

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Executive Member for Customer Engagement & Climate Change Champion

To: Council, 25th February 2021

Author: Greg Pearson, Senior Policy Advisor

Subject: Breckland Sustainability Strategy 2021-2035

Purpose: To adopt the proposed Breckland Sustainability Strategy and to approve the release of funding from reserves to enable additional activities to be undertaken to mitigate climate change in Breckland.

Recommendation:

- 1) That Council approves and adopts the Breckland Sustainability Strategy.**
- 2) That Council approves the release of £525,000 from the Inclusive Growth Reserve to fund the programme of work as set out in Appendix 6 of this report; and delegates approval of individual expenditure to both Executive Directors in consultation with the lead member for Climate Change and the Leader of the Council.**
- 3) That Council approves and agrees to adopt a target of being net zero by 2035.**

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 In September 2019 the council declared a climate emergency and agreed to work towards developing a Breckland Sustainability Strategy and an associated programme of work. It was fundamental that any such strategy and work programme was built on a strong factual evidence base. Therefore, the council has taken a measured approach to the development of its strategy and has not rushed into making commitments that in reality it might not be able to deliver within its resources or timescales. As previously mentioned in updates to cabinet the development of the strategy has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 In the development of this strategy the council has already taken the following actions to support this agenda: -

- a. It has switched tariff within its existing energy contract with Total Gas and Power to one that provided energy generated by wind/solar/hydro which are all seen as zero carbon sources.
- b. It commissioned an organisation called Eunomia to conduct a carbon audit to enable it to fully understand its own impact and the work it will need to undertake to be become carbon neutral (Attached as Appendix 1). This piece of work has helped to shaped the work programme attached to this strategy and has informed the date that the council is intending to reach net zero.
- c. It has appointed a fixed-term Environment and Climate Change Officer to provide additional resource to help support and take this agenda forward.

- d. It has utilised the University of East Anglia's Internship programme to bring in a post graduate student between June and September 2020 to assist with research and identifying best practice examples to inform the strategy.
- e. It is actively working in partnership with all the other district councils in Norfolk, Norfolk County Council and the Broads Authority as part of the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership to identify opportunities where joint working would deliver economies of scales and better outcomes for the whole county on this agenda.

1.3 **Development and Consultation**

1.4 As part of the development of this strategy the following mechanisms for consultation and feedback have been used: -

- a. **All Members Forum** – this was held on 9th November 2020 and was a first opportunity for elected members across all parties to have sight of the emerging strategy and to have an informal opportunity to feed into its development. The session outlined the three pillars of the Council's strategy and initial ideas for a programme of work. Feedback was broadly supportive of the direction and approach. A summary of the key points from this meeting is attached as Appendix 2 which has previously been received as part of a cabinet update in December 2020.
- b. **Overview and Scrutiny Commission** – the commission was consulted on 3rd December 2020, it received a presentation on the potential actions that could form the work programme and was given an opportunity to review a draft policy statement. It was asked to provide feedback on both, feedback was supportive of the direction and proposed actions outlined, it was requested that the language in the policy statement be strengthened to signal the council's intent more. A summary of the key points from this meeting is attached as Appendix 3 which has previously been received as part of a cabinet update in January 2021.
- c. **Public Consultation Exercise** – the council ran a three-week public consultation exercise which concluded on 15th January 2021. The public were asked whether they agreed with the three pillars of the Council's strategy; they were given a number of potential actions that the council was considering and asked to prioritise them; they were also given the opportunity to put forward any suggestions that they might have. The Council had 206 responses to its consultation, each pillar of the strategy was supported by over 80 percent of the respondents. Appendix 4 sets out a summary of the responses to the public consultation.

1.5 **Sustainability Policy Statement**

1.6 Appendix 5 of this report sets out the Council's policy position for the sustainability strategy. It sets out that there will be three main pillars to our approach to addressing sustainability in Breckland, they are: -

- a. Reducing our own impact as an organisation on the environment
- b. Using our regulatory powers to influence behavioural change
- c. Enabling our communities to take action for themselves

1.7 Appendix 6 of this report sets out the Council's intended programme of activity to support the Strategy.

1.8 **Resources to support the Sustainability Strategy**

1.9 When considering this issue it is important to remember that the Council has already committed £935,000 to support environmental issues in Breckland. These include: -

- a. £825,000 to replace all the street lights it owns with LED alternatives which is already reducing energy consumption.
- b. £90,000 to fund a new 2-year fixed term Environment and Climate Change Officer
- c. £10,000 to carry out an initial carbon audit to understand its emissions more fully
- d. £10,000 for Elected Member ICT kit to enable paperless meetings

1.10 In addition, the Council currently allocates approximately £2,006,000 per annum of its budget to support the environment through the following activities: -

- a. Approximately £310,000 per annum for the delivery of the Local Plan
- b. Approximately £1,350,000 per annum for collection of recycling across the district
- c. Approximately £300,000 per annum on environmental protection services
- d. Approximately £46,000 per annum to deliver enforcement activities to address environmental crime such as fly tipping

1.11 As part of the work programme set out in Appendix 6 the Council will look to deliver a number of actions within existing resources. These include: -

- a. Strengthening of its planning position to protect the natural environment while ensuring that growth is still delivered in a sustainable way.
- b. Carbon literacy training for elected members and officers to enable them to make more informed choices both professionally and personally.
- c. Reviewing our procurement strategy to ensure that we buy more locally and drive more sustainable behaviours within our supply chain.
- d. Delivering new web pages to help post residents to helpful information that will help them reduce their own impacts.
- e. Renewal of our current energy contract to purchase our energy directly from a renewable only supplier and explore the option of establishing a power purchasing agreement with other partners.
- f. Deliver new ways of working through our Worksmart 2020 programme which will change how we use our offices and reduce the amount of times elected members and officers are required to travel to them.
- g. Through our new waste contract, we will continue to promote reuse and recycling with residents.
- h. We will continue to take a robust approach to enforcing environmental crimes such as fly tipping.
- i. Using our taxi licensing policy to look at how we reduce emissions associated with taxis in the district.

1.12 In addition, the Council is looking to create the following new work programmes by releasing £525,000 of funding from reserves: -

- a. £100,000 to create new tree planting and environmental schemes
- b. £60,000 to deliver additional electric vehicle charging points in the district
- c. £200,000 to reduce the impact of Council owned builds on the environment
- d. £100,000 to create a grant scheme to support community environmental projects
- e. £10,000 to look at further initiatives to reduce the impact of member/staff travel
- f. £5,000 to promote switch and save schemes for residents
- g. £50,000 to commission feasibility studies on renewable energy options in Breckland

1.13 **Breckland Net Zero**

1.14 As part of the Sustainability policy statement the Council has set a net zero date of 2035. While this is later than the 2030 date that some councils have set it is significantly earlier than the 2050 date required by the government. The council has been clear that unless it is unavoidable it does not wish to use offsetting measures as it would rather affect positive behavioural change and address the root cause of emissions. With that in mind the recent carbon audit identified a number of emission areas that are not likely to be fully resolved by 2030. These are: -

- a. Emissions generated by our refuse vehicle fleet;
- b. Emissions relating to elected member and officer travel;
- c. Emissions relating to the heating of the council's leisure facilities;
- d. Emissions relating to tenants of the council's commercial assets.

1.15 Therefore, in order to allow sufficient time to tackle the root causes of these emissions the Council feels that a timescale of 2035 is more prudent to allow for advances in technology around vehicle emissions, to enable them to find ways and to fund the heating of the leisure centres in a more sustainable way and to work with our tenants around their emissions.

1.16 **Measuring Success/Progress**

1.17 As part of its refreshed performance framework the council will establish a number of high level performance indicators that will measure the success of this programme of work. These indicators will be reported through the Council's existing performance reporting mechanisms through Overview and Scrutiny Commission and Cabinet.

1.18 In addition, the Council will make commitment to publish its carbon footprint and emissions levels annually on its website.

2.0 **OPTIONS**

2.1 Do nothing.

2.2 Adopt the Breckland Sustainability Strategy 2035 including a net zero target date of 2035 and agree to the release of funding to support the additional activities outlined in paragraph 1.12 and Appendix 6 (recommended).

3.0 **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

3.1 This will enable the Council to clearly set out how it will address its own environmental impact, use the powers that it has to influence others across the district to lessen their impact, and work with communities across the district to make positive behavioural changes.

4.0 **EXPECTED BENEFITS**

4.1 The policy statement and programme of work will enable the council to address its own environmental impact, use its power and resources to influence others across the district to lessen their impact and work with communities across the district to make positive behavioural changes.

5.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues;

Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Data Protection; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

5.1 **Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues**

5.1.1 The Breckland Sustainability Strategy sets out how the Council will reduce its own environmental impact, use the powers that it has to influence others across the district to lessen their impact and work with communities across the district to make positive behavioural changes.

5.2 **Corporate Priorities**

5.2.1 This directly links to the delivery of the following critical activity set out under the 'Our Place' strategic theme "We will develop an Environmental and Climate Strategy that sets out how as an organisation we will respond to climate change but also identifies how we will empower our communities to take action for themselves"

5.3 **Reputation**

5.3.1 Climate Change is a matter that is important to many of our residents and it is important that any strategy and related work programme is carefully considered to ensure that it achievable as failure to deliver against this would have significant reputational damage to the council.

5.4 **Stakeholders / Consultation / Timescales**

5.4.1 As part of the development of this strategy a number of consultation activities have been conducted. These are outlined in paragraph 1.4 and Appendix 4 of this report.

6.0 **WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED**

6.1 All

7.0 **ACRONYMS**

7.1 NA

Background papers:-

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Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Discretionary Service

Appendices attached to this report:

Appendix 1 Breckland Carbon Audit Report
Appendix 2 Summary of Feedback from All Members Forum
Appendix 3 Summary of Feedback from Overview & Scrutiny Commission
Appendix 4 Summary of Feedback from Public Consultation
Appendix 5 Breckland Sustainability Strategy Policy Statement
Appendix 6 Breckland Sustainability Strategy Initial Work Programme