

Great Communities – Environment and Waste

Our aim is to ensure that we protect our environment by minimising our environmental impact as a council, tackling climate change and embedding environmental sustainability into what we do. We also aim to enhance the environment across the county and improve the quality of life of residents. In May 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency and made commitments to achieve carbon neutrality for its own operations by 2030. We also committed to work with others and lobby government to achieve carbon neutrality for Leicestershire by 2050 or before. We want to lead the way in creating a clean and green future which will bring economic, social and environmental benefits. A new Environment Strategy was approved in July 2020 reflecting our new commitments.

Net Zero Carbon - in September 2019 the Council agreed to invest £450,000 of funding to develop plans on how to meet our Climate Emergency commitments. A good start has been made by switching to a green electricity tariff, launching a major tree planting programme and working with developers and others to build 'green' new homes. We've already seen real change and initiatives such as LED streetlights and solar panels have enabled us to cut our wider greenhouse gas emissions by 64% to the end of 2018/19 compared to 2008. Signing the UK100 pledge and our membership of the Countryside Climate Network to demonstrate the valuable contribution from rural counties also underlines our commitment to clean energy. A new investment of £16m and a long list of projects signals the Council's determination to tackle climate change. Plans include a 10MW solar farm aiming to create a carbon-neutral industrial estate and replacing some diesel vehicles with low carbon alternatives.

Green Energy and Energy Efficiency - we have switched to a green electricity tariff, so all our electricity is now coming from renewable sources. We have installed electric vehicle (EV) charging points at Council sites which are available for council vehicles, staff and visitors to use. We are also expanding the network of EV chargers at council sites to support the growth of council and privately-owned 'plug-in' electric vehicles. £300k was invested in upgraded lighting, boilers and heating controls at County Council premises last year. The Property Energy Team continues to find ways to reduce the Council's energy consumption and carbon emissions. There are projects in the pipeline to double the amount of solar PV at County Hall and to upgrade lighting to LED at County Hall. The Council has now produced a Zero Carbon Policy for construction projects which includes enhanced building specifications aimed at increasing energy efficiency and working towards the Council's 2030 Net Zero Carbon target. Energy is now incorporated into all construction projects and as a result many projects have had additional energy measures delivered including solar PV, heat pumps and EV chargers. The Energy Team continue to work to deliver low carbon upgrades to all building projects and to embed energy into property processes.

New Solar Farm – in November 2019 we published further details of ambitious plans to develop a solar farm and one of the first carbon neutral industrial sites in the country. The solar farm based on Barrow Road, Quorn, would generate almost 10 megawatts of electricity a year. As part of the plans, the authority is also looking to build a carbon neutral industrial site. The development could include solar roof panels, LED lighting, rainwater harvesting and electric vehicle charging. The

development would produce clean, green energy, while building new units would offer local businesses the chance to get their foot on the ladder or expand. The returns would also generate more than £800k a year, which will benefit services from social care to highway maintenance. Plans for the scheme were formally lodged to the Planning Committee in May 2020. The planned zero-carbon industrial site would be only the second carbon neutral industrial site in the UK.

SHIRE Environment Grants – in November 2019 the Council launched a new 'SHIRE Environment Grant' scheme to help community groups and organisations fund innovative projects to improve their local environment. The scheme is focused toward projects that help reduce the amount of household waste and greenhouse gas emissions produced, improve biodiversity or support the creation and protection of sustainable green spaces in Leicestershire. Community groups and organisations can apply for grants of up to £3k. Projects that have been funded include planting new, wildlife-friendly hedgerows; the creation of a 'green gym' to create a food growing space based on permaculture principles; improving the mix of species of plants on four roadside verges; and a community composting facility. A second round of funding was launched in July 2020.

Vision for Country Parks – in October 2019 the Council announced its ten-year vision for Leicestershire country parks. Over the next ten years we aim to enhance visitor facilities, support more people to get physically active, engage more with communities and community groups, grow volunteering and reduce carbon. We are committed to maintaining and developing our green spaces, which are vital in tackling the climate emergency, improving health and boosting wellbeing. As part of the new strategy, six destination parks, at Beacon Hill, Broombriggs Farm, Bosworth Battlefield, Market Bosworth, Watermead and Snibston, will have dedicated five-year action plans to help deliver the ambitious goals.

Ashby Canal - in September 2019 proposals to transfer part of the Ashby Canal route between Snarestone and Measham to a local charity moved a step nearer. We approved the submission of an application to the Secretary of State for consent to transfer part of the Order to the Ashby Canal Association (ACA), following a consultation which showed widespread support for the proposal. Since 1994 the council has led restoration work on the stretch of canal, with a 500-metre section from Snarestone to the new bridge 62 completed in 2015. However due to limited third-party funding and our own resource constraints the council hopes to transfer the ownership so further restoration of the canal can be progressed.

Tree Management Strategy - in March 2020 the Council agreed a new Tree Management Strategy which will see more trees planted and a greater emphasis on recognising their importance in promoting Leicestershire as an attractive place to live and work. The strategy sets out plans to ensure the long-term conservation, sustainability and development of the precious tree stock for the people of the county and future generations. Trees are an essential resource which provide a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits, and our focus is to continue to build upon our ever-growing green infrastructure. The Council is responsible for managing approximately 82,000 individual tree specimens and over 400 hectares of woodland on its land holdings. The Council is also working in partnership with the National Forest Company to produce an overview document outlining a countywide approach to tackling climate change and creating a sustainable place through more tree planting.

Tree and Hedge Planting – in October 2019 and in a bid to increase the number of trees across Leicestershire, the council again teamed up with the Woodland Trust to offer local landowners and farmers free tree packs. Designed to help renew and restore existing woodland and vegetation, the packs aim to help regenerate countryside that is under threat from diseases such as Ash Dieback. Each pack includes 45 native trees, and applicants can choose between two different packs. Trees and hedges have an important role to play in keeping our air clean, helping to prevent flooding and providing valuable habitats for local wildlife.

Biodiversity - nature recovery and climate change are at the forefront of the Environment Strategy. In May 2020 Leicestershire residents were urged to stay on the look-out for local wildlife as part of World Biodiversity Day. Recording what they saw on their daily walks using NatureSpot, a website that helps maintain up-to-date county wildlife records. Several other projects aimed at strengthening biodiversity across Leicestershire include the Charnwood Forest Landscape Partnership securing £2.7m of investment from the National Lottery to promote, protect and enhance the Charnwood Forest landscape through a programme of eighteen interconnected projects.

Urban Roadside Verges - we have been working with parish councils to give them the opportunity to turn urban roadside verges into dedicated wildflower verges. The Urban Wildlife Verge Project aims to improve biodiversity and encourage wildlife. A total of twelve parish councils signed-up to take part in the project, which will involve volunteers giving up their time to make a difference in their community by weeding, planting seeds and developing more effective management practices to encourage wildflowers at identified locations in the county. The Council have also changed the management of rural verges between towns and villages. This year marked the largest reduction in the areas of rural verges the council has cut, all to allow wildflowers to thrive and encourage pollinators.

Great Crested Newts – in May 2020 we announced that work had begun to restore ponds and provide habitats for endangered Great Crested Newts in Leicestershire. Great Crested Newts, one of the UK's three native newt species, have seen huge decline in their populations over the last 60 years, despite being heavily protected by law. This is largely down to the loss of their natural habitat. The project aims to make existing ponds more attractive to the Great Crested Newt and introduce new ponds, expanding the habitat range of the species. Brabazon Farm in Mowsley and a Kibworth Schools Trust site were identified by Natural England as being areas that could help improve the numbers of and habitat for the species. Further sites located in Leicestershire's country parks are planned for future habitats.

Waste Management

Resources and Waste Strategy – the National Resources and Waste Strategy was released in December 2018 and sets out how the Government will preserve material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency and moving towards a circular economy. During May 2019, we responded to several government consultations including consistency in household and business recycling collections in England, a Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging.

Environment Bill - we are also engaging with Defra on the Environment Bill which introduces a series of measures that will fundamentally change the way government, businesses and individuals produce and consume products including new legal powers allowing resource efficiency standards to be set for new products and clear labelling enabling citizens to make fully informed purchasing decisions.

Waste Education - in January 2020, we provided theatre sessions to schools with the aim of inspiring the next generation of recyclers to think about reducing, reusing and recycling and to encourage more sustainable behaviours. We offered 50 two-hour sessions to all primary schools in Leicestershire who received an interactive and fun workshop. We also offer free educational workshops, activities and talks to community groups in Leicestershire.

Composting – each year Leicestershire residents produce more than 300,000 tonnes of rubbish and recyclables, some of which is uncooked fruit, vegetables and garden waste which could have been composted rather than put in the residual waste bin. To help we continue to offer cut-price compost bins to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. During 2019/2020 we sold over 900 subsidised bins to Leicestershire residents. Residents can also call on the support of a Master Composter, volunteers who use their own skills to raise awareness of the benefits of home composting.

Food Waste Prevention – we continue to promote the Love Food Hate Waste campaign in association with WRAP (Waste Resources and Action Programme) and its national campaigns, including the 'Keep crushing it' campaign which highlighted the importance of not wasting food. During the national lockdown due to Covid-19, household food waste in the UK reduced dramatically and the campaign aimed to help citizens to Keep Crushing It and reduce food waste for good.

Recycling – in September 2019 the council teamed up with Recycle Now as part of Recycle Week and lit up its headquarters and shared recycling tips to encourage residents to think about what they throw away and how to recycle right. Just under half of all household waste in Leicestershire is currently recycled or composted, however items such as used nappies and food waste are still being disposed of incorrectly in recycling bins across the county, which can spoil recycling. The council wants to inspire residents to make small changes, like rinsing jars, tubs and containers before recycling, or reusing plastic tubs for storage before recycling them, in order to have a big impact on our environment. These messages were accompanied with a video highlighting the recycling process and the problems associated with contamination. During August 2020 we took part in some research to understand why people contaminate their recycling and we will utilise the findings to inform our messages.

Real Nappies – the average child can need 5,000 to 6,000 nappy changes before potty training is complete. We offer a free reusable nappy trial kit to Leicestershire residents to reduce the amount of disposal nappies which make up approximately 6% of the household waste bin. The kit contains a variety of different nappies along with wraps and liners and allows the opportunity to see which nappies suit best over a period of four weeks. During 2019 we distributed over 60 nappy lending kits to Leicestershire residents.

Environment Action Volunteers - during 2019 we consolidated our separate volunteer schemes under one brand, called Environment Action Volunteers. We offered modular training and continued ongoing development opportunities. The Environment Action Volunteers can specialise in a variety of topics such as food waste prevention, composting, biodiversity and carbon reduction and help Leicestershire residents establish positive environmental behaviours.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic our engagement activities have been suspended with more digital events and engagement opportunities being developed and delivered in order to inform and engage on waste prevention, reuse and recycling and home composting.

Recycling and Household Waste Sites – the Council provides 14 sites across the county. A programme of works at the Recycling and Household Waste Sites (RHWS) and Waste Transfer Stations (WTSs) has continued to ensure ongoing environmental compliance and efficient service provision. This includes improvements and a range of preparatory work for future projects. In November 2019 our Shepshed RHWS reopened on schedule following essential maintenance and improvement works. We have also been focusing on raising standards and reducing risk; we have commenced the development of a Quality Management System and Occupational Health and Safety Management System.

Waste Treatment - the Council continues to make efforts to reduce reliance on landfill and increase the use of treatment through existing arrangements. We have also commenced the procurement of additional waste treatment capacity. This will ensure the Council's reliance on landfill as a disposal method for residual waste continues to reduce and we will be able to meet targets set in the National Resources and Waste Strategy.

Waste Transfer Station – in October 2019 we agreed to use part of the land at Interlink Business Park, Bardon for a waste transfer station. The planning application for the waste transfer station was submitted in August 2020; we expect the application to be considered by the Development Control and Regulatory Board by the end of 2020. The new waste transfer station will significantly improve our service resilience and support future service changes likely to arise out of the National Resources and Waste Strategy.

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