

Environment Committee	
Meeting Date	2 November 2023
Report Title	Annual Climate and Ecological Emergency Progress Report
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
Lead Officer	Janet Hill, Climate Change Officer
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note progress. 2. To take the report to Council in January. 3. To return to the Environment Committee with a revised Action Plan in July 2024.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 26 June 2019 the Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency setting ourselves challenging targets to achieve net zero carbon for the council by 2025 and net zero carbon across the borough by 2030.
- 1.2 Part of the declaration requires an annual progress report to be taken to Council in January each year.
- 1.3 This is the fifth annual report covering the activities undertaken towards achieving our targets during 2023.
- 1.4 It is very positive to be able to report the amount of progress made despite the pressures on the Council from the pandemic and other economic pressures.
- 1.5 However, we need to realise that we will not fully meet our ambitious targets and that work is needed to reprioritise our actions.

2 Background

- 2.1 Since the spring of 2019 councils across the UK have been declaring climate emergencies of varying types and ambition.
- 2.2 One of the first things the newly elected council did after the May 2019 local elections was to develop a Climate and Ecological Emergency declaration motion which was passed unanimously on 26th June 2019.
- 2.3 Swale has set some of the most ambitious targets nationally to achieve net zero carbon by 2025 as an organisation and by 2030 as a borough.

- 2.4 Our policies and strategies are being reviewed and changes are being made as necessary to achieve net zero carbon across the Borough by 2030. A Climate and Ecological Action Plan was developed, as required by the declaration, and was adopted on Earth Day, 22nd April 2020.

3 Progress 2023

- 3.1 The report can be found at Appendix I.

Progress highlights

- 3.2 A steering group of councillors and officers meets regularly to progress actions and includes coverage of all service areas across the Council.
- 3.3 The refurbishment of Swale House is largely complete. The carbon reduction work in the Master's House in Sheerness was completed early in 2023.
- 3.4 Most of our fleet vehicles for directly delivered services have been replaced with EVs, this has reduced the carbon footprint of our services. The grounds maintenance contract has seen new electric vehicles and power tools used for the first time on this service. The proposed new waste and street cleaning contract will reduce carbon emissions by re-routing rounds to reduce fuel use by 10-15%, using cleaner more fuel-efficient Euro VI diesel vehicles with an electric lift for the bins and use of EVs for some supervisors and street sweeping vehicles.
- 3.5 The Improvement and Resilience Fund is enabled projects which help to tackle the emergency including LED lighting, tree planting, the car clubs, EV charging points and air quality measures.
- 3.6 We are working with KCC to explore in more detail measures to increase active travel, promote wider adoption of electric vehicles (e.g., on street charging), and improve the air quality especially in the Air Quality Management Areas. We are working with schools close to AQMAs to promote sustainable travel and a schools education programme has been rolled out this year. Further air quality monitoring has been implemented. We have developed an air quality planning technical guide and trained planning officers. An Anti-idling campaign has been rolled out with signage, staff training and the ability to issue fixed penalty notices for non-adherence.
- 3.7 The Climate and Ecological Emergency Declaration stated that we would “eliminate single-use plastic from council operations wherever possible” by 2021. A cross department audit of the council's plastic use was undertaken, and elimination or replacement of single use products is underway both in Swale House and across our estate/services. The drinks and vending machine contracts were not renewed. Where it has not been easily possible to remove products, facilities to recycle specific plastic waste in Swale House have been introduced. For example, coffee

cups, crisp packets, pens and blister packs can be recycled. Biodegradable tree guards are being used when trees are planted.

- 3.8 A fuel and water advice service was developed as a way of reaching our more vulnerable residents to help them reduce bills and carbon emissions. The adviser was appointed in late 2020 for two years. Funding for a third year was agreed in 2022 and an assistant has been funded from an external source. Over the three years the service has advised over 1500 households across the Borough on energy and water use and issued over 2500 fuel vouchers.
- 3.9 Via the Off Road Charging Scheme (ORCS) funding was secured for additional EV charging points across the borough. 10 twin chargers have been installed in three car parks and are fully functioning. These new charging bays add to the existing SBC EV charging bays (4 in Faversham, 8 in Sittingbourne and 4 in Sheerness).
- 3.10 A car club was set up in Faversham in May 2022 and another in Sittingbourne in March 2023. Two hybrid cars and one electric vehicle are available in car parks across the towns. To date the club has reached a utilisation rate of up to 50% which is above expectations. We are working with developers to include car clubs in new developments.
- 3.11 The Planning Committee has successfully requested more renewable energy and energy-efficiency measures to be included in new developments. All new developments are encouraged to achieve a 50% saving in carbon emissions over 2013 building regulations (19% more than current regulations). The emerging Local Plan will bring this down to net zero emissions by 2030. A guide for developers including examples of how the 50% reduction in carbon emissions can be achieved is available on the council's website.
- 3.12 This year we have planted 295 standard trees and 14053 whips.
- 3.13 COVID19 has accelerated the move to virtual and hybrid meetings and new ways of working, resulting in business and commuting miles falling dramatically. However other challenges have arisen, such as the increase in household waste being put out by residents. We are therefore working on education campaigns to get this reduced.
- 3.14 Kent Wildlife Trust approached Swale to be a local authority partner in their 3Cs project which will restore saltmarshes along the Swale. We are also working with Peel Ports on a beneficial use of dredging materials project.
- 3.15 Kemsley Cluster -Swale has supported the University of Kent's bid to Innovate UK and we will update ahead of Council in January.
- 3.16 Swale is the only second tier authority in Kent with an Active Travel Co-ordinator. A lot of work has been undertaken to promote active travel such as the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Projects, Active Travel bids to KCC with funding awarded for the Faversham Cross Town Path, The Quietways bid and

Sheppey Light Greenway Project. Considerable funding of £1,115,100 has been won during the year.

One project unique to Swale is the Swale Cycle Recycle Project. A scheme that takes unwanted or damaged bikes and repairs them in the workshops of HMP Swaleside before they are distributed via charity partners to people who cannot afford bikes. The benefits are bikes are diverted from the waste stream, prisoners learn new skills increasing their employability on release and economically vulnerable people get access to bikes which may make travel to work more viable and improve health.

Looking forward

- 3.17 In 2019 we set very ambitious targets to reach net zero. This drove us to start on projects which might have been delayed otherwise – tree planting, LED roll out, car clubs, EV charging, the renovation of Swale House and the Master’s House to name a few. Our efforts have been recognised by the Carbon Disclosure Project and Climate Emergency UK. Covid brought its challenges but also accelerated the use of virtual meetings and hybrid working, paper use and business mileage has reduced dramatically.
- 3.18 However it has become apparent that we will not reach the aspirational 2025 council target although we are moving in the right direction. We remain committed to reducing both our own emissions and in leading our borough’s residents and businesses on their net zero journey. There are a number of reasons for this including industry the not being able to deliver the correct infrastructure needed to reduce our waste collection emissions and constantly changing offsetting situation.
- 3.19 The Borough targets will also remain a challenge due to the recent central government announcements re delaying the switch to EVs, the delayed change and reduced numbers changing from gas boilers, the removal of the improved EPC requirement on landlords and the delay to biodiversity net gain rules for developers which have all weaken the drivers for our work when we need strong national leadership and guidance.
- 3.20 At Swale we have a small dedicated team which has worked with the Steering Group to embed the cause across the entire organisation. The emergency impacts all out work. Staff recruitment and retention is an issue with staff leaving for London and other unitary authorities – at least ten officers left Kent wide in 2023. We were without a full-time project officer for several months in this reporting cycle. We need to explore more joint working Kentwide and this is in development.
- 3.21 In order to respond to the challenges to the targets we need to revisit our footprint to establish where we are and how we proceed, setting new actions to make sure we maintain momentum. This will need to include whether we offset or retarget.
- 3.22 The financial situation facing local authorities and the cost-of-living crisis has limited our options and we need to understand what is feasible.
- 3.23 During the early part of 2024 we will revisit our Action Plan and take a revised version to the Environment Committee for adoption.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 There are no decisions to be taken from this report. However, an alternative option would be to revert to our previous pre-Declaration way of working. This would mean our own emissions would decline more slowly than required to meet our 2025 targets as declared in the emergency or any revised targets. Borough wide, taking no action would have similar consequences with a failure to meet 2030 or revised targets. We would also risk reputational damage.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The Steering Group, and the Environment Committee chair have all been involved in the development of this report.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Progress on the declaration will support the delivering improved quality of life and delivering the council of tomorrow priorities.
Financial, Resource and Property	This report is for noting but the annual report identifies funds that have been used. Activities to address the declaration have financial implications and these will be addressed through the base revenue and capital budget processes. Grants from external sources will also be sought.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The progress made to date supports improving our environment and contributes to the development of a more sustainable council and borough.
Health and Wellbeing	Improvements to the environment and sustainability have tangible health and wellbeing benefits.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.

Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Annual Climate and Ecological Emergency Progress Report

8 Background Papers

Motion to full council 26 June 2019

<https://services.swale.gov.uk/meetings/documents/g2156/Public%20reports%20pack%2026th-Jun-2019%2019.00%20Council.pdf?T=10>