

ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL

<u>REPORT TO :</u>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<u>DATE :</u>	22 nd November 2022
<u>REPORT TITLE :</u>	Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy Update
<u>LEAD COUNCILLOR :</u>	Councillor Chris White, Leader of the Council
<u>WARDS :</u>	All
<u>CONTACT OFFICER :</u>	Candice Luper, Sustainability Projects Officer, Community and Place Delivery, Candice.luper@stalbans.gov.uk

1. **Purpose Of Report**

- 1.1 To update the Committee on progress towards the Council's Sustainability and Climate Crisis action plan and outline the next steps.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee review the report and feedback any comments to the Contact Officer.

3. **Background Information**

- 3.1 In 2019, St Albans City and District Council [declared our commitment](#) to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2030. This applies to our own services, largest contractors, buildings and operations, which are in our direct control. We also commit to doing all we can, within our powers, to reduce emissions from energy and transport across the District.
- 3.2 A [Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy \(SCCS\)](#) was developed and published in 2020 which sets out our ambitions, and the first phase of actions that we commit to taking between 2020-23. The strategy includes actions that specifically address the Council's direct carbon emissions (scope 1, 2 and some 3) and emissions from local housing and transport. It also includes wider actions focusing on waste, wildlife, water, climate change adaptation as well as actions around leadership and governance.
- 3.3 Officers are asked to report progress towards their actions in the Sustainability Tracker every 2 months. The Sustainability Tracker is monitored by the Climate Advisory Group at every other meeting.
- 3.4 Numerous changes have occurred since the strategy's publication. The pandemic created dramatic and widespread changes across the world. Some of these were positive for the environment, such as the increase in homeworking, reduced business and travel emissions and the greater appreciation for nature and community projects. Economic consequences however also diverted attention and resource away from environmental initiatives.

- 3.5 This year the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) have reported that global inaction on decarbonisation means the world is now set to pass the 1.5C threshold by 2040. The [UN Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) also announced that even if all pledges are delivered by 2030, temperatures will rise to 2.5C by the end of the century leading to catastrophic extreme weather across the globe. Nationally, the Government have published various plans and strategies relating to decarbonisation but have also approved drilling licences for 900 locations in the North Sea.
- 3.6 Across the globe people's lives are being affected by climate changes already happening from the current 1C temp rise. The summer of record-breaking temperatures, fires and storms have made climate change all the more real for many. The enormous price increase of energy has also revealed great vulnerability for us all, as we all remain dependent on a unsustainable and unstable fossil fuel business.
- 3.7 It is clear that urgent and sustained action is needed to limit our emissions and prepare for climate changes. This report will set out what we have already achieved as well as the next steps in our climate emergency programme.

4. **Analysis and Findings**

- 4.1 Progress towards each of the actions in the SCCS is provided in the Sustainability Tracker, which can be viewed on the Council's Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy webpage [here](#). Below is just a short summary of key achievements with particular focus on energy and transport which have a direct impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

Achievements

- 4.2 Theme 1: Governance and Leadership:
- ✓ Recruited two year fixed-term post to deliver technical decarbonisation work.
 - ✓ Sustainability Impacts Assessment process is in place across the Council to ensure that impacts are assessed early on in all new projects, policies and large purchases/contracts. There is still more work to do to ensure all staff remember to do this.
 - ✓ Sustainability E-Learning module developed in-house, is now mandatory as part of annual staff training and induction processes. Climate Science E-Learning module developed in-house, has been made available for staff to complete on a voluntary module. Completion numbers remain low on this one as not compulsory. The module has been adopted for use across multiple other Hertfordshire Districts. Key managers have also completed one day in-person carbon literacy training.
 - ✓ Working with Oaklands College to incorporate sustainability themes across all the curriculums in 2022/23 to produce outputs that can be used for ongoing community engagement across the District.
 - ✓ Sustainable St Albans have delivered a 2 day per week programme (since Sept 2021) on our behalf to engage the community and train a network of volunteers to engage the community. The project has provided training and engagement to 22 groups/businesses, trained 9 Climate Champions who have engaged a further 192 people, delivered 4 pop-up events in Batchwood,

Sopwell and Cunningham Wards and have encouraged 58 people to pledge 99 steps as part of St Albans Count Us In / St Albans Climate Action Network. We are now exploring how to expand and extend this initiative going forward.

4.3 Theme 2: Energy Efficiency

- ✓ Through the St Albans Warmer Homes scheme with YES Energy and National Energy Foundation (NEF) Installer Network, vulnerable households received: 26 boilers, 66 Cavity, Room in roof or Loft Insulation, 20 new heating and 1 remedial heating during the programme.
- ✓ Solar Streets scheme to help residents obtain lower cost solar panels and batteries through bulk purchase has led to 29 solar PV panels being installed and another 69 awaiting installation. Herts-wide Solar Together bulk purchase scheme launched in September via iChoosr received over 3300 local registrations for the scheme and over 300 solar panel orders.
- ✓ Warmworks scheme was launched Sept 2022, allocating £1,362,000 Green Homes Grant funding to deliver wall, loft and hot water tank insulation, Air Source/ground source/hybrid heat pumps, biomass boilers, double/triple glazing to replace single glazing, energy efficient doors, thermostats and heating controls, to low-income households.
- ✓ NEF now provide the St Albans Home Energy Support Service which replaces St Albans Warmer Homes. This central port of call for residents provides information on energy-efficiency and funding.
- ✓ SADC awarded funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 1 of £1.5m to improve the EPC performance of 136 properties; and Green Homes Deal Local Authority Delivery 1B funding to carry out works to 45 properties to achieve a Carbon Neutral output and an EPC rating of C to these properties. The Council are preparing a bid for funding under the SHDF Wave 2 scheme for works on 900 properties, bidding is expected to open in November 2022 and the programme delivery dates are from April 2023 until March 2024.

4.4 Theme 3: Transport and Air Quality

- ✓ 36 Electric Vehicle (18 fast charging) charging spaces will have been installed by the end of 2023. This excludes EV points at new developments at Jenny Lane, Noke Shot, Cottonmill Community & Cycle Centre, Fleetville Community Centre and CCOS South.
- ✓ Emissions based fees and charges policy for parking has been approved and implemented, as well as a new taxi policy which including phasing out of petrol/diesel vehicles, emissions standards and reduction in fees for low emission vehicles.
- ✓ Our Air Quality monitoring results showed sustained reductions of nitrogen dioxide at 2 of our 3 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA's). We have thus applied to revoke the AQMA status.
- ✓ We have been encouraging our contractors to move away from fossil fuelled vehicles. Our Housing contractor has purchased two electric vehicles. Our Grounds Maintenance contractor is planning to purchase four electric vehicles and one hybrid vehicle as an interim step. We have also jointly funded an electric JCB for the cemetery service. Our Waste Contractor is

currently trialling electric vehicles and keeping abreast of developments in the technology. Electric street cleaning vehicles are currently being trialled.

- ✓ Car Club has been launched to the public. March-Sept 2022 the cars travelled 8,928 pollution-free miles.

4.5 Theme 4: Waste

- ✓ SADC number one in England for recycling.
- ✓ We are now sending the Councils Recycling Guide to new households when they get their first Council tax Bill.
- ✓ Funding from WRAP Binastructure grant has allowed us to progress the installation of new dual litter bins.
- ✓ Entertainers at events are required to use biodegradable balloons or no balloons as per our Sustainability Procurement Policy.
- ✓ Plastic Free Council Action Plan published and in progress.

4.6 Theme 5: Nature and Food

- ✓ [Wilder St Albans](https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wilderstalbens) Officer has developed a website, engaged with local groups, individuals and schools. This led to 200 rewilding actions being undertaken across the community; 15 wildlife gardening champions being trained to provide support in the community; 3,600 children involved in the Wilder Schools initiative; 20 operatives completing the Wilding in Parks and Green Spaces Training; the creation of 31 ponds, the installation of 23 bird boxes and the overall involvement of 101 volunteers.
<https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wilderstalbens>.
- ✓ 3,600 trees planted.
- ✓ Successfully trialled glyphosate-free streets with HMWT and wilderwatch group. Involved 5 streets and 90 people. Feedback has been positive, and we will now explore how to expand the scheme.
- ✓ Successful in bid for 2022/23 Local Authority Treescapes Fund 2022/23 which will provide new woodland areas.
- ✓ Meadow creation being carried out in Verulamium Park, other open spaces and some highway verges where appropriate.

4.7 Theme 6: Water and Climate Adaptation

- ✓ Council Climate Change Risk Register has been produced and updated on an annual basis. This may be used as a basis for county-wide risk assessment. Mitigating actions integrated to service plans to ensure we begin preparing for climate changes, include: planting trees along footpaths and in open areas to provide shade, ensuring ventilation, cooling and grey-water recycling is integrated to new building design or when retrofitting existing buildings and ensuring that condition surveys and inspection regimes consider the risk of winds and storms to help identify the potential for damage occurring to fragile structures.

Analysis

- 4.8 A report went to [November 2021 Climate Advisory Group meeting](#) providing a summary of our corporate and community-wide greenhouse gas emissions and the trajectory required to achieve net zero emissions by 2030. This highlighted our objective to reduce emissions from energy and transport across the District by 49,500 tonnes every year. Despite the widespread closure of businesses, the introduction of wide-scale home working and the reduction of road transport due to the pandemic, [Government emissions data](#) shows that between 2019 and 2020, district-wide emissions fell by 45,000. This is less than what is needed, highlighting the scale of work required. The shortfall will need to be made up in future years.
- 4.9 The above report highlights the Council's achievements in reducing *corporate* emissions by 1,823 tonnes (5 times more than we aimed for) due to the closure of buildings during the pandemic. Our 2021/22 corporate greenhouse gas emissions calculations haven't been finalised yet, but once completed we will be able to assess the overall impact of our efforts and if the milestone reductions have been met.
- 4.10 Whilst carbon emissions are not the only indicator or progress they are an important one. In early 2023 we also be establishing a set of KPI's to help us effectively monitor progress going forward.

Delays and Challenges

- 4.11 UK Government is tightening budgets for public services, which has major impacts for decarbonisation targets. The Council's budgetary deficit naturally has had an impact on some actions in the SCCS and poses a risk if previously allocated funding has not been spent. Rising inflation and increasing costs of materials required for infrastructure schemes is putting delivery within allocated budgets at risk. The costs of solar panels as well as electric vehicle charging infrastructure has increased.
- 4.12 Resource limitations naturally affect our ability to deliver on our climate emergency goals. Council approved funding to increase staff resource in 2019 has only been partially spent. Additional resource will be needed to support Council teams to deliver their actions; monitor and report on the SCCS; leverage in external funding; engage the community; and facilitate wider partnerships to address complex problems such as transport, energy and fuel poverty.
- 4.13 Some actions have not been completed as they are currently judged to be financially unsustainable (e.g. pay-per-hour bikes). External funding may become available at some stage to make these actions a reality.

Opportunities

- 4.14 As we have seen through projects such as Wilding St Albans, WilderWatch, Foodsmiles St Albans and St Albans Incredible Edibles, the local community have good ideas that often just require a little input and assistance from the Council to get started and become self-sufficient. The Council should continue to encourage and support the community to run with their own ground-level initiatives.

- 4.15 With energy bills rising fast, many households are now seeking out ways to make their homes more energy efficient and reduce their fuel bills. Enquiries for solar panels have soared. This provides an ideal opportunity for the Council to capitalise on this enthusiasm and facilitate and drive forward more community renewable energy projects and energy efficiency education, to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and their suppliers.

5. **Conclusion**

- 5.1 The Council has made many notable achievements since declaring a climate emergency in 2019. Looking ahead to the next 7 years, the most urgent priorities (within our direct control), are to fully eliminate the use of fossil fuels in Council buildings and transport; ensure the Local Plan sets, and Capital Projects design, the most stringent of criteria for sustainable and net zero developments; and do all we can to facilitate the wide-scale rollout of renewable energy.

We also have a role in leading the community to shift away from fossil fuels. This involves shifting perception away from “loss”, towards “gain” of things that matter to people such as clean air, cheaper bills, quieter streets, less congestion, healthier people, warmer homes and products with fewer impacts on distant environments, species and populations.

Next Steps

- 5.2 With the current strategy due to expire in 2023, we are now recruiting for a consultant to help develop the 2023-2036 phase of the action plan and understand the costs and benefits of each action.
- 5.3 [A report was presented](#) to the July 2022 Climate Advisory Group meeting outlining the results of the Climate Emergency’s Scorecard process. This process scored local authority climate action plans against a list of ideal elements and provided us with some useful feedback which will be used to inform the development of the next strategy for 2023-26.
- 5.4 The intention for the next strategy is that it will be more succinct, with the focus on action and presented in an easy-to-understand online format so that the public can view progress on each action. Actions will be specific, measurable, and costed (where possible) and we will explore in advance how each will be funded.

6. **Implications**

This table provides a short statement of the impact of the recommendations in this report and/or a reference to the relevant paragraph/s in the report.

Will this report affect any of the following?	Yes/No	Impact/Reference
Vision and Priorities	Yes	Report relates to Council priority to tackle the Climate Emergency
Policy	Yes	Not directly though climate emergency affects should be

		integrated within all levels of Council policy
Financial	Yes	Not directly but climate emergency work requires financial input
Impact on the community	Yes	No impacts of report on the community but long-term impacts of climate change.
Legal and Property	Yes	No impacts of report but requirements on Council to decarbonise property.
HR/Workforce		
Risk Assessment		
Environmental Sustainability	Yes	Report directly impacts on Environmental Sustainability goals of the council
Health and Wellbeing	Yes	As above, Report directly impacts on the health and wellbeing goals of the Council.