

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILAUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE20 January 2022Report by Head of Strategic ServicesINVESTIGATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE REPORT UPDATE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To provide the Audit and Scrutiny Committee with a progress report against the recommendations approved in the Investigation on Climate Change Report submitted on 12 March 2020.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Committee note the progress to date and future plans for delivery against statutory climate change targets.

BACKGROUND

3. At the meeting of the Committee held on 21 November 2019, the scope and timeline of an investigation on climate change were approved. The final draft report on the investigation, including recommendations, was considered by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 12 March 2020. The report was not submitted to Cabinet until 13 August 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At this time, Cabinet agreed that a response should be prepared.

4. This paper fulfils this requirement and takes each recommendation from the original report (Appendix A) in turn and outlines the progress to date.

REPORTRecommendation 1:

5. *To raise awareness levels further on the importance of addressing climate change, across all levels within the Council, and the wider East Renfrewshire community, including maximisation of the potential offered by social media, and the Council's new website once it is launched;*

Response 1:

5.1 Progress has been made against raising awareness levels on the importance of addressing climate change but perhaps not to as great an extent as might have been expected in 22 months. This has been largely due to the impact of Covid-19 and the focus on maintaining key services from March 2020 until June 2020 and adapting to new working practices.

5.2 In August 2020, a Climate Change Officer was recruited. In 2021 a series of “what does good look like?” workshops took place across 7 key themes: Planning and Place, Transportation, Waste, Fleet, Housing, Estates, and Procurement. These workshops raised awareness levels of the scale and scope of the challenge in tackling climate change by engaging over 60 key officers within services that will be pivotal in the net zero journey.

5.3 A Get to Zero Senior Officers’ Working Group has also been set up which is now beginning to gather pace. It has considered the Council’s ‘Get to Zero ‘Ambition Statement’ and associated high-level action plan and has served to raise awareness levels at a senior management level across the Council.

5.4 In terms of the council’s new website, a dedicated Climate Change page has been created with updated content to include findings from the thematic Citizens’ Panel Survey on Climate Change and links to information sources to help local residents and businesses to take action.

5.5 To date, social media posts have been focused on specific activities i.e. local housing strategy focus on low carbon technology and energy efficiency and the planting of 26 ‘wee woods’ as a COP 26 legacy project.

Future Plan:

5.6 The “what does good look like?” workshops will recommence in early 2022 to move from a high-level to a more detailed action plan with the objective, wherever possible, to quantify the carbon impact of activities and set targets for reduction on the route map to net zero. In doing so, awareness levels will further increase across staff.

5.7 The GTZ Senior Officers’ Working Group will continue to meet on a monthly basis to guide and shape the forthcoming GTZ Action Plan.

5.8 Provision of comprehensive ‘carbon literacy’ training to a wider group of staff, including employees who may not consider that their role is key to delivery of the climate change agenda, would be desirable to raise awareness levels. It would also be beneficial to include ‘carbon literacy’ training as part of future corporate inductions for new employees. Funding has not been identified for this to date.

5.9 In relation to the Council’s website and social media platforms, it is acknowledged that more can be done to engage employees, local residents and businesses but resources are limited.

Recommendation 2:

6. *To support the further promotion of agile working procedures in the Council, including raising awareness through guidance of how employees and departments as a whole, impact upon the Council’s carbon footprint, and steps they can take to reduce this;*

Response 2:

6.1 Covid-19 and the ‘work from home’ mandate from the Scottish Government in March 2020 resulted in a rapid deployment of agile working technology and new procedures. As a result business and commuting mileage was drastically reduced. The potential link between agile working and reducing our carbon footprint and future opportunity has not been made explicit and more efforts to raise awareness of the climate benefits of home working will be made in the forthcoming Get to Zero Action Plan.

Recommendation 3:

7. *That the Council's strategy on climate change is renewed, setting out the Council's future priorities with clear actions, replacing the former Climate Change Strategy and Sustainability Action Plan, and to include the involvement of children and young people in the development of the new strategy;*

Response 3:

7.1 A new detailed Get to Zero Strategy is in development with an 'Ambition Statement' and high-level action plan approved by Cabinet on 25 November 2021. To date this has involved key council officers and services with an initial focus on the council's own emissions and those within its supply chain.

Future Plan:

7.2 In 2022, a more detailed 'Get to Zero' action plan will be developed and will incorporate a broader scope and provide the opportunity to engage with children and young people. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Plan will also be undertaken.

Recommendation 4:

8. *In relation to oversight, it was noted that the Cabinet and the Convener for Environment have responsibility for climate change and sustainability. Notwithstanding, it is suggested that a cross party Elected Member / Officer working group could be established on climate change to make further recommendations to Cabinet;*

Response 4:

8.1 As outlined in para 5.3 above a Senior Officers' Working Group has been established with its inaugural meeting taking place in September 2021.

8.2 Elected members' briefing sessions on climate change were delivered in April and December 2021. The purpose of these cross-party information events is to provide a better understanding of climate change impacts, net-zero objectives and the role of the council and councillors in terms of delivering on this agenda.

Future Plan:

8.3 It is proposed that the establishment of a formal cross-party Member/Officer Working group takes place post-election.

Recommendation 5

9. *That the Corporate Management Team should consider how they can best take forward their leadership role in climate change;*

Response 5:

9.1 The Corporate Management Team have been kept aware of the many challenges facing the Council in relation to climate change.

Future Plan:

9.2 The Director of Environment who has responsibility for coordinating the Council's response to climate change will be submitting regular update reports to the CMT ensuring they maintain an oversight and provide appropriate leadership given the scale, potential costs and cross departmental nature of the issue.

Recommendation 6

10. *That an inter-departmental working group be formed on climate change, supported by the change-management team within the Environment Department, and reporting through the Director of Environment to the Corporate Management Team;*

Response 6:

10.1 The "what does good look like?" workshops (as outlined in para 5.2) that took place in 2021 included officers mainly from the Environment Department but officers from Corporate and Community Services and Education also participated, where appropriate. At a senior level, the GTZ Senior Officers' Working Group has a representative from each department (as outlined in para 5.3). These groups were supported by the Environment Department's Change & Governance team.

Future Plan:

10.2 Once the Get to Zero Action Plan is adopted, progress will be reported to the Corporate Management Team. By approval of the Cabinet Paper submitted on the 25 November 2021, a commitment was made to provide an annual update to Cabinet, in much the same way as the Cabinet is provided with a progress report on health and safety across the Council.

Recommendation 7:

11. *That the Council considers setting a date by which it should be carbon neutral. The Audit and Scrutiny Committee suggest that 2040 could be an option, on the basis that should the Council achieve milestones earlier than planned on climate change, then consideration could be given to revising this date;*

Response 7:

11.1 In August 2020, Cabinet approved the recommendation to "support the ambition for the Council to be 'carbon neutral' by 2040 (as a minimum target)".

Recommendation 8:

12. *That consideration be given to establishing reporting mechanisms to inform the Cabinet on progress being made towards reaching the suggested target date of 2040, subject to baseline figures being agreed for all services, e.g., reductions in paper, printers, vehicle mileage, single-use plastics, to enable better information gathering on the Council's climate change performance;*

Response 8:

12.1 To support this recommendation a carbon baseline has been established. While this work took place in 2021, it has been decided that the baseline year should be 2019/2020 to reflect emissions from pre-Covid Council operations. Baseline figures are not aligned to services but rather categorised as follows:

- Procurement (or supply chain emissions)
- Natural gas supply in council buildings
- Electricity use in council buildings
- Food and garden waste recycling
- Municipal landfill
- Fuel for vehicles

12.2 Whilst the methodology is consistent with other local authorities, the baseline report includes 'Scope 3' or indirect emissions, i.e., emissions arising as a consequence of council activities but not necessarily owned or controlled by them e.g., procurement/supply chain emissions and commuting. This ensures the Council is considering the fullest extent of the emissions it can influence. However, public bodies are free to interpret their 'Scope 3' emissions, including not reporting these at all. By including Scope 3 emissions East Renfrewshire Council is putting itself in a strong position to meet future reporting requirements but it does mean that it is difficult to compare emissions performance against other local authorities.

Future Plan:

12.3 A carbon emissions report will be submitted to Cabinet on 27 January 2022. This report acknowledges the current emissions performance and the need for improvements to data capture and management. The paper also recommends further analysis of the procurement spend.

12.4 A commitment has been made to report performance against the 2040 target in an annual update to Cabinet (see para 10.2 above).

Recommendation 9:

13. *That a full-time post of climate change coordinator is created with Council-wide responsibility, as a matter of urgency, and based within the Environment Department, subject to further discussion on the resource implications;*

Response:

13.1 A Climate Change Officer was appointed in August 2020. The post is based in the Environment Department. To date, the Climate Change Officer has compiled the annual carbon returns to the Scottish Government in 2020 and 2021; commissioned a carbon baseline report for the Council to establish the baseline to track progress to net-zero against; coordinated 16 "what good looks like" workshops to inform the high-level action plan and identify barriers to progress. The Climate Change Officer has also delivered 5 community/schools talks and continues to coordinate the 'wee woods' project which aims to plant 26 mini-woodlands as part of the COP 26 legacy project – engaging over 30 schools in the process.

Recommendation 10:

14. *That the Council's departments give further consideration to the capacity which they have to coordinate climate change activities, especially due to the need for greater inter-departmental working and the likelihood of greater project-based work, through the joint working arrangements proposed at Recommendation 6 above.*

Response:

14.1 The Scottish Government Climate Change Plan Update was published in December 2020. This provided further details for delivery of net-zero which led to an assessment of resources required for the development and ongoing governance of a climate change action plan. As a result of this, a further post of Get to Zero Manager was created and recruited in October 2021. A further exercise was then undertaken which engaged the various council services involved in the climate action groups to identify shortfalls in capacity, skills and knowledge. There is currently a shortfall in the type and number of staffing resources required to deliver this agenda.

Recommendation 11:

15. *To invite the appropriate bodies to consider inclusion of the following wording on the capital projects appraisal form:*

'Please outline any positive or negative effects for sustainability which the project will have once completed. In terms of carbon reduction for example, impacts could include use of renewable energy sources, reduced energy/fuel consumption, increasing recycling and reduced need for people to travel by private car. In terms of the environment, benefits could include the provision of sustainable drainage, tree-planting, habitat creation and reduced use of plastics.'

Response 11:

15.1 This has been included in the Capital Project Appraisal Form by the Corporate Asset Management Group (CAMG). The updated form will be included in the Capital Investment Strategy Update paper which will be submitted to Cabinet in February 2022.

Future Plan:

15.2 However further to this, a more comprehensive Climate Change Impact Assessment for all new policies, plans and operations will be proposed to Cabinet in April 2022.

Recommendation 12:

16. *That the Council's Corporate Report Format Guidance is re-issued to all departments, with a request that sustainability and climate change implications are given greater prominence and wider consideration. Further criteria on sustainability and climate change should be developed, led by the Council's renewed climate change strategy, to assist authors in the preparation of reports;*

Response 12:

16.1 As outlined in para 15.2 above, a Climate Change Impact Assessment is being proposed for all new policies, plans and operations. If approved, the findings from any assessment will be incorporated in the Council's corporate report format in order to give climate change implications greater prominence.

Recommendation 13:

17. *To agree that a Council policy is developed, with input and support from the trade unions, on the usage and deployment of single-use plastics throughout the authority, to minimise and eventually eradicate their use;*

Response 13:

17.1 The Council continues to make progress towards reducing and eradicating the use of the single use plastics. The Education Department has made significant progress in eradicating single use plastics by using reusable cutlery and crockery across educational establishments. As a consequence of the impact from Covid and the requirement to ensure social distancing and hygiene standards, there is on occasion the need for catering staff at individual educational establishments to use single use resources. Where this is the case, the department is continuing to avoid the use of plastics by using biodegradable cutlery and crockery.

Future Plan:

17.2 A policy to support the elimination of single-use plastics in all Council operations will form a key action within the Get to Zero Action Plan. The action plan will also promote the reduction and eradication of their use by residents and businesses through appropriate communications and support measures, e.g. sharing best practice and facilitating opportunities for re-use and roll out of 'top up' water taps in public places.

Recommendation 14:

18. *To agree that consultation and engagement takes place with the East Renfrewshire community to establish what their views and priorities are on climate change, to inform the renewal of the Council's climate change strategy, using existing channels such as the East Renfrewshire Citizens' Panel/East Renfrewshire Youth Voice, and through new channels, e.g. the Council's new website once launched;*

Response 14:

18.1 A climate change survey was issued to the Citizens' Panel in March 2020 in order to better understand what people's view and priorities are on climate change. Key findings included:

- 86% agreed that climate change is an urgent and immediate problem
- 76% of respondents indicated that they would like to do a lot more to reduce the effects of climate change
- 96% agreed that the Council should lead by example to communities by taking action on climate change

18.2 The 2022/23 budget consultation included a number of questions on climate change priorities and living locally. The consultation closed on 12 December 2021 and findings are yet to be analysed and shared. Core climate change questions have been devised for inclusion in the 2022 Citizens' Panel to allow us to track attitudinal change in key areas. At the time of writing findings from these surveys have not been compiled.

Future Plan:

18.3 As part of the development of the Get to Zero Action Plan, the East Renfrewshire Youth Voice will be explored as a means of engaging the young people across the area.

18.4 The Climate Emergency Declaration made by East Renfrewshire Council on 25 October 2021, requested that the Council set up a Climate Change Partnership Group, involving Councillors, residents, young citizens, businesses and other relevant parties. The Get to Zero team is progressing this and also looking at digital consultation platforms which might facilitate sustained engagement and ability to capture views from a variety of audiences. It is anticipated that a partnership group will meet in 2022 but this is likely to be post-May local elections.

Recommendation 15:

19. *That the film produced by pupils at the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre on climate change and recycling, should, on the suggestion of a pupil there, be shared via social media links, with other educational establishments in East Renfrewshire;*

Response 15:

19.1 The film, which was shared with members of the audit and scrutiny committee during a visit to the Isobel Mair School and Family Centre in January 2020, was posted on the school's website and shared through social media so that young people and staff from other educational establishments in and beyond East Renfrewshire could learn from this best practice.

Recommendation 16:

20. *To maximise the potential for achieving further ECO schools status and Green Flag awards across educational establishments in East Renfrewshire, building upon the excellent work already taking place;*

Response 16:

20.1 Pupils across East Renfrewshire continue to participate in a wide range of *Learning for Sustainability* activities including award-based programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, John Muir Award and Eco School Green Flag. Thirty educational establishments currently hold an Eco Schools Green Flag Award, which is a higher proportion than in any other local authority. An Eco-coordinator Forum and associated Google Classroom were established in 2021 in order to facilitate further sharing of best practice and resources across our schools and ELC centres.

Recommendation 17:

21. *To investigate the feasibility of reviewing the Council's recent investment of resources in active travel, to assess the impact of more choices for citizens of cycling and walking, and any associated benefits, such as alternative commuting options, increasing access to the countryside, or more generally improving the quality of life of residents.*

Response 17:

21.1 To date investment on active travel measures and assessment of impacts and benefits have been delivered through external funding sources. In 2020/21 temporary measures such as the Giffnock Primary 'School Street' and 10km of cycle lane pilots were undertaken as part of the transport response to Covid-19. Various other measures- including the Better Points scheme which awards people who have walked, cycled or used public transport with points to be spent in local businesses, along with some small-scale walking and cycling projects have been delivered.

21.2 A new Sustainable and Community Travel Officer was appointed in September 2021 and will play a key role in the shaping and delivery of an updated Local Transport Strategy, as well as developing policy and delivery of expanded EV charging infrastructure.

Future Plan:

21.3 Given the Scottish Government target to reduce car kilometres travelled by 20% by 2030 (as outlined in the Scottish Government Climate Change Plan Update Dec 2020) it is

anticipated that forthcoming council budgets will require to be reviewed in terms of both capital & revenue expenditure in respect of promoting active travel within the authority.

Recommendation 18:

22. *That consideration be given to what further action can be taken, such as thorough revisions to the Local Development Plan, and related planning guidance, to promote sustainability and raise awareness of the authority's expectations regarding new housing developments;*

Response 18:

22.1 The requirement to move towards a net zero has been given greater emphasis in Local Development Plan 2. LDP2 sets out a range of policies which contribute to tackling climate change through encouraging sustainable site selection; sustainable design, sustainable travel; integrated green infrastructure, electric vehicles, encouraging renewable energy proposals, reducing waste and pollution; encouraging recycling; promoting sustainable drainage and flood management; and the regeneration of vacant and derelict land.

22.2 This approach will contribute towards reducing the areas carbon footprint, energy consumption and facilitating the transition to a low carbon economy and low carbon living.

Key Policies are provided below:

- Strategic Policy 1: Development Strategy requires proposals to meet the objectives of the Plan in order to create sustainable, well designed, connected, healthy, safe and mixed communities and places. It also requires proposals to contribute to energy reduction and sustainable development in accordance with Policies E1 and E2 (see below)
- Strategic Policy 2: Development Contributions requires new development to be accompanied by the appropriate infrastructure and services required to support new or expanded communities.
- Policy D1: Place-making and Design requires proposals to be assessed against the 6 qualities of a successful place as outlined in SPP and Designing Streets. Proposals must deliver a clear sustainable movement hierarchy, incorporate integrated and enhance existing green infrastructure and incorporate the use of sustainable design and construction methods and materials in the layout and design to support a low carbon economy.
- Policy D8: Sustainable Transport Networks requires proposals to prioritise active travel and to demonstrate a clear sustainable movement hierarchy.
- Policy D11: Electric Charging Infrastructure requires proposals to incorporate charging points and infrastructure as a core component of their proposal.
- Policy E1: Sustainable Design requires major development to provide an energy and carbon footprint assessment to demonstrate their contribution towards achieving sustainable development, reducing energy use and how the proposal will offset the overall carbon footprint of their development, during and post construction.
- Policy E2: Renewable Energy provides criteria for considering low carbon and renewable energy proposals.

Future Plan:

22.3 Although the current LDP provides a strong framework in developing place-based solutions to a zero-carbon future and contains strong policies on climate change adaptation and mitigation, it will be critical to build upon this in the preparation of LDP3.

Recommendation 19:

23. *That a review be undertaken of our approach to public transport to ensure it is sufficiently sustainable, and tailored to residents' current and future needs;*

Response 19:

23.1 To date there has been no review of the Council's approach to public transport. Management and operation of local public transport is delegated to operators and Strathclyde Passenger Transport which makes the recommendation more difficult to fulfil.

Future Plan:

23.2 The Council's Planning Team will refresh the Local Transport Strategy in 2022 and will consider the findings from recent transport studies and provisions contained in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 to help strengthen and improvement partnership plans. The Council will continue to work through the Glasgow City Region Transport & Connectivity Portfolio Group to ensure that opportunities are understood and explored.

Recommendation 20:

24. *That the opportunity is taken through the re-development plans for Eastwood Leisure Centre complex, to consider the option of introducing a district (i.e., linked) heating system for the public buildings located within Eastwood Park;*

Response 20:

24.1 The option of introducing a district heating system for the public buildings located within Eastwood Park was reviewed at high-level by the project team. District heating is most suited to well-insulated new buildings with good air tightness values that are of the same use type and have relatively constant energy demands. Given the mix of different building types and ages at Eastwood Park it was considered, at this stage, that it would be too intrusive to make the significant alterations to the existing buildings required to make them suitable to be plugged into a District Heating system. It was also a concern that a District Heating system may limit the energy performance of the proposed leisure centre and theatre, given its very different energy demands to the other buildings in the park, by needing to create additional top-up systems within the building.

Recommendation 21:

25. *That the implications should be assessed of plans to replace gas boilers with low carbon heating after 2025, for new homes;*

Response 21:

25.1 For new homes, we have considered the Passivhaus building standard which is widely accepted to be the optimum approach to achieving a carbon neutral home. However, it is an expensive build option. Therefore, net zero standards like air source heat pumps and electric storage heaters are being explored at the early stages of new build projects. This looks achievable with additional grants made available by the Government for new

developments. Ground source heat pumps are another option but can only be used where there is ground space.

25.2 The Scottish Government are currently looking at the strategy to introduce a policy for all new buildings from 2024, whereby the primary heating source would be zero emissions with a requirement to meet a higher energy efficiency standard. This may become a regulatory requirement through Building Standards.

25.3 It is worth noting that there are other factors to consider in the move to low carbon heating, which will most likely be electricity. A switch to all electric will require tariff knowledge, possibly increased cost (depending on how Government controls energy cost by 2025) and an understanding of how to use the systems effectively.

Recommendation 22:

26. *To continue the programme of improvements already underway to the Council's housing stock and other public buildings, to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions through the use of innovative new technologies in relation to lighting, heating, and infrastructure;*

Response 22:

26.1 Our investment plan to improve energy efficiency in our housing stock has continued. This includes the installation of new windows; external; internal and cavity wall insulation to properties to reduce heat loss and make homes warmer. Gas boilers are being upgraded to 'A' rated gas boilers to improve energy efficiency in homes.

26.2 This is part of the Council's commitment to meet the Scottish Government's Energy Efficiency in Scottish Social Housing (ESSH) targets, which aims to achieve an energy performance certificate (EPC) rating of band 'B' for all social rented properties in Scotland by 2032, with an interim target of EPC band 'D' by 2025. At present 99% of our tenants' homes achieve EPC band 'D'. We are aiming to improve our homes to achieve EPC band C which is above set target by March 2025.

26.3 In addition to above, the feasibility of new technologies, i.e., installation of Solar Photovoltaic Panels to reduce energy cost to tenants; retrofitting with low carbon heat sources will be explored.

26.4 As with the replacement of gas boilers, this requires research around financial viability and financial implication on tenants, coupled with education on how to use the systems effectively to reduce energy consumption.

26.5 In terms of public buildings' improvements, there has been no further Council funding assigned for energy efficiency projects in the last two years. However, SALIX funding (£70k) has been used for LED replacement lighting in St. Joseph's Primary School (completed in July 2021) and a SALIX-led refurbishment of St. Andrew's House will bring £30k of energy efficiency benefits.

26.6 Net-zero buildings surveys have been completed by expert consultants. Eight Council buildings, including Eastwood HQ, 2 Spiersbridge Way and the Barrhead Main Street office have been assessed in terms of what is required to reduce carbon emissions and the cost of implementing improvements. Findings and recommendations are due to be shared with and considered by in January 2022. Funding is not currently available to undertake similar surveys across the Education and Culture and Leisure Trust buildings' portfolios.

26.7 The Council has also been successful in a funding bid to the Scottish Government as part of the developing approach to Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategies. Between now and end of March 2022, the project will consider the governance required (internal and external stakeholder mapping exercise); and improvement to baseline data using national and local datasets with a focus on the non-domestic buildings sector in order to understand the costs for decarbonisation of heat provision.

Future Plan:

26.9 All local authorities in Scotland are required to assess capacity for delivery of district heat networks under the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021. This recognises the potential that heat networks have to reduce emissions in our homes and buildings. This is a significant undertaking and will form a part of the wider Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) which is to be completed by all councils by the end of 2023. These plans will show how local councils intend to improve the energy efficiency of all buildings and decarbonising heat.

26.9 Following on from the net-zero surveys undertaken in 2021 in council offices and to inform the LHEES, a comprehensive view of the thermal/mechanical energy efficiency measure that will be required in the remainder of the Council's estate, including the Education and Leisure portfolios, will be required. Based on the work already undertaken, it is estimated that further survey work will cost between £200k and 300k.

Recommendation 23:

27. To continue working with partner organisations and other agencies to ensure the preservation and protection of peatlands in East Renfrewshire, including the exploration of new funding opportunities, to ensure that the huge potential of peat to absorb CO2 is maintained and increased where possible;

Response 23:

27.1 Policy E4 of the Local Development Plan 2 seeks to protect soil quality including peatland areas. The 'Spatial Framework for Wind Energy Development' also excludes land of Class 1 nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep-peat and priority peatland habitat from being suitable for development. Policy E4 is provided below.

Policy E4: Protecting Soil Quality

Proposals will be required to minimise adverse impacts on soil, avoiding the unnecessary disturbance of peat and other carbon rich soils, and minimise the amount of land that is affected.

Proposals must be supported by appropriate surveys, assessments and management plans and where necessary provide appropriate mitigation measures.

In the case of carbon rich soils, in order that the Council may assess the merits of the proposal, applicants must demonstrate the effect it would have on CO2 emissions as a result of its construction.

27.2 Policy E2 'Renewable Energy' also has criteria for considering the impact upon carbon rich soils.

Future Plan:

27.3 Identification of peatland protection and restoration will be incorporated in the Get to Zero Action Plan. A better understanding of the current peatland and carbon absorption achieved will be a first step. Peatland also has a role in terms of biodiversity protection and enhancement and will be central to a revised Local Biodiversity Action Plan, in conjunction with relevant partner organisations including Nature Scot.

Recommendation 24:

28. *To protect the environment, and to help the Council reach its suggested objective of reaching carbon neutrality by 2040, a headline project for the new climate change strategy could be considered e.g., a tree being planted for every resident in East Renfrewshire (approx. 95,000).*

Response 24:

28.1 No headline project has been formally considered as yet.

Future Plan:

28.2 The new Get to Zero Action Plan will incorporate a headline project which will either significantly reduce or absorb emissions.

CONCLUSIONS

29. Clearly much has changed since the Audit and Scrutiny Committee considered their report on 12th March 2020, just days before the first lockdown. Public awareness of climate change is much greater than it was 22 months ago. However, progress and preparation against the necessary targets has slowed due to the activities associated with Covid. The targets are challenging, both in terms of the solutions and their affordability. This picture is replicated across Scotland and is not unique to East Renfrewshire Council.

30. The council has put in place some of the key foundations necessary to deliver effective change and has plans for more foundations. It is hoped that this report provides a comprehensive summary of these plans and the challenges ahead.

RECOMMENDATIONS

31. It is recommended that the Committee note the progress to date and future plans for delivery against statutory climate change targets.

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