

**7a REFERRAL FROM CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT: 23 FEBRUARY 2021
– DISCUSSION LED BY THE CO-CHAIR (CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY)**

NB: To be taken with Item 9

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the revised Climate Change Strategy be endorsed;
- (2) That the target date for achieving Net Zero Carbon District status be brought forward to 2042.

REASON FOR DECISION:

- (1) To promote policies which allow NHDC to take a leadership role in local efforts to address the climate emergency.
- (2) To ensure the Cabinet Panel on the Environment's feedback on the strategy is heard by Cabinet.

The Policy & Community Engagement manager gave a presentation on the revised Climate Change Strategy and highlighted points including:

- The Council was acting in partnership with organisations across the district including Herts County Council Climate Strategy Partnership, Affinity Water, the Environment Agency, and other public interest groups e.g Plastic Free Letchworth;
- NDHC climate policies had sought to reduce its carbon footprint significantly and other efficiencies in terms of water, single use plastics and emissions reduction in vehicle fleets and no-idling licensing requirements were being put in place;
- The Climate Change Strategy review proposed development under three headings of reducing the Council's carbon emissions, facilitating businesses and citizens to reduce their carbon emissions through policy development, and to guide and encourage outside bodies (citizens and businesses) to go further with their environmental impact goals;
- Specific actions included ensuring that Council estate buildings use energy efficient and zero carbon measures; putting green clauses in leases and licenses of properties; exploring on-site generation of energy; replacing Council fleet vehicles with ultra-low emission vehicles; exploring opportunities for low-emission refuse freighters; quantifying how much land would need to be planted to offset some carbon emissions; instituting a once a year cut-and-lift regime on verges; strengthening hedgerows and preserving scrubland; ensuring masterplans are designed around foot travel rather than private vehicles; bringing Passivhaus or similar standards in to design SPDs; signposting residents to retrofitting services to boost energy efficiency; working with Herts Waste Partnership; encouraging support for community tree planting initiatives.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure highlighted the following:

- The revised climate change strategy aimed to do three things; bringing the Council's estate up to the highest environmental standards, ensuring decisions made by the Council in areas like planning promoted environmental protections as a priority, and working with outside partners to assist and encourage environmental policies beyond the resources of the Council;

- The revised strategy would set out a road map on the Council's carbon emissions reduction journey with an accurate assessment of its starting position, a target for net zero, and goals along the way.

The Chair led a discussion on contributions to the meeting and the revised Climate Change Strategy with Members, Officers and public participants including:

- There were differences in carbon emissions assessments and assessment of the District's emissions came from central government, whereas NHDC was able to assess its own emissions as a Council;
- Net Zero and Carbon Neutral were subtly different measures to do with whether third party emissions were considered;
- NHDC would have to rely on some degree of carbon sequestration but was able to do this in-District;
- There was a Natural Environment Readiness Fund available from central government which could provide funds to projects to allow them to attract further investment;
- The Council should aim for a more ambitious target than the national objective of 2050;
- The target date for achieving zero carbon should be ambitious but achievable;
- Too short a date could lead to a failure in finding lasting and sustainable reduction policies; long term solutions were required;
- The Climate Change Strategy and environmental policies more generally relied on the Council convincing the public and other bodies to make progress themselves;
- Explaining the reasons behind climate change related policies to the public was essential;
- The existing housing stock in the District was a significant emissions/energy efficiency problem and a way forward to bring existing houses up to standard was required;
- Building regulations were set nationally and while the Council had good working relationships with housing providers in the district, NHDC primarily had a lobbying and supporting role in bringing existing housing stock up to energy efficient standards;
- The Council would continue to work within HCCSP to encourage change county-wide and magnify its influence with outside bodies;
- NHDC should sign post and provide support for residents seeking to retrofit and to housing associations, and highlight the successes of business and groups with high environmental standards;
- The revised Climate Change Strategy was a positive step forward and the Panel was satisfied with its aims and intentions but keen to strengthen its target date.

It was:

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