

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	16 NOVEMBER 2021		
TITLE:	ANNUAL REPORTS BY (i) READING CLIMATE CHANGE PARTNERSHIP ON THE READING CLIMATE EMERGENCY STRATEGY (ii) RBC ON CORPORATE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	CLIMATE CHANGE & SUSTAINABILITY	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report presents Annual Reports on two key initiatives within Reading's response to the climate emergency:

- An Annual Report on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 for the year 2020/21 (Appendix 1). This report has been produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership and reflects activity by a range of partners across Reading, not just the Council. The headline message from the report is that Reading Borough's carbon footprint fell by 49% between 2005 and 2019 (the latest year for which data is available). This represents the 5th largest reduction of 379 UK local authorities.
- An Annual Report on the Council's corporate Greenhouse Gas Emissions (for the year 2020/21) (Appendix 2). This report has been produced annually by the Council since 2008/09 to report on progress with implementation of the Council's Carbon Plan, and its publication meets our obligations to report transparently on the Council's corporate emissions. The headline message from the report is that the Council's carbon footprint was cut by 69.8% between 2008/09 and 2020/21, up from 63.5% in 2019/20. This represents a significant reduction, with the closure of offices and public-facing buildings during the pandemic being a significant factor in the reductions seen.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Committee notes:

(i) the continued reduction in Reading Borough's carbon footprint, which has fallen by 49% since the baseline year of 2005.

(ii) the continued reduction in Reading Borough Council's carbon footprint, which has fallen by 69.8% since the baseline year of 2008/09.

(iii) the need for the Council and other partners to redouble efforts to meet the very challenging target of a net zero carbon Reading, and a net zero carbon Council, by 2030.

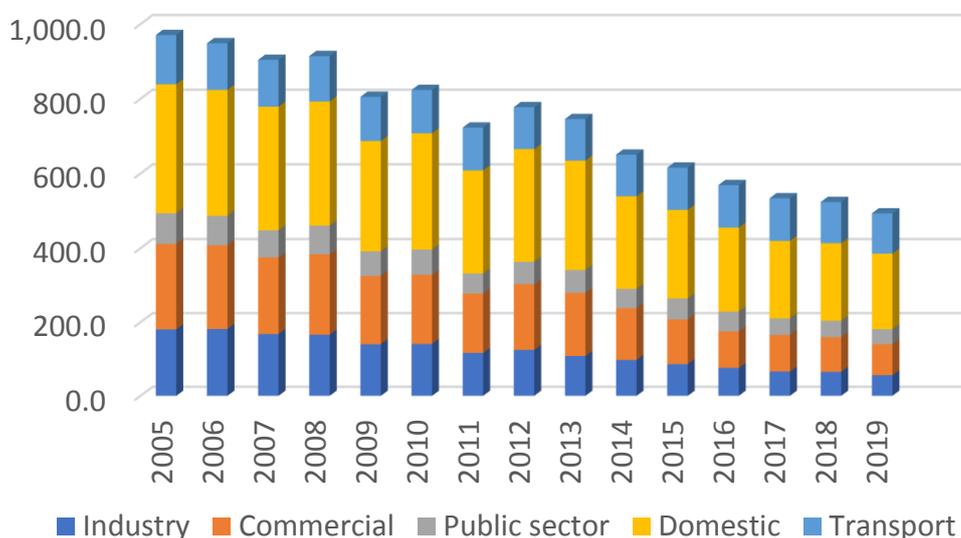
3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In 2008, following the adoption of the UK Climate Change Act 2008, the Council launched its first climate change strategy, ‘*Stepping Forward for Climate Change*’. A key commitment within this was to reduce the Council’s carbon footprint by 50% by 2020. This target, and an action plan for its delivery, were later included in successive iterations of the Council’s corporate Carbon Plan, and the 50% reduction target was ultimately delivered three years early.
- 3.2 Government has more recently committed to a national target of ‘net zero carbon’ by 2050, having updated the Climate Change Act to aim for a 100% reduction in emissions compared to the 1990 baseline. In December 2020 the Climate Change Committee, established to advise the Government on how to meet its carbon reduction targets, published the sixth UK carbon budget report setting the country on a path to achieve a 68% reduction in emissions by 2030 (and 78% by 2035).
- 3.3 Prior to the adoption of the national ‘net zero by 2050’ target, Reading Borough Council had declared a climate emergency at its meeting in February 2019, committing to the more ambitious aim of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. In November 2020, the Council subsequently endorsed the new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 (prepared by the Reading Climate Change Partnership) based on the ‘net zero by 2030’ ambition, and adopted a new Corporate Carbon Plan for the period 2020-25, including a more ambitious target to reduce the Council’s own emissions by 85% by 2025 *en route* to net zero by 2030.
- 3.4 This report now presents Annual Reports on both the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy (produced by the Reading Climate Change Partnership) and the Council’s own greenhouse gas emissions (produced by RBC), covering the first year since both were published in November 2020.

4. KEY CONCLUSIONS FROM THE ANNUAL REPORTS

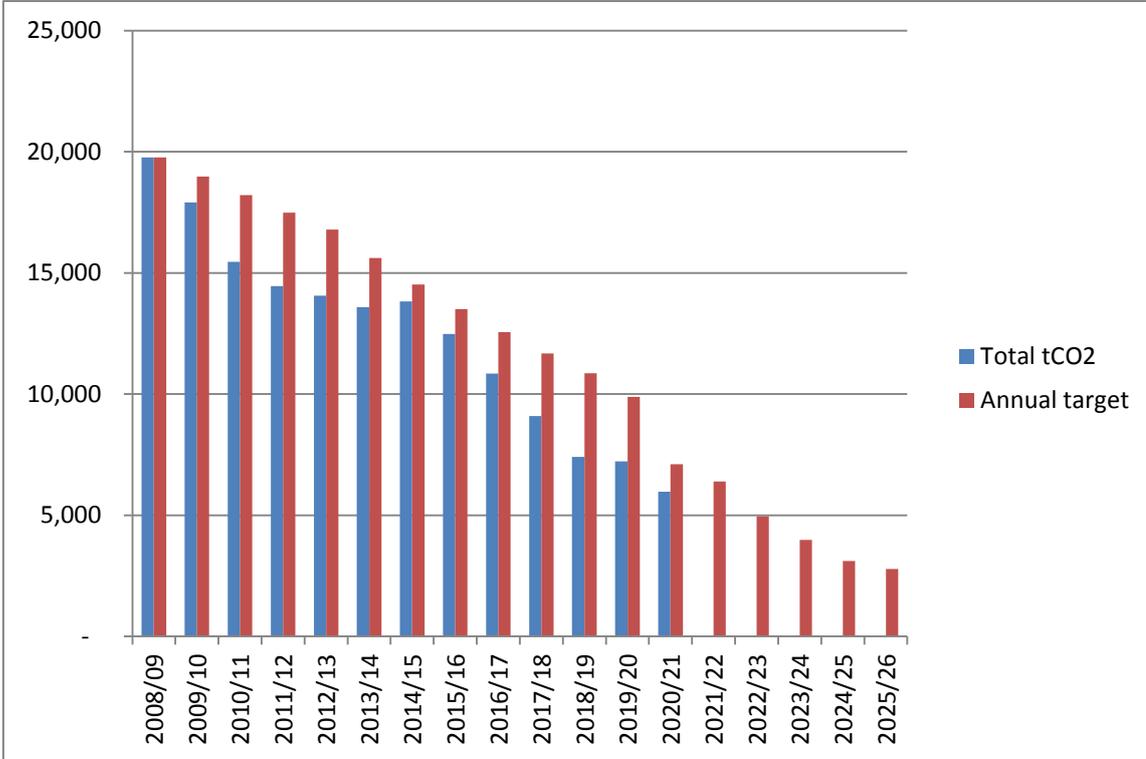
- 4.1 **Annual Report on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy:** this report has been prepared by the Reading Climate Change Partnership, and is being presented to SEPT Committee to meet the Partnership’s commitment to open and transparent reporting on progress with strategy implementation, and to ensure that it is widely available to the public. As such, the report describes activity by a range of partners who have committed to action within the action plan, of which the Council is one.

Figure 1: Reading Borough carbon dioxide emissions (kiloTonnes CO₂) 2005-2019 (Source: National Statistics (BEIS))



- 4.2 The headline message from the Annual Report is that Reading Borough’s carbon footprint fell by 49% between 2005 and 2019 (the latest year for which data is available). This represents the 5th largest reduction of 379 UK local authorities. The overall emissions reduction trajectory for Reading since 2005 is shown in figure 1 above.
- 4.3 The report also reviews progress with the seven action plans included within the Strategy. This suggests that, of almost 150 actions included within the Strategy, approximately 30% are rated ‘green’ (complete or on target), 50% ‘amber’ (underway but not complete/not on target) and 20% ‘red’ (not started). In the context of the disruption arising from the pandemic, this is considered a notable achievement in the first year since Strategy publication.
- 4.4 **Annual Report on Reading Borough Council’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** this report has been produced annually by the Council since 2008/09 to record progress with implementation of the Council’s carbon reduction efforts, and its publication meets our obligations to report transparently on corporate emissions in line with greenhouse gas emissions reporting protocols for local authorities. The headline message from the report is that the Council’s carbon footprint has been cut by 69.8% between 2008/09 and 2020/21, an increase from 63.5% in 2019/20. The reduction in emissions of 17.3% between 2019/20 and 2020 represents a significant reduction in a single year, with the closure of offices and public-facing facilities during the pandemic being a significant factor in the reduction seen. The overall emissions reduction trajectory for Reading Borough Council since 2008/09 is shown in figure 2 below. It is worth noting that the Council’s corporate emissions now represent less than 1.5% of the total emissions for Reading Borough as a whole.

Figure 2: Reading Borough Council greenhouse gas emissions (tonnes CO₂) 2008/09-2020/21 (Source: RBC)



- 4.5 **Progress in relation to ‘net zero by 2030’ targets:** while the emissions reductions recorded in both annual reports are very welcome, they must be considered in relation to the very ambitious aim set in Reading’s climate emergency declaration to achieve a net zero Reading by 2030. While the 2% reduction in Reading’s carbon footprint between 2018 and 2019 is encouraging, in broad terms the rate of emissions reduction would need to approximately double in each remaining year of the decade to be on track to

meet the 2030 target. Similarly, while the steep reduction in the Council's carbon emissions puts the Council 'ahead of the curve' in terms of the organisational trajectory to net zero by 2030, there is a risk of emissions 'bouncing back' in 2021/22 as pandemic restrictions on services such as leisure centres, theatres and libraries have lifted, which may be reflected in next year's annual greenhouse gas emissions report. While encouraging, therefore, neither the emissions reduction figure for the Borough or the Council should be a cause for complacency, and continued, sustained effort will be required to increase the rate of emissions reduction between now and 2030.

4.6 Key factors driving the reduction in the Council's carbon footprint: some of the initiatives which have contributed to the reduction in the Council's emissions include:

- Since 2008 the Council has implemented a government-backed scheme called SALIX, which provides a revolving fund to invest-to-save in low carbon technologies. By the end of 2020/21 the Council had invested nearly £1.8m via this route in over 100 projects in corporate buildings and schools.
- The Council has been in the process of electrifying its vehicle fleet and in September took delivery of its first all electric refuse collection vehicle, with a second tranche to be ordered later this year for arrival early in 2022. Under a new fleet replacement plan agreed by the Council in September, over 200 Council fleet vehicles will be replaced with EVs by 2028.
- A programme of street lighting upgrades to LED technology started in 2016 and was completed in 2019 delivering significant reductions in electricity consumption.
- 2020/21 was the sixth full year of operation of the refurbished Civic Offices building, which is equipped to high energy efficiency standards and which hosts extensive solar PV roof arrays. The Council continues to dispose of older and less efficient buildings where it makes sense to concentrate activity in a more modern, greener Civic Centre, and is exploring the potential to replace gas boilers with heat pumps to make it greener still.
- A major building retrofit of the Town Hall was completed in 2019/20 with further heating upgrades following on from energy efficiency works.
- In 2017/18 Electric Vehicle Fast Charge facilities were installed outside the Civic Offices. These were installed alongside a bank of chargers in the basement car park for RBC fleet vehicles.
- In 2019/20 six additional EV charging points were installed at the Bennet Road depot to be used by RBC fleet vehicles, and major EV charging infrastructure is now being planned at the depot, along with solar canopies and battery storage, to power the Council's growing fleet of EVs. Heat pumps have already been installed at Bennet Road to replace gas heating as part of a recent refurbishment programme.
- The Council purchases a 'green' electricity tariff, backed up by supplier traceable Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin certificates or REGOs which give a higher level of assurance than the standard tariff.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Council's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions support the following Corporate Plan priorities:

- **Healthy environment:** the Annual Reports on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and the Council's Greenhouse Gas Emissions record progress on tackling climate change and working towards our goal of a net zero carbon town and Council by 2030.
- **Inclusive economy:** the Council's Carbon Plan includes investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy which stimulates the low carbon economy and provides employment in this sector.

- 5.4 The corporate Carbon Plan also contributes to the TEAM Reading value on **Efficiency** - by minimising the risks and costs associated with energy use and by improving the efficiency of Council operations.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a climate emergency at its meeting in February 2019 (minute 48 refers). This commits to the ambitious goal of a net zero carbon Reading by 2030. The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 and the Council's Carbon Plan for 2020-25 align with this goal, setting more ambitious targets for reducing emissions compared to the Council's previous plans. The Annual Reports which are the subject of this report are an important mechanism for tracking progress towards these targets but do not have any material environmental or climate implications in and of themselves.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way". While there is no requirement to consult on the Annual Reports which are the subject of this report, they will be made public via the Reading Climate Action Network website and the Council's website. In addition, the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy was the subject of extensive public consultation and engagement prior to publication in November 2020.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required for this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report. Completion of the Annual Reports included in this report is not mandatory but is important for transparency in demonstrating progress towards key policy objectives.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report although appendix 2 quantifies the cumulative and annual costs avoided as a result of efforts to reduce energy use and thus carbon emissions within the Council's estate and operations, under the auspices of the corporate Carbon Plan. This suggests that the cumulative costs avoided by the Council from reduced energy consumption since 2008/09 are c.£15m (excluding standing charges and other contract charges) compared to if no action had been taken. In 2019/20 alone these avoided costs were estimated at £2.1m.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 *Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25* (Reading Climate Change Partnership)

Carbon Plan 2020-25 (Reading Borough Council)

Environmental Reporting Guidelines: Including mandatory greenhouse gas emissions reporting, June 2013 (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)