

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

To: Cabinet – 4th January 2021

Author: Greg Pearson, Senior Policy Advisor

Subject: Update on the Breckland Sustainability Strategy

Purpose: To provide an update on the progress to date in developing the Breckland Sustainability Strategy.

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That Cabinet note the contents of this report.

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 is fundamental that any such strategy and work programme is 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.
- 1.2 Since the last written update provided to Cabinet in October 2020 we have been making steady progress in bringing forward the strategy and have delivered a number of actions to support the climate change agenda. They are as follows: -
 - a. The Council has now received a first draft of its carbon audit and high level emissions management plan from the organisation (Eunomia) it commissioned to develop these. At the point of writing this update the council is considering how the findings will influence the initial work programme that will be presented alongside the strategy. It is also using the findings to inform the most appropriate date for the council to achieve carbon neutrality, which will also be set out in the strategy.
 - b. The recruitment of a two year fixed-term Environment and Climate Change Officer has been concluded. It is expected that the successful candidate will be in post at the beginning of January.
- 1.3 On 9th November, an all members' forum was held to seek input into the direction of the strategy and any emerging actions that could be generated. Feedback was positive and supported the proposed direction of the policy. The following bullet points summarise the key bits of feedback from the session: -
 - a. The use of our regulatory powers to drive this agenda was important to members, they wanted these to be a mechanism to affect behavioural change
 - b. The role of the Local Plan as enabler to this was key particularly around future policies and design principles

- c. There is an appetite to secure government funding to support this agenda (particularly looking to access those funds announced in the Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy)
- d. There is a level of urgency around this agenda and timescales for delivery needs to reflect this
- e. There is a need to explore the most effective carbon sinks not just trees, and where we do create tree planting schemes these need to ensure the right trees are planted in the right habitats
- f. There is a role for Town and Parish Councils to commit resource to supporting this agenda
- g. There is a need to focus on water management and conservation for the future
- h. There is a need to explore energy provision for the future, including exploring the options for placement of solar PV panels
- i. Communication with and education of our residents on these matters is key to success
- j. Better and more meaningful engagement with partners is need particularly around improving the impact of housing on the environment

1.4 On 3rd December, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission was consulted for feedback on the three pillars of the strategy, which 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

1.5 Feedback from the commission was supportive of the direction of travel to date. The following bullet points provide a summary of the key point raised which will all be fed into the development of council's sustainability strategy: -

- a. There were queries around understanding the current usage of electric vehicle charging points across the district.
- b. The commission recognised that carbon offsetting did not result in positive behavioural change so they were only supportive of this where there was no alternative and only as a transitional arrangement.
- c. Could the strategy look at creating some form of grant scheme or effectively signpost village halls to funding options for reducing their impacts on the environment by using solar PV or other means.
- d. Could we learn from other councils; an example was given of how the community in Hebdon Bridge were using electric trade bikes within the town to reduce emissions relating to deliveries from local business within the proximity of the town.
- e. Can we develop measures to understand that the work we undertake is having a positive impact?
- f. Ensure any amendments to the local plan consider the impacts on viability of development.
- g. Could salary contribution schemes include elected members as well as officers
- h. Ensure that

2.0 **OPTIONS**

2.1 That Cabinet note the contents of this report.

2.2 Do Nothing.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3.1 This report is to provide an update to cabinet on progress to date.

4.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

4.1 The work to date and the next steps set out in this report will enable the creation of a Breckland Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy with an associated work programme which will set out how the council will look to 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 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 and Climate Change Strategy will when delivered set out how the Council will look to 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 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 set out in this report an all members forum has been arranged for 9th November to seek their input into the key themes and proposals that have been developed so far.

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 Mandatory Service and Discretionary Service