



West Lancashire Borough Council

Report of the Corporate and Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee
**'Action on Climate Emergency Review/Create/Designate Hedgehog and Wildlife
Areas in Public Parks/Gardens Across The Borough'**





Action on Climate Emergency/Create/Designate Hedgehog and Wildlife Areas In Public Parks/Gardens Across The Borough' Review - Report of the Corporate and Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee

FOREWORD by the Chairman Councillor Donna West



“The Corporate and Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of ‘Action on Climate Emergency/Create/Designate Hedgehog and Wildlife Areas In Public Parks/Gardens Across The Borough’” in 2020/21. This report sets down the outcomes of the work undertaken by Members of the Committee during that period.

We started the Scrutiny Project in March 2021 with a presentation from the Environmental Strategy Officer and Head Ranger, to give an overview and background of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2030, the current position, plans for the future, aims, ideas and opportunities.

We would like to thank all those who have been involved in the review in particular those Members and Officers who took the time to attend meetings.

In addition to the information provided by Officers of the Council, we would like to thank External Partners and Citizens who provided their feedback and comment to the on-line ‘Action on Climate Emergency’ consultation.

THE REVIEW

BACKGROUND

The Corporate and Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10 December 2020 agreed that the topic selected for review in the 2020/2021 Work Programme of the Committee would be "Action on Climate Emergency" combined with 'Create/Designate Hedgehog and Wildlife areas in public parks/gardens across the Borough'.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To undertake a review entitled 'Action on Climate Emergency'.
2. To encourage and actively promote 'Climate Action' involving the Communities, Businesses, Individuals and Stakeholders across all sectors of the Borough.
3. To participate and engage in a 'Community Action Plan' to encourage engagement from our Communities, Businesses, Individuals and Stakeholders in order to identify targets and key areas of interest for action.
4. To present a report of the Committee's findings to Cabinet and Council, as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. That the following completed Actions/outcomes highlighted by the Committee during the course of the review, be noted:
1. Information regarding the Green Homes Grant has been sent to all residents who requested it, with links to the Cosy Homes in Lancashire (CHIL) website, which provides further information, encourages householders to take up free energy efficiency measures in their homes and provides an online application form.
 2. An invite to the NW Energy Hub event in June was forwarded to all who expressed an interest, together with another similar event by Electricity Northwest (ENW) 'Powering our Communities' which launched a Fund to support community and local energy groups to develop and grow.
 3. A 2nd bid has been submitted to the Office of Low Emissions Vehicles (OLEV) for their consideration. This includes 32 charge points at 16 locations, the majority of which are in communal parking areas on housing estates in Skelmersdale, to ensure those living in properties without off-street parking have access to a convenient charging network. Should the project go ahead, it would attract £374,709.01 investment, at nil cost to the council.
- B. That interested parties be contacted to inform about the Rural Community Energy Fund.
- C. That the Council continue to investigate a community/group purchasing project for Solar PV, noting that early conversations are underway with NW Energy Hub regarding an application to the Rural Community Energy Fund, with possible partners. The intention is to community fund a solar PV project on large scale building/s in Skelmersdale occupied by a high energy user to purchase the power (this could be a Council owned commercial building with a high user tenant). The

income generated could then be reinvested to fund a further project or offered back to investors, depending on the community model used.

- D. That representatives from North West Energy Hub and Electricity North West be invited to attend a West Lancashire community energy event, following the outcome of a RCEF fund application in C above.
- E. That case studies, with performance and savings figures, from installed renewable technologies on Council housing, be developed and made available on the Council's website, including details of:
 - 1. How much will it cost to install a 2kw 3kw or 4kw?
 - 2. How much disruption will there be to install them?
 - 3. What potential returns are there, if any, besides the positive impact on the environment?
- F. That working with the Lancashire Woodland Connect Project, continue to identify locations for tree planting and hedgehog and wildlife areas, noting that potential sites currently identified include 2-3 hectares at Fairy Glenn for the Queens 'Green Canopy Scheme'; 2-3 hectares at Tawd Valley Park with the assistance of the 'Friends of Tawd Valley Park'; a community orchard at Whittle Drive, Ormskirk, working with Westend School; hedgehog gardens at the Halsall Lane site, where the Schools will be getting involved, with potential funding being made available from the housing environmental improvement fund.
- G. That the potential to provide for an alternative/reduced mowing regime be investigated in order to manage areas specifically for wildlife and wildflower habitats.
- H. That consideration be given to climate change matters within the emerging Local Plan.
- I. That officers investigate / explore how businesses in the Borough can be supported with recycling.
- J. That 'Water Management Strategies' be considered as a future topic for consideration for inclusion in the Corporate & Environmental Overview & Scrutiny work programme for 2022/23.
- K. That Members receive via a Members Update, frequent updates in respect of the 'Action on Climate Emergency Strategy and Action plan'.
- L. That a Lead Member and senior officer be identified to drive forward the Council's agenda for Carbon Reduction/Environment and the importance of appointing an Environmental Strategy Manager to facilitate the actions outlined in the Council's Climate Change Strategy, be expressed.
- M. That an update on progress of the recommendations be reviewed at Corporate & Environmental Overview & Scrutiny Committee in September 2022.

INFORMATION GATHERED

Meeting held on 11 March 2021 (Presentation 1)

The Environmental Strategy Officer and Head Ranger provided the Committee with a Presentation in respect of the Climate Emergency Action Review, which provided an overview of the background of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2030, the current position, plans for the future, aims, ideas and opportunities.

The Presentation provided information, which included the following:

- Carbon footprint baseline and targeting
- Community Action Plan / Citizen Assembly – Identify Stakeholders / Partners and interested parties
- Projects 2021-22; Green Homes Grant voucher Scheme; On Street Residential Charge Point Scheme
- Potential Projects; The Rural Community Energy Fund; Solar Together
- Waste Reduction Strategy – Current Projects
- Potential Projects – Business Waste; Residential Recycling
- Biodiversity – Current Position; 16 Parks and Country Parks managed by Ranger Service
- Work with local schools to promote, protect, enhance green space
- Programmes on site carried out by staff, volunteers, stakeholders and contractors (subject to funding)
- Planting of in excess of 2000 trees in last 3 years
- Focus on improving habitat connectivity
- Green Infrastructure improvements / Sustainable Transport Plans
- Current Biodiversity including; Improving Clough Valleys in Skelmersdale – CIL / Kickstart
- Towpath Improvements
- Investigating potential Beacon Eco-Park and surrounding green space (subject to funding)
- Biodiversity opportunities; Revise mowing regimes; investigate areas to manage specifically for wildlife habitat
- Fairy Glen Country Park
- Water Management Strategy – Current Position and Potential Projects including; Asset Management Review; Property Flood Resilience Service; Sustainable Drainage; Provision of water butts for the public

Questions and comments were raised in respect of:

- Green Homes Grant Funding – Types of efficiency measures / eligibility of private rented properties / homeowners
- Current carbon output in tonnes / How we report progress against the target reduction
- Vehicle Replacement Programme – Electric vehicle trial / Hydrogen substitute
- Charging points for electric vehicles / costs / locations
- Carbon Budget 2035 - 50,000 ha/year of trees must be planted. What is our contribution and how will they be paid for?
- Recycling contamination

- Potential business waste pilot
- Community Orchards
- Bike Storage
- Hedgehog friendly development (Local Plan)
- Volunteer Litter Picker Risk Assessment / Pack

OUTCOMES: The Environmental Strategy Officer circulated after the meeting a spreadsheet showing all the answers and comments received from the Climate Change Consultation by Ward,

Meeting held on 10 June 2021 (Presentation 2)

The Environmental Strategy Officer and Head Ranger provided the Committee with a Presentation in respect of a Climate Emergency Consultation which was launched on 14 May 2021 until 30 May 2021.

Members were informed that PR was undertaken for the launch and that Community Groups known to the Council were also encouraged to promote. She explained that the Consultation tied in with the four areas linked into the Climate Emergency Action Plan 2030; Renewable Energy Generation; Waste Reduction Strategy; Developing/Supporting Biodiversity Projects and the Development of Water Management Strategies.

The Presentation provided information, which included the following:

- Results – 123 responses
- 86% very concerned / fairly concerned about Climate Change
- Areas currently taking action to reduce impact on the Environment – 93% recycle and reduce waste, examples included; home compost, litter picking, allotment, vegan/ vegetarian diet
- Community Group Action - 48 interested in being involved
- Rewilding/wildlife friendly planting - majority would like to see this delivered in the Community, followed by generating renewable energy and tree planting
- The considered top priority for reducing emissions from homes was Generating renewable energy and insulating buildings
- Green Homes Grant CHiL Scheme – 32 would like details of the Scheme
- Renewable Energy Generation – It was considered by the majority that it would be helpful to receive more information in respect of the Community Group purchasing scheme. (details/data to be placed on the Councils website)
- 44% would like to be involved in a Community Energy Project in West Lancashire
- Transport is the highest source of emissions in West Lancashire – 32 new vehicle charge points have been fitted in Ormskirk and Skelmersdale
- The main considerations for people to be more likely to consider an electric vehicle in the future were being convenient / prominent electric vehicle charging infrastructure in communities / Home electric vehicle charging/ more information and details of the running costs
- Waste reduction – More information on product packaging; buy local and seasonal; donation of unwanted items; work with businesses on credentials; work with Community/Schools

- Biodiversity – areas to prioritise including tree planting; habitat protection; reduced mowing regime; natural woodland/wildlife corridors; water conservation measures
- 77% support reduced mowing regime in open spaces to encourage wildflower regeneration
- 49% interested in helping with a community planting or biodiversity/habitat creation project

The Environmental Strategy Officer listed numerous other areas of interest raised as a result of the Consultation, some of which included food waste/compost collection, cycling infrastructure and litter picking.

Questions and comments were raised in respect of the following:

- Public information on meadows and locations
- If there was a breakdown of the Consultation by Ward
- Varieties of crops on fields for bees
- Accredited companies / schemes for renewable energy
- Tree planting in Wards/ residential areas (appropriate species)
- Recycling education and promotion
- Community Action / Citizen Assembly
- Behavioural change

NEXT STEPS / OUTCOMES::

- To provide further information to the interested households of details of the Cosy Homes in Lancashire Scheme (CHiL) and encourage to take up free energy efficiency measures in their homes.
- To contact interested parties in respect of Community Energy and invite to a community event by NW Energy Hub and also inform about the Rural Community Energy Fund.
- To develop and promote case studies with performance and savings figures from installed renewable technologies on Council housing.
- To investigate a community/group purchasing project for Solar PV.
- To progress a second bid for further funds from the Office of Low Emission Vehicles to further expand the charging network in West Lancs.
- To identify further locations for tree planting, working with the Lancashire Woodland Connect Project.
- To investigate an alternative/reduced mowing regime.

Meeting held on 16 September 2021 (presentation 3)

The Head Ranger provided the Committee with an update on the outstanding actions arising from the Climate Emergency online Consultation and presentation from the previous meeting of the Committee.

- I. Information regarding the Green Homes Grant has been sent to all residents who requested it, with links to the Cosy Homes in Lancashire (CHiL) website for further information and an online application form.
- II. An invite to the NW Energy Hub event in June was forwarded to all who expressed an interest.

Another similar event has just been announced by Electricity Northwest (ENW) 'Powering our Communities' which launches a Fund to support community and local energy groups to develop and grow. This has also been circulated.

Early conversations are underway with NW Energy Hub regarding an application to the Rural Community Energy Fund, with possible partners Paul Cotterill and Edge Hill University. The intention is to community fund a solar PV project on large scale building/s in Skelmersdale occupied by a high energy user to purchase the power (this could be a Council owned commercial building with a high user tenant). The income generated could then be reinvested to fund a further project or offered back to investors, depending on the community model used.

Representatives from both NW Energy Hub and ENW have been approached and would be happy to speak at a West Lancashire community energy event, however they had no capacity over the summer (term time working). Might now be best to await the outcome of a RCEF fund application, then we can approach with funding to get started.

- III. A case study of the performance of solar PV installed on Council housing has been developed and will be made available on the Council website.
- IV. To investigate a community/group purchasing project for Solar PV is currently outstanding.
- V. A 2nd bid has been submitted to OLEV for their consideration. This includes 32 charge points at 16 locations, the majority of which are in communal parking areas on housing estates in Skelmersdale, to ensure those living in properties without off-street parking have access to a convenient charging network. Should the project go ahead, it would attract £374,709.01 investment, at nil cost to the council.
- VI. Sites identified for tree planting, working with the Lancashire Woodland Connect Project include 2-3 hectares at Fairy Glenn for the Queens 'Green Canopy Scheme'; 2-3 hectares at Tawd Valley Park with the assistance of the 'Friends of Tawd Valley Park'. Staff are working with Westend School on a Community Orchard at Whittle Drive, Ormskirk. Suitable areas have been identified for hedgehog gardens at the Halsall Lane site, where the Schools will be getting involved. Discussions have taken place in respect of the housing environmental improvement fund to plant trees, the possible suitability for these areas would be ornamental as well as fruit varieties.
- VII. The investigation into an alternative/reduced mowing regime was progressing slowly.

Questions and comments were raised in respect of the following:

- Sites identified for Hedgehogs – work ongoing with Ranger and Schools / contact to be made with resident that put topic forward
- Mowing Regimes / Verges / timings of cuttings
- Work curtailed by Covid and staff resources
- Potential Projects on Waste; Reduce Reuse Recycle; Food waste bins
- Commitment to ongoing Climate Strategy
- Communication to give to residents
- Businesses recycling – Investigate, encourage and assist
- Changes in behaviour

NEXT STEPS/OUTCOMES:

It was expressed that it was important to continue work on the 4 key objectives and for Members to become involved and engaged and liaise with the community, businesses, and individuals across all sectors of the Borough.

Members also discussed the possibility of investigating / exploring how our Businesses could be assisted with their recycling.

That Members receive frequent updates in respect of the 'Action on Climate Emergency Strategy and Action plan to 'flag up' the work to be continued.

Membership of the Committee

2019/20

Chairman: Councillor C Coughlan

Vice Chairman: Councillor C Dereli

Councillors: A Blundell, Mrs M Blake, S Currie, J Finch, N Furey, J Gordon, S Gregson, K. Mitchell, P O'Neill.

2020/21

Chairman: Councillor D West

Vice Chairman: Councillor J Finch

Councillors: Mrs M Blake, C Dereli, A Fennell, J Gordon, S Gregson, D Hirrell, K Mitchell, P Turpin, J Upjohn.

Officer Support

Lead Officer: Chris Twomey, Corporate Director Transformation & Resources

Scrutiny Support Officer: Jacky Denning, Democratic Services Manager
Julia Brown, Member Services Officer

Officers Reporting: Tina Iball, Environmental Strategy Officer
Dan Massey, Head Ranger
Emma Lofthouse, Waste and Recycling Officer

Legal Officer: Adam Spicer, Assistant Solicitor

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2030 makes a commitment to aspire to be a carbon neutral Council by 2030, at the latest. This includes all greenhouse gas emissions directly associated with Council operations. Reduction in the use of dirty energy derived from fossil fuels and finite resources and an increased use of energy from renewable sources will reduce carbon emissions, reduce our impact on climate change and help to improve air quality. Energy efficiency measures undertaken on the Council's housing stock will improve the quality of housing provided, helping to deliver affordable warmth, reduce fuel poverty and cold related illnesses and improve health and well-being, inadvertently reducing demand on local health services in the long term and environmentally conscious businesses will help to enhance a green economy.

Developments in this area of work are likely to involve key partners, stakeholders and residents of the Borough, in its on-going development.

FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant financial or resource implications arising from this report other than work associated with the 'Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2030. Financial or resource implications will need to be considered for any future projects or actions arising from this review.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Tackling climate change and enabling a low carbon future has many links to health and well-being. The impacts of climate change include warming temperatures and increases in the frequency or intensity of extreme weather events such as heat waves and flooding. Such events can threaten our health (especially for the most vulnerable), the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe.

Improving the energy efficiency of homes not only saves energy and carbon but will reduce fuel poverty, deliver affordable warmth and reduce ill health/deaths resulting from living in a cold home.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact of members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders, therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required. An EIA would be undertaken for any future projects or actions arising from this review.

Appendices

None.