

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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

1.1 This report presents Annual Reports for 2021/22 on two key elements of Reading's response to the climate emergency:

- An Annual Report on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 for the year 2021/22 (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 55% between 2005 and 2020 (the latest year for which data is available). This represents the 4th largest reduction of 374 UK local authorities.
- An Annual Report on the Council's corporate Greenhouse Gas Emissions (for the year 2021/22) (Appendix 2). This report is produced annually by the Council and details progress with implementation of the Council's Carbon Plan. The headline message from the report is that the Council's carbon footprint was cut by 71.3% between 2008/09 and 2021/22, up from 69.8% in 2019/20. This represents a modest reduction but still a welcome improvement given the expectation that emissions could 'bounce-back' after being artificially suppressed by pandemic restrictions (closure of offices and public-facing facilities etc) in 2020/21.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Committee notes:

- (i) The reduction in Reading Borough's carbon footprint, which has fallen by 55% since the baseline year of 2005;
- (ii) The reduction in Reading Borough Council's corporate carbon footprint, which has fallen by 71.3% since the baseline year of 2008/09;
- (iii) The need for the Council and other partners to maintain efforts to meet the very challenging target of a net zero carbon Reading, and a net zero carbon Council, by 2030.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

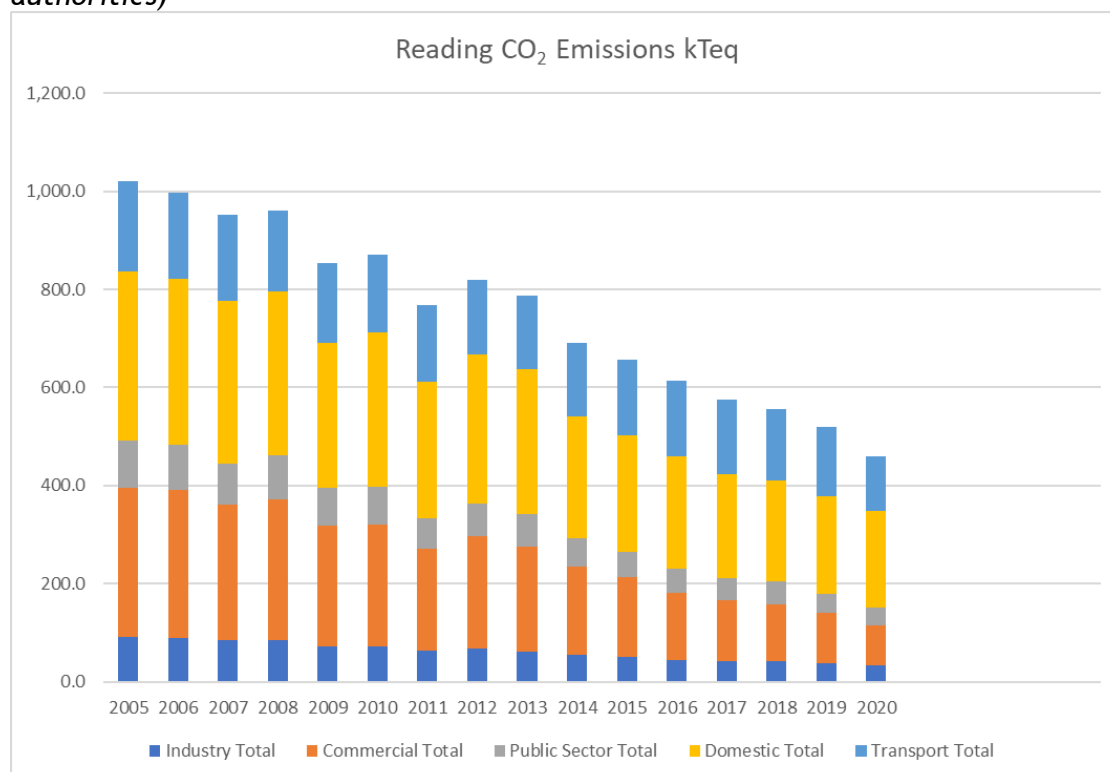
- 3.1 In 2019 the UK government committed to a national statutory target of ‘net zero carbon’ by 2050, having updated the Climate Change Act to aim for a 100% reduction in emissions compared to the 1990 baseline. In December 2020 the Climate Change Committee, established to advise the Government on how 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 officers), covering the second financial year (2021/22) since both were published in November 2020.

4. KEY CONCLUSIONS FROM THE ANNUAL REPORTS

Annual Report on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy:

- 4.1 This report has been prepared by the Reading Climate Change Partnership, and is presented to SEPT Committee to meet the Partnership’s commitment to 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 just one.

Figure 1: Reading Borough carbon dioxide emissions (kiloTonnes CO₂) 2005-2020 (Source: National Statistics (BEIS) for emissions within the scope of influence of local authorities)



- 4.2 The headline message from the Annual Report is that Reading Borough's carbon footprint fell by 55% between 2005 and 2020 (the latest year for which data is available). This represents the 4th largest reduction of 374 UK local authorities (Reading was 5th by the same measure in the previous year's data). It also represents the highest rate of emissions reduction, both in absolute and per capita terms, out of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities. The overall emissions reduction trajectory for Reading since 2005 is shown in figure 1 above.
- 4.3 The report also highlights a series of case studies which have been taken forward by partners in Reading during the course of the last year. These include several initiatives led by the Council:
- Reducing emissions from Reading's schools: in March 2021 the Council was awarded over £1.3m from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund for school solar and energy efficiency projects which were completed in September 2022, saving 2,584 tonnes of CO₂ over the lifetime of the projects.
 - Reading Borough Council secured an indicative allocation of £26 million in Government funding to implement its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to help public transport recover after the lifting of pandemic restrictions - one of 31 grants awarded to local authorities and one of the largest in the country.
 - Reading Borough Council secured over £2 million in Active Travel funds from the Department of Transport to improve provision for cycling and walking across the Borough. Reading was also ranked as the UK's 3rd most 'cycle-friendly' city in a 2022 survey by COLAS.
 - In March 2022 the Council committed £976,248 to provide additional carbon reduction measures (heat pumps and solar panels) in the new leisure centres at Rivermead and Palmer Park, in addition to the £1.6 million in energy efficiency measures which were already part of the investment in new leisure facilities.
 - As part of its commitment to transparency, in 2021 Reading Borough Council submitted details of Reading's climate programme to the international NGO, the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), whose reporting platform is regarded as the 'gold standard' in environmental reporting. As a result, in November 2021 Reading was added to the CDP's 'A' list of cities taking 'bold climate action' - an accolade reserved for just 11 other UK cities and 95 worldwide.

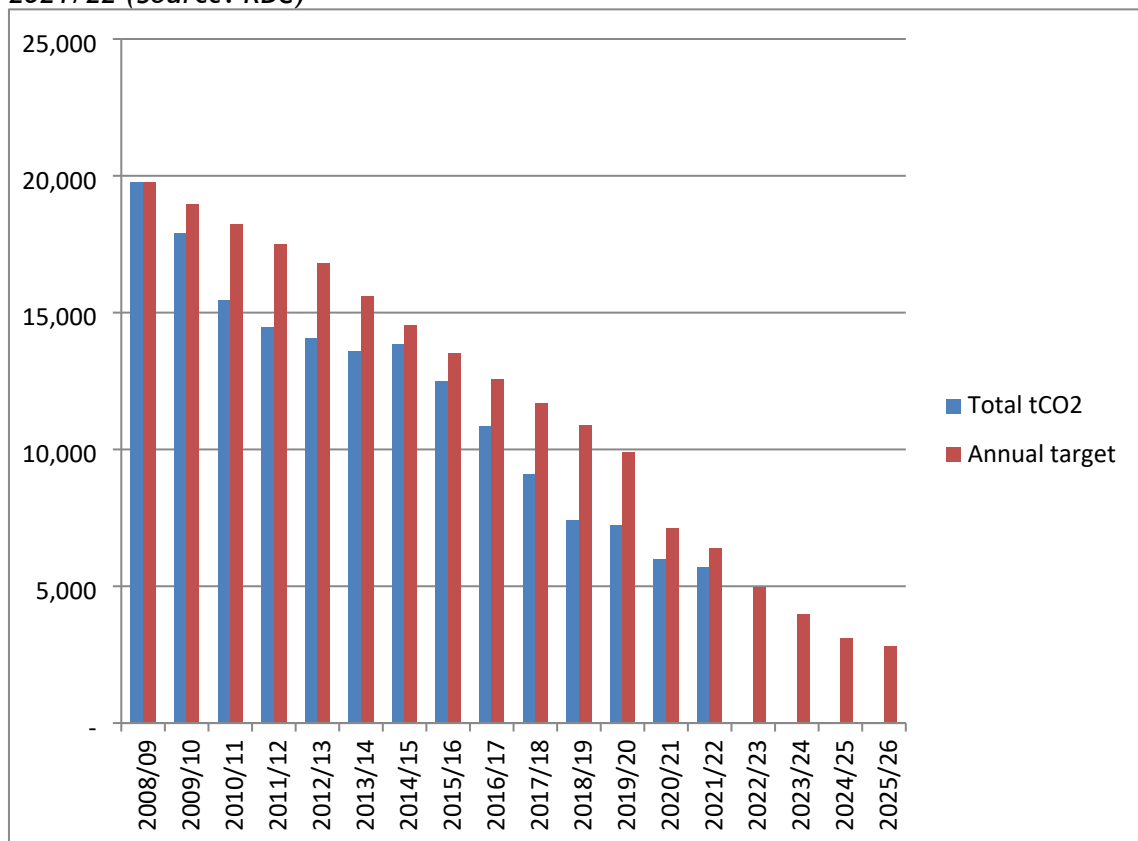
Annual Report on Reading Borough Council's Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- 4.4 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 71.3% between 2008/09 and 2021/22, an increase from 69.8% in 2020/21. Whilst this is a modest improvement, it represents a positive outcome in the sense that there was an expectation that emissions would 'bounce-back' after the pandemic restrictions of 2020/21 were lifted and offices and other public services were re-opened, possibly to the extent that the Council's carbon footprint in 2021/22 would be higher than in 2020/21.
- 4.5 It should be noted, however, that during the course of 2021/22 when operational control for a number of leisure centres passed from the Council to Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL), under the greenhouse gas emission reporting protocols a significant volume of emissions moved out of our 'corporate Carbon Footprint' calculation. This does not

mean that the Council has lost sight of these emissions as they now appear in our ‘wider influence footprint’ calculation which we also measure and report on, and which is detailed in Appendix 2. Emissions from these leisure centres are now treated similarly to the Rivermead Leisure Centre which was already operated by GLL, emissions from which were already reported under the ‘wider influence footprint’. Neither does this mean that the Council has shed responsibility for emissions from the leisure estate - on the contrary, in addition to the £1.6 million investment in energy efficient buildings made as part of the initial £40 million investment in new leisure facilities, in March 2022 the Council committed a further £976k to enable additional heat pumps and solar panels to be installed at Rivermead and Palmer Park, significantly improving the carbon performance of the new facilities. Had these leisure emissions continued to be reported as part of the Council’s corporate carbon footprint, it would still have seen a reduction, albeit a smaller one (a 70.5% cut compared to 2008/09 rather than a 71.3% cut).

4.6 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 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) 2008/09-2021/22 (Source: RBC)



4.7 **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 are as follows:

- 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. Although the SALIX programme is being wound up in 2025, investments continue to be made under the scheme.
- The Council has been in the process of electrifying its vehicle fleet and in September 2021 took delivery of its first all electric refuse collection vehicle, with a second tranche on order. Under a new fleet replacement plan agreed by the Council in September 2021, over 200 Council vehicles should be replaced with EVs by 2028.

- Major EV charging infrastructure is now being installed at the Bennet Road depot, along with solar canopies, 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.
- A programme of street lighting upgrades to LED technology started in 2016 and was completed in 2019 delivering significant reductions in electricity consumption.
- 2021/22 was the seventh 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.
- A major building retrofit of the Town Hall was completed in 2019/20 with further heating upgrades following on from energy efficiency works.
- 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.

4.8 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 6% reduction in Reading's area carbon footprint between 2019 and 2020 is encouraging, pandemic restrictions played a large part that outcome, and in broad terms the rate of emissions reduction would need to approximately match this in each remaining year of the decade to be on track to meet the 2030 target. Similarly, Reading Borough Council remains on track to hit its Carbon Plan target of an 85% cut in emissions by 2025 *en route* to net zero by 2030, but this remains an ambitious target requiring sustained commitment and investment.

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 record progress on tackling climate change and working towards our goal of a net zero carbon town and Council by 2030.
- **Thriving communities:** various actions in the Climate Strategy and Carbon Plan are designed to help reduce energy use and thus reduce the exposure of households and businesses to high energy bills, which have been a major source of concern as energy prices have escalated.
- **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£17.4 million (excluding standing charges and other contract charges) compared to if no action had been taken. In 2021/22 alone these avoided costs were estimated at £2.3 million. With energy prices at record highs, the value at stake from reducing our energy consumption and our reliance on grid energy in line with Carbon Plan aspirations is only likely to increase in future years.

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)