

<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>24 June 2025</b>

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030**

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR - ENVIRONMENT

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member for Environment

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report proposes a replacement of the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027, which was approved in 2022. This replacement version is The Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 and aligns with the Council Plan 2024-2028 priority of Sustainability.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. That Cabinet note the contents of Appendix C Sustainability Strategy Consultation Response.
- 2.2. That Cabinet adopt the following documents, taking into consideration the new actions proposed under each theme.
- Appendix A Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030
  - Appendix B Sustainability Strategy Actions Table

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. In 2019 the Council passed a motion to declare a Climate Emergency, pledging to do everything within its power to become carbon neutral by 2030. In July 2023, the Council also declared an Ecological Emergency recognising that the crisis facing nature requires urgent action and is interlinked with the climate crisis. The replacement of the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 and transition to the Sustainability Strategy will reflect the Sustainability priority in the Council Plan 2024-28. As such it includes new actions under this broader scope. It also reflects the latest legislation and best practice.

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1. To keep the existing Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 and not align with our Sustainability Priority, however this is not best practice. In that scenario, we would also need to separately approve and publish our biodiversity objectives and actions in order to fulfil our Biodiversity Duty, as per The Environment Act 2021. These objectives and actions have been incorporated into the Sustainability Strategy.

## **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1. A workshop was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> November with members of the Climate Sustainability Officers Group, other key officers, the Leadership Team, and senior colleagues who work in sustainability at Hertfordshire County Council. Participants were invited to due to their specialist expertise and assisted in identifying gaps in the previous strategy and developing further actions which take into account the broader scope of sustainability.
- 5.2. The public, staff, and councillors were all given a chance to comment on and express their level of satisfaction with the proposed objectives and actions through a survey that ran throughout March. The survey received 141 responses from the public, 33 from members of staff and 3 from councillors.
- 5.3. The proposed strategy actions underwent cross-party consultation with elected members on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March where representatives from all parties had an opportunity to make comment on the strategy.
- 5.4 The relevant Executive Member has been kept updated throughout.
- 5.5 The draft strategy was reviewed by the Leadership Team (comprising of Chief Executive and Directors), and Political Liaison Board (comprised of the Leadership Team and Cabinet), prior to being brought to committee.

## **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 14th February 2025.

## **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1. The Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 was drafted to replace the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 in order to align with the council priority of Sustainability as laid out in the [Council Plan 2024-2028](#). The new Sustainability Strategy widens the scope of the previous strategy with the inclusion of two new themes (Adaptation and Biodiversity) as well as retaining a focus on emissions reduction with the aims to create a net zero council by 2030 and a net zero district by 2040.
- 7.2. The Strategy outlines the international frameworks and agreements that have informed the global response to climate change. On the advice of the CCC, Parliament passed legislation in June 2019 that required the UK to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050. In 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report found that greenhouse gas emissions are continuing to rise globally and that current national and international plans to address climate change are not ambitious enough to limit warming to 1.5°C. It also found that despite progress in adaptation, many more measures are needed to live safely with the effects of climate change.

- 7.3 The Climate Change Act requires the UK Government to produce a Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) every 5 years. The Third Climate Change Risk Assessment was published in 2022, with the government subsequently publishing the UK's Third National Adaptation Programme in 2023, to address the 61 climate risks and opportunities identified in the risk assessment. The Climate Change Committee has recently acknowledged the key role that local authorities can play in helping communities adapt and prepare for climate impacts.
- 7.4 The Environment Act 2021 and subsequent regulations include legally binding targets to reduce the risk of species extinction, restore or create 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat, and ensure overall species abundance is increasing by 2030 and increases by 10% by 2042. The Environment Act also introduced the policy of Biodiversity Net Gain from development - a means of measurably increasing biodiversity through the planning system - as well as a strengthened biodiversity duty, requiring all public authorities in England to consider how they can conserve and enhance biodiversity, and take appropriate actions to do so. As such, there is a clear part for local authorities to play in improving biodiversity.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The actions from the previous Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 were reviewed early into drafting this Sustainability Strategy, and were included or excluded based on their completion, viability, and relevancy. The aims of creating a Net Zero Council by 2030 and a Net Zero District by 2040 were carried forward from the previous strategy with some new actions added. The aims around Adaptation were also carried forward, with new actions created to increase focus in this area. National government published the UK's Third National Adaptation Programme in 2023 addresses the biggest climate risks and opportunities and highlights the leading role of local government to carry out adaptation measures. The proposed actions in the strategy address many of the priorities laid out in this Adaptation Programme such as flooding defences and creation of green spaces in urban areas for cooling. The fourth aim around Biodiversity is new to this iteration. It follows the declaration of the Ecological Emergency in 2023 and the Council's commitment to take action to protect nature. The proposed actions aim to address this and will also help the council fulfil its obligations under the Biodiversity Duty (Environment Act 2021).—Finally, there is a 'cross-cutting' section for actions which relate to multiple aims.
- 8.2 During the drafting of the Strategy, it was identified that there are a number of actions that we take on a continual basis – effectively, our 'business as usual'. While these actions are not new, they are an important part of the council's culture of sustainability which should be noted. These are therefore included in the Strategy under 'What We Do'.
- 8.3 Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is central to sustainability. We have completed an assessment of the Council's emissions from 2021-2024, identifying key sources and trends. This assessment has been used to inform the key actions under the aim of being a Net Zero council by 2030. The assessment also provides an overview of emissions trends across our District from 2005-2022 which has informed the actions under the aim of being a Net Zero district by 2040. The assessment is due to be uploaded to the council's [climate change webpage](#) shortly.

- 8.4 A document highlighting the achievements from the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 will also be uploaded to the council's climate change webpage shortly.
- 8.5 It should be noted that this is a plain-text version only. The Strategy will be formatted and designed once the content is approved. The design will draw from the look and feel of our current strategies to ensure brand consistency.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. Cabinet's Terms of Reference in the Council's Constitution include at section 5.7.1 the power 'to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council'. The proposed actions at Appendix A are not reserved to Council and therefore the Cabinet can prepare and agree the policy outlined.
- 9.2. The proposals highlight the direct link to the Council's priority of Sustainability, as laid out in the Council Plan 2024-2028. The Council Plan's strategic priorities for 2024-2028 provide high level reference points to assist the Council making clear and effective decisions to reduce environmental impact. The proposed actions at Appendix A detail how the Council plans to meet its target of being net zero in its own operations by 2030, a net zero district by 2040, as well as details of improving biodiversity and adaptation to climate change, and therefore accord with the Council's established strategic priorities.
- 9.3. The Environment Act 2021 introduced a strengthened 'Biodiversity Duty' whereby local authorities in England are required to consider how they can conserve and enhance biodiversity, and take appropriate actions to do so. This Strategy helps the Council fulfil this duty.
- 9.4. Local authorities must also help ensure the delivery of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain from development via the planning process (Environment Act 2021). This duty is covered through the Planning Policy system and highlighted in this Strategy.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 A number of the proposed actions detailed in Appendix A will require additional financial resource to achieve. This is likely to include both revenue and capital costs and the Strategy is clear that external funding will be necessary to make some of the actions affordable. Some of those actions may deliver future reductions in costs. For example, reductions in energy use can reduce cost, but the current relative costs of gas and electricity can mean that reduced overall energy use can actually cost more. The revenue costs of capital (which are made up of interest costs and Minimum Revenue Provision) will need to be factored into business cases and budget projection.
- 10.2 As part of the annual budget planning process each year it will be necessary to prioritise to determine the actions that can be achieved in the coming year(s), and the costs involved (including whether they are capital or revenue). There will be a need to prioritise the actions, in terms of the extent to which they can be delivered, the timing of delivery and the sustainability benefits that they achieve. To ensure that the overall programme is affordable within the resources that the Council has available it is likely that there will need to be reductions in spend elsewhere. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025-30 sets a target for the delivery of net savings of £2.5 million (increased to £2.8 million as part of setting the 25/26 budget) per year by the end of 2029/30. As this is a net target, this does allow for additional costs relating to new priorities but does require that these

will increase the gross savings (efficiencies, income generation or service changes) that need to be delivered.

- 10.3 There are currently no external requirements placed on Councils to meet environmental targets. As our medium-term budgets currently only go up to 2029/30, we have not considered the costs of any carbon off-setting that may be required. The medium-term budget that is developed this year will cover the period up to 2030/31. However, due to the uncertainty over the level of off-setting that may be required and the unit cost of off-setting, the intention is that this will continue to be excluded from budget projections. As a result of the above, all financial business cases just consider the direct costs.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. There are risks associated with not delivering the actions within the Sustainability Strategy and not meeting our net zero targets, these may be reputational as well as putting the future climate at further risk by not mitigating against climate change. To help address this, in November 2024 we added a service risk to the Council's corporate risk management system (Ideagen) covering Climate Change Adaptation. The risk assumes that adaptation to climate change will remain an ongoing and consistent consideration as the climate continues to change. While the short-term failure to adapt services to the changing climate may have a low impact on the organisation, the failure to adapt over the long term brings bigger potential impacts to the organisation which need to be acted on. Once the strategy has been approved, we will look to introduce other corporate risks to help manage potential threats to the successful delivery of strategy actions, with key projects and associated risks being added to the Council Delivery Plan as appropriate.
- 11.3. While the strategy is aspirational and contains actions that will help us meet our targets, some will be subject to additional resources, both financial and human resources which will be reviewed and forecast as best as possible on an ongoing basis. At this early stage, without having secured the resources required to deliver the entire action plan, there is a risk that the Council could fail to achieve the aims of the strategy.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. There are no direct negative impacts attached to this Strategy. However further equality impact assessments may be undertaken for individual proposed projects.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

## **14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 The Strategy aims to improve the Council's action on protecting the environment, mitigating against climate change while also improving biodiversity and climate change adaptation of Council services and the district as a whole. The themes and actions within the strategy will have an overall positive impact on the environment and address the commitments of our Climate and Ecological Emergency declarations set out in section 3. Environmental Impact Assessments may be completed for individual projects as they come to fruition.

## **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1 A number of the proposed actions detailed in Appendix A will require additional staffing resource to achieve. They will have impacts across a number of teams including planning, estates, property services, leisure, waste, green space, parking and policy & strategy. Some of the work may be able to be incorporated in to existing and developing work plans, but it will mean that other activities will be deprioritised. As actions and projects from the strategy are reviewed, so will the resource implications.

## **16. APPENDICES**

- 16.1 Appendix A Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030  
16.2 Appendix B Sustainability Strategy Actions Table  
16.3 Appendix C Sustainability Strategy Consultation Response

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**18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

18.1 None