability of this will need careful consideration given the Council's financial pressures.
- Climate emergency needs to be further embedded throughout the organisation at every level. This will help climate considerations to be automatically prioritised as matter of course.
- There is a need to address conflicting priorities for the Council, such as facing increasing financial pressures. For instance, schools' actions have not been progressed as fast as they ought to due to limited resources and officers' time being allocated to this. We need to deliver the best possible outcome for Climate emergency whilst meeting other demanding priorities. As a result, as of mid-2023 the climate team is working more closely with the Children Services team, with key steps taken that will be captured in more detail in the next progress report. This includes attending Borough Education Partnership meetings from September 2023.
- There is potential to make significant carbon saving through the Council's procurement processes. The Climate Emergency and Procurement team are looking to work more closely for better alignment between the Council's procurement work and climate commitment.
- Review of the carbon savings for some the actions means that the Plan savings fell by over 16kt – mainly due to changes to retrofit actions and some renewable energy projects.

## What happens next?

There is a need for further embedding of climate emergency across the Council. The delivery of the CEAP actions is a responsibility of each department, and it's currently challenged by the unprecedented financial pressure that the Council is facing. In light of this, we need to make sure that climate change considerations are given sufficient weight through strategies and in decision-making, particularly where they bear a financial cost to the departments.

The Climate Emergency team will continue to coordinate the actions listed in the plan, and report on progress. The team will continue to support all departments by delivering expert advice in sustainability, carbon accounting, and project specific advice.

## 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 focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

### **Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision**

The cost of delivering all the CEAP actions is currently estimated to be in excess of £250m. This is a high-level estimate for all actions up to 2030, including those which have already begun. Many of these ongoing projects have already had partial/full funding secured, but the remaining future projects and stages (of projects) will require additional funding, in excess of the current council internal budget, in order to be fully implemented. This includes any additional actions added to the plan.

Suitable funding sources will be identified for these projects as and when schemes are brought forward, with funding confirmed before schemes are progressed. These will need separate decision(s) which will go through feasibility assessments and the forward programme in their own right. Where possible, additional funding will be sought from government grants and schemes, but for some actions such as engagement, there is likely to be a requirement for council funding.

Many of the CEAP actions will save the Council money in the long run, for example from retrofitting assets, utilising EVs and delivering solar farms. The majority of these costs are already incorporated where possible into the CEAP report.

The Climate Emergency team remains a team with no budget for service delivery, and so cannot initiate any new projects, including projects that are part of the CEAP without additional funding being approved

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

Delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan is a council-wide project which ultimately affects all council services, whether directly through the actions for specific teams, or indirectly through embedding and engagement elements which can affect and support all officers. Where this applies is specified within the plan itself, but broadly incorporates officers increasing the priority of climate emergency aspects within their service and reducing carbon dioxide emissions where possible. Any potential impacts are discussed with teams in advance and disruption minimised, with actions indeed designed to help teams in service delivery via reduced costs or other aspects.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

Equalities assessment has been completed. Appendix C.

<b>Reasons for considering the report in Part 2</b>
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<b>List of Background Papers</b>
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Appendix A. WBC CEAP Fourth Progress Report September 2023
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Appendix B. WBC CEAP Carbon Accounting Methodology and Assumptions 2023
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Appendix C. WBC CEAP September Progress Report EqIA 2023
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