

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 31 March 2022

Portfolio: Planning and Sustainability (Cllr N Bedford)

Subject: Climate Change Action Plan Consultation Update

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To consider the outcomes of the Climate Change Action Plan Consultation ahead of the Climate Change Action Plan going to Cabinet on 11 April.

Report:

1. The principle objective of the Climate Change Action Plan is to demonstrate actions being taken by Epping Forest District Council to deliver on the pledge to do everything within our power to be carbon neutral by 2030 and address the declaration of the Climate Emergency. The document focuses on the identification of carbon emissions and the actions to reduce them both within the Council and across the wider District area. The plan aligns with the corporate objectives of keeping the district moving sustainably and enabling residents to access new opportunities for employment, and to reduce the carbon footprint across the district and within our council. There are also links to Policies T1, DM 2 and DM15-22 in the Emerging Local Plan.
2. Climate change action requires a whole organisation approach therefore development of the Climate Change Action Plan has involved officer input from many different service areas across the council. The action plan reflects this by looking at several themes. The initial Council Operations section focuses on the Council's own emissions from buildings, business practices and staff travel. The subsequent themes examine emissions from travel, buildings and waste in the wider District. Actions to address the related themes of air quality, natural greenspace and climate change mitigation are then explored.
3. The Council undertook some informal engagement prior to the development of the draft Climate Change Action Plan. Following approval at Cabinet on 20 April 2021, these documents were published for formal consultation for a six-week period from 12 October to 26th November 2021. The consultation was originally scheduled for June but the delay in release was so as not to overlap with the Local Plan Main Modifications consultation and the school holiday period.
4. The public consultation was carried out using the following methods:
Digital engagement:
 - Consultation notice via email to EFDC databases, statutory consultees and other stakeholders.
 - Dedicated email address for enquiries and consultation response submissions.
 - Dedicated consultation page on EFDC website, including PDFs of documents and a frequently asked questions page
 - Social Media campaign

- Staffed online Q&A sessions and event attendance
- Online Community Q&A
- Youth Council Q&A Session

Non-digital engagement:

- Hard copy of the Climate Change Action Plan available on request and in the Civic Offices.
 - Leaflet/ poster information to provide summary and link to online document.
 - Postal address set up for responses
 - Event attendance at the Stay Well Event, Youth Council Climate Action Conference and a Members Briefing in person
 - Leaflets at Epping and Waltham Abbey Markets
5. Overall, the Council received comments from 839 respondents, through the main survey (121 responses) and youth survey (707), emails (9) and postal comments (2).
 6. The consultation survey included general questions around individual and community behaviours to understand the level of engagement with climate change in the District and to inform a behaviour change strategy for the future. The survey also asked questions related to businesses, travel and the Climate Change Action Plan itself.
 7. **Headline figures for the general survey questions:**
 - Adults were more likely to be very concerned (69%) than the youth respondents (16%) and more young people were not concerned (16%) when compared to the main survey (6%).
 - The top reasons for concern were having a responsibility to future generations, the threat to human existence and the damage to wildlife and ecosystems. However, those not concerned cited that changes in climate have happened before or that they were too old to see the effects.
 - When respondents in the main questionnaire were asked where they got information on climate change documentaries (70%) and TV, radio and newspaper news (69%) were the most popular answers. Other common sources of information cited outside of the options given were from environmental groups, scientific literature, personal experiences and technical documents. A small number said that they do not seek information on climate change.
 - In the youth questionnaire the most common information source was less defined but teachers (55%), documentaries (49%), search engine (49%) social media (47%) and TV radio or online news (44%) were chosen most often. 75% of youth respondents said they knew a lot or a medium amount about the causes and effects of climate change, which is an encouraging figure.
 8. To understand priorities throughout different sections of the District questions were asked on how respondents prioritise actions that can be taken by individuals, Councils and businesses:
 - The most important actions for individuals to take were thought to be using more sustainable energy, improving home energy efficiency and reducing household waste. The main obstacle to carrying out these actions on a personal level was seen as cost but other obstacles given were too much packaging from shops, lack of guidance, having homes difficult to upgrade e.g. solid wall or listed buildings.
 - The most important actions for Councils to take were more energy efficient homes, better cycling and walking paths and increasing domestic recycling.
 - Priority actions for businesses to take were seen as reducing packaging, procurement of green goods and services and using fewer fossil fuels. To encourage these actions suggestions were financial incentives to provide greener options, creating consumer pressure, providing grants to green fleet/offices and promoting good behaviour.

- When asked what more we could do as a community to tackle climate change there a range of views with the most common being to make car travel a deterrent and increase the amount of public transport and routes. This was followed closely by planting more trees and rewilding of derelict sites. A common theme was to improve local green space, involve the young and local communities in projects and in deciding what green spaces should include and to support local High Streets.
9. Respondents were asked for feedback on what the Council can do to improve the Climate Change Action Plan. A summary of common themes from both the questionnaire and written responses is shown below:

- General (62 Comments)

Feedback on the overall plan varied across respondents with equal weighting between the plan needing more detail and others saying it was comprehensive. The general points to improve the plan included:

- Getting agreement on target proposals
- Changes to the language to make it stronger on action
- Text revisions to mention COP26, Essex wide climate policy and some minor text revisions for clarity.
- Further detail to be provided on actions

- Waste (447 comments).

This was the most common theme to be commented on especially in the youth questionnaire. Ideas to improve this area included:

- providing more bins/recycling bins in public places
- influencing the amount of packaging in shops
- enforcement of littering
- more emphasis on reducing waste

- Travel (328 comments)

The most prevalent response for the barriers was the cost of electric vehicles, which is likely to require national government policy or a change in market conditions to address. Recurring themes throughout the questions related to both areas that are under EFDC control but also areas under ECC jurisdiction for example public transport.

- Improvement to bus services consisting of improved frequency, cost and routes to key hubs
- Better cycling and walking provision with increased safety, clearer signage, more cycle/walking paths to school and employment centres and to fix the roads.
- More electric charge points
- More emphasis on a reduction in car travel

- Buildings (192 comments)

Comments related to buildings were more general in nature siting reductions in energy use, less fossil fuel use and more renewable energy generation. More specific comments related to:

- More solar production
- Paving over of driveways and the subsequent loss of drainage and biodiversity
- Further consideration of embodied carbon, with retrofit of buildings favoured over demolition and rebuild.
- Promotion of community energy projects

- Behaviour change (141 comments)

This topic was particularly common in the youth questionnaire when asked what the council can do for climate change, across the two surveys the same recurring themes were:

- Awareness raising sited as being very important especially education and provision of information.
- Collaborative working needed with organisations including voluntary organisations, community organisations and businesses. Schools were seen as especially important for collaboration.
- Visible volunteer community activities eg. litter picking

10. Travel Specific questions findings:

- 86% of respondents held a driving licence. Of those that drove, 59% drive petrol vehicles, 21% drive diesel, 6% drive a hybrid and 4% are in fully electric vehicles (EVs).
- The most frequent other types of transport used were walking (84%), the London Underground (45%), Bus (22%) and Bicycle (22%).
- When asked about obstacles to carrying out individual climate actions relating to driving less, using more sustainable transport and using an electric vehicle the top 3 were inadequate public transport, lack of safe cycling routes/sustainable transport infrastructure, and the need for more charge points. Other obstacles sited were accessibility of transport, extra time needed, no driveway for an EV, ability to walk and cycle, transporting bulky items, rural location and a car dominated culture.
- The top 3 most sited answers as to what would make it easier to switch to EV were: more affordable electric vehicles with calls for more second hand EVs, scrappage schemes and grants, followed by more electric vehicle charging points and more frequent and better timetabled buses. Other themes cited around EV's was that they needed longer ranges and solutions for larger vehicles. Also, some scepticism around EV reliability and maintenance. Some also wanted to keep their car longer to avoid embodied energy of getting a new electric vehicle.
- The youth questionnaire asked about travel to schools, the most common methods of transport were being driven or driving themselves (29%), walking (28%) and taking the bus (26%). For those that drive or are driven factors that would help to travel more sustainably were better and more frequent public transport routes and better walking and cycling routes. From comments Covid is still seen as a barrier to taking public transport.

11. Key updates made to the plan based on the feedback received from the consultation:

- Update of targets, these will continue to be updated as more data becomes available.
- Text revisions to mention COP26, Essex wide climate policy and some minor text revisions for clarity.
- The Priority Actions in 2021/22 section has been updated to Progress in 2021/22.
- Update of the waste chapter to account for comments made and to show further action being taken. These include actions related to the litter strategy, litter picking equipment, information on reducing waste and providing a waste education video.
- Further detail added to the Council Operations chapter to include more specific storage and energy projects, social housing regeneration, social housing stock review and a building energy survey.
- In the Travel chapter a new section has been made to show actions related to reducing travel and more detail on actions related to electric vehicle charging points.
- Actions added to the Natural Environment section to involve the local community in tree planting activities and to provide information on sustainable growing and home composting.
- Actions added to the behaviour change section and additions made throughout to mention of schools as a point of collaboration. The subjects included for engagement have also been expanded to include sustainable food and diet. A note has been added to mention business support and engagement.

Reason for decision:

Not applicable

Options considered and rejected:

Not applicable

Consultation undertaken:

Yes, as described above

Resource implications:

Not applicable

Legal and Governance Implications:

Not applicable

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

The draft Climate Change Action Plan seeks to drive down carbon emissions across the District to become carbon neutral by 2030. Actions will include measures to increase the provision of sustainable development, energy efficiency and consideration of the natural environment.

The largest proportion of emissions in the District arise from on-road transport therefore, activities within the plan look to increase modal shift towards active travel and put in place measures to increase the uptake of electric vehicles. The co-benefits of these actions such as reduced fuel poverty, enhanced health and wellbeing and provision of jobs promote the notion of making Epping Forest District a good place to live, work and visit.

Activities to tackle carbon emissions will also help to improve air quality in the District, which will help with human health concerns and address the impacts of air quality on the Epping forest Special Area of Conservation.

Background Papers:

Draft Climate Change Action Plan

Impact Assessments:***Risk Management:***

No risks identified

Equality: