

TITLE: Environment Policy

Committee: Finance and Assets Committee

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1.0 Issue

1.1. To approve the draft Environment Policy at Appendix 1.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1. Members are requested to Approve the updated Environment Policy as attached at Appendix 1.

3.0 Background

3.1. On 21 March 2022, the council adopted its first Environment Policy. It is important to keep the Policy under review, and update as necessary. Our current Environment Policy (2022) is available on our website here: <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/content/environment-policy>.

3.2. Our Environment Policy should not be confused with our wider strategy and action planning for nature and climate change, which are brought to this Committee annually (and was last done so in June 2024). Instead, our Environment Policy is a short, broad policy statement which acts as the basis not only for our more detailed strategy and action planning for nature and climate but should also be used to influence our wider policy and decision making of the council.

4.0 Arguments/Conclusions

4.1. Following a review of the current policy, it is recommended to retain the broad intent of the policy. However, a number of updates are suggested which are summarised as follows:

- Adding specific reference to the severe water related issue which we are likely to face in East Cambridgeshire as a result of a changing climate and depleted natural environment. Water is already proving to have a significant impact on our communities, with severe droughts in summer (e.g. 2022) and flooding in winter (e.g. 2023/24). These are having a particular damaging effect on our farmland, our parks and open spaces and our key infrastructure such as roads.
- Removal of a specific date we are targeting for net zero. Instead, the updated policy proposes to delegate that target setting to our strategy and action planning. In addition, the policy also proposes to include a new bullet point (fifth

paragraph, third bullet) which confirms our policy is to try to reach consensus with our wider Cambridgeshire local authorities on what is the best approach for us collectively to maximise emission reductions, and what date collectively can we set ourselves in terms of a net zero target. Such consensus building is already underway via a national-leading project between local authorities and Cambridge University seeking to establish what Cambridgeshire’s ‘locally determined contributions’ are, in terms of what can the county best offer to help the nation as a whole reduce its emissions (recognising that some counties will be better than others at achieving reductions in some areas, but less able to make reductions in other areas).

- Adding specific reference to ‘scope 3’ emissions, these being emissions largely arising from the manufacturing and distribution of the goods and services we buy. Whilst hard to measure, it is important over time we attempt to reduce such emissions as much as possible, instead of just the more direct emissions such as the fuel we use (‘scope 1’ emissions) and electricity we consume (‘scope 2’ emissions). Our latest ‘Top 20’ Actions of June 2024 includes an action to look more closely at our procurement arrangements in this regard.
- Adding acknowledgement of the important role of all staff playing a part in our journey to net-zero, including adding reference to the council’s ‘Green Team’ (open to all staff to join, and was the driver, for example, behind the council reducing its paper use by more than half in under 2 years).
- Reference added for the availability of carbon literacy training to all staff. This day-long accredited course, provided in-house by the strategic planning team, has already been given to over 100 staff since late 2023, and over 80 staff are now fully accredited as being ‘carbon literate’. This is a significant achievement and puts the council as a market-leading local authority for developing a council-wide staff base with an understanding of the challenges we face, and also the opportunities we could take advantage of.

4.2. The draft updated policy as attached at Appendix 1 is recommended for approval.

5.0 Additional Implications Assessment

5.1 In the table below, please put Yes or No in each box:

Financial Implications No	Legal Implications No	Human Resources (HR) Implications No
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Yes	Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) No	Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) No

5.2. A brief summary of the implications under the relevant heading is set out below:

(a) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 5.3. Compared with the 'do nothing' option of not having an Environment Policy, there is the potential, albeit slight, for the policy as recommended to cause a positive impact on different groups in our local community with protected characteristics. This judgement is reached because national evidence has identified that some groups with protected characteristics are statistically less able to afford measures to adapt to heat/cold and have less access to local green space. Such groups may also be more likely to live in homes at greater risk of flooding. The policy specifically commits to working with our wider community on adapting to a changing climate, and to do so in a just and fair way.
- 5.4. Taken much more broadly, and in a global sense, the positive impact from an equalities basis of the recommended policy could be considerably greater. This judgement is reached on the basis that climate change is much more likely to have a severe negative impact on certain communities around the globe (impacts such as heat, drought and sea-level rises), and certain such groups with protected characteristics are more likely to reside in such highest risk areas and are therefore likely to be significantly and potentially severely negatively impacted. Overall, climate change is highly unlikely to have a positive impact on any group, but it is highly likely to have much greater impacts on certain groups, and many such groups are likely to have protected characteristics.
- 5.5. Nevertheless, the policy recommended for adoption is only a headline policy, and is dependent on the separate specific projects that will follow in order to determine more clearly whether or not a positive equality impact will arise.

(b) Carbon impact assessment

- 5.6. Whilst this is also ticked 'no' in the above summary box, Members should note that the policy should, indirectly, achieve positive carbon emission savings. This judgement is based on the presumption that the policy will feed into wider policies and proposals of the council, and those such policies and proposals will have a positive carbon impact assessment. However, at this stage, adopting the Environment Policy itself will have no direct implications, positive or negative.

6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: The Council's Environment Policy 2024

7.0 Background documents

None

Appendix 1: DRAFT East Cambridgeshire District Council Environment Policy 2024

The Policy

At East Cambridgeshire District Council, we recognise that we can affect the environment through:

- the services we provide and how we deliver them
- our policies
- our enforcement of laws and regulations
- the choices we make when buying goods or commissioning services and
- our role as a community leader

The Council is committed to act on urgent environmental issues facing the district and the wider world, especially the climate change emergency and biodiversity crisis we face, locally and globally, as well as the increasing risk of severe water-related impacts that could affect East Cambridgeshire in future years (namely, a lack of supply in summer and flooding in winter).

We recognise our role as a community leader, and we are committed to supporting you as we all come together to do our bit to tackle climate change, help bring back nature and adapt to an uncertain world.

In addition to fulfilling our statutory environmental responsibilities and complying with all legal and other requirements, including any voluntary commitments, we will use our powers and influence to further protect and improve the environment, challenging ourselves to make continual improvements in our performance.

We will:

- update every four years our Climate and Nature Strategy, within which we will set out, amongst other matters, our ambitions towards achieving 'net zero' carbon emissions.
- publish annually our Climate and Nature Monitoring Report and Action Plan, setting out clearly what we have achieved in the previous year, any challenges we faced, and our latest set of Top 20 Actions for the coming year. It will also report on the latest carbon footprint data, for the Council, the district as a whole and for Cambridgeshire as a whole.
- seek to reach consensus with Cambridgeshire local authorities on a shared evidence base and the most effective actions for the county to reduce its emissions deeply and quickly, together with collectively agreeing a target year for net zero emissions in the county, and what resources, skills and experience can we share with each other.

As an organisation, we want to reduce our actual emissions, not buy 'credits' to offset our emissions. On that basis we will primarily use 'location based' reporting of our emissions, not 'market based' reporting. We will progressively improve our reporting of emissions, by bringing in as many 'scope 3' (indirect) emission as is practical to do so, such as the emissions arising from the goods and services we buy.

Working with partners, we will develop our understanding of the risks presented by climate change and ensure our services and infrastructure (such as our water management and flood prevention capacity) are adapted to protect the district and its residents. In doing so, we will ensure that it is delivered in a just and fair way, meaning no community or group is left behind as we adapt to a changing climate.

We will prevent or minimise pollution to air, water and land (including noise pollution, litter, fly tipping and the impacts of car travel) and work to ensure that air quality in East Cambridgeshire meets all legal limits on air pollution levels.

We are committed to protecting and enhancing the quality, extent and accessibility of East Cambridgeshire's 'green infrastructure' (open spaces, trees, waterways and natural environment) for people and for nature, and we will use the improvement of green infrastructure to help the district adapt to climate change and reduce carbon emissions.

We will

- contribute to the creation of a sustainable built environment through the planning process and achieve a high level of sustainability in our own development projects.
- act as a role model, minimising energy and water demand across our estate and use all resources efficiently to reduce the environmental impacts of their consumption by our services and activities. This will include increasing use of renewable and low carbon energy, including through the installation of projects within our own estate.
- take even more steps to minimise waste and the impact of its disposal by applying the 'waste hierarchy': maximising waste reduction, reuse, recycling or composting and energy recovery to minimise the amount sent to landfill.
- promote a circular economy, and actively participate where we can.

Throughout the Council we will strengthen the culture of environmental awareness, including through the provision of training (including carbon literacy training available to all staff) and ensuring that staff are aware of their role in implementing this policy. As part of that culture, the senior management team and political leadership will take advantage of their leadership roles and capabilities, supporting and encouraging change and awareness throughout the organisation. At the same time, 'bottom up' support and ideas will be provided by the Council's cross-department staff Green Team.

A Council Member will continue to be designated as the 'Natural Environment and Climate Change Member Champion', overseeing the corporate implementation of this policy and help promote it within, and beyond, the organisation.

Implementing the policy

All staff are expected to implement this policy within the Council wherever it relates to their work. Managers are expected to ensure it is implemented as relevant and appropriate.

We recognise the importance of effective communication in delivering this policy, as well as the potential of participation and dialogue to enhance progress.

We will

- communicate this policy within the Council and to our external stakeholders, enabling our staff and others to fulfil their role in delivering it by providing information and other support.
- encourage dialogue within the Council and with our stakeholders to foster debate, learning and greater environmental improvement. This will include the public, businesses, education and community organisations, and regulators.
- encourage the public, schools and partners to act too, through environmental information, advice and services.

Accountability

This Policy has been approved by the Finance and Assets Committee (September 2024). The Council will publicise its performance and progress each year, in its annual Climate and Nature Monitoring Report and Action Plan, to enable the people of East Cambridgeshire to hold us to account.