

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

This page is intentionally left blank