

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Climate Change and Sustainability
Date:	29 July 2021
Title:	Environment Strategy
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the preparation of an environment strategy setting out the County Council's environmental principles and priorities in relation to its activities. This is to ensure that there is an overarching, high level, framework, covering both the natural and built environments, to provide a consistent, coordinated and coherent framework. The strategy will contribute to the County Council's climate change objectives.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Member for Climate Change and Sustainability approves the preparation of an environment strategy for the County Council, in consultation with key partners and organisations, which will contribute to the County Council's climate change objectives.
3. That the proposed environment strategy should be prepared on the basis set out in the report and presented to the Executive Member for Climate Change and Sustainability at a future decision meeting for approval to adopt the strategy.

Executive Summary

4. This paper seeks to identify in general terms the scope of the environmental agenda faced by the County Council, the need for an overarching environment strategy to guide its activities, and the requirement for this to address both the natural and built environments. The paper seeks approval for the preparation of the strategy, in consultation with key partners and organisations, which will contribute to the County Council's climate change objectives.
5. The County Council has long recognised that a healthy environment is vital in contributing to the long-term sustainability of the county, in tackling the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change and meeting the

Government's commitment to a green recovery. The Strategic Plan¹ places the importance of protecting and improving Hampshire's environment and quality of life at the heart of the County Council's priorities, and the recommendations of the Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry and the County Council's Climate Change Strategy have further highlighted this.

6. In addition to the work of the Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry and the Climate Change Strategy, the County Council has developed and is continuing to develop a wide range of policies, plans and strategies recognising the importance of the environment and setting out how it will be protected, enhanced and improved.
7. As the County Council deepens its commitment to meeting the challenges of climate change, and other human pressures on our environment, so the number of policies, plans and strategies that both impact on and are impacted by environmental issues, has increased. It is therefore considered that there is now a need to provide an overarching environment strategy, covering both the natural and built environments, to provide a consistent, coordinated and coherent framework for the County Council's activities.
8. This need is made more urgent not only by the continuing work to deliver the actions in the Climate Change Action Plan but by the evidence set out in the twin reports into the state of Hampshire's natural and built environments², the proposals set out in the emerging Hampshire Spatial Framework and the growing number of strategic environmental initiatives at the local, regional and national level. These include the proposed reforms to the planning system, the 25-Year Environment Plan and forthcoming Environment Bill, the Agriculture Act 2020 and the UK's National Infrastructure Strategy.

Contextual information

9. The County Council has long recognised that a healthy environment is vital in contributing to the long-term sustainability of the county, in tackling the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change and meeting the Government's commitment to a green recovery. The Strategic Plan places the importance of protecting and improving Hampshire's environment and quality of life at the heart of the County Council's priorities, and the recommendations of the Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry and the County Council's Climate Change Strategy have further highlighted this.

¹ <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/corporate/ServingHampshireStrategicPlan2017-2021.pdf>

² <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/hampshire2050/StateofNaturalEnvironmentReport.pdf>

10. The Hampshire 2050 Commissioners Summary Report³ set out the following vision:
- “Recognise Hampshire’s natural and historic environment and the services it provides as its most valued asset and an essential component of Hampshire’s attractiveness and prosperity.”
11. In considering the built and natural environment, commissioners expressed the need to strive for “net positive environmental gain across both” and put forward a policy to “develop and promote a focus on sustaining and enhancing Hampshire’s environment to strengthen Hampshire’s economy and society.” Among the commissioners’ recommendations was to “work with partners to understand and develop key strategies and policies that recognise the benefits of net environmental gain across all sectors.”
12. The third strategic outcome of the proposed new Strategic Plan for 2021-2025 provides a strong alignment to the County Council’s key corporate programmes relating to climate change and place shaping. Importantly, it includes a reference to striving for Environmental Net Gain – defined by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government as the aim to reduce pressure on and achieve overall improvements in natural capital, ecosystem services and the benefits they deliver for people and nature⁴.
13. Ensuring that the environment continues to thrive and prosper is also central to the vision of the County Council’s Climate Change Strategy. The environment strategy will be key to embedding climate resilience and mitigation across key policies and sectors, working with communities across Hampshire.
14. The experience of the environment, or place, is integral to the newly launched The Hampshire Story⁵. Supported by the County Council, this is a new approach to marketing Hampshire and promoting inward investment. Its aim is to provide a forward-looking view of what Hampshire will be as a place, its distinctiveness and ambition. Reflecting the inclusion of protecting the natural environment in the Government’s Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution⁶, “cultivating the natural capital” is a key part of what The Hampshire Story has called its ‘Big Idea.’ The experience of Hampshire’s

³ <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/hampshire2050/2050-summaryreport2019.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment>

⁵ www.hampshirstory.co.uk

⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936567/10_POINT_PLAN_BOOKLET.pdf

unique environment, in all its aspects, is reflected prominently in the themes which the initiative has chosen as its focal points as it grows and develops.

15. Natural England's People and Nature Survey in 2020⁷ revealed that almost nine in 10 adults in England reported that protection of the environment is important to them personally. Nearly three quarters of adults were concerned about biodiversity loss in England. Research has shown that access to high quality public spaces, gardens, parks, woodlands and rivers is associated with better mental health and wellbeing outcomes⁸, and has played a significant part in helping many through the coronavirus pandemic. The importance of environmental quality and the built environment is a key strand in the Strategy for the Health and Wellbeing of Hampshire 2019-2024⁹, and Towards a Healthier Hampshire: A Strategy for Improving the Public's Health 2016-2021¹⁰. Creating liveable streets, promoting active travel, improving access to green and blue spaces, and improving air quality all come through strongly in the strategies.
16. In addition to the work of the Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry and the Climate Change Strategy, the County Council has developed and is continuing to develop a wide range of policies, plans and strategies recognising the importance of the environment and setting out how it will be protected, enhanced and improved. Many of these are listed in the Climate Change Strategy and include the following:
- Local Flood and Water Management Strategy;
 - Strategic Asset Management Plan;
 - Hampshire Tree Strategy;
 - Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan; and
 - Local Transport Plan

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-love-for-nature-during-covid-19-highlighted-by-new-survey>

⁸

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to Greenspace_2020_review.pdf

⁹ <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/adultservices/AStrategyfortheHealthandWellbeingofHampshire-final.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/public-health/TowardsahealthierHampshireastrategyforimprovingthepublicshealth2016-2021.pdf>

17. As the County Council deepens its commitment to meeting the challenges of climate change, and other human pressures on our environment, so the number of policies, plans and strategies that both impact on and are impacted by environmental issues, has increased. There is however a corresponding risk of an increasing disconnect between them. It is therefore considered that there is now a need to provide an overarching, high level, environment strategy, covering both the natural and built environments, to provide a consistent, coordinated and coherent framework for the County Council's activities.
18. This need is made more urgent not only by the continuing work to deliver the actions in the Climate Change Action Plan but by the evidence set out in the twin reports into the state of Hampshire's natural and built environments, and the proposals emerging in the evolving Hampshire Spatial Framework¹¹.
19. Commissioned on behalf of all 11 district and borough councils and the two national parks, the Framework will be shaped around strategic environmental and infrastructure requirements for the period up to 2050. Prepared on a 'boundary blind' basis, the Framework will seek to encourage policy and behaviours across the county to accommodate future sustainable growth in a way which secures improvements to key infrastructure and protects and enhances the role and function of the natural environment. It will do that by identifying opportunities to enhance, connect and create new environmental and infrastructure provision across Hampshire which, amongst other objectives, protects, enhances and creates natural habitats (including green infrastructure) in order to arrest the decline in our native flora and fauna.
20. In the last three years the County Council has faced a growing number of strategic environmental initiatives at the local, regional and national level. The implementation of last year's Agriculture Act, and the proposed reforms to the planning system and the forthcoming Environment Bill will maintain the pace of change.
21. Published by Government in January 2018, the 25-Year Environment Plan¹² is seen as one of the most significant catalysts for change and is the basis of the Environment Bill which is expected to pass into legislation later this year. The Bill will provide the legal foundation for Government action to improve the environment, set targets for some of the biggest current environmental challenges, and introduce new duties on local authorities, and others, in the delivery of the following goals set out in 25 Year Environment Plan:
 - clean air;
 - clean and plentiful water;

¹¹ <https://hampshire-spatial-framework-luc.hub.arcgis.com/>

¹²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

- thriving plants and wildlife;
- a reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought;
- using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently; and
- enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

The 25-Year Environment Plan also sets out how pressures on the environment will be managed by:

- mitigating and adapting to climate change;
- minimising waste;
- managing exposure to chemicals; and
- enhancing biosecurity.

22. The 25-year Environment Plan promotes a “natural capital” approach to protecting and enhancing the environment, and introduces the principle of nature recovery networks, and biodiversity and environmental net gain into planning decisions. Local Nature Recovery Strategies, natural capital and biodiversity net gain feature prominently in the Environment Bill and it is proposed that these, and the goals set out in the 25-Year Environment Plan, inform the scope and approach to the development of the proposed County Council’s Environment Strategy.
23. While the pressures, goals and policies relating to the natural environment have arguably gained most attention, and the County Council’s State of Hampshire’s natural environment report rightly highlighted the “significant decline in the overall health of Hampshire’s natural environment, including its diversity and abundance,” the condition of our built environment is also of concern.
24. Although just 15% of land in Hampshire is defined as urban, city or town, 78% of the population live in urban areas meaning that the day-to-day experience of ‘environment’ for most people in the county is defined by the buildings and infrastructure surrounding them. It is worth noting however that this infrastructure can be “green” and “blue” as well as “grey.”
25. The UK’s National Infrastructure Strategy¹³ recognises our urban areas as hubs of economic activity and that “greener and more beautiful places, with cleaner air, more green spaces, green buses, more cycling, low carbon and energy efficient homes, and better high streets” is fundamental to their long-

term success and to achieving the government's ambition "for every town to be an excellent place to live and work – offering opportunity to those who live there."

26. Our urban areas are also prominent in the physical, social, economic and cultural landscapes of Hampshire and their value is increasingly being recognised by the emergence of a "culture and heritage capital approach"¹⁴. As a natural capital approach to policy and decision making considers the value of the natural environment for people and the economy, so culture and heritage capital will inform policy and decision making for our built environments and 'everyday heritage'¹⁵ sites.
27. According to the UK Green Building Council¹⁶, the built environment is responsible for around 40% of the UK's total carbon footprint and represents huge stores of embodied carbon. Retaining, reusing and retrofitting our existing built heritage including buildings and infrastructure will therefore be central to how urban areas develop in future. Reducing buildings' carbon emissions, and increasing their energy generation, will mean the emergence of new forms, materials and construction methods that will begin to change the appearance of cities and towns. Green roofs and walls, and the requirement for tree lined streets as part of the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and a new national design code, will further impact on the experience of the built environment.
28. The natural and built environments face a plethora of opportunities, challenges and changes that are interconnected, dynamic and complex. Meeting this environmental agenda is fundamental to the objective of "building back better." The proposed environment strategy will therefore consider both the natural and built environments and in doing so provide an overarching framework for existing and new individual policies, plans and strategies at a more detailed level across the corporate structure. In setting out the County Council's environmental principles and priorities in relation to its activities, the strategy will closely align with the Climate Change Strategy.
29. While the broad scope of the environment strategy will be informed by the 25-Year Environment Plan, the County Council will work closely with its strategic partners, including the Hampshire 2050 Partnership, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership and other key organisations to develop the strategy in detail. This will not only enable the strategy to provide the consistent, coordinated and coherent framework required for the County

¹⁴ <https://historicengland.org.uk/research/current/social-and-economic-research/culture-and-heritage-capital/>

¹⁵ <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/heritage-value-of-place/>

¹⁶ <https://www.ukgbc.org/climate-change/>

Council's activities but demonstrate leadership, encourage agreement around the environmental principles and priorities, and facilitate a joining-up of complementary initiatives among all those engaged in the development of the strategy.

Finance

30. It is intended to utilise strategic frameworks and existing internal resources by reviewing and re-prioritising current work programmes to undertake the preparation of the Environment Strategy.

Consultation and Equalities

31. The decision in this report is seeking approval for the preparation of an environment strategy. The development of the strategy will be informed through engagement and consultation with key partners and organisations and will undertake specific consideration of equalities issues. The impact of the Environment Strategy during the preparation stages covered by this decision is considered to be neutral for groups with protected characteristics.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

32. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
33. The tools to assess specific impacts on climate change adaptation and mitigation were found not to be applicable on the grounds that the decision relates to an early-stage commitment to prepare an environment strategy. Meeting the challenges of climate change is one of the key drivers for the development of the proposed strategy. It is therefore recognised that work on the strategy will be guided by climate change considerations and closely aligned with the County Council's Climate Change Strategy.
34. The preparation of an environment strategy contributes to the Strategic Plan priorities, the Climate Change Strategy actions, and supports the recommendations of the Hampshire 2050 Commission of Inquiry.

Conclusions

35. The proposed Environment Strategy will provide an overarching, high level, framework setting out the County Council's environmental principles and priorities in relation to its activities. The preparation of the Strategy reflects the

significant challenges and opportunities facing the County Council, the need to demonstrate leadership while working collaboratively with a wide range of partners, and the identification of those areas where it will need to focus its efforts to ensure resources are targeted to enable a consistent, coordinated and coherent approach. The strategy will align closely with the Climate Change Strategy and contribute to the County Council's climate change objectives.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

The impact of the Environment Strategy during the preparation stages covered by this decision is considered to be neutral for groups with protected characteristics.