



Report to: Environment Committee, 27th October 2020

Report of: Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy

Subject: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY FOR THE CITY OF WORCESTER 2020-2030

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee notes the feedback from the consultation on the draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy approved in January 2020.

1.2 That the Committee endorses the updated strategy and recommends it to Council for adoption.

2. Background

2.1 The draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy was approved for consultation on 28th January 2020 and a public consultation and independent appraisal have since been carried out. The strategy has been further developed in response to the feedback received and is included at **Appendix 1**.

2.2 On 16th July 2019, in response to a Notice of Motion, Council agreed to "Declare a 'Climate Emergency':

- Pledge to make the city of Worcester carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions (scope 1, 2 and 3)
- Call on Westminster to provide the powers and resources to make the 2030 target possible
- Work with other governments (both within the UK and internationally) to determine and implement best practice methods to limit Global Heating to less than 1.5°C
- Continue to work with partners across the city and region to deliver this new goal through all relevant strategies and plans
- Appoint the already budgeted new Environmental Sustainability Officer in a timely way, create a cross-party steering group and report to Environment Committee on 28th January 2020 on actions the Council will take with key stakeholders to address this emergency. This work will be led by the Chair of the Environment Committee.

2.3 On 29th October 2019, the Environment Committee agreed to:

- support the proposals for establishing a steering group to work with officers to develop a draft environmental sustainability strategy for consideration by the Environment Committee in January 2020

- review the terms of reference of the steering group at its January 2020 meeting.

2.4 On 28th January 2020, the Environment Committee agreed:

- That the Committee endorse the draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy as the basis for public consultation and engagement with stakeholders and other interested groups.
- That the Committee notes the proposed timetable and approach to consultation with the presentation of the finalised strategy being referred to the Committee in May 2020 for approval.
- That the Committee agrees the terms of reference for the member steering group as set out in this report.
- That the Committee recommends to Policy and Resources Committee that an enabling budget of £100,000 is allocated in the 2020/21 budget.

2.5 The steering group terms of reference agreed were:

- Ensure the plan for consultation on the draft strategy is comprehensive and thorough
- Assist with the subsequent development of the strategy and agreement of this strategy at the Environment Committee in May 2020
- Regularly review progress against the action plan, once developed and agreed
- Assist the Environmental Sustainability Officer with prioritisation of actions (subject to the Council's standard governance and decision making procedures)
- Seek out good practice and establish best practice amongst other Local Authorities, organisations and sectors as appropriate
- Report to the Environment Committee on progress on a quarterly basis (or as required).

2.6 The steering group comprises the Chair and Vice Chair of the Environment Committee and a Member from the Green Party, and has met eleven times in total to assist with the development of the strategy and to give advice on direction.

2.7 Due to key staff being involved in the Covid-19 response, and the delay to the consultation period due to the restrictions in place, it has taken longer than initially intended to produce the final draft, but this has allowed for additional consultation and engagement.

3. Consultation and feedback

3.1 Consultation on the draft of this strategy has taken place and included three webinars, an online survey, individual meetings with key organisations and stakeholders, and an exhibition in the Guildhall courtyard for three days. In addition to this, a number of organisations gave detailed written feedback. A full analysis of the activities carried out is in **Appendix 2** to this report.

- 3.2 The consultation was held in two phases (June/July and September) to try to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible were able to respond, bearing in mind the current pressures of Covid-19. Whilst the consultation had to be delayed due to Covid-19, the engagement with the consultation when it did take place was particularly high from local businesses and organisations.
- 3.3 Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) were appointed to support with the consultation on the strategy and also to provide an independent review of the draft strategy. The changes to the strategy incorporate their recommendations.
- 3.4 There are three primary findings from the consultation:
- The desire to see improved walking and cycling infrastructure is high, having been repeated most often in the survey and the face to face consultation. In addition, promotion of opportunities and incentives for large employers to encourage active travel was a key recommendation from the webinars.
 - The second, from the businesses and organisations in the webinar and through individual responses, was the endorsement of the City Council taking a leadership role, co-ordinating and facilitating projects and partnership working across the city.
 - The third was the strength of support for actions relating to our natural environment. Support for this theme and its proposals was the highest of all the themes.

4. Strategy

- 4.1 The attached Environmental Sustainability Strategy sets out our overall approach to tackling the climate emergency and addressing other environmental pressures. This includes our key commitments, our approach to engagement and partnership working and governance, and funding for the strategy.
- 4.2 Six themes follow, all of which appeared in the draft strategy. Each theme has been developed following discussions with the steering group, SWM's review and the consultation feedback.
- 4.3 In summary, the following substantial changes have been made to the strategy compared to the draft:
- Our strategic approach has been developed further, reflecting the feedback from the consultations, confirming the need for the Council to act as a local leader, using our influence and the powers which are available to us.
 - A vision and priorities have been identified for each theme, reflecting feedback from the consultations to have a clear idea of the priorities for action and the need for a more descriptive, dialogue approach to our vision for each theme.
 - The proposals have been updated, clarified and there is distinction between what we will do ourselves and what we will seek to do in partnership with others
 - There is a more specific funding section giving names of actual funds which will be applied to, in order to deliver the strategy.
 - The recently declared biodiversity emergency is referenced, with a proposal to write and implement a specific biodiversity action plan, ensuring that biodiversity is clearly addressed on our own sites and across the city.

- 4.4 The declaration of a biodiversity emergency also committed to oversee work through a Member steering group. It is recommended that, due to the considerable overlap between environmental sustainability and biodiversity, that the remit of the existing steering group is expanded to include the Council's response to the biodiversity emergency. This will make efficient use of resources and more importantly ensures a joined-up approach that avoids duplication.
- 4.5 The strategy has been produced in a visual format that is intended to aid readability and be 'web friendly'.

5. Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 The development of an Environmental Sustainability Strategy was agreed by the Environment Committee in October 2019. Alternative options for inclusion in the strategy were explored during the consultation process. The content and overall strategic approach have been developed following extensive feedback from many stakeholders and has been endorsed by the cross-party steering group.
- 5.2 To not adopt a strategy. This would limit the Council's ability to set out a range of actions to address the Council resolution adopted on 16 July 2019 and the subsequent recommendations of the Environment Committee.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

There is no additional budget request at this time.

It should be recognised that delivering the strategy over the next few years will take commitment of further funds. Part of our strategic approach is to apply for external funding where this is available, and this approach is already being actively applied.

6.2 Legal and Governance Implications

The strategy will need strong and close governance, with the Environment Committee and steering group for the strategy providing this. A section on governance is included in the strategy for further detail.

The implementation of specific actions and measures set out in the strategy will be subject to the Council's normal governance processes.

6.3 Risk Implications

The deliverability of the strategy depends on many of our partners and stakeholders across the city. The approach for continued engagement and strong partnership working with these businesses, organisations and residents is clearly set out in the strategy.

The specific risks to the Council associated with climate change and environmental pressures will be managed under the Council's risk management framework.

6.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The strategy is in line with the corporate commitments made and with the City Plan priority 'Sustaining and Improving Our Assets'.

6.5 Equality Implications

Significant activities to deliver the strategy will be subject to the Council's standard project management framework and require approval on detailed project plans and equality impact assessments. In this way, the Council can ensure that impacts on equality in the city are fully considered.

There is evidence that climate change can impact disproportionately on the least well off members of society.

It is acknowledged that currently the strategy document does not fully meet accessibility standards for those using screen reader software and work is in progress to ensure that the final document will be fully accessible. A plain text version is available on request.

6.6 Human Resources Implications

No significant implications arise from the content of this report. Any implications arising from projects to deliver the strategy will be considered on a case by case basis.

6.7 Health and Safety Implications

No significant health and safety implications from the proposed draft strategy have been identified. All major proposals will be delivered using the councils existing project management framework, allowing opportunity for any health and safety implications to be identified.

6.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

This strategy will seek to actively address these social impacts of climate change.

This strategy seeks to respond to key environmental pressures affecting our city and all who live and work here, including both the climate emergency and the biodiversity emergency, as recently recognised by the Council. One key proposal is that the Council develops a biodiversity action plan, to stem from this strategy and set out a more detailed, technical approach to improving biodiversity in the city.

This strategy should deliver significant improvements for the whole environment in Worcester: land, water, air and in protection against climate change.

The Sustainable Economy theme seeks to grow the low carbon economy in Worcester and to assist local businesses to understand the implications of a changing climate and changing economy, meaning there should be positive economic implications.

Ward(s): All
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Background Papers: Appendix 1: Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2020-2030
Appendix 2: Consultation Analysis