
Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report 2024/2025

Committee considering report:	Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee
Date of Committee:	12 May 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	23.02.2026
Report Author:	Emily Ashton-Jelley and Helen Ramsey
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4767

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee the Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report. The last time the Environment Strategy was considered by Scrutiny was in April 2024. At that time the activities and projects up to the end of 2022/23 were being reported. A significant amount has happened across the intervening 2 years, and it is therefore appropriate to provide an update to this committee.
- 1.2. The Annual Progress Report covers the period from July 2024 through to July 2025. It is, however, part of the continuous story of how the council is addressing climate change, biodiversity enhancements and promoting environmental sustainability in West Berkshire.
- 1.3. The report includes a summary of achievements as well as an update on the council's carbon footprint for financial year 2024 / 2025 and looks ahead to how existing and new projects will assist the Council in achieving Net Zero by 2030 with a 'pathway to Net Zero' graph. A key finding from this year's report is the council's carbon emissions have reduced by 38% compared with the baseline year (2019/20).

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee note:
 - the latest 2024/2025 Progress Report on the Environment Strategy (as included in Appendix A)
 - the additional information provided in relation to our update on Biodiversity Duty reporting (Appendix B)
- 2.2. The remainder of this report is the same information drafted for the Executive meeting on 21st May unless otherwise stated.

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 by existing approved budgets and/or external funding. Teams across the council will use the budget setting process to plan for future programmes and secure funding for them.
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 reported to the Net Zero Steering Group and kept under review.
Property:	There are no direct property implications as a result of this report. Whilst there are projects discussed or indicated in the Pathway to Net Zero that impact on the council's property portfolio, these are projects that are already approved and nothing new is being proposed through this report.
Policy:	Priority Area: 3. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. This annual progress report aims to demonstrate how the Environment Strategy is being delivered and will play a part in informing and shaping relevant Council policies and plans across the organisation. With the introduction of the Sustainability Assessment Tool last year, this is assisting 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. The Sustainability Assessment Tool is also helping to guide staff and Members on how they can assist in delivering environmental outcomes within their roles.

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	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
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 as a result of the annual progress report. 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.
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 as a result of the annual progress report. 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.

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<p>Environmental Impact:</p>	<p>X</p>			<p>The purpose of the annual progress report is to demonstrate the delivery of the Environment Strategy which seeks to have a positive impact on the environment in numerous ways addressing both the climate and ecological emergencies declared by the council. It has a primary target of achieving net zero on Council operations by 2030. An outline of the Council's vision can be found in section 4 of the Environment Strategy. As the projects within the Delivery Plan are implemented, consideration will be given in the detailed planning stages as to whether there are unintended negative environmental impacts that require mitigation. The Sustainability Assessment Tool will help determine and mitigate against any negative impacts of projects. The ecological emergency declared by the Council in 2023, will add further focus for positive environmental improvement and will be assisted by a framework to drive positive change as well as identifying collaboration and engagement opportunities.</p>
<p>Health Impact:</p>	<p>X</p>			<p>The Annual Progress Report does not have a direct impact on health outcomes, however the projects and activities within the Environment Strategy 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.</p>
<p>ICT Impact:</p>		<p>X</p>		<p>There is not a significant ICT impact.</p>
<p>Digital Services Impact:</p>		<p>X</p>		<p>There is not a significant impact on Digital Services.</p>

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<p>Council Strategy Priorities:</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>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.</p> <p>Other priorities from the Council Strategy that the Environment Strategy helps to deliver are:</p> <p>Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy. The Delivery Plan includes active travel infrastructure, green and blue infrastructure and influencing the environmental standards of other infrastructure, including housing.</p>
<p>Core Business:</p>	<p>X</p>		<p>As a result of projects detailed within the Annual Progress Report the council will see some of its core business processes improved as the Environment Strategy starts to have an impact. For example, the implementation of the Sustainability Assessment Tool that includes environmental and socio-economic factors to consider, is having a positive impact on project delivery and aligns with the Environment Strategy and bring environmental improvements.</p>
<p>Data Impact:</p>		<p>X</p>	<p>It is not envisaged that there will be any data impacts.</p>

<p>Consultation and Engagement:</p>	<p>The Annual Progress Report has been presented to key personnel. Those consulted are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councillor Stuart Gourley, Executive Portfolio Holder: Environment and Highways - Clare Lawrence, Executive Director, Place - Jon Winstanley, Service Director, Environment
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Kofi Adu-Gyamfi, Service Lead Climate Change- Jenny Graham, Environment Delivery Manager <p>Various teams across the council have contributed to and been consulted on the Annual Progress Report and the pathway to net zero graph.</p>
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4. Executive Summary

- 4.1. The purpose of this report is to present the Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report. The Annual Progress Report covers the period from July 2024 through to July 2025. It is, however, part of the continuous story of how the council is addressing climate change, biodiversity enhancements and promoting environmental sustainability in West Berkshire.
- 4.2. The Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report is included in Appendix A. The report includes a summary of our achievements as well as an update on the council's carbon footprint for financial year 2024 to 2025 and looks ahead to how existing and new projects will assist the Council in achieving Net Zero by 2030 with a 'pathway to net zero' graph. Key projects highlighted in the 'pathway to net zero' demonstrate projects on the horizon, the momentum that exists and the significant investment being made in planning some of our larger infrastructure projects.
- 4.3. A key finding from this year's report is the council's carbon emissions have reduced by 38% compared with the baseline year (2019/20) decreasing from 11,619.59 tCO₂e to 7,162 tCO₂e in 2024/25. In addition, emissions have fallen by 20.65% compared with last year, representing a reduction of 1,864 tCO₂e from the 2023/24 total of 9,025.90 tCO₂e. This is due to several factors including better quality data and fewer estimates for school sites; a reduction in staff mileage claims; energy efficiency measures and solar panel installations at several council sites; and HVO fuel being used in our food waste vehicles. These figures demonstrate continued and meaningful progress toward our long- term decarbonisation goals.
- 4.4. At a district level, the Government releases annual CO₂ emissions data for each local authority with both a full dataset and a subset that removes emissions from nationally managed roads. The latest available data is for 2023 due to a two- year lag in data being reported. Long- term trends show decreases across both datasets, mainly due to cleaner electricity generation, better energy efficiency in buildings, economic changes, gradual improvements in transport emissions, and strong climate policies.

5. Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1. The report seeks to inform the public about this year's progress on the Environment Strategy.

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- 5.2. The Annual Progress Report covers a busy year of climate- related activity for the Council, with several projects completed, new ones launched, and strong progress on longer-term initiatives.
- 5.3. Three main areas of action continue to guide the work:
- 5.4. **Reducing the Council's own carbon emissions**, with contributions from teams across the organisation.
- 5.5. Collaboration between colleagues across the organisation to **address the ecological emergency**.
- 5.6. **Supporting and engaging communities and stakeholders** to help lower emissions and improve the environment across the whole district.

Background

- 5.7. Although it's not a legal requirement for local authorities to publish their emissions, it is considered good practice. Mandatory reporting may be considered by the Government in the future, so this report, in conjunction with our carbon footprint calculation methodology, ensures the Council is prepared.
- 5.8. The Council's 2024/25 data indicates emissions continuing to fall, remaining below the levels seen during the COVID- 19 pandemic. This confirms that reductions are now being achieved through sustained action rather than temporary circumstances. Overall emissions have decreased by 38% since 2019/20, decreasing from 11,619.59 tCO₂e to 7,162 tCO₂e in 2024/25. Breaking this down further, since last year, emissions have fallen by 20.65% representing a reduction of 1,864 tCO₂e from the 2023/24 total of 9,025.90 tCO₂e.
- 5.9. Improvements in data collection, especially more accurate, site- specific information for schools has contributed to more reliable reporting. This enhanced accuracy supports better decision- making as the council progresses toward its Environment Strategy goals.
- 5.10. Additional reductions have come from:
 - **Lower staff mileage**, supported by increased use of pool cars (including an EV), public transport, and smarter working practices.
 - **Energy- efficiency upgrades** at council sites including leisure centres, such as improved boilers and pool covers.
 - **Transition to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO)** for food- waste vehicles, cutting emissions through the use of a renewable, lower- carbon fuel.
- 5.11. The council remains committed to continuously improving its carbon reporting by adopting best practice and updating methodologies as needed.
- 5.12. The Government publishes annual data on carbon dioxide emissions for every local authority, measured in tonnes of CO₂ per person. Two versions are provided: a full dataset covering all local emissions sources and a subset that excludes emissions from

nationally managed roads like the M4 and A34. Due to a lag in the reporting cycle, the latest available figures are for 2023.

- 5.13. COVID- 19 significantly influenced the 2020 data, with emissions dropping during lockdowns. Emissions rose again in 2021 as restrictions eased and remained broadly similar in 2022, with slight reductions in some areas.
- 5.14. Overall, both the full and subset datasets show a long- term downward trend. Key drivers include cleaner electricity generation, improved energy efficiency in buildings, structural economic changes, gradual reductions in transport emissions, and better waste and land management. National and local climate policies have also supported these reductions.
- 5.15. The Council emphasises the need for continued district-wide action and highlights the importance of community engagement, supportive policies, and measures within the Delivery Plan and Local Plan to help reduce emissions and respond to the climate and ecological emergencies.

Proposals

- 5.16. We propose the Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report is approved for publication on the website specifically noting:
- A reduction in emissions from the baseline year of 38%.
 - The progress the Council has made in delivering our projects as outlined in our Environment Strategy Delivery Plan.
 - The updated Pathway to Net Zero graph which shows the key projects the council has committed to in order to progress towards net zero for its own operations by 2030.

6. Other options considered

- 6.1. The Council is committed to reporting annually on its progress in delivering the Environment Strategy. Each report covers activity and achievements from July of one year to the end of June the following year, reflecting the Strategy's approval in July 2020.
- 6.2. The Council's own carbon footprint is measured by financial year, with the most relevant data included in each Annual Progress Report (APR). District- wide emissions figures, provided by central government through the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), are reported by calendar year, and the latest published data is also incorporated into the APR.
- 6.3. Alternative options would be:
- (a)** *Not reporting on progress in delivering the Environment Strategy, or*

(b) Reporting only the Council's carbon footprint data and the District- wide emissions data from DESNZ.

Response:

Whilst the Council are in a position to resource the reporting of progress in delivering the Environment Strategy and the latest carbon footprint figures, this will be carried out. Limiting the report to data alone would overlook the wider work, projects, initiatives and policy development that contribute to reducing environmental impacts. Producing a more detailed report allows both the Council and the communities of West Berkshire to showcase the broad range of activity taking place across the district. It also helps to inspire further action by sharing useful and engaging information about ongoing work.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The Annual Progress Report highlights the progress made over the past year in delivering the Environment Strategy. It forms part of the ongoing narrative of how the Council is addressing the challenges of tackling the climate and ecological emergencies.
- 7.2. Both the council's own carbon emissions and those recorded across the district continue to show an overall downward trend, moving us closer to our net zero target. While there is still significant work ahead, the delivery of several major projects currently in development will support meaningful progress in the coming years.
- 7.3. Work will continue to be driven by the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan, which is updated throughout the year and published on the Council's website. Both the Strategy and the Delivery Plan have recently been refreshed to ensure resources are focused on the actions with the greatest impact.
- 7.4. Despite wider challenges, such as the ongoing cost of living pressures, it remains essential to maintain momentum on climate action and protecting and enhancing the district's natural habitats for future generations.
- 7.5. We're also forging ahead with rooftop solar projects; we have secured a four-year contract to install solar PV across council sites and schools. Alongside this we are progressing a significant nutrient mitigation programme in the River Lambourn catchment to stop the decline of water quality in sensitive habitats by ensuring that new developments do not increase the overall load of nutrients. Our successful Town and Parish Forum has been expanded (now the [Community Climate Forum](#)) to include community groups and individuals which will provide greater collaboration on climate action. A great deal of background work has been happening around [EV infrastructure](#) which will help secure the delivery of further installations.

8. Biodiversity Duty

- 8.1. *For the purposes of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee meeting and in response to a request from the Chair, Appendix B is included which provides an update on the Council's Biodiversity Duty reporting. This is one aspect of the Council's response to the declared ecological emergency. The Council has previously reported*

its actions and activities on the [website](#) and will continue to keep this updated when the next full reporting data is available.

9. Appendices

9.1. Appendix A – Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report July 2024 – July 2025

9.2. Appendix B – Update on Biodiversity Duty reporting

Background Papers:

The Environment Strategy (2025 Refresh) and previous annual progress reports are all on the Council's [website](#).

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No: **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: This is not an item for decision, but the Annual Progress Report includes actions and projects being delivered throughout the district.

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Version	Date	Description	Change ID
1.0	02/01/26	ES Annual Progress Report	EAJ
2.0	24/02/26	ES Annual Progress Report	EAJ
3.0	22/04/26	Updates for Executive Briefing including info on Biodiversity Duty	JG
4.0	06/05/26	Updates for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee	JG

APPENDIX A

Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report 2024/25