

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

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Leader of the Council: Councillor Jonathan Nunn

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Report Title Estate and Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategies

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## List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	26/10/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	26/10/2023
Other Director	Stuart Timmiss, Executive Director of Place, Economy & Environment	26/10/2023
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	26/10/2023

## List of Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Estate Climate Strategy

Appendix B – Draft Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy

### 1. Purpose of Report

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1.1 To seek approval for strategies setting out the Council's approach to delivering net zero in the operation of its estate and in construction and maintenance activities.

### 2. Executive Summary

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1.2 The Council has declared a climate emergency and set itself the goal of achieving net zero carbon in its own operations by 2030. As part of this it needs to address net zero in the operation of its estate, and in construction and maintenance activities.

- 1.3 Two strategies have therefore been produced, dealing with the different issues these areas of activity raise. The Estate Climate Strategy is focused on efficiency in energy use and on production of renewable energy, whereas the Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy is focused on understanding and reducing emissions from construction materials and operations. Common to the strategies are arrangements for dealing with residual emissions in ways which seek to secure multiple benefits.
- 1.4 The Strategies do not form detailed business cases justifying new budgets of themselves. Rather, they provide clear directions of travel to be applied within existing budgets and to prepare business cases for new budgets. Wherever possible the focus is on saving carbon in ways which also save, or make, money for the Council.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- 3.1.1 Approves the Estate Climate Strategy, as set out at Appendix A.
- 3.1.2 Approves the Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy, as set out at Appendix B.

### **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 To enable the Council to deliver on its policy of achieving net zero carbon by 2030, in respect of the operation of its estate and construction and maintenance activities.
- 4.2 To provide clear direction for the Council's staff and supply chain.
- 4.3 To maximise benefits, including financial benefits, and minimise costs.

### **5. Report Background**

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- 5.1 The Council has declared a climate emergency and set targets to achieve net zero carbon in its own operations by 2030, and for West Northamptonshire as a whole by 2045. ('Carbon' is used as shorthand for emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases implicated in global warming, measured as tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, CO<sub>2</sub>e.) For these purposes, the emissions arising from the occupants of homes and business units owned by the Council but let out to others fall within the 2045 target rather than the 2030 one.
- 5.2 Alongside this the Council has adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to guide its wider approach to sustainability.
- 5.3 Achieving these net zero goals in the context of the SDGs requires action across the Council's operations and assets. Work is ongoing in various areas and two are now ready to make firm proposals. These relate to operation of the Council's estate, principally energy use, and construction and maintenance – how the estate is put and kept into a suitable form. Whilst these are linked, different approaches are required and therefore two strategies have been produced:
- Estate Climate Strategy.

- Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy.

5.4 The Estate Climate Strategy provides an overview of the current operational emissions of the Council's estate, then identifies strategic steps to mitigating those emissions, and finally makes proposals for offsetting (capturing) any remaining emissions. The strategy clearly shows it is financially favourable to improve energy efficiency and produce green energy rather than have to offset it, justifying significant effort in energy efficiency and energy production. However, it is likely that some offsetting will still be needed, so the Strategy outlines an approach to delivering this.

5.5 It is noteworthy that the largest single element of the strategy, in terms of impact on carbon, is the introduction of large scale photovoltaic (solar) electricity generation. Without this it is hard to see how the net zero goal could be achieved.

5.6 The Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy cannot provide a simple baseline, as these activities vary year by year, and the Council does not yet have emissions data from them. It therefore adopts a two-step approach:

- Identifying major areas of carbon emissions and proposing an approach to reducing those. Notably, this includes a focus on natural materials where this is practical, particularly wood, which locks up carbon taken from the atmosphere.
- A series of stages to improve the Council's understanding of carbon emissions from construction leading to pricing these into all significant projects. This is followed by estimating and offsetting emission from smaller projects where it is not practical to measure carbon.

5.7 Common to both strategies is the importance of trees and wood. In the case of the Construction & Maintenance strategy, this is to use a low-carbon, potentially carbon-negative, material. In the case of the Estate strategy, this is to use trees as a means of removing carbon from the atmosphere. They overlap in that there is potential to plant trees and use timber in construction, although this will take time to realise. A key action from both strategies is therefore to explore the business case for a productive woodland in West Northamptonshire, seeking to secure multiple benefits from it and minimising any net cost.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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6.1 The Council could choose to adopt the strategies, or one of them, or neither of them. It could also pursue different approaches to various aspects; for example, it could focus on technological solutions for carbon removal.

6.2 Each strategy has been designed to maximise the benefits, including financial benefits, and minimise costs. They are therefore suggested to be pragmatic ways of meeting the Council's policy goals.

6.3 Other options, such as the Council investing in technological solutions for carbon removal from the atmosphere, appear unlikely to be viable at scale by 2030, and in any event to be costly and offer little in the way of collateral benefits.

6.4 Alternatively, the Council could focus on buying 'carbon credits' from suitable sources. However, whilst these do exist the supply is finite and, as with technological solutions, represents a pure cost rather than an opportunity for collateral benefits.

6.5 It is therefore recommended that the two strategies are adopted.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

7.1.1 The Strategies are not intended to form detailed business cases justifying new budgets of themselves. This would not be practical. Rather, they provide clear directions of travel to be applied within existing budgets and to prepare business cases for new budgets. Wherever possible the focus is on saving carbon in ways which also save, or make, money for the Council.

### **7.2 Legal**

7.2.1 The Strategies, being strategic documents, do not generally raise direct legal issues. Issues of, for example, which powers are best used to achieve certain outcomes, will be addressed on a project-by-project basis.

### **7.3 Risk**

7.3.1 The main risks of adopting the strategies are as follows.

7.3.2 Risk 1: Delivery of aspects of the Estate strategy, notably large scale photovoltaics, may cause some concern. This will be mitigated by careful engagement with affected communities and sensitive design, including, for example, landscaping.

7.3.3 Risk 2: The costs of low-carbon measures and energy generation may not always have a positive financial case. This risk will be mitigated by focusing on projects with the best returns, and acting opportunistically where, for example, works to a building are needed in any event. Eventually the use of WNC's internal carbon price will allow the most efficient solutions to be adopted.

7.3.4 Risk 3: Delivery of low-carbon construction may, especially in the early years, increase project costs. This is likely in any significant change in construction practices. The impact should be minimised by the fact that there is a global movement in the same direction, meaning that suppliers and contractors are becoming increasingly well-equipped to provide the services at sensible costs. The move to low-carbon also offers the opportunity to reduce costs by rethinking approaches and, for example, making greater use of off-site construction with less waste and higher standards. The Council having clarity about its approach should also help its supply chain respond in positive and economical ways. Low-carbon buildings should also reduce future occupation costs.

7.3.5 The main risk of not adopting the strategies is that the Council would not have a clear direction or focus, meaning limited progress is made. The supply chain would not be engaged and

opportunities to develop efficient low-carbon solutions would be lost. The net zero goal may well not be met.

#### **7.4 Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 The Strategies will provide a clear basis on which to communicate the Council's intentions in their respective areas as it works towards delivering upon its policy of achieving net zero carbon by 2030.

7.4.2 Consultation with the supply chain will take place on the best ways of implementing the Construction & Maintenance strategy. (The issue does not really arise for the Estate Climate Strategy.)

#### **7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 None.

#### **7.6 Climate Impact**

7.6.1 The purpose of the strategies is to implement the Council's net zero goals in important areas of the Council's activity. Therefore, their impact on the climate should be wholly positive.

#### **7.7 Community Impact**

7.7.1 The approach set out in the draft strategies is designed to secure as many benefits as possible, for example looking for biodiversity and flood risk gains alongside carbon capture. Whilst some individual schemes may have, or be feared to have, some negative local impacts, the overall impact on the communities of West Northamptonshire from the package should be positive.

### **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 None.