

Committee:	Cabinet
Date:	2 June 2020
Report By:	Director of Communities, Economy & Transport
Title of Report:	East Sussex Environment Strategy and corporate Climate Emergency Plan.
Purpose of Report:	To seek agreement to the East Sussex Environment Strategy and to the corporate Climate Emergency Plan.

RECOMMENDATION: Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1) agree the East Sussex Environment Strategy as set out at appendix 1 of the report;**
 - 2) agree the corporate Climate Emergency Plan as set out at appendix 2 of the report; and**
 - 3) agree to report progress towards the target of achieving climate neutrality to the County Council.**
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1 Background information

1.1 The East Sussex Environment Strategy: in March 2018 the Corporate Management Team agreed that the 2011 Environment Strategy for East Sussex should be updated and that an Environment Board to Team East Sussex (TES) should be set up to enable the economic development and environmental agendas to be brought together more effectively. The Board was established in November 2018 and has produced the draft Environment Strategy set out in appendix 1. Cabinet is now being asked to agree the Strategy on behalf of the County Council.

1.2 The corporate Climate Emergency Plan: in October 2019 the County Council declared a climate emergency. This included a commitment to become carbon neutral from its own activities as soon as possible, and by 2050 at the latest, to set out a clear plan of action and to report annually at the July County Council meeting on its progress towards the target. The proposed action plan is set out in appendix 2.

1.3 Together, the corporate Climate Emergency Plan and the Environment Strategy comprise a package of measures that the County Council is proposing to take forward to improve the environment of East Sussex. The Climate Emergency Plan illustrates where the Council has direct control, whilst the Strategy illustrates areas where the Council is working with a range of partner organisations to effect change. Both of these are underpinned by an outline communications strategy, set out in appendix 3, through which the Council and partners will seek to influence positive behavioural change within the wider community.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 The East Sussex Environment Strategy: The East Sussex Strategic Partnership (ESSP) adopted the first Environment Strategy for East Sussex in July 2011. The strategy has been updated to reflect a number of changes to national, regional and local policies and targets, for instance the national 25 Year Environment Plan and climate change emergencies declared by a number of local organisations. The Strategy provides a consistent local evidence base for decision-making and a mechanism for partnership working to address new challenges, such as net zero carbon targets.

2.2 The Environment Board which produced the Strategy includes the national environmental regulators, businesses and business representative organisations, the two universities, District and Borough Council representatives and the County Council, which provides the secretariat.

2.3 The Environment Strategy focuses on 5 key environmental themes, namely climate change, natural capital, air quality, water and resource efficiency. This reflects the environmental priorities identified in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, national strategies and the priorities of the organisations that make up the Environment Board.

2.4 The actions in the Strategy have been selected on the basis that they meet a clearly identified need, provide county-wide benefits, and can be delivered in 1-2 years. The County Council will take a lead on some of the proposed actions, where these are most relevant to the Council, for instance developing a Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan for the county. The Environment Board will provide regular updates on progress to TES and the ESSP.

2.5 A significant amount of environmental work is already being delivered through other partnerships and strategies, which the Environment Strategy signposts to in order to help manage expectations as to the scale of change that the Environment Strategy is able to deliver. For example, many environmental aspects of transport are addressed by the Transport for the South East's Transport Strategy and the County Council's Local Transport Plan.

2.6 Investing in improvements in the environment is part of the recovery from Covid-19, in terms of jobs, health and wellbeing (e.g. There is a need to significantly increase the number of tradespeople required to deliver domestic retrofit requirements to help reach net zero, whilst Covid-19 has emphasised the need and value of our green spaces as part of physical and mental health resilience).

2.7 The Environment Strategy has been reviewed and endorsed by the organisations represented on the Environment Board and on TES.

2.8 The corporate Climate Emergency Plan: the plan in appendix 2 sets out the County Council's current carbon footprint, recommends a carbon reduction target, and identifies a clear set of actions to be taken towards becoming carbon neutral. The key points from appendix 2 are:

- 1) The Council's emissions in 2018-19 were about 3% of total emissions from East Sussex;
- 2) The Council has reduced its emissions by over 50% during the last 10 years, including through projects that have generated annual savings of £770,000;
- 3) The largest part of the Council's carbon footprint is from the goods, works and services that are procured. The Council has only limited understanding of these emissions and no direct control over them, so it is recommended that they are omitted from the corporate carbon reduction target until a better understanding of these emissions has been gathered. This is the approach taken by other local authorities, for instance Adur-Worthing Council and Wealden District Council;
- 4) It is recommended that the Council commits to increasing its carbon reduction target from 3% per year to 13% per year, as this aligns with the UN Paris climate change agreement to hold the increase in global average temperatures to well below 2°C above pre-industrialisation levels. This approach has been adopted by a number of private and public sector organisations;
- 5) A 13% reduction target is likely to become increasingly difficult to achieve, once the simpler and more cost-effective measures have been implemented;
- 6) It is recommended that an initial 5 year carbon target, with annual milestones, is adopted, and supported by a 2 year action plan. This will enable short-term adjustment in light of changing legislation, technology and levels of resources available.

2.9 From the tragedy of Covid-19 we also have an opportunity to lock in key changes that we will need to make anyway to address climate change, notably flexible working and more walking and cycling.

2.10 A critical aspect will be how and when to involve and engage the public on climate change again, in view of the current need to prioritise jobs, and support businesses as they restart.

2.11 Councillors will be aware that the Place Scrutiny Committee is also undertaking a Scrutiny Review of Becoming a Carbon Neutral Council, which has considered the draft Climate Emergency Plan and reviewed the Council's baseline carbon footprint. The Review Board is examining the actions necessary for the Council to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve the aim of becoming carbon neutral.

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

3.1 Cabinet is recommended to agree the East Sussex Environment Strategy and the corporate Climate Emergency Action Plan, and for progress towards the target of achieving carbon neutrality to be reported to Full Council in July.

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LOCAL MEMBERS: ALL

BACKGROUND PAPERS: None