

Chichester Councils Strategic Direction for the Environment

Cllr Penny Plant, Cabinet Member for Environment and Chichester Contract Services

Introduction

As the Cabinet Member for the Environment and Chichester Contract Services, I have been asked to provide an overview on the strategic direction of areas within my portfolio which have or can have an environmental influence. This report will focus on 4 priority areas:

- **Climate Change** – the climate emergency is an area of increasing public concern and has received a lot of recent attention within the media. The Council declared a Climate Emergency in July this year and is currently formulating its Climate Emergency Action Plan;
- **Air Quality** – the Council is revising its Air Quality Action Plan which will detail the interventions proposed to improve the air quality within those areas which are unlikely to comply with the UK Government's Air Quality Objectives, namely the Air Quality Management Areas.
- **Parks and Open Spaces** – a Parks Strategy is currently being produced which will include a parks vision or overview which set out the aspirations for all of our parks and also the production of site specific management plans for key sites;
- **Commercialisation of Trade Waste** – there have been a number of recent developments to expand the commercialisation of our trade waste service, including the provision of a new vehicle and bin weighing equipment;

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Climate Change

Recent developments and increase in public awareness

Public awareness of climate change has greatly increased over the last 18 months. The Climate Emergency movement, including the Climate Strikes (promoted by Greta Thunberg) and Extinction Rebellion, was galvanised by the October 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report which warned of the rapid and far reaching consequences of more than a 1.5°C warming.

In response to the IPCC report and following a recommendation by the UK's Committee on Climate Change (CCC) in May 2019, the UK is now committed to achieving net carbon neutrality by 2050 (as opposed to a reduction in emissions by 80%). The Climate Emergency campaign group is pressing for this to be achieved by 2030 in order to avoid unprecedented levels of global heating.

In recognition of this urgent issue, Chichester District Council declared a Climate Emergency at Cabinet on 9 July 2019. This stated: "Chichester District Council declares a Climate Emergency and requests the Environment Panel to advise Cabinet and Council on how move to a carbon neutral environment." The Environment Panel was tasked with evaluating priority actions for Climate Emergency Action Plan and to report back to Cabinet in January 2020.

Although the UK's greenhouse gas emissions have reduced by 43% compared to 1990 levels, this has largely been achieved through changes in the power sector (responsible for 75% of emission reductions since 2012). Emissions from transport, buildings, agriculture and waste have been largely constant, as progress in these sectors has stalled, in part due to the cancellation of four major policy initiatives since 2012.

Impact on Chichester District of cancellation of National Schemes

Three of those cancelled initiatives have had implications for taking action at a community/council level: Feed-in Tariffs for solar PV; introduction of Zero Carbon Homes through the building regulations and funding of retro-fit insulation for all but those in fuel poverty.

A policy void at national level, the withdrawal of National Indicators in 2010 which required local authorities to report annually on their carbon reduction activities and the Governments Austerity drive over the last 10 years has consequently led to less emphasis on climate change work at the Council. The Council has delivered a Climate Change Strategy but much reduced on pre 2012 levels. Emphasis has been towards bringing together the activities across the Council which helps to mitigate carbon emissions, including the Home Energy Visitor service shared with Arun DC, providing help for those in fuel poverty; development of sustainable construction standards within the draft Local Plan Review; activities to promote sustainable transport and EV charging points and drought

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tolerant planting within our parks to enable adaptation to a warmer climate.

Opportunities for Chichester's Climate Emergency Action Plan

Recently Homes England (HE) has offered CDC the opportunity to use money due to them from the Graylingwell development to offset the residual emissions of the development in achieving net zero carbon. The amount of funding is estimated to be approximately £250k for locally implemented carbon reduction projects which will need to be agreed by HE and which CDC will help to deliver.

In response to the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration and the funding from the Graylingwell development, there is an opportunity to produce a new and much more ambitious Climate Emergency Action Plan detailing the priority actions to ensure Chichester District is on the trajectory to zero carbon. The priority actions within the plan for the short term will focus on: delivery of the funds from Homes England (Low Carbon Chichester Funding) on local projects; investigating opportunities for a low carbon offset fund for residual carbon emissions from new development and reviewing opportunities for energy savings within the Council's estate.

Central government is currently consulting on a new Future Homes Standard which revisits the options for minimising the carbon emissions from new homes. There is also an opportunity to consider climate change mitigation and adaptation, including tree and draught tolerant planting, in our evolving Parks Strategy. We can also reduce the proportion of biodegradable waste going to landfill but we will need to factor in the benefits of the current use of refuse derived fuel against reduced emissions due to anaerobic digestion. It is also clear that we will need the assistance of our residents and local communities to put us on the trajectory to zero carbon.

The Environment Panel will be reporting to Cabinet early in the New Year on the recommended priority actions for the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

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Air Quality

CDC has specific legal duties known as Local Air Quality Management. In order to discharge these effectively CDC has a programme of air quality monitoring as reported to DEFRA annually¹ and available on-line². Where an area is non-compliant or likely to be non-compliant with UK government air quality Objectives then authorities are obliged to declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). CDC has declared three AQMAs for failure of an annual mean Objective for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) at Orchard Street, St Pancras and Stockbridge A27 roundabout Chichester. CDC is in the process of declaring a further AQMA at Rumbold's Hill, Midhurst.

Where an authority declares an AQMA then it is statutorily obliged to write and adopt an Air Quality Action Plan³ (AQAP) and CDC is currently in the process of rewriting its AQAP. In order to inform, and provide an evidence base for, the revised AQAP air quality modelling is being undertaken. The modelling outputs will provide a better understanding of the relative contributions from different vehicle classes in each of our AQMAs⁴, allow an understanding of the predicted impact from a range of interventions designed to improve air quality and for the prioritisation of such measures. In any case most air quality actions are subject to funding.

Given that all of CDC's AQMAs relate to transport related emissions then partnership working with both WSCC (as the Highway Authority) and Highways England (regarding the A27) is critical. CDC participates in a pan-Sussex group (Sussex-Air) and WSCC's Inter Authority Air Quality Group (IAAQG).

Under the previous and existing AQAP various air quality actions have been delivered using a mixture of grant streams (DEFRA, OLEV) and sometimes in partnership with WSCC. These include:

- Doubling the number of bike racks in Chichester City Centre,
- Initiating and expanding the Co-Wheels car club,
- Installing 18 EV charge-points,
- Making the business case for EV integration into the CDC fleet (thus facilitating the procurement of two EVs for CDC Parking Services),
- Production of a draft Supplementary Planning Guidance note to better integrate air quality considerations into the Local Plan,
- Employing a Sustrans 'Bike It' officer,
- Supporting the community in delivering a feasibility study for the Selsey to Chichester cycle route,
- We are currently employing a consultant for the delivery of a Local Cycling and Walking Plan (LCWIP) for Chichester,
- Delivery of a feasibility study for a section of shared –use path Oaklands Way Chichester,
- Delivering a small section of bike path.

¹ <https://www.chichester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=32162&p=0>

² All 'real-time' data for Sussex (including historic data) is available here: <http://www.sussex-air.net/>

³ The current AQAP is here: <https://www.chichester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=6298&p=0>

⁴ Including Rumbolds Hill.

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The revised AQAP is due for adoption in the summer of 2020. Members' views are sought on policy items for inclusion in this Plan. Current thoughts include:

- Seek to best integrate air quality considerations into related CDC policy (Local Plan, Parking Strategy),
- Seek to enhance our working relationships with WSCC and HE,
- Declaring parts of the District as 'smoke control zones',
- Car free day for Chichester,
- Working with taxi firms for improved emission standards in the fleet,
- Working with the bus companies for improved emission standards in the fleet,
- Integrating air quality considerations into Parking Policy,
- LCWIPs for further areas of Chichester District,
- Publicity plan for air quality,
- Anti-idling campaign,
- Planting schemes to improve air quality,
- Cycling promotional work (secure bike parking, cargo bikes, bike racks),
- Work to make HE a delivery partner for better air quality,
- Work with WSCC,
- Bid for grant monies to enable delivery and
- Seek non-perverse outcomes ref climate change.

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Parks and Open Spaces

The council manages or maintains more than ninety 'green' assets across the district. The portfolio includes car parks, estates land, cemeteries and parks (including a nature reserve and various conservation sites).

Our parks and open spaces are managed by Chichester Contract Services and the Grounds Maintenance team, operating from the depot in Westhampnett. Three independent audits in as many years have confirmed a high standard of provision and maintenance so we know our parks are in good shape. This has been achieved through the application of a management hierarchy which places health and safety as the first priority, maintaining high standards as the second and making enhancements as the third.

In recent years numerous environmental enhancements have been made. A handful of examples include:

- The replacement of annual floral displays with sustainable planting i.e. herbaceous pollinators that do not require watering.
- The introduction of community orchards at Oaklands Park and Jubilee Path Midhurst.
- Tolerance of weeds. Allowing weeds to be present in beds and borders during their pollinating periods.
- Reduction of pesticide and herbicide use to an absolute minimum i.e. fine turf maintenance only (cricket and bowls).
- Allowing areas such as the City Walls ramparts to naturalise and reducing the mowing regime on other sites to introduce swathes of longer grass.
- Leaving 'totems' instead of felling dead trees to the ground and allowing wood to break down in situ; providing a valuable habitat for insects and birds.

Interestingly the changes noted above have sometimes drawn criticism from residents, officers and Councillors that feel naturalised areas are scruffy, herbaceous planting is less colourful or weeds in a cricket outfield are unacceptable. We've often had to defend the environmental benefits over a perceived reduction in care. In reality those of us in the parks industry have cared about the environment for many years so welcome current interest in the subject and feel well positioned to respond.

Although good progress has been made on our sites it is recognised that more can be done, not only with our parks, but with all green assets that the council holds. For this reason SLT recently approved the production of a Parks Strategy.

Though managed by CCS our parks are a shared asset; contributing to the aims and objectives of a range of council services such as, community engagement, wellbeing, tourism, the economy, leisure and culture. Therefore, in order to capture the breadth of interests in our parks a task and finish group made up of councillors and officers has been formed with the remit to produce the strategy. This will be delivered in two stages: 1) Production of a Parks Vision that sets out the aspirations and direction of travel for our parks generally over the next ten years. 2) Production of site specific management plans that identify activity required on key sites to realise the Vision. Thirteen sites have been selected for this phase. Some are well used and others less so. All have areas of untapped potential so the Vision and site specific plans aim to address this. The guiding principles of the Vision will also be applied to other green assets that the council holds. For example if the Vision

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recommends additional tree planting this does not have to be limited to our parks. Trees can also be planted in our car parks, on Estates land and in our cemeteries.

Due to the extent of stakeholder engagement required in developing the strategy it is anticipated that the Vision will be delivered in six months and the management plans within a year.

Biodiversity and the environment will undoubtedly be a priority so there will be an opportunity to look further into what we can do in these areas. This will require investment and education as there can be competing demands in parks management. Our sites are used for sport, play, events and education but they also provide critical habitats for wildlife and make a crucial contribution to the environment. In the past the environment has perhaps featured less prominently than other activities but this is changing. It is also likely that community involvement and commercialisation will feature strongly in the Vision as we seek ways to protect parks for the future. The challenge will be to deliver balanced and sustainable sites where public use and enjoyment sits in harmony with income generation, biodiversity and ecology. Without wishing to pre-determine the outcome of the Parks Vision it is anticipated the priority will be the development of "Healthy Parks" that support wildlife and the environment as well as people's physical and mental wellbeing.

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Commercialisation of Trade Waste

In July 2019 Cabinet approved a number of recommendations to increase the commercialisation of the CCS Trade waste and recycling service, these were

- 1) The release of £134k from reserves for the provision of a new vehicle for the Business Waste and Recycling Service as set out in the Project Initiation Document with an estimated payback period of 4 ½ years
- 2) To use some of the CCS recycling bonus surplus income for FY 19/20 to support the employment of a commercial trade waste officer, the ongoing costs for subsequent years being self-financing
- 3) The purchase of bin weighing equipment for CCS trade waste vehicles to a maximum of £49k funded by the in-year predicted trade waste budget surplus

These recommendations were accepted to both protect CDC's current trade waste income and to provide a platform to increase this revenue.

Chichester Contract Services (CCS) operates a business waste and recycling collection service from its depot in Westhampnett. It is key revenue generating service; contributing to Council finances and offsetting household waste collection costs. Whilst it has been operating successfully, it has not realised its full commercial potential. Over the past three years the back office operation has been reviewed in order to instil structure and improve processes in customer service, invoice and payment management and crew operations. In addition, a new contract for the disposal of business waste was agreed in 2018 securing the long term financial viability of the service. These changes have provided the foundations to move towards a more commercial approach and the decisions stated above will start this process.

In 2020/21 the new trade food waste collection service will be introduced and following the appointment of the new trade waste officer a new approach of managing the CCS customer base will be implemented. This will also include leveraging good industry practice in key account management.

Improved market information and data will help support a greater understanding with respect to competitor positioning and pricing such that the excellent reputation CCS currently has can be appropriately valued.

CCS will use FY20/21 to develop a more added value approach to selling by leveraging its current experience of communication and engagement with residents and applying this within a business context and to help businesses to improve its own recycling and sustainability credentials, which will in turn save them money. Unlike competitors CCS Trade Business will look to encourage recycling wherever possible by offering more frequent collections and promotions.

CDC has, to date, installed one vehicle with a bin weighing system. This, as the name suggests, will weigh each bin lifted. We have been trialling this across the trade waste rounds. The trials have yielded invaluable information in respect of the bin weight, and therefore the cost of disposal, of

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many of its customer's bins and CCS are now working with a number of customers who consistently present heavy bins (100kg +) for collection.

CCS does however have to operate within strict guidelines in relation to a local authority trading within a commercial market and it cannot unfairly use its position to materially alter market conditions.

CCS will be also looking to progress a number of initiatives to further commercialise its business. Following Cabinet approval work has progressed on the depot refurbishment programme which includes the installation of a new vehicle wash facility. This facility will be open to the public and other organisations to use at a competitive market rate. It is anticipated this will be primarily open to the public during the day and possibly on Saturdays dependent on planning permission. The equipment will initially be used only by its own fleet to fully commission and debug the equipment following which it will be opened up for external users probably in approximately 12 months' time.

A new vehicle equipped to handle large fly –tips has been ordered , it is anticipated the same vehicle can be used to introduce a kerbside collection of bulky waste service utilising 'Hippo' like bags, in the second half of 2020 /21. This will provide an alternative to skip hire and will ensure we make greatest use out of this asset.

Using the expertise that is now within CCS I will be encouraging them to continue to identify new growth areas and / or new opportunities to provide further revenue growth for CDC providing that these make sound business sense and can be sustained.