

# Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

30 July 2024

## Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology: Progress Report – Summer 2024

### For Review and Consultation

**Cabinet Member and Portfolio:**

Cllr Nick Ireland, Leader, Cabinet Member for Governance, Performance, Communications, Environment, Climate Change and Safeguarding

**Local Councillor(s):**

County Wide

**Executive Director:**

A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

Report Author: Carl Warom

Title: Climate & Ecology Policy Officer

Tel: 01305 225853

Email: carl.warom@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

**Report Status:** Public

#### 1. Brief Summary:

- 1.1 Since refreshing our strategy in early 2023, delivery of our programme has continued to demonstrate our commitment to a net zero, nature positive and resilient Dorset. Record temperatures in 2023 and 2024 have again underscored the imperative for us to proceed at pace as a council and a county to deliver a cleaner, greener Dorset. This report is the first of our biannual reports for 2024. It provides a qualitative narrative of our own delivery on our strategy's core missions.

#### Recommendation:

To review progress made in delivering the natural environment, climate and ecology strategy during 2023/24.

## Reason for Recommendation:

In line with the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on 12 May 2021 that the Committee would provide oversight against progress and delivery of the strategy and action plan via six monthly progress reports. The Committee's views will be used to inform the shape of the next phase of the delivery programme.

## 2. Background and context

2.1. Since refreshing our strategy in early 2023, delivery of our programme has continued to demonstrate our commitment to a net zero, nature positive and resilient Dorset. Record temperatures in 2023 and 2024 have again underscored the imperative for us to proceed at pace as a council and a county to deliver a cleaner, greener Dorset. Spurred on by the 2023 release of the IPCC's 6<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report, the latest UK State of Nature report, and the launch of the third National Adaptation Programme, the strengthened case for action catalysed further delivery across the year.<sup>1</sup>

2.2. To maintain transparency, we report biannually in two ways:

- Spring/Summer reporting: qualitative narrative on delivery within our operational and facilitation programmes – i.e. our interventions.
- Autumn/Winter reporting: quantitative reporting on the consequent changes to our council and county emissions trajectory – i.e. on the outcomes.

This report is the first of our biannual reports for 2024. It provides a qualitative narrative of our own delivery on our strategy's missions, but does not provide an updated quantitative description of emissions or biodiversity outcomes – which will be provided in the subsequent Autumn/Winter reporting.<sup>2</sup>

2.3. Our last (Autumn/Winter 2023) quantitative report<sup>3</sup> noted that:

- Compared to our reported baseline emissions (2017 data) *Dorset (county) emissions* reduced by around 10% by 2021. The three most significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Dorset are transport (29%), agriculture (33%) and domestic sources (22%). Total emissions were up by 6% on the year to 2021 however, which mirrors the 6% increase in national emissions due to a post-Covid rebound.

---

<sup>1</sup> [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023 \(ipcc.ch\)](#); [State of Nature 2023 - report on the UK's current biodiversity](#); [Third National Adaptation Programme \(NAP3\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Previous progress reports are available here: [What's happened so far - Dorset Council](#). The latest reports on national progress can be found from the Climate Change Committee/Office for Environmental Protection on [net zero](#), [natural environment](#), and [climate adaptation](#).

<sup>3</sup> [2023 Autumn/Winter Progress Report](#)

Consequently, Dorset is now off target for the county's decarbonisation trajectory.

- Compared to our baseline year (2019) *Dorset Council emissions* have reduced by approximately 27%. By far the largest contributors to Dorset Council emissions are the energy use in our buildings, and fuel used for our fleet of vehicles. We have therefore managed to remain on our target trajectory.
- Around 22% of Dorset's land falls within our ecological network, but only around a third of the network is known to be in good condition – with a fifth known to be in poor condition.

### **3. 2023/24 progress**

- 3.1. 2023/24 has seen considerable further delivery across a vast programme of work, including:
  - Further retrofit works through our extended Low Carbon Dorset programme, to support the decarbonisation of non-residential buildings locally.
  - Enhanced domestic retrofit activity through Healthy Homes Dorset, supported by receipt of Homes Upgrade Grant funding.
  - Publication of our Planning for Climate Change guidance.
  - An in-depth examination into grid constraints, led by our Places and Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
  - Significant progress in developing major strategies, such as our Local Transport Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
  - Commencement of the next phase of our public EV charger programme.
  - Major active travel infrastructure projects.
  - Enhanced development mitigation through implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain, and the award of major funding for nutrient mitigation.
  - Our becoming the #1 unitary for recycling.
  - Allocation of all remaining funds within Dorset National Landscape's £2.4m Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.
  - The launch of our Community Tree Programme.
  - Kickstarting new work on adaptation, procurement and partnership working.
- 3.2. This work has been enabled in part thanks to our generous capital programme, and thanks to our successfully winning many external grants, including from the Shared Prosperity Fund, Rural England Prosperity Fund, SW Net Zero Hub Local Net Zero Fund, Homes Upgrade Grant, Green Light Fund, BSIP+ Fund, Nutrient Mitigation Fund, Natural Flood Management fund, and Innovate UK Net Zero Living Fund.
- 3.3. We were also pleased to be recognised through awards this year for our programmes. Significantly, we won Regen's Public and Local Sector Net

Zero Transformation Award, thanks to our building decarbonisation programme (incorporating our public sector programme, Low Carbon Dorset, and Healthy Homes Dorset). Additionally, our solar-powered 'hotbox' at Charminster Depot also received global recognition at the International Green Apple Environment Awards.

- 3.4. Further detail on this progress is described by mission in the appended report.
- 3.5. We have achieved much over the year, however as we proceed our trajectory will likely get more difficult – and it will take significant effort to reach our next interim operational target and to get our county-wide trajectory back on target. Achieving this will require (a) increasing the pace and scale of our activity; (b) delivering 'smarter' by giving greater definition to our pathways and targets; and (c) strengthening our facilitation work by working more closely with our communities.
- 3.6. Previous scrutiny meetings have noted that whilst narrative commentary is welcome, there is difficulty in appraising whether work is at an adequate pace or scale without quantitative targets. We are therefore working towards meeting that in two ways:
  - a) In collaboration with Regen, we are aiming to develop a more comprehensive dashboard of quantitative indicators in addition to our high-level emission and biodiversity metrics, which will describe a wider range of indicators of progress. This will inevitably be constrained by data availability, but there are several significant data sources which could enable a richer picture than we have previously provided. We aim to prepare a prototype dashboard for our next (Autumn/Winter) quantitative progress report.
  - b) Fully responding to this really requires specifying detailed targets or mission-specific trajectories. Over the course of the last few months, we have undertaken several operational deep dives with internal teams to develop a more detailed programme to meet our interim operational targets. Additionally, several of our emerging new strategies and plans will be critical to defining these, and therefore giving us a smarter path forward. For this reason, the next few years of the programme will benefit considerably from the development of our Strategic Asset Management Plan, council Travel Plan, new Local Plan, Local Transport Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and Local Area Energy Plan.

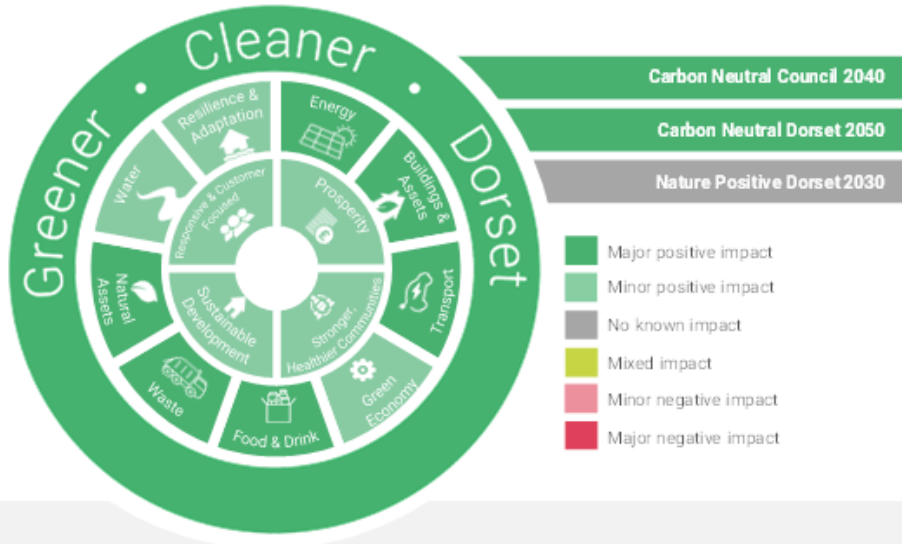
3.7. To support the development of further progress, we have recently recruited four new members of staff to our sustainability team and are aiming to recruit a further two. This is strengthening our capacity to expedite our operational programme, develop funding bids, strengthen our partnerships, develop new programmes on adaptation and procurement, and to develop a Local Area Energy Plan.

**3. Financial Implications**

3.1 This report itself has no financial implications. A costed action plan for the programme was presented to Cabinet on 6 October 2020, highlighting what could be achieved with existing resources, but stressing that significant additional revenue and capital would be required to deliver over its lifetime at the pace and scale required. Dorset Council made significant commitments in the 2022/23 Dorset Council budget.

3.2 We will need to continue our success in accessing additional resources from a variety of external sources through competitive grant funding and partnership working – and will need to ensure we are opportunity ready with the right evidence and resources to win funding competitions.

**4. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**



Quantitative Impact on CEE targets (if known)		
	Unit	Number of units (+/-)
2030 - Natural asset extent & condition	Ha	Unknown
2040 - Operational Emissions	CO <sub>2</sub> (tonnes)	Unknown
2050 - County Emissions	CO <sub>2</sub> (tonnes)	Unknown

<b>Natural Environment, Climate &amp; Ecology Strategy Commitments</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Energy	Major positive impact
Buildings & Assets	Major positive impact
Transport	Major positive impact
Green Economy	Minor positive impact
Food & Drink	Major positive impact
Waste	Major positive impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	Major positive impact
Water	Minor positive impact
Resilience and Adaptation	Minor positive impact
<b>Corporate Plan Aims</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Prosperity	minor positive impact
Stronger healthier communities	minor positive impact
Sustainable Development & Housing	minor positive impact
Responsive & Customer Focused	minor positive impact

Quantitative impacts will be detailed within the programmes Autumn/Winter progress report.

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

- 5.1 There are no specific health and wellbeing implications of this report. However, from a strategic perspective, implementation of the strategy and action plan has significant co-benefits for health and wellbeing, and climate change impacts include significant socio-economic and health and wellbeing risks. Our emerging work on adaptation is considering how to mitigate the impacts of now unavoidable warming.

## 6. **Other implications**

- 6.1 There are no other specific implications contained in this report. As previously noted, the 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.

## 7. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

- 7.2 Due to the known high level of public interest in the climate change agenda and the previous commitment to provide the public with a bi-annual progress report, to not do should be considered a high reputational risk to Dorset Council.
- 7.3 The publication of this report is in line with commitments made and shows a significant level of progress; but notes that there remains a need for increased urgency and further progress.
- 7.4 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 will increase the risks associated with climate change.

## 8. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 8.1 A 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.

## 9. **Appendices**

- Appendix A - Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology: Progress Report – Summer 2024