

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** Environment and Climate Change  
**Date** 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022



## CLIMATE CHANGE – UPDATE JUNE 2022

### KEY DECISION

**Author** Zayd Al-Jawad | 2257  
**Lead Officer** Zayd Al-Jawad | 2257  
**Contact Officer** Zayd Al-Jawad | 2257

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report builds upon the update provided to the Executive at its meeting in October 2021 and provides Members with an overview of the action that Stevenage Borough Council is taking to address climate change. The report also outlines further action being taken in partnership at county level through the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) and references the emerging activities of the recently established East of England Regional Climate Change Forum.
- 1.2 The report highlights the continuing need for substantial legislative and financial support from Government.
- 1.3 The report provides the first opportunity for the new Portfolio Holder for Environment & Climate Change to share thoughts on the state of SBC work, on areas for greater focus; to outline future work on engagement and strategic communications with various stakeholders; and to propose a neighbourhood level and street level approach in addition to current activities and programmes.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the content of this report are noted and that Members highlight any further matters for officer consideration.
- 2.2 To receive further details on the community engagement and stakeholder relationships at the July Executive.

## **3 BACKGROUND – INTERNATIONAL / GLOBAL**

- 3.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced the UK's first legally binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% compared to 1990 levels by 2050. Strong progress has been made. Between 1990 and 2017, the UK reduced its emissions by 42% while growing the economy by more than two thirds.
- 3.2 On 27 June 2019 the UK government amended the Climate Change Act and set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions from across the UK economy by 2050.
- 3.3 Acknowledging that the 2050 net zero target is not sufficient, Stevenage Borough Council in June 2019 declared a climate emergency, and agreed a motion for the Council to achieve zero carbon for town and Council by 2030. This has been reflected into a Strategy (approved September 2020) and a live Action Plan has been developed to implement the Strategy. To achieve this strategy in full, the Council will require substantial external support and funding from Government to implement the scale of change required in the town.

### **COP 26 what was agreed and what happens next?**

- 3.4 COP stands for "Conference of the Parties", and the one in Glasgow was the 26th annual summit. Ahead of it, 200 countries were asked for their plans to cut emissions by 2030. The goal is to keep cutting emissions until they reach net zero by mid-century. Next year's COP27 summit is in Egypt. It aims to reduce the worst impacts of climate change, but some leaders and campaigners say it does not go far enough.
- 3.5 The agreements made at COP 26, which although not legally binding, will set the global agenda on climate change for the next decade. The biggest announcement was relating to Emissions. It was agreed countries will meet next year to pledge further cuts to emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) - a greenhouse gas which causes climate change. This is to try to keep temperature rises within 1.5C - which scientists say is required to prevent a "climate catastrophe".
- 3.6 For the first time at a COP conference, there was an explicit plan to reduce use of coal - which is responsible for 40% of annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. However, countries only agreed a weaker commitment to "phase down" rather than "phase out" coal after a late intervention by China and India.

- 3.7 Lots of funding for both developing countries to transition away from polluting to investments in new low carbon technologies were made. Over £200bn was pledged. The world's biggest CO2 emitters, the US and China, pledged to co-operate more over the next decade in areas including methane emissions and the switch to clean energy. Leaders from more than 100 countries, covering around 85% of the world's forests - promised to stop deforestation by 2030. A scheme to cut 30% of methane emissions by 2030 was agreed by more than 100 countries, but not China, Russia or India. Methane is currently responsible for a third of human-generated warming.

### **BACKGROUND - LOCAL**

- 3.8 The Council is estimated to be responsible for about 1% of the direct emissions in the geographical area of Stevenage. This rises to 10% when including the 8,000 Council homes that are managed by Stevenage Borough Council. By the use of existing regulations and powers, the Council can influence change over another 10%-20% of the emissions of the town. This leaves the remaining 70%+ that individuals and organisations will need to directly address. As such SBC and other local Councils will need to make the case to Government for increased powers and funding to help reach our shared ambitions to achieve net zero. The funding required is so large most individual businesses or residents cannot fund it themselves.

To achieve the Council's collective ambition for a zero carbon Stevenage by 2030 the Council, central government and local residents and businesses over time. Given local government spending cuts, central government will need to commit more resources to allow the Council to meet its goal.

- 3.9 All levels of government and stakeholders acknowledge that these ambitions for climate change can only be realised with the support and action of local residents and businesses. We all must make changes to how we consume and travel to protect our environment. It is an emergency and the time for action for us all is now.
- 3.10 The Council has identified its fleet emissions, building emissions and the way in which we work (covering 80% of SBC's emissions), as those elements SBC can directly make the most impact alongside regulations. The Council's 'asks' from government support the areas residents and businesses are most affected by and for which they can make the most change towards.
- 3.11 In March 2022, Stevenage Borough Council allocated additional budget funding for a permanent Climate Manager, to help co-ordinate and lead activities in Stevenage. The recruitment of a permanent post holder for this will commence in June 2022.

### **WORK IN PROGRESS**

- 3.12 Since providing an update report to Executive in October 2021, several projects have progressed, including
- Stevenage Bus Interchange: Works have completed on this new and enhanced facility, which increases capacity for sustainable travel by bus and improves user experience

- Zero-Emissions Bus Bid: £13m funding bid to central government for £6m funding for 30 single deck, battery electric buses to cover the Stevenage Arriva network.
- Towns Fund: Business case approved for £3.75m for walking and cycling projects
- Station Gateway: New MSCP designed, with 25% - 50% capacity for EV charging and 100+ cycle spaces
- Successful housing bids for over £2m of investment in:
  - Local authority delivery fund (LAD1b) until May 2022 - £932K to increase EPC Band D properties to EPC Band C, measures included where required solar PV, loft insulation, cavity insulation, external wall insulation, ventilation and draft proofing
  - Local authority delivery fund (LAD1b) additional funding until May 2022 - £465K to increase EPC Band D properties to EPC Band C, measures included where required solar PV, loft insulation, cavity insulation, external wall insulation, ventilation and draft proofing
  - Social Housing Decarbonisation fund (SHDF) until April 2023 - £1.836m to increase EPC Band D properties to EPC Band C, measures included where required solar PV, loft insulation, cavity insulation, external wall insulation, ventilation and draft proofing

**Recommendation 2.1: That the content of the Climate Change update June 2022 be noted.**

#### **4 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE JUNE 2022 - GLOBAL**

4.1 The global pandemic and associated 'lockdowns' have had a significant impact on climate change during 2020 – 2021. This included an estimated 85% drop in long haul air travel and reductions in all type of commuting, and meant that emissions declined at the fastest rate on record in 2020, an estimated 13% drop. The drop in 2020 marks a record eighth consecutive year of reductions in the UK and much will depend on the recovery in 2021 and beyond to see how much of these carbon savings can be maintained and further improved, in a way that does not exacerbate energy poverty to lower income households, or limit access to employment and good quality housing. The dramatic increasing in energy prices for individuals and businesses alike will result in behavioural and production changes. While this may limit energy use in the short term, there will be profound effects on us all, particularly highlighting the urgent need for government-level initiatives to promote insulation and energy efficiency measures and alternative forms of sustainable energy production.

##### **Emissions in Stevenage**

4.2 The carbon emissions in the Stevenage Borough Council geography dropped by 3.1% in 2019, over 2018 to 340.8 ktCO<sub>2</sub> (Kilo-tonnes of carbon). 350 ktCO<sub>2</sub> is broadly equivalent to 350,000 return flights from London to New

York, or 1.2 billion miles driven in a diesel car, and it would need 17.5 million new trees to offset its carbon. The 2018 figure (351.8\_ktCO<sub>2</sub>) is our baseline as it is the level of emissions when SBC announced its climate change emergency. These are figures produced by central government taking into account a complex array of energy use data and are about a year behind. The Council is working across Hertfordshire to agree an approach to common baseline which can be used to track progress and monitor effectiveness.

- 4.3 The Climate Change Strategy is based around 8 themes, reflecting the breadth of services offered by the Council. The 8 themes are shown below and the Council's delivery against those themes is set out below. The traffic light colouring (red, yellow, and green) depicts the progress made against each one.

## People

SBC will produce a Climate Change Comms Plan to help education and inform our residents.

Continue to work with youth groups, Youth Council and local schools to help both understand their Climate Change concerns and also empower them to make changes.

## Biodiversity

Tree protection and Planting Strategy

Biodiversity Plan and Actions

Plant over 2,000 trees by 2030

Construct at least 3 new lakes or ponds by 2030

## Transport

Electric Taxis and support to drivers to transition their fleet.

Electric Buses, with expanded routes and frequencies.

With HCC, introduce work-place parking charges

Living Streets trials

Decarbonising the SBC fleet before 2030.

Bike and E-bike hire

## Energy & Water

Promote cross county purchase of renewable energy supply

Identify opportunities for local renewable energy generation.

Test a Combined Heat & Power Station as part of new swimming pool development.

With Affinity Water & HCC, support their move to zero carbon

## Businesses

Lobby government to support our businesses and a Green Recovery

Using our network's shared knowledge to support SME to adapt to climate change opportunities

Share knowledge and improved ways or working across our business community to reduce carbon.

## Homes

Energy efficient housing and subsidies for public and private homes

Planning Policy for zero carbon homes on all large scale developments

Zero carbon development at the Station Gateway

Fully electric / zero carbon heat and power on SBC lead developments

## Construction & Regeneration

Design a Carbon Neutral new Civic Hub

Work with Regeneration Partners that are committed to zero carbon operations

Fully electric SG1 residential development

Zero carbon state schools

## Waste & Recycling

Develop a new Waste Strategy promoting reduction, reuse and recycling

Zero waste to landfill or incineration

With HCC produce biogas

Some key work in progress:

## People

- Implement the Collaboration and Communication Plan, support our residents to make choices to lower their carbon usage
- Lobbying government directly through the UK100 Programme to fund and support Local Authorities to decrease our collective emissions
- One of the first councils in the UK to partner with Energy Saving Trust to provide an energy efficiency app to residents and help them make energy savings. Unique and easy-to-use the Hertfordshire Energy Advice Tool (HEAT) app gives a virtual tour around a typical home, asking questions and giving advice along the way. Potential savings of £70 per year

## Biodiversity

- Biodiversity Action Plan in place, delivered a range of works including the management of around 33 ha of meadow grasslands for wildlife (Weston Road Meadow).
- 5 community orchards
- Council adopted Biodiversity SPD to ensure new development enhances biodiversity
- New trees policy implemented for Stevenage to replace on a 2 for 1 basis
- £100k funding for biodiversity projects secured
- Leading partner through HS CCP for Biodiversity, including a Countywide baseline analysis

## Transport

- £13m funding bid to central government for £6m funding for 30 single deck, battery electric buses to cover the Stevenage Arriva network.
- New EV charging facilities on Swinggate in the town centre, Old Town and proposal for 12 new EV charging stations in the neighbourhood centres.
- Planning permission granted for new 1 station EV charging station at junction 7 on the A1 (M).
- Local Cycling Walking Investment Programme (LCWIP) in place
- Sustainable Travel Town bid approved
- North Road cycle project at £1.8m from Graveley Road to Old Town
- New bus interchange, close to the train station, improved facilities connections to support modal shift.

## Energy & Water

- SBC main energy contract changed to zero carbon saving carbon
- Working with Affinity Water to support their 2030 net zero target



## **Business**

- Mapped all large businesses carbon commitments
- Establishing a Stevenage Together and Smartgo Stevenage sub group on Climate Change.

## **Homes**

- SBC successful bid for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund will see around 400 social homes with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D or lower receive upgrades to improve their energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. This includes fitting, if required, wall and loft insulation, double glazing and solar panels. Resolution to grant SG1 planning application with over 1,800 units, with zero gas
- Planning permission granted North of Stevenage planning application with a 38 ha country park, SUDS, and 2250+ new trees
- Committed to electric boilers in our new housing schemes from 2023 onwards.
- £2m+ investment in lowering carbon and energy costs in SBC housing stock.

## **Construction and Regeneration**

- SG1 application, baseline for electric only heating with higher standard for schemes
- £3.75m funding secure for walking, cycling and heritage trail
- Securing £37.5m Towns Funding
- Housing Development, triple glazing, solar power and other low carbon housing
- Regeneration refurbishments in the town centre, at North Queensway and Town Square North Block hosting 'Co-Space' flexible work space.

## **Waste and Recycling**

- Work on waste policy to help improve collection methods and clarity for customers
- National waste strategy under consultation and SBC Strategy completed in 2021
- Commitment to Food Waste collections for residential properties in Stevenage from 2025

## **Working with partners:**

### **Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership and at the East of England level.**

- 4.4 A crucial element of the Council's approach is to work with other local government partners to help secure investment, business cases and to find ways to collectively reduce carbon footprint and improve sustainability.
- 4.5 The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) consists of all 10 districts and the county council, plus the Local Enterprise Partnership. HCCSP is a strategic group which acts as the lead partnership organisation for partners to collaborate and identify joint work programmes on environmental, climate change and wider sustainability issues, and where projects to address the climate challenge are best addressed across a wider footprint.
- 4.6 SBC are proactive participants in the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), with the Chief Executive the lead Officer sponsor for the HCCSP work plan and the Council is supporting on two of the four main themes for which detailed action plans are being developed:
- Biodiversity
  - Carbon reduction
  - Transport
  - Water.
  - New : Behavioural Change
  - New: Climate Change Adaption
- 4.7 Much of the strategic work is being focused through HCCSP to harness the power of a county of over 1.2 million people. The themes fed into the Council's own 8 themes and it is through this work with HCCSP that the Council is delivering on its own objectives at a greater scale. Large amounts of work have been done already, including producing and agreeing the 4 Action Plans and some important quick wins.
- 4.8 The Regional Climate Change Forum is organised by the East of England LGA, which the Council's Chief Executive leads on and its key deliverables and areas of focus are:
- Identifying the scale of the challenge in the region (e.g. specific issues/impacts unique to the EoE)
  - Understand our collective preparedness to meet the challenge – are there any gaps? What is the legislative framework
  - Developing regional strategy/themes/action plan/areas of focus
  - Exploring collaboration opportunities at regional level (e.g. joined up communications, behaviour change approaches, joint commissioning etc.)
  - Best practice information sharing
  - National lobbying activity
  - Regional funding bids

## **5 HOW WE ARE WORKING**

### **Engagement**

- 5.1 To inform the strategy and action plan, extensive consultation has taken place. An open consultation in 2019/2020 achieved wide and broad engagement across the town, with 1,600 responses helping shape the strategy. Key priorities identified by residents included making a change to their method of travel and eating habits.
- 5.2 Further work on engaging with young people through the Green Schools network is being explored, alongside work with North Herts College.
- 5.3 Through work with the Environment & Economy Committee, there has been technical work with the University of Hertfordshire and extensive discussions with stakeholder groups like HEART.
- 5.4 The research work with the University of Hertfordshire, see appendix 1, looks in detail at the most effective ways of reducing carbon output. From this technical analysis, it can be seen that a combination of building insulation and tree planting has the most impact, alongside behavioural change. This research should help with bids and seeking to apply resources to the areas with most impact.
- 5.5 For our local businesses with the Council is working with Wenta at the BTC to support local SMEs on their zero carbon journey and make the most of the opportunities from a lower carbon economy. Local businesses like the IET have invested in their building to reduce both carbon and energy costs, and SBC is keen to share these experiences and learnings.
- 5.6 Developing an updated engagement approach to work closely with interested community groups, and engage widely. SBC is exploring ways to best engage locally at both the neighbourhood and street level, to empower and incentivise local people to make positive change in their local areas.

### **Governance - Climate change Corporate Programme Group**

- 5.7 With the appointment of the new Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Speller, officers are reviewing and expanding the Member governance around climate change. An expanded Member working group is being developed, to be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change. The group includes the Portfolio Holders for Economy, Enterprise & Economy; Housing & Housing Development; Resources and Information Technology; and Regeneration; and the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee.
- 5.8 A new Climate Change Corporate Programme group will be established, led by the new Climate Change Programme Lead, to report quarterly clearly on SBC's performance in meeting its climate change commitments. This high level group of officers and portfolio holder will keep a track on performance and highlight achievements and areas which require additional support and resources.
- 5.9 The Deputy Leader and Youth Mayor will also work with the Council to ensure the Borough's younger voices are heard and empowered into action.

- 5.10 The Environment and Economy Select Committee have committed to reviewing the delivery of the climate strategy and action plan over a two year period, with an expectation that the climate actions planned and required in each portfolio area will be subject to review.
- 5.11 There is a cross-party member led group within the HCCSP, which Cllr Speller (as Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change) will attend and contribute towards.
- 5.12 Over the last two years, a significant amount of preparation work has been undertaken to engage residents and businesses, work with partners and focus on deliverable actions that can achieve the goals of the Stevenage Borough Council Climate Strategy. The Council is working closely with partners through Stevenage Together, to share experiences on climate change, speak with a single voice to government and support its residents and customers to reduce their emissions.



**6 IMPLICATIONS**

**Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The costs associated with producing and consulting on the climate change strategy have been met from the agreed departmental budget. A number of projects referenced within this report have secured third party funding from

government and other sources, such as s106 agreements, to be able to pilot initiatives, or to improve sustainable travel assets.

- 6.2 To give some of the required investment some scale, the average cost to retro-fit a house to be net zero is £26,000 per house. Targeting SBC 8,000, as being some of the oldest in Stevenage would require £208 million, clearly beyond SBC or residents budgets. Similarly the Borough has some older and new private housing which would require more than this again. Currently new EV waste vehicles are 4 times the price on non EV, however it is expected that these costs would fall as demand and supply of these increased.
- 6.3 There are likely to be significant reductions in income to the Council linked to changes in the way people commute and use the Council's car parks. This will need to be carefully managed to ensure the services and provisions for sustainable transport the income funds can continue.
- 6.4 As the report identifies, for councils to meet net zero, by 2023, significant funding will be required from central government and/or third parties to fund the cost of large scale projects, such as implementation of Electric Vehicle charging networks, retrofit of council housing stock and commercial and operational buildings.
- 6.5 As the Council works on options and future projects to achieve the ambition of being a net zero carbon Council and town by 2030, Officers will need to bring forward a number of business cases. If the government does not step in to support the local government sector and the Council is required to provide the investment then a significant reprioritisation of other projects and activities would be required to progress highly complex projects to absorb increased revenue and capital costs.

### **Legal Implications**

- 6.6 There are no direct legal implications associated with adopting the Climate Change Strategy, however it is likely the Government will begin introducing stricter targets with legal implications for those Councils that are not meeting carbon reductions.

### **Risk Implications**

- 6.7 The greatest risks associated with this work are failing to secure sufficient support from residents, businesses and government to protect us all from the effect of climate change.

### **Policy Implications**

- 6.8 The Annual Update on Climate Change supports the Council's own Climate Change Strategy and wider corporate ambitions for a low carbon future.

### **Climate Change Implications**

- 6.9 This report highlights the risks, challenges and opportunities that the Council has to address, not only carbon emissions but its wider climate change aspirations.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.10 Climate change affects those in most need both in the UK and around the world. Those in deprivation, hunger or unwell are both most affected by climate change and least able to address it. Therefore the Council is duty bound as one of those in the world that are more able to act, to act now.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

SBC Climate Change Strategy