



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Growth and Development
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Growth & Development
DATE:	Thursday, 11 July 2024

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Growth and Development
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: EB_Climate Emergency Action Plan Progress Report 2023/24 and Plan for 2024/25

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's first Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) was published in February 2020 in support of the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration, committing to a target of making Blackburn with Darwen carbon neutral by 2030. This is a progress report on the Action Plan's implementation in 2023/24 and proposed Climate Emergency Action Plan for 2024/25.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- i. Note the progress made in 2023/24;
- ii. Approve the Climate Emergency Action Plan for 2024/25;
- iii. Authorise the Strategic Director for Growth & Development, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council, to finalise the details of the agreed Action Plan;
- iv. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Growth & Development, in conjunction with the Executive Member for Growth & Development to implement the agreed Action Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and pledged to work towards becoming a carbon neutral Borough by 2030. The Declaration was supported by a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) comprising activities ranging from quick wins to longer-term aspirations, grouped under five objectives:

- 1) Make sound climate-related decisions.
- 2) Create a resilient & attractive Borough.
- 3) Be lean and clean with resources and energy.
- 4) Travel lightly.
- 5) Capture more carbon.

3.2 Delivering the CEAP is integral to the Corporate Plan and achieving the other three core missions for a more prosperous borough where no one is left behind, where every child and young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and communities are healthier, happier and safer.

3.3 The CEAP has been updated annually, with progress reports to Executive Board, since the first edition in February 2020. Initially a framework to steer internal activity and to stimulate and engage with residents and partner organisations with a call to action, the CEAP is evolving into a strategic document that drives cross-sectoral climate action across Blackburn with Darwen.

3.4 The fourth edition of the CEAP, appended to this report, is informed by the People's Jury on the Climate Change Crisis, Blackburn with Darwen's Climate Community, (a stakeholder group of local public, private and third sector organisations), and resident feedback on climate-related communications. It provides a progress report on activity to date and presents actions for 2024/25 and beyond.

3.5 Much of 2023/24 was spent testing toolkits, having surveys and studies done and submitting grant applications in readiness for implementation of schemes in 24/25. The following are the key activities undertaken by the Council last year. There is a significant amount of climate action being undertaken by other organisations in the borough, some examples of which are given in the CEAP. There was limited joint working, however, in 2023/24.

- a. Adoption of the Local Plan 2021-2037 in January 2024, providing a strong climate-related planning policy framework.
- b. Installation of 86 energy efficiency measures Blackburn with Darwen homes under the Home Energy Grant (round2), such as heat pumps and solar PV and upgrading windows from single to double glazed, in homes with no gas central heating.
- c. Co-ordination of advice and links to other organisations that can help with the cost of living crisis, including [help with energy bills](#) and [energy efficiency](#) measures.
- d. Successful application to the Low Carbon Skills Fund for a grant to prepare a Heat Decarbonisation Plan for the Council's mid-tier of energy using buildings (mainly day centres). This is to help the Council plan how to shift these buildings from gas to low carbon heating to future-proof the services.
- e. Feasibility assessment of solar farms on Council-owned land and outline business cases for three locations that showed good potential.
- f. Options appraisal of how best to increase solar energy generation on the borough's commercial roof space. An outline estimate by the NW Net Zero Hub suggests there is sufficient roof space to potentially meet the borough's entire annual electricity demand, although this would require further investigation in terms of feasibility.
- g. Blackburn with Darwen Food Alliance securing a Bronze award from Sustainable Food Places in recognition of a holistic and systems approach to sustainable and healthy food and waste reduction. Food waste is a massive issue in Blackburn with Darwen, making up more than 40% of the contents of the average burgundy bin, adding to climate change and costing households £700 a year.
- h. Commissioning 11 electric vehicles to replace diesel vans on the Council's fleet.
- i. Setting up an electric vehicle pilot project to work with a private Charge Point Operator (CPO) who will provide and service 25 electric vehicle charge points at five residential sites around the borough - Lambeth St. and Pringle St., Blackburn and Progress St. Darwen and car park sites at Old Bank Lane and Whalley Range. The information generated by the pilot will be used to inform the main Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) funded project.
- j. Surveying residents' attitudes to electric vehicles and charging infrastructure to inform the LEVI programme.
- k. Obtaining Executive Board approval for our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in December 2023.
- l. Progressing active travel infrastructure projects in Southeast Blackburn, Darwen and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Corridor to various design stages.
- m. Developing the Cycle Centre in Witton Park into an Active Outdoors Hub, creating a new multi-use space for organisations to deliver walking and cycling training and workshops on Active Travel.

- n. Planting almost 1,000 trees – standards, orchards and micro-wood – in parks and green spaces around the borough.
- o. Preparation of a Tree & Woodland Strategy to guide tree planting and management in the borough, approved by Executive Board in April 2024
- p. Preparing a peatland restoration plan for Aushaw Moss.
- q. Working with the People’s Jury to communicate climate messages, particularly the One Degree Challenge to encourage households to turn down the thermostat to save money as well as the planet.
- r. BwD Youth Forum hosted The Climate Summit in June 2023 to provide young people with an interactive space in which to learn about the climate and environment and share ideas on how they could support reducing the impact of climate change.
- s. Establishing the Blackburn with Darwen Climate Community, with members drawn from business, the public and charitable sectors. This stakeholder group is sharing best practice on climate action and identifying where joint working might be beneficial.
- t. Securing an ‘A’ grade from CDP (Corporate Disclosure Project) a global disclosure platform that assesses how an organisation is managing its environmental impacts. The ‘A’ rating means that the Council demonstrates environmental awareness, management and, crucially, leadership and puts Blackburn with Darwen Council in the same category as cities such as Barcelona and New York.

3.6 The following initiatives stalled during 2023/24:

- i. Development of a Local Area Energy Plan – this topic will be pursued on a Lancashire footprint with the Lancs Combined County Authority;
- ii. Community Energy Projects – the Council does not have the capacity to actively promote or pursue Community Energy Projects. Enquirers will be forwarded to the NW Net Zero Hub for assistance.
- iii. Insetting – A platform to direct funding to local carbon reduction or avoidance schemes as an alternative to offsetting overseas was launched by Anthesis in 23/24. The cost of using the platform is high and not felt to be sufficiently robust to justify the expenditure. Other platforms are emerging, which may make a local solution unnecessary. The discussion nevertheless continues with Lancs County Council and East Lancs Chamber of Commerce to gauge demand for a local service.
- iv. Demand responsive transport – this subject will be addressed as the Bus Service Improvement Plan and transport strategy are implemented.

3.7 Key strands of work for 2024/25 and beyond are heat decarbonisation, carbon capture, transport and housing. Activity in these areas has the potential to make real reduction to the borough’s carbon emissions and draw in other partners, such as Blackburn College in the case of heat network development, and private landowners in the case of carbon capture. Heat networks serving Council buildings, for example, could cut emissions by 1,300 tonnes, about a quarter of current estate emissions, whilst tree planting and peatland restoration could capture 350 tonnes of carbon by 2030, roughly the emissions from Darwen Leisure Centre in one year. The Council doesn’t control emissions from housing and transport, but it can set a policy framework and use its influence to encourage behaviour change. Together these sectors account for about half of all emissions in the borough and so worth tackling. The priority actions for 2024/25 are listed below:

1. Introducing the [Carbon and Co-benefits Decision Support Tool](#) to Council decision-making processes;
2. Rolling out an e-learning module for staff and members on adapting to climate change.
3. Providing bite-size training on the climate emergency to members.
4. Deliver energy efficiency measures to 150 properties with HUG2 funding.
5. Complete the consultation on a Selective Licensing area in the Hollin Bank area. If a licensing scheme is introduced all privately rented accommodation would be subject to licensing. A condition of the licence will cover minimum energy efficiency rating for the properties.

6. Develop a housing strategy that includes addressing how all residents can benefit from tackling the climate emergency.
7. Update the Council's Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan.
8. Work with partners to encourage businesses to install solar panels on their buildings.
9. Develop the business case for at least one of three potential solar farm sites and draw up and an implementation plan for economically viable schemes.
10. Undertake a heat network techno-economic feasibility study for Blackburn and Darwen town centres.
11. Develop and tender a bulk-buying scheme to help homeowners install solar PV at reduced cost. For economies of scale the scheme is likely to have to be run on a Lancashire footprint.
12. Have a Heat Decarbonisation Plan prepared for the 'mid-tier' of energy consuming buildings in the Council's estate.
13. Impose a strict brief for energy efficiency and removing dependence on fossil fuels for the new education campus development in Blackburn town centre.
14. Reminders to minimise food waste in advance of the introduction of a weekly food waste collection service in June 2026.
15. Progress the new Local Transport Plan (LTP4) for Lancashire alongside Lancashire County Council and Blackpool Borough Council.
16. Bid for Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funding for installation of 260 charge points by 2026 and a further 570 by 2030.
17. Trial electric pool cars at Duke St to test the impact of diverting business miles from petrol and diesel to electric power, in terms of emissions and cost saving.
18. Replace another 3 diesel vehicles on the Council's fleet with electric vehicles.
19. Explore the costs of increasing the power supply at the depot to accommodate more electrification of the fleet.
20. Update the corporate Walking and Cycling Plan (2021-24) to set a clearer strategic focus for all Council services with respect to active modes of travel.
21. Consult the public on early designs of the new active travel network in southeast Blackburn and Active Travel Fund (ATF4) schemes.
22. Seek sources of additional funding to build upon the wide range of physical activity work programmes already offered through a variety of partners and the Active Outdoors Hub to encourage behaviour change.
23. Plant a minimum of 1,000 trees to create community orchards and micro-woods and standards to enhance green spaces and replace trees lost to Ash Dieback.
24. Implement year 1 of the three-year restoration plan for Aushaw Moss (damming drainage ditches)
25. Prepare a restoration plan for Darwen Moor.
26. Prepare an environmental plan for Darwen to link the moors with the town.
27. Prepare a biodiversity strategy to address the ecological emergency as an integral part of the climate emergency and to link and co-ordinate environmental activity in the borough.
28. Work with the People's Jury to progress the Recommendations and develop more climate messages for the community.
29. Share climate action best practice with members of the Blackburn with Darwen Climate Community and consider where joint working might be beneficial on transport, energy generation, adaptation and procurement (themes for 24/25).
30. Contribute to development of the net zero work strand for the Lancashire Combined Authority.
31. Disclose to CDP with an aim to retain the Council's A score.

3.8 The Council's Climate emergency activity is facilitated by a confirmed budget allocation of £300,000. The budget is used to lever in external funding to grow the resource as far as possible. To

date, it has leveraged funding from the Community Renewal Fund (£43k), the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (£37k), the Heat Networks Development Unit (£96k).

3.9 The CEAP will continue evolve to take account of new proposals and implementation of its current content and recommendations. It will, as far as possible, reflect the ambitions of other sectors, more readily achievable through the Climate Community, and endeavour to measure and record the impact of activity. A progress report will be presented to Executive Board 12 months from the publication of the revised Action Plan.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

4.1 The Council continues to make good progress on developing and implementing its Climate Emergency Action Plan. A sound base of preparatory work has been done to progress heat networks and carbon capture schemes in 2024/25. Further key strategic frameworks will be developed for housing, transport and biodiversity this financial year to guide service delivery across the Council. Links have been made with other sectors and opportunities for collaboration may emerge.

4.2 The Action Plan also to be developed and implemented within the context of the Borough's growth ambitions. Growth is an essential means of attracting investment to the Borough, and improving people's lives, without adding to the burden of climate change or to its impacts on people, especially the more vulnerable communities.

4.3 Support from Government remains essential to the UK achieving an equitable transition to net zero by 2050, through provision of targeted finance and strategy that delivers cleaner and greener homes, jobs, business and transport, space for nature, and climate resilience. The national Committee on Climate Change, however, reports that tangible progress lags behind policy ambition, which will inevitably hinder progress at local level.

4.4 The shape of national policy may change following the general election, as may government funding regimes. Presently, these are targeted and competitive. Where grants cannot be secured because of the high level of demand, alternative sources of funding, such as loans, will be investigated. There is always a risk that implementation of some proposals in the CEAP in any iteration will be delayed or prove to be unaffordable.

4.5 The Council is responsible for less than 2% of the borough's emissions and influences only about 30% of the total. It will always be limited in what can be achieved in this context and with the resources the Council can muster. The costs associated with climate action also have to be weighed and prioritised against other Council priorities. The level of activity that the Council can influence and afford to implement, without a more positive national framework, is unlikely to be sufficient to achieve the objective of a carbon neutral borough by 2030. Nevertheless, it is vital that the Council continues to provide leadership and drives local change with key stakeholders, given the risks of inaction.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Climate Emergency Action Plan is a core mission of the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Development and implementation of the Action Plan has financial implications. A dedicated budget allocation of £300,000 has been confirmed for 2024/25, which is being used to lever in funds from external sources.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from the report.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Development and implementation of the Action Plan will require time and skills from a number of officers from across all Council departments.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

None

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Gwen Kinloch
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DATE:	24 th June 2024
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	None
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