



Report to: Environment Committee, 7th June 2022

Report of: Deputy Director – Corporate Policy and Strategy

Subject: PROGRESS UPDATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee notes the content of this report.

2. Background

2.1 Following the declaration of the climate emergency in July 2019, the Environmental Sustainability Strategy for the City of Worcester was approved by this Committee in October 2020.

2.2 This Committee then approved the Action Plan for the first phase of delivery of the strategy in March 2021.

2.3 In order to ensure effective governance of the strategy and associated action plan, it was agreed that this committee would receive progress reports on the delivery of the daction plan twice yearly.

2.4 This is the second of these reports.

3. Overall Progress

3.1 Progress continues to be made in a number of key areas set out within the Action Plan. This section of the report identifies some of the highlights, with more detailed coverage later in the report.

3.2 The introduction of nine new EV charge points at St. Martin's Gate car park in September 2021 has saved over 9.3 tons of CO2 to date. Plans to invest a further £200K in charging points in other City Council car parks are now progressing.

3.3 Over 160 homes, occupied by residents with a household income of £30,000 or less, will have received energy efficiency improvements by the end of August 2022. The improvements are valued at approximately £10,000 per property.

It is estimated that this will reduce CO2 emissions in Worcester by approximately 67.62 tonnes per annum (at 0.42 tonnes per property).

3.3 An ebike trial scheme for local businesses launched in Spring 2022, in partnership with the University of Worcester. Following training, bikes have become the main method for the civil enforcement team to move around the city. Further ebikes will be available for other staff to use by late summer.

This scheme was funded through an £18,000 grant secured by the City Council from the Local Government Association.

- 3.5 Over the last six months 22 Worcester organisations, including nine schools, have received an Environmental Community Grant of up to £1,000 from the City Council. This has helped to fund the creation of water habitats, fruit and vegetable patches, bird and bat boxes and bug hotels, and many other initiatives which will benefit the environment.
- 3.6 The City Council supported the planting of a further 1,500 trees at Aconbury Orchard and 400 trees at Perdiswell Park over the winter (2021-22).
- 3.7 Details for each action within the plan are provided in the performance report at Appendix 1, and the following sections of this report provide further commentary on a theme by theme basis.

4 **Carbon Neutral City Council**

Emissions from buildings

- 4.1 There has been a 7.4% decrease in the City Council's CO₂ emissions from the heating of buildings in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21. This may be in part due to the second lockdown. Heating related carbon emissions in the last financial year were 554.72tCO₂e.
- 4.2 The City Council uses green zero-emission rated electricity across all of its sites, meaning that it has recorded no emissions from electricity usage (using market based emission factors) for the last two consecutive years (2021-2 and 2020-1).
- 4.3 The Council's overall carbon footprint for 2021-2, including emissions from buildings, transport and facilities run by third parties such as Freedom Leisure, is currently being calculated and will be reported to the Committee in the Autumn.
- 4.4 Officers are investigating the potential to install more solar panels on the roof of St. Martin's Gate car park. The current panels are reducing the City Council's carbon footprint by approximately 23,368 kg per year. Since their introduction in late March 2019, the panels have produced 126,976 units of electricity. This equates to a £15,237.12 reduction (at a rate of 12p per unit) to the City Council's energy bills.
- 4.5 An independent assessment from the European Development funded Public Energy Efficiency Programme has highlighted the very limited scope to install solar panels at the Guildhall, Museum and Art Gallery and Commandery, due to the buildings' age and listed status. Officers are currently investigating options for a short and long term strategy to decarbonise the Council's major buildings.
- 4.6 Property Services have undertaken a replacement programme for inefficient lighting over the past two years across all Council-owned sites, installing LED lighting and PIR controls where applicable.

5. **Emissions from transport**

- 5.1 The Energy Savings Trust is currently undertaking a free assessment of the City Council's use of vehicles - including its refuse fleet, street cleaning and maintenance

vehicles and business travel) - with a view to further reduction of the City Council's CO2 emissions.

- 5.2 Officers will review any options and recommendations that are presented, and bring an appropriate report to this Committee in due course.
- 5.3 The Civil Enforcement team are now using ebikes to travel around the city, following bespoke training delivered by Bikeability Worcestershire.
- 5.4 The team has reported high levels of satisfaction with the ebikes citing speed, zero emissions, ease of use and agility as the key benefits. Officers can now travel at greater speed to hotspots where parking issues have been reported. The team has also created a rota of visits to Worcester schools where parking is an issue, which are undertaken by bike.
- 5.6 Officers are now planning to acquire more ebikes and make them available to all staff via an online booking system. This is expected to go 'live' in the summer.
- 5.7 In December the Personnel and General Purposes Committee approved a £50,000 investment in bike storage facilities at the Guildhall, Crematorium, Six Ways Depot and St Martin's Gate car park. Construction of the new facilities is currently in preparation and is expected to be completed by Autumn 2022.
- 5.8 The City Council currently offers employees the opportunity to make tax and NI savings against the cost of a new bike and accessories. HR will make a proposal to introduce a similar offer for staff who wish to buy an electric vehicle in the second half of the year.
- 5.9 Members are reminded that the Council continues to offer a bicycle mileage allowance to staff and Councillors for travel on Council business.

6. Embedding sustainability in all Council work

To ensure that wider consideration is given to the impact the Council's work has on the environment, the following clauses will be included in the implications section of all Council committee reports from July 2022 onwards:

Carbon Management

Evaluate what impact the proposed activity will have on the City's carbon emissions and set out any steps to mitigate this. If there are no significant effects on carbon emissions or if these are not known, then say so.

Biodiversity

Explain what impact the proposed activity will have on wildlife and the natural environment, and what actions will be taken to mitigate any impact.

7. Carbon Neutral Worcester

7.1 Reducing emissions from homes

The Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme (GHG LADS) is a multi-phase programme being delivered as a corporate project within the City Council.

The aim of the scheme is to improve energy efficiency within homes occupied by people on low incomes (less than £30,000 or on qualifying benefits).

- 7.2 The scheme will reduce carbon emissions and also decrease the number of Worcester households suffering with fuel poverty.
- 7.3 A total of 161 Worcester properties have already been or will have received energy efficiency improvements by 31 August 2022, as a result of this programme. It is estimated that this will reduce CO2 emissions in Worcester by approximately 67.62 tonnes per annum (at 0.42 tonnes per property).
- 7.4 There are various phases to the scheme:

Phase 1A of the project has now been completed. Seven properties received external wall insulation, with a total investment of £70,364. This was an average spend of £10,052 per property.

Phase 1B has been extended until 31st August 2022 in agreement with BEIS. 100 Platform homes are being upgraded, in addition to 26 owner occupied homes. Ninety of the social housing properties are being retrofitted with solar PV, as well as loft insulation and cavity wall insulation where required. In addition, ten solid wall properties will be insulated. The owner-occupied properties will be upgraded with solid wall insulation, cavity wall insulation and loft insulation. Solar PV will also be installed on 10 properties.

It is anticipated that approximately £640,000 of energy efficiency improvements will have been delivered through this phase of the scheme by the end of August 2022.

- 7.5 **Phase 2** of the scheme is also underway, which offers loft and cavity wall insulation, energy efficient storage heaters, solar PV and other smaller measures, such as boiler controls and low energy lighting.

The City Council received nearly 200 expressions of interest in this scheme through Act On Energy; however this resulted in only 28 eligible applications. The conversion was much lower than anticipated. Installations commenced in April at four properties, with a further seven booked in at the start of May.

- 7.6 **Phase 3** of the LADS scheme is in preparation, in addition to the new Home Upgrade Scheme (HUG). This phase will focus properties with no gas connection. The City Council has received an allocation of just under £1 million between the two schemes. The deadline for completing installations for both schemes is 31st March 2023.

The delivery proposal has been submitted to the Midlands Net Zero Hub. Measures will include solid wall insulation (approximately 30%) alongside lower cost measures, such as loft and cavity wall insulation.

- 7.7 Increased material costs and increased demand nationally for contractors continues to pose a risk to all phases of the scheme.

8. Active Travel

- 8.1 The City Council's policy and resources committee approved Towns Fund investment proposals in March 2022 to create more than seven miles of new and upgraded walking and cycling routes, the multi-million-pound Kepax Bridge across the River Severn from Gheluvelt Park, new secure cycle parking and a proposed bike hire scheme. The plan has now been sent to the Department for Levelling Up for approval.
- 8.2 This Spring the City Council launched an e-bike trial scheme for local businesses, in partnership with the University of Worcester. The pilot, which was supported by an £18,000 grant from the Local Government Association and has now concluded, aimed to establish the benefits and barriers which need to be overcome to encourage more businesses to invest in ebikes.
- 8.3 The Council has also agreed to create a new post to focus on promoting active travel.

9. Zero emission vehicle charging in car parks

- 9.1 Recent research from Midlands Connect estimates that Worcestershire could have 130,004 electric vehicles on its roads by 2030 – a 2,573 increase on today. The report suggests that approximately 2,730 new public charging points will be needed across the county to support the shift.
- 9.2 Between the installation of nine EV charge points in St. Martins Gate car park in September 2021 and 1 May 2022, 180 individual drivers have used the charge points for 732 sessions. By fuelling vehicles with green tariff electricity as opposed to petrol or diesel, the charge points at St. Martin's Gate have so far saved 9.3 tons of CO2 – the equivalent of planting 56 trees.
- 9.3 Following agreement by P&R Committee to allocate a further £200K to install more electric charging points in City Council car parks, officers will bring recommendations to the Environment Committee in the second half of the year.
- 9.4 Key factors to consider will be the charge points' proximity to properties with no off-road parking; connectivity to the power supply and avoidance of areas which are prone to flooding.
- 9.5 Officers will also work in partnership with the Energy Savings Trust and Worcestershire County Council to create an EV charging term strategy for Worcester. This will address both the short and long term challenges which need to be overcome to ensure the city is equipped to meet the future needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

10. Support for car clubs for residents in Worcester

- 10.1 Following a motion to Council on 30 November 2021, members agreed "That the Council request the Corporate Director - Operations, Homes, and Communities in conjunction with the Environment Committee to update the Environmental Sustainability Action Plan to include an action with the objective to encourage and support the introduction of car clubs in Worcester. This will be incorporated into the action plan update due to be considered by this committee in the Autumn".

- 10.2 Officers have met with local representatives from Enterprise Cars, who are keen to set up car clubs across Worcester. They have indicated that the position of cars would need to be agreed on a case by case basis.
- 10.3 Factors to be taken into account will include the level of anticipated demand from residents in particular Worcester locations; whether an on-street parking space would give the car greater visibility, and the proximity of Council-run car parks to the homes of residents who want to access the cars.
- 10.4 There has been a strong level of interest to set up a car club in the Arboretum. Officers have approached two venues in the area; Enterprise has agreed both would be viable locations for a car club vehicle. If agreement is reached, Enterprise has indicated that a car could be made available within a matter of weeks.
- 10.5 Once the first vehicle has been successfully established, officers will work with Enterprise to identify further locations across the city for club cars.

11. Support for community environmental projects

- 11.1 In July 2021, this Committee approved an allocation of £20,000 to launch an Environmental Community Grants scheme. This scheme attracted successful applications from 22 local organisations – including nine schools, the RSPB, Worcester Environmental Group and St. Paul’s Hostel for the Homeless.
- 11.2 The funding supported the installation of bird and bat boxes, hedgehog houses and insect hotels; the creation of gardens where residents of all ages could learn to grow and cook fruit and vegetables; tree planting and facilities to boost recycling.

Following the success of the scheme, the budget has been exhausted.

12. Sustainable Economy

- 12.1 Funding opportunities are being explored in order to assist with the delivery a new employment and skills strategy for the City Council. The authority is and will continue to look for funding from a range of sources to support the green agenda, which could include UKSPF and other new funding regimes.
- 12.2 The Town Investment Plan’s Community Skills & Enterprise project includes a new "Building Block 2" construction training centre at Dines Green that will include training in the installation of green / low carbon technology.

13. Natural Environment

The City Council’s biodiversity action programme underpins all work in this area.

- 13.1 The authority has supported the planting of well over 10,000 trees in Worcester over the last five years. 1,500 saplings were planted at the Aconbury Orchard Nature Reserve this winter, in partnership with the Worcester Environmental Group (WEG) and Nunnery Wood High School eco club. A further 400 trees were planted at Perdiswell Park as part of the City’s Charter 400 celebrations.

1,000 trees will be planted at Perdiswell Park in winter 2022/23, extending the existing area of woodland. Almost five hectares of wildflower meadow are currently being created at the site in a bid to boost bird, bat and bee numbers.

- 13.2 The City Council has reduced the frequency of grass cutting on verges around Worcester and has invested £48,000 in new 'cut and collect' mowing equipment, allowing for the growth of more wildflowers.
- 13.3 The authority is giving advice on how to boost biodiversity on Worcester's allotment site, via a newly launched quarterly newsletter for allotment tenants.
- 13.4 The City Council works in close partnership with local organisations including the Worcester Environmental Group (WEG) and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. The authority has committed resources to support the creation of the 'Wild About Worcester Way' - a 12-mile walking route around the city, proposed by WEG.

Members of the Environmental Operations team are working with WEG and the Trust to enhance biodiversity and improve access where required along the route.

- 13.5 The City Council also works in partnership with the RSPB. The Malvern and Worcester branch of the charity has installed bird boxes at a number of Council-run sites over the last 12 months, including Astwood Cemetery, Cromwell Crescent Park and Laugherne Brook Nature Reserve. Volunteers have provided training and give regular advice to members of the Environmental Operations team.

14. Preparing for climate change

- 14.1 The Environment Agency is working in partnership with Worcestershire County Council to reduce the risk of flooding to 26 properties in the Lower Wick area of Worcester. Toronto Close is situated near the River Teme and Laugherne Brook and has a history of flooding, most recently in February 2020 when 16 houses were flooded.
- 14.2 Flood Re, a joint initiative between the Government and insurers, organised a 'Floodmobile' visit to Worcester on 15 March 2022, showcasing property protection measures against flooding and highlighting the need for these. Two separate sessions were run at Copenhagen Street and Gheluveld Park.

15. Resource Efficiency

- 15.1 The City Council implements the county-wide social media campaign encouraging recycling, reduction of food waste, re-using items and zero waste. The campaign coincides with times when a greater volume of food and products are purchased, such as Christmas and Easter. Nationwide campaigns such as national Recycling Week and Compost Awareness Week are also supported.

16. Single use plastics elimination

- 16.1 On 30 November 2021 a motion was presented to the Council to encourage takeaway food businesses in Worcester to reduce their reliance on plastic.
- 16.2 This follows a Government consultation launched in the same month to ban single-use plastic cutlery, plates and polystyrene cups.
- 16.3 Officers met with representatives of the local campaign group Plastic Free Worcester with a view to working together to encourage change. The group indicated that it was already affiliated to the national Plastic Free Champion scheme, originally created by campaign group Surfers Against Sewage.

- 16.4 When businesses sign up at <https://plasticfree.org.uk/get-involved/business/#> they can access a free toolkit, with a practical step by step guide to eliminating single use plastic. Once demonstratable progress has been made, the business is sent a Plastic Free Champion certificate which can be displayed on their premises.
- 16.5 A joint publicity campaign was developed to highlight Government proposals and to encourage more Worcester businesses to become Plastic Free Champions.

This resulted in coverage in the Worcester News:

<https://www.worcesternews.co.uk/news/19967032.food-businesses-urged-cut-single-use-plastic/>

<https://www.worcesternews.co.uk/news/20029818.plastic-free-worcester-make-food-business-eco-friendly/>

and Worcester Observer: <https://worcesterobserver.co.uk/news/worcesters-cafes-takeaways-and-restaurants-encouraged-to-become-plastic-free/>

The campaign was also promoted through the City Council's social media accounts and at <https://www.facebook.com/plasticfreeworcester>

- 16.6 To date 39 businesses in Worcester have signed up to be Plastic Free Champions. The City Council will now work with Worcestershire Regulatory Services to further promote proposed Government action and the Plastic Free Champion scheme.

17. Engagement

- 17.1 The City Council plans to host an Environment Summit at the Guildhall on Friday 30 September. Approximately 100 representatives from local businesses, community groups, organisations and educational settings will be invited.
- 17.2 The event will focus on five priorities identified in the environmental sustainability action plan: improving Worcester's infrastructure for EVs; decarbonising homes and buildings; active travel; boosting biodiversity and reducing waste.
- 17.3 The event will also be used to gauge opinion and support for setting up a new Environmental Forum, with sub-groups to ensure progress in these areas continues.

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Background Papers: Appendix 1: Report from Pentana