

East Herts Council Report

Executive

Date of meeting: 12 July 2022

Report by: Councillor Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability

Report title: East Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022 to 2026

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

At its meeting of 24th July 2019, East Herts Council unanimously agreed a Climate Change Declaration in recognition of the climate emergency. Since that time, the council has developed and closely monitored a detailed Sustainability Action Plan. Now, a high-level Climate Change Strategy has been produced in order to make the council's overall direction of travel, which is guiding the action plan, as clear as possible.

The draft document has been consulted on and considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21st June 2022, this report highlights the responses points raised. Members' views are sought prior to presentation of the strategy to Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE:

- (a) That Members consider the draft Climate Change Strategy 2022 – 2026, as amended following consultation and consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and recommend it to Council for approval.

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 The draft Climate Change Strategy document, attached at Appendix A, has been produced based on research and consultation. The strategy lays out, in high-level terms, the approach the council will take to delivering the key commitments in the Climate Change Declaration, these being to:

- join with other councils in recognising and declaring formally the necessity to do everything within the authority's power to reduce its impact on the climate and moreover everything we can in supporting the whole of East Herts District to become carbon neutral by 2030
- develop an ambitious sustainability strategy for reducing the council's own emissions, with an objective that the Council becomes carbon neutral by 2030.

2.0 Background

2.1 Although there is no legislative requirement to produce a climate change strategy, a high-level strategy as proposed gives an opportunity for East Herts Council to:

- ensure a co-ordinated approach to its efforts to tackle climate change
- maximise opportunities and resources to meet the sustainability challenges within the district, using council resources and partnership opportunities
- allow the council to assess the scope for adopting new technology if/as wider adoption leads to low costs and in doing allow the council to make best use of existing and developing technological solutions

- promote the role of residents, community groups and public and private sector partners in delivering the necessary actions to work towards the council's carbon reduction aspirations.
- 2.2 An audit of the council's efforts to tackle climate change was conducted by the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) in 2021. While SIAS commended the council on its ambition and the detail within its Sustainability Action Plan, they also suggested that a high-level Climate Change Strategy would be helpful in highlighting to the public and partners alike, the council's overall direction of travel. The draft Climate Change Strategy at Appendix A lays out the council's overall approach.
- 2.3 The draft Climate Change Strategy runs from 2022 to 2026 so as to provide the impetus to keep the strategy under review and make any necessary amendments and/or additions prior to the 2030 target date by which the council itself wishes to become carbon neutral and the date by which we wish to do all we can to achieve the same target across the district.

3.0 Reasons

- 3.1 The proposed Climate Change Strategy clearly states the three overarching ways in which the council can seek to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change. The strategy lays out how the council aims to make a real difference by:
- making changes to the council's own premises and the services we deliver
 - using our regulatory powers to promote action by

others

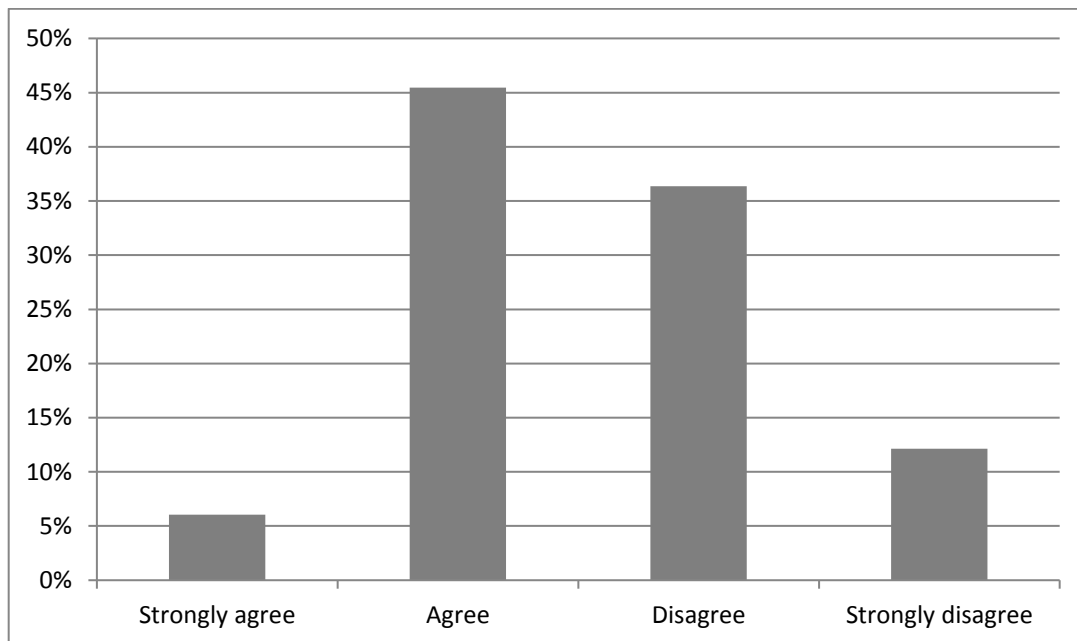
- influencing and encouraging others to do things.

3.2 The draft strategy has been informed by a public consultation exercise. The consultation ran from 23rd April 2022 to 23rd May 2022 and was openly available to any respondent via the council's website. Promotion took the form of three invitations to respond via our social media channels (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) as well as direct e-mail outreach to all East Herts Council elected members, town and parish councils, officers, community partners including carbon and sustainability groups, housing associations, participants in the East Herts Environmental and Climate Forum and the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP). This consultation elicited a total of 35 responses.

Outcomes of the consultation

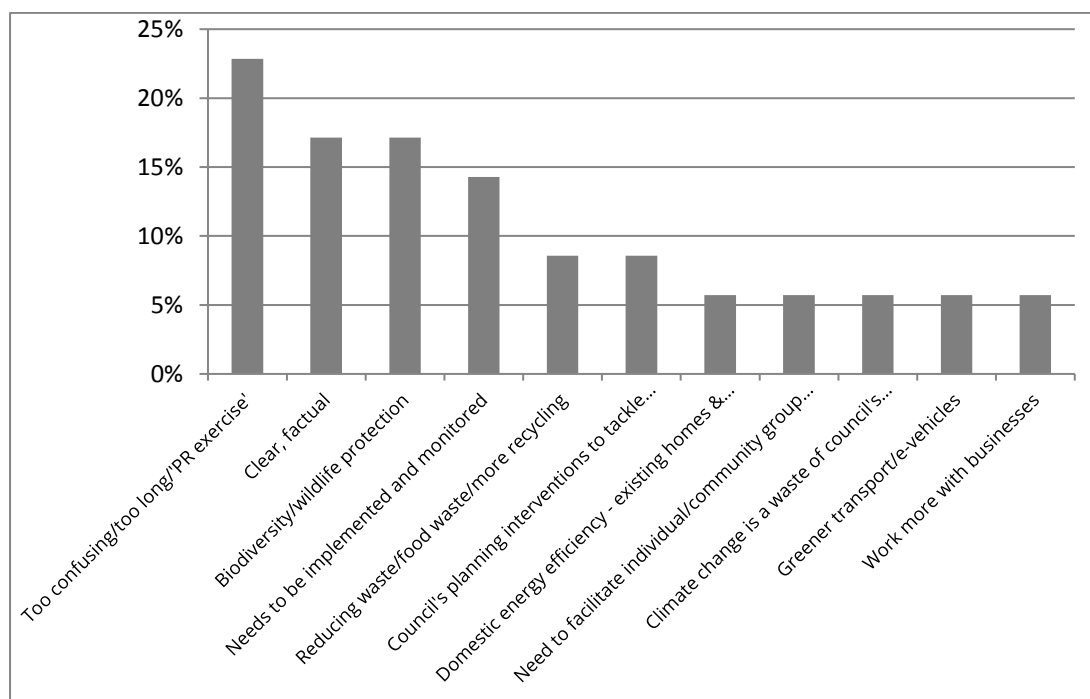
3.3 Figure 1 below shows that on balance, a small majority (51%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the Climate Change Strategy clearly sets out the council's approach to climate change.

Figure 1: Do you agree or disagree that the strategy clearly sets out the council's approach to tackling climate change?



3.4 The consultation went on to ask whether there were any ways in which we can make the strategy clearer. The results are presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Are there any ways in which we can make the information in the strategy clearer?



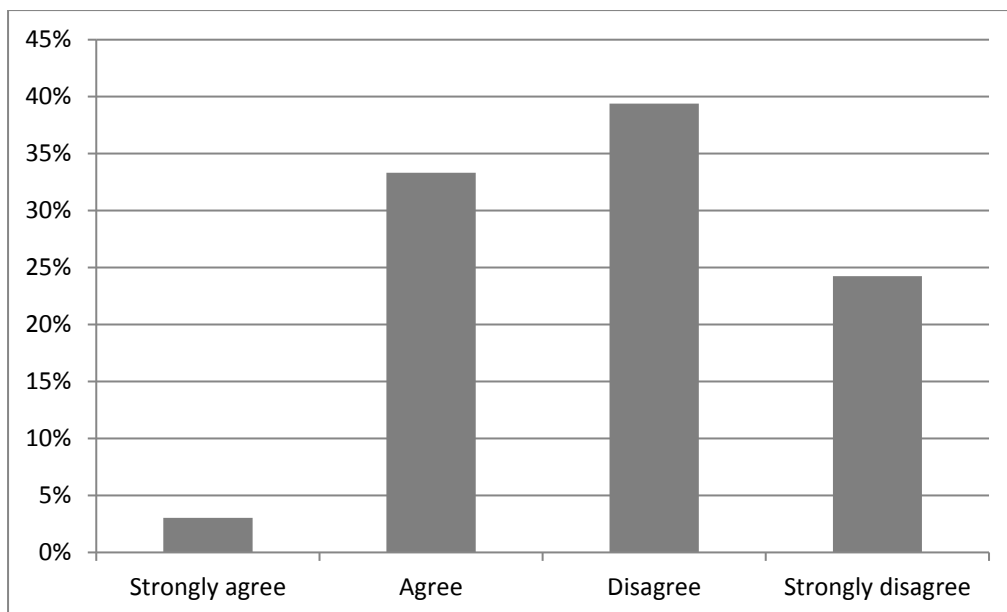
Notes

The percentages in Figure 2 relate to comments made by at least two respondents. In addition, the following comments were also made by a single respondent in each case:

- carbon lifecycle costs/impacts
- what will delivery cost?
- more detailed carbon figure
- air quality
- sustainable farming
- water efficiency
- greener energy.

3.5 Figure 3 below shows that there was a fair degree of disagreement that the council has its over-arching priorities right.

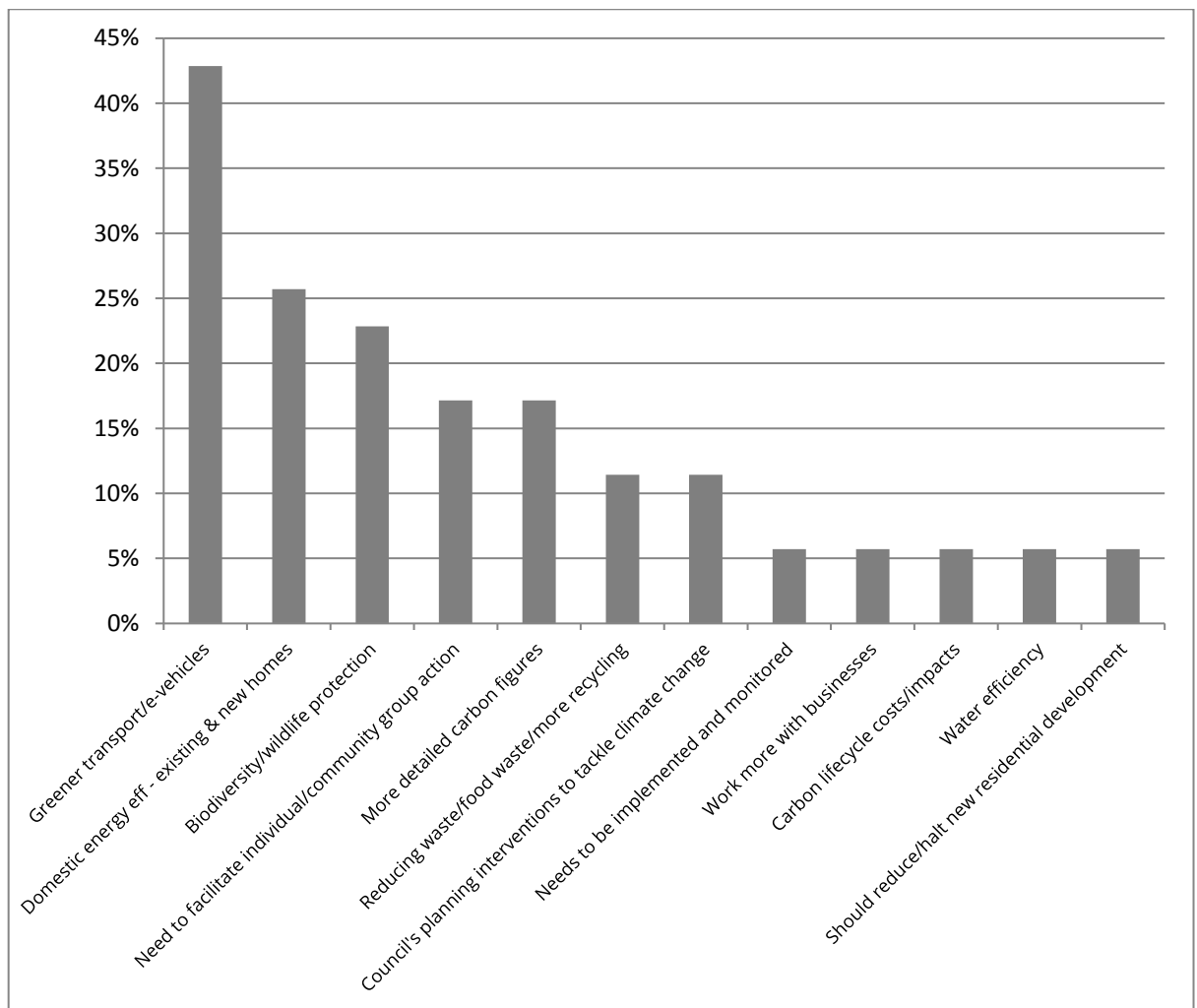
Figure 3: How much do you agree or disagree that we have got the over-arching priorities right?



3.6 The information in Figure 3 is perhaps open to interpretation. Of note, when the reasons given for disagreeing that the council has got the over-arching priorities right are looked at, it is apparent that

dissatisfaction is being driven by a desire to see specific interventions and priorities given greater emphasis rather than the council's overall approach being thought to be at fault. Figure 4 shows the issues respondents felt should be emphasised in the strategy.

Figure 4: What else do you think our high-level Strategy could include?



Notes

The percentages in Figure 4 relate to comments made by at least two respondents. In addition, the following comments were also made by a single respondent in each case:

- climate change is a waste of council's money/not necessary
- sustainable farming
- more needed on adaptation.

3.7 The council is very keen to consider and incorporate as much of the feedback as possible into a revised version of the strategy. Thus, in response to the above findings, the following amendments to the strategy are proposed.

Key point raised during consultation re: making the Climate Change Strategy clearer	Resultant amendment to the Climate Change Strategy
The strategy is too confusing/too long/just PR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive summary added to ease access • The glossary of terms has been moved to Appendix A
Desire to see more emphasis on biodiversity, reducing waste, greener transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New section adding demonstrating the council appreciates the areas of most interest to local people • More explanation added of the existing diagram which covers the multiple impacts on carbon reduction • We will consider incorporating the specific suggested actions raised within the Sustainability Action Plan
The strategy needs to be implemented and monitored	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 5 already covers this in some detail, however, a link to the council's Sustainability webpages has been added to more easily guide readers to the council's existing monitoring information
Need to facilitate individual/community group action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability for residents and community group to influence the climate change agenda has been added to the governance diagram
Need for more detailed carbon figures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic added to show the sources of carbon across the district

3.8 It is worth bearing in mind that the Climate Change Strategy is a *high-level* document indicating the direction

of travel regarding tackling climate change. It should be noted that the consultation feedback included, in many instances, specific, detailed suggestions which are better placed within the Sustainability Action Plan rather than the strategy. In fact, a significant number of suggested actions are already included in the action plan. That said, all suggestions raised during the consultation that are not already in the action plan will be considered by the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability and the cross-service Sustainability Working Group for inclusion in the plan or extension to an existing action. Such suggestions include:

- participation in a solar bulk buy scheme – *note: since the consultation on the strategy, the council has signed up to a county-wide solar bulk buy scheme being managed by Dacorum Borough Council. The action plan could include targets relating to delivery*
- build sustainability requirements explicitly into the process for revising the District Plan
- devise specific ways to engage businesses in contributing to the council's aspiration for the whole district to become carbon neutral work with housing associations to improve the energy efficiency of the existing social housing in the district
- provide information and guidance for climate change community groups to maximise 'amplification' of the council's actions and messages
- draft a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan – *note: since the consultation on the strategy, it has been*

proposed that Hertfordshire County Council will lead on the scheme for East Herts, with the council's officers being actively engaged in the work and overseeing progress. The action plan could include targets relating to progress

- promote anti-idling specifically among the council's contractors
- work more closely to promote messaging through schools.

Consideration of matters raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.9 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the strategy, as amended following consultation, at its meeting of 21st June 2022. Before approving the recommendation to endorse the strategy for presentation to the Executive, members of the committee raised several points which have been carefully considered by the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability, in consultation with the Head of Housing and Health. The table in Appendix B summarises the points raised and the Executive Member's responses.

3.10 Specifically, as a result of the discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the following amendments have been made to the latest draft of the strategy:

- more explicit mention of driving forward the climate change and sustainability agenda during revisions to the District Plan
- a clearer explanation that the council's emissions form only a very small part of the district-wide

emissions and so the strategy must be a 'call to arms' for everyone across East Herts

- a clearer explanation that pointing to the council's track record of making sustainable changes indicates its ability to deliver the strategy's aspirations.

3.11 In addition, as a result of the committee's comments, the Sustainability Action Plan will be amended to:

- give greater detail to the training of and advice to elected members
- include an action to further explore how the council could provide or promote a local e-car club.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Not produce a Climate Change Strategy – NOT RECOMMENDED. The proposed East Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022 – 2026 will provide a firm foundation for partnership working with residents and stakeholders.
- 4.2 Not make any amendments following the consultation and consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – NOT RECOMMENDED. Thirty-five respondents took considerable effort to read through the draft document and provide detailed, well-reasoned responses. In addition, members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided valuable comments. Arguably, the strategy is strengthened by incorporating feedback.
- 4.3 Rewrite the Climate Change Strategy in a more fundamental way – NOT RECOMMENDED. Although there was a fair degree of dissatisfaction expressed with the

over-arching priorities during the consultation, this appears to be driven by respondents' strongly held desires to see more detail. Despite officers' attempts to stress the role of the council's Sustainability Action Plan in covering detailed interventions, it appears that a number of respondents have chosen, perhaps understandably, to use the consultation process to raise specific actions. Officers will consider all suggestions for inclusion in the Sustainability Action Plan and thus it would appear unnecessary and possibly counter-productive to seek to reformulate the strategy so that it simply reads as a variation of the Action Plan. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the strategy.

- 4.4 Recommend the draft Climate Change Strategy to Council for approval – RECOMMENDED for the reasons laid out in this report.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 The proposed East Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022 – 2026 takes the form of information and guidance for residents and partners, rather than specific contractual obligations. Therefore, there is no risk associated with the production of this strategy.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 The draft strategy has been produced following considerable consultation as detailed in this report.
- 6.3 To ensure that this strategy informs the work of the council and its partners, the detailed Sustainability Action Plans will continue to be kept under review and updated

on a monthly basis. All specific suggestions raised during the consultation will be reviewed for inclusion in the action plan.

Community Safety

No implications.

Data Protection

No implications.

Equalities

The strategy has been drafted with reference to the council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010. It recognises that a number of people from protected groups are currently disproportionately impacted by climate change and so are likely to find delivery of the strategy particularly beneficial.

Environmental Sustainability

The strategy seeks to make a fundamental change to environmental sustainability in the district.

Financial

There is nothing in the strategy which obliges the council to expend revenue or capital resources. Any future proposals with financial implications for the council would be subject to member decision as part of the budget and Medium Term Financial Planning (MTFP) process at the time. Such expenditure would predominantly cover adaption of current assets and service delivery models.

Whether or not net zero targets are met the climate is in the process of change and there are increasing numbers of effects that will require the council to respond, such as:

- hotter and drier summers with temperatures above 25 degrees Celsius (C) occurring on average five days more than in 2019 which will impact service delivery for refuse and recycling and grounds maintenance services were operations will need to start earlier in the day to avoid high temperature after noon. This is likely to become the norm more often affecting traditional service delivery times. Our office building is currently difficult to ventilate and has no shading or cooling system consequently temperatures inside exceed 24C on a number of days each summer with consequent drops in productivity
- warmer and wetter winters with up to 22% more rainfall than today plus more extreme rainfall events will probably require adaption of properties in the flood plain to prevent damage. There are also likely to be service disruption due to flooding and more emergency plan responses required.

The recent announcement of an allocation of £1.77m from the government's Shared Prosperity Fund for expenditure in East Herts provides a potential source of new funding to further some of the aims of this strategy. Of particular note, climate change, the natural environment and community engagement are all named under the 'Communities and Place' theme of the funding programme with greenhouse gas reductions being listed in the government's documentation as an important potential indicator of the fund's impact.

Health and Safety

No implications.

Human Resources

No implications.

Human Rights

No implications.

Legal

Although there is no statutory obligation for local authorities to produce a climate change strategy, the information in the proposed strategy builds on information provided in other statutory documentation produced by the council, notably the District Plan and Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document.

Specific Wards

No implications.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

- 7.1 Appendix A – the draft East Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022 to 2026.
- 7.2 Appendix B – responses to comments raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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