

Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	Environment Principles
Meeting/Date:	Overview and Scrutiny Customer and Partnerships – 7 October 2021 Cabinet – 14 October 2021
Executive Portfolio:	Councillor R Fuller Executive Leader, Chairman of the Cabinet Executive Councillor for Housing and Economic Growth
Report by:	Joanne Lancaster, Managing Director Neil Sloper, Assistant Director (Recovery) Clara Kerr, Strategic Growth Manager
Ward(s) affected:	All

Executive Summary:

This report sets out a proposal for the Council's environmental principles and key considerations to support the renewal of Huntingdonshire's Strategy for Environment. These principles will also inform the delivery of the Corporate Plan and shape our ambitions for the District .

The aspiration is of a net zero carbon Huntingdonshire by 2040 to be delivered through sustainable place making. This will be achieved through strong economic growth with strong environmental principles, good design of our homes and infrastructure, with health and biodiversity net gain at the core of our agenda to ensure our residents thrive now, and in the future.

The principles are those developed as part of the Oxfordshire Cambridgeshire (OxCam) Arc reflecting that Huntingdonshire is well positioned with partner organisations to maximise the benefits of an environmentally positive recovery. This also links closely to the Council's Economic Growth Strategy – Ready for Recovery.

The environmental principles proposed for the District Council and its activities:

- To target net zero carbon at a district level by 2040

- To protect, enhance and restore, existing nature areas (green space) and create new ones (where it is viable to do so).
- To pursue the ambitions of 'A green Future: Our 25 year Plan to Improve the Environment' and that new development should be designed with a view to minimising and mitigating the effects of Climate Change.
- Ensuring existing and new communities see real benefits in their well-being from living in Huntingdonshire.
- Using natural resources wisely.

Recommendation(s):

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED to agree:**

- A) the adoption of the aspiration of a net carbon zero Huntingdonshire by 2040.
- B) the adoption of the OxCam Arc environmental principles
- C) that the environmental principles form the basis upon which to renew Huntingdonshire's Strategy for the Environment, centred on achieving an environmentally positive recovery.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To adopt a set of environmental principles for Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) and its activities that align with those developed as part of the Oxfordshire – Cambridgeshire Arc (OxCam Arc).
- 1.2 The adoption of these principles will support the renewal of Huntingdonshire's Strategy for the Environment, shaping our ambitions for the District and informing the delivery of the Corporate Plan centred on achieving an environmentally positive recovery.
- 1.3 To present the aspiration of a Net Zero Carbon Huntingdonshire by 2050 delivered through sustainable place making.

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Government Policy

The UK Government amended the **Climate Change Act 2018** in 2019 by introducing a target of at least a 100% reduction in the net UK carbon account (i.e., reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, compared to 1990 levels) by 2050. This is otherwise known as the 'Net Zero' target.

The **Government's 25 year Plan to Improve the Environment – A Green Future** published in 2018 sets out long term targets and approach to protecting and enhancing natural landscapes and habitats in England for the generation – its goals are:

- cleaner air and water
- plants and animals which are thriving
- a cleaner, greener country for us all.

The forthcoming **Environment Bill 2019-21 and 2021-22** has completed the Committee Stage, Report Stage and Third Reading in the House of Commons. The bill has now proceeded to the House of Lords and in June 2021 it was confirmed that requirements would be set for biodiversity net gain for new nationally significant infrastructure projects in England. There is no clear timescale for a bill at this stage as it is subject to mutual agreement of the House of Lords and Parliament before it can achieve Royal ascent and become law, originally it was anticipated that this would be Autumn 2021.

The main purposes of the bill are:

- Transform our environmental governance once we leave the EU by putting environmental principles into law; introducing legally binding targets; and establishing a new Office for Environmental Protection.
- Increase local powers to tackle sources of air pollution.
- Protect nature and improve biodiversity by working with developers.

- Extend producer responsibility, ensure a consistent approach to recycling, introduce deposit return schemes, and introduce charges for specified single use plastic items.
- Secure long-term, resilient water and wastewater services, including through powers to direct water companies to work together to meet current and future demand.

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF - 2021)

This included a number of amendments and updates relating to climate change mitigation for new development including reference to UK signing up to “17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development in the period to 2030. These address social progress, economic well-being and environmental protection.”

2.3 Oxfordshire - Cambridgeshire Arc

The OxCam Arc is a globally significant area between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. It is formed of 5 counties: Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire.

Huntingdonshire District Council is a key partner in the Arc because it supports the ambition of building a better economic, social and environmental future for the area with high-quality, well-connected and sustainable communities.

In developing ambitions for the Arc HDC was involved in a working group of all partners to devise a set of Arc environmental principles. All partner agencies have been asked to adopt the principles while recognising the primacy of Council’s Development Plans:

- Targeting net zero carbon at a district level by 2040
- Protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets
- Be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development, in line with the ambitions set out in the government’s 25-year plan. We will aim to go beyond the minimum legislated requirements for development.
- Ensure that existing and new communities see real benefit from living in the Arc.
- Using natural resources wisely.

2.4 Huntingdonshire’s Local Plan

In May 2019 the **Huntingdonshire Local Plan 2036** (HLP2036) was adopted setting out 8 key policies which better shape our future environment for the benefit of nature and the reduction of carbon emissions.

Climate change is recognised as a key issue for due to changing household size and the challenge of obtaining affordable properties. The development strategy aims to meet the NPPF's challenge to respond to expected climate change by concentrating most of the new development

in locations where people can choose to walk or cycle to local services, can create sufficient demand to make public transport services viable and are away from areas of greatest flood risk to protect against the increased frequency, extent and impact of flooding associated with climate change.

Cambridgeshire Flood and Water Supplementary Planning Document (2017) adopted across all Cambridgeshire Authorities details guidance for applicants on managing flood risk and the water environment in and around new developments within Cambridgeshire ensuring development appropriately located, well designed, managed and take account of the impacts of climate change.

The **Huntingdonshire Design Guide (2017)** Supplementary Planning Document addresses the need for good design and recognises landscaping is part of the solution to challenges from climate change to declining health and well-being.

2.5 Huntingdonshire District Council Activities

Pride of Place was established as a guiding principle for Huntingdonshire in 2018, with continuous development of good quality services, improving them to be more sustainable with good financial management.

HDC is guardian of 1,534 hectares of green space, 42.8 hectares of woodlands and a managed tree canopy of 400 hectares the Council protects and manages the natural environment every day. Over £2.5m of investment has been assigned to our open spaces over the next few years.

Considerable work has been undertaken in all services to deliver the activity and projects that enhance our environment and respond to the challenges presented by climate change (Appendix 1 – Executive Member Statement – Environment, Appendix 2 - Nature and Biodiversity in Huntingdonshire).

2.6 Key Governance Risk

HDC has consistently identified and responded to Environmental Sustainability as an Annual Governance Risk termed **Environmental Pressures and Sustainability Challenges** – *specifically based on the long-term sustainability and attraction of our area*. This is detailed in Appendix 3 – Annual Governance Statement Environmental Risk. This corporate risk has informed the work of the Council's services to ensure a sustainable and affordable approach to climate change was in place.

3. REPORT

3.1 Strategy for the Environment

The Council has long recognised the key environmental issues impacting the district, with a commitment to Pride of Place. The focus has been of

actions to address the impact of our changing climate such as reducing our own carbon emissions by over 1,000 tones between 2018 and 2022 or planting over five and a half Wembley stadiums of pictorial meadows to increase biodiversity. These are set out in Appendix 1 – Executive Member Statement – Environment, and Appendix 2 - Nature and Biodiversity in Huntingdonshire.

The Council has a duty to ensure we promote an environmentally positive recovery in Huntingdonshire following the impacts of COVID 19 and to limit the negative impacts of climate change. We also have a duty to deliver sustainable place making. This will be achieved through strong economic growth with strong environmental principles, good design of our homes and infrastructure, health and biodiversity net gain at the core to ensure our residents thrive now, and in the future.

Clear environmental principles now will support the Council to renew its Strategy for the Environment and its role in an environmentally positive recovery for Huntingdonshire as we move beyond the crisis presented to our communities through Covid-19.

HDC has direct control of only a tiny proportion of all the carbon emissions within Huntingdonshire, but we can adopt a key role to influence the district, demonstrating good practice whilst setting policies and strategies to influence businesses and communities to tackle climate change whilst enabling sustainable living and growth.

3.2 Environmental Principles

It is proposed that HDC adopt a core set of environmental principles as the foundation of this approach and that this is tied to those of our key partners, engaged in the delivery of the same outcomes. HDC has been a key partner in the development of the environmental principles for the OxCam Arc, it is therefore proposed that these are also adopted by the Council.

- Targeting net zero carbon at a district level by 2040
- Protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets
- Be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development, in line with the ambitions set out in the government's 25-year plan. We will aim to go beyond the minimum legislated requirements for development.
- Ensure that existing and new communities see real benefit from living in the Arc.
- Using natural resources wisely.

The aspiration is of a net zero carbon Huntingdonshire by 2040 to be delivered through sustainable place making. This will be achieved through strong economic growth with strong environmental principles, good design of our homes and infrastructure, health and biodiversity net gain at the core of our agenda to ensure our residents thrive now, and in the future.

4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 4.1 The annual governance risk is highlighted in Appendix 3.
- 4.2 Agreed environmental principles will facilitate and focus the renewal of an environmental strategy. These principles will balance strong economic growth with strong environmental principles, good design of our homes and infrastructure, health and biodiversity net gain at the core of our agenda to ensure our residents thrive now, and in the future.
- 4.3 In adopting the principles co-created with the OxCam Arc, the Council will ensure maximum benefit from alignment with this globally recognised area of economic opportunity central to the UK's future economic growth and prosperity in an environmentally sustainable and enhancing way for Huntingdonshire.

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

- 5.1 Subject to the adoption of the environmental principles, a proposal to progress a refresh of the Council's strategy for environment will be progressed.
- 5.2 This refresh will include:
- Establishing a new baseline of the Council's own impact on the environment through its activities including a gap analysis of where these are actively monitored.
 - Clear identification of the issues impacting Huntingdonshire and actions our communities and businesses can take to achieve our aspiration of carbon zero by 2040.
 - Independent and expert advice able to advise robust methodology for calculating impacts and options for monitoring these so that the Council can embed this within its activities.
 - Inclusive engagement with businesses and our communities is essential, time will be taken to listen and prioritise the environmental issues of those living, working and visiting Huntingdonshire along with the changes they might most like to see. This will ensure the strategy and resulting action plan options are well informed, as well as well researched.
- 5.3 It is anticipated that a draft strategy will be produced within 12 months to allow the elements above to be completed with sufficient rigor.
- 5.4 After the adoption of the strategy, an action plan will follow to support the aspiration of net zero carbon Huntingdonshire by 2040. This will seek to demonstrate our own actions leading by example and encourage our businesses and communities to make positive choices for the environment that have been identified as those that will benefit Huntingdonshire the most.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

6.1 The corporate plan sets out a vision that:

We want to support a safe and healthy environment for the people of Huntingdonshire

- **For people** – to make Huntingdonshire a better place to live, improve health and well-being
- **For place** – to make Huntingdonshire a better place to work and invest

The Council has strategic priorities to:

- create, protect and enhance our safe clean built and green environment
- to support infrastructure to enable growth and investment

The Council's stated ambition is to adapt to the challenges we are facing and involve our residents and local businesses.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 To kick start positive recovery, it is proposed that resources be diverted this year to initiate the renewal of the environment strategy, to pull the work together for maximum benefit. A strategy for the environment which re-baselines carbon impact and biodiversity will enable even more positive actions to minimise the environmental impact of our own operations, maximise our positive impact on the environment and influence our partners, businesses and communities to do more.

7.2 The development and co-ordination of an Environment Strategy to implementation and initial delivery of outcomes across the Council is anticipated to take 24 months. To accelerate this, subject to the adoption of the proposed environmental principles, it is proposed that resources and work is brought forward into this year, highlighting the importance of an environmentally positive recovery in Huntingdonshire.

7.3 The funding will support a dedicated officer with additional budget for any additional specialist research if required. This will deliver a refreshed and co-ordinated environment strategy, targeted and evidenced based, outcomes agreed with a monitoring system for carbon reduction and enhancements to nature.

8. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Council's Healthy Open Spaces Strategy and 10 year action plan established in 2020 identified:

- 90% of our community believe parks, play areas and open spaces improve their mental health and well-being
- 78% actively visit them for this purpose
- 64% of our community say parks and open spaces are essential to their quality of life.

The environmental principles will continue to support this commitment to encourage a healthy and active community.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 9.1 It is proposed that the District Council formally adopt a simple and clear set of principles to establish a clear Climate Change Vision, Strategy and Action Plan for Huntingdonshire. An environment strategy with aspiration of a carbon neutral Huntingdonshire by 2040 will support an even more focused approach in response to the challenges Huntingdonshire faces and the aspirations of our communities and businesses in respect of climate change.
- 9.2 Adopting principles that align the Council with Arc will be beneficial in terms of supporting a green recovery and enhancing and protecting nature whilst reducing the carbon emissions of the district.
- 9.3 The Environment Strategy will accelerate progress in the green recovery engaging with our communities across the themes proposed capitalising on the opportunities presented within the forthcoming Environment Bill.

10. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- 10.1 Appendix 1 - Nature and Bio Diversity in Huntingdonshire – Summary 2021
- 10.2 Appendix 2 - Portfolio Environment Statement – 2021
- 10.3 Appendix 3 – Annual governance Risk - Environment

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Huntingdonshire District Council - Healthy Open Spaces Strategy

<https://applications.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s111005/Appendix%202020-%20HDC%20Healthy%20Open%20Spaces%20Strategy%20and%2010%20Year%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

CPCA Independent Climate Commission Report 2021

https://f.hubspotusercontent40.net/hubfs/6985942/CLIMATE%20COMMISSION%20REPORT_Final.pdf

Oxfordshire-Cambridgeshire Arc Spatial Framework

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-for-sustainable-growth-in-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-spatial-framework/planning-for-sustainable-growth-in-the-oxford-cambridge-arc-an-introduction-to-the-spatial-framework>

Environment Bill 2020-21 and 2021-22

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-bill-2020>

25 year Environment Plan for England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/9780111187654/pdfs/ukdsi_9780111187654_en.pdf

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