

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	7 JULY 2022		
TITLE:	UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S LOW CARBON CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	CLIMATE STRATEGY & TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	DEGNS	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The 2022/23 Budget, approved by Council in February 2022, confirmed the Council's commitment to a c£7m programme of low carbon investment (energy efficiency and renewable energy installations) to help achieve the corporate Carbon Plan target of an 85% reduction in the Council's carbon emissions by 2025 and wider emissions reduction targets for the Borough. It is important to note that there are a number of projects within the capital programme which contribute to the Council's climate goals (e.g. in transport, fleet, waste, housing and schools) - the programme which is the subject of this report is just one part of this, relating specifically to decarbonisation of key corporate assets.
- 1.2 Approval to spend against the programme was sought and secured at SEPT Committee in June 2021 based on the programme summarised at Appendix 1 of that report, along with delegations to the Executive Director to agree significant variations to the programme and commit sums from the programme as match funding for external funding bids, in consultation with Director of Finance and Lead Member. Appendix 1 of this report provides an update the programme, reflecting changes and significant variances agreed in the interim, the main one of which was the provision of funding for a package of low carbon investment in the leisure estate (see Decision Book Report 654, 23 March 2022, item 2). Oversight of the programme is provided by the corporate Climate Programme Board. It is envisaged that a similar update on the programme will be provided annually to SEPT in future to ensure that the Committee has regular sight of the status of the programme covered by the recommendations in the June 2021 report.
- 1.3 Appendix 1 gives a summary of the status of the low carbon investment programme.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the progress with the development and delivery of the Council's low carbon investment programme as summarised in Appendix 1, pursuant to the recommendations agreed at SEPT Committee in June 2021 be noted.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, which was endorsed by the Policy Committee in November 2020, reaffirmed the goal of achieving a net zero carbon Reading by 2030 as set out in the Council's climate emergency declaration of February 2019. At the same time as endorsing the Climate Emergency Strategy for the Borough, the Policy Committee also adopted a new corporate Carbon Plan for the organisation covering the period 2020-25. This set an ambitious target of an 85% reduction in the Council's CO₂ emissions by 2025, compared to the 2008/09 baseline, en route to becoming a net zero organisation by 2030.
- 3.2 Key to achievement of these targets is additional investment in the Council's assets to reduce energy use, improve energy efficiency and increase renewable energy generation. While there are a large number of projects within the capital programme which contribute to this aim, the 2022/23 Budget and MTFS confirmed specific provision for c£7m investment in low carbon investment up to 2024/25. This investment is reflected in three budget lines in the approved capital programme as follows: Salix Re-circulation fund, the Decarbonisation fund and the Renewable Energy fund.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 **Current Position:** the substantive decisions in relation to the programme were taken by SEPT Committee in June 2021 and associated budget decisions. This report simply updates Appendix 1 to the June 2021 report to give a more current picture of the status of the programme. Key projects within the programme are, however, as follows:
- Decarbonisation of the Bennet Road depot via installation of roof-mounted and canopy-mounted solar PV arrays (procurement complete) and installation of EV charging infrastructure (in procurement) to power the Council's growing fleet of EVs, the vehicles themselves being funded from a separate capital budget.
 - Installation of heat pumps and solar PV as part of the leisure centre programme to raise their carbon performance further above and beyond the standards required in planning policy (under construction).
 - Decarbonisation of the Hexagon Theatre including ground source heat pumps, solar PV arrays and LED lighting upgrades (in development).
 - Decarbonisation of heating/cooling systems at the Civic Centre via heat pumps (in development).
 - Development of a solar farm at Smallmead/Island Road (in development and subject to planning, pre-application discussions underway).
- 4.2 Further details of these and other projects within the programme are included at Appendix 1.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The recommendations in this report align with Corporate Plan priorities as follows:
- **Healthy Environment:** the programme will help deliver the Council's ambitions to become a 'net zero carbon' organisation by 2030, as part of the wider ambition set out in the corporate plan of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

- Thriving Communities: the programme will help deliver the Council's ambitions for Reading's communities to be protected from the worst impacts of a changing climate.
- Inclusive Economy: the programme will help deliver the Council's ambitions for development of Reading's 'low carbon economy' by stimulating demand for low carbon goods and services.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers), endorsed the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 in November 2020 and adopted a new corporate Carbon Plan 2020-25 also in November 2020. The programme is designed to deliver the key aims of the Carbon Plan and will contribute directly towards the Carbon Plan target of an 85% reduction in RBC emissions by 2025, *en route* to becoming a net zero organisation by 2030. The Council's low carbon investment programme is designed to reduce the Council's energy use and ensure that the energy we do use is from lower carbon sources. As such the climate impact assessment conducted on this report suggests that the programme will have a 'net high positive' impact on the Council's carbon emissions. Additionally, any environmental impacts arising from individual projects within the programme are being addressed via the appropriate mechanisms (e.g. via the development control process where planning permission is required).

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". The programme was the subject of public consultation as part of the budget setting process.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not considered necessary for the recommendations in this report as they do not have implications for groups with protected characteristics.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The capital funds referred to in this report are part of the 2022/23 approved budget and MTFS.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 No unpublished documents have been relied upon to a material extent in drafting this report.