

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	COUNCIL		
DATE:	25 FEBRUARY 2020		
TITLE:	RBC ACTION SINCE DECLARATION OF A CLIMATE EMERGENCY - AND FUTURE PLANS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	CLIMATE CHANGE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on action taken on climate change since the declaration of a climate emergency in February 2019, and to summarise future plans in this area, with a particular focus on financial commitments in the context of the draft budget to be put before Council on 24 February 2020.
- 1.2 The report illustrates that over the two first full financial years since the declaration of a climate emergency (2019/20 and 2020/21), subject to approval of the budget, the Council will have committed c£34million to capital projects which will contribute directly to reducing emissions, in both its own operations and the wider community. The report also illustrates how the Council has also made additional revenue commitments to develop and accelerate its response to the declaration.
- 1.3 Perhaps more important that these specific financial commitments, however, will be the action taken by the Council to ensure that all policy and spending decisions across the full range of its activities take account of their impact on emissions wherever possible, and that all staff are engaged in the process of working towards the goal of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. A new Climate Action Programme Board was established in January 2020 to help achieve this and to ensure good governance in this area in line with best practice advice.
- 1.4 Appendices to this report:
 - Appendix 1: Summary of RBC Action Since Declaration of a Climate Emergency - and Future Plans

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the progress to date be noted and the future plans outlined in Appendix 1 to take forward the Council's commitment to achieving a net zero carbon Reading by 2030 be endorsed.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and committed to the goal of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. Reports were subsequently taken to all key Committees in the summer of 2019 committing them to embed the action required to work towards this goal in the relevant services, activities and plans of the Council. In November SEPT Committee received an update on the Council's own carbon reduction plans and progress with development of a new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy for 2020-25, which is being led by the Reading Climate Change Partnership.
- 3.2 The Council has reduced its own emissions by 62.5% since 2008/09. The main vehicle through which this has been achieved is the Council's corporate Carbon Plan, the current iteration of which covers the period 2015-20. Officers have started the process of reviewing the Plan in parallel with development of the wider Reading Climate Emergency Strategy to cover the same period (2020-25). The current intention is that the draft RBC Carbon Plan 2020-25 will be brought back to the Policy Committee in the Summer alongside the final version of the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25. The new Carbon Plan will provide the detailed framework for implementing the future plans outlined in Appendix 1.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 4.1 The action summarised in Appendix 1 contributes to corporate aims as follows:
- Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities: by promoting 'clean growth' and the development of Reading's low carbon economy
 - Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe: by reducing Reading's contribution to climate change and encouraging more sustainable travel options
 - Ensuring the Council is fit for the future: by reducing energy use and the costs to the Council associated with it.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The action summarised in the report illustrates action taken by the Council to tackle climate change in accordance with both the spirit and the letter of the Climate Emergency declaration. The future plans summarised will have significant impact on the Council's own carbon emissions and will demonstrate leadership by example in this area to the wider community.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The future financial commitments summarised in Appendix 1 were the subject of public consultation on the draft budget. Climate change and the environment attracted significant comment from respondents, being one of the most commented on policy areas, and the responses generally supported action on climate change.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The report presents a factual summary of action taken and future plans so has not been subject to Equalities Impact Assessment. Specific projects mentioned would, however, be subject to Equalities Impact Assessment as required.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The report presents a factual summary of action taken and future plans so there are no legal implications arising.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Capital and revenue commitments: the specific actions identified for the Council within Appendix 1 can be delivered within the revenue and capital budgets to be agreed in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (2020-23), subject of course to its approval by Council.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 In producing this report, the following have been referred to:

- Reading Borough Council Carbon Plan 2015-20
- Reading Local Plan
- 'Reading Means Business on Climate Change': the Reading Climate Change Strategy 2013-20
- Draft budget proposals as set out in the budget consultation process

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF RBC ACTION SINCE DECLARATION OF A CLIMATE EMERGENCY - AND FUTURE PLANS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and since that time has taken forward an ambitious programme of activity reflecting the urgency and importance of the issue. Since the declaration the Council has continued to implement its corporate Carbon Plan, which has:

- Reduced our emissions by 62.5% since 2008/09 and by 18.5% in 2018/19 alone
- Avoided energy costs of £10.9m since 2008/09 and £1.5m in 2018/19 alone
- Met our carbon reduction target of a 50% reduction by 2020 three years early

It has also supported delivery of the Reading Climate Change Partnership's strategy, 'Reading Means Business on Climate Change 2013-20', which has contributed to a reduction in Reading's per capita emissions of 50% since 2005.

The activity over the last year and future plans are summarised below.

2. STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The climate emergency declaration acknowledged the importance of aligning key plans and strategies to support the drive towards a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. As envisaged in the declaration, development of a number of key plans and strategies has been taken forward as follows:

- The Reading Climate Change Strategy 2020-25: plans to produce a third Reading Climate Change Strategy to cover the period 2020-25 were accelerated by six months following the climate emergency declaration. The Strategy is produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership, which is hosted by RBC, and the Council has made significant officer time available to support the Partnership in developing the strategy. Consultation on a draft strategy, which will set out steps on Reading's pathway to net zero, is due to begin in March 2020 with the strategy due to be finalised in May/June and launched in June/July.
- The RBC Carbon Plan 2020-25: in parallel with the production of the new Reading Climate Change Strategy, the Council will be updating its own Carbon Plan for the same period. The new Carbon Plan, also to be finalised in May/June, will demonstrate the Council's commitment to the wider aims of the Reading Climate Change Strategy by setting out how RBC will work towards the ambitious goal of becoming a net zero carbon Council by 2030.
- The Reading Local Plan: while the Local Plan process was underway well before the climate emergency declaration, the Council successfully defended pioneering policies to achieve 'zero carbon' standards in new housing development through the latter stages of the process, which were adopted in November 2019.

- The Local Transport Plan (LTP): the climate emergency resolution committed the Council to reflect the urgency of the declaration in the forthcoming review of the LTP. As part of the preparation for this, the Council initiated Reading's largest ever transport survey which indicated strong support for measures to promote low carbon travel and transport across the borough. Informed by this outcome, the LTP is on track to go out to public consultation later this year and will include measures to reduce car use and promote public transport, walking and cycling as an essential part of our emissions reduction efforts.

Other forthcoming strategies and plans, including the borough's Housing Strategy, will be 'climate-proofed' to ensure that they support the ambition for a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. Best practice guidance for local authorities emphasises the importance of good governance in driving climate action. To this end, in January 2020, the Corporate Management Team established a Climate Action Programme Board, to be chaired by the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, with a mandate to 'embed the action required to achieve the ambition of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030 in the Council's strategic plans, services and operational practises'.

3. FINANCIAL COMMITMENT

The Council has committed significant resources to respond to the climate emergency through both revenue and capital budgets:

3.1 Revenue budget commitments

Following the declaration of a climate emergency, the Council created a special revenue budget of £250,000 which has enabled the creation of the new post of Head of Climate Strategy (2-year fixed-term appointment) and associated operational budget. This post has provided the additional capacity needed to support the Reading Climate Change Partnership in accelerating development of Reading Climate Change Strategy, to bid for external funding to support the Council's ambitions and to take forward other projects.

In addition, the Council has maintained its 2019/20 Sustainability budget of c.£230,000 in the budget for 2020/21 which will enable review and implementation of the Council's Carbon Plan as referred to above. As well as developing the Carbon Plan, the Council's Sustainability team delivers energy efficiency and renewable energy projects on the Council's land and buildings, and provides advice to internal and external partners on reducing emissions.

More significant than either of these budgets, however, are the steps we are taking to ensure that the wider Council revenue budget supports the ambition to work towards net zero carbon. The Climate Action Programme Board referred to above has a mandate to ensure that procurement processes and significant spending decisions made by the Council take account of the impact on CO2 emissions. A requirement for all Committee reports to highlight the environmental implications of decisions has also been implemented with this in mind.

3.2 Capital budget commitments

The Council's capital programme for the next 3 years includes (subject to approval of the budget) investment of over £7 million in energy saving measures in our buildings and renewable energy infrastructure to contribute to our net zero carbon ambitions. Of this, £1.35m is allocated for the next financial year 2020/21. The Council has a long-standing programme of investment in energy efficiency, taking advantage of the SALIX Recirculation Fund, a revolving loan fund, which is available for the public sector. The Council's capital budget for this SALIX Recirculation Fund has been around £250,000 p.a. for a number of years and this has enabled a large number of projects to be taken forward (see list of projects delivered in 2019/20 at Annex A). A similar provision is included in the capital programme for each of the next 3 years which will enable additional projects in the pipeline to go ahead (see list at Annex B).

In addition to the smaller scale works enabled by the SALIX Recirculation Fund, from 2020/21 the Council is creating two new major capital programme budgets specifically to support its climate change commitments, enabling a step change in ambition in this area. The first will take advantage of a new SALIX Decarbonisation fund, designed to support more ambitious carbon reduction projects in the public sector. In 2020/21, £0.6m has been allocated with a further £1.2 million over the following 2 years. The second will support further investment in renewable energy. In 2020/21, £0.5m has been allocated for this purpose with a further £4 million over the following 2 years. This will enable a larger number of more ambitious projects to be progressed, including more ground-source heat pumps, solar arrays and potentially district heating systems. However, as with revenue budgets, the specific investments in low carbon energy highlighted above are but a part of the picture: many other capital investments - in offices, housing, transport and waste - will also contribute to carbon reduction by improving the efficiency of our buildings and operations (see details in section 4).

The Terms of Reference for the new Climate Action Programme Board give it a role in 'shaping the wider capital programme' with a view to reducing emissions. In this way, as with the revenue budget, the Board will aim to ensure that capital spending decisions support net zero carbon objectives.

Whilst it is not possible to extract those elements of each project in the capital programme which will support carbon reduction, the budget figures show that **in the first 2 full financial years following the declaration of a climate emergency, combined capital expenditure of c.£34 million¹ will be contributing directly to the Council's net zero carbon ambitions.** Although a significant amount within this is Government grant funded, the Council has given these schemes priority and invested its own resources to enable these funds to be accessed.

4. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY

¹ Total of capital allocations across the current financial year 2019/20 and next financial year 2020/21 for SALIX Recirculation and Decarbonisation Funds, Renewable Energy, Green Park Station, South Reading MRT, food waste collection, bus fleet retro-fit, EV charge points, LED streetlighting and tree planting. Does not include road maintenance, fleet replacement or other capital projects which may offer additional carbon reduction opportunities. See section 4 for details of planned spend on these programmes over the period 2019/20 to 2022/23.

Since the declaration of a climate emergency in February 2019 the Council has:

- Completed a full upgrade of street lighting assets to LED, reducing energy consumption by 54% in 2018/19 compared to the 2013/14 peak
- Progressed Town Hall refurbishment, using a 'whole building' approach including roof insulation, switch to LED lighting, and upgraded heating system
- Continued to update Council housing stock with double glazing, insulated doors, solar panels and new showers, ensuring that all new build properties are energy efficient with ventilation that recovers heat
- Continued to upgrade schools with energy efficiency measures and LED lighting

Going forward, major capital projects which will contribute directly to greenhouse gas emissions reduction include:

- £18 million for Green Park Station (across 4 years from 2019/20)
- £11 million for the South Reading MRT (across 4 years from 2019/20)
- £4.5m for renewable energy (across 3 years from 2020/21)
- £2.55 million for energy saving measures via the Salix Decarbonisation and Recirculation funds (across 3 years from 2020/21)
- £1.49 million for food waste collection (in 2020/21)
- £1.19 million for retro-fitting the bus fleet to lower emission standards (across 2 years from 2019/20)
- £258,000 for LED streetlighting (across 2 years from 2019/20, completing a total investment of £9.8 million which began in 2016)
- £250,000 for electric vehicle charging points (across 2 years from 2020/21)
- £150,000 for tree planting programmes (across 3 years from 2019/20)

Additionally, a substantial part of the investment of £9 million over the next 3 years in highway maintenance will support low carbon, 'active travel' by improving facilities for cyclists and pedestrians as well as other road users, while the fleet replacement budget of almost £6 million over the next 3 years will enable us to increase the proportion of electric vehicles within the fleet.

One of the largest projects progressed this year within the SALIX capital budget referred to above has been for works to reduce emissions at the Council's Bennet Road depot site. These works have included:

- Conversion of heating from gas to electric air-source heat pumps
- Improvement of building fabric, reducing heat leakage and double glazing
- Solar film on windows to reduce solar gas
- Lighting upgrade to LEDs and updated controls
- Large solar pv installations

Other smaller works delivered in 2019/20 through the SALIX programme are listed at Annex 1 with projects in the pipeline for 2020/21 listed at Annex 2.

Annex 1: SALIX projects undertaken in 2019-20 (and approximate cost)

- Bennet Road energy efficiency and solar pv (£132k)
- Town Hall heating (£53k)
- Northumberland Avenue lighting (£20k)
- Museum lighting (£12k)
- Thamesbridge House lighting (£20k)
- Oxbury Rd Primary lighting (£20k)
- Coley Primary (£12k)
- Sun Street lighting and heating (£5k)

Annex 2: SALIX projects planned in 2020/21

Work is underway to identify potential energy efficiency projects across the schools estate, as part of the Education Asset Management Unit's mechanical and electrical programme. We hope to bring forward at least 3 new school lighting projects in 2020/21, and potentially a conversion to heat pumps in at least 1 school (subject to identifying the appropriate technology).

Other projects in the pipeline for 2020/21 include:

- Further lighting upgrades at the Town Hall
- Mapledurham Pavilion upgrade, possibly including solar pv
- Leisure facilities
- Additional solar pv at Bennet Rd depot
- Lighting upgrade at The Avenue

Additional projects will be identified through the Condition Surveys currently being undertaken by Property Services.