

**GROWING AWARENESS – A PLAN FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT
ANNUAL REVIEW 2011/12
(Report by Head of Environmental Management)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report accompanies the annual review of Growing Awareness – A Plan for Our Environment, the Council's Environment Strategy, covering the financial year 2011/12.
- 1.2 The strategy provides the framework for the Council to make continual, measurable progress in reducing its own resource use and in stimulating environmental improvement in the wider District. The strategy covers a five year period to the end of 2013/14, and improvements are measured against a baseline year of 2008/09.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Growing Awareness is now three years old. The tables contained within the attached review document chart progress to date against the Strategy's five year targets. The review also contains an action plan for the remainder of the strategy period ensuring the strategy remains current and that our targets are challenging but realistic.
- 2.2 During the annual review of the strategy covering 2010/11, the structure of the document was adjusted to take into consideration central government and the Councils changing environmental priorities. The document now groups projects and indicators under the following priorities:
- Managing a resource efficient Council
 - Improving the environmental efficiency of existing homes
 - Providing environmental advice to local businesses, schools and community groups
 - Shaping sustainable growth
 - Sustainable water management
 - Sustainable waste management
 - Clean & safe Huntingdonshire
- 2.3 Wherever possible, national indicators have been used to track the progress of the strategy, where no national indicator exists, we have created indicators of progress that are simple to understand and easy to gather.
- 2.4 Performance against the objectives of the Environment Strategy, and the specific targets contained within this review document, show that the Council

continues to make real progress in reducing its own environmental impact and in encouraging others to do the same.

- 2.5 The range of projects outlined within this review show that the Council is performing well against the majority the priorities in Growing Awareness with 70% of all indicators contained within the environmental performance tables exceeding target expectations and only 15% of indicators having failed to be met.
- 2.6 Internally, there have been a number of extremely successful projects completed in 2011/12. The installation of one of the largest arrays of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on a public building anywhere in the UK, on our Eastfield House Operations Centre, will not only generate a profit in excess of £300,000 over its operational lifespan, but will reduce mains electricity use at the site by approximately 30% per annum. It will be critically important to continue to implement and such innovative projects to maximise revenue saving opportunities and environmental benefits.
- 2.7 The projects outlined and work contained within our action plan to 2013/14, will further reduce the Council's environmental impact and will result in significant cost savings. Energy use, carbon reduction, water usage and employee travel, will all be key areas of focus for the remainder of the strategy.
- 2.8 Externally, 2011/12 has seen a major increase in the uptake of micro-generation technology across the District. Despite a reduction in the government's feed-in-tariff, the planned introduction of the Renewable Heat Incentive in 2013 and the Government's new 'Green Deal' loan scheme should further stimulate demand. The Council is well placed to maximise uptake locally through its Green House Demonstration property in St Ives and to generate revenue funding by working in partnership with a Green Deal Provider.
- 2.9 Rising energy prices are contributing to a sharp increase in the number of local householders accessing energy efficiency grants for loft and cavity wall insulation with help from of the Council. Further changes in Government funding streams, and a revamping of the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) in 2012, will mean this must also remain a priority for the remainder of the Strategy period.
- 2.10 In the wider District, a great deal of groundwork has been undertaken to help Huntingdonshire begin its transition towards a low carbon economy. Progress has been made to investigate the ability of the District to deliver low carbon energy technologies via the Carbon Reduction Infrastructure Framework (CRIF). The possible development of a District Heating Network for St Neots will provide a platform for the long term sustainable future of the town and a long term revenue generation opportunity for the Council.
- 2.11 The Council continues to deliver a high quality waste management and street cleansing service to the residents of the district ensuring a clean and safe local environment which contributes to the good quality of life experienced by local residents. The Council also remains one of the top ten local authorities in the UK for recycling with a rate of 57%. Maintaining such a high level of recycling is not an easy task, and effective promotion and publicity to residents will be vital to further success.

3. FINANCIAL/ RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Growing Awareness is supported by a limited capital budget of £50k per annum. This is used to fund projects in line with the aims and priorities of the Strategy. In both 2010/11 and 2011/12, the allocation was used to make a

contribution towards the total cost of the solar PV installation at Eastfield House. In the coming year, funding will be used to finance a biomass boiler at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, sustainability features at Love's Farm Community Centre, in addition to some smaller scale projects at the Council's main sites.

- 3.3 In 2010 the Council successfully applied for Government Salix Energy Efficiency grant funding receiving £75k which was match funded to provide an initial £150k for energy efficiency projects at the Council's main sites. Savings generated from the projects implemented are recycled into the fund which will ultimately provide a maximum of £450k towards energy efficiency projects across the Council's estate.
- 3.4 To date, £150k of Salix funding has been allocated to projects and spending is detailed in the annual review of the Council's Carbon Management Plan.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Growing Awareness continues to provide the framework for Huntingdonshire District Council to deliver its environmental objectives and never has the need for effective local delivery been more critical. In the face of rising energy prices and increasing pressure on water availability the strategy has already delivered a series of very significant 'wins' for the Council and has engaged employees across all service areas to consider revenue saving opportunities associated with the environmental agenda.
- 4.3 The drive for energy efficiency and carbon reduction remains a growth area even in a time of recession and there is the potential for the local economy to benefit directly from the business created. It is therefore critical that the strategy continues to underpin the Council's internal and wider district activities in order to deliver both sustainable growth and resource efficient management of our internal estate.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is recommended to:
- (a) Note the significant progress towards the implementation of Growing Awareness contained within the annual update 2011/12.
- (b) Continue to support the role of the strategy as the main means for the Council to monitor and improve its own environmental performance, whilst acting as a community leader, to encourage improved environmental practice in the District as a whole.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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