

Meeting: ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area: Lead Portfolio Area – Environment & Climate Change/All Portfolio Areas

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FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the final report and recommendations of the Environment & Economy Select Committee Scrutiny review into the Council's response to the Climate Emergency.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED

- 2.1 In 2019 the Council along with other local authorities declared a climate emergency. The then Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee, Cllr Michael Downing on 22 June 2021 invited the committee to make this its main review for 2021/22 and this was agreed by the Select Committee.

- 2.2 Due to the scope and size of the review it has been conducted over 2 municipal years.

2.3 Scope and Focus of the review

- 2.3.1 The Committee met on 4 and 24 October 2021 [Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 21 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#) to agree the scope for the review, and it agreed should consider the following areas:

- How are the public engaged in this project?
- Establish how the funding to support measures are being implemented to mainstream this work?
- Compare with other local authorities of a similar size and demographic to see how the plans look?

- Establish what equalities and diversity measures will be considered for this project?
- What does the Council need to do that it currently isn't doing that will help mainstream a climate emergency approach to its day-to-day practises?
- What should Council's be doing to lead on Climate Change?

2.4 Process of the review

2.4.1 The Committee met formally on 11 occasions over the two years in 2021 and 2022 and informally on 3 occasions to undertake the review and received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- Monday 4 October 2021, received an officer presentation and considered the scoping document
- Thursday 21 October 2021, interview with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, Cllr John Gardner and updated scoping document
- Thursday 18 November 2021, interview with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe; HEART environmental community group and considering a mapping exercise document
- Monday 10 January 2022, interview with the Director of the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab, Professor Lubo Jankovic; Members mind mapping and quick wins; notes from a COP26 seminar for local government and notes from a post COP26 LGiU seminar
- Monday 17 January 2022 informal meeting of E&E Members on Zoom to look at possible long term strategic recommendations and short-term quick wins from the review
- Thursday 3 March 2022, informal meeting of the Committee to interview the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas
- Wednesday 23 March 2022, interim report and recommendations of the Select Committee
- Thursday 23 June 2022, consider the University of Hertfordshire's Zero Carbon Lab report providing theoretical carbon reduction measures which could help the Council reach its net zero ambitions
- Wednesday 13 July 2022, interview with the Leader of the Council, Cllr Sharon Taylor and Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and ICT, Cllr Joan Lloyd
- Tuesday 22 September 2022, interview with the new Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller
- Thursday 20 October 2022, interviews with the Executive Portfolio Holders for Culture, Leisure, Children and Young People, Cllr Richard Henry; Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council, Cllr Sandra Barr; and Executive Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Equalities, Health and Older People and updates on tree policy and recycling

- Monday 24 October 2022, informal meeting of the Committee to interview Friends of the Earth, Peter Foord and Andy Holtham
- Wednesday 16 November 2022, representatives of the Committee met Members of the Young People's Climate Change Committee (a sub-group of the Youth Council) to engage with young people re climate change
- Thursday 17 November 2022, interviews with HCC Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment, Cllr Eric Buckmaster and Chair of the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership, Cllr Graham McAndrew, and with HCC Head of Sustainability, Julie Greaves and Lead Officer for Climate Change, East of England LGA, Matt Partridge

2.4.2 The review provided an interim report and recommendations on 23 March 2022 based on the work the committee had undertaken from October 2021 to March 2022 including sessions with three of the Executive Portfolio areas, HEART community group and the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab.

2.4.3 The interim report of the Committee agreed 23 specific recommendations under areas such as:

- Mainstreaming of climate change activity including protection in the Council budget
- Creation of a full-time post to lead on climate change
- Decarbonising the housing stock
- Improved resident engagement
- Encouraging local, small scale, micro-ward events that can focus resident's involvement in green environmental projects
- Improved recycling rates
- Increased tree planting to meet the 2% gap in the Stevenage tree canopy
- Moving to strengthen local plan that has climate change as its core
- Transport – promotion of EV and modal shift
- Improved performance reporting for progress against the baseline figure and milestones around projects
- Improved communications channels
- Promotion of 20 Minute Neighbourhoods

3 REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 Conclusions of the Environment & Economy Select Committee

3.1.1 In addition to the Committee's interim report and based on the input provided to Members conducting the review the Committee have made the following conclusions:

3.1.2 Progress achieved since declaring a climate emergency

3.1.3 Since declaring a climate emergency progress has been made in the following areas:

3.1.4 **Establishing a robust base line figure for the town's carbon footprint.**

As part of the review the Environmental Sustainability Co-ordinator, David Thorogood, presented to Members CO2 emission data for Stevenage, which showed a spread of the carbon footprint by sector. Transport (34%) produced the biggest CO2 emission followed by the domestic (28%), commercial (18%), industry (13%) and public sector (7%). In fact, transport and domestic emissions combined were almost 2 thirds of the overall emissions for the area (64%), so this provided Members with a clear idea about where the focus of all partners should be regarding reducing the areas carbon footprint. The percentage for transport emissions are accounting emissions from all vehicles on A roads and minor roads (the full set includes main roads too), railways and flights. For Industry, Domestic and Private, the above percentages are referring to their energy consumption, i.e. electricity, gas and other solid fuels. Other sectors included in the overall emissions inventory are waste management, agriculture and the net emissions from land use (i.e. carbon uptake by vegetations).

3.1.4.1 The way progress against the 2018 baseline figure is measured as part of the annual report update on Climate Change to the Executive and the way it is more widely publicised needs to be thought through so that this is clearly described to show what progress is being made each year and understood by officers, Members and by the public. These findings should be subjected to an annual audit process, which is perhaps built into the work of the audit committee and subjected to scrutiny by members on an annual basis.

3.1.4.2 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review at its meeting on 15 December 2022, Environment and Economy Select Committee Members recommended that the report should reference the 1998 UK Climate Change Act, which followed the first Conference of the Parties (COP) held in 1995 in Berlin, and the Council's 1st Climate Change Strategy some 15 years later, which was established in 2010, to show that the climate change challenge has been a known issue for a long time.

3.1.4.3 The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that the 2050 target within the Climate Change Act was amended in 2019. The target changed from at least 80% reduction from 1990 levels to net zero by 2050. This might have prompted taking actions at a local level. Veronica has since clarified the way the carbon dioxide emissions were estimated within the scope of local authority in the SBC baseline year 2018 was 350 kt. Industry and commercial combined (42%, including the electricity and gas consumption, solid fuels burn and installations but excluding large industrial sites) followed by domestic (31%, including the electricity and gas consumption and solid fuels burn), and transport (27%, including emissions from A roads, minor roads and combustion of lubricants but excluding railways and motorways).

- 3.1.5 **Appointment of a lead Climate Change Officer.** The appointment of this post and budget provision for a new post of Head of Climate Change Service has shown real commitment to taking a lead and mainstreaming climate change activity. The hope is that this post will enable a framework for working within SBC, which enables climate impacts to be assessed as a routine part of council working, and that SBCs sustainability goals become a factor in the appraisal process of the organisation.
- 3.1.6 **Leading on Biodiversity.** Stevenage is one of the leading authorities in Hertfordshire on promoting biodiversity and has been praised by Friends of the Earth for its Collaborative work with the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust as a model for other council to adopt. The hope is that SBCs expertise in this area is disseminated via HCCSP and other county wide forums. However, Stevenage and other authorities, need to work hard to address the depletion of native species and plant types in Hertfordshire in recent years.
- 3.1.7 **Improved energy efficiency of its housing stock.** Having a key focus on improving the energy performance of its housing stock with a target to reach an EPC rating of C or better by 2030 and the aspiration to make new build net zero by 2030, has been welcomed by Friends of the Earth who agree with SBC's focus on home insulation. Progress in this area has started slowly, and this is largely due to only limited amounts of funding available to local authorities by way of competitive bids to government funds bidding against other authorities. The pace of change is comparable to other authorities with a housing stock or for any social landlord. There will be a requirement for greater funding streams or funding options being made available from central government to meet the level of investment that is required.
- 3.1.8 **Following Industry wide local government best practice.** The Scrutiny Officer attended a post COP26 local government seminar hosted by the LGiU, at which advice was given about how local government can best influence residents and business in its area. The advice is to work collaboratively and be science led. On both these issues the Council is on the right path. SBC is an active member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership and Matt Partridge is the lead CEO for climate change in Hertfordshire and represents the Herts Chief Exec Group at the HCCSP executive meetings and represents the County at the East of England LGA Climate Change Forum. The authority also has dialogue with leading environmental groups in the area including Friends of the Earth and HEART. The work that the Council is doing in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire Zero Carbon Lab gives a sound scientific basis to provide leadership. This work continues through the HSCCP on research about lower carbon buildings.
- 3.1.9 **Tree Planting** - The Council's Climate Change Strategy (September 2020) has a target plan to plant 2,000 250 trees a year by 2030 – equivalent to 200 trees per year for ten years. However, current budget only enables the

planting of 80-100 standard trees (2-3m tall) per year. In 2022/23 officers are working with schools, volunteers and residents to plant around 4,000 tree whips (60-100cm tall) to create a new community woodland. All trees require a level of care and maintenance to give them the best chance of survival and long-term establishment. Standard trees make a quicker impact due to their size and are more suitable for specimen planting in open spaces and residential areas, but will require a high level care (through provision of and future checking of stakes & ties, and watering) for at least the first three years after planting. Whip planting is more suitable for hedgerow and woodland planting, but due to their smaller size take longer to make a visual impact. They don't require the same high level of maintenance as standard trees. Members were made aware of the rate of sequestration of carbon that trees and grasslands have to absorb carbon, which is greater than any other measure. However, grasslands and ponds also help to sequester carbon and it is important to provide a matrix of habitats in order to support the widest benefits to biodiversity as well as mitigating the impact of climate change.

3.1.9.1 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review, Environment and Economy Select Committee Members commented that although they see tree planting as an important feature in combating climate change on a global scale it is not something that can be done at sufficient scale in Stevenage to significantly reduce the areas carbon footprint, but maintaining a healthy tree stock and canopy is important for the carbon sequestration they offer as well as for biodiversity and for offering shade, an important measure to adapt to the increased air temperature in the summer.

3.1.10 **Aspirational target of Net Zero by 2030 for the area of Stevenage**

Members are of the view that having the target of being net zero by 2030 for the area of Stevenage is very challenging and at this stage it would be more realistic to say that the Council's carbon footprint will be net zero by 2030 but the whole area will be harder to achieve. However, having a tough target will encourage all partners to keep its focus and aim on meeting it. If a less ambitious target of net zero by 2050, as is the government's national target, will push off any urgency into the distance and would very much slow progress.

3.1.11 **Change of working practises since the pandemic** A change to the way work is carried out with an increase in home working has had an impact with reduced travel from outside of Stevenage into the town. However, it is worth noting that the emissions of working from home are included within the greenhouse gas protocols under scope 3 (which are the same category as staff commuting) and that some of the emission sources would be transferred. However, it is hard to know the impact (either positive or negative) as the carbon emissions from commuting were not included in the SBC baseline calculation. In time, hybrid working could lead to a smaller office space being required, which would in turn give a lower carbon footprint arising from the gas and electricity consumption in the office (scope 1 and 2). However, the ability of all staff to work from home is not equal so there is a

limit to the benefits that hybrid working can achieve. The town centre regeneration will deliver a public service hub, and this represents an opportunity for SBC to deliver a fully sustainable, low carbon building, which offers efficient use of space and energy.

3.2 **Challenges**

3.2.1 Two aspects – SBC carbon footprint and town wide emissions

3.2.2 **Pathway to 2030 and how to measure progress** – A critique of the Council's Climate Change strategy from Friends of the Earth is that there is no clear targets or pathway to see how Stevenage gets from where it is now, to net zero by 2030. Members have echoed this and have asked for an easy to follow 'flightpath' that can show progress year on year. There is a need for interim targets or other ways to measure progress such as carbon budgets. Linked to this critique, Members of the Select Committee had earlier in the review suggested that the Executive and Strategic Leadership Team consider how to represent the progress of the strategy by way of a Fishbone chart or Gantt chart with key target lines and KPIs, which would make it possible for Members and for the public to see how the Council is working towards its target for net zero by 2030.

3.2.2.1 The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that the online platform will be used to plan, track, measure and publish the Council's climate action plan. The lead officer for each action will be able to update the progress of their actions in real time and improve the transparency of the progression of individual action to both internal and external stakeholders. Some of the actions will also be connected to quantifiable metrics and the platform will enable visualising of those metrics. Officers are aiming to launch the platform in Feb 2023.

3.2.3 **Pace** – A further critique from Friends of the Earth has been around the pace the Council is addressing climate change, they recognised that it is hard for Councils to move quickly, but the 2008 Climate Change Act was made legislation 14 years ago. It could be argued that nationally most of those years have been a missed opportunity and could be called lost years up to 2019 when the Council declared a climate emergency. Friends of the Earth challenged the Council if it is really being treated as an emergency? This links to the question that the former Chair of the Committee consistently raised about if the issue was truly being treated as an emergency. The Council needs to ramp up the pace to get to net zero for the town by 2030.

3.2.4 **Travel** – Within the Council's existing travel strategy there are good initiatives to decarbonise taxis and buses which is a good plan, but the policy is less strong on reducing emissions from cars such as trying to get people out of cars for short journeys and to use public transport and other modes of zero carbon active travel such as cycling and walking. Due consideration needs to be given to the promotion of and increasing the use of the excellent cycle path network

in Stevenage. Members recognise that for the majority of local residents the option of converting from fossil fuel to EV is prohibitively expensive.

3.2.4.1 Hertfordshire County Council had partnered with Arriva, the bus operator in Stevenage, and supported by Stevenage Borough Council to bid for the Government Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme. Acknowledging the bus fleet in Stevenage is an aged fleet, with the average age being around 11 years, there is an opportunity for the fleet to be replaced by a zero-emission alternative. The most suitable solution to match the duty cycle requirements at Stevenage is battery electric single deckers. The success of the bid will deliver 27 new electric buses in Stevenage by 2024. It is estimated to remove 1,700 tonnes of CO2 emissions per year, as well as improving the local air quality and cutting down on noise.

3.2.4.2 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the report should make more of the cycling network in the town. Stevenage has an excellent cycle infrastructure, but the challenge is getting more people to use it. SBC Stevenage Direct Services cleanse the cycle network, but the maintenance is the responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council which is a challenge as the Council can request interventions from HCC but has no control over them or the network. Members have suggested that officers ask secondary schools in the town what their numbers are for students cycling to school? Members were also keen to find out what the numbers are for cyclists who use the rail station? Members and officers are keen to promote Active Travel, with other interested groups and agencies in the town.

3.2.5 **Improve Public Engagement** – The annual report on Climate Change has identified this as an area for focus with work with residents. The initial work with the Citizen's Panel was good but this was not followed up in a timely way so lost momentum. At this stage this is an area that needs development. Members are aware that the new Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller, is in the process of changing this approach to improve the current position with two levels of engagement with environmental expert activists in one reference group and ordinary members of the public, acting as a sounding board to policies. The opportunity for detailed consultation on practical, small scale project (recycle rates in flat blocks) (Grey water capture at neighbourhood centres to water flower beds) should not be lost.

3.2.5.1 Commenting on the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review in December 2022, Members recommended that the report should say that more needs to be done with public engagement on this issue, as not enough progress has been made on this yet and Scrutiny Members wished to see progress using a co-production model with interested residents, businesses, and the voluntary sector. The Assistant Director Planning and Regulatory has stated that this is the approach that the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change has embarked upon with the plans for Topic Reference Groups and Topic Panel Groups which should address the public engagement deficit in this area.

3.2.6 **Behaviour change** - This is an area local government can champion, and it is cost neutral to change behaviour. For individuals there is a huge up-front cost to mitigations like solar panels, Electric Vehicles, and air source heat pumps but no up-front investment needed to change behaviours. Councils could do much more here to promote eating less meat, flying less, and cycling and walking more. There will be opportunities to link up with the HCC Behaviour Change unit to work together on this. A consequence of the extreme rise in energy costs in 2022 has made the public look at their domestic energy consumption, so this links with the campaign to get households to lower their thermostats by 2 degrees. If this habit becomes established behaviour even when the unit price of energy eventually decreases, then the adjustment may become a permanent feature for some households. ([Public Pack](#))[HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE UNIT PRESENTATION Agenda Supplement for Cabinet Panel on the Environment, 06/07/2021 19:30 \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

3.2.6.1 Harnessing public behaviour change is not easy to achieve, as a 2021 Kantar Public survey of 10 countries (including the UK, Germany, New Zealand and the US) showed that, as part of this survey, although 78% of Europeans consider climate change as a very serious problem, this only translates into the mid 30% taking direct action to change behaviour such as eat less meat and use alternative modes of transport and overall 46% of respondents feeling that there was no real need for them to change their personal habits [PUBLIC Journal 04 \(turtl.co\)](#)

3.2.6.2 Commenting on the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review in December 2022, Members suggested that that there was a danger of the Council sounding sanctimonious, the best way to change behaviour is to provide a benefit in kind in some form e.g. a cost saving on energy or something similar to incentivise behaviour change so that residents can own their own actions. The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that the Council is working with other councils within Hertfordshire under the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) leadership on Behaviour Change. The strategic Behaviour Change Action Plan has set out 15 actions working towards raising awareness of the values of climate actions, encouraging sustainable choices, cross-sector campaign supporting sustainable development, modal shift and linking it with air quality and health.

3.2.7 **Helping SME's** – SBC are providing support to the Small to Medium Enterprises in the area. Big businesses based in the area are leading on climate change and have set ambitious targets to be net zero by 2030. SME's will find the journey to net zero far more challenging as they have competing priorities in the cost of living/energy crisis. SME's lack the capacity and expertise to progress on climate change, but SBC can provide support with networking, sharing knowledge and joint bids.

3.2.8 **Strengthening sustainability through the Local Plan** - The Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) informed the review that one of the

Council's aspirations was to include sustainability requirements in all its planning policy measures. This can only happen in an enforceable way once it is in an early version of the next Local Plan. In relation to major planning developments approved by the Council, where the biodiversity net gain could not be achieved by the developer, an amount would be charged to the developer which the Council would then use towards area wide biodiversity purposes. When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the report should reference land use which was missing from report. Given that 34% of the area's CO2 emissions are from transport Members have suggested that the Council should do all it can to make amenities local for residents. The Assistant Director, Planning and Regulatory has stated that insulation is a building control function, however the review of the local plan in 2023 will examine how the Council can be use land use planning to reduce carbon emissions of both new and existing residents.

- 3.2.9 **Waste and recycling** – The review supported the input received from officers regarding developments with waste and recycling and wishes to promote using and consuming less as the principal focus for waste and recycling followed by reusing including promoting the use of clothes banks and upcycling of clothes and household goods. A growing model in this regard are Repair Cafés. Members are keen to support a repair café in the town should residents in Stevenage be inclined to start one.
- 3.2.9.1 When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the report should go further, and that the Council should help any residents that wish to start up a repair café in the town, by way of some pump prime funds from the Executive Portfolio Holder for Climate Change “Dragons Den” style funding of community led climate change initiatives. Officers have said that there could be capacity to host a repair café or similar in the indoor market.
- 3.2.10 **Training** - The Committee recommends the creation of a climate change training package for members, and additional training for senior officers, on climate change mitigations and adaption. This will help support future decision makers who are well informed in all aspects of the councils' operations, and the bearing climate change mitigation and adaption may have on them.
- 3.2.10.1 The Climate Change Lead Officer, Veronica Chan, has stated that she has started a conversation with Human Resources and is now in discussion regarding rolling out an “Introduction to climate change” to all new starter staff as part of their corporate induction. The Climate Change Lead Officer has also suggested that some senior officers should attend climate change risk and adaptation training that is organised by Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Panel (HCCSP) in early 2023.
- 3.2.11 **Review mapping document** – Given the size and scope of the review Members used a mapping document through out the review process (see the latest iteration which was presented to the 17 November 2022 meeting -

[https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s33020/Mapping_exercise_for_EESC - Climate Change Emergency Review - Update for 17 Nov 2022 EESC.pdf](https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s33020/Mapping_exercise_for_EESC_-_Climate_Change_Emergency_Review_-_Update_for_17_Nov_2022_EESC.pdf)

There were a few areas that the review has not been able to completely consider highlighted in the document and are as follows:

- Engage with E&N Hertfordshire NHS Trust re the plans for the Lister Hospital. Contact has now been made with Claudia Montgomery, Deputy Director Estates and Facilities for the E&N Hertfordshire NHS Trust, with a view for SBC's Lead Climate Change Officer and colleagues to meet and to start a dialogue with them to understand what their baseline year is and what the Trust's approach is to measuring their carbon footprint. In time it is hoped that this dialogue will provide opportunities to discuss any climate adaptation actions and get a better understanding of how E&NH NHS Trust are planning to decarbonise their fleet and supply chains.
- Make links to tenant and leaseholder representative groups. Due to the changes in the governance and engagement model it has not been possible so far to make contact with these groups.
- Although some contact with young people has been made with a small sub-group of the E&E Select Committee and a young people's Climate Change Group linked to the Youth Mayor and Youth Council, limited progress was made in this area. The Committee will look to the Executive Portfolio Holder covering Children and Young People to take a lead in this area and report back progress to the Committee at a later date.

3.3 **Main conclusions**

3.3.1 **SBC focus**

3.3.2 **Decarbonising the housing stock** - As demonstrated in the paragraphs above there has been good progress shown since declaring a Climate Emergency in 2019 but unless there is serious funding made available by the government then SBC will not deal with its main challenge of funding £240Million decarbonising its housing stock of 8,000 properties.

3.3.3 **Fleet emissions** - Tackling fleet emissions is a challenge, replacing the fleets smaller vehicles with Electric Vehicles will be possible over a period of time, but the larger vehicles and specifically the freight refuse vehicles will require a decision in the next 2 to 3 years on replacements vehicles. In this area the technology is developing with one authority in the UK operating a hydrogen fleet at Aberdeen City Council, [H2 Aberdeen | Aberdeen City Council](#) which removes close to a 1000 tonnes of CO2 a year per refuse vehicle. Lessons from this example will need to be considered. An option will need to be decided upon, but this will have significant budget implications as well as environmental considerations to factor in. It may therefore be possible in future years that a hydrogen power source for the larger freighters is possible or perhaps a hybrid option dual power source may have to be considered.

3.3.3.1 The Assistant Director Stevenage Direct Services has stated that this is an issue that is under review, but it is difficult to be specific regarding the financing of various options as they are susceptible to change, and officers do not know the whole policy environment yet. Officers have undertaken some financial projections on changing the fleet to electric, and there are wider considerations regarding electrical infrastructure capacity and costs too, to accommodate an increase in electrical demand.

3.3.3.2 The sector is also in a state of flux. For example, whilst electrical vehicles may be a reasonable alternative for smaller vehicles / vans, they are less of a viable solution for larger fleet, and alternatives such as hydrogen seem to be developing. Purchase costs currently vary enormously, e.g. a diesel refuse freighter is circa £183k an electric freighter £450k (the technology only works for 'waste' vehicles, not 'recycling' ones, as the latter draws more energy needs via the hydraulics) and hydrogen is between £500k and £800k (and these are in their infancy).

3.3.3.3 In the meantime, officers are looking into alternative lower-carbon fuels such as Gas to Liquid (GtL) and refined Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO). Both of these options can be used without engine modifications, and will benefit the environment through reduced CO₂, however the fuel is a higher cost than diesel currently. Officers are also aiming to introduce flexible Solar PV panels onto the tops of the refuse and recycling trucks, which can save around 1,100 litres of fuel p/year. This is subject to successful capital funding approval.

3.3.3.4 In terms of the needs of the replacement programme for the larger ticket items of the refuse and recycling freighters these do not need to all be replaced at the same time and can be replaced over a rolling replacement schedule over the next few years with just one needing to be replaced in 2023/24, then three in 2024/25 and finally six in 2025/26.

3.3.4 **Greening of the Council's Estate** - The Council's estates assets are being considered in audits which will need to consider what the long-term needs for repairs and future proofing is required as well as future use and or disposal is required. The regeneration plans include the demolition of Daneshill House with a replacement building in the civic hub incorporating, health, library, museum and civic offices and council chamber. If the SG1 plans were to stall or be altered and Daneshill House is retained, then a deep retrofit would be required. Other existing buildings, such as the leisure centre and the swimming centre are inefficient and poorly insulated buildings. Therefore, the regeneration plans will have a crucial impact on how the Council develops the climate impact of its buildings. There are trade-offs between new builds with low energy needs but high carbon upfront impacts, against the carbon saving of repurposing existing buildings. This will be a consideration for the new leisure buildings as part of the Council's regeneration plans.

3.3.5 **Community Energy Projects** a future consideration for the Council, potentially in partnership with other local authorities, is community energy

projects. [Hotting up: the growth of district heat networks - LGiU](#) the examples given in the LGiU link are for larger unitary Council's, it is hard to find comparable examples for district councils, the most likely development would seem to be working in partnership with other districts and the County Council to explore options for similar schemes locally. [How Cambridgeshire Council is raising revenue with solar farms | Climate Action \(takeclimateaction.uk\)](#) Tempering this there is a recent example of a failed Solar Energy Company owned by Thurrock Council resulting in a £655 Million loss.

3.3.6 **Stevenage Progress** - Stevenage has clearly made some good progress in the last few years, and for a district Council of its size is showing good ambition to make a difference in its areas for climate change. Stevenage is some way behind other leading local authorities such as Bristol City Council who have been on a 20-year journey towards net zero, but this is well ahead of most authorities. [Bristol City Council: Share insights and evidence of success | Local Government Association](#)

3.3.7 **Adaptations** - The review established that due to extreme weather events linked to climate change there is already a need for adaptations to buildings and for up-to-date emergency response plans to care for older residents in Council run sheltered housing schemes. A need for an audit of all adaptations required will be a recommendation of the review.

3.4 **Area wide focus**

3.4.1 As well as dealing with its own carbon footprint which is estimated to be 2% of the areas CO₂ (or up to 10% if all of the Council's housing stock is included), the Council has a role in influencing partners, business based in the town and with residents.

3.4.2 There has been progress with the big companies in the town, but more work needs to be done to encourage SME's to make the necessary changes required.

3.4.3 Influencing behaviour change with residents is the biggest challenge to affect the area wide target. The area of behaviour change that is needed which costs little is around lifestyle issues such as eating less meat, using less resources and repairing rather than disposing and replace clothes and household gadgets and for travel encouraging families to consider flying less, and for short journeys cycling and walking more and using rail and buses for long and medium length journeys. However, as stated at 3.2.6.1 this is not an easy task to achieve given people's reluctance to make individual changes. When considering the draft report and recommendations of the Climate Emergency review Members recommended that the Council needs to be careful how it approaches this subject as there was a danger that the Council could appear to be sanctimonious and be taken as talking down to residents rather than providing them with easy to take up solutions.

3.5 **Equalities & Diversity issues**

3.5.1 The issue of equalities and diversity and the climate emergency are interlinked. Throughout the review Members have seen that there can be different impacts on protected characteristic groups, with impacts on older people becoming a concern in extreme climate change related weather events. The impact on those on low income or in receipt of benefits is also noteworthy as this group have little chance to make household interventions to lower their carbon footprint with heat pumps, insulation, solar PV and EV, and also the lifestyle changes are a challenge due to the focus being on economic and social survival. However, this does not mean that people from this demographic group are not unaware of or unable to make some lifestyle choices around climate change.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 That the Environment & Economy Select Committee considers the findings of the review, contained within this report and the recommendations below be presented to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, Cllr Simon Speller; the Assistant Director, Zayd Al-Jawed and Lead Climate Change Officer, Veronica Chan and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report.

4.2 **SBC and area wide pathway and targets** It is recommended that clear targets and a pathway to 2030 for both SBC targets and area wide targets need to be established. It is not currently clear what the targets or pathway are to see how Stevenage gets from where it is now to 2030. The way progress against the 2018 baseline figure is measured and publicised needs to be thought through so that this is clearly described to show what progress is being made each year and understood by officers, Members and by the public.

4.3 **Pace** Is the climate emergency really being treated as an emergency? It is recommended that there is a need to ramp up the pace to get to net zero for the town by 2030. Members accept there are challenges around funding but where it sits in corporate priorities is an area that is a decision for the authority. Members will be looking to see how the pace is picked up leading to 2030.

4.4 **Adaptations** The review established that due to extreme weather events linked to climate change there is already a need for adaptations to buildings and for up-to-date emergency response plans to care for older residents in sheltered housing schemes. It is recommended that there be an audit of all adaptations required across the Council.

4.5 **Behaviour Change** It is recommended that officers from SBC link up with officers from the HCC Behaviour Change unit to work together on behaviour change initiatives.

4.6 **Future review** It has been recommended by the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee that the issue of the climate emergency

should be under regular review by the Committee and that a progress report should be brought back to the committee on a yearly basis.

- 4.7 **Training** The Committee recommends the creation of a training package for members, and additional training for senior officers, on climate change mitigations and adaption, so that future decision makers are well informed in all aspects of the councils' operations, and the bearing climate change mitigation and adaption may have on them.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

A number of the review recommendations would have a financial implication, but these are as yet undefined. Depending on the Executive Member response to the recommendations these implications would need to be fully costed by officers and brought back to the Executive Portfolio Holder before any spending was agreed.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications for this report.

5.3 Equalities Implications

The Equalities implications have been addressed within the report at paragraph 3.6.1 There are no further equalities implications for this report.

5.4 Climate Change Implications

By definition this report has climate change at its main focus and therefore climate change implications are addressed throughout the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Links to the E&E Select Committee Meetings:

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Monday, 4 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 21 October 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 18 November 2021, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Monday, 10 January 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Wednesday, 23 March 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 23 June 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Wednesday, 13 July 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Tuesday, 20 September 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 20 October 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 17 November 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)

[Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Thursday, 15 December 2022, 6.00pm \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](#)