

**GROWING AWARENESS – ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY REVIEW
(Report by Head of Environmental Management)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report accompanies a mid-way review of the Councils Environment Strategy 'Growing Awareness – A Plan for our Environment'. The Environment Strategy is divided into three main themes:

- Tackling Climate Change
- Using Resources Efficiently
- Protecting and Improving the Environment

1.2 'Growing Awareness' provides the framework for the Council to prioritise, monitor and deliver its environmental objectives. The Strategy covers the period 2008 to 2013.

1.3 The main review document attached as Appendix A to this report comprises two parts:

- Internal progress - addressing the need for the Council to improve its own environmental performance
- External progress – The Council acting as a community leader to encourage a reduction in the environmental footprint of the district as a whole.

1.4 The Environment Strategy Action Plan included at Appendix B, documents progress against a set of environmental indicators, sets targets for the remainder of the strategy period and outlines future areas of focus.

1.5 This systematic approach to addressing its environmental responsibilities has recently been recognised by the Council being short listed for the national Environment Agency Annual Environment Awards under the category of 'Best Public Sector Organisation'.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE (2008 – 2010)

INTERNAL PROJECTS

2.1 The internal goals contained within the Environment Strategy Action Plan are overseen by the cross departmental Environmental Resource Efficiency Group.

2.2 Significant internal achievements to date include:

- The development of the Council's Carbon Management Plan and an 11% reduction in the Council's own carbon emissions (2008/09 to

2009/10). This is in line with the Council's commitment to the national 10:10 campaign

- A successful grant application for £75,000 SALIX grant funding to establish a ring fenced fund of up to £450,000 to implement energy saving 'invest to save schemes for Council owned buildings
- Innovative sustainable new buildings such as:
 - The St Neots Creative Exchange,
 - The St Ives Enterprise Centre
 - The Paxton Pits Nature Reserve Education Centre.
- Reduced CO2 emissions from Council's fleet vehicles
- The staff-led Greenforce environmental awareness initiative involving representatives from all departments, co-ordinating campaigns and behavioural change within the organisation
- Development of a risk based approach to climate change adaptation
- Sustainability and energy efficiency measures at Council's new headquarters

2.3 In addition to the individual projects listed above, since the adoption of the strategy considerable progress has been made in embedding environmental sustainability within the Council's policy framework. Environmental targets are now included within the Council's corporate scorecard reporting mechanism and also within the service plans of Council departments where potential improvements have been identified.

EXTERNAL PROJECTS

2.4 Environmental projects undertaken in the wider district initiated by the Council, have been overseen by a cross-organisational partnership of key environmental organisations in the district, the 'Huntingdonshire Environment Forum'.

2.5 Key achievements In the wider district have included:

- Greenhart Grove a development of sustainable new build properties in Huntingdon built to Code Level 5 under the Code for Sustainable Homes (the first of it's kind in the east of England)
- The Green House Project properties in St Ives and St Neots encouraging individuals and organisations to act to reduce their energy use and promote of low carbon refurbishment
- Adoption of higher environmental standards within the Council's planning requirements as part of the Council's Core Strategy
- Continued development of landscape scale restoration projects such as the multi-partner Great Fen Project
- Progress towards the completion of a Water Cycle Strategy for the District

2.6 The above internal and external projects are described in detail in Appendix A.

3. FUTURE AREAS OF FOCUS (2010 -13)

INTERNAL PROJECTS

- 3.1 The primary area of focus for the remainder of the Strategy period is the continued identification and implementation of projects to increase the energy and water efficiency of the Councils estate, to realise monetary and carbon savings. A full environmental performance assessment of each of the Councils main sites will ensure that only the most cost effective measures are undertaken.
- 3.2 Staff transport and fleet efficiency will also be key areas of internal focus for the remainder of the strategy period. This will include such projects as updating site specific internal Travel Plans, a review of employee travel allowances and a major phased renewal of the refuse and recycling fleet. All of these projects have the potential to deliver revenue and resource savings as a result of changing travel habits and increasing the fuel efficiency of the Council's operational fleet.
- 3.3 Work to embed resource efficiency throughout the Council's operations should also remain a priority, with targets to reduce resource consumption included within the Council's scorecard reporting mechanism and where appropriate, departmental scorecards. This is the first stage in implementing an environmental management system and formal accreditation to a recognise scheme is the ultimate goal.
- 3.4 The Environmental Resource Efficiency group which meets on a quarterly basis will continue to monitor and oversee internal progress against strategy objectives and identify the best environmental efficiency savings for the Council whilst also seeking to develop other key internal objectives where progress to date has been slower than anticipated such as sustainable procurement.

EXTERNAL PROJECTS

- 3.5 The low carbon and resource efficiency agenda will be increasingly the focus of the Council's external environmental projects and initiatives.
- 3.6 The Green house project will help facilitate a business transformation to show how typical family homes can be refurbished affordably and easily, not only to reduce carbon emissions but to be cheaper, more comfortable and more efficient to run.
- 3.7 Training and engagement of local businesses such as electricians and heating engineers will also be key to sustainably retro-fitting properties in the district over the coming years, transforming the market for energy efficiency and renewables locally by developing the skills base and expertise required to install them. Opening the Green House properties for the remainder of 2010 and throughout 2011 will maximise opportunities for residents to visit and gain information and advice and for sponsors to organise Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for a number of trades and professions.
- 3.8 The Green House Project also aligns well with the Governments recently announced 'Green Deal' designed to make energy efficiency available to all. This includes measures to improve energy efficiency in the private rented sector which mean landlords will face no upfront costs when improving their properties. In the longer term the forthcoming Energy Bill will create powers allowing any tenant asking for reasonable energy

efficiency improvements to receive them from 2015 onwards. It will also allow local authorities to insist that landlords improve the worst performing homes.

- 3.9 In future it will be imperative to develop environmental opportunities within the context of the newly formed Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).
- 3.10 Increasingly environmental activities will focus on the development of strategic projects e.g. redevelopment and growth in Huntingdon, St Neots and other areas e.g. Alconbury airfield. Projects which will be developed in this context include the Low Carbon Development Initiative (LCDI). As part of this European Resource Development Fund (ERDF) initiative, the Council will develop the business case for a District Heating System to benefit St Neots.
- 3.11 Focus will inevitably decrease on 'traditional' areas of small scale environmental improvements and transport related initiatives. This refocusing of activity and continuous re-examination of priorities will enable the Council to deliver its low carbon and resource efficiency priorities in the District.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Environment Strategy benefits from time limited capital and revenue funding to facilitate its delivery. It is proposed that future funding is used primarily to support the implementation of 'invest to save' schemes in line with the Council's Carbon Management Plan and the 'future projects' identified within the Strategy Action Plan.
- 4.2 All funding requirements will be considered through the Council's Medium Term Planning (MTP) process and in the light of the necessity to achieve an overall reduction in the Council's spending commitments.
- 4.3 Significant external funding has been secured in the form of the SALIX energy efficiency grant and it is likely that delivery will depend increasingly on accessing external sources of funding.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Performance against the objectives of the Environment Strategy and the specific targets contained within the review document show that the Council is making real progress in reducing its own environmental impact and in encouraging others to do the same.
- 5.2 The range of projects outlined within the review show that the Council is performing well against each of the three key themes of Growing Awareness and over 60% of all indicators contained within the strategy action plan (Appendix B) are exceeding target expectations. Only 15% of the indicators have failed to be met and where this is the case it will be necessary to ensure that adequate resources are in place to ensure that they are achieved.
- 5.3 Internally, the integration of environmental performance into relevant service planning documents, has promoted a greater understanding of the Council's environmental impact and as a direct result there have

been significant cost savings and a reduction in resources used. In addition to carbon reduction, sustainable procurement, water usage and employee travel will all be key areas of focus for the remainder of the strategy.

- 5.4 Externally, increased emphasis on strategic work to steer the transition towards a low carbon economy will be required to ensure that future development in the district contribute to this goal through efficient design the use of renewable technologies where appropriate.
- 5.5 Advice to householders to encourage the installation of energy efficiency and renewable measures will remain central to the work of the Council's Environment Team and the Greenhouse Project will be the primary means by which this is achieved in addition to the provision of grant information and advice.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 It is recommended that Cabinet -
 - (a) To note this report and the assessment of current performance against the aims and objectives of the Councils Environment Strategy.
 - (b) To endorse the current and future priorities outlined within the review document for the remainder of the strategy period; specifically the focus on carbon management and the implementation of 'spend to save' projects in this area to enable further significant reductions in carbon emissions and cost savings to the Council.
 - (c) To support the publication of the strategy review document and to encourage greater participation by communities to promote the strategies aims and objectives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Growing Awareness: Our Plan for the Environment – HDC 2008
Huntingdonshire District Council

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