

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING

13 JULY 2021

CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT, HIGHWAYS & WASTE: COUNCILLOR PHIL LARRATT

Report Title	Environmental Principles and Framework
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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Oxford-Cambridge Arc Environment Principles

Appendix B – Report of the West Northamptonshire Environment Task and Finish Group

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present for endorsement and adoption the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Environment Principles as approved by the Arc Leadership Group on 9th March 2021 and the Environmental Framework proposed by the Environment Task and Finish Group.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Oxford-Cambridge Arc Leadership Group has adopted a set of Environment Principles and proposed the development of an Arc Environment Strategy. It is seeking endorsement of these approaches from the Arc partners, including this Council.
- 2.2 The West Northamptonshire Environment Task and Finish Group has prepared an Environmental Framework to help guide the Council's actions in this field.

- 2.3 It is suggested the documents are endorsed or adopted (as applicable). Both offer useful assistance in taking forward matters the Council is likely to want to progress, and also support clear decision-making on these matters.
- 2.4 Further work to implement both documents would be needed. This would have some resource implications, but also offer some potential for savings and income generation. There are some risks associated with proceeding but on balance these are considered less than the risks of not acting.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) Endorses the Arc shared environment principles as set out at Appendix 1.
 - b) Supports the development of an Arc Environment Strategy which would provide for how the principles can be delivered.
 - c) Adopts the proposals set out in the WNC Task and Finish Group report as set out at Appendix 2, subject to:
 - i. The commitment to purchasing 100% 'green' energy is understood to mean electricity generated and gas produced without the use of fossil fuels, and to apply from 1st October 2021 or as soon as possible thereafter.
 - ii. To accommodate this, an increase in the energy budget of £25,000 in the current financial year and £50,000 in 2022/23 is approved. The current year cost is to be met from in-year underspends or from General Fund balances if required.

4. Reasons For Recommendations

These courses of action are proposed because the Arc Principles and proposed Strategy should support the objectives of the Council, notably as set out in the Corporate Plan 2021-2025, and reinforce its influence by working with partners across the Arc, and because the Framework offers a useful structure for the Council to embed environmental issues in its decision-taking and service delivery.

5. Report Background

Arc Environment Principles

- 5.1 This section of the report uses with some minor changes wording commended to each partner by the Arc Leadership Group.

Background

- 5.2 In 2020 the Arc Leadership Group Environment Working Group agreed to produce a set of Arc-wide Environment Principles. The recommended principles are attached as Appendix 1. They are the result of a collaborative piece of work led by a range of partners and stakeholders including:

- Environmental NGOs (who drafted the first document)
- Local nature partnerships
- Local government environment and planning policy representatives (responses were received from around 20 local authorities, with representation from across the Arc)
- DEFRA
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- MHCLG (planning policy lead)
- University representative from the Universities' Environment Group
- A LEP representative
- Anglian Water
- A South East Energy Hub representative

5.3 The document was endorsed by the Arc Leadership Group Plenary on 9th March 2021. It is hoped by having developed consensus and support for these principles, including direct engagement with Government, that these will be used to support emerging environmental policies within the emerging Arc Spatial Framework. The agreed principles would be strengthened further after being publicly considered by every partner organisation.

Status of principles

5.4 The principles are not formal policy but rather a shared statement of ambition for the Arc. They are intended to:

- Support our position with respect to the environment policies emerging from the Arc Spatial Framework.
- Allow use of the Arc as a place for DEFRA to test and apply its 25-year plan and funding through pilots and projects.
- Support local planning authorities with a frame of reference to further develop the principles through local and strategic plans at a local and sub-regional level.

5.5 The Arc Leadership Group will next be developing an Arc Environment Strategy which will provide the route map to delivering against these ambitions, including trajectories for meeting ambitious future performance targets.

Outline of the Principles

5.6 There are five overarching principles:

- a. To target net zero carbon at a pan-Arc level by 2040.
- b. To protect, restore, enhance and create new nature areas and natural capital assets, including nationally and locally designated wildlife sites and priority habitats through the implementation of the spatial planning mitigation hierarchy of avoid, mitigate, compensate and gain.
- c. To be an exemplar for environmentally sustainable development, in line with the ambitions set out in the government's 25-year plan. This will incorporate a

systems-based and integrated assessment and implementation approach. We will aim to go beyond the minimum legislated requirements for development.

- d. To ensure that existing and new communities see real benefits from living in the Arc.
- e. To use natural resources wisely.

5.7 Each theme has several sub-principles which describe further the outcomes we aspire to. Some of the sub-principles will evolve further as we develop our thinking (for example, a waste/circular waste principle).

Next steps

5.8 Having been endorsed by the Plenary, the Arc Environment Principles will be shared amongst a wider audience including the development community to gain support and buy-in. It is intended that each partner organisation will now proceed to take these through local decision-making processes to provide even more support for the shared principles.

5.9 The next piece of work for the Arc Environment Working Group is to develop an Environment Strategy which will set out a comprehensive plan for how the principles will be delivered in the Arc. It is likely that the strategy will take 12-18 months to complete.

West Northamptonshire Environmental Framework

5.10 At Shadow Executive on 23rd June 2020 an Environment Task and Finish Group was established. The overall purpose of the group was:

“To develop and recommend a policy framework to ensure the new authority leads the way in environmental protection through its decision-making and service delivery”.

5.11 The Group concluded its work in January 2021 with a proposed Environmental Framework for the new Council. This includes a number of structured recommendations for how WNC should approach these issues.

5.12 The full Environmental Framework is given in Appendix 2. It addresses issues through the following themes:

- Culture and leadership
- Governance and decision-making
- Partnership working
- Place services
- People services

5.13 The report notes that the “list of recommendations is not exhaustive. Once work from the other Task and Finish Groups is collated and the new West Northamptonshire Council is established there will likely be further opportunities to expand on these high level recommendations. Therefore, this list should be seen as the foundations of which to build the ‘greenest’ Council in the country.” In this respect, the Council may usefully

have regard to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 The Council could chose to endorse or adopt the Principles or the Framework, or not do so. It could also adopt the Framework with amendments, or propose changes to the Principles for discussion with other Arc partners.
- 6.2 In relation to the Principles, it is considered that they cohere well with the Council's emerging approaches. They have also been prepared in partnership, including all the predecessor councils to this Council, and involving senior Members.
- 6.3 The Principles should be a valuable tool to help ensure that the Arc, including West Northamptonshire, is in a better condition environmentally by 2050 than it is now, even allowing for the development that is expected to occur. As a shared set, they are likely to have greater impact on Government and its agencies than anything this Council could produce by itself.
- 6.4 Not endorsing the Principles seems unlikely to achieve more positive results. It would be likely to leave West Northamptonshire somewhat isolated on these issues, and potentially vulnerable to less environmentally appropriate activities or developments.
- 6.5 Therefore it would seem appropriate for WNC to endorse the Principles, and to support work on an Arc Environment Strategy to help put them into action.
- 6.6 In relation to the Framework, it has been prepared by a cross-party Task and Finish Group and sets out a clear approach to managing the environmental impact of the Council's policy choices and service delivery arrangements. Whilst it would require a degree of focus and therefore resource by the Council, it reflects what are expected to be a key policy objectives of the Council. Indeed, Cabinet in June 2021 adopted a policy of seeking carbon neutrality by 2030, reflecting the proposal in the Framework.
- 6.7 Measures which could be taken under the Framework also have the potential to reduce costs, notably in energy efficiency, or to generate income (notably in renewable energy generation) from Council assets. The proposal to purchase solely 'green' energy has potential costs; see below on these.
- 6.8 The Framework would also help the Council demonstrate compliance with duties and expectations on public bodies in relation to biodiversity and climate change.
- 6.9 Therefore it would seem appropriate for WNC to adopt the Framework.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 As the Principles are of general application they do not have direct financial implications. When specific actions are proposed in relation to or under them or the Framework the financial implications of those actions would need to be addressed.

- 7.1.2 At this strategic level the major, if unquantified, issues to note are the proposals in the Framework for ISO50001 (energy management systems) accreditation (actually certification), and for dedicated staffing. These will carry certain costs, although as the outgoing councils also had such approaches they may not be net additional costs. In any event, proposals for staffing and budgets would be subject to approval in the normal ways.
- 7.1.3 The proposal in the Framework for the Council to adopt 'green' energy for all of its buildings is taken to mean (at this stage) electricity and gas in buildings the Council directly occupies and not, for example, those occupied by commercial tenants or service providers such as leisure operators. Including the latter would be a longer-term issue, to be addressed as part of the 2030 net zero target. Likewise, under ISO50001 the Council would be actively managing its energy use with a view to becoming more efficient and thereby reducing consumption.
- 7.1.4 NCC had already applied 100% renewable electricity and gas supplies and this was allowed for in budgeting, so no cost issues would arise from that source. The former district and borough councils contracted to use 3.6 million kWh of gas and 2.8 million kWh of electricity per year. The cost premium for gas is currently £0.00950 per kWh and for electricity £0.00075 per kWh. Thus the premium for gas is likely to be £34k pa and for electricity £2k pa. Allowing for fluctuations in usage it may be wise to budget for £50k pa in total. As technology advances, particularly in sustainable electricity generation, the cost premium seems likely to reduce over time and may eventually fall to zero or below.

7.2 **Legal**

- 7.2.1 The Council has the power to take the proposed actions under, among other powers, the general power of competence provided by Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. As the principles are of general application they do not raise any specific legal implications. Where specific actions are proposed in relation to or under the principles any legal issues they raise would need to be considered at that time.
- 7.2.2 The Council has specific duties to have due regard to conserving biodiversity through its decisions under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Access to the Countryside Act 2006. The Principles and Framework should assist it in demonstrating compliance with this duty.

7.3 **Risk**

- 7.3.1 Whilst both the Principles and the Framework set out approaches likely to be generally regarded as desirable, they do carry some risks. In particular:
- a. There is the potential to increase public expectation of what can be achieved without necessarily having the resources or powers to deliver it.
 - b. They may create tension with other priorities and calls on resources.
 - c. The Framework is Arc-wide, which could suggest that if other Arc partners struggle to meet their 'share' of the goals, pressure might come on West Northamptonshire to assist.

7.3.2 None of these risks is considered sufficient to suggest the Principles and Framework should not be endorsed or adopted. Moreover, the risks of not acting include:

- a. Lack of focus on achieving environmental outcomes for West Northamptonshire, including insufficient mitigation of climate change impacts (such as flooding) and loss of biodiversity.
- b. Weakening of influence within the Arc arrangements and with Government, particularly on these issues.

7.4 **Consultation**

7.4.1 Neither it nor the Framework have been subject to specific public consultation. However, their tenor is considered in line with other documents and strategies adopted by the previous councils for West Northamptonshire, many of which were subject to consultation.

7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None.

7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 Climate is a key focus for both the Arc principles and the Task & Finish Group's recommendations. Endorsing and adopting the principles should help the Council focus on measures which both mitigate and adapt to climate change.

7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 The principles are of general application. They will clearly have different impacts, and require different implementations, in different parts of West Northamptonshire.

8. Background Papers

8.1 None.