

# Cabinet

21 June 2022

## Dorset Council Plan priorities: update report on Climate and Ecology priority For Review and Consultation

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr R Bryan, Highways, Travel and Environment

**Local Councillor(s):** County Wide

**Executive Director:** J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

Report Author(s): Steven Ford and Antony Littlechild

Title(s): Corporate Director for Climate and Ecological Sustainability and Sustainability Team Manager

Tel: 01305 225484 and 01305 224802

Email: [steven.ford@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:steven.ford@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk) and  
[antony.littlechild@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:antony.littlechild@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Report Status:** Public

### 1. Brief Summary:

1.1 The Dorset Council Plan<sup>1</sup> is the articulation of ambitions of the Council for the period between 2020, and 2024. These priorities set out the political vision of the council, helping us make decisions about where to prioritise our focus. This plan was developed after a series of conversations with residents, parish and town councils and representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Tackling the Climate and ecological emergencies are identified in the corporate plan as key priorities, and this report provides an update on this priority area.

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<sup>1</sup> [Dorset Council's Plan - Dorset Council](#)

- 1.2 The Dorset Council Climate & Ecological Emergency strategy and action plan were adopted by Full Council on 15 July 2021. The focus areas are highlighted below:
- **Making Dorset Council operations carbon neutral by 2040** – in autumn 2021, we reported that we had reduced the Council carbon emissions by 17%, an excellent step towards our interim target of 40% reduction by 2025.
  - **Helping Dorset to become Carbon Neutral by 2050** – a significant amount of work is being undertaken in our facilitation programme to support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions across Dorset, as well as strengthening the focus on protecting and enhancing the natural environment as articulated in the three-pillar approach. The latest available figures for Dorset suggest that CO2e emissions reduced by 6% (2017 baseline).
  - **Combatting the ecological emergency** - work is now underway to provide a stronger framing for our response to the ecological emergency by linking it to the government's ambition of **delivering 30% of land under positive management by 2030**. The development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy will form a key part of this approach.
- 1.3 Work is also underway to strengthen our **strategic approach to adaptation**.
- 1.4 Overall, excellent progress has been made across the strategy actions, and a broad summary is given in appendix A. In some areas progress has been slower than anticipated but this is countered by better than anticipated progress in some critical areas, particularly in reducing the council's own operational footprint and in establishing robust structures to ensure the strategy is successfully delivered.
- 1.5 Dorset Council has recently been praised for its action plan by Climate Emergency UK, coming out as one of the top single-tier authorities for its comprehensive approach to tackling the climate and ecological emergencies<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.6 This report provides a high-level articulation of the strategic direction of travel that is being taken to drive leadership at the scale required, the future

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<sup>2</sup> [Dorset Council – Climate Action Plan Explorer \(climateemergency.uk\)](https://climateemergency.uk)

areas of focus and provides a more detailed summary of progress in appendix A.

**Recommendation:**

To review progress made in the Climate and Ecology priority of the Dorset Council plan and the wider systems leadership that is being put in place.

**Reason for Recommendation:**

This report forms the first in a series of updates on the Dorset Council plan priorities and provides an opportunity for the Cabinet to focus collectively on progress to date and next steps.

**2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1** A costed action plan was presented to Cabinet on 6 October 2020, highlighting many initial actions that could be taken forward within existing resources. However, it was highlighted that significant additional revenue and capital would be required to deliver the strategy over its lifetime to ensure action continued with the urgency required and carbon reduction targets are achieved in a timely manner.
- 2.2** Dorset Council has made significant financial commitments in the 2022/23 Dorset Council budget, including the following:
- £10 million capital over 5 years
  - £750k revenue
  - Funding for a new Corporate Director for Climate & Ecological Sustainability, in post from 9 May 2022.
- 2.3** This additional funding will help to strengthen and accelerate the work already underway and the capacity within Dorset Council to prioritise, coordinate and deliver the strategy and action plan. The capital commitment will enable Dorset Council to continue, and strengthen, work already underway in some key areas, to include building retrofit, electrification of the fleet, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

### **3. Climate Implications**

- 3.1** The specific purpose of this report and the strategy is to present Dorset Council's overall approach to the delivery of the Climate and Ecology priority within the Dorset Council plan.

### **4. Well-being and Health Implications**

- 4.1** There are no specific health and wellbeing implications of this report. However, from a strategic perspective, the Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy (which is the articulation of the Climate and Ecology priority) highlights the impact that climate change poses to the health and wellbeing of the residents of Dorset. There will need to be significant consideration of how Dorset will start to manage the adaptation required to mitigate these impacts. The strategy also highlights that effective delivery of the action plan will have wider health and wellbeing co-benefits, such as improved air quality, healthy diets, improved access to high quality natural environment and active travel, amongst others.

### **5. Other implications**

- 5.1** There are no other specific implications contained in this report. As previously noted, the climate and ecology priority as articulated in the Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy and action plan itself has wide ranging implications, opportunities, and benefits for the way the council delivers services and works with others across the county.

### **6. Risk Assessment**

- 6.1** Having considered the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

- 6.2** Due to the known high level of public interest in the climate change agenda, it is important that updates are made on a regular basis.
- 6.3** The publication of this report is in line with commitments made and shows a significant level of progress in taking forward the strategy and action plan; but notes that there remains a need for increased urgency and further progress in several areas.

**6.4** In addition, the impacts of climate change pose a significant risk to council services and budgets and the wider Dorset area in the medium and long-term. Failure to effectively address the climate and ecological emergency and resilience/adaptation will increase the risks associated with climate change.

## **7. Equalities Impact Assessment**

**7.1** An initial scoping exercise is currently being undertaken to highlight any specific impacts that need to be considered through the delivery of the strategy and action plan.

## **8. Appendices**

- Appendix A – Climate and Ecology Update June 2022 – key achievements
- Appendix B – Letter to Rt Hon Greg Hands MP
- Appendix C – Letter response from Rt Hon Greg Hands MP
- Appendix D - Case study examples of work that has been undertaken by Dorset Council and partners

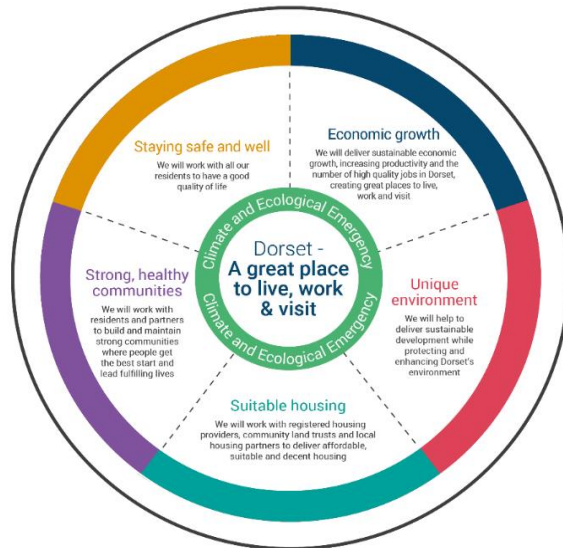
## **9. Background papers**

- Dorset Council plan - [Dorset Council's Plan - Dorset Council](#)
- Dorset Council Climate Emergency Strategy and action plans - Progress to date Autumn 2021 & Spring 2022 progress reports - [Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy - Dorset Council](#)
- Place & Resources Scrutiny committee 26 May 2022, Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy – Progress report Spring 2022 - <https://moderngov.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=654&MIId=5193>

## **10. Background**

**10.1** The main focus areas of the council plan are summarised in figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Dorset Council Corporate priorities set out in Dorset Council plan 2020-2024



**10.2** It is important that the progress against our priorities is constantly checked, and this report focusses on our climate and ecology priority (a summary of progress is contained in appendix A).

**10.3** The climate and ecological emergencies that we are all facing up to are well documented, with a burgeoning scientific consensus that climate and ecological breakdown in many parts of the world is accelerating<sup>3</sup>.

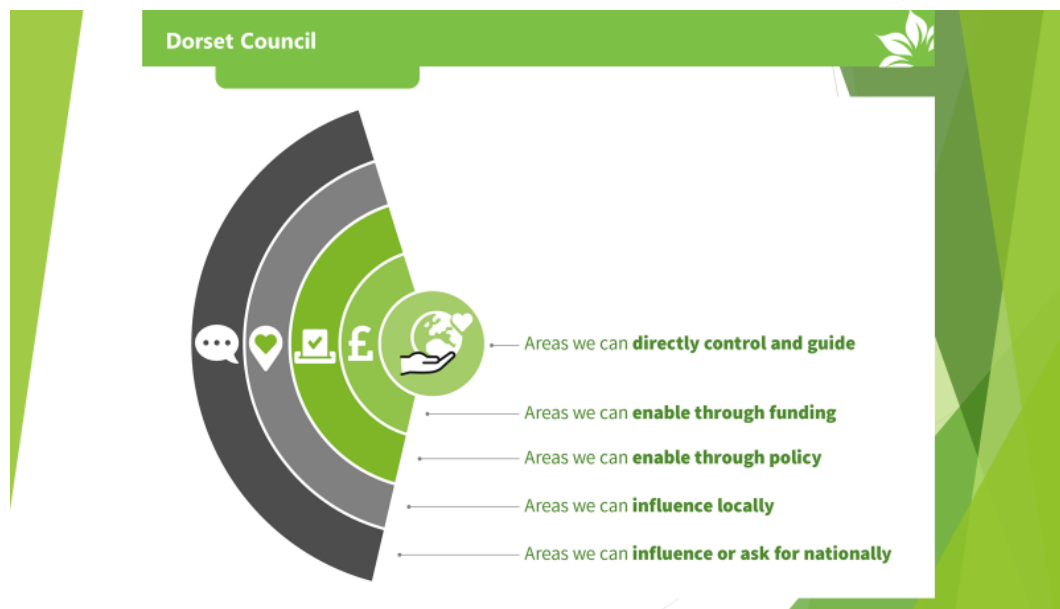
**10.4** The Dorset Council Climate & Ecological Emergency strategy and action plan were adopted by Full Council on 15 July 2021. The strategy addresses distinct targets:

- **Making Dorset Council carbon neutral by 2040 (operational)** – carbon emissions from our own operations only account for approximately 1.5% of Dorset’s wider footprint, but the council has direct control over these emissions, and it is critical that Dorset Council shows leadership in this area. This has therefore been a key focus of our activities to date.
- **Helping Dorset to become carbon neutral by 2050 (facilitation)** - the strategy recognises that Dorset Council has a far wider sphere of influence through the range of services it provides (statutory and non-statutory), its partnership work with a range of organisations and its influence on the national policy agenda.

<sup>3</sup> [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability | ClimateChange 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability \(ipcc.ch\)](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/)

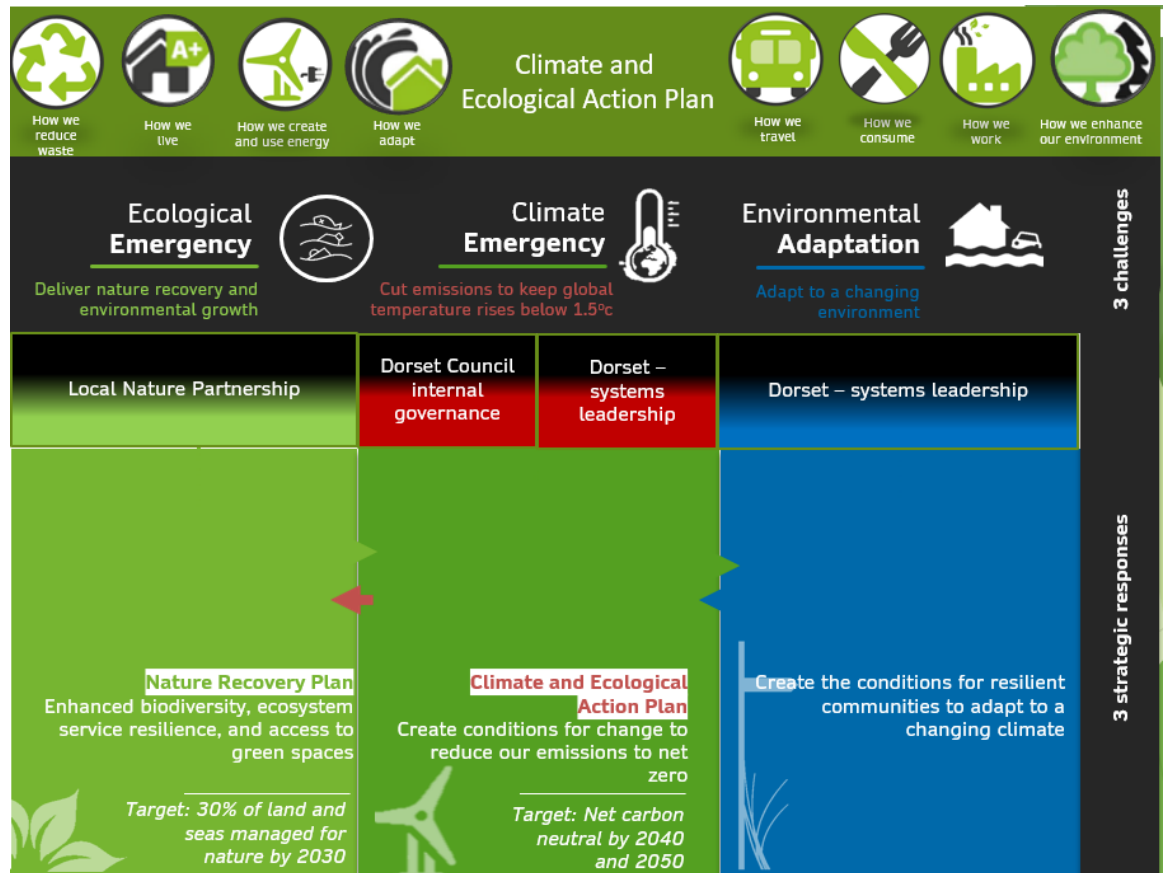
- In addition, work is now being undertaken to put in place the necessary leadership for delivering nature recovery by 2030 (ecological emergency).
- A more strategic approach to adaptation is also emerging as a key focus.

**10.5** It is important to recognise the strategic approach that the council is developing to drive the change that is unprecedented in its scale and complexity, requiring action from all sections of society. In many ways, this is new territory for local authorities, pushing the traditional boundaries of leadership into new areas that can be challenging and at times uncomfortable. The diagram below highlights the influence that the council can have through understanding its place in the system.



**10.6** Since the adoption of the Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy and action plan, work has been ongoing to ensure that there has been a clear strategic articulation of how the interdependencies of climate, ecological and adaptation work streams come together. As can be seen from the diagram below, this is resulting in the development of a ‘three-pillar’ approach, where the work required to reduce our emissions works symbiotically with our nature-recovery and adaptation work. While there remains more work to do, working across systems and partners to ensure

that these links are made is of paramount importance, especially if we are to achieve our Dorset-wide goals with partners working to common goals.



- 10.7** The delivery of the strategy and action plan is a long-term piece of work that will evolve over time, requiring systems leadership and partnership across all sections of society. Many of the solutions do not always lend themselves to rapid or easy solutions, and the council does not have all of the answers and has always remained open to working in collaboration.
- 10.8** While Dorset Council can and indeed must do what it can to show the requisite leadership to accelerate change, there remain many areas where action is required that do not fall under local leadership or their scale goes beyond what is possible to deal with within local systems (grid constraint issues, key planning policy areas, future homes standards, mass scale retrofit, decarbonisation of heat and transport at scale). Work is ongoing to ensure that, where possible, representations are made to government to push forward our low carbon ambitions through discussions on county



deals, wider pilot opportunities and possible future changes to legislation and devolution.

- 10.9** Most recently, the Leader wrote to the Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change and the Minister of State for Housing urging government to introduce energy policy which addressed the national energy crisis, while recognising the important role of renewable energy technologies and the need to achieve national net zero targets by 2050. As well as recommending that the forthcoming planning white paper strengthens the National Planning Policy Framework to enable Planning Authorities to have due and proper regard to implication of climate change on developing local planning policy. Appendices B & C – provide copies of the Leaders letter and response from government.
- 10.10** It is also important to recognise that the context within which the council is operating is constantly changing; recent legislation such as the Agriculture and Environment Acts (2021), the findings of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2022) as well as the frameworks for existing legislation such as the Climate Change Act (2019) all influence the actions and powers that are available. A direct result of the Environment Act will be the requirement to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, closely aligned to the government's ambition of delivering 30% of all land in positive management by 2030; this will work alongside the existing targets for 2040 and 2050.
- 10.11** The scale of change required is significant, and to ensure that the ambitions contained within the strategy and action plan are fulfilled, a programme of this scale will need to access additional resources from a variety of sources. Maximising opportunities for external funding and partnership working are key and over the past year Dorset Council has been extremely successful at drawing in external funding streams contributing to reducing carbon emissions. Dorset Council will need to ensure it is 'opportunity ready', with the right evidence and resources available to draw in funds for both the operational and county-wide areas of focus, all of which will be through competitive processes.
- 10.12** In addition, tackling the climate and ecological emergencies, does not only help reduce carbon emissions and help to reduce the decline in our natural environment but can also have wider economic, environmental, and social co-benefit. Appendix D, provide some examples.

## **11. Key observations and opportunities**

**11.1 Pandemic** - the pandemic impacted on the speed of delivery and continues to impact on supply chains, availability of goods and services and even energy prices at a global level. However, the pandemic also created a swift change in the way we work, travel, and use our buildings, with significant benefits for reducing our carbon emissions. We must now work hard to maintain some of these gains (bounce forward, not bounce back) and ensure this is fully embedded in our organisational transformation.

**11.2 Evolving national policy and guidance** - We have been in an intense period of national legislative and policy change and much of this is beginning to align more strongly with our strategic ambitions to tackle the climate and ecological emergency. Most notably:

- a) The UK Net Zero Strategy (2021) sets out the Government's commitment to meet its net zero 2050 target by transitioning from fossil fuels, supporting energy efficiency and greater deployment of renewable energy (particularly wind and solar), and development of new innovations such as hydrogen. Additionally, there are initiatives aimed at supporting sustainable transport and opportunities for green finance. Most recently the British Energy Security Strategy (2022) aimed to address concerns over energy price rises and the cost of living by decreasing reliance on imported fossil fuels and transitioning to secure, clean, and affordable energy for the long term.
- b) The Environment Act 2021, which gives a legal framework for environmental governance in the UK and brings in measures to improve the environment in relation to waste, resource efficiency, air quality, water, nature and biodiversity, and conservation. Of particular importance to tackling the ecological emergency is the requirements for 10% net gain in biodiversity and development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The government has also made it clear its priority for 30% of land to be under positive management by 2030, which could have significant positive impacts on carbon sequestration as well as biodiversity renewal.
- c) The Agriculture Act 2020 sets out a framework to implement new approaches to farm payments and land management. This includes animal welfare, replacement of the basic payments scheme and a move to 'Environmental Land Management schemes' (ELMS)

focusing on supporting biodiversity, improving the local environment and more sustainable farming practice.

These legislative pathways will enable Dorset Council to strengthen its role in a number of areas to achieve our net zero ambitions, support a thriving green economy, help residents to reduce costs and carbon, and to protect and enhance Dorset's natural environment.

**11.3 Available resources** - Achieving our ambitions will require significant investment by the council, organisations, and individuals. The council has made additional financial commitments in the 2022/23 budget to strengthen successful delivery (see finance below), but there will be a need for external funding. It is anticipated that future national financial commitments will follow to support the national legislative & policy frameworks outlined above. To date Dorset Council has been very successful in attracting over £50m of external funds to support its climate change ambitions. We must, therefore, ensure we have the structure, resource, and expertise and have undertaken the initial background work to be 'opportunity ready' for new funding streams.

**11.4 Physical constraints** – A critical factor in the deployment of low carbon technologies will be the future capacity of the electricity grid to support the scale of change needed. It will be important that we take a strategic view of the future energy needs and aspirations of the county and work in partnership with the distribution network operators, government, and the regulator to ensure the capacity of the network matches our ambition.

## **12. Performance monitoring and reporting**

**12.1** Several climate and ecological key performance indicators (KPIs) have been integrated into the corporate performance management programme. These will be updated over time to ensure each objective has a corresponding performance indicator. These will be reported through the corporate performance management process to senior management teams.

**12.2** The ongoing progress of each workstream will be monitored and reviewed and progress reported to the Climate and Ecological Emergency steering group. This will aim to ensure work streams remain on track to deliver the action plan and meet our key deliverables and milestones.

## **13. Next Steps**

**13.1** Over the past year the council has strengthened its delivery of the climate and ecological emergency and is now in an excellent position to make a strategic shift in our approach to reducing our own operational emissions and influence wider systems to tackle Dorset's carbon emissions, resilience to the effects of climate change and to protect and enhance Dorset's natural environment in line with the 'three-pillar' approach.

**13.2** A programme management approach is being developed to ensure development, monitoring and delivery of actions and objectives. A robust governance structure is being established to ensure the council promotes a sense of urgency now and into the future and to ensure successful delivery over the long-term. This will in the first instance focus on the operational (2040) carbon reduction commitments but will eventually extend to the wider strategic place-shaping policies and commissioning approaches that will have an impact on the Dorset (2050) targets, as well as the nature recovery 2030 targets. Key focus areas will include:

### **Dorset Council carbon neutral by 2040:**

- Electrification of small Fleet & use of alternative fuels
- Expanding EV infrastructure at DC sites
- Estate's decarbonisation programme
- Renewable energy generation
- Work on developing new decision-making tools
- Staff and Member climate literacy training explored

### **Dorset County carbon neutral by 2050:**

- Source additional funding for sustainable transport and low carbon housing
- Explore options for the future role of planning vis-à-vis climate and ecology
- Explore the opportunities for renewable energy generation across Dorset as part of the wider decarbonisation of the energy system

- Put in place engagement and communications with the wider Dorset community, including town and parish councils and schools

### **Ecological**

- Development of the local nature recovery strategy
- Undertake an ecological baseline as part of the 2030 aspirations
- Strengthening partnership working to support the aspirations of the ecological emergency programme at scale, working closely with the Dorset Local Nature Partnership

### **Adaptation**

- Refresh the climate change risk assessment to inform the strategic response to adaptation

- 13.3** Successful delivery against these ambitious objectives will in most cases require cross-service, cross-directorate and partnership working and as such it is considered vital that a framework is put in place to facilitate this. A whole council approach is being taken to support the work involved in adapting business as usual activities and developing new ways of working, to achieve the targets in the strategy and action plan.
- 13.4** A stronger focus on engagement with business, communities, town and parish councils and individuals will also be developed during the course of 2022, ensuring that there are more opportunities for working in collaboration and sharing best practice.
- 13.5** A refresh process will take place for the Climate and Ecological Emergency strategy and action plan, ensuring that actions remain relevant given the significant changes that have occurred on a number of fronts during the last few years
- 13.6** As part of the council's commitment to deliver update reports to the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee twice yearly, a progress report will be presented in autumn.
- 13.7** Additionally, representations will be made to government on, key inhibiting factors such as grid constraints, facilitating large scale retrofit programmes,

working closely on the potential to develop new low carbon technologies and flexibilities in certain policy areas to help us accelerate our ambitions.