

Environment Committee	
Meeting Date	15 January 2025
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	1. To note the report

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 sixth annual report covering the activities undertaken towards achieving our targets during 2024.
- 1.4 It is very positive to be able to report the amount of progress made despite the pressures on the Council from resource and economic pressures.
- 1.5 This will be the last Annual Report on our current Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan. We are currently drafting a new Action Plan with new targets and timelines which will be taken to the Environment Committee for adoption in the Spring.

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.

2.5 The full Annual Report can be found at Appendix I.

Progress highlights

2.6 A steering group of councillors and officers meets regularly to progress actions and includes coverage of all service areas across the Council.

2.7 The refurbishment of the second floor of Swale House is complete. Master's House is fully refurbished and has been successfully let to a charitable enterprise supporting youth in business.

2.8 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 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.

2.9 The Improvement and Resilience Fund enabled projects which help to tackle the emergency including LED lighting, tree planting, the car clubs, EV charging points and air quality measures. This fund is now spent.

2.10 We are working with KCC to explore in more detail measures to increase active travel, promote wider adoption of electric vehicles, and improve the air quality especially in the Air Quality Management Areas. We are working with schools close to AQMAs to promote sustainable travel. Further air quality monitoring has been implemented. An air quality tool for health professionals was launched in November. 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.

2.11 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.

- 2.12 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. In 2024 Swale used some of our HSF to continue this service while other external funding was sought. In 2024 1139 fuel vouchers were issued, 150 Winter Warm packs were given out, and 330 energy efficiency packs. £16k of Southern Water debt was cleared and 32 households moved to a lower water tariff. 130 households were added to the Priority Services Register
- 2.13 KCC has secured LEVI funding and we have been working with them to start the process of on street EV chargers being installed. A ten year Kent wide programme should see 650 chargers installed in Swale. The EV chargers in our car parks continue to be well used.
- 2.14 A car club was set up in Faversham in May 2022 and another in Sittingbourne in March 2023. 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.
- 2.15 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 work to bringing this down to net zero emissions.
- 2.16 This year we have planted 150 standard trees and 6200 whips.
- 2.17 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.
- 2.18 Kent Wildlife Trust approached Swale to be a local authority partner in their 3Cs project which is restoring saltmarshes along the Swale. We are working with Peel Ports on a beneficial use of dredging materials project and we are supporting the local Farmers' Cluster in their work on biodiversity net gain.
- 2.19 Swale supported the University of Kent's successful bid to Innovate UK for the Kemsley Cluster project. Five of the largest manufacturing businesses in Swale are looking at their energy demands and emissions and identifying synergies. Swale sits on the Advisory Board.
- 2.20 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 public consultation and feasibility studies. The three LCWIPs in Swale will be merged into one.

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. In 2024 150 bikes were donated and 100 distributed.

Looking forward

- 2.21 In 2019 the Council 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, while paper use and business mileage has reduced dramatically
- 2.22 Although we are moving in the right direction, it has become apparent that we will not achieve the aspirational target of being a net-zero council by 2025. There are numerous reasons for this, including a lack of financial support from national government, industry not being able to deliver the required infrastructure, and constantly changing offsetting situations. Despite this, we remain committed to reducing both our own emissions and in leading the residents and businesses of Swale on their own net-zero journey
- 2.23 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 our work. Staff recruitment and retention is an issue countywide with staff leaving for London and other unitary authorities. This is a common feature across Kent, where all local authorities are in the process of revisiting their targets and producing refreshed action plans. In doing this, the need to explore more joint working Kentwide has been recognised, and efforts are underway to develop these relationships
- 2.24 Swale Council consulted with the Carbon Trust throughout 2024 to recalculate our carbon footprint, as well as model various carbon reduction scenarios going forward. We are also revisiting targets that were set for Borough wide net-zero, and in the process of developing a renewed Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan. This will set fresh actions to ensure that Swale Borough Council maintains our momentum
- 2.25 The financial situation facing local authorities and the cost-of-living crisis has limited our options and we need to understand what is feasible.

2.26 The revised Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan will be put to the Environment and Climate Change Committee in Spring 2025 for adoption.

3 Proposals

3.1 To note the report.

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 planned. Borough wide, taking no action would have similar consequences. We would also risk reputational damage.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 The Climate and Ecological Emergency Steering Group has 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	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 wherever possible.
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>