

Briefing on Essex County Council (ECC) Climate Change Action

Background

At Full Council in October 2019 the Leader dedicated his Executive Statement to 'The Biggest Single Issue Facing the World': Climate Change.

In it he acknowledged that ECC supported the declaration of climate emergencies around the country at the LGA General Assembly in July. He went on to note that, instead of declaring an emergency in Essex, it was important to prioritise action.

The Leader listed some of the many key initiatives taking place across the Council, including

- replacing streetlights with LEDs
- supporting residents to purchase solar panels, saving 300 tonnes of carbon in year one alone
- installing solar power on our buildings and Essex Housing developments, saving 258 tonnes of CO₂
- removing single use plastics from across the estate
- nearly 50% of our workforce is now using reusable coffee cups
- converting 60 buses to be to Euro VI
- encouraging residents to use public transport by improving the park and ride, installing electric vehicle charging and encouraging cycling
- developing a Green Infrastructure Strategy
- creating 63km of wild roadside verges
- protecting 1000 properties from flooding, often using innovative low carbon techniques such as Leaky Dams
- 90% of materials linked to our highways' works are being recycled
- using sustainable materials on highways, like the innovative, award-winning use of bamboo to protect structures.
- working to ensure new Garden Communities are sustainable. Our ambition is for tens of thousands of new homes, entire communities of the future built to be as energy efficient as possible

The Essex Climate Change Commission

In May a motion was passed at Full Council to set up a cross party group to investigate what further actions ECC could take to reduce carbon emissions and promote Green Infrastructure. In his Executive Statement in October the Leader enhanced the powers of the group by announcing the Essex Climate Change Commission.

This Commission will still be cross-party, independently chaired and made up, not only of ECC Members, but of experts in the field as well. It will also have a budget of an initial quarter of a million pounds.

The Independent Chair and Terms of Reference for the Commission will be announced shortly, and political groups in the Council should begin to consider who their representatives on this Commission will be.

The Essex Forest Initiative

While the Commission inaugurates and begins its work it is important that ECC wastes no time in continuing its work on tackling climate change. The Council will continue to explore

- Changing procurement rules requiring suppliers to adopt more stringent sustainable practices;
- Changing how residents travel, ensuring we prioritise and enable walking, cycling and public transport first
- Aligning with Defra's Recycling & Waste strategy, ensuring we have Zero Avoidable Waste by 2050, Exploring how to achieve the government target on net zero carbon sooner than 2050
- Supporting the Greening of Town Centres by setting up a Green Essex Network
- Buying green energy and generate more of our own renewable energy
- Taking advantage of new innovations. An example of this: Essex Highways are exploring warm tarmac, - if rolled out across the country it would save at least 61,000 tonnes of CO₂ - the equivalent of almost 300 million car journeys

A new commitment announced in October was a million pound tree planting project. Known as the 'Essex Forest Initiative', which will involve planting 375,000 trees across the County over the next 5 years, equivalent to the size of 210 football pitches.

Prioritising Climate Action Politically

As a further indication of the elevation of this priority, Cllr Walsh's title has now changed, from Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste to Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change Action.