

Subject:	Climate Change Strategy	Status:	For publication
Report to:	Full Council	Date:	7 July 2021
Report of:	Director of Communities	Portfolio Holder:	Environment
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/>	General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required: yes	Attached:	No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required: yes	Attached:	No
Contact Officer:	Adam Allen, Director of Communities	Telephone:	01706 252492
Email:	adamallen@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1. That Council note the progress of the first year of the Climate Change Strategy.
- 1.2. That Council agree the priority projects for the coming year.
- 1.3. That Council approve the recruitment of a Carbon Reduction Project Officer on a two-year fixed term to increase the council's capacity to progress projects in the strategy.
- 1.4. That Council delegate approval of individual projects funded from the Carbon Reduction Fund to the s151 Officer in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Climate Change Member Champion.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Council on actions being taken to address the climate emergency and to agree priority areas of work for the forthcoming year.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In September 2019, the council declared a climate emergency and committed to take action locally through a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. The strategy and action plan were agreed in July 2020 and work has progressed on five priority actions over the past twelve months. A copy of the Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 for information.
- 3.2. The Cabinet appointed Councillor Adshead as the council's member Climate Change Champion. A working group has been established which meet monthly and includes Councillors Adshead and Lythgoe. A larger corporate group of officers meets quarterly to ensure that the climate emergency is considered in all areas of work of the council. The working group monitors the implementation of the strategy's action plan.

4. PROGRESS ON THE STRATEGY

- 4.1. Progress has been made in the delivery of the full ten-year action plan and there has been a particular focus in the past twelve months on the following four priority areas:
 - 4.1.1. **Working in partnership** – it is recognised in the strategy that we can have a much greater impact on climate change by working in partnership across Rossendale and mobilising local people, schools and business to play their part.

A Climate Emergency Network has been established which includes local residents, school pupils and a Headteacher, local farmers, supporting council officers and Elected Members. Dedicated sub groups have been established and already established groups that focus on sustainability topics are now connected with the network. A good example of this is sustainable transport. To support and energise the community to get more involved, a Community Carbon Reduction Fund is proposed (details on this are covered in section 5.3).

We have made connections with local business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce. This has resulted in a joint proposal for a business fund, which forms part of the proposed actions for the forthcoming year.

4.1.2. **Carbon audit for the council** – it is essential that we measure progress over the ten year life of the strategy. In order to do this the council commissioned a carbon audit of all council functions. This is the first time the council has had such an audit and this has proved more complex than originally anticipated. The audit is anticipated to be complete in the coming weeks and will be shared with members. Once complete it will be refreshed annually to monitor our impact. In addition, we are planning a borough-wide assessment of carbon emissions in partnership with Lancashire County Council.

4.1.3. **Electric vehicle charging points** – the borough now has seven public locations where electric vehicles can be charged (as well as an unknown but growing number of private charging points) in the borough. We want to increase this number and encourage the growth of residential charging points. We have been successful in obtaining funding through the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles to install four charging points in council owned car parks. This will allow further charging points to be added easily in future. This work has been delayed due to Covid, but is scheduled to take place during July 2021. The council will continue to review charging points in Rossendale and seek to add additional ones when external funding becomes available and encourage developers to consider these as part of new housing developments.

4.1.4. **The Rossendale Forest** - reducing carbon emissions is a priority rather than offsetting the emissions produced. However, there is great potential to increase tree coverage across the borough to form a Rossendale Forest. The council has an aspiration to plant a minimum of 16,000 new trees across Rossendale during the life of the strategy. Work with a range of partners has commenced and increased tree planting will commence in winter 2021. The council is updating its asset register which will assist in identifying land for planting. We will continue to assess the suitability of planting sites. Some smaller scale planting opportunities have been identified and are being progressed:

- Planting at Edgeside Park to take place as identified in the Masterplan. ESDRA to apply for tree packs ahead of planting in the winter.
- Identified sites being shared with Ribble Rivers Trust for them to assess suitability of sites. They are seeking to plant up to 1,000 trees on sites in Rossendale during winter 2021.
- A tree planting information sheet is being produced for community groups/schools/allotment societies. This will include relevant information like funding streams (Woodland Trust; free tree packs for schools/community groups), land ownership, important stakeholders.
- Considering the establishment of woodland burial plots. This would help retain

current mature trees where ashes can be spread or buried and possible newly planted sites for full burials. A pilot site is being sought by the council as part of its asset review.

5. PRIORITY AREAS OF WORK FOR THE COMING YEAR

5.1. In the coming year, work will continue to build on the work of the past twelve months. This will include developing our engagement work, including a Climate Change Conference on 10th November 2021. Work will continue on the Rossendale Forest with our first planting taking place in Autumn/Winter 2021 and we will further develop our networks with communities and business.

5.2. A Carbon Reduction Capital Fund of £1m was agreed by Council in February 2020 as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. This was a major commitment by the council aimed at providing financial support to project undertaken by the council, local businesses and community organisations. This report makes recommendations as to how this fund should be earmarked and this is detailed in section 5.3. This fund will support the priorities in the coming year, in particular two grant funding schemes and a programme of works to council assets.

5.3. It is proposed that the priorities for the coming year are:

- **Initiate a programme of carbon reduction schemes** across the council based on the One Carbon World audit. This aims to establish the council as an exemplar of best practice in carbon reduction.
- **Launching a business carbon reduction grant scheme** – in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce this aims to encourage smaller local businesses to adopt carbon efficient technologies. Further detail on how the scheme will work is provided in the following section.
- **Launching a Community Carbon Reduction grant scheme** – many community groups are not in a position to be able to afford energy efficient boilers, insulation and lighting in their buildings. This scheme will support a limited number of the most effective schemes each year.
- **Review our planning guidelines** and developing supplementary planning guidance to promote low carbon development. As part of our new local plan, it will be possible to implement agreed supplementary guidance, which can ensure that carbon efficient design principles are adopted in new developments. This would be a significant step forward to influence housing developers to take carbon reduction measures more seriously.
- **Work with local Housing Associations and private landlords** to reduce the carbon reduction from their housing stock. This would seek to pump prime schemes that could then be financed through much higher levels of Government funding.
- **Launch a major recycling initiative and a non-recyclable plastic reduction campaign.** This initiative will look to get Rossendale to sign up to a zero plastics pledge along with a major publicity campaign to increase recycling rates. This will aim to make Rossendale a plastic free community by 2025.
- **Develop our cycling and walking initiatives.** Work is underway on a range of walking and cycling initiatives to improve health and to also boost our visitor economy. Increasing walking and cycling as an equally important role to play in tackling carbon emissions and we will look to support these initiatives where we can.
- **Developing the Rossendale Valley Green Growth Corridor** - working with our Rossendale Business Leaders, East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and

partners across Lancashire, we are putting green technology at the heart of economic recovery by growing the local low carbon technologies sector. The Rossendale Valley Green Growth Corridor will support the clustering of green technologies as a location opportunity along the A56/M66 corridor for new green technology businesses, advanced manufacturing companies looking to diversify into green technologies, local supply chains as well as low carbon technology installation businesses. Working with partner colleges and BOOST, innovative ways are being explored to develop green tech workforce skills and business support infrastructure.

- Encouraging developers in the borough to **adopt the Home Quality Mark** to ensure high quality sustainable build standards and low carbon emissions.
- Continuation of the **review of all council owned land** to assess suitability for solar/wind energy schemes and tree planting.

The schemes above require work in partnership to develop in the next few months, however Council are asked in principle to agree these areas for priority in the coming 12 months.

- 5.4. Publicity and awareness raising is a key element of the future success of the strategy. Additional emphasis will be placed on communications and engagement activity in the coming twelve months. This will include a dedicated communications campaign on the Rossendale Forest, the Climate Change conference (in November) and efforts to prompt behaviour change with residents, businesses and schools.

6. CLIMATE PROJECT OFFICER AND CHANGE FUND

- 6.1. It is critical the council has sufficient capacity to drive forward climate change projects at the appropriate pace. It is proposed that a dedicated project officer be appointed to drive the work forward. It is proposed to fund the post through the unspent Communities budget in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The Communities team have been actively involved in supporting vulnerable people through Covid and this work has been funded by Covid related grants, enabling the release of some funding back to the General Fund. Subject to approval, this unspent budget will be allocated to fund a project officer for climate change for two years, who will sit within the Communities team.

- 6.2. It should be noted that the £1m Climate Change Fund is capital funding, which does require any spend to comply with capital spending guidance. This allows capital grant projects to be financed by the fund along with other capital projects within the council. It does not allow the funding of posts or publicity campaigns. There are external grants available at both a Lancashire level and a national level. A full examination of available external grant funding will take place to ensure that the council does not fund schemes that could be funded from elsewhere.

- 6.3. Capital funding is currently profiled at £250k per annum over the next four years of the strategy. It is proposed it is used to finance the following schemes in the coming year:

- 6.3.1. Carbon reduction projects within the council. This will include a programme of improvements to buildings, transport and waste initiatives.

- 6.3.2. A scheme to reduce the carbon emissions of small businesses in Rossendale. Agreement has been reached with the Chamber of Commerce for them to provide free consultancy and support to develop projects and for ourselves to fund part of the capital works. These improvement schemes are likely to include EV panels, LED lighting and heating improvements. It is suggested that:

- Smaller businesses are prioritised
- We contribute a maximum of 50% to projects (with projects generally expected not to exceed £5k). Projects costing more than this that have high impact on carbon reduction will be considered in more detail.

The Leisure Trust would be eligible for free consultancy support and it is suggested that feasibilities be undertaken to determine possible projects that could be financed through the fund.

6.3.3. A community building improvement scheme. This would be a grant scheme for community groups to improve community buildings carbon emissions up to a maximum of £5k per scheme. It would be expected that recipients would sign up to be Rossendale Climate Change Champions and actively support the climate change network in publicity.

6.3.4. Rossendale Forest. Under existing capital guidelines, 'forestry' cannot be classified as capital expenditure unless it can be proven that the 'trees embody service potential generally by improving the local environment and contributing to the well-being of the local area'. We will investigate the options for tree planting that do meet these criteria.

6.3.5. Contributions to possible walking and cycling schemes. Currently funding is available for this through Lancashire County Council, however there may be opportunities to unlock schemes using a small amount from the fund as match funding.

6.4. A Climate Change Fund Panel will be established to govern allocation of funding to projects. This panel will include, but will not be limited to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, the Climate Change Member Champion, the Section 151 Officer and the Director of Communities.

6.5. All bids must meet the following criteria:

- All recipients must be Rossendale based and all projects must take place in Rossendale
- Funding for successful schemes should not be available through other funding routes/grant schemes
- Must be evidence based and potential schemes will be judged on their impact on carbon reduction and how they best address the priorities of the strategy
- Schemes that provide added value by raising the awareness of the climate emergency will be given preference
- All successful bidders must become a Rossendale Climate Emergency partner and work with us in raising awareness
- Only one scheme per organisation will be funded in any one financial year
- A report detailing all funded schemes will be presented to Elected Members annually

7. RISK

A risk register has been developed for the strategy as part of the council's programme management process and these risks are monitored regularly. A public commitment has been made by the council to do what it can locally to tackle climate change. This report limits the risk of not delivering on that commitment by putting the resources in place to ensure delivery. This report identifies ways in which the risk of non-delivery can be mitigated.

8. FINANCE

- 8.1. Section 6, above, proposes to create a two-year fixed term project officer post. This post cannot be funded from the Climate Change capital fund. It is proposed the post be funded from the underspent Communities revenue budget in 2020/21 and 2021/22, which has resulted from staff being redeployed to Covid related work. Therefore the 2020/21 unspent Communities budget will be slipped into the current year to fund the post. The effectiveness of the role will be reviewed in 2022.
- 8.2. Council approved a £1m Carbon Reduction Fund in February 2021, phased over 4 years commencing in 2021/22. There are strict rules around the types of expenditure, which can and cannot be capitalised. Consequently each project will need to be assessed individually to make sure it is compliant.
- 8.3. To ensure projects can be commenced in a timely manner this report seeks approval from Full Council to delegate approval of individual projects funded from the Carbon Reduction Fund to the Section 151 Officer in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Climate Change Member Champion. These funding proposals will be overseen by a Climate Change Fund Panel.

9. LEGAL

There are no legal implications arising from this report. Each project will be subject to its own considerations on a case by case basis.

10. POLICY AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

11. CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1. The council have made a public commitment to tackling climate change by taking action locally. Agreeing the strategy and a clear action plan in 2020 provided a clear programme of projects to deliver on this ambition. This has been further strengthened through the commitment to provide a £1m fund to make lasting change. Making progress has been challenging and the council is seeking ways to accelerate the impact it can make on this agenda.
- 11.2. A start that has been made. This includes strong political support, engagement of community and business partners. Actions have been progressed but it is critical that the council receives and understands the outcomes from the carbon audit, appoints the proposed project officer and accelerates its actions proposed in this report to make a stronger impact.
- 11.3. The report makes clear recommendations to Council as to what the priorities in the coming year should be and how the £1m Carbon Reduction Fund will be utilised. A further update to members will be provided next year to enable members to continue to track progress.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Rosendale Climate Change Strategy 2000-2030 Cabinet, 1 July 2020	Appendix 1 https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/1211/cabinet