

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
STREET SCENE and ENVIRONMENT SERVICES ADVISORY BOARD

05 October 2020

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Key Decision

1 TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY IN LIGHT OF THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 A Draft Climate Change Strategy and Draft Year 1 Action Plan was approved by this Committee on 11 February 2020. It was recommended that these drafts were available for public consultation from 1 March – 30 May 2020.
- 1.1.2 To publicise the consultation, a news release was undertaken along with social media posts, there was a dedicated link direct from the Council's home page in addition to targeted emails to partners and stakeholders. As everyone will be aware, from March onwards the global pandemic has dominated focus for the Council and the wider community. With this in mind, the consultation period was extended until the end of June 2020 and there were a number of residents and Parish Councils who took advantage of this extension.
- 1.1.3 Attached at Annex 1 to this report is a summary of the responses to the consultation. In total we received 46 responses. 33 responses were from individuals living in the borough and 6 were from local interested groups or organisations. Of the 34 Parish Councils in the borough, we received 7 responses.
- 1.1.4 Whilst the number of responses is low, those who did respond have taken the time to provide detailed and thorough feedback, for which we are extremely grateful. The responses have been circulated to the Council's Climate Change Officer Study Group who have responsibility for drafting the Strategy and Action Plan (the group includes representatives from across each Council department). The Officer Study Group considered all of the consultation responses and whilst it hasn't been possible to include all of the suggestions at this stage, we hope to be able to incorporate more of the suggestions in future versions of the Action Plan. The Action Plan will be updated and published every year.

1.2 Key Themes highlighted by Respondents

1.2.1 A Green House Gas (GHG) scoping exercise needs to be undertaken:

Several respondents felt that the strategy has not recognised or identified the scope of emissions which will be accounted for. In the original Draft Action Plan the following was stated: *“Appoint consultants to scope out existing carbon footprint and prioritise programme of activity to reduce carbon emissions”* In response to the comments received, this has now been clarified and includes the following: *“Evidence, prioritise and agree measures to be taken to lower carbon emissions at the Council. In line with GHG Protocol guidance, this will determine which entities and operations will be in scope and secondly determine which emissions sources will be in scope from TMBC estate and operations”*

1.2.2 Lack of ambition:

It is very clear from some that an “aspiration” is felt to be too weak and more measurable commitments are required, particularly where we do have the power to make the changes for example in the Council’s own estate and operations. There is a request for a road map of how the Council will reach the 2030 target. This is a very valid comment as this is not addressed in the existing strategy. However, we simply cannot include this detail at this early stage. This work will be undertaken by the consultants and is included as a target within the Action Plan. As soon as this work is completed, we will publish the findings.

1.2.3 Climate Change Member Champion and Climate Change Committee:

A couple of respondents wanted a Member Champion. Cabinet Member, Cllr Robin Betts is the portfolio holder for Street Scene and Environmental Services and is also the Climate Change Champion. The work relating to climate change initiatives will be reported to SSEAB enabling regular scrutiny of progress.

1.2.4 Planning /Development/Energy Standards in the Local Plan:

A good proportion of the respondents had suggestions around planning, development and Local Plan issues. In particular reference was made that the Council should require energy efficient standards above Building Regulations. Since the Government published its response to the consultation on the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) it launched the ‘Future Homes Standard’ (FHS) in October 2019. This sets out the Government’s commitment to significantly improve the energy performance of new buildings in terms of their carbon emissions through revisions to the Building Regulations. This commitment was reinforced in the Government’s ‘Planning for the Future’ Paper (March 2020) which makes it clear that from 2025, the FHS will require up to 80% lower carbon emissions for all new homes.

The Council is of the view that the most effective and comprehensive way of improving the energy performance of new buildings is through the national Building Regulations regime. The Council does encourage energy efficient design as highlighted in the adopted Local Development Framework and in the submitted Local Plan. The changes that will come into force in 2025, which is not far away, are significant and will make a difference in the following years. The Council is mindful that any deviation from this short-term plan would require compelling local evidence to demonstrate why new buildings in Tonbridge & Malling should be built to a more energy efficient standard than the national regime. It is not something that can be introduced as a simple desire or aspiration because it impacts on viability, and therefore deliverability, of developments. The local circumstances in respect of climate change are not unique and do not, therefore, justify Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council demanding, for a relatively short period of time, an energy performance of new buildings that exceeds the requirements of the Building Regulations.

The Council, through its planning function, will continue to encourage and be supportive of new buildings that achieve energy savings that exceed those set out at the national level.

The Council has also committed to target promotion of “Solar Together” which is a collective solar group purchasing scheme. The aim is to achieve 60-80 installations over the period of the scheme and this is included in the Year 1 Action Plan.

1.2.5 Biodiversity:

Respondents were concerned about habitat loss and the impacts of development on local biodiversity. The Green Infrastructure and Ecological Network map (Policy LP19 and Appendix C of the submitted Local Plan) identifies the key habitats and wildlife corridors in the borough. These were identified in consultation with a range of natural environment partnership organisations including the Kent Local Nature Partnership. Proposals for biodiversity and habitat improvements should aim to support these in order to increase resilience of the network to climate change and facilitate species movement.

The NPPF allows for minor development in AONBs and the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan and the High Weald AONB Management Plan support some small scale development necessary to support local communities and businesses within AONBs. Submitted Local Plan Policy LP12 seeks to protect AONBs.

Biodiversity Net Gain is the newest method from central government of securing improvements in biodiversity coming through the Environment Bill. Once enacted, this will mandate 10% net gains in biodiversity on most developments (there are proposals to exclude some small scale applications) and Local

Authorities will have 2 years to establish mechanisms to deliver this. DEFRA and Natural England are leading on this.

TMBC work with a range of partners including the Kent Downs AONB Unit and High Weald AONB Unit, the Kent Local Nature Partnership and the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership to deliver a range of projects across the borough to support habitats and biodiversity.

1.2.6 Flooding and the risks associated with increased development:

This was also highlighted by several respondents. Areas at High Risk of Flooding have been excluded from residential allocations included in the submitted Local Plan. The Local Plan (Policy LP18) also requires Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to be integrated into major development schemes to help attenuate the flow of water off buildings and help with natural infiltration, thereby reducing the risks of flash flooding, which is one of the consequences of climate change.

1.2.7 Tree planting:

Although some respondents felt we should be planting more trees, we must recognise that TMBC has limited open space and we cannot convert all open spaces to woodlands. This fact was recognised by a respondent who felt the drive to increase tree cover should not be at the expense of other important habitats. As stated in the Year 1 Action Plan, we aim to publish a tree charter for the Borough, which will give consideration to the balance required to plant more trees in addition to the measures put in place to protect and manage existing tree stock.

1.2.8 Roadside verges and cutting regimes:

Predominantly this is a KCC function and any verges that the Council does own, tend to be in residential areas. It should be noted that we already receive complaints if verges in residential areas are uncut as it is felt that they attract litter, dog fouling and fly tipping. Any cutting regime will require careful consideration and will need to vary depending on the local circumstances. The creation of more meadows was also highlighted. This has taken place where appropriate and where funding has permitted.

1.2.9 Electric vehicle charging points:

This was another theme that featured in several responses. Most people welcomed a commitment to increase charge points across the borough and we will be exploring the options for EV charge points in Council owned car parks. Any on street charging will need to be done in conjunction with KCC. A respondent would also like to see free parking for electric vehicles. Rates of parking fees will be considered once charging points are in place.

1.2.10 Air Quality:

This is of concern to some of the respondents and a request was made for a separate strategy. We do have a separate Air Quality Action Plan, but the wording in the revised Climate Change Strategy has now clarified the links and benefits of meeting air quality objectives, which in turn will benefit climate change objectives (reduced travel, improved access to public transport and promotion of cycling and walking).

1.2.11 Anti-idling and incentivising the use of low emission vehicles for taxis:

Many respondents were supportive of an anti-idling campaign. Tonbridge & Malling Licensing are working towards adding anti-idling signs at the Taxi ranks within the Borough. The sign designs have already been made and the proposal is to start with two signs and then move to four to cover the entire length of the taxi rank in Waterloo Road. KCC run the school contracts and use many of our licensed vehicles for these contracts. We would support KCC if they were to introduce anti-idling at all schools where our licensed vehicles complete contracts.

It is also Tonbridge & Malling's intention to encourage our licensed fleet towards lower emission vehicles. This will be completed over a ten year period allowing vehicle owners and companies the time to invest in their vehicles going forward. There is currently a limited number of suitable vehicles available that could be used as licensed vehicles and those that are available can be very expensive. We want to support the trade as well as encourage them towards lower emissions. Members will be aware that a huge number of taxis haven't worked throughout the pandemic. This means there is a risk the consultation may not begin until the end of this year. However we will retain this action in the Year 1 plan, as we aim to undertake this work as soon as feasibly possible. We will need to work with the taxi drivers to undertake this work when they are fully operational again.

1.2.12 Communication and Engagement:

Some respondents felt we should do more to raise awareness, with a suggestion to encourage schools, businesses and churches to appoint Environmental Champions. This is an excellent idea which is now included in the Year 1 Action Plan. The aim will be to increase the visibility of the environmental agenda and share ideas and progress against climate change targets with nominated Environmental Champions in the borough. This can be done virtually via newsletters, social media and the website. The Council will be appointing a new officer to enhance our website and online presence, which will be invaluable to raise awareness of climate change issues.

1.2.13 Active Travel:

A number of respondents felt there is not enough in the strategy to encourage cycling. This is a valid point and whilst responsibility for most cycle route infrastructure lies with KCC as highway and transport authority, there is an opportunity to support a sustainable transition out of lockdown, as more people than ever have been cycling during the pandemic. There are studies that show 20mph schemes encourage active travel, increasing walking and cycling levels by about a fifth. The borough has been fortunate in receiving DfT funding for emergency active travel schemes at Tonbridge, including a town wide 20mph zone. The Council will be actively working with KCC to progress this scheme. Further funding for active travel measures is anticipated from the DfT this autumn. Officers otherwise continue to secure funding for active travel schemes through the planning process. The Council is also committed to the preparation of a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, which will be progressed in 2021.

1.2.14 Waste Minimisation and Recycling:

This was an area highlighted by some of the respondents who felt that the Council needs to champion and engage with residents to increase recycling. This is something the Council will be undertaking within waste services and the Recycle for All team. An action point has now been added to the Action Plan to develop a robust communication plan in partnership with KRP and TMBC media team to further improve resident communications in relation to waste minimisation and recycling. The Recycle for All team will communicate and educate, championing reducing waste, reusing what we have and correctly recycling the valid items. The Council will also promote smaller charitable commercial recycling schemes: e.g. supermarkets, Terracycle, Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) for recyclable items which we are unable to collect through our current domestic contract.

Waste that cannot be recycled is sent to Allington and is incinerated to produce electricity for the National Grid. Consultation is currently underway to extend the existing energy from waste (EfW) generating station. This extension will include the development of an additional waste treatment line. The extended generating station has the potential to deliver direct heat and power from the electricity generating process for use by local heat users which in turn contributes to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions. The existing station manages 560,000 tonnes per annum of non-hazardous residual waste, generating 42 Megawatts of electricity (MWe). The proposed extension would be capable of processing approximately 350,000tpa of non-hazardous residual waste, generating approximately 30MWe.

1.2.15 Plastics:

There were several references to plastics from respondents. WRAP are leading on Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) On Pack Recycling Labelling (OPRL) and the huge issue around plastics, bioplastics and compostables. The 13 Kent councils and Medway under the Kent Resource Partnership (KRP) are working with RECOUP (Pledge for Plastics) on an education campaign throughout 2020/21 to better inform residents around various plastics.

1.3 Revised Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

- 1.3.1 Where possible we have tried to cover the issues raised by respondents and have included some suggestions into the Strategy and Action Plan. It is important to remember that the Action Plan only takes us until the end of the financial year.
- 1.3.2 The revised Climate Change Strategy 2020-2030 and the revised Climate Change Action Plan have been included as Annex 2 and Annex 3 to this report. As mentioned in the Strategy – the Action Plan will be updated and reported to this Committee each year. The outcomes and progress from each action, will also be reported to this Committee each year.
- 1.3.3 We are coming to the end of Year 1 and therefore aim to bring a report back to this Committee in spring 2021. This will provide an update on progress against Year 1 targets and a Draft Action Plan setting out targets and commitments for Year 2. By this time, we should also have undertaken the work with the consultants to outline the scope; determining which entities and operations will be included and determining which emissions sources will be in scope in relation to our own estate. This will then allow us to plot a carbon descent plan for our estate and operations.

1.4 Legal Implications

- 1.4.1 None

1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.5.1 An earmarked reserve has been established in the sum of £250,000 to fund in full or in part recommendations/initiatives that come out of the scoping exercise in relation to the carbon descent plan for the Council.
- 1.5.2 £6,000 has been spent on consultancy expertise from Laser of which 50% is to be met by KCC and the balance funded from the climate change reserve.

1.6 Risk Assessment

- 1.6.1 N/A

1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.8 Policy Considerations

- 1.8.1 Asset Management
- 1.8.2 Biodiversity & Sustainability
- 1.8.3 Business Continuity/Resilience
- 1.8.4 Climate Change
- 1.8.5 Communications
- 1.8.6 Healthy Lifestyles
- 1.8.7 Community

1.9 Recommendations

- 1.9.1 That the revised Climate Change Strategy as set out in Annex 2 of this report **BE ADOPTED**
- 1.9.2 That the Year 1 Climate Change Action Plan as set out in Annex 3 of this report **BE ADOPTED**

Background papers:

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Nil

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Chief Executive