

Full Council, 8 October 2024
Councillor Neil Reeve, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change

This report reflects the highlights of the Portfolio from Mid July to End Oct
2024

Climate Change

Climate Action Updates:

Biodiversity

- The public consultation for the **Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy** launched on 30 August 2024 and consultation will end on 25th October 2024
- Includes mapping of nature recovery opportunities, biodiversity priorities and key actions
- UDC is a supporting authority to the consultation and is encouraging everyone to engage by exploring the opportunity maps, reviewing habitat priorities and actions, and to share your thoughts.

District Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

- Consultants have produced the Uttlesford LCWIP a 10-year strategic approach to cycling and walking improvements.
- It focuses on opportunities for delivering a new strategic cycle network, setting out the quality of current provision and priorities for future investment in Uttlesford and has two more settlement-based plans for Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow.
- Public Consultation on the LCWIP is expected later in the autumn, dates to be confirmed shortly.

Essex Transport Strategy Part one

- 22nd Sept the consultation closed on part one of the Essex Transport Strategy.
- A second consultation on the full draft strategy and a programme of planned investment in different parts of Essex is expected to take place in early 2025.

UDC Carbon Baseline Report and Trajectory to Net Zero

- APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) Energy is working with us to revisit the council carbon emission baseline data and create an updated trajectory to net zero.

Public Sector Decarbonisation fund

- Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme has been announced. Closing date for applications 25 Nov
- Design and costings for a UDC Heat Decarbonisation Plan for London Road is being finalised ahead of decision on our PSDS Grant application due shortly.

Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme launched:

- We are now open for applications for Round 3 of the Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme.
- Scheme open to community groups, town and parish councils. Grants from £1k up to £20k
- Projects that will reduce carbon emissions, or can be for nature/biodiversity projects
- **Closing date midday 2nd December. Webinar 7.30pm Thurs, 10th October.**

Great British Energy

- GB Energy will partner with energy companies, local authorities and communities – investing in community owned energy generation.
- GB Energy Local Power Plan - through partnering with and providing funding and support to Local and Combined Authorities and Community Energy Groups.
- Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP) consultation closes 8th October. Part of new policy framework for LPAs and will be implemented in 2025.
- LPAs will be a key part of the regional energy coordination, providing the bottom-up inputs - RESP outlines how it will work with LPAs, gas and electricity networks and heat network developers.
- RESP ensures that there is understanding of what infrastructure is needed to achieve net zero prospects/plans locally, in addition to sending the strong signals to investors, and so on.

Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants

- Takeley Park Homes HUG2 project. UDC are working closely with the Greater South Eastern Net Zero Hub (GSENGH) and Cornerstone to deliver improvements to properties for eligible residents. Currently 26 park homes have had full external wall insulation and re-cladding on their homes as part of the Home Upgrade Grant scheme and some have even received under floor insulation too. Further homes are in the application and survey phase that we hope to get completed before the winter.
- Warm Homes Local Grants. The government have just announced a new grant scheme which will replace the Home Upgrade Grant scheme.

Community Energy Projects – taking the next step

- The Littlebury Energy Project was awarded £40,000 from the Community Energy Fund (CEF) earlier this year. Bioregional and EQUANS will shortly conclude and publish their feasibility study which looks at a community-wide solution to decarbonising heating in Littlebury.
- Findings from the study indicate that blending home retrofits while developing a district heat network will achieve the highest carbon savings for the greatest number of residents.
- It is expected that the Littlebury Energy Project will apply for phase 2 of the CEF (£100k) to develop more detailed project proposals.

Air Quality Updates

- Following a successful and sustained reduction in air pollution in Saffron Walden, the council revoked the air quality management area (AQMA) that covers Saffron Walden town centre in March.
- Notwithstanding the above, the council has a statutory duty to continually review and assess air quality in its area. Each year UDC is required to report annually to the government on the findings of its assessment in the form of an Annual Status Report. This report is published each year on the Councils website. The 2024 report

concludes that there were no air quality exceedances identified in 2023. This has now been the case for the past seven years. It also sets out the Councils priorities with the main focus being the delivery of the Clean Air Projects.

The main themes of these projects are:

- To seek improvements to air quality in Saffron Walden through the introduction of clean active travel schemes
- To identify improvements to traffic management in the town to reduce congestion.
- Raise awareness of air quality issues and better educate residents and businesses on the health impacts of poor air quality and change behaviour.

Clean Air Projects

- Saffron Walden Clean Air Stakeholder Steering Group held 17th September. Implementation of all shared mobility schemes is complete. A proposal has been accepted to close the steering group and create a senior officer Saffron Walden Transport Strategy delivery group working with ECC, UDC and Town Council stakeholders.
- Saffron Walden Shared Bike Schemes have now been operating for 6months. Mode shift case studies have been published. The network of 35 on-street hire bikes in Saffron Walden has had 1500 hires since it launched in April. The most popular journey is between the town and Audley End Railway Station.

Following the successful project in Saffron Walden we are now working with consultants MP Smarter to commence projects with 10 more schools in locations across the district to raise awareness of air pollution and encourage behaviour change (modal shift) to reduce car trips.

Environmental Services

A meeting of the Essex Waste Partnership - Member Advisory Board was held on 26 September 2024.

Following from the approval of the Essex Waste Strategy, it has been announced that ECC have awarded residual waste contracts. These include one for incineration for energy production, including separation of metals for recycling, which means the Essex will move away from landfill starting in October 2025. There will be no more landfill by End 2027, which is two full years ahead of the 2030 date stated in the strategy.

The three new waste collection vehicles for UDC have been ordered.

NOTE: As always I offer my appreciation to the Officers in the team who are carrying out all this work.

A personal climate change/biodiversity note

Detergents in washing machines for clothes and laundry pass phosphates into the waste water that ends up in our sewage outfalls. This can cause an appreciable percentage of the phosphates getting into our waterways. About 10 years ago my family stopped using detergents. Instead we use Muko Nuts. These organic soap nuts (mostly from India) contain natural soap (saponin). Five of the small nuts in a small bag lasts five washes. Our laundry is clean. Once used, the remaining husk is put onto the compost heap (or the food waste caddy if you use those). And they are very much cheaper than normal detergents. A highly recommended tip.