

3 – ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

This section gives an overview of our effect on the environment.

On 16 July 2019 the Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency reflecting growing concerns about the impact of climate change on the local environment, natural resources and the conditions in which people live and work. The Climate and Ecological Emergency Declaration set out ambitions to reduce carbon and greenhouse gas emissions and develop plans to create a more sustainable future for the area. The Declaration also embraced a commitment to take appropriate action to make the Council’s activities net-zero carbon by 2030.

The Declaration is accompanied by a Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan which was approved at Cabinet on 28 January 2020, the current priorities for implementation being:

- i. Implementing further measures to reduce the amount of waste generated and ensure that as much as possible of any waste that is generated is reused, recycled or composted
- ii. Implementing measures to lower energy consumption by Council operations and activities, ensure the most efficient use of water resources, reduce pollution and improve air quality
- iii. Undertaking a greening programme to significantly increase the amount of woodland and the proportion of tree cover in Chelmsford
- iv. Implementing measures to improve the ‘green infrastructure’ of Chelmsford, protecting and expanding natural habitats and increasing biodiversity
- v. Improving the environmental quality, attractiveness and recreational potential of public spaces, rivers and waterways and associated green corridors in the City Centre and surrounding areas
- vi. Upgrading the Council’s vehicle fleet to embrace the latest low emission technology, including ultra-low emission electric powered vehicles as they become operationally and commercially viable
- vii. Supporting the Environment Agency to implement further flood resilience measure in and around Chelmsford to reduce the risk of flooding to residential and commercial properties
- viii. Creating opportunities for people, local organisations and businesses to get involved, to influence and to inspire innovation and cooperation in response to the key challenges identified in the Climate and Ecological Emergency

During 2023/24 the Council achieved the Carbon Literacy Organisation ‘Bronze’ accreditation demonstrating its commitment to action on climate change and to creating a low-carbon culture. The City Council is the first district council in Essex to achieve this

recognition. The Council will now target the CLO 'Silver' accreditation to further embed practical carbon reduction actions and behaviours both internally and externally.

Community engagement through the 'Love Your Chelmsford' programme continues to flourish with an extensive volunteering programme for all sectors of the community and businesses. Promotional campaigns to encourage behaviour changes, particularly in relation to reducing food waste and promoting the more sustainable fashion, including the reuse and re-purposing of clothing and other textiles, have taken place throughout the year.

The 'Space to Thrive' initiative is growing, with the policy for the creating and managing species-rich grassland now fully established and embedded in grounds maintenance practices across the City Council area.

By 31 March 2023 an additional 68,811 trees had been planted out of an original ten-year target of 180,000 new trees. The target has subsequently been increased to 192,000 to reflect anticipated population growth by 2030.

Measures are being taken to decarbonise the Council's direct operations and activities so that the target for a net-zero carbon position by 2030 can be achieved. The vehicle fleet has been switched to HVO [hydrotreated vegetable oil] fuel. Whilst more expensive, this achieves a carbon reduction of around 90% from vehicle emissions. Some other small vehicles have been switched to ultra-low emission electric-powered alternatives.

The air quality management areas at the Army and Navy and Maldon Road Danbury have now been revoked following significant and sustained improvements in air quality. Air quality standards have not been exceeded during the last five years in these locations.