

Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report and Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	22 May 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Report Author:	Jenny Graham
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4649

1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- (a) present the Annual Progress Report on the Environment Strategy covering the fourth year of the delivery of the Strategy from July 2023 to July 2024, and;
- (b) to propose for approval the Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh which aims to focus activity on meeting the target of net zero emissions by 2030 for the Council

2 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Executive:

- (a) note the Annual Progress Report on the Environment Strategy (as included in Appendix C) and agree its publication on the Council's website, and;
- (b) approve the Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh (as included in Appendix D) and agree its publication on the Council's website including the associated Delivery Plan (Appendix E) and Carbon Definitions Report (Appendix F).

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are no direct funding implications as a result of this report. Projects and actions already underway are funded using existing approved budgets. Teams across the Council use the budget setting process to plan for future programmes and secure funding for them. It has been made clear where

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	projects that are not yet funded have been included in the Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh for illustrative purposes. Before these projects progress any further (if considered appropriate) business cases and funding bids would be required along with formal budget approval.			
Human Resource:	There are no direct HR implications as a result of this report.			
Legal:	There are no direct Legal implications as a result of this report.			
Risk Management:	A high-level risk register has been developed for the Environment Strategy. This is kept up to date and the Environment Delivery Project Board is used to keep it under review.			
Property:	There are no direct property implications as a result of this report. Whilst there are projects discussed or indicated in the Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh that impact on the Council's property portfolio, these are projects that are already approved or are being used as illustrative only and nothing new is being proposed through this report.			
Policy:	This annual report and the strategy refresh aim to demonstrate how the Environment Strategy is being delivered and will continue to be delivered and will play a part in informing and shaping relevant Council policies and plans across the organisation. In particular this year we are reporting the development of a Sustainability Assessment Tool which will assist in increasing the influence and understanding of the Environment Strategy and how the Council can address the climate and ecological emergencies as well as other important health and wellbeing outcomes through its policies, plans and events.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				

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A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		No impact directly. Across the Delivery Plan on a project by project basis, equalities should be considered through the PMM process to ensure there are no negative impacts.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		No impact directly. Across the Delivery Plan this will need to be dealt with on a project by project basis through the PMM process to ensure delivery does not have a negative impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics.
Environmental Impact:	X			<p>The purpose of the annual report is to demonstrate the delivery of the Environment Strategy which seeks to have a positive impact on the environment in numerous ways. The Strategy Refresh serves to focus the work of the Council in order to achieve its primary target of achieving net zero by 2030 for Council activities. The ecological emergency declared in October 2023 adds to the published Environment Strategy as an additional focus for positive environmental impacts.</p> <p>As the projects within the Delivery Plan are implemented there is consideration in the detailed planning stages as to whether there are unintended negative environmental impacts that require mitigation.</p>
Health Impact:	X			The projects and activities within the Delivery Plan that have a focus on carbon reduction will have health benefits through a reduction in air pollution. Some projects delivered to date are not purely focused on outcomes that reduce carbon and seek to improve health and wellbeing as a key benefit.

ICT Impact:		X		There is not a significant ICT impact.
Digital Services Impact:		X		There is not a significant impact on Digital Services.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			The main Council Priority to which the projects and actions within the Delivery Plan contribute is tackling the climate and ecological emergency . They do this in many ways but will have a key focus on achieving net zero and enhancing biodiversity.
Core Business:	X			<p>As a result of projects delivered the Council will see some of its core business processes improved as the Environment Strategy continues to have an impact.</p> <p>For example, the implementation of the Social Value Policy that includes environmental factors is having a positive impact on our procurement outcomes and how they can align with the Environment Strategy and bring environmental benefits. The use of the Sustainability Assessment Tool will also have a positive impact on the Council's core business activities.</p>
Data Impact:		X		It is not envisaged that there will be any data impacts.

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>The Environment Advisory Group (EAG), including at the Open Forum (OF), have received updates as the Environment Strategy has been refreshed. This has involved presentations and the opportunity for feedback. The EAG OF are kept up to date with key projects throughout the year.</p> <p>The West Berkshire Town and Parish Council Climate Forum have been kept up to date with progress in refreshing the Environment Strategy through their regular meetings.</p> <p>The West Berkshire Natural Solutions Delivery Partnership have also been kept up to date and received a presentation on the refreshed strategy and delivery plan at their last meeting.</p> <p>Various teams across the Council have contributed to and been consulted on the Annual Progress Report and the Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh. This has included officers who attend the Environment Delivery Project Board and the Active Travel Officer Coordination Group.</p>
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Annual Progress Report for the Environment Strategy and demonstrate the work that has taken place to propose a focused Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh
 - 4.2 The Annual Progress Report specifically covers the period from July 2023 through to July 2024. It is, however, part of the continuous story of how the Council is addressing climate change, biodiversity enhancements and other environmental issues in West Berkshire.
 - 4.3 The Annual Progress Report is included in Appendix C and sets out actions and achievements under each strategic objective of the original Environment Strategy including case studies and examples from the communities across West Berkshire. The report also looks forward to key projects on the horizon demonstrating the momentum that exists, and the significant investment being made in planning some of our larger infrastructure projects.
 - 4.4 An important part of the report is to provide an update on the Council's carbon footprint and also to report on the carbon emission data for the District. The Council's carbon footprint shows a reduction for the reporting period and an overall reduction of 22% when compared to the 2019/20 baseline. Due to the lag time in data reporting for the District's emissions, the latest figures we have are for 2022.
 - 4.5 The work that has taken place on refreshing the Environment Strategy now that we are halfway through the original period of 2020-2030, is set out in Appendix D. It describes how the focus of the Delivery Plan for the remaining years will be around 4 themes with some important common threads linking to all themes such as net zero and health and
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wellbeing. The 4 themes are: Energy Efficiency and Renewables, Sustainable Transport, The Natural Environment and Waste Reduction and Recycling.

- 4.6 An important purpose of the Environment Strategy Refresh is to demonstrate a possible path for the Council to achieve its focus of achieving net zero by 2030. The projects already committed and contributing carbon emission reductions are mapped out and the 'gap' that is likely to remain is estimated to be 1,915 tCO₂e (down from the latest position in 2023/24 of 9,026 tCO₂e). A possible scenario showing how the 'gap' could be closed and net zero achieved by 2030 is set out for illustration purposes and to assist in the consideration of future plans, projects and budgets.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The year we are reporting on through the Annual Progress Report has been another busy one with some projects completing, others being launched and good progress being made on longer term project delivery. The highlights of the year can be found in Section 3 of the Annual Progress Report (Appendix C).
- 5.2 There are two key strands of action:
- reducing the Council's own carbon emissions with actions from across the organisation contributing to this,
 - engaging with key stakeholders and encouraging and facilitating action in local communities to help reduce carbon emissions within the District.
- 5.3 Planning for some of our larger projects has continued during the reporting period in anticipation of these starting to be delivered in future years. This is relevant for our solar farm plans near Grazeley, further rooftop solar pv projects and the decarbonisation works at some of our larger buildings. There has still been plenty of delivery within the reporting period which has included launching the kerbo charge innovative system for supporting residents with charging their electric vehicles, delivering actions in our Bus Service Improvement Plan, responding with increased recycling and saving on food waste via the new corporate waste contract, facilitating 214 residential rooftop solar pv installations via the Solar Together scheme and continuing to engage with communities through our Environment Advisory Group Open Forum and the Town and Parish Council Climate Forum.
- 5.4 Across our communities, there has been lots of climate action with regular repair cafes, projects to support our wildlife, care for the Almond Avenue Orchard and surveying of biodiversity across our extensive length of rural verges to name just a fraction of the activity.
- 5.5 A key element of the annual reporting on the Environment Strategy is to provide an update on the Council's carbon footprint. Each year as our understanding of impacts and data improves, we endeavour to improve the quality and accuracy of our reporting. Our baseline is taken from the time the declaration of a climate emergency was made and the Environment Strategy was developed. When the latest figures for 2023/24 are compared to the baseline figures from 2019/20 a reduction of 22% in emissions is observed. The reported data for each year since the baseline was set is included in an Appendix to the Annual Progress Report.
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- 5.6 There are a number of challenges for the Council in reducing its emissions. For example, Figure 3 in the Annual Progress Report shows the impact that schools have on our carbon footprint. They are by far the group of buildings that contributes the most in terms of emissions. This is because we have a large number of schools to serve our communities well and many of these education buildings are old, lack insulation and modern technology and are not energy efficient. We are addressing certain aspects through maintenance and improvements projects across the estate and are also planning more targeted decarbonisation projects focusing on those sites with the greatest emissions.
- 5.7 Moving up to the District level, the data used for monitoring the District emissions across West Berkshire comes from central government. There is a 2-year lag in the publishing of this data meaning we are reporting 2022 figures in this latest report. The figures in Table 2 of Appendix C show an encouraging overall downward trend are nearly matching the emissions recorded for the 2020 which was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore the lowest year since our baseline.
- 5.8 Following on from reporting on the progress of the fourth year of delivery, work has been taking place on refreshing the Environment Strategy. At the halfway period it is appropriate to review and consider what is required for the remaining years of the plan. There are other important and relevant reasons why a review and a refresh of the Environment Strategy has been undertaken. Some of these key reasons are set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Key factors feeding into the review of the Environment Strategy:



- 5.9 Some of the important learning from the initial years of delivery were focused around the Delivery Plan. The existing Delivery Plan was considered too large and was not focused enough to deliver effective results. This has resulted in a streamlined Delivery Plan (Appendix E) with tasks arranged around 4 themes and a recognition of common threads across the themes. A number of the original actions have become business as usual or have been completed in the first few years of delivery meaning that the number of entries in the Delivery Plan is significantly reduced. This will ensure more focused delivery and easier reporting on progress against tasks.
- 5.10 The most important element of the Environment Strategy Refresh is the work to forecast the carbon footprint in future years and the possible pathway to net zero. This work has been very detailed and is based on the best evidence available. This evidence has
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included specially commissioned reports, feasibility studies and project delivery information to date. In addition, the work on the pathway has been independently checked by consultants acting as a 'critical friend' to ensure the data, methodology and assumptions that have been made are all relevant and deliver a sound piece of work.

5.11 Due to the fast pace at which the delivery plan can change and develop, the possible projects that will contribute to our pathway to net zero will be kept under constant review. For example, the Council received good news in March of this year of success in being awarded grant funding of £2.8million for delivery of decarbonisation works at Northcroft Leisure Centre in Newbury. This funding, combined with a further £425k from Council budgets already marked for improvements at Northcroft LC, will enable a significant project to be delivered which will improve the facilities, increase efficiency and contribute well to our pathway to net zero. This scheme has been able to be included in the following list of projects which are approved and have budgets agreed. These have measurable carbon reductions that have fed into the pathway to net zero:

Project	Start year
25% WBC fleet cars and light duty vehicles that are ULEV.	2024/25
Solar Panel Installations on WBC buildings.	2024/25
Carbon sequestration on WBC owned land	2025/26
Padworth Solar Panel installations	2025/26
Grazeley Solar Farm	2026/27
HVO fuel for some waste/ recycling vehicles.	2026/27
Northcroft Leisure Centre decarbonisation works	2027/28

5.12 With the above projects included, the position at 2030 is that the 'gap' to net zero is 1,915 tCO₂e. This is from the latest reported position in 2023/24 of 9,026 tCO₂e. In order to demonstrate what might be needed to reduce the 'gap' to zero, the following projects and their associated carbon reductions have been used as an illustration of how the target could be achieved:

- 100% of the Council's fleet (cars and light duty vehicles) being EVs by 2030
- All waste and recycling vehicles using HVO fuel
- Additional decarbonisation projects being delivered at Council sites where initial feasibility work has been carried out

5.13 The inclusion of the above projects in 5.12 (as yet not approved or funded) enables the target date of net zero by 2030 to be achieved with a small amount of contingency. Consideration of the most appropriate future projects to be added to the programme will happen via the normal project planning and budget setting processes.

5.14 The terminology used in some of these documents can be confusing. Some terms used by West Berkshire Council have also changed since the climate emergency declaration in 2019. In order to provide clarity, a definitions report has been produced which can sit alongside the Environment Strategy Refresh and be included on the Council's website. This proposed report is included at Appendix F.

6 Other options considered

6.1 There is a commitment to report on an annual basis on progress delivering the Environment Strategy. The pattern of reporting is to look at achievements and actions from July one year through to the end of June the following year. This aligns with the approval of the Environment Strategy in July 2020. Within this the Council's carbon footprint data is captured for each financial year with the most relevant period being reported in the Annual Progress Report. The District's data, which comes from central government and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), is reported per calendar year and, again, the most up to date published position is included in the APR.

6.2 Alternative options would be:

(a) To not report on progress in delivering the Environment Strategy.

Response – Given there is a commitment to report to the Executive, this is not an option. Not to report on such an important area as carbon reduction and our journey to net zero after the Council declared a climate and ecological emergency, does not serve anyone well.

(b) To only report the Council's carbon footprint figures and the District emission data from DESNZ.

Response – This minimal reporting of figures and data may be all that is required to report progress. However, this does not present the full picture and would not provide the overview of projects, activities and policy development that all contribute to the efforts to minimise environmental impacts. A full report enables the Council and the communities of West Berkshire to demonstrate the wide range of work happening across the District and serves to inspire others through interesting case studies.

It is worth noting, however, that due to the refocusing of work and the balance between resources and delivery demands, it is likely that future annual reporting will focus on the data, include a roadmap of delivery for the year and include one case study per theme. It will not be as comprehensive as this year's report in Appendix C.

6.3 An alternative option for the Environment Strategy as a whole would be not to refresh and refocus the Strategy. This was not considered a suitable option because it would likely result in targets not being achieved due to a lack of knowledge of the latest position and the options available for effective project delivery. The process that has been undertaken has shown the value in the work considering the pathway to net zero. It provides knowledge of existing projects that will contribute to the pathway and enables consideration of future options for achieving the key target of net zero by 2030.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The annual report demonstrates the actions that have taken place to progress our work on delivering the Environment Strategy over the period from July 2023 through to July

2024. The annual report would normally be brought to Executive in the autumn following this period (autumn 2024). However, it made sense to bring the report at the same time as continuing the story in the refreshed Environment Strategy, so it has been delayed on this occasion and both are reported to the Executive together.

- 7.2 The reduction of emissions by 22% compared to the baseline, gives the figure from which the pathway to net zero in the Strategy Refresh starts. The Strategy Refresh helps to provide focus for future years of delivery and a pathway guide for tracking progress via the annual reporting.
- 7.3 The pathway included in the Environment Strategy Refresh indicates a possible scenario where net zero could be achieved. Whilst this is illustrative and not all projects have allocated or approved budgets, it does demonstrate that, given a realistic level of investment, the 2030 target is achievable.
- 7.4 With the prospect of Local Government Reorganisation likely to be impacting on West Berkshire Council between now and 2030, it could be argued that we should wait and see what happens before looking at our options for achieving net zero. The restructuring to create new unitary authorities is driven by improving outcomes, efficiency and service delivery. Therefore, West Berkshire Council has taken the view that it does not want to wait and see what happens but sees value in developing a strong and informed position from which to enter into this new phase. We have therefore maintained a clear picture of our current emissions and have a well-developed plan of how we are going to reduce our impacts.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Equity Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B – Data Protection Impact Assessment
- 8.3 Appendix C – Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report July 2023 – July 2024
- 8.4 Appendix D – Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh
- 8.5 Appendix E – Environment Strategy Delivery Plan
- 8.6 Appendix F – Carbon Definitions Report

Background Papers:

The Environment Strategy was approved by the Executive in July 2020 – the papers relating to that decision can be found [here](#) and the [published strategy](#) is on the website.

[Previous Annual Progress Reports](#) on the Environment Strategy can be found on the Council's website.

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council ☐

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position ☐

Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months ☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☐

Wards affected: The Annual Progress Report reports on actions and projects that have been delivered throughout the District and the Environment Strategy 2025 Refresh includes a Delivery Plan that will have projects for delivery across West Berkshire.

Officer details:

Name: Jenny Graham
Job Title: Environment Delivery Manager
Tel No: 01635 519623
E-mail: Jenny.Graham@westberks.gov.uk
