

Cheshire East Council

Environment Strategy 2020-24



Working for a *brighter future*  together

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INTRODUCTION

At the Council meeting on 22 May 2019 the Elected Members of Cheshire East Council approved the following Notice of Motion¹:

“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 2008² 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 2050³.

The UK Government published its 25-Year Environment Plan⁴ in 2018. Central to this plan is climate change and it sets out its goals for “cleaner air and water; plants and animals which are thriving; 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.

The Environment Bill⁵, designed to deliver against the priorities set out in the 25-Year Environment Plan, was re-introduced to parliament on 30 January 2020 following the general election. Upon introducing the Bill, the Secretary of State wrote to local authority Chief Executives across the UK reaffirming the importance of central and local government working together to protect and improve the environment, and explaining how the Bill would bolster the role of local government in responding to environmental issues at a local level, leading specific and locally appropriate responses and driving innovation.

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. Spending time in the natural environment also has a positive impact on people’s mental and physical health and wellbeing, helping people to live well and for longer.

This Environment strategy sets out our strategic goals and summarises the key strategies and action plans that will ensure we deliver these goals through our service delivery, regulatory activity, projects, and partnerships. It also provides a policy framework for the Council to evaluate all emerging strategies, policies, action plans, and projects to consider the environmental and climate change impact and how they can contribute positively to the goals of this strategy. It will ensure that the Council provides strong environmental leadership and stewardship. Everything we do as a council should consider the implications on climate change and the natural environment.

1. Cheshire East Council will be carbon neutral by 2025

- Carbon Action Plan

2. Reduce waste

- Municipal Waste Strategy

3. Improve air quality

- Air Quality Strategy, Air Quality Action Plan

4. Ensure new development is sustainable

- Local Plan

5. Increase sustainable transport and travel

- Local Transport Plan

6. Protect and enhance our natural environment

- Green Infrastructure Plan

The Council has developed a new Economic Strategy for the Borough that outlines the main priorities that will support inclusive and sustainable growth. This promotes a ‘sustainable approach’ to growth through encouraging businesses, residents, visitors and organisations across Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint and to protect and enhance our natural environment. There are interdependencies between the Environment and Economic strategies that need to be closely managed to ensure economic aspirations do not have a detrimental effect on the environment. However, delivering sustainable infrastructure and business environments could be a significant attractor for business to invest in the borough.

The Environment Strategy also complements the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Strategy⁶ as attractive and accessible green spaces enable people to access outdoor

space for the mental and physical health benefits. We will promote access to our natural environments and inspire more people to use green spaces for the health benefits.

ENCOURAGING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Supporting and encouraging changes in day to day behaviour, habits and expectations of residents, Council staff, council customers, local businesses and other stakeholders will be an important part of the council's activities to deliver 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, web content, and internal communications activity.

A programme of campaigns will be delivered to raise awareness of issues and nudge people towards simple changes and the day-to-day lifestyle choices that they can make in order to reduce their carbon footprint and protect and enhance our environment. 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, and reducing energy consumption in the workplace.

MEASURING PROGRESS

We will measure and report progress and impact through key outcome indicators such as carbon emissions, waste re-use and recycling rates, and air quality. Our decision-making reports now include a section to consider the implications of the recommendations on climate change. Carbon accounting will be embedded into our business planning and financial investment practices and procedures.

We will produce a report in 2022 to update on progress against our goals and review our action plans to ensure they reflect our broader strategic planning and learning.

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1. 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.

The Council has already reduced carbon emissions by 55% since 2010 through initiatives to reduce carbon and introduce renewal energy sources to our buildings and streetlighting. The Council has produced its Carbon Action Plan⁷ to set out how it will achieve carbon neutrality by 2025 and how it will influence wider carbon emission reductions across the borough.

The current carbon footprint of the Council has been assessed to be 15,447 t/CO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent). To achieve carbon neutrality the Council recognises that it has a range of influences on carbon emissions depending upon the amount of control it has. The scope of the carbon neutrality ambition for 2025 are those emissions which the Council has direct operational control.

Currently carbon for the Borough is estimated to be 2,518,000 t/CO₂e, of which 38% is On-Road Non-Electric (transport fuels), 35% is Stationary Energy Non-electric (heating and process gas), and 24% is Stationary Energy Electric (electricity use). The residual are small amounts of landfill and rail emissions. Going forward the emissions in the Borough should decrease in line with the UK Government's 2050 zero carbon objective; however, there is a significant amount of influence the council will bring locally to facilitate this.

The action plan to reduce emissions is broken down into 5 areas:

- **Behaviour Change and Internal Policy** - Actions that focus on internal policy, culture and behaviour of the council (e.g. decision-making and procurement process). Changes in this category are generally the least financially intensive and can be initiated quickly. It is also important to drive actions in this area as an enabler and stimulus of further action in the wider borough.
- **Energy Demand Reduction** - Focused on council operations and assets (e.g. council buildings, fleet), but unlike the above, relates to more tangible, capital investment related actions that the council can take to use less energy and fuel, and improve efficiency.
- **Increase Low Carbon Energy Supply** - Alongside a reduction in energy demand, it is necessary to improve the supply of energy by using renewable sources. This includes both a council and borough-wide focus for action, as measures will commonly deliver benefits at scale that can provide opportunity for stakeholders beyond just the council.
- **Natural Capital** - similar to energy supply, the council has the opportunity to progress action both on its own land estate and within the borough more widely.

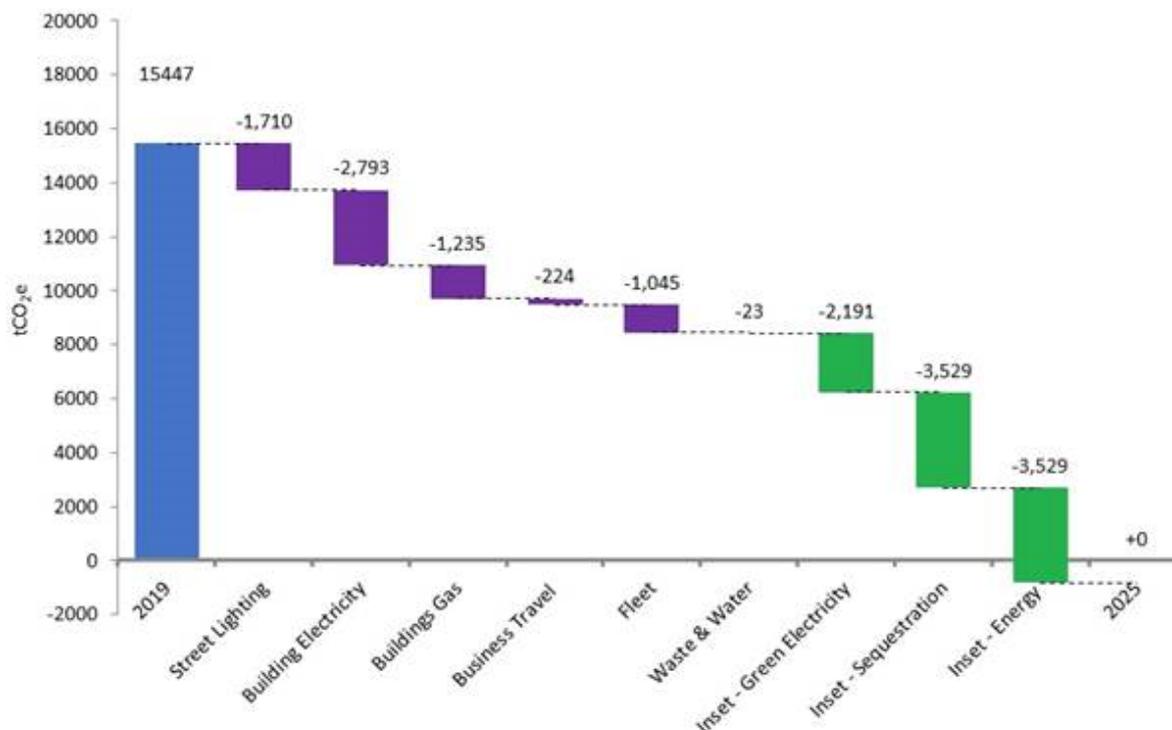
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- **Reducing Borough-wide Emissions/External Policy** - Although these emissions may be under the least influence from the council, in-borough emissions must also reach net zero to keep the UK on track with the national target. The council's role becomes one of a partner and facilitator amongst the community and local businesses, but there is the potential to offset direct council emissions through this work.

It is anticipated that these actions, alongside decarbonisation of the electricity grid, will save 6,315 t/CO₂e, a 41% reduction. The Council will therefore need to plan to offset a minimum of 9,132 t/CO₂e. This will be done through two mechanisms:

- **Green Electricity** – the residual carbon from electricity can be offset with purchase of green electricity. The Council will prioritise purchase from local energy generating projects where available. This is expected to save 2,051 t/CO₂e.
- **Authority Based Insets** – the remaining 7,081 t/CO₂e will be offset through local offsetting projects, described as 'insets' because they are within the scope of the council's control, in this instance the borough. It is anticipated that this will initially be an even 50/50 split between carbon sequestration, such as large-scale tree-planting, and reduction projects, such as renewable energy generation.

The below diagram outlines the relative contribution of all activity to achieve carbon neutrality by 2025.



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In order to ensure that this level of emissions is reached, each service area within the Council will be allocated a carbon budget and will be required to develop a costed implementation plan to deliver this. Progress against these carbon budgets will be reported through the Council's performance management system.

2. REDUCE WASTE

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'.

In 2018 the Government published its Resources and Waste Strategy – Our Waste, Our Resources: A strategy for England. This set out the ambition to preserve material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency, and moving towards a circular economy. It also advocated minimising the damage caused to our natural environment by reducing and managing waste safely and carefully, and by tackling waste crime.

The draft Environment Bill will take forward the ambitions set out in the Government's Resources and Waste Strategy and will ensure that, under the 'polluter pays' principle, producers can be held responsible for the full net costs of managing the packaging that they produce at the end of its life, reducing local authorities' financial burdens from waste management. The draft Bill also includes the powers to introduce a deposit return scheme whereby consumers pay a deposit for the single-use container (e.g. a plastic bottle) at the point of purchase which is then returned to the consumer where they bring back the container for recycling.

It should be noted that the Government has also proposed minimum service standards designed to ensure consistency in the materials collected for recycling by all English local authorities. However, there are certain aspects, such as separate collections of dry recyclables and weekly food waste collections, that may require changes to our current service. Further consultation on the details of these schemes is expected in 2020.

The Council has produced its revised Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2030 to ensure its objectives are still relevant in the changing waste industry and national policy framework. The Council is responsible for the management of all household waste within the borough. 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'. In 2018/19 total local authority collected waste was 181,288 tonnes. Just over half of this was recycled, composted or re-used (52%); the majority of the remainder was sent to an energy from waste facility, with only around 5% going to landfill. Since 2012 the Council has consistently exceeded the national 2020 recycling target of 50%.

The Council provides a range of services for the collection of municipal waste and litter, including:

- Kerbside collections – non-recyclable waste, recycling and garden and food waste
- A bulky waste collection service

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- Household waste recycling centres (HWRCs)
- Bring banks
- Street cleansing
- Litter and dog waste bins
- Litter picking
- Clearing of fly tipped waste.

The Municipal Waste Management Strategy is underpinned by the principles of the waste management hierarchy that prioritise not producing waste in the first place, then reusing it followed by recycling and composting. Not producing waste in the first place is by far the best environmental and economic solution to tackling waste.

The Strategy includes objectives to help reduce waste through a range of waste education and awareness initiatives to make waste prevention, reduction and reuse a priority over recycling and disposal. One of the challenges that the authority faces is that Cheshire East is a good place to live and that levels of income are higher than the national average and this is reflected in the higher levels of waste produced per household. At the most local level – at home – reducing what is put in the bin (perhaps by making decisions in the supermarket not to accept over-packaging or using food waste to make compost) all contributes to the objective of reducing the amount of waste produced across Cheshire East. The Council provides a collection service for bulky waste such as items of furniture through a partnership with a third sector partner. In many cases these items can be re-used either almost immediately or after some repair and refurbishment. This provides many opportunities to use the waste to the benefit of less advantaged members of our community. We also plan to set up a re-use shop at Macclesfield household waste recycling centre. This will be a pilot for the council and we will see what materials are brought to the site that could be made available through the re-use shop.

CASE STUDY – FOOD WASTE CAMPAIGN

40% of residual waste in our black bin is food waste. In order to address this high figure, Cheshire East has been working hard to encourage residents to waste food by encouraging them to buy less, use leftovers, freeze when possible and from January 2020 to recycle food waste. Our campaigns have aimed to address these issues head on, indicating to residents that by wasting less food they could potentially save themselves around £70 per month (updated from £60 in 2019). Each year we reach on average 7,000 schoolchildren and approx. 8,000 adults during our engagement events. A common theme of our food waste dialogue is clearing confusion over sell-by, use-by and best before dates on packaging as uncertainty around these areas has a direct impact on the volume of food waste collected.

We will also to continue to work in partnership with the commercial and charitable sectors, such as supermarkets and housing trusts, schools and higher education establishments to promote waste reduction, re-use and recycling. We will also continue to build and utilise

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our waste prevention volunteer network in communities across the borough. We will continue to support and equip local Clean Teams who come together as volunteers to organise litter picks and clean their local areas.

With an increasing awareness of the harm that our waste can cause to the environment and the need to offer as many opportunities to recycle as possible, the Council will be increasing the number of opportunities to recycle 'on the go'. This will mean a move away from a traditional litter bin only and see the introduction of bins that enable residents to recycle their waste. These bins will initially be located in high footfall areas and some parks.

We will measure the impact of our activity to reduce the overall volume of waste and increase re-use through the Council's performance management system.

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3. 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.

The Cheshire East Air Quality Strategy (AQS)¹⁰ 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.

The Council adopted an updated Air Quality Action Plan¹¹ 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.

The Council has published the 2019 Air Quality Annual Status Report¹² which provides an overview of air quality across the borough for the 2018 calendar year. It sets out the results of monitoring, discusses trends in air quality data and outlines strategies employed by Cheshire East Borough Council to improve air quality including any progress with regards to actions contained in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan. Defra have provided their appraisal of the latest Annual Status Report and accepted the report, commenting that the measures within the adopted Air Quality Action Plan are highly detailed and show that the Council have great consideration for improving air quality within their borough. They also commented that the AQMA and diffusion tube mapping is comprehensive and clearly demonstrates the monitoring network, and that monitoring quality assurance/quality control is considered robust.

Air quality in the borough is generally good, but there are areas where the measured nitrogen dioxide concentrations are exceeding the annual average objective, which is 40µg/m³. There are currently 19 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) within the borough, however, trend data indicates that air quality is starting to improve and some AQMA may be considered for revocation in the 2020 Annual Status Report.

It is apparent that the main source of air pollution across the borough is due to vehicular emissions and in particular where there are areas of poor traffic flow. For example, as a result of the construction of a bypass for Mere traffic within the AQMA has decreased and this is reflected in the monitoring results. Given this, measures to improve air quality within Cheshire East are focused on reducing vehicular emissions and easing/improving traffic flows through traffic management, development management, alternative and active travel, low emission technology, and also public awareness.

CASE STUDY – AIR QUALITY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The level of air pollution is currently a regular item on national and local media reports. Therefore, Cheshire East is currently looking at all options to try and educate and where possible, change perceptions with regards to air pollution. To help with this, the air quality team have produced an education package for delivery in schools to raise awareness within Key Stage 2 (KS2), specifically years 5 and 6.

The aim of the education package is to educate children about air pollution and the effects it can have on health. It is hoped that this will enable the children to have a better understanding about the choices they make and the effects these can have on both the environment and their health. The education awareness package includes a short session with hands on activities for the children, delivered by members of the air quality team. It gives children the opportunity to discuss the causes, effects and potential solutions to air pollution.

The number of Air Quality Management Areas is monitored through the Council's performance management system. The overall number of AQMA should not be considered an indicator of good or bad as identifying AQMA and actions to improve air quality is positive action. However, the revocation of AQMA once monitoring confirms a sustained improvement in air quality is the key measure of success. The Annual Status Report is submitted to Defra for assessment and feedback, and is presented to the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee before being published on the Council's website.

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4. ENSURE NEW DEVELOPMENT IS SUSTAINABLE

4.1 Planning Policy

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. The Local Plan seeks to meet the objectively assessed needs for development which includes accommodating a realistic element of economic growth-derived development need. The overall growth proposition set out in the Local Plan Strategy, adopted in 2017, is to deliver at least 36,000 new homes and around 31,000 additional jobs by 2030. A strong economy offering sustainable growth is essential in maintaining the borough's prosperity, but the objective is not economic growth at any price; rather it is the sustainable development of Cheshire East.

The National Planning Policy Framework¹⁴ (NPPF) explains that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Achieving sustainable development means that we must develop both economically and socially, but in a way that contributes to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

At the heart of the NPPF and the Cheshire East Local Plan is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This is set out in the Local Plan Strategy by the overarching all-embracing Policy MP 1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development. Further policies in the Local Plan Strategy provide clear guidance on how the Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development will be applied locally.

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. This includes more detailed policies to manage the impact of new development on the natural environment, climate change mitigation, renewable energy, flood risk management, and natural resources. The Council consulted on its draft SADPD during Autumn 2019 and is undertaking a further review because of the significant number of representations received, and this may require a further round of public consultation prior to its submission to the Secretary of State for examination.

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- **The Minerals & Waste Development Plan Document (MWDPD)** - 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 the sustainable management of waste in the Borough to 2030. A first draft of the MWDPD is being prepared for initial consultation during 2020. A further consultation will be undertaken on the publication draft in 2021 before that plan is also submitted for examination

4.2 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.

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. The draft Environment Bill proposes a mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain in the planning system, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and create new green spaces for local communities to enjoy.

To date the Council has secured financial contribution for biodiversity through section 106 agreements associated with planning permissions with a total value of £1.7m. Funding for biodiversity has also been secured through non-section 106 sources including HS2 Phase 2a - £875,000. The following habitat creation measures have been implemented using contributions secured for biodiversity through the section 106 process:

Habitat Type	Quantity
Native Species Hedgerows	1080m new native species hedgerow
Species Rich Grassland / Wildflower Meadow	In partnership with Cheshire Wildlife Trust's 'Pollinating Cheshire' project 13.4ha have been enhanced as species rich grassland.
Barn Owl	A number of contributions have been received to offset the loss of barn owl foraging habitat which has been used to deliver a substantial number of barn owl boxes in partnership with the Local Barn Owl Groups.
Ponds	One new pond created, one existing pond restored, and marginal planting completed at Queens Park Lake.
Lowland Raised Bog and associated habitats	£50,000 worth of habitat restoration underway at Wybunbury Moss. £3,780 worth of fencing installed at Blakenhall Moss local Wildlife Site to prevent damage to this Lowland Raised Bog Local

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CASE STUDY – MITIGATING BIODIVERSITY LOSS FROM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The planning application for the widening and dualling of 3.3km of the A500 between Junction 16 of the M6 and the Mere Moss Roundabout was approved in April 2019. The existing habitats within the boundary of the planning application were assessed using the Defra Biodiversity Metric in order to determine their nature conservation importance in an objective standardised manner. The proposals to widen the road will result in the loss of a range of habitats including scrub, broad-leaved plantation woodland and mixed deciduous woodland. Most of the habitats lost to the scheme were considered to be of low to medium value, but there will be the loss of 0.29ha of high value woodland. The total loss of habitat associated with the scheme was anticipated to equate to 43.78 biodiversity units.

The A500 widening scheme included proposals for the enhancement of a number of retained habitats including one and three-quarter hectares of species rich grassland and a small area of marshy grassland. The scheme also included proposals for the planting of new areas of native woodland and scrub. Despite these on-site measures, the scheme was found to result in the loss of a number of biodiversity units. This deficit was mainly the result of the time that newly created or enhanced habitats take to achieve their target condition, which limits the number of units that can be achieved and the lack of opportunities within the boundary of the scheme to undertake further habitat creation measures.

In order to address the shortfall in biodiversity units resulting from the scheme, Cheshire East Highways proposed the payment of a financial contribution to facilitate further off-site habitat creation. The contribution will likely be used towards the creation of species rich grassland in partnership with Cheshire Wildlife Trust as part of the Trust's Pollinating Cheshire Project. A potential site for offsite habitat creation has already been identified.

The Council has a large infrastructure programme to support the delivery of the growth ambitions in the Local Plan Strategy. Schemes such as Congleton Link Road, Middlewich Eastern Bypass, Poynton Relief Road, 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.

4.3 Building Control

Since 1965 the Building Regulations have been the means by which we regulate for minimum energy efficiency standards in new build and extended homes. Essentially the Building Regulations set standards for how new buildings must be constructed and existing buildings altered to achieve a minimum level of acceptable performance through a

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framework of nationally developed standards applied locally. Part 6 of the Building Regulations imposes specific requirements for energy efficiency. Schedule 1 Part L – “Conservation of Fuel and Power” provides guidance for the conservation of fuel and power by producing heat and gases and providing building services which are energy efficient and have effective controls.

Homes account for 20% of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK which have reduced by approximately 20% since 1990 through the continued application of the regulations.

In 2019 the Government consulted on the proposed Future Homes Standard¹⁵ for new build homes to be future-proofed with low carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency, including proposals to improve the energy efficiency of new homes from 2020 as a meaningful and achievable stepping stone to the Future Homes Standard. The Future Homes Standard will provide a consistent national standard, removing the ability of local planning authorities to be able to demand different energy efficiency standards. Implementation is planned for 2025 and will seek to improve carbon reduction emissions by up to 31%.

CASE STUDY – HANDFORTH GARDEN VILLAGE

The Council is planning to deliver an exemplar sustainable community through its strategic development site at Handforth Garden Village, one of the 14 garden villages selected by Government. A garden village is a development of between 1,500 – 10,000 homes, with an emphasis on high quality design and community benefits. The Strategic Planning Document for the site sets out our vision and aspirations, including:

- A village to meet every day needs for the village residents and minimise the need to travel by car, as well as a ‘car and cycle club’ environment to minimise use and dependence on the car, and walking, cycling and bus connectivity to Handforth railway station.
- A ‘smart village’ environment, embracing digital technology and providing shared workspace facilities, including the provision of electric charging vehicle infrastructure throughout the site.
- An integrated district heating network extending across the site to reduce dependency on non-renewable energy sources.
- Incorporation of water efficiency measures and sustainable drainage systems for the management of surface water.
- A net gain for biodiversity through a package of mitigation and enhancement measures on and off site, including green infrastructure that connects and extends existing and newly created habitats to facilitate the movement of species between them, with existing grassland, trees, hedgerows and ponds retained where possible, and new water features designed to maximise their biodiversity value
- Habitat creation by incorporating green roofs and green walls as a way of greening the village centre, residential and employment areas.
- A network of footpaths, cycleways, and green spaces to encourage healthy activity for people of all ages.

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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. However, on-road transport is the largest source of carbon emissions in Cheshire East and is 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 Plan¹⁶, adopted in October 2019, considers all forms of transport and how transport will support wider policies to improve our economy, protect our environment and make attractive places to live, work and play. A series of Town Delivery Plans are now in development to focus on how the issues and opportunities identified in the Borough wide Local Transport Plan relate to specific areas, setting out schemes and interventions to improve the transport network and choices. The Town Delivery Plans will also consider the surrounding rural areas and smaller settlements which is vital given the Borough's rural population and economy.

5.1 Local Bus Services

As the predominant mode of public transport bus must be central to decarbonisation. A double decker bus can take 75 cars off the road. Even small changes in travel behaviour can make a big difference. If everyone switched just one car journey a month to bus it would mean one billion fewer car journeys on our roads and a saving of two million tonnes of CO2 every year.

Cheshire East has one of the lowest levels of per capita bus use in England, with an average of only 10.6 trips annually per resident by bus. Bus patronage declined by 22% between 2009-16 in Cheshire East; a more significant decline than occurred nationally. Contributory factors to this decline include the geographical nature and demography of the borough, with high car ownership levels and a number of remote rural areas which are challenging to serve with conventional bus services. Congestion is also identified as one of the causes of reduced bus patronage, owing to adverse impacts on the reliability and attractiveness of bus travel. The trends in local bus patronage place considerable pressure on the viability of commercial bus services, whilst requirements for additional public subsidy place increasing pressures on scarce Council budgets.

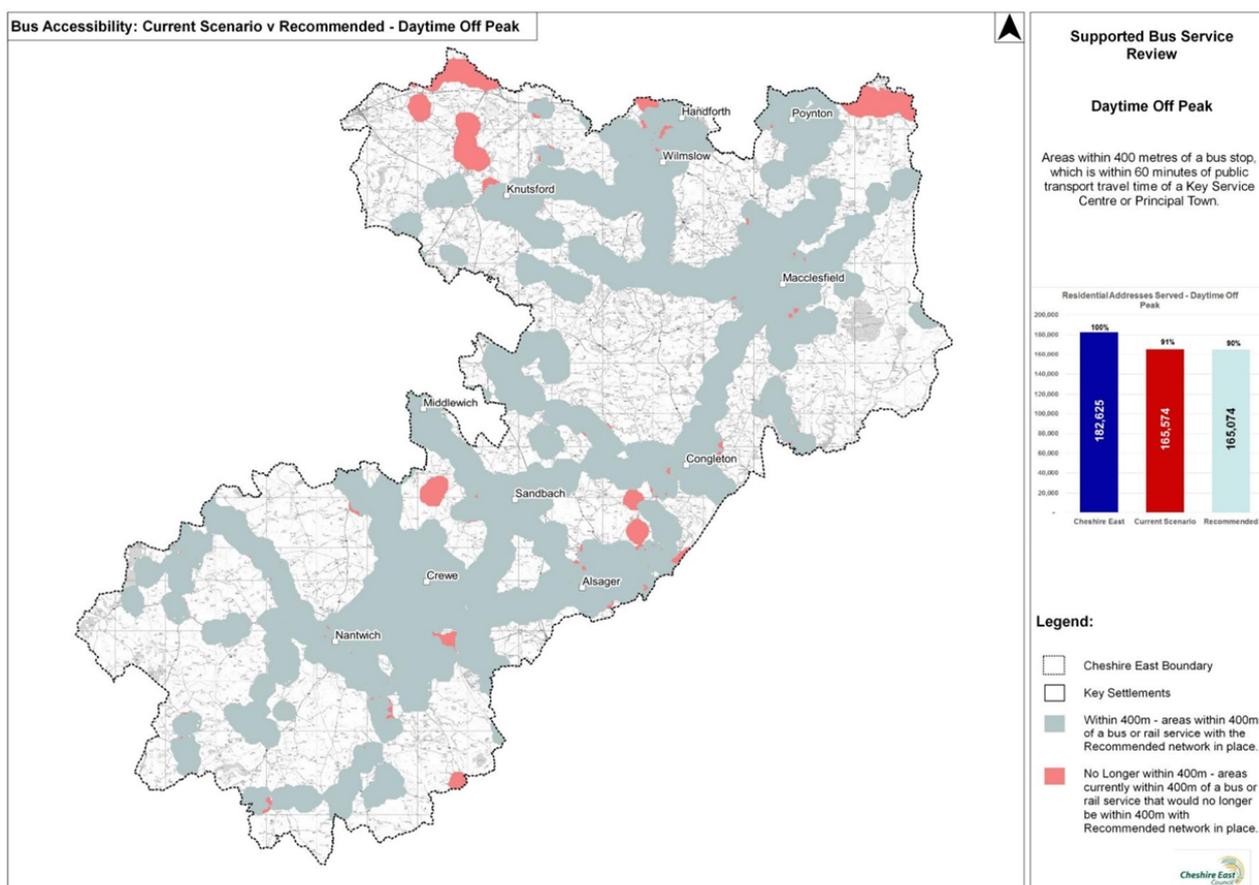
The Cheshire East bus network comprises of a mix of commercial and supported (subsidised) services. Commercial bus services are operated by private sector companies in response to levels of travel demand that provide greater potential for revenue generation through bus fares. The Council has only limited opportunity to influence commercial services, since these are controlled by commercial private operators that

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include national groups e.g. Arriva, larger regional companies e.g. D&G Buses, and a number of smaller independent bus and coach operators. The Council provides financial support (subsidy) to operate socially-necessary bus services in the Borough. These services enable residents to benefit from local bus services in areas where commercial services do not operate given ongoing Council budget pressures and the subsequent de-registration of commercial services

The coverage of our local bus network is a critical determinant of sustainable transport choices. Currently, accessibility by local bus across Cheshire East is sufficient to provide many of the essential linkages between towns across the Borough although there are a number of localities that do not meet even minimum standards for bus provision. The areas shaded grey on the below map represent those areas within 400 metres of a bus stop which is within 60 minutes public transport travel time of a Principal Town or Key Service Centre. The areas shaded red are not within 400 metres of a bus stop. Importantly, however, these minimum standards increasingly fail to meet passenger's expectations for frequency, duration and reliability of service. Hence, where people have a choice, they are more likely to choose alternatives to the bus network.

Bus Accessibility Across Cheshire East



The quality of bus infrastructure is also a vital component in making bus services attractive to users. Stations and stops are an integral part of the bus-users experience, as these are the places that provide the waiting room for local bus. All too often the experience is

miserable, leaving passengers without adequate information, comfort or shelter during their wait for the bus. A significant uplift in the passenger waiting environment is necessary to ensure that local bus use is attractive for modern users. The Council is progressing with a town centre regeneration programme for Crewe that incorporates a new bus interchange.

CASE STUDY – FLEXIBLE TRANSPORT SERVICE

The Council recognises that traditional, scheduled bus services may not be feasible in all areas of the Borough or meet the needs of all residents and communities in Cheshire East. The Council has provided a flexible demand responsive transport service for a number of years. This service provides a safety net for isolated communities or passengers with particular mobility needs. The service is regularly used by a relatively small but important group of users, who consider it is critical to meeting their local travel needs. Those users typically comprise of vulnerable users across the borough, including the elderly and mobility impaired.

Development of Flexible Demand-responsive Transport offers interesting opportunities for the future of local bus. There is a need to test the commercial viability of various models of flexible transport, which potentially provide more bespoke services both to individual users or to specific user-groups e.g. corporate travel, or links to education or training.

A key drawback of local bus provision is the lack of integrated ticketing options for customers. Most commercial operators across Cheshire East provide a range of ticket options which are exclusive to their own services. Whilst these undoubtedly provide benefits to those users who can rely on only one operator, there are major price penalties for any trip requiring interchange between operators. Development of a system of integrated tickets is a key priority for Transport for the North. Cheshire East will benefit considerably from this outcome, which should enable local people to make cost-effective journeys that rely on more than one local bus company, or require both local bus and local rail services.

The government has recently pledged £5bn over the next five years to improve bus and cycling services in England. To ensure the Council is able to benefit from these funding opportunities, we will:

- Develop a Cheshire East Bus Strategy that defines a future vision for our local bus network;
- Develop Town Delivery Plans to identify the schemes and interventions required to improve the transport network and choices within each locality;
- Identify and prioritise local infrastructure improvements to support bus networks;
- Work in partnership with bus operators and neighbouring councils to enhance the quality, reliability and sustainability of local bus networks;
- Maximise investment in the local bus network through bids to national and regional funding streams.

5.2 Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

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The Government has announced that a ban on selling new petrol, diesel or hybrid cars in the UK will be brought forward from 2040 to 2035, and could come even earlier if possible. Electric vehicles provide an opportunity to reduce carbon emissions and other vehicle emissions. Electric Vehicles will become ever more popular, with experts forecasting that the purchase price of electric vehicles will reach rough parity with fossil fuel cars by the middle of the decade. Therefore, it is important that there is the necessary infrastructure to cope with this.

The Council has already provided six 50kW rapid charging units in car parks in Congleton, Wilmslow and Nantwich. 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. 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.

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.

The annual National Travel Survey¹⁷, undertaken by the Department for Transport, will enable us to monitor the uptake of sustainable transport and travel, and compare with national trends.

6. PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Our natural environment provides us with multiple benefits including improving air quality, conserving biodiversity, reducing flood risk and capturing carbon. It contributes to our 'Quality of Place' and enables people to enjoy the outdoors contributing to their physical and mental wellbeing and to our economy. However, we cannot take this for granted and if economic growth is to be sustainable, we must ensure a parallel increase in the quality of our natural environment.

Our Local Plan strategy sets a vision for growth, but one that is balanced in a sustainable way. It envisages a green infrastructure network that will increase the provision of accessible green spaces, supporting flora, fauna and improving general wellbeing. Cheshire East aspires to a comprehensive and connected green infrastructure that will meet the needs of people and nature in the 21st century. We aim to pass on a better environment to the next generation.

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 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 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.

The Council has published a Green Infrastructure Plan¹⁸ for Cheshire East to 2030 as a road map for a more comprehensive and connected green infrastructure. The Plan provides an evidence base and framework to guide future decision-making, investment and action for like-minded organisations or individuals who share a vision for excellent green infrastructure. While it has been commissioned by Cheshire East Council, it will be delivered through collective contributions with the involvement of partners, communities, landowners and developers. The Plan identifies key activities that can be aligned to projects and particular interest groups:

- **Urban greening** – creating and maintaining vibrant, healthy and inspiring places where people want to live and work.
- **Getting outdoors easily** – engaging people and improving community access to, and enjoyment of, green infrastructure for health and wellbeing.
- **Rivers and valleys** – catchment-wide activity to improve water quality, natural flood management, re-naturalisation and tranquil enjoyment of watercourses and waterways.
- **Thriving nature** – creating and safeguarding well-connected networks of habitats.

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- **Working alongside major infrastructure** – integrating green infrastructure into major new infrastructure projects and retrofitting green infrastructure alongside existing infrastructure.
- **A distinctive place for culture, heritage and tourism** - enhancing the setting of and access to heritage, landscape and outdoor recreational assets.
- **Environments for business** – creating an attractive and accessible setting for centres of employment and economic activity, both in towns and the countryside.
- **Farmland and soils** – enabling land management which conserves and restores soil productivity and improves carbon sequestration.

The Plan applies these activities at both a landscape scale in urban fringe and rural areas, and to urban projects in the principal towns and key service centres.

While the Council will maintain a commitment to leadership of the Green Infrastructure Plan, it cannot deliver the plan on its own and will require collective contributions from like-minded partners. A key priority for the Council is to develop a range of partnerships at both a landscape and community level to deliver the opportunities and benefits outlined in the plan.

The South West Peak Landscape Partnership is an example of a successful place-based collaborative approach. Utilising Heritage Lottery Funding combined with contributions from a range of delivery partners, the partnership is delivering initiatives across a defined rural landscape area, engaging communities, enhancing habitats and species, generating wider environmental benefits and building stronger connections with the landscape to encourage stewardship.

The Cheshire Local Nature Partnership is another example of collaborative working that has a key role to play in helping Cheshire and Warrington to thrive by championing natural capital benefits for business, people and biodiversity. It brings together a range of organisations involved in improving the local natural environment. The Green Infrastructure Plan identifies that the Local Nature Partnership offers an existing mechanism that presents an opportunity to support partnership working in Cheshire East and more widely across the area.

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