

Draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy

Consultation Analysis

Overview of the consultation

The draft Environmental Sustainability Strategy was approved in January 2020 by the Environment Committee for consultation. This consultation was scheduled to take place in March and April, however, it was postponed when Covid-19 restrictions came into place.

In June 2020, the Steering Group for the strategy development agreed that the consultation should proceed, in two phases. One phase in June and July would be centred around online webinars and an online survey. The second phase, in September, would focus on face to face opportunities, in line with restrictions.

Sustainability West Midlands (SWM) had been procured to support the consultation events originally planned, and to provide an independent evaluation of the draft strategy. SWM supported the online webinars instead, and the evaluation went ahead unchanged.

Three webinars were held, one for businesses and organisations, one for residents and one aimed at the city councillors. These were very successfully and provided useful feedback, as well as giving attendees an opportunity to ask specific questions as to the Council's position and proposals.

The online survey ran from around the 25th June and continued through the summer and to the end of September, covering both phases of the consultation.

A stand in the courtyard of the Guildhall was manned by the Environmental Sustainability Officer for three days in September, providing people with an opportunity to speak to the officer face to face, and also providing an opportunity to draw people in from the high street who would not have considered responding online.

All responses to the consultation were recorded and analysed, with common issues and themes identified. These have been used to produce this analysis.

Overview of the consultation feedback

Looking at the consultation as a whole, there are three particular suggestions and findings which stand out. First is the request for improved walking and cycling infrastructure which came through very clearly from 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 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.

Analysis of individual parts of the consultation

Feedback from the webinars

SWM's report includes a summary of the key points worth considering for the strategy, from the webinars. These are repeated here:

All three engagement events provided the opportunity for attendees to provide suggestions on how the strategy can be improved and actions taken forwards. We suggest that the following are worthy of further consideration by the council:

Carbon Neutral Worcester:

- *Develop the strategy such that it will have a positive impact on people in lower income households which are concentrated in social housing stock*
- *All new buildings, regardless of use, should be built to net zero standards rather than retrofit/refurbished in the future*
- *Role for council in raising awareness of the opportunities associated with the Green Homes Grant*
- *Promote opportunities and incentivise big employers in the city to promote greater uptake of sustainable travel and minimise avoidable car journeys by their employees*
- *Employers could all be encouraged to support electric car salary sacrifice schemes*
- *Promote water efficiency opportunities across the city*
- *Opportunities associated with the River Severn should be explored including hydro-electricity and district heating (possible linkages with the River Severn Partnership¹)*

Sustainable Economy:

- *Worcester Bosch are a key business within the city and are developing many low carbon solutions which could contribute to various elements of the strategy. This partnership should be built upon.*
- *Consider the broader opportunity for education associated with the strategy, and working with education providers to improve low carbon economy skills.*

Resource Efficiency:

- *The greatest focus should be on waste prevention as well as the measures already included in the strategy*

Engagement and Governance:

- *Consider establishment of a 'climate change forum' with cross-sector members from key organisations across the city to take the strategy forward and help develop an action plan*
- *Consider how the strategy can link to the City's masterplan which was adopted last year - there is an opportunity to link delivery on a number of levels (e.g. housing, new development, economic recovery etc.)*

Feedback from individual businesses and groups

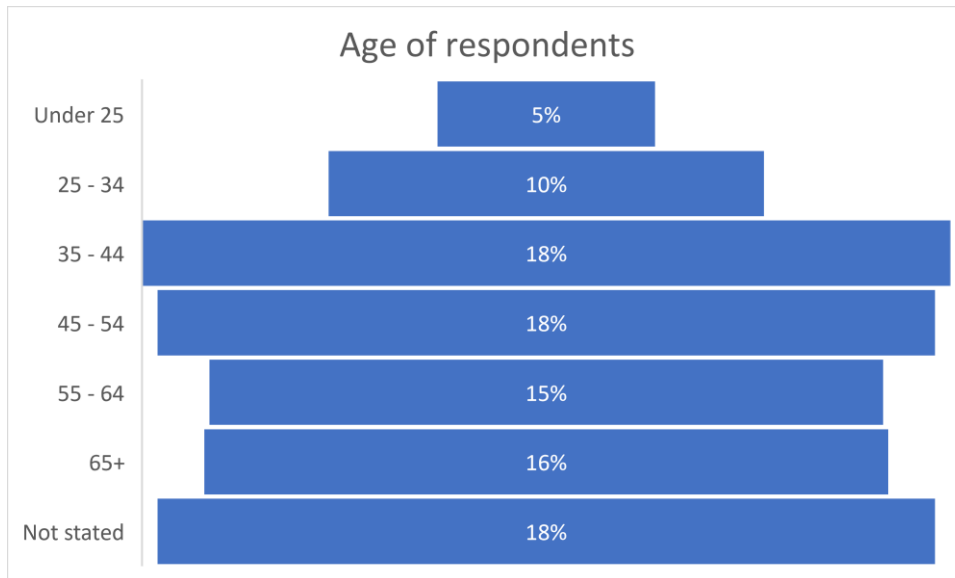
Written or verbal feedback was received from the following:

- Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Cadent
- Western Power Distribution
- Worcester Labour Party
- Worcester Civic Society
- Worcestershire County Council
- Environment Agency
- Worcester Environment Group
- Worcester Bosch

Online Survey responses

Only 3% of responses were from local businesses, showing that businesses were much happier to engage via an individual meeting, a written response or by attending the webinar, than through completing the survey.

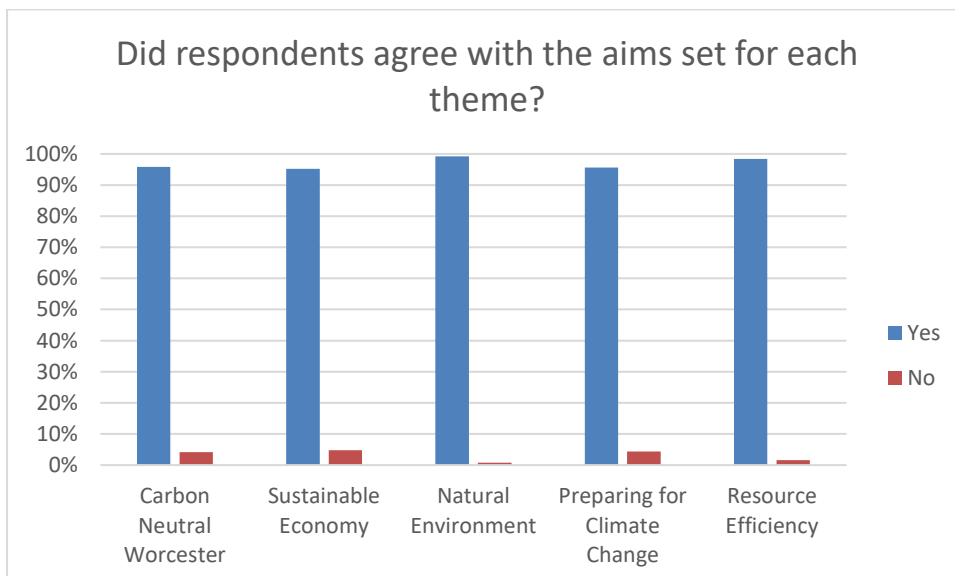
There was a fairly even split of people from every age group from 35 years and up. Fewer people in the under 25 and 25-34 category responded.



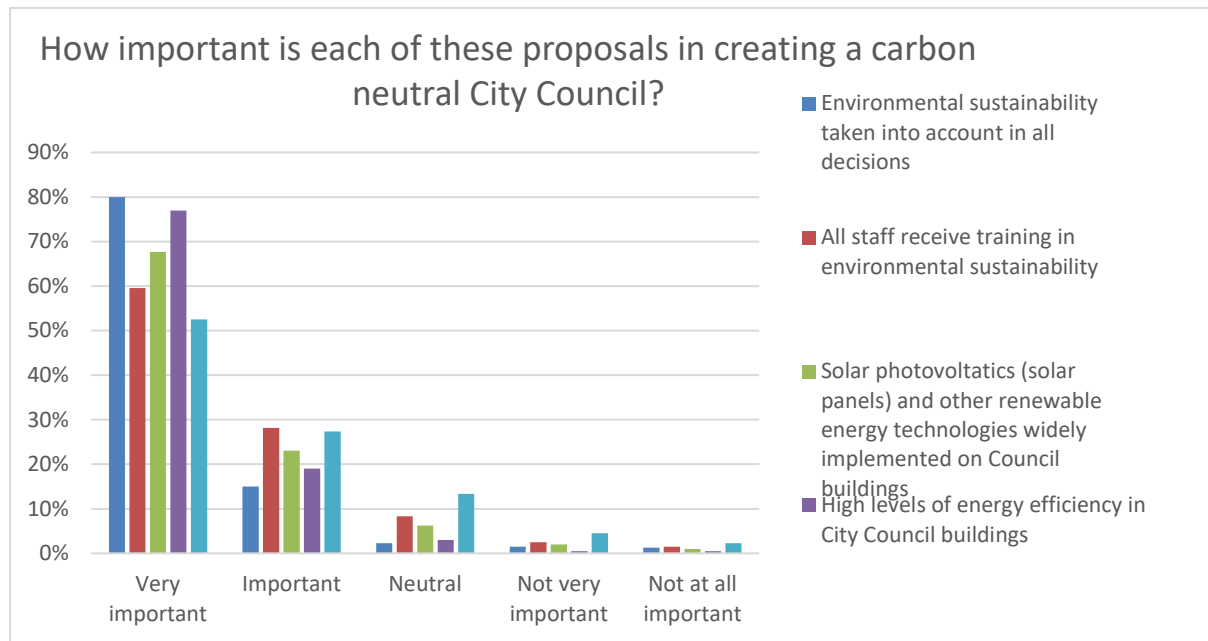
Summary of survey questions

Overall agreement with the aims of each theme

As the graph below shows, there was a high level of agreement with each of the six themes included in the survey, with the highest support for the Natural Environment theme.



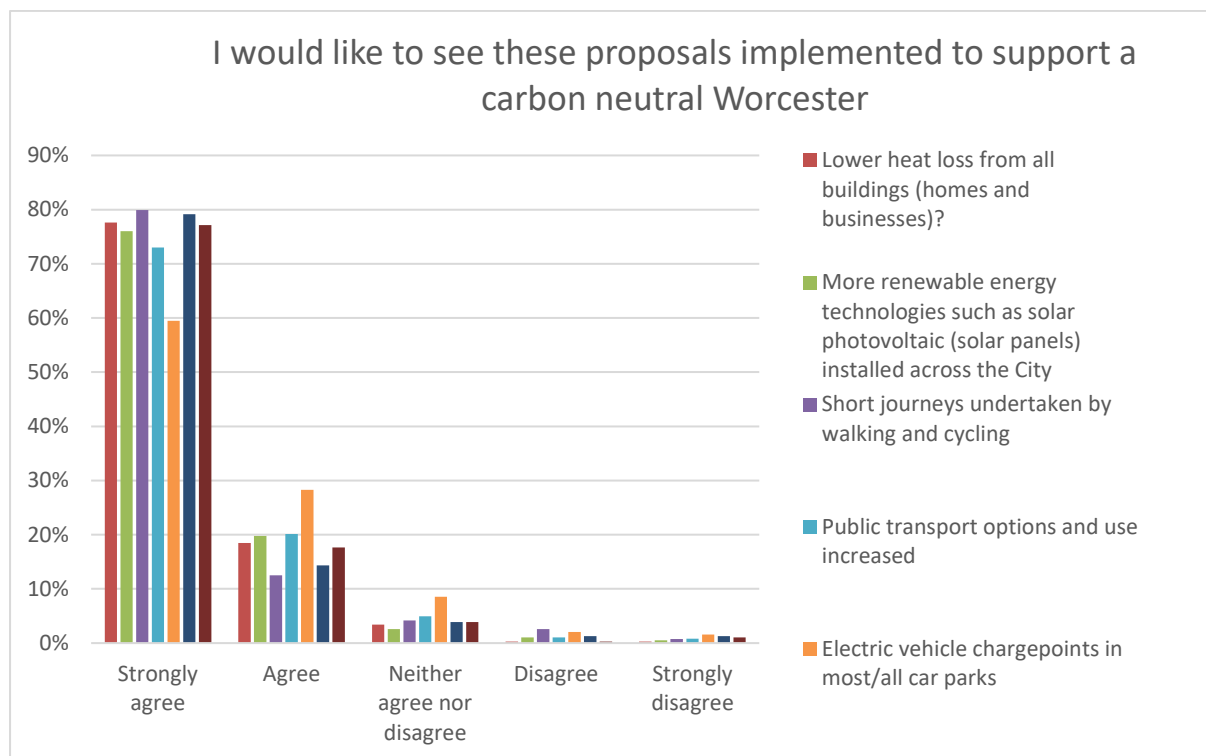
Carbon Neutral City Council



The overall level of support for the proposals in this theme is very high. However, differences between how much people agree with each proposal can be seen.

Taking the environment into account in all decisions receives the highest support. Replace existing vehicles with electric alternatives receives the lowest support and has the most people who are neutral on this. Staff training on environmental sustainability also receives less support than other proposals.

Carbon Neutral Worcester



Receiving the most support is for short journeys to be undertaken by walking and cycling. All the proposals received strong support from over 70% of people, apart from the proposal to have electric vehicle chargepoints in most or all car parks. Looking at the comments, it is likely this is due to people’s concerns around how sustainable electric vehicles are, when the materials and extraction of the necessary chemicals for the batteries is taken into account. Only a handful of people disagreed with any of the proposals put forward.

Carbon Neutral City and Carbon Neutral Council

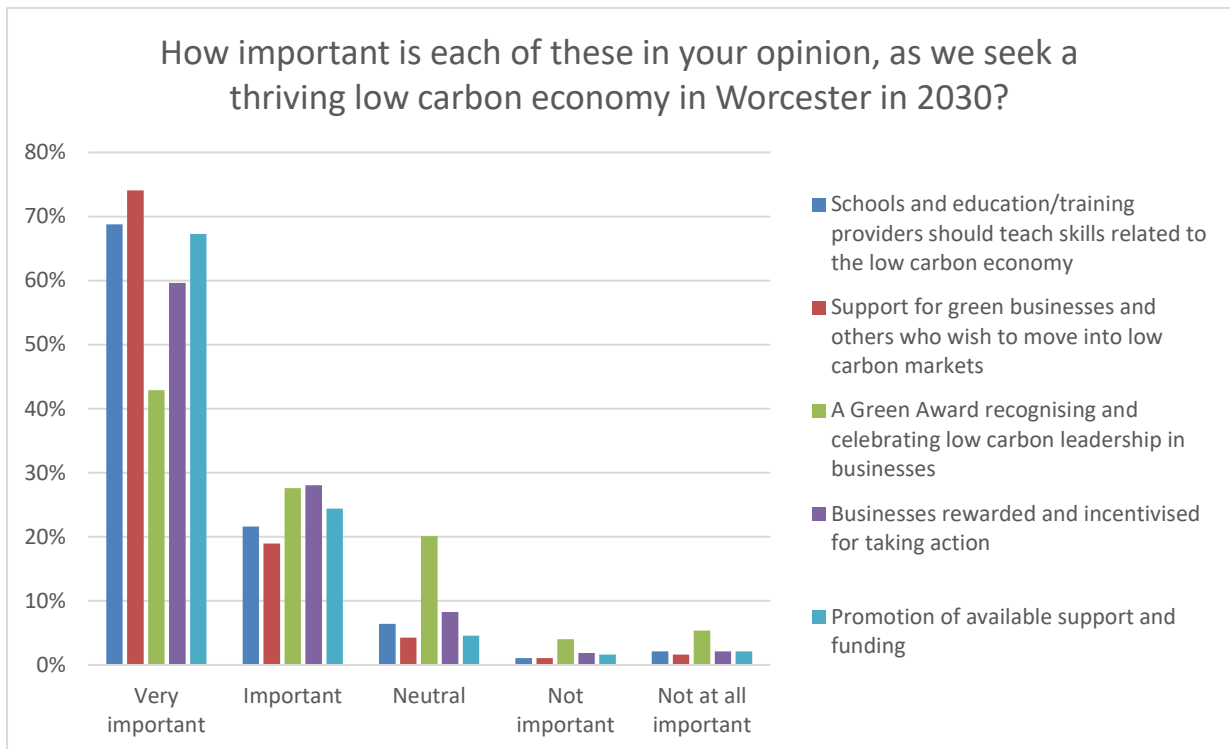
The analysis of the additional ideas and suggestions submitted in the ‘free text’ boxes for these two questions is presented together, as the answers to the questions crossed over. The majority of answers to the first question, on carbon neutral council, provided ideas and suggestions for carbon reduction in the city.

In total for the two questions there were over 300 suggestions. The most common suggestion, from 70 people, was improvements to the city’s walking and cycling infrastructure. This was significantly the most common suggestion given with a number of different aspects mentioned – from the need for safer cycle routes and lanes, to the need for more secure cycle parking, to the need for a bike hire scheme. This matches with the desire expressed through the question above, with the highest percentage of people in favour of measures to encourage short journeys to be undertaken by walking and cycling.

The next most common suggestion had 16 mentions, which was to encourage and facilitate remote working and video conferencing. This was specific to the City Council and for the wider city too.

14 people asked for public transport improvements, with transport at different times suited to commuters, cheaper and more flexible services. A further 13 people mentioned the need for active travel incentives. The same number of people called for more electric vehicles – across City Council fleet, buses and taxis, and seven people asked for electric vehicle chargepoints for residents to use. 11 people called for more tree planting, ten for energy efficiency measures in homes and businesses. Smaller numbers wanted to see promotion of vegetarian or vegan diets for the environmental benefits, and six people suggested education for sustainability. Five people called for a return of the park and ride facility and four said Council vehicles should only be replaced at the end of their lives, even if an electric alternative is available sooner.

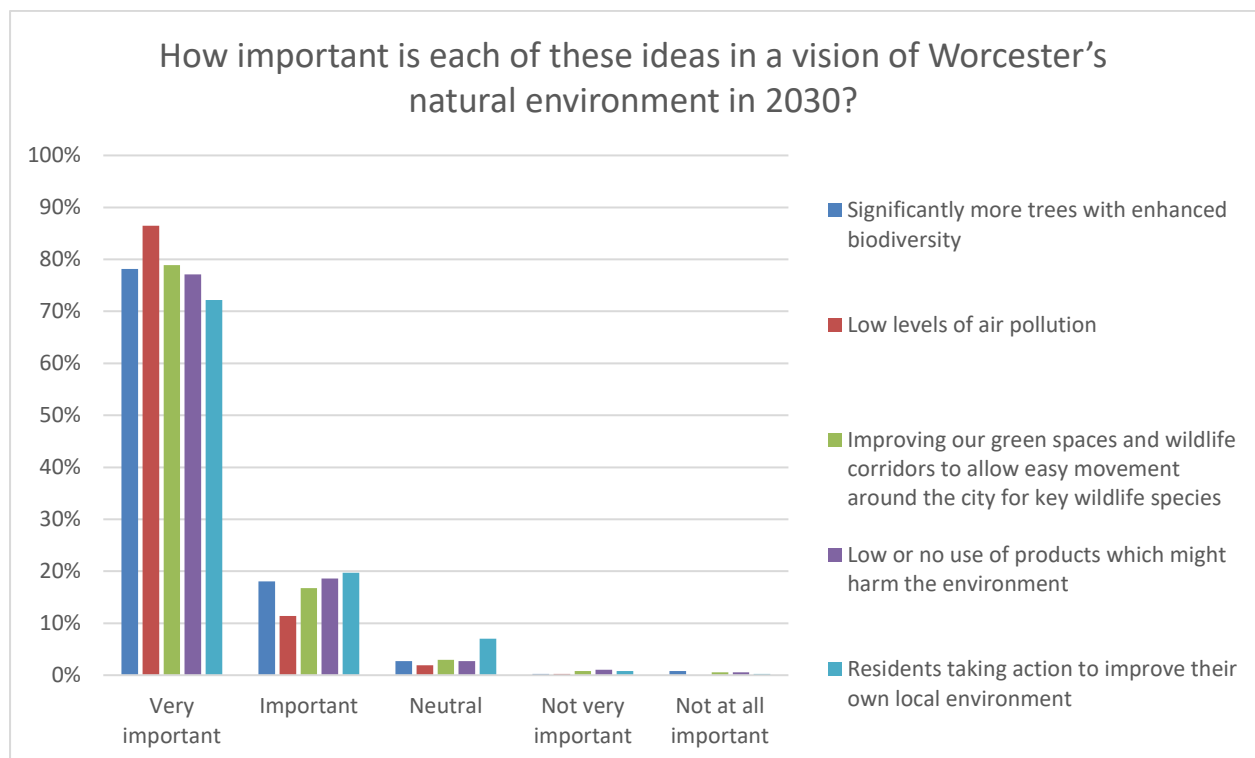
Sustainable Economy



Again mixed results with regard to people’s support for the proposals put forward. Gaining most support was the suggestion that there should be support provided to green businesses and those wishing to move into low carbon markets. Least supported was the suggestion of a Green Award, with 20% ‘neutral’ on this suggestion. It was suggested in the business webinar that this is something already offered regionally and nationally, and it would be better to take part in an existing scheme. Only 60% of people felt it was very important that businesses should be incentivised and rewarded for taking action and 10% were neutral or disagreed with this suggestion. Nearly 70% of people felt that it was very important that education providers should be teaching skills relating to the low carbon economy, and generally education on sustainability was mentioned many times in the free text suggestions.

This theme had the greatest mix of responses to the free text question with many suggestions only being mentioned once or twice. Overall there were lots of good ideas for how we can support and encourage low carbon businesses and encourage all businesses to take action on their own environmental impact. Procurement taking account of their environmental impact of the business or contract was the most popular suggestion, after cycle infrastructure. People were supportive of awards and incentives, with business rates incentives for good environmental behaviour mentioned four times, although two people felt it was better to work together than competitively for awards. Support for the development and adoption of low carbon technology was mentioned a few times, along with apprenticeships for low carbon skills.

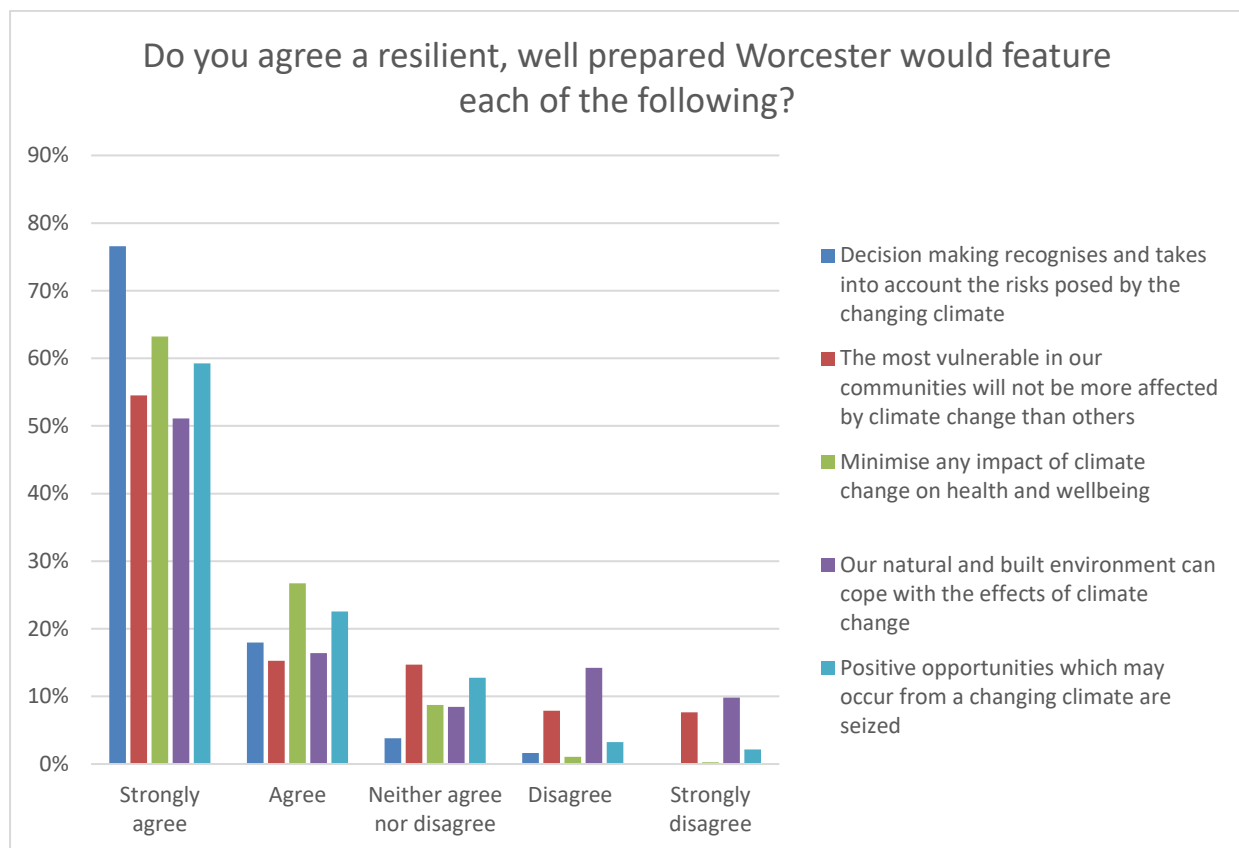
Natural Environment



As the theme which gained the most overall support from the survey, and also being of great interest during the residents webinar in particular, it is clear that the local environment around people is of great importance to them. All proposals here received a high level of support with very few people feeling the proposals were not important. Interestingly air pollution received the most responses as a proposal that is 'very important' to see action on, with over 85% of people giving this answer.

Many ideas and suggestions were received for this theme in the free text question, many only mentioned by one person but over 25 mentioned by two or more people. The most common suggestion was changes to our planning policies to ensure protection of green open space, the greenbelt and to take the environment into account. Next was tree planting, with a preference shown by some people for fruit and nut trees, others 'diverse' tree planting. The next most popular suggestion with 15 mentions was the 'rewilding of road verges' as it was often described – allowing wildflowers to grow rather than mowing road verges, with yet more people calling for wildflower meadows in other locations. Six people want to see further education on the natural environment and its protection. A pesticide ban, bird and bat boxes and a reduction in light pollution through reducing street lighting were all also supported.

Preparing for climate change



Ensuring that the Council’s decision making processes recognise and take into account the risks of a changing climate received strong support, with over 75% of people saying this was very important and a further 18% saying this was important. Less well supported was the suggestion that we should act to ensure that vulnerable groups are not more affected than others, along with the proposal to ensure that our natural and built environment can cope with climate change. More investigation would be needed here to understand fully people’s answers, but it may be that people feel this proposals are less realistic / possible than others given.

The highest number of comments received for this theme was a call for us to stop building on flood plains, and to ensure that our planning policy is fit for climate adaptation, ensuring no new impermeable surfaces and renewables built in as standard. The need for more flood defences was the third most common suggestion, followed by cycle infrastructure, tree planting and dredging of the river and canal. Other suggestions included green corridors for wildlife, free water fountains and grow your own food schemes. One or two residents wanted to more information on what they can do to help with better information and community workshops, including support for our more vulnerable residents. One or two residents mentioned this work should be embedded in the Council with all councillors involved.

Resource Efficiency

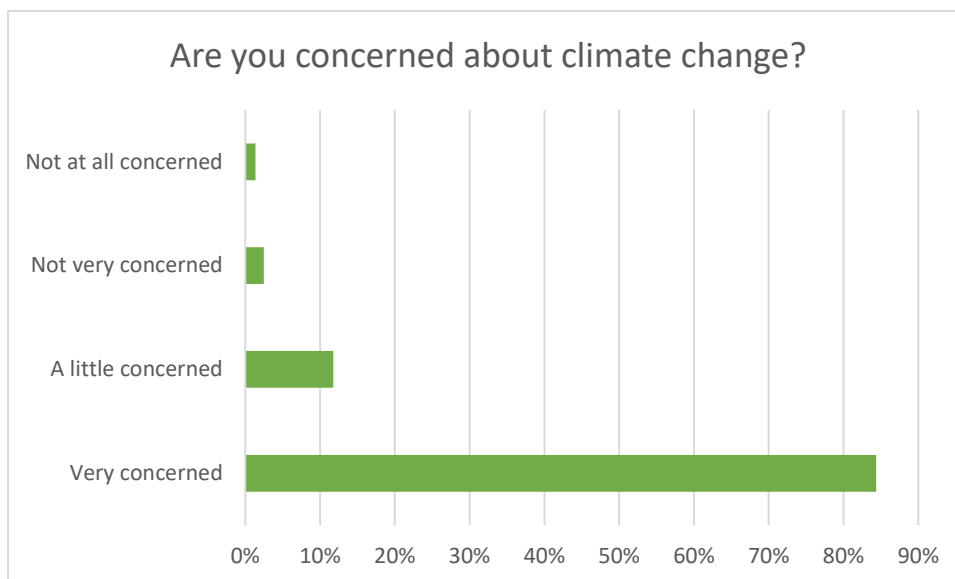


The proposal least well supported was the suggestion that less waste should be collected by the Council. This may be a misunderstanding of the meaning behind this, which was that more use of reusables, composting and improved packaging would mean less waste generated, to be collected. Some of the comments point to a feeling this meant the Council would cut back on collecting certain items or restrict people’s bin sizes.

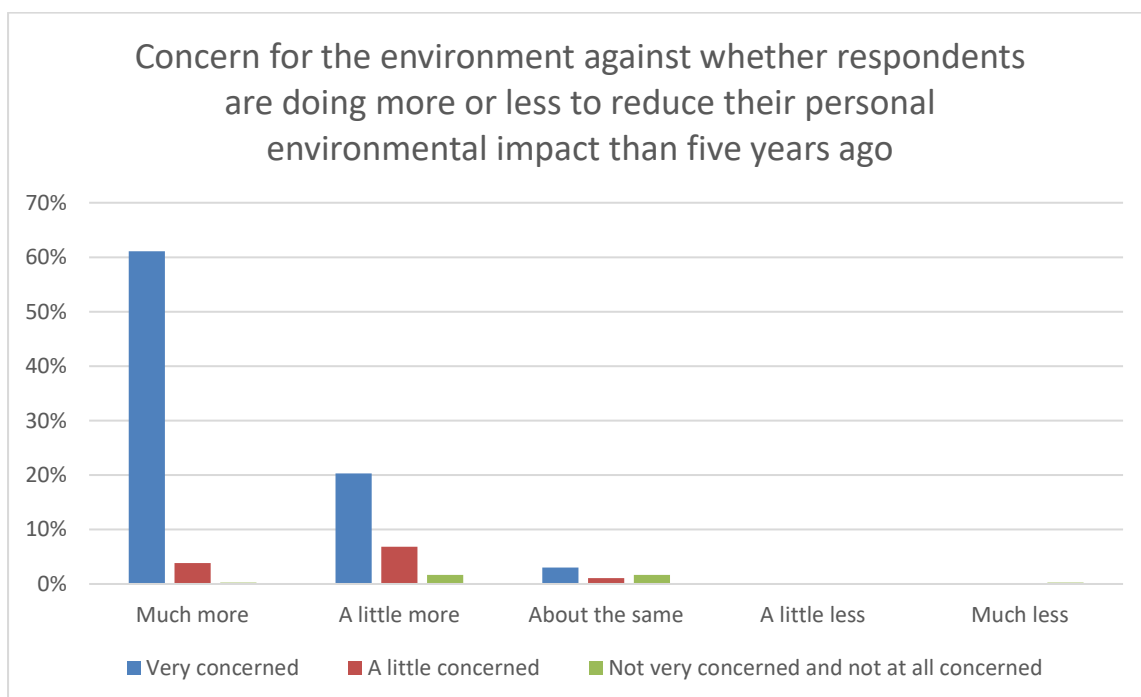
All the other proposals received broadly the same support. Very few disagreed with any of the proposals.

The highest number of comments for this theme asked for food waste collections from the kerbside (26 people). A further 16 people mentioned support for and promotion of the zero waste shop, repair café, Worcester Resource Exchange and the reuse areas at the HRCs. The next highest suggestion was a request for improved information and guidance on what can and can’t be recycled, and recycling statistics to be published. Close behind this suggestion with 8 people was a request for improved education on recycling, littering, food waste and composting. 7 people want to see an increase in the types of materials collected for recycling in kerbside collections, to include for example electrical items, batteries etc. Others want to see enforcement against littering and flytipping, a reduction in food waste through partnerships with supermarkets and restaurants and a campaign aimed at food waste reduction from households. Single use plastics should be banned and businesses incentivised (possibly with business rates) to move away from disposable packaging. A number of people wanted to see community composting facilities, recycling credits and promotion of resource/food exchange and distribution between households and businesses. Two people wanted to see refill options in supermarkets.

General questions

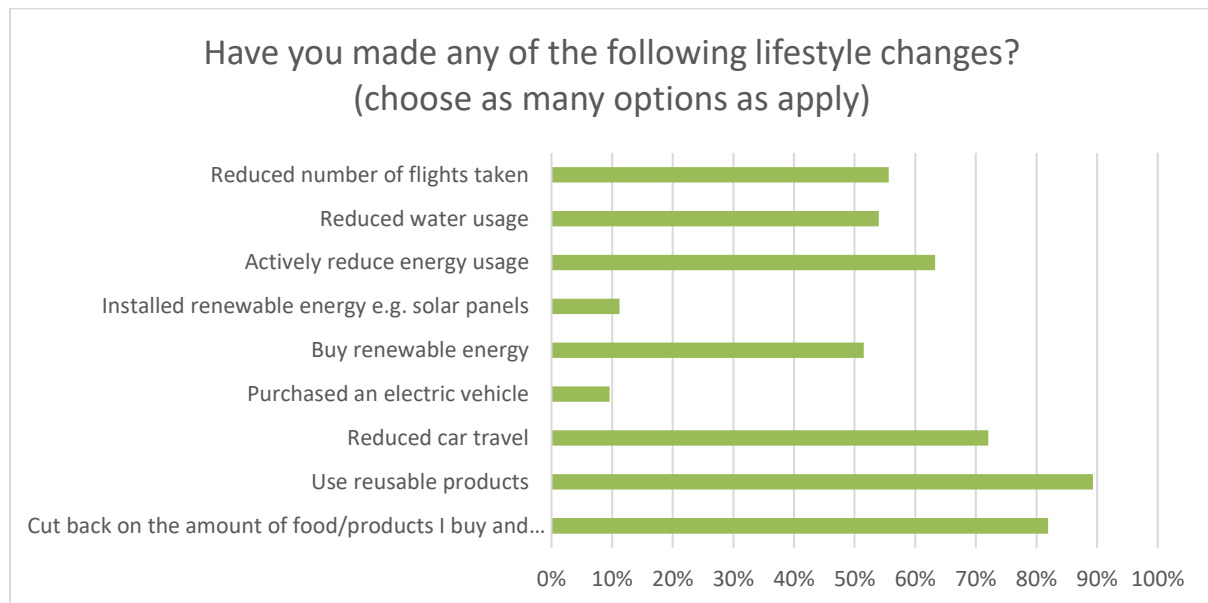


Overwhelming majority of people responding are feeling very concerned about climate change.

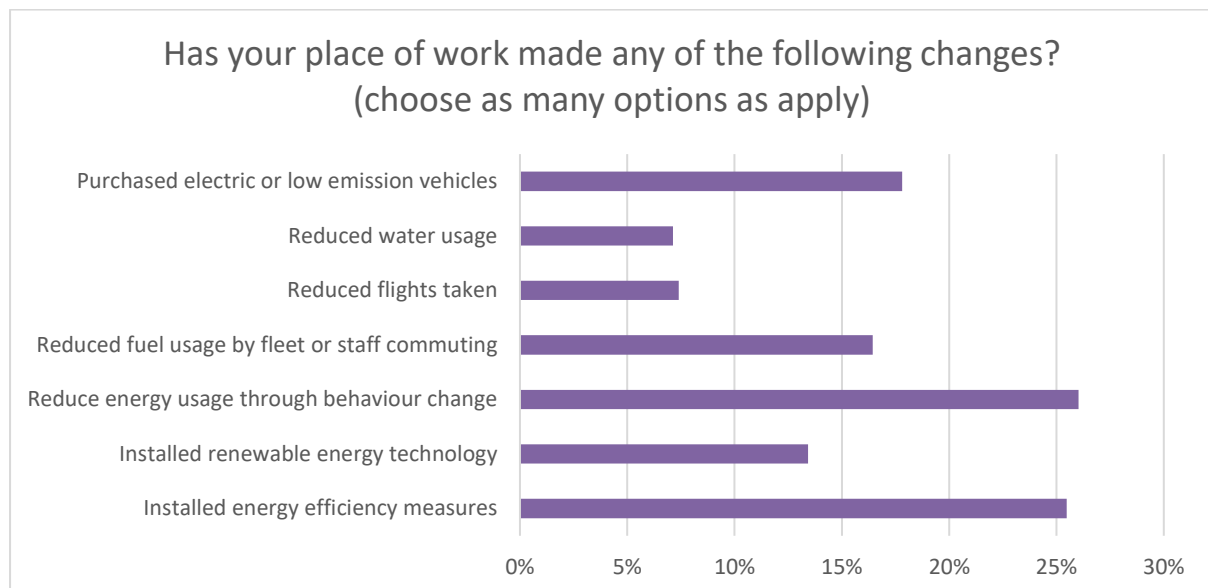


The graph above maps the responses to two questions together. It is interesting that of the people who said they were very concerned about climate change, 20% are only doing a little more to reduce their environmental impact than they were five years ago. This points to a potential for education and campaigns to help people understand what more they could be doing and the impact that could have. It is good that of the few people who said they were not very concerned or not at all concerned (grouped due to very small numbers), none of these people are doing less to help than the environment than before, and some are doing more. This may be because whilst they are not concerned about

climate change, they are concerned about other issues and pressures on our environment.

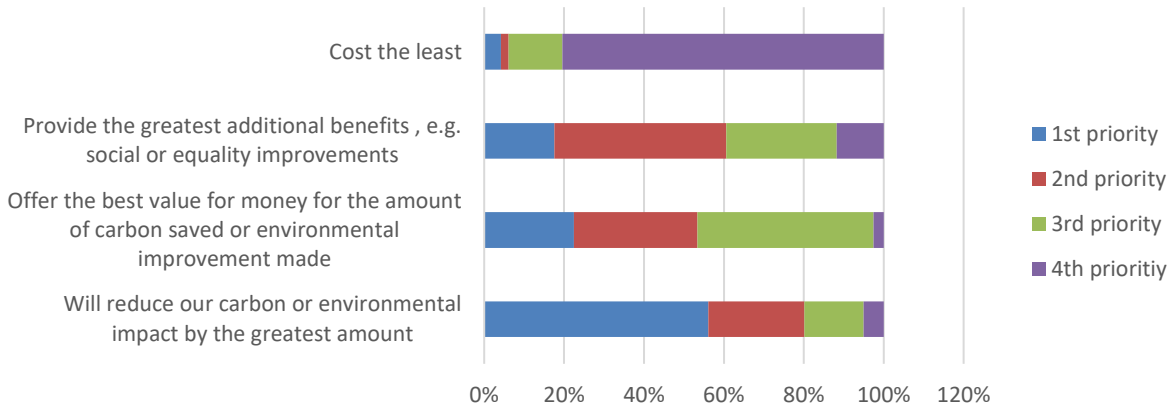


Nearly 90% of people are using reusable products which is very positive, and over 80% of people have cut down on what they buy and waste. As expected, few people have purchased solar PV or an electric vehicle. The number of people who have done these things suggests an environmentally-aware audience responding to the survey.



The responses here really highlight the work which can be done with local businesses, as only just over 25% businesses had done the most common actions, according to the knowledge of their employees. It was surprising how many have purchased electric vehicles however, this was higher than might have been expected.

How do you think we should prioritise our actions? Your preferred option should go first or be ranked as number one.
 We should focus on actions that:



Respondents most want the Council to prioritise actions according to what will reduce our carbon and environmental impact by the greatest amount. Looking at people’s first and second priority together suggests that the next criteria to consider when prioritising is actions which will produce the greatest additional benefits.

Summary of face to face consultation

Three days of consultation were held outside the Guildhall on 18th, 19th and 22nd September. Alongside a display of the materials prepared summarising the draft strategy, a simple question was asked as a conversation starter, getting people passing to think about the actions and behaviours to help the environment they have already taken. All of the options were proposals that will be encouraged through the strategy. This led into conversations about where they want the City Council to prioritise our time and resources.

Several people came specifically to the exhibition knowing we would be there and looking to speak to us and give their ideas, comments and suggestions of actions they would like to see implemented. Other people had questions they wanted answering such as how to access the Government's new Green Homes Grant vouchers, where their recycling goes or how young people can best engage with the environment.

It was felt that the face to face consultation met its objectives of reaching a different demographic of people than had been reached through the online consultation and also to provide people who had already engaged with a opportunity to speak to us face to face.

A good number of topics and suggestions were repeated many times over the three days.

The topics which were raised repeatedly were:

- The need for more recycling bins in the city centre, especially in the High Street and along particular sections of the canal towpath.
- Kerbside recycling collections, including the need to improve the information around where the recycling goes, what can be collected and extending the current provision to include electrical items, tin foil and food waste. The need for provision for residents without vehicles to recycle items that would be recycled normally at an HRC was mentioned by one resident.
- The recent decision publicised in the media over the last week by the County Council to extend the hours when cycling is banned in the main 'pedestrian' areas of the city centre. Numerous people felt strongly about this, feeling it went against efforts to encourage and support cycling and discouraged them from cycling into the city when their bike could not be ridden close to the shops.
- The need for a significant increase in secure cycle parking in the city centre and outside the Museum and Art Gallery, to provide for the MAG and also the shops and offices opposite.
- The need for secure cycle parking at community facilities, those run by the Council / Council providers (such as WCT) and those run by others

(such as Lower Wick Swimming Pool). One idea was to provide grants and advice to organisations to install cycle parking.

- The need for improvements to encourage people to cycle more and ensure they are, and feel safe whilst cycling

Other comments and requests included:

- The need to be realistic regarding the overall targets for carbon neutrality
- Planning policies to ensure new developments are 'hedgehog friendly' and that ample cycle parking provision is allowed
- More trees to be planted (but not trees which will increase pollen levels)
- Enforcement against idling vehicles, especially outside of schools and of taxis and buses idling
- 20mph zones in all residential areas
- School Streets (temporary closure of streets around schools at drop off/pick up times)
- Facilitation of community energy projects
- Pesticide free council
- Communications to encourage the use of reusable masks and the responsible disposal of single use masks where these have been used
- More electric vehicle chargepoints required
- Reduction in the use of disposable coffee cups particularly in areas where the City Council has influence such as Perdiswell Leisure Centre café
- The importance of environmental education of young people
- The importance of opportunities for people to connect with nature
- Use of empty shops as temporary bike storage facilities