

Cheshire East Council's Environmental Strategy Consultation

Summary report



Contents

Conclusions.....	2
Introduction	5
Delivering the strategy.....	6
Contradictions between current policy, and Environmental Strategy aims	9
Rating the strategic goals.....	12
Comments on the strategic goals	14

Conclusions

A passionate response

The Environment Strategy consultation received a high number of responses, from a wide range of stakeholders. Responses received were extremely lengthy, detailed and covered a wide scope.

Respondents seemed particularly passionate on the topic, and as such it may be in the council's long term best interests to ensure it listens to, and acts on, this response.

On the whole, Cheshire East Council's draft Environment Strategy was well received, with very large proportions of respondents agreeing the Strategic Goals were relevant (89%) – this suggests the strategy focuses on the right areas.

More detail needed

However, lower proportions of respondents felt the Strategic Goals were comprehensive (64%). This point was repeatedly emphasised throughout written consultation feedback, with respondents feeling that much more detail will be needed for the strategy to be effective.

Greater urgency needed

Similarly, respondents felt the strategy required a much greater sense of urgency. If this council truly believes there is a climate emergency, fundamental policy changes, and council transformation, may be required to meet the challenge – potentially leading to fundamental change in the way we live, and in the way our communities function.

Key challenges

Throughout the consultation respondents highlighted some of the key challenges the council will need to meet to face the climate emergency:

Economic growth – Respondents felt that economic growth has in many ways only been possible at the expense of the environment – on a “throw away” economy, increasing populations and constant development. They questioned how the council will balance economic growth with environmental sustainability, and whether there needs to be a move towards a [circular economy](#).

Development – Respondents are extremely agitated at current and planned levels of new housing and development within the borough – they felt there has been too much and want it to stop. They fail to see how this development, and associated increases in traffic and loss of green space, is environmentally friendly, and urge a full and comprehensive review of the Local Plan in light of the climate emergency. They questioned how the council will balance demands for new housing, and new roads, with environmental sustainability.

Reliance on cars – Respondents are clearly aware of their reliance on cars, even for short journeys, but feel that there is currently no practical, viable alternative. The challenge of moving people out of cars, and onto more sustainable forms of transport is formidable – significant infrastructure investment may be required. Current development is not supportive of this aim – it is “out of town” and therefore car dependent, little green infrastructure is being built, and cuts to bus service subsidies lessen the sustainable transport options available. Electric cars are presented as a solution, but there is doubt that these are environmentally friendly enough to provide a long term viable alternative.

Reducing waste – Reduction of the amount of waste produced by residents was seen as a high priority – achieving this with an affluent population will be a challenge, particularly in a consumer economy, as will reducing use of packaging and single use plastic by manufacturers and retailers.

Further to these key challenges, respondents highlighted many other challenges and suggestions, which will need consideration in the fight against climate change.

The council's role

Respondents called for the council to be clearer in the strategy about what its role would be in tackling the climate emergency. Some called for the council to lead on this issue, and felt that its strategy should not be solely internal facing, but that the council should lead on a process of change throughout the whole borough. They felt that unless it does, efforts will not do much for Cheshire East unless the council brings the whole population with it.

Some suggested a sub-regional Carbon Strategy which “clearly identifies the role all partners, residents, businesses and policy can play in achieving carbon zero, with clear targets and measurables that can be reported against”.

Future engagement

Fighting the climate emergency is a global, national and local issue. Cheshire West and Chester Council recently declared a climate emergency, stating [“radical change”](#) will be need to meet the challenge, committing [£16 million towards this aim](#).

For Cheshire East Council, this consultation will be the beginning of an ongoing engagement process on a challenging and emotive issue, which will need to be well resourced and carefully managed to be successful.

Introduction

During October and November 2019 Cheshire East Council consulted on its first draft of an Environment Strategy for 2019 – 2024.

The consultation was widely promoted and received a significant response, including 384 survey responses, 32 formal written responses, and 54 social media comments.

Responses were received from a wide range of stakeholders, including CEC Environmental Health Team, Cheshire CCG, Cheshire East Climate Alliance, Cheshire East Countryside Access Forum, Cheshire Local Nature Partnership, Congleton Cycling Campaign, Congleton Sustainability Group, Councillor Akers-Smith, Goostrey Parish Council, Holmes Chapel Parish Council, Holmes Chapel Village Volunteers, National Trust, Natural England, NFU North West, Pickmere Parish Council, Poynton Town Council, Sandbach Town Council, Scotwood Nursery Shavington-cum-Gresty Parish Council, The Environment Agency, The Tatton Group, Transition Wilmslow, Walkers Strings Limited, and Weston & Basford Parish Council.

The 3 reports being released as part of this consultation are:

1. This summary report
2. A full report
3. All formal responses.

Delivering the strategy

Throughout consultation feedback, respondents highlighted the following aspects they felt would be important for the delivery of a successful Environmental Strategy.

Greater urgency needed

Respondents emphasised a sense of urgency which they felt was not reflected within the strategy – “The [IPCC \(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change\)](#) gave us a decade to turn things around, and we are already two years into this period. We cannot waste time. Every action counts”.

Some felt the strategy appears cursory, is “all talk no action”, and thought more passion is needed. They stated that:

- The strategy is not in-line with the UK’s overall commitment to the [Paris Agreement](#)
- The strategy doesn’t reflect the level of pressure the environment is under, as set out in the [State of Nature report 2019](#)
- The scale of the challenge being faced is more clearly set out in the [Greater Manchester 5-year Environment plan](#).

Ultimately respondents felt that “whilst the council wants to be carbon neutral by 2025, it seems unlikely to be able to meet that without much bolder policies”. They were also disappointed that the strategy “gives no indication of the level of ambition” being aimed for.

More detail needed

Respondents felt the Strategic Goals were “non-specific”, contained “broad brush wordy phrases”, and as such required significant, more detailed targets adding, alongside target dates and estimated costings, in order to be effective.

They suggested the strategy should set clear and quantifiable targets for residents, businesses, and other organisations within the borough to aim for, and, at the very

least, should “establish a current emissions baseline to (define) the trajectory required to reach net zero by 2025”. Respondents stressed that target dates for the achievement of actions were either missing or unrealistic.

The council’s role in delivering change

Respondents also wondered what role the council should play in facing the climate emergency, and felt this needed to be made clearer within the strategy.

On the one hand some felt the council is “best placed and indeed the only actor with the authority to lead and facilitate a process of change”, and should act as a leader on this agenda. They felt the council should impel stakeholders rather than just encourage them to become more environmentally friendly, perhaps through enforcement or monetary penalty.

On the other hand some felt it was a good “lead by example strategy”, with suggestions that the council should act as a “fast follower” (e.g. an organisation that quickly imitates the innovations of its competitors), rather than being a leader in this area.

Engage more widely to develop and deliver the strategy

Respondents felt the strategy should involve, refer to and engage a wider range of stakeholders – they felt all stakeholders in Cheshire East must play their part, rather than just the council, to reduce energy consumption and carbon footprints.

Potential stakeholders included residents, businesses, Councillors, Town and Parish Councils, neighbouring Local Authorities, Central Government, developers, charities, local schools, health organisations, police and fire, local environmental groups, environment agencies, volunteer groups, wildlife conservationists and experts, Local Enterprise Partnerships, and local land owners.

Respondents also suggested ways this engagement could take place, including through community information hubs, public update reports, consultation and engagement events, public meetings, People’s Assemblies, Natural Capital Audits, and community environment audits.

Produce a sub-regional carbon strategy

Respondents suggested having “an overarching Carbon Strategy, which clearly identifies the role all partners, residents, businesses and policy can play in achieving carbon zero, with clear targets and measurables that can be reported against”. Others called for a sub-regional Carbon Strategy, to galvanise collective activity, and to be monitored and reported on.

Contradictions between current policy, and Environmental Strategy aims

Respondents highlighted the following contradictions between current council policy, and Environmental Strategy aims – they felt there is a disconnect between what the council says it will do, and what it is actually doing:

1. Economic growth Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents felt economic growth has only been possible at the expense of the environment, and wondered how the council will balance economic activity with environmental sustainability in future.

They wondered at what point the cost of economic growth becomes environmentally unacceptable, and felt that to meet this balance significant behaviour change will be required. They wondered how the borough will move towards a [circular economy](#), and felt that the council's Environmental Strategy contradicts the council's Economic Strategy.

2. Housing completions Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents were strongly aggrieved by what they saw as too much development in Cheshire East, feeling that there appears to be “no control on new developments”. Some simply wanted the council to “stop building”, while others strongly opposed development on greenfield sites, wondering how loss of green space and natural habitat for development was environmentally sustainable.

Some urged a “full, urgent and comprehensive review of the Local Plan in response to the climate change emergency motion”, feeling the “number of new homes required in the Local Plan has been vastly overstated, and does not comply with more recent Government requirements and ONS data”. They felt that some of the current Local Plan sites would simply not be accepted against the current Environmental Strategy.

3. Housing build quality Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents felt recent and planned housing was not as environmentally friendly as it must be to meet the challenge of the climate emergency. They felt new development must be built to much higher environmental standards, such as the Passivhaus standard, to help tackle the emergency effectively.

4. Green infrastructure Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents felt that the council's current planning policy contradicts its aims to increase sustainable transport and travel. They felt current development was "out of town", and therefore car dependent, and that housing, services and employment centres were not close enough together, or well enough linked, to enable sustainable travel.

They felt new housing developments include "token" cycling and walking provision, and "does nothing to link the new development to adjacent shopping, primary and secondary schools". Respondents felt sustainable transport is not taken into account in planning applications.

5. Reliance on cars Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents were concerned that a reliance on cars is not environmentally sustainable, and felt changing this reliance would be difficult in an affluent and rural borough, where personal car ownership is high. They felt cars are too convenient for people, and that unless travellers have the assurance of efficient, hassle free trips, devoid of danger, they will continue to use their own vehicles.

Some simply wanted the council to stop building new roads, despairing at "the number of extra highways being built to accommodate the increased use of cars and other vehicles". They wondered how this policy could address the issue of sustainable transport.

Others felt the Local Plan aim for increased road capacity appears to contradict the Environmental Strategy aim for sustainable transport and less reliance on cars.

6. Electric cars Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents felt electric vehicles provide “only part of the answer” for environmental sustainability. Electric vehicles were felt to be unaffordable for the majority, while some suggested it is a “myth” that electric cars are more environmentally friendly than petrol / diesel cars.

They were concerned that promotion of electric cars would proliferate the use of private transport, when they felt public transport, cycling, and walking were better for environmental sustainability.

7. Bus service cuts Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents felt that current bus services are “absolutely dire”, or are “sparse, erratic, finish early, doesn't exist at weekends, or just doesn't exist (at all)”. They felt bus services needed to be more frequent, more reliable, better quality, cleaner, and more affordable.

Respondents questioned why the council has cut bus services in recent years, and felt proposals in the Environment Strategy “will be met with hollow laughter by residents who have had bus service funding withdrawn”. Some wondered whether this strategy represents a U-turn on the policy of bus service cuts, or whether this strategy is just paying “lip service to this concept”.

8. High levels of waste Vs Environmental sustainability

Respondents felt there should be an emphasis on reducing waste in the first instance, rather than on increasing recycling levels. They felt an emphasis on recycling encourages people to be wasteful, and that people must change their “throw away lifestyles” instead.

Some suggested the level of affluence in the borough meant people could afford to be wasteful, as one respondent suggested “I have noticed that the wealthier my friends, the more the throw out”. They felt “zero waste” should be the aim.

Rating the strategic goals

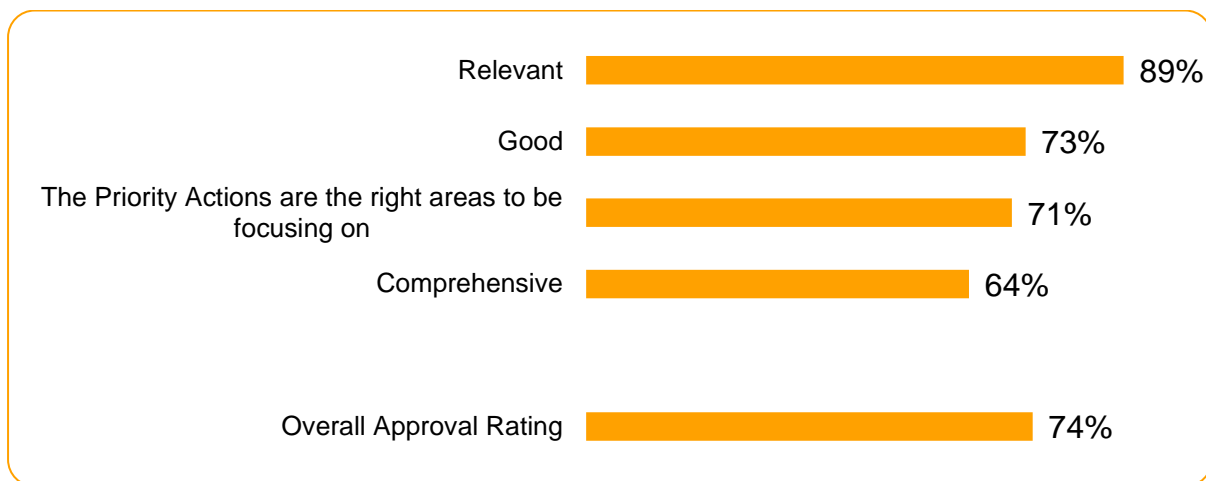
In total, 384 respondents submitted their consultation response via an online survey. The following section summarises all responses to the quantitative questions in this survey.

Overall Approval Ratings

Respondents to the survey, conducted as part of the consultation, were asked to state whether they thought each of the Strategic Goals were relevant, good, comprehensive, and whether they felt the priority actions were the right areas to be focusing on.

Overall, respondents were most likely to agree the Strategic Goals were relevant (89% agreed overall), but least likely to agree they were comprehensive (64%).

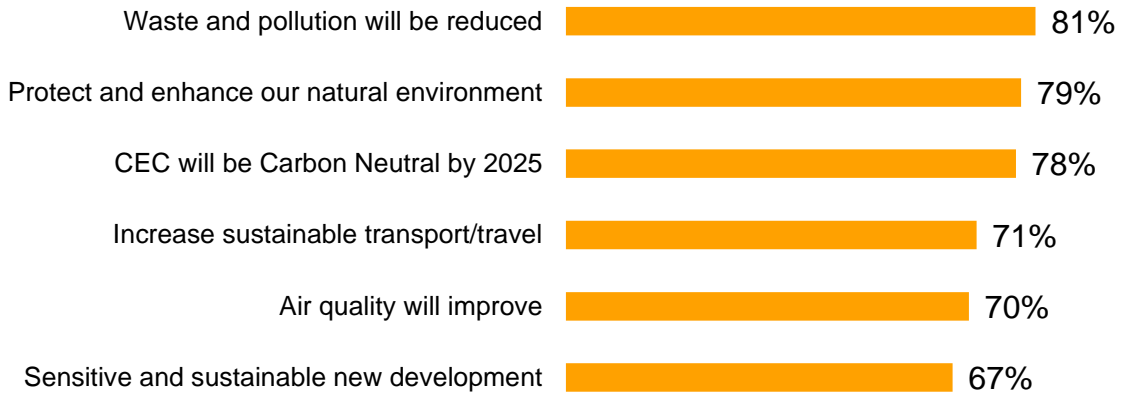
Overall Approval Ratings are calculated as averages of these ratings.



Overall Approval Ratings for the Strategic Goals

Strategic Goal 2 (Waste and pollution will be reduced) received the highest Overall Approval Rating of 81%, with Strategic Goal 5 (Sensitive and sustainable new development) receiving the lowest Overall Approval Rating of 67%.

Overall Approval ratings for each of the Strategic Goals:



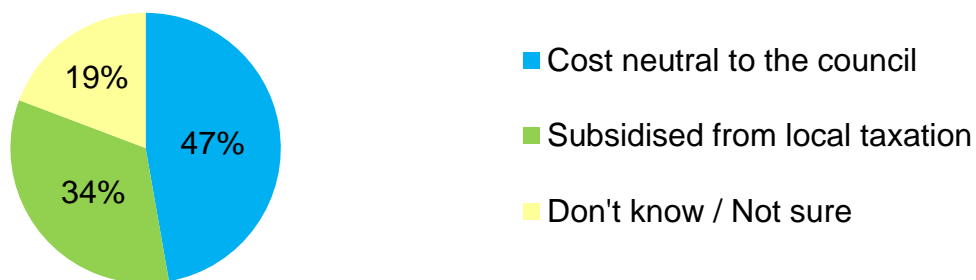
Number of respondents between 326 and 360

Delivering the Environment Strategy

Respondents favoured delivery of the strategy being cost neutral to the council – though opinion was fairly split on this.

47% felt delivery of the strategy should be cost neutral to the council, 34% felt it should be subsidised from local taxation, while the remaining 19% were unsure.

Do you think that delivery of the Environment Strategy should be subsidised from local taxation, or cost neutral to the council e.g. by relying on government grants and other external funding?



Number of valid responses = 343

Comments on the strategic goals

The following section presents a summary of respondent comments on each of the Strategic Goals in the Environmental Strategy. Full summaries can be found in the main report.

Waste and pollution will be reduced

The main aim here should be to reduce the amount of waste being produced as far as possible, the borough should be aiming for zero waste, and there is over-emphasis on recycling and recycling rates. Some felt that:

- The level of affluence in the borough meant people could afford to be wasteful
- Behaviour change is needed – consumer and eating habits need to alter to help reduce waste
- Retailers must be encouraged to reduce the amount of packaging
- Single use plastic must be eliminated as far as possible
- Clear targets should be set in the pursuit of zero waste.

Respondents wanted the number of items that can be recycled to be expanded, to include items such as all plastics, household items, shoes, clothes, and other fabric goods. They wanted clearer guidance about what can and cannot be recycled, particularly with regard plastics and food waste, and wanted improved transparency on what actually happens to their recyclable waste once collected.

Respondents suggested a number of recycling schemes they felt should be embraced/embraced further within the strategy, including [Recycling On The Go](#), [Terracycle](#), [Freecycle](#), smart bins, composting, water collection, [reverse vending machines](#), paper recycling, and business waste collection / recycling.

Finally, some felt that “pollution” is not given any attention within this Strategic Goal, and that it either needs removing from the Strategic Goal heading and tackling separately, or given more attention within this Strategic Goal.

Protect and enhance our natural environment

Respondents emphasised the importance of green space to for people's health and wellbeing, and felt that safe, accessible green space should be available to as large a proportion of the population as possible, within a short walking distance. They felt investment was needed in green space, PROW, and green corridors, and that more green space is needed. They suggested the council should:

- Plant more trees – Set targets for the percentage of tree cover to aim for e.g. Friends of the Earth propose 20%
- Create “wildlife corridors” throughout the borough – To improve biodiversity, increase insects, wildlife, and native wildflowers/pollinators. Some suggested rewilding of hedges and verges.
- Encourage farmers to be more environmentally responsible
- Take environmental and wildlife considerations in all new planning and development
- Have better flooding management
- Restrict chemical use.

Some felt that constant population increases were not compatible with protecting the natural environment, and that the council's planning policy contradicts this Strategic Goal.

CEC will be Carbon Neutral by 2025

Suggestions for the council in becoming carbon neutral:

- Increase the amount of homeworking and shared offices for staff, have fewer face to face meetings
- Encourage staff to use more public transport, have more cycle to work schemes, encourage more staff to walk to work
- Cancel car parking subsidies, sell the car parks, increase car sharing

- Embed carbon reduction into procurement processes
- Use alternative fuels in its whole fleet
- Use renewable energy in all council buildings
- Ensure carbon reduction targets apply to arms length companies and contractors e.g. ANSA, Orbitas, bus companies
- Bulk buy electricity
- Become 100% paperless.

Suggestions for residents in becoming carbon neutral:

- Change behaviour through education and financial incentive
- Reduce car use – Cheshire East should aim for 40% of commuter journeys being made by public transport, cycling and walking, up from the 19% currently (Friends of the Earth Climate Check calculator)
- Improve public transport – Public transport is not a viable alternative to car use and needs improving, expanding and promoting. Reverse bus cuts
- Increase walking and cycling – Walking and cycling as an alternative to car use was not a viable option as it is unsafe, there are not enough cycle paths, and roads in Cheshire are too narrow to cycle on
- Increase EV use – Increase EV use, install more electric car charging points, change the fleet to EVs
- Plant more trees and hedges, ban fires, go plastic free, cut down on waste
- [Gravitricity](#) – Store renewable energy down mine shafts, or down the Salt Mines
- Carbon offsetting – By 2025 the process of grid decarbonisation will be far from complete, so a high level of offsetting of the residual emissions will still be needed post-2025 – this challenge merits specific treatment in the strategy

Increase sustainable transport / travel

Respondents felt that reducing car use, and a reliance on cars, was a high priority. They felt cars are too convenient for people, particularly for more affluent residents, or those living in rural areas, and that people need to be actively discouraged from using them. Unless people have the assurance of efficient, hassle free travel on sustainable transport, devoid of danger, they will continue to use their own vehicles.

Suggested ways of reducing car use included:

- Have congestion charges, ban petrol and diesel cars / have car free days in town centres
- Reduce and slow traffic down to reduce emissions
- Deter people from making short trips by car, including to and from school
- Encourage ride sharing, and shared vehicle ownership
- Develop co-working spaces closer to where people live, consider whether centralised education facilities are needed in the 21st Century
- Introduce workplace parking levies
- Change all council vehicles to electric, have council cycle to work weeks.

Some felt the council's current planning policy contradicts sustainable transport – they felt development was “out of town”, car dependent, only includes “token” cycling and walking provision, and that the council should stop building new roads.

Better public transport, particularly bus services, are needed. Some felt current bus services are “absolutely dire”, or are “sparse, erratic, finish early, doesn't exist at weekends, or just doesn't exist (at all)”. They wanted more frequent, more reliable, better quality, cleaner, and more affordable services. They wondered why the council has cut bus services in recent years, if it wishes to increase travel by public transport.

Investment in cycling and walking infrastructure is also needed, perhaps with a

commitment to invest a certain % of the highways budget on cycling and walking provision. People will only cycle or walk more if it becomes safe, easier, and quicker than driving.

Electric vehicles are “only part of the answer” – Some felt EVs are not affordable, and lack sufficient charging infrastructure to be practical. Others felt it is a myth that electric cars are more environmentally friendly than petrol/diesel cars, feeling that over their whole lifetime their carbon footprint is still very significant, with carbon released during their manufacture and recycling.

Air quality will improve

Respondents cited traffic congestion, and increased levels of development as the main causes of air pollution.

They felt congestion, especially during rush hour, leads to increased air pollution, exacerbated by idling vehicles and “dirty” diesel buses. They felt that new housing, new roads, and the continued development of Manchester Airport would lead to worse air quality.

They felt air pollution could be tackled by promoting green travel, planting more trees, reducing pollution at source, educating people to be greener e.g. on driving habits, focusing on the worst areas, and extending air quality measurements.

Some felt the council has a lot to do to regain trust on the issue of air quality, given the past issues around air quality data falsification.

Sensitive and sustainable new development

Many respondents simply wanted new housing / development in the borough to stop – respondents felt the borough was too populated, that there had been too much development recently, and that there appears to be “no control on new developments”. They implored the council not to build on greenbelt, or greenfield sites.

Some felt that “the whole planning system needs overhauling”, that they do not trust the council with planning applications and development.

Others felt developers must be held more to account, and made more responsible for development in Cheshire East. They felt they should be discouraged from putting profit first, and prioritising development over the environment.

They felt new development should:

- Comply with the council’s environmental and carbon strategies
- Adhere to the highest building regulations and standards (which some felt current development does not) e.g. Passivhaus standards
- Be carbon neutral (both when lived in, and when being built), or be Net Zero Carbon Buildings (as defined by the UK Green Building Council)
- Integrate with green infrastructure including roads, cycle lanes and facilities
- Have access to good public transport networks
- Be close to, or well linked to, local services such as shops, schools and GPs etc.
- Be eco-friendly and sustainable e.g. incorporating solar panels, triple glazing or thermal insulation, smart meters, EV charging points, ground source heat pumps or district heating, green walls / roofs
- Be eco-friendly and sustainable e.g. incorporating water collections tanks for rainwater harvesting, built-in wildlife habitat such as swift boxes, bat boxes and bee bricks, gardens that have compost bins, ponds, trees, good quality soil, small trees and wildlife friendly hedges, roads that have amphibian friendly crossings and kerbs
- Be affordable, and built by local firms using local materials.

Respondents also felt that the council’s key policy documents need updating in light of the declared “climate emergency”, that they were written and consulted on at a different time, and that in light of the climate emergency, are not fit for purpose and require re-writing. They felt:

- The “number of new homes required in The Local Plan has been vastly overstated, and does not comply with more recent Government requirements and ONS data”, and urged “a full, urgent and comprehensive review of the Local Plan in response to the climate change emergency motion”
- The SADPD does not reflect the Climate Emergency strongly enough, that it continues to propose developments on green belt “with no real justification”, that “urban sprawl” across CEC continues, and that the time period for adoption of the SADPD seemed ambitious
- The Minerals and Waste Plan this plan should commit to keeping coal, gas and shale in the ground.

Measuring progress

Respondents suggested that metrics used to measure progress should be: realistic, measurable (e.g. [SMART](#)), accurate, joined-up, and benchmarked (e.g. [SCATTER](#)).

They also felt they should be transparent (e.g. [RAG](#), trend, or hotspot data), reviewed regularly, and well publicised.

A number of metrics were suggested, including: car ownership levels, numbers of vehicles on the roads by type (e.g. EV, petrol, diesel), the length (km) of new or improved “routeways” for cycling and walking, the numbers of people cycling, bus and train annual passenger numbers, public transport reliability figures, public transport passenger satisfaction surveys, congestion levels, the number of events where emissions exceeded acceptable levels, the type of waste being processed and where it originates from, the amount of waste produced per person, the amount of packaging, the number of houses being built, the ratio of green space to built environment in CEC at local and overall levels, wildlife levels, species diversity, amount of habitat created, biodiversity net gain, tree and hedgerow coverage, numbers of trees planted each year, energy consumption of buildings, overall council emissions, and the proportion of petrol / diesel council vehicles vs proportion of electric council vehicles.

