

Committee(s): Community Environment and Enforcement	Date: 19 December 2022
Subject: Environment Strategy	Wards Affected: All
Report of: Marcus Hotten, Director of Environment	Public
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Summary

This report presents an updated version of the draft Environment Strategy previously presented at the March 2022 Environment Enforcement & Housing Committee, at which it was agreed to approve the strategy for consultation, and to consider feedback and alter the strategy if required.

Key changes to the original document consist of including a additional pages summarising the impact climate change can have at a national and local level; the replacement of 'Actions' with 'Aims' in the main body of the strategy; and the development of a clearer action plan as an appendix to the strategy. This action plan, going forward, will form the basis any annual reporting on the progress of the strategy.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

R1. To Approve the Environment Strategy as appended to the report. report.

R2. To approve that the current temporary post of the Climate & Sustainability Officer is made a permanent position.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. The Climate Change Act (2008) highlights the UK's aim to become carbon neutral by 2050. Following the government's announcement, Brentwood Borough Council declared its aim to be carbon neutral within its own activity by 2040 and borough wide by 2050. This means that it will be carbon neutral if the amount of CO₂ emissions it puts into the atmosphere are the same as the amount of CO₂ emissions it removes from the atmosphere.
2. There are also two very clear and different targets. One is the Council's target to reach carbon zero (2040) and the other is for the borough (2050). The Council's target is considered easier to deliver as it is within the Council's own operation and therefore control. However, to deliver carbon neutrality for the borough is far more difficult as it requires buy in and commitment from groups that we have no direct control and only some limited influence over.
3. The Environment Strategy has been prepared to help the council tackle these issues by identifying key actions and commit to our target of becoming carbon neutral by 2050.
4. The aim of the strategy is to help identify actions needed to achieve the Council's targets. Key themes of the strategy include transport, air quality, built environment, natural environment, waste, energy, and partnerships. The strategy shows what the council is doing to reduce its environmental impacts including reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from its own buildings and in delivering council services. It also sets out ways the council can facilitate and encourage individuals and organisations to reduce their own environmental impact so that everyone can help and contribute to becoming carbon neutral.
5. This report presents an updated version of the draft Environment Strategy previously presented at the March 2022 Environment Enforcement & Housing Committee, at which it was agreed to approve the strategy for consultation, and to consider feedback and alter the strategy if required.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

6. Key changes to the original document, presented in March 2022 consist of including additional pages summarising the impact climate change can have at a national and local level; the replacement of 'Actions' with 'Aims' in the main body of the strategy, and the development of a clearer action plan as an appendix to

the main strategy. This action plan, going forward, will form the basis any annual reporting on the progress of the strategy, and where possible identifies the scale of impact each of the actions identified, will assist in achieving net-zero.

7. The consultation taken to assist in shaping the action plan and strategy is discussed in greater detail below. However, it is worth noting that the potential actions that residents most greatly identify with (such as tree-planting), are those that perhaps have less impact in achieving carbon neutral. Nevertheless, these actions are included, recognising the importance of engaging with residents so as to allow the opportunity to have further conversations with communities on the harder to achieve actions.
8. At present the Environment Strategy sets out how the Council can influence actions and outcomes to achieving carbon neutral across the Borough by 2050. It is proposed that a further action-plan, a Carbon Reduction Plan, is developed with a greater level of detail setting out how the Council will specifically achieve net-zero by 2040. It is intended for the plan to be a working document, driving the necessary changes required across the organisation, to achieve the net-zero target. It is proposed that the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan will be presented at the next Committee meeting.
9. To ensure that the actions outlined within the Environment Strategy can be taken forward, it is proposed that the current temporary post of Climate and Sustainability Officer is made permanent.

Reasons for Recommendation

10. The proposed Environment Strategy sets out the how Brentwood Borough Council can achieve its declared aims of carbon neutral within its own activity by 2040 and borough wide by 2050.

Consultation

11. A survey questionnaire was undertaken throughout July and August seeking opinion on the general subject of climate change and specifically the draft Environment Strategy. In total there was 117 responses.
12. The responses to questionnaire indicate that the effects of climate change are an important issue for residents. 68% said that they were very concerned whilst only 2.5% said that they were not concerned. Those people who undertook the survey also knew a reasonable (medium) amount about climate change and its effects, 54% and most obtained information on the subject through TV, radio and newspaper articles or the on-line equivalent.

13. The responses in the section of the survey covering sustainable lifestyle choices broadly indicate that residents would consider lifestyle choices supportive of a more sustainable approach to living. For example, on the themes under home management almost a third of responders said that they definitely could act on reducing water consumption and improving insulation in their own homes etc.
14. Under the home management theme, the most supported and achievable action (using a weighted average system) was '*recycling more household waste*' and the least achievable '*switching to renewable energy sources*'.
15. Under the theme of travel choices most supported and achievable action was making more '*journeys by walking and cycling*' and '*the least car sharing more often*'.
16. Under the theme of food and diet again almost a third to a third of responders said that they definitely could achieve the actions identified with the most achievable action being '*shopping locally for food*' and the least achievable taking part '*in community growing schemes*'.
17. Similar results were received under the theme of shopping with the highest proportion of responders indicating the most achievable was the '*purchase of energy efficient electrical good*' and the least achievable '*reducing clothes purchases*'.
18. The second section of the survey covered questions specifically on council services aimed at helping residents reduce carbon emissions and on the councils' sustainability strategy. All the services identified by the council aimed at reducing carbon emission were considered by responders to be important in helping them to reduce carbon emissions. Planting trees and creating green space were considered very important. Based on a weighted average the most important service were considered to be '*planting trees and creating new green spaces*' and the least '*creating more energy efficient homes*'.
19. Question 10 asked those taking the survey to rank in importance the main themes identified within the environment strategy. Results showed that the majority of those taking the survey considered all the themes to be important or very important. By weighted average the **natural environment** was considered the most important and **transport** the least important.
20. The final section of the survey asked for those undertaking the questionnaire to provide any additional comment on the councils' sustainability strategy and to highlight any activities that they were already undertaking. Comments were diverse but a common theme identified issues relating to transport, green space and housing. Activities included recycling and travelling less.

References to Corporate Plan

21. The proposed Environment Strategy is identified as a key objective for 2021-22: *'Develop an Environment Strategy and Action Plan that promotes a cleaner and greener borough'*; and aligns with the key priority: *'Promote the environment and recognise its importance in the decisions we make,'*

Implications

Financial Implications

Financial Implications: Tim Willis, Interim Director of Resources

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There are no direct financial implications in approving the strategy. All costs in developing the strategy have been met within existing budgets. However, the outcomes of the strategy will need to consider any financial impact that will need to be developed and built into the Council's future MTFS and Capital and Investment Strategy.

Approval of a permanent climate officer will add a pressure to the Council's MTFS. Officers will review its existing establishment to consider any current vacant posts can be utilised to fund this permanent position. Currently the post is funded by the environmental initiatives reserve to ensure a net impact on the Council's GF account.

Legal Implications

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Through the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, the UK became the first major country to legislate for a net-zero target for carbon emissions by 2050. The Council by implementing this strategy will be supporting the legislative goal to become carbon net zero by 2050.

Economic Implications

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The Environment Strategy has been prepared taking account of the council's corporate priorities, which includes the objective to grow the local economy. It has also been prepared in consultation with the council's Economic Development team. Economic objectives that are environmentally conscious are a core aim of both the council's Economic Development Strategy and Environment Strategy.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

Background Papers

- None

Appendices to this report

- Appendix A: Environment Strategy