

Cheshire East Council

Environmental Strategy 2019-24 - Draft

1. INTRODUCTION

At the Council meeting on 22 May 2019 the Elected Members of Cheshire East Council approved the following Notice of Motion relating to Climate Change.

“This Council notes that on 1 May Parliament declared an environment and climate emergency and

- a) Requests that a Cheshire East Environmental Strategy is brought forward as a matter of urgency;
- b) Commits to the target of Cheshire East Council being carbon neutral by 2025 and asks that details of how to meet this commitment are included in the Environmental Strategy;
- c) Will work to encourage all businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint by reducing energy consumptions and promoting healthy lifestyles.”

It is widely accepted that climate change is happening as a result of human activity, as is the fact that we need to do things differently, both to adapt to the impact and reduce the extent of change in the long term. The effects are being felt at a global level with higher land and sea temperatures, rising sea levels and extreme weather patterns. The impact of extreme weather is being felt at a local level also, whether it be the impact on homes and businesses from increased incidents of flooding or the impact on the elderly and vulnerable from extreme heat.

The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced a legally binding target for the UK to reduce greenhouse gases by 80% by 2050 against a 1990 baseline. In June 2019 the UK Prime Minister announced a revised target - the UK will cut emissions to net zero by 2050.

The UK Government published its [25-Year Environment Plan](#) in 2018. Central to this plan is climate change and it sets out its goals to leave our environment in a better state than we found it with cleaner air and water, thriving plants and animals, and a cleaner, greener country for us all. The Government’s Plan acknowledges that it will require work across society - citizens, businesses, local councils, charities and other non-profit organisations - to make sure that responsible attitudes towards the environment become the norm to secure lasting change.

As well as responding to climate change, the Council is committed to protecting and enhancing the built and natural environment of the borough and how this relates to

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residents, visitors and business. This is reflected in our strategic outcome: Cheshire East is a green and sustainable place. Spending time in the natural environment has a positive impact on people's mental and physical health and wellbeing, contributing to another of the Council's strategic outcomes – People live well and for longer.

The goals of this Environmental Strategy are that:

- 1. Cheshire East will be a Carbon Neutral Council by 2025**
- 2. Waste and pollution will be reduced**
- 3. Air quality will improve**
- 4. The availability and use of sustainable transport and travel will increase**
- 5. New development will be sensitive and sustainable**
- 6. We will manage the environment to restore nature, conserve heritage and enhance the beauty of our landscapes**

This is the first Environmental Strategy that the Council has published. It will ensure that the Council provides strong environmental leadership and stewardship. It sets out the strategic goals and priority actions the Council will take to respond to the global challenge of climate change and protect and enhance our local environment. It is important to recognise the relationships with other key strategies and plans of the council, such as the Local Transport Plan, and how this Environmental Strategy influences and informs those strategies. Consequently, further priority actions that will contribute to the goals of this Environment Strategy will emerge from the development of those complimentary strategies. The priority actions will also evolve and develop through the life of the strategy as we learn and develop our understanding. We will review the Environmental Strategy action plan annually.

The strategy also provides a policy framework for the Council to evaluate and connect policies, projects and service delivery to consider the environmental and climate change impact and how they can contribute positively to the goals of this strategy. Everything we do as a council should consider the implications on climate change and the natural environment.

Alongside the direct impact the council will have through the way we operate, the services and projects we deliver, and the investments we make, we will also seek to educate and encourage businesses, residents, visitors and organisations across Cheshire East to commit to do things differently in order to reduce their carbon footprint and to protect and enhance our natural environment. We will also promote access to our natural environments and inspire more people to use green spaces for the mental and physical health benefits.

This Environmental Strategy complements the Council's Economic Strategy as an attractive and sustainable environment is inextricably linked to quality of place. It helps to

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maintain or enhance qualities that differentiate us from other areas and underpins our image and our attractiveness to live, work or invest here. A healthy environment supports a healthy economy. It also complements the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Strategy as attractive and accessible green spaces will support and enable people to access outdoor space for the mental and physical health benefits.

2. A CARBON NEUTRAL COUNCIL BY 2025

Climate change is a global issue, threatening unpredictable and potentially irreversible damage to our planet. It is in everyone's interest to be part of the solution and the Council will lead by example locally by taking action to reduce our carbon emissions and become a Carbon Neutral Council by 2025.

Much has already been done through initiatives to reduce carbon and introduce renewal energy sources to our buildings estate. As a major user of energy, the Council spends over £6m on energy per annum across its school and non-school estate. The Council's Carbon Management Plan for 2009 – 2016 aimed to reduce the Council's CO² emissions by 25%. The 25% target was achieved two years early and at the end of the programme, the reduction stood at 42% or 7,000 tCO².

The Council has also undertaken a programme to upgrade the conventional street lighting assets across the borough to the new LED (Light Emitting Diode) energy efficient street lighting. The programme commenced in November 2014 and concluded in September 2018, upgrading 38,420 conventional street lights to the new LED technology and also replacing 10,375 aged street lighting columns. The programme has delivered both significant environmental benefits with a 72% carbon reduction and financial savings from energy consumption in excess of £1m per annum.

We will build on this work to develop further strategies that will reduce our carbon emissions further. We will look to use 100% renewable electricity tariffs, identify and support the delivery of investments in energy efficiency, heat and power networks, solar, and battery storage to decarbonise the council's infrastructure and develop alternative power and heat sources.

We will review our transport fleet and journeys by staff to and during work to promote low carbon alternatives such as public transport, cycling and walking infrastructure. We will also consider incentives such as a workplace parking levy for staff to provide funding for sustainable transport investment.

We will audit the resources we use and the waste we produce in undertaking Council business to prioritise sustainable purchasing, waste reduction, and reuse.

The Council will also look to offset carbon and improve air quality through the development of our green infrastructure, the way we manage our farms estates, and ways we can

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contribute to improving soil health. We will also examine the potential for woodland creation and tree planting in suitable road side, hedge row and urban locations and engage communities in tree planting initiatives.

To ensure we have a clear carbon reduction roadmap, we will produce an over-arching Carbon Strategy that establishes the baseline carbon footprint for the Council in 2019 and the pipeline of projects and initiatives we will progress to achieve our goal to be carbon neutral by 2025.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an over-arching Carbon Strategy for the Council to achieve its carbon neutral aims by 2025 and to encourage all businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint 	Apr 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trial alternative fuel vehicles for our fleet vehicles to reduce transport related carbon emissions 	Apr 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed carbon reduction into Council procurement, purchasing and facilities management 	Apr 2020

3. REDUCE WASTE AND POLLUTION

A key objective of sustainable development is to produce less waste and as far as possible use it as a resource. In Cheshire East the waste produced in our community needs to be sustainably managed in order to protect the environment and help to achieve the Government’s key aim of moving towards a ‘zero waste economy’. This means making adequate provision for a range of waste management facilities which enable waste to be re-used, recycled or recovered wherever possible, and only disposed of as the last option in accordance with the overarching principle of the ‘Waste Hierarchy’.

3.1 Waste Reduction, Reuse, Recycling, and Disposal

Cheshire East residents are generally good at recycling the waste that they produce. With a recycling rate of 54.4% we were 41st out of 355 English Authorities in 2017-18. However, the total amount of household waste Cheshire East residents produce per person is very high, at 488kg per person in 2017-18 ranked 347th out of the 355 English authorities.

A key focus of the Council’s strategy for waste is to help households think about the whole life cycle of products and packaging in accordance with the overarching principle of the ‘Waste Hierarchy’.

- We will focus on waste prevention to prevent material entering the waste stream in the first place.

- We will promote the reuse of waste through our charitable bulky waste scheme and reuse of waste at household waste centres.
- We will continue to deliver a programme of community engagement to make waste prevention, reduction and reuse a priority over recycling and disposal, expanding our team of Waste Prevention Volunteers.
- We will increase recycling by providing food waste recycling and ensuring waste that cannot be recycled is disposed of as a resource to create heat and power with landfill only being used as a last resort.

The waste management needs of the authority need to be strategically planned for alongside all other environmental, social and economic considerations to ensure an appropriate level of provision. The Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Cheshire East Council establishes key aims and objectives for the management of municipal waste and identifies important steps that will be undertaken to deliver these aims and objectives. The actions are targeted to improve the sustainability of waste management practices, make increased use of waste as a resource and ensure legislative compliance moving forward. These objectives collectively contribute to waste prevention and reduction, increased reuse and recycling, the recovery of energy from residual waste, substantially reduced dependence on increasingly expensive and unsustainable landfill, the support of local third sector organisations, the protection of the environment and the improved efficiency of waste services delivered by the Council.

3.2 Litter and Street Cleansing

We will work to keep our Borough clean and a pleasant place to live and work. To achieve this street cleansing needs to be more than simply collecting litter. Through education and engagement of our communities we seek to change behaviours and foster local community prided in our towns and villages.

We aim to encourage community action through innovative volunteer based schemes engaging key partners and working with national initiatives. We are assisting communities through providing educational material such as our *Life with Less Plastic* campaign and in engaging with national initiatives such as *The Big Spring Clean*. We will continue to support and equip local *Clean Teams* who come together as volunteers to organise litter picks and clean their local areas.

In street cleansing we are seeking to take an evidenced approach to ensure we have the right bins in the right locations balancing the need to encourage the public to take responsibility in taking litter home while providing where needed bins to allow the disposal of dog mess and litter, including recycling on the go, at strategic locations.

We continue to be frustrated by pockets of fly tipping in our towns and countryside. We are committed to identifying and prosecuting those responsible. We provide a simple to use reporting mechanism for fly tipping to support timely clean up but ensuring there is

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sufficient time for enforcement teams to assess evidence to enable prosecution. We have also opened our household waste recycling centres to small trader construction waste to provide a new disposal route for small quantities of trade waste, the main source of rural fly tipping.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch food waste recycling 	Jan 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce Recycling on the Go street litter bins in key town centres 	Oct 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update the Council's Municipal Waste Management Strategy 	Mar 2020

4. IMPROVE AIR QUALITY

Pollution by particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) can impact public health and cause short and long term health effects. These pollutants also contribute to climate change by affecting sunlight reflection and absorption.

The protection and improvement of the air quality environment is both a national and local priority. Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 requires local authorities to review air quality in their area and designate air quality management areas (AQMA) if improvements are necessary. Where an AQMA is designated an air quality action plan (AQAP) describing the pollution reduction measures must then be put in place to contribute to the achievement of air quality objectives at local level. Local Authorities are required to produce an Annual Status Report describing the strategies employed to improve air quality, the progress made in implementing actions, and to review the planned actions to ensure they reflect the latest understanding of effective air quality mitigation measures. The Air Quality Action Plan and Annual Status Report must be submitted to Defra for assessment and feedback.

On the whole the air quality across the majority of the borough is relatively good; however there are a number of small areas where, due to vehicular emissions and traffic flow, there are concerns about nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter.

The Cheshire East Air Quality Strategy (AQS) was updated in 2018. It provides an overarching strategic framework to deliver air quality improvements within the borough. Its purpose is to support the achievement of the national air quality objectives and raise air quality as an issue for consideration within a wide range of local and regional frameworks including transport and strategic planning. The strategy also acknowledges the need to raise awareness of air quality and its impact upon health within the local community to help residents understand the role that they can play in reducing pollutant concentrations.

Underpinning the Air Quality Strategy is up to date knowledge of the air quality environment within Cheshire East. The Council actively monitors pollutant concentrations at relevant sites across the Borough. There are currently 17 Air Quality Management Areas declared within the borough, although the Council intends to declare two additional Areas during 2019.

The Council adopted an updated Air Quality Action Plan in 2018. This contains general measures that will help improve air quality across the borough and specific measures for each Air Quality Management Area. The measures target traffic management, development control, alternative and active travel, low emission technology and public awareness and education. The actions required to improve air quality in an area requires the active cooperation and commitment of a wide range of council services, partners and the local community.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the Air Quality Action Plan and publish the 2019 Air Quality Annual Status Report 	Sep 2019

5. INCREASE SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL

In Cheshire East our transport infrastructure and services are vital to meet our community needs for connectivity to employment, education, health care, shopping and leisure. A significant contributor to air pollution within Cheshire East is road transport. This impact is indicative of relatively high car ownership in Cheshire East with 40% of households having two or more cars against a UK average of 29%. Greater use of sustainable transport will help improve air quality and contribute to the decarbonisation of the borough. This means making adequate provision for a range of sustainable transport opportunities to enable travel on foot, by cycle or by public transport wherever possible, thereby reducing reliance on private cars – especially single-occupancy cars.

The Council’s Local Transport Plan, due to be published in October 2019 following consultation, establishes aims and objectives for the maintenance, management and improvement of our local transport infrastructure. These objectives collectively contribute to maximise opportunities for residents of Cheshire East to make informed and sustainable travel choices, increase use of more sustainable means of transport, support commercial, voluntary and local third sector transport providers, protect the environment and improve the efficiency of transport services delivered by the Council.

The Plan identifies what transport success against each of the Corporate Outcomes will look like. To support delivery of the outcome: ‘Cheshire East is a green and sustainable place’ success will look like:

- All residents have access to places of recreation, leisure and the countryside;

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- The negative impact of the transport network on the natural and built environment is minimised;
- Air quality is improved;
- Residents have the option to travel by walking, cycling and public transport;
- The transport network is resilient to the impacts of weather events and a changing climate.

The Local Transport Plan identifies the transport goals, challenges and actions for the Council and partners across Cheshire East.

The Plan acknowledges that with the recent government announcement to ban the sale of conventional internal combustion engine vehicles from 2040 there is a significant opportunity to move to low carbon transport initiatives. Electric vehicles provide an excellent opportunity to reduce carbon emissions and other vehicle emissions. Electric Vehicles are becoming ever more popular, therefore it is important that there is the necessary infrastructure to cope with this increase. The Council has already provided six 50kV rapid charging units in car parks in Congleton, Wilmslow and Nantwich (Love Lane). The sites have been chosen as they are close to destination points such as supermarkets and coffee shops, where drivers can pass 20 minutes or so while waiting for their vehicle to charge.

The Council will produce an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy which will outline the ambition to increase electric charging infrastructure provision, and seek funding opportunities and initiatives which encourage the uptake of electric vehicle usage. The Strategy will also determine the most appropriate locations across the borough depending on the need, land availability, power provision and types of charging points to be installed.

As the Local Planning Authority, the Council is able to request charging points are installed where appropriate as part of the approval process for both domestic and commercial planning applications.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and publish the Local Transport Plan 	Oct 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy to increase electric charging infrastructure provision and encourage the uptake of electric vehicle usage 	Mar 2020

6. SENSITIVE AND SUSTAINABLE NEW DEVELOPMENT

New development needs to respond to the character of the area and provide for sustainable, high quality design that minimises its environmental impact, with a focus on delivering quality buildings and the spaces that surround them.

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6.1 Local Plan

The Local Plan is the Council's plan to manage growth and development over future years. It governs all new development, including the change of use of land, and allocates land for new developments such as housing, employment, retailing, infrastructure and community facilities. However, the plan also has a range of policies designed to control or manage development where necessary and appropriate – in order to safeguard areas or features of heritage, landscape, ecological or natural resource importance.

The Local Plan is in three parts:

- The Local Plan Strategy (adopted July 2017) – this provides the overall framework for growth up to 2030 and includes the key strategic policies necessary to achieve sustainable development.
- The Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) - this plan provides further detailed planning policies and site Allocations to support the strategic policies and sites contained in the Local Plan Strategy.
- The Minerals & Waste Plan - this is a plan to govern and manage natural resources. It plans for the extraction and exploitation of earth minerals in all their forms: sand, aggregate, hard rock, salt, coal, shale gas and peat. It also plans for how waste resources will be managed, treated and processed.

The Local Plan and related documents is a powerful tool for protecting and enhancing the environment of the Borough – by setting clear policies and proposals, the system of development management is enabled and empowered to ensure they are implemented and that the planning system should provide biodiversity net gains where possible. The Site Allocations and Development Policies Document includes a range of policies to show resilience to climate change and manage the impact of new development on the natural environment. For example:

- The design of new development should take account of the effects of and adapt to the impacts of climate change through the implementation of appropriate design measures, e.g. optimise energy efficiency measures including the use of decentralised energy; minimise the generation of waste and energy consumption in the design, construction, use and life of buildings.
- New development should seek proportionate opportunities to protect, conserve, restore and enhance the ecological network for the borough.
- Major developments and developments affecting semi-natural habitats must be supported by a biodiversity metric calculation to ensure the delivery of a biodiversity measurable net gain.
- Development proposals should seek to retain and protect trees, woodlands and hedgerows. Where the loss of significant trees is unavoidable it must be

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compensated for on the basis of at least three replacement trees for every tree removed.

6.2 Development Management

The delivery of sustainable development is central to the determination of planning applications ensuring that any new developments comply with appropriate National and Local Plan policies. New developments are required to have regard to all relevant material planning considerations which includes key environmental factors such as air quality, access to sustainable transport, and protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment. The Cheshire East Design Guide is now embedded within our Development Management practices, recognising our distinct towns and villages add to the character and quality of place.

New developments are required to achieve no 'net loss' of biodiversity and deliver a positive net gain for the borough. This can be achieved through financial contribution secured through s106 legal agreements and/or the provision of land to deliver off-site habitat creation. For example, the widening of the A500 near Crewe has required the removal of some hedgerows which cannot be mitigated on site so an off-site contribution has been secured which will result in a net gain for biodiversity.

Development Management also ensures that the existing natural and built heritage is protected against harmful and unlawful activities through effective planning enforcement.

6.3 Council Led Development

The Council has a large infrastructure programme to support the delivery of the growth ambitions in the Local Plan Strategy. Local Plan schemes such as Congleton Link Road, Middlewich Eastern Bypass, Poynton Relief Road, A500 Dualling and the North West Crewe highway package, which all facilitate housing and jobs growth, are either in preparation for delivery or are under construction. As promoter of these schemes, the Council will ensure that any environmental harm is effectively and proportionately mitigated in line with the appropriate planning policies; being mindful at all times of the need to balance the costs of such mitigation against the desire to ensure the schemes are affordable and deliver the desired benefits.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	WHEN
• Adopt the Site Allocations and development Policies Document of the Local Plan (Part 2)	July 2020
• Adopt the Minerals and Waste Development Plan (Local Plan Part 3)	Oct 2020

7. PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

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Our natural environment provides us with multiple benefits including improving air quality, conserving biodiversity, reducing flood risk and storing CO₂. It also contributes to our Quality of Place and is important to our physical and mental wellbeing.

We aim to deliver a high quality and accessible network of green spaces for people to enjoy, providing a range of social, environmental, economic and health benefits. We will seek to protect the health of existing ecosystems, encourage the restoration of degraded ecosystems and enhance the biodiversity of the borough. In doing so we will improve people’s health and wellbeing by encouraging people of all ages use and have access to green spaces.

We will take a coordinated approach to the management of the green infrastructure the Council is responsible for (such as open space, countryside sites, public rights of way, parks, playing pitches, water bodies, highways and our farm estates) to protect, develop and enhance these green spaces for all. We will work closely with partners that share common purpose to connect and improve the green infrastructure and natural environment. We will also coordinate with designated landscapes and other managed green spaces, which in Cheshire East include part of the Peak District National Park.

PRIORITY ACTIONS	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce a Green Infrastructure Plan that guides the approach to Green Infrastructure management and investment in Cheshire East 	Oct 2019

8. MEASURING PROGRESS

We will measure progress through monitoring the actions that we take and reporting the impact through key outcome indicators such as carbon emissions, recycling rates, the biodiversity impact of new development, and air quality. We will produce an Annual Status Report to report key outcome indicators, update on the progress made in implementing actions, and review the action plan to ensure they reflect our broader strategic planning and learning.

9. ENCOURAGING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE THROUGH COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITY

Supporting and encouraging changes in day to day behaviour, habits and expectations of residents, Council staff, council customers and other stakeholders will be an important part of the council’s activities to deliver the priorities of this strategy.

The council has a number of platforms and opportunities to engage and educate different audiences about climate change and the environmental impacts of their day to day lives.

This includes access to local media through media releases and feature articles, social media activity, (the council has significant followings in key social media,) web content, internal communications activity etc.

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A programme of campaigns is being developed to raise awareness of issues and nudge people towards simple changes that they can make to day-to-day behaviour that will help achieve the objectives of this strategy. This programme will be coordinated with the work of partners, commissioned services and national and international awareness days / weeks, to maximise reach and traction.

This will include content and opportunities to engage around issues such as sustainable travel, recycling, household energy, making space for wildlife, reducing energy consumption in the workplace among others.

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10. SUMMARY ACTION PLAN

Priority Actions	When
1. Develop an over-arching Carbon Strategy for the Council to achieve its carbon neutral aims by 2025 and to encourage all businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint	Apr 2020
2. Trial alternative fuel vehicles for our fleet vehicles to reduce transport related carbon emissions	Apr 2020
3. Embed carbon reduction into Council procurement, purchasing and facilities management	Apr 2020
4. Launch food waste recycling	Jan 2020
5. Introduce Recycling on the Go street litter bin recycling in key town centres	Oct 2020
6. Review and update the Council's Municipal Waste Management Strategy	Mar 2020
7. Publish the 2019 Air Quality Annual Status Report	Sep 2019
8. Publish the Local Transport Plan	Oct 2019
9. Produce an Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy to increase electric charging infrastructure provision and encourage the uptake of electric vehicle usage	Mar 2020
10. Adopt the Site Allocations and development Policies Document of the Local Plan (Part 2)	July 2020
11. Adopt the Minerals and Waste Development Plan (Local Plan Part 3)	Oct 2020
12. Produce a Green Infrastructure Plan that guides the approach to Green Infrastructure management and investment in Cheshire East	Oct 2019

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