



Grounds and Environmental Services Committee

Date: 6 December 2021

Title: Climate emergency

Purpose of the Report:

To consider the next steps following the Council's resolution made 27 September 201.

Contact Officer:

Ian Haynes, Head of Grounds & Environmental Services

Corporate Objective/s	LLTC Five Year Plan – Objective #7	
Implications:		
Financial	Yes	£4,500 funds to taken from 9024/950 with available funds of £28,197.
Human Resources	No	None
Operational/Service delivery	No	None
Procedural/Legal	Yes	Tree Survey required.
Risk/Health and Safety	No	None
Environmental Aims	Yes	Council to be becoming net carbon neutral by 2030

1 RECOMMENDATION/S

Should the Committee be minded, the proposals are:

- 1.1 To note the report.
- 1.2 To recommend to Policy & Finance Committee approval of the new revenue budget line included in the draft budget for 2022-23, with respect to the climate change agenda.
- 1.3 To endorse that quotations be received for a carbon assessment of Town Council operations to provide baseline evidence on which to take forward the move towards being net carbon neutral by 2030.

- 1.4 To endorse that, an i-Tree Eco assessment is incorporated in our latest tree condition survey, with a combined cost of £4,500 (to be taken from 9024/950) with available funds of £28,197.
- 1.5 To support the undertaking of carbon literacy training as an organisation for both staff and councillors.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting held 24 June 2019, the Town Council adopted a set of environmental ambitions to support the climate change agenda. This was forward-thinking and pre-dated the declaration of a climate emergency by the Local Government Association on 2 July 2019 and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in October 2019.
- 2.2 Since adopting the ambitions, the Town Council has been embedding environmental awareness into its operations wherever possible. For example, moving to largely paperless meetings for its 60+ annual council/committee meetings. A report to Council in September 2021 outlined some of the actions taken to date and those proposed in the future: <https://www.leightonlinlade-tc.gov.uk/climate-emergency/>
- 2.3 At its meeting held 27 September 2021, the following resolution was made:

RESOLVED that following the declaration of a "Climate Emergency" by the National Association of Local Councils at its Annual Conference in October 2019 and their excellent Case Studies Report and their detailed advice on how councils can take action on climate change, this Council declares a "Climate Emergency" and commits to the activities of this Council being carbon neutral by 2030.

This Council also commits to working with Central Bedfordshire Council in influencing and supporting the wider community of Leighton Linlade to achieve the Government's targets of net zero emissions by 2050.

- 2.4 Following this resolution and the request made by the Council for more measurable ("SMART") objectives in respect of the climate emergency, several steps are proposed as a starting point to the development of more specific actions and projects leading to the target date of 2030.

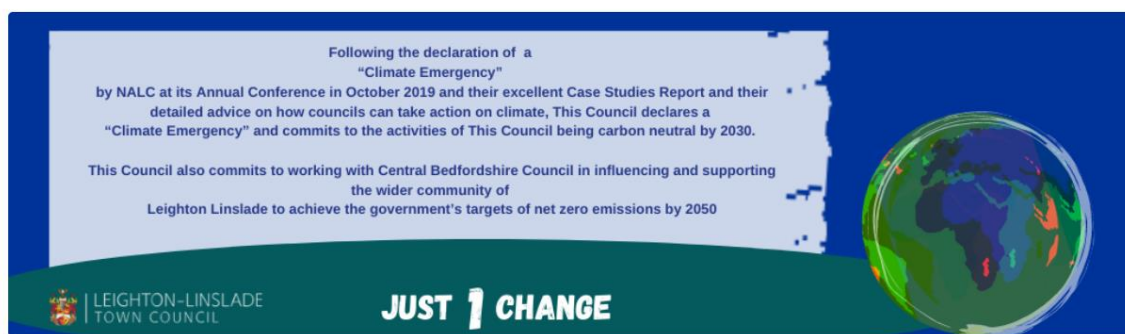
3 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 In 2021, NALC issued a publication, "What can local councils do on climate change", following a survey of the sector (circulated with councillor newsletter no. 24 on 29 October 2021). NALC recommends that local councils start by conducting carbon footprint calculations in order to identify how to adapt council operations to reduce carbon emissions.

- 3.2 Whilst many local councils surveyed had declared a climate emergency, only 17% had come up with any innovative projects/solutions. Many councils stated that lack of legal powers, specialist knowledge, and funding were barriers to progressing climate emergency work.
- 3.3 NALC has committed to providing support and guidance to local councils which are seeking funding, grants or expertise to implement their climate change policies, sharing best practices in the sector and continuing to lobby the Government to raise awareness of the climate emergency at a local level and to improve access to funding.
- 3.4 The NALC publication also contained several links to valuable sources of guidance and information, which will be explored further.
- 3.5 Officers took part in an NALC webinar "Levelling up the environment through biodiversity net gain" on 27 October 2021 (recording later circulated to councillors). A whole range of initiatives was discussed, including disposable cups, green energy suppliers, smart meters, solar panels, electric vehicles, community energy schemes, TerraCycle, repair café, community fridge, wildlife-friendly gardening, the planting of flowering trees and fruit trees, banning pesticides and encouraging sustainable food production. Many of these ideas will form the basis of messages to residents to encourage actions supporting climate change.
- 3.6 The Local Government Association climate change hub, whilst aimed at local authorities, contains some helpful information and resources, including an e-learning module in respect of biodiversity:
<https://www.local.gov.uk/biodiversity-e-learning-councils>
<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change>
- 3.7 Central Bedfordshire Council adopted a Sustainability Plan in September 2020 outlining the steps it intends to take to become carbon neutral by 2030. Key aspects of this include:
- i) training of councillors and staff; a cultural shift towards sustainable living and work practices
 - ii) embedding sustainability in processes such as procurement and project management
 - iii) improve the sustainability of council operations via smart meters, energy audits and improvements, investing in renewable energy infrastructure
 - iv) electric vehicle charging infrastructure, active travel and improved public transport
 - v) creating a virtual advice centre on sustainable living for communities
 - vi) working with groups and with parish councils to encourage communities to engage in sustainable practices and reduce carbon footprints

https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/122/climate_change/672/climate_change_-_tackling_it_and_our_strategy

- 3.8 A web page is now on the Town Council website. Some initial messages have gone out in the November/December edition of About Town and across social media platforms. In the future, messaging will focus on ways people can "make 1 change" in their everyday lives, which will help make a difference. <https://www.leightonlinlade-tc.gov.uk/climate-emergency/>



- 3.7 Officers have recently participated in a webinar run by the Carbon Literacy Project as part of the COP26 climate change summit. The Project will release a toolkit for carbon literacy training for town and parish councils in January 2022. It is envisaged that initial carbon literacy training with both employees and councillors will be a practical first step in the journey to becoming net carbon neutral. <https://carbonliteracy.com/toolkits/>

- 3.8 The Town Council is due to undertake its latest tree condition survey, and Officers would like to include an i-Tree Eco assessment. i-Tree is a state-of-the-art, peer-reviewed software suite from the USDA Forest Service that provides urban and rural forestry analysis and benefits assessment tools. The i-Tree tools can help strengthen forest management and advocacy efforts by quantifying forest structure and trees' environmental benefits. i-Tree Eco provides extensive forest and individual tree analyses, including the following:

Functional Analyses:

- Pollution removal and human health impacts
- Carbon sequestration and storage
- Hydrology effects (avoided run-off, interception, transpiration)
- Building energy effects
- Tree bio-emissions

- 3.9 Although several online tools exist to help determine carbon footprint, it is felt that clear, accurate, and credible baseline data is essential to choosing the next steps. An initial enquiry was made to the Carbon Trust to undertake a carbon assessment. Due to the enormous increase in demand, they are currently unable to help. Other avenues are now being explored, with recommendations sought from other local councils that have completed a carbon footprint assessment.

- 3.10 Until an assessment has been completed and recommendations taken forward, the costs associated with reaching a net carbon neutral position by 2030 are unknown. In the emerging 2022-23 revenue budget, an initial sum of £30,000 has been included. Still, it is recognised that far more significant sums are likely to be required in the subsequent seven financial years, circa £1 million +, which may need to be found by various means. It may be the case that some projects could be funded through the future projects earmarked reserve as set out in the five-year financial plan. However, this would be a matter for the Council to determine alongside other proposed projects to be delivered.
- 3.11 The Committee's attention is also drawn to the fact that there may be resourcing implications that will need consideration further down the line. The use of different grounds maintenance equipment may, for example, necessitate significant changes in the scheduling of operational workload due to the need to recharge equipment after a period of use and may take longer to complete simple tasks. Therefore an increase in staffing may be required to maintain standards.

4 CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 As with the previously adopted environmental ambitions, the climate change declaration and resolution to become net carbon neutral will need to underpin all Town Council operations and decisions in the future as a priority.
- 4.2 To this end, the emerging procurement and tendering procedures will give greater weight to this aspect of quote/tender evaluation.
- 4.3 To help the Council on its journey, carbon literacy training in 2022 will provide information to both employees and councillors, enabling the Council as a whole to become more aware of the carbon implications of its operations and decisions.
- 4.4 As the Committee perhaps most significantly affected by the recent resolution and its implications (grounds maintenance equipment, vehicles, and most Town Council buildings), the Committee is asked to note that it may be asked to consider significant expenditure and/or operational changes in future if the target set by the Council of becoming net carbon neutral by 2030 is to be met.

End.