

Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Committee

Themed Review 2020-21

Climate Emergency Response

Chair's introduction

Tackling the Climate Emergency is a massive priority for the Council. Although a global issue, it is vital that leadership is displayed at a local level to minimise the borough's contribution to the crisis and to make adaptations for the adverse conditions created by a changing climate. A report to Cabinet in October 2021 set out the Council's initial response to the recommendations of the Climate Emergency Commission, making this a pivotal time for the committee to carry out this review in scrutiny.

During the year we have been lucky enough to hear from some great witnesses both internally and externally. They provided us with unique insight and vital information. I would like to thank each and every one of them for their time. They told us about the innovative action being taken by the Council already, such as the wide-ranging work on enabling active travel in the borough. We also heard about the considerable challenges the Council must overcome to reach their net zero ambitions – for example in retrofitting and decarbonising the borough's homes.

Using the discussions had in committee and some extracurricular activities, including a sustainable transport exhibition and a visit to the Council's Eco Show Home, we have pulled together a set of focused and robust recommendations. My hope is that the recommendations complement and build upon the work the Council is already doing, providing valuable guidance.

I must admit I was a little apprehensive when taking the decision to lead this review. Though I have always supported the Council's climate ambitions, I was very aware that the cross-cutting and detailed knowledge required to fully understand the Climate Emergency and the best way to respond to it was something I lacked.

Given the vast and complex nature of this area, it is my belief that Councillors like myself would benefit from structured training. Not only will this help us to better understand and scrutinise the Climate Emergency response, it will also give us the tools to influence others – especially residents and local businesses – to make better climate choices.

In addition to our fantastic witnesses, I would also like to thank officers, committee members, and Cllr Clyde Loakes, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Lead Member for the Environment, for their steadfast support throughout this review.

Cllr Anna Mbachu, Chair of Neighbourhoods Scrutiny

Summary of recommendations

People, communities and climate

Recommendation one

- That the Council aims to improve the Climate Emergency skills and knowledge of Councillors; that, to achieve this, Carbon Literacy is integrated into the Councillor induction process

Recommendation two

- That, as part of its forthcoming behaviour change strategy, the Council makes full use of the unique connections Councillors have within their communities to further influence residents on their attitudes and behaviours towards the Climate Emergency

Sustainable transport

Recommendation three

- That the Council leads by example in enabling active travel to its staff; that they also engage its health and care partners to do the same for their employees

Recommendation four

- That the Council explores the parameters used to decide when a School Street can be implemented

Greener buildings

Recommendation five

- The Committee commends the Council's Eco Show Home initiative and endorses its fabric first approach to retrofitting its own stock

Recommendation six

- That the Council continues to provide private homeowners with support and guidance on retrofitting their homes and reducing their household carbon emissions

Recommendation seven

- The Committee supports the Council's ambition to lead by example through Sixty Bricks by delivering its first zero carbon development in 2024; that details of out how this will be achieved is presented to the committee in 2022/23

Adapting to the Future

Recommendation eight

- That the Council explores the option of bringing in a dedicated specialist ecologist to provide strategic oversight and maximise effectiveness of biodiversity programmes

Recommendation Nine

- That an item on green jobs is added to the 2022/23 forward plan; that a relevant witness working in the industry is invited to attend

Background

Context

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in April 2019, recognising it as the single most important challenge facing us all¹. With this declaration, the Council signified its intention of being a net-zero Council by 2030. To act as a guiding hand, an independent Climate Emergency Commission was established to review the Council's current position and provide a series of recommendations where improvements can be made.

The Commission's final report, containing 29 recommendations, went to Cabinet in December 2020². Cabinet noted the report and agreed to receive a further report setting out how the Council intends to respond to those recommendations.

The ensuing pandemic unfortunately caused unmitigable delays and the follow-up report went to Cabinet in October 2021³. The approach and initial funding asks set out in the report were accepted by Cabinet. The report outlined the overall approach and a range of initial projects. It also committed to bringing a further report with a detailed action plan for reaching net-zero by 2030 in Spring 2022.

Recognising the broad range of the recommendations made by the Climate Emergency Commission, the Council identified five strands to categorise them under: Waltham Forest Council as Leader; People, Communities and Climate; Greener Buildings; Sustainable Transport; and Adapting to the Future. This model would form the basis of the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny themed review, looking at a different strand in each meeting.

Waltham Forest residents support the Council's focus on the Climate Emergency. In a recent survey of over 4,000 residents, nearly half (44%) said they wanted more guidance from the Council on what they can do to tackle the Climate Emergency⁴. This comes against the backdrop of widespread flooding in June 2021 that caused damage, distress and forced people from their homes⁵. Extreme weather incidences like flash flooding are predicted to become more common as the Climate Emergency worsens⁶.

As well as being a priority for the Council and its residents, tackling the Climate Emergency is a core part of the Government's agenda. In November 2020 they set out its Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, committing £12bn of investment⁷, and promising to 'Build Back Greener' following the COVID-19 pandemic⁸. Additionally, the UK hosted COP26, the first summit ever to reach an agreement on phasing down coal power.

¹ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=335&MId=4594&Ver=4>

² <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-11/Waltham%20Forest%20Climate%20Emergency%20Brochure.pdf>

³ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=287&MId=5266&Ver=4>

⁴

https://wfclimatechoices.co.uk/?utm_content&utm_medium=email&utm_name&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term

⁵ <https://walthamforestecho.co.uk/walthamstow-flooding-heavy-rainfall-thunderstorms/>

⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/climate-model-extreme-weather-events-b1953392.html>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-his-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution-for-250000-jobs>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy>

This review would give committee members the opportunity to assess the Council's work so far and offer strategic guidance in their continued ambition to reduce carbon emissions in Waltham Forest.

Methodology

In September 2021 the Committee was presented with an initial scoping document, and agreed to take the review forward, with a focus on how the Council intending to respond to the recommendations of the Climate Emergency Commission. The Committee then used its meetings from October 2021 – April 2022 to review the context, speak to officers from across the Council, speak to experts and partners working to improve the climate, and make recommendations. Committee members also spoke with witnesses outside of the meeting and attended the Council's Eco Show Home, which displays state of the art retrofitting measures.

September 2021 – People, Communities and Climate

As well as agreeing the scope for the themed review, this meeting was used to discuss the People, Communities and Climate workstream. Officers prepared a report outlining how they were putting the community at the heart of their climate change plans. This meeting was held in the lead up to COP26, and during preparations for the first Waltham Forest Youth Climate Summit. Poppy Flint, the newly recruited Climate Action Outreach Coordinator, was present, along with Cllr Clyde Loakes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, spoke about how the initiative aimed to put young people at the centre of the conversation about the climate.

Simon Rayner, Head of Strategic Communications and Campaigns and David Beach, Director of Enforcement, also attended the meeting and informed the committee of the forthcoming behaviour change strategy and the communications campaigns that would help enact the strategy.

The Committee were keen to encourage the Council to go further with their engagement plans. In addition to young people in schools, the committee felt the Council could look to provide training to school governors and councillors; giving them the tools to have positive conversations and actions on the climate. These people are in positions of influence and well connected to the community; meaning they are ideally placed to help enact behaviour change.

November 2021 – Sustainable Transport

Sustainable transport is an area where the Council has made significant developments since the 'Mini-Holland' programme started over eight years ago⁹. Through successfully securing funding from Transport for London for the scheme, the Council embarked on an ambitious course to introduce cycle infrastructure and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) throughout the borough. Mini-Holland has since been encompassed as part of the wider Enjoy Waltham Forest programme, and the Council continue to create circumstances where people can easily walk and cycle and encouraging residents to make fewer journeys by car. For

⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mini-Hollands>

example, more recently the Council has been developing its 15 Minute Neighbourhood concept which will aim to ensure residents can access vital services and amenities within a 15-minute walk or cycle¹⁰.

To give members the opportunity to ask questions on the full scale of the work the Council has undertaken on sustainable transport, the meeting was attended by expert witnesses from local cycling groups Cycle Sister and Joy Riders, sustainable delivery partners Zedify, and an academic from the University of Westminster who has published research on LTNs and their impact on car use, street crime, and fire service emergency response times¹¹¹²¹³. As well as questioning the witnesses in the meeting, members met with the witnesses in a 'sustainable transport exhibition' prior to the meeting, where they could talk in detail about their work and ambitions.

The Committee asked a range of questions, including on how the Council could progress its partnership work with Zedify, and do all they can to encourage local businesses to take up zero carbon delivery methods. Similarly, in a Growth Scrutiny meeting in November 2021, the Committee discussed the development of the 15-minute Neighbourhoods concept in relation to local economic growth¹⁴. As part of the discussion, they suggested that a core focus of the concept should be developing services and facilities that residents can reach by walking or cycling in 15 minutes.

Sustainable transport acting as a bedrock for a concept like 15-minute neighbourhoods demonstrates how actions that tackle the Climate Emergency can have far reaching co-benefits. By walking or cycling to a local shop instead of using a car, not only will residents decrease their carbon output and help reduce traffic; they will also realise health benefits from the exercise and boost the local economy by shopping local.

The hope is that through initiatives like 15-minute neighbourhoods the Council will create enablers for residents to travel more sustainably. The committee was keen to press that the Council should lead by example in this area by enabling their own staff to commute via active travel, and to work with their health partners to do the same.

During a discussion about School Streets, an initiative that prevents cars from travelling on streets near schools during drop off and pick up times, the committee asked whether the Council would consider implementing one in an area that doesn't have a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ). The committee were told there are various reasons that the Council's current policy does not allow for this, for example a CPZ creates an ecosystem that reinforces School Street enforcement and provides a source of funding to establish, install and enforce them. The committee felt that the Council should explore alternative options which may allow School Streets to be introduced in areas, such as the north of the borough, that have typically fewer CPZs.

¹⁰ <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/stories/15-minute-neighbourhood-tell-us-what-you-think>

¹¹ <https://findingspress.org/article/17128-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-car-use-and-active-travel-evidence-from-the-people-and-places-survey-of-outer-london-active-travel-interventions>

¹² <https://findingspress.org/article/19414-the-impact-of-introducing-a-low-traffic-neighbourhood-on-street-crime-in-waltham-forest-london>

¹³ <https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/v5157/the-impact-of-2020-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-on-fire-service-emergency-response-times-in-london-uk>

¹⁴ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/s80662/3%20-%20Growth%20Scrutiny%20report%2015min%20neighbourhoods%209-9-2021%202.pdf>

January 2022 – Greener Buildings

At the start of the meeting, members who had recently visited the Council's Eco Show Home¹⁵ explained the range of retrofit measures had been undertaken at the Victorian terrace house to improve its EPC and praised the Council for this innovative initiative. The message at the show home, reiterated during the scrutiny meeting, is that whilst a range of energy efficiency methods exist, a 'fabric first' approach – whereby homes are insulated before other implementations are made – is the most effective. This is because proper insulation is required before other measures can be effective.

It is clear that if the Council is to reach its target of Net Zero, housing is an area where large scale carbon reduction needs to happen. Members, both in the committee meeting and during a visit to the Council's Eco Show Home, heard how in 2019 housing was accountable for just under half of the borough's emissions. With retrofitting currently being very costly, and the Council having control over a relatively small section of the total housing in borough, the challenges are clear. However, by improving the energy efficiency of their own housing stock, and encouraging private homeowners to do the same, will bring various co-benefits including improving health inequalities and creating job opportunities to deliver these improvements.

The meeting was attended by Cllr Simon Miller, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, and Ian Rae, Commercial Director for Regeneration, Planning and Delivery, who spoke about the Council's development approach. The committee heard how the Council was using Sixty Bricks, its wholly owned development company, to lead the way on sustainable development. Their current aim, as set out in its 10 Year Business Plan, is to deliver a zero carbon development by 2024¹⁶. The committee endorsed this approach and were keen to encourage the Council to continue to lead by example in this area. Members asked to see a further report come to scrutiny that set out in detail how the Council was planning to meet this target.

Adapting to the Future

The final meeting of the committee's themed review looked at adapting to the future. In previous meetings the committee heard about measures the Council is taking to positively change behaviours that reduce carbon emissions. The response to the Climate Emergency is however multi-faceted and must consider how adaptations can be implemented to respond to the physical impact of climate change.

During the meeting the committee heard how the Council was focusing on biodiversity through initiatives such as Bee Friendly Streets and planting trees to increase canopy cover, which is shown to improve resilience to heatwaves by reducing the maximum daily air temperature and local air temperatures.

The committee asked about how the Council is monitoring biodiversity programme, and whether the introduction of a specialist ecologist resource would assist in maximising the effectiveness of the various biodiversity initiatives. They heard that it was not uncommon for

¹⁵ <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/design-and-conservation/eco-home-47-greenleaf-road>

¹⁶ <https://democracy.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/s81533/3a%20-%20Appendix%201%20SBL%2010%20Year%20Company%20Business%20Plan.pdf>

local authorities to have this resource, and that a dedicated ecologist could provide strategic oversight and have the capacity to bid for funding projects to improve the Council's biodiversity projects.

The committee were especially interested in the emerging green economy, and how jobs would also have to adapt to deliver it. A prime example of this would be the need to train and retrain the workforce to give them the skills to retrofit homes. The committee suggested they would like to see more detail on this in a future report to assess the support offered by the Council. They suggested inviting a relevant witness who had received training to receive green skills be invited as a witness.

Key findings

The Committee recommends:

- **That the Council aims to improve the Climate Emergency skills and knowledge of Councillors; that, to achieve this, Carbon Literacy is integrated into the Councillor induction process**
- **That, as part of its forthcoming behaviour change strategy, the Council makes full use of the unique connections Councillors have within their communities to further influence residents on their attitudes and behaviours towards the Climate Emergency**

The Council is developing a behaviour change strategy for residents with the aim to assist them in reducing their carbon emissions. Aspects of this have already started, for example in the form of the Council's Climate Choices campaign¹⁷. Through formal training the role of Councillors in behaviour change could be bolstered. Carbon Literacy, for example, could give them the tools to utilise their unique links into the community and talk influence residents. This would give them practical knowledge and the skills to have conversations about climate change with residents.

The Committee recommends:

- **That the Council leads by example in enabling active travel to its staff; that they also engage its health and care partners to do the same for their employees**
- **That the Council explores the parameters used to decide when a School Street can be implemented**

Sustainable transport is an area where the Council has a pioneering approach and has showed strong leadership in introducing measures to increase active travel in Waltham Forest. During the committee meeting members heard from experts in the field, for example academics and business owners, about how they had partnered with the Council and were keen to see their approach furthered where possible. As one of the biggest employers in the borough¹⁸, the Council could make a significant impact by enabling its staff to travel to work on sustainable transport.

¹⁷ <https://wfclimatechoices.co.uk/>

¹⁸ <https://careersinspiration.co.uk/London/London-Job-Market/East-London#:~:text=The%20average%20Waltham%20Forest%20salary,home%20to%20over%2012%2C000%20businesses.>

School Streets have been successfully introduced in Waltham Forest, with 16 currently active. They have also been popular across London, with the Mayor of London encouraging their uptake¹⁹. In Waltham Forest they are currently introduced only in areas that are in a Controlled Parking Zone. The programme could be further expanded if there was a review of the criteria required to implement them.

The Committee recommends:

- **The Committee commends the Council's Eco Show Home initiative and endorses its fabric first approach to retrofitting its own stock**
- **That the Council continues to provide private homeowners with support and guidance on retrofitting their homes and reducing their household carbon emissions**
- **The Committee supports the Council's ambition to lead by example through Sixty Bricks by delivering its first zero carbon development in 2024; that details of out how this will be achieved is presented to the committee in 2022/23**

The Eco Show Home shows the range of retrofit measures available; ranging from insulation to heat pumps and smart technology. Whilst the Council have been able to bring the EPC rating of a Victorian Terraced house from a E to A, the recommended first steps for retrofitting is to install insulation as this will help improve the efficiency of any additional measures. Retrofitting is currently an expensive endeavour and the upfront cost is likely to be a challenge for most homeowners. Whilst this is predicted to change in the future, in the interim the Council can provide practical guidance to private homeowners to help them consider their best options, and to continue to reduce their household carbon emissions.

New builds tend to be much more energy efficient as they are designed and made via modern methods. However, developing new buildings can be a significant emitter of carbon. The Council owns a development business named Sixty Bricks and has shown its leadership by committing to deliver its first zero carbon development in 2024. The committee will hear more details in the next municipal year on how the Council can achieve this goal.

The Committee recommends:

- **That the Council explores the option of bringing in a dedicated specialist ecologist to provide strategic oversight and maximise effectiveness of biodiversity programmes**
- **That an item on green jobs is added to the 2022/23 forward plan; that a relevant witness working in the industry is invited to attend**

Throughout the review the committee has scrutinised how the Council was reducing its own and its residents' carbon emissions. In addition to this, it must prepare for a changing climate and adapt to be in a better position to deliver carbon saving initiatives. Improving the biodiversity of the borough and expanding aspects such as tree canopy cover can will help build resilience against extreme weather instances like floods and heatwaves. To deliver and improve biodiversity in a strategic way, it may be worth the Council considering bringing in a specialist ecologist.

¹⁹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-hails-success-of-schools-streets-programme>

Conclusion

This review was ambitious in setting out to use a committee normally focused on resident services to look at a crucial issue that spans the entire Council. Pulling in witnesses from other services and multiple external witnesses demonstrated clearly that only a collective effort – from all parts of the Council and residents – will see the Council reach its net zero goal.

Another theme that was evident was the need for behaviour change. The Council has made strides in this area already but by utilising ward councillors, it could further its efforts to engage residents.

The Council has a reputation for the work it has done on transport. With transport estimated to account for around a third of the borough's emissions, it will be vital for the Council to continue to push in this area. Once again there is a behaviour change aspect; making it easier for people to make journeys that don't involve fuel burning vehicles should hopefully act as encouragement for residents to travel by more sustainable means. It can also lead by example in making travelling to and for work easier for its own staff.

The other area the committee were keen to urge the Council to continue its work was on buildings, which accounts for around half of the borough's emissions. Again, the Council has taken steps to address this issue where it can through the Eco Show Home and offering guidance to residents thinking of retrofitting their homes. As with sustainable transport, the Council must also demonstrate leadership through retrofitting its own stock and by ensuring Sixty Bricks developments are zero carbon as early as possible.

Whilst bringing together this range of activities will minimise the borough's impact on the climate crisis, it must also build resilience and adaptations against the conditions created by climate change. This includes boosting its biodiversity, building flood-proof developments, and supporting residents in training and retraining for green jobs.

Continuing to display leadership will be vital. The Council has done this capably so far and will have the opportunity to push on with its forthcoming behaviour strategy and Climate Emergency action plan.