



15 November 2023

Title	Annual Reports for 2022/23 on (i) the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and (ii) the Council's corporate greenhouse gas emissions
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Peter Moore, Head of Climate Strategy
Lead Councillor	Cllr Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the progress in reducing Reading Borough's carbon emissions, which have fallen by 51% since 2005. 2. Note the progress in reducing Reading Borough Council's corporate emissions, which have fallen by 74% since 2008/09. 3. Note that while progress is being made, the Council and other partners will need to increase the pace of emissions reduction to meet the targets for a net zero Reading, and a net zero Council, by 2030.

1. Executive Summary

1.1. This report presents Annual Reports for 2022/23 for two key elements of Reading's response to the climate emergency:

- The 2022/23 Annual Report on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 (Appendix 1): this report has been prepared by the Reading Climate Change Partnership and reflects activity by a range of partners across Reading, not just the Council. The headline messages from the report are that, in common with the rest of the UK, emissions for 2021 (the latest year for which data is available) rose compared to 2020, as emissions re-bounded following the lifting of pandemic restrictions. The long-term trend remains positive, however, with Borough emissions falling 51% since 2005. This is down from the 55% reduction reported in 2020, but Reading has still seen the 8th largest reduction in emissions out of 374 UK local authority areas. Reading's per capita emissions also remain the lowest in Berkshire. The pace of emissions reduction will, however, need to increase significantly to get back on track to achieve the Strategy target of 'net zero by 2030'.
- The 2022/23 Annual Report on the Council's corporate greenhouse gas emissions (Appendix 2): this report is produced annually by the Council and tracks progress with implementation of the Council's Carbon Plan and the targets within it. The headline message from the report is that the Council's carbon footprint has been cut by 73.9% since 2008/09, a further reduction from the 71.3% figure reported in 2021/22. This means the Council remains broadly on track to meet its interim target of an 85% cut in emissions by 2025, but further action and investment will be needed to achieve this target, and to make progress towards the ultimate target of becoming a net zero organisation by 2030.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. 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. The UK's 'carbon budget' is designed to achieve a 68% reduction in UK emissions by 2030 and 78% by 2035. The Committee on Climate Change, the government's statutory adviser on climate change, has, however, warned in its latest (2023) report to Parliament that insufficient urgency is being attached to delivering these targets and the necessary enabling measures. The Committee has also warned that proposals to defer key climate policies such as the ban on the sale of new petrol/diesel cars announced in September 2023, will put the achievement of these targets at even greater risk.
- 2.2. 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, of which the Council is a founding member) based on the 'net zero by 2030' ambition. At the same time the Council adopted a new corporate Carbon Plan for the period 2020-25, including an interim target to reduce the Council's own emissions by 85% by 2025 *en route* to net zero by 2030.
- 2.3. This report now presents Annual Reports on both the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy and the Council's own greenhouse gas emissions, covering the financial year (2022/23).

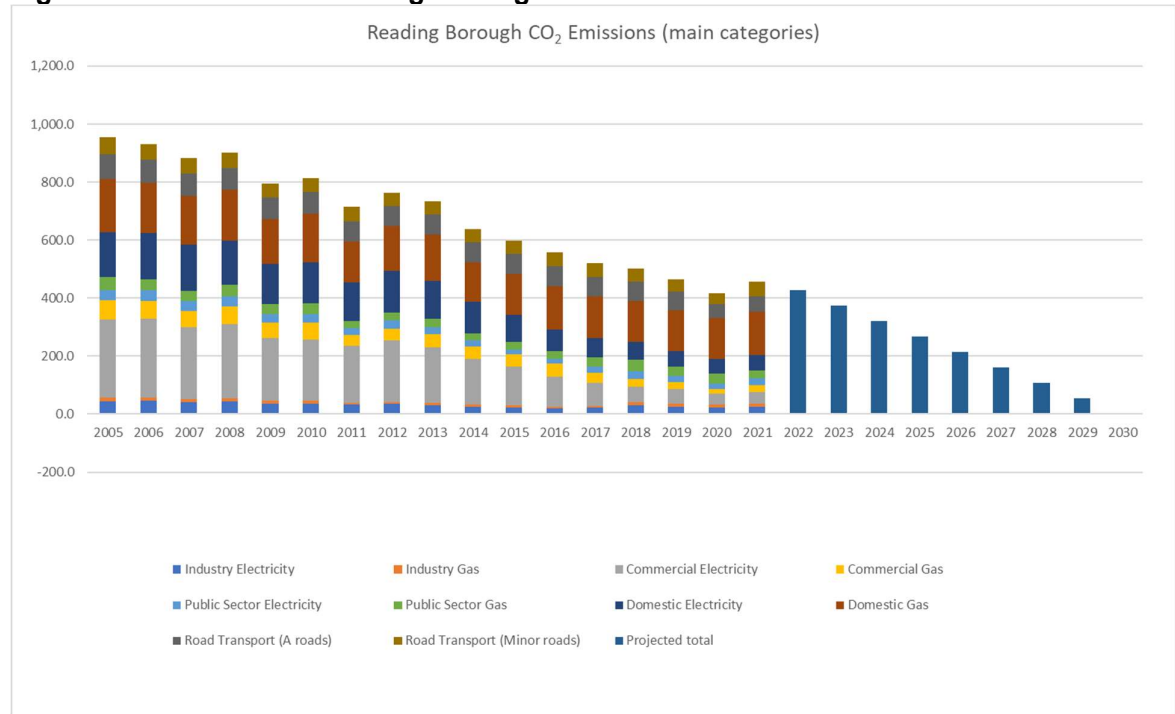
3. Key conclusions from the Annual Report 2022/23 on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy (see Appendix 1)

- 3.1 The Annual 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 strategy, of which the Council is just one.
- 3.2 The measure used to track progress towards the target of 'a net zero Reading by 2030' is a national (DESNZ) dataset for 'emissions within the scope of influence of local authorities', published annually. There is a lag in the national data collection exercise so the latest data, published in June 2023, relate to the calendar year 2021, the first year after the main 2020 lockdown restrictions, including travel restrictions, were eased.
- 3.3 While the 2020 data showed a sharp drop in Reading's emissions compared to 2019, reflecting the impact of pandemic restrictions, the 2021 data show a clear 'bounce-back' in emissions, a pattern reflected locally, nationally and internationally. Key points are:
 - Reading Borough's emissions increased by 9.7% between 2020 and 2021 - although this is slightly above the national average increase of 8.1%, Reading's reduction between 2019 and 2020 was also larger than most - so our emissions fell faster in response to pandemic restrictions but bounced back harder once they eased.
 - The pandemic 'bounce-back' phenomenon was exacerbated nationally and locally by colder weather in 2021 compared to 2020, which led to more demand for heating.
 - Care should be taken, however, with these year-on-year comparisons, particularly those years affected by the pandemic, and long-term trends are more instructive: in this regard, the long-term trend remains downwards and Reading's emissions have fallen by 51.3% since 2005 – the 8th largest reduction out of 374 UK local authority areas.

- Reading's per capita emissions remain the lowest in Berkshire and are also lower than the SE and UK average.

3.4 Reading's performance relative to other areas is therefore strong by this measure. Nonetheless, 2021 was the first year for over a decade that emissions rose nationally and locally: to achieve net zero by 2030 we now need to see significant reductions every year to 2030 as shown in figure 1. Nationally and locally emissions in 2021 were only slightly lower than the pre-pandemic year of 2019. We will, however, need the 2022 data (due for publication in June 2024) to understand whether the long-term downward trend shown in figure 1 resumes.

Figure 1: reductions in Reading Borough emissions 2005-2021



3.5 The Annual Report also highlights case studies and celebrates achievements which have been taken forward by partners in Reading during the course of the last year. These include several initiatives led by the Council:

- **Low carbon leisure centres:** new leisure facilities opened at Palmer Park and Rivermead for which, in 2022, the Council provided an additional £976,248 to install air source heat pumps and additional solar capacity, reducing emissions from the facilities by 57% and 80% respectively compared to the original design. This formed part of an energy and carbon saving package of measures worth over £2.5 million as part of the £40 million investment in new leisure facilities delivered with our partners Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL).
- **Reduced waste emissions:** research conducted earlier this year by re3, the waste partnership between Reading, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Councils, quantified the reductions in emissions arising from adoption of more sustainable waste management practices. This shows that emissions from Reading's municipal waste were cut by 66.8% between 2015/16 and 2022/23, largely as a result of achieving significant reductions in waste going to landfill, with reductions in waste volumes overall also being a significant factor.
- **Public participation:** in April 2022 Reading submitted a successful bid to be part of the Local Climate Engagement Project, a prestigious initiative offering training and

peer learning, developed and delivered by UK100 and a consortium of NGOs specialising in public participation, to better equip staff and volunteers with the skills needed to engage the public in decisions about climate change. Training took place in 2022 and the learning is now being applied to our communications and engagement work.

- **Citizen engagement:** the Council was also invited to take part in a national pilot programme, *The Strategy Room*, which uses an innovative scenario-based format to engage citizens in discussions about climate change to inform local policy-making. Six workshops were held in Reading in March 2023 as part of the project, achieving the highest participation rates of all the pilot areas. A separate report on the outcomes of the project is being presented to SEPT Committee at the November 2023 meeting.
- **Transparency and accountability:** in July 2022 the Council submitted its annual return to the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) whose international reporting platform is regarded as the 'gold standard' in climate reporting for local authorities. In November 2022 CDP confirmed that Reading had retained its place on their 'A' list of cities taking bold climate action, an accolade reserved for just 19 UK local authority areas and 122 worldwide out of over 1,000 who disclose via CDP.

4. Key conclusions from the Council's annual greenhouse gas emissions report (see Appendix 2)

- 4.1 This report has been produced annually by the Council since 2008/09 to track progress with implementation of the Council's Carbon Plan and its publication meets our obligations to report transparently on corporate emissions in line with the relevant emissions reporting protocols. Although the Council's emissions represent less than 1.3% of the total for the Borough, they assume greater significance due to the need for the Council to lead by example in setting and delivering ambitious carbon reduction targets.
- 4.2 The headline conclusion of the report is that the Council's carbon footprint has been cut by 73.9% since 2008-09, a further reduction from 71.3% reported in 2021/22. This means that the Council's emissions fell by 9% between 2021/22 and 2022/23. As with Borough carbon emissions, however, care should be taken with year-on-year comparisons and the long-term trend is more instructive. Whilst this keeps the Council broadly on track to meet its target of an 85% cut in corporate emissions by 2025, figure 2 shows that the gap between 'planned' and 'actual' reductions has closed.
- 4.3 One of the factors in the reduction in emissions recorded in 2022/23 is the continued decarbonisation of grid energy as more renewable energy (such as offshore wind and solar) comes on stream – this reduces the carbon content of the electricity used by the Council, hence our strategy of electrifying heating and transport to take advantage of this lower carbon energy. Put another way, for every heat pump or EV we invest in, we see an additional 'free' reduction in our emissions every year beyond the initial year of installation/ purchase as long as grid decarbonisation continues.
- 4.4 Major projects in the pipeline which will deliver significant additional cuts in emissions over the next few years include:
- Full electrification of the Refuse Collection Vehicle (RCV) fleet: 6 electric RCVs are now operational and the remaining 7 are on order, for delivery later this financial year. Together these will reduce fleet emissions by c15%;
 - Decarbonisation of the Civic Offices: the Council is replacing gas heating with air source heat pumps as part of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) project to integrate the Central Library into the Civic Offices, with heat pumps due for installation in 2024.
 - Decarbonisation of the Hexagon campus, with a combination of air source and ground source heat pumps replacing gas heating as part of the LUF project to add a

new performance space to the existing Hexagon, along with lighting and insulation improvements, due for completion in 2025.

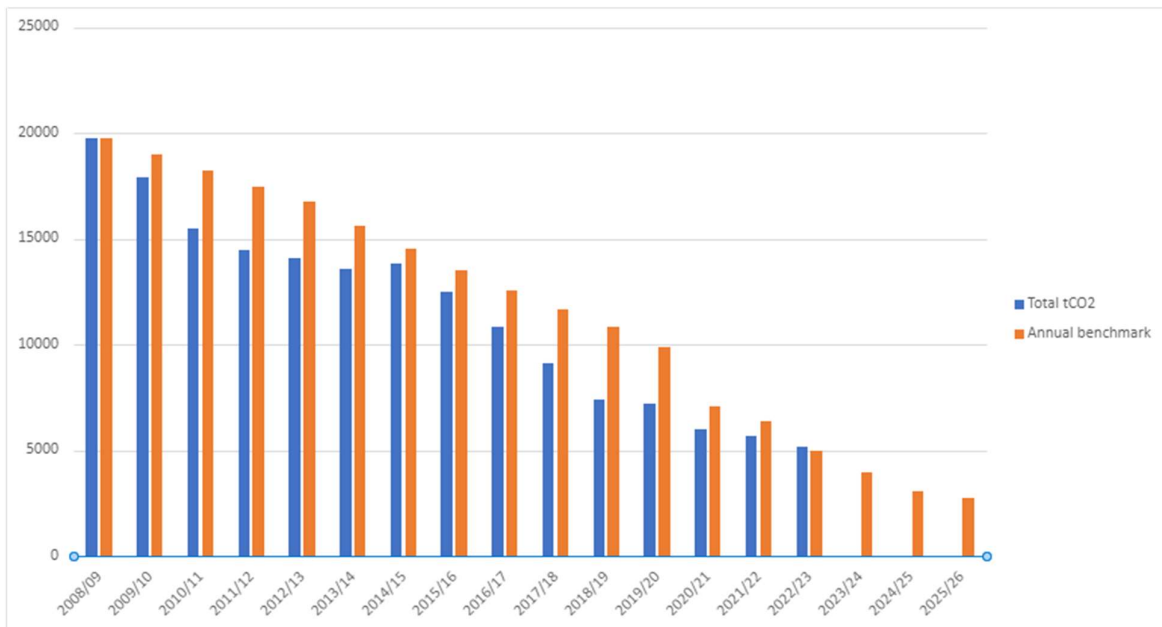
- Disposal of Central Library as part of the LUF programme, expected in 2025.

4.5 These projects will make a significant contribution towards our targets but further projects and further investment will still be needed. Work is underway to identify these investment needs and will be taken forward through the normal budget setting processes of the Council.

4.6 Working in the opposite direction to these initiatives, a recent inventory of streetlighting assets identified a number of assets (traffic lights etc) which had not previously been accounted for in the emissions reporting. Streetlighting remains a significant energy user and source of emissions, despite the Council successfully completing the LED switchover project, so this will result in an increase emissions from this source in 2023/24, unless other mitigations can be found to compensate within the streetlighting portfolio. Work is therefore underway to mitigate this potential impact.

4.7 The overall trajectory of Council emissions since 2008/09 is shown in figure 2, along with notional annual benchmarks aligning to the interim target of an 85% cut by 2025. These benchmarks were based on assumptions made in 2020, at the start of the current Carbon Plan period, on when the impact of different interventions might be seen. Figure 2 shows that the gap between actual reductions and these notional benchmarks has closed, reflecting the fact that the Council has set very ambitious targets, and that, with many of the ‘easy’ and low cost carbon reduction measures having already been taken, each remaining percentage point of emissions reduction is inevitably more challenging.

Figure 2: reductions in RBC corporate emissions 2008/09 to 2022/23



4.8 Significantly, the Carbon Plan includes a secondary target to reduce the Council’s fossil fuel use to 50% of its 2008/09 level by 2025 through removal of fossil fuel heating and electrification of vehicles. The council used 433,214 litres of fuel/oil, and 10,325 MWh of natural gas in 2022/23. This means that this target has now been achieved two years early – the Council’s gas use is currently 61% lower than 2008/09 and oil/fuel is 55% lower than 2008/09, which represents a significant achievement.

5. Contribution to strategic aims

5.1 The Council’s efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as summarised in this report 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.

5.2 The corporate Carbon Plan also contributes to TEAM Reading values, particularly on Efficiency – by minimising the risks and costs associated with energy use and by improving the energy and carbon 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

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 Implications

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

9. Other Relevant Considerations

9.1. Consideration has been given to other issues of relevance to this report, the key one being risk management implications. 'Failure to meet net zero carbon commitments', in relation to both Borough emissions and the Council's own operations, is included as a high level risk in the Council's Strategic Risk Register, and the likelihood and impact of this risk is assessed on an ongoing basis. The increase in Borough emissions between 2020 and 2021 inevitably increases the risk associated with achievement of the targets.

10. Legal Implications

10.1. 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.

11. Financial Implications

11.1. There are no direct 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£22.2 million (excluding standing charges and other contract charges) compared to if no action had been taken. In 2022/23 alone these avoided costs were estimated at c£4.7 million. With energy prices still at a high level, the value at stake from reducing our energy consumption in line with Carbon Plan aspirations is likely to increase in future years. The report also highlights the need for the Council to make further investment to achieve its interim target of an 85% cut in corporate emissions by 2025 and ultimate target of net zero by 2030. Work is underway to quantify these investment needs and will be taken forward through the normal budget setting process.

12. Timetable for Implementation

- 12.1. Not applicable. The next Annual Reports on the Climate Strategy and Carbon Plan will be presented to SEPT Committee in November 2024.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Annual Report 2022/23 on the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25
2. Annual Report 2022/23 on Reading Borough Council Greenhouse Gas Emissions