

## Appendix B - Annual Report for Environment and Climate Change highlights

### **Environment, Climate Change 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. 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 2045. We want to create a clean and green future which will bring economic, social and environmental benefits. By the end of last year, we had reduced greenhouse gas emissions from council operations by 67%.

**Environment Strategy** – an Environment Strategy was approved in July 2020 reflecting our new commitments. We have agreed a £16 million package of measures over the next four years to reduce carbon, such as generating clean renewable energy on the council's estate and increasing the efficiency of our buildings and streetlighting.

**Clean Air Pledge** – Global Action Plan report that every year air pollution causes up to 36,000 deaths in the UK. Supporting national campaigns such as Clean Air Day encourages residents to think about their own contributions to air pollution and carbon emissions, and to pledge to take action to help us make Leicestershire a greener, healthier, happier place to live together. In October 2020 the Council marked Clean Air Day by renewing its pledge to continue to tackle air pollution and reduce carbon emissions. In June 2021, for the third year running the Council marked Clean Air Day UK.

**Net Zero Carbon** – initial plans to deliver net zero for the council's operations were agreed in July 2020 and a more detailed Net Zero Council Delivery Plan is being developed. In December 2020 the County Council joined the UK100 coalition of the most ambitious local leaders in the UK, pledging to achieve 'net zero' across the county by 2045, five years sooner than the government target of 2050. This reflects our commitment to tackle climate change and drastically cut emissions.

**Energy Strategy** – in March 2021 we set out plans for further energy saving over the next decade as we move towards being carbon neutral by 2030. The revised Strategic Property Energy Strategy will involve tailoring energy upgrades with new digital ways of working in mind. The targets include making a 30-to-50% further reduction in energy consumption from council buildings, compared with last year, along with a 50% increase in onsite renewable or zero-carbon energy generation.

We were successful in applying for £3.6m funding from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme which will pay for an ambitious programme of works to cut our carbon footprint. Among the projects planned for the next year are increasing the number of solar panels and LED lighting at County Hall, introducing solar panels and electric vehicle chargers at Snibston Colliery Park and investigating

low carbon heating solutions at other council-owned properties. It is also hoped to install large scale energy generation schemes such as solar farms on council land. Schools, academies, tenants and developers will also be encouraged to implement low carbon solutions.

The council is also purchasing green electricity to support its net zero ambitions while continuing to improve its energy efficiency and increasing its energy supply from renewables. Additionally, successful electric vehicle trials have been completed to identify suitable alternatives for the council's fleet operations. A new procedure for vehicle procurement considers whole life costs and environmental impacts to identify the best available options and to accelerate the transition to electric vehicles for appropriate journeys. Further, a new project to improve the energy efficiency of low level streetlighting through trimming the hours of illumination and dimming the power of the lights will deliver further carbon reductions from streetlighting.

**SHIRE Environment Grants** – in October 2020 community groups and organisations were invited to apply for the latest round of SHIRE Environment Grants of up to £3,000. The scheme aims to help projects that minimise household waste, reduce carbon emissions and improve biodiversity. A virtual workshop was held in January 2021 to encourage and support groups in applying for the grants. A simplified application process is also available for smaller grants of up to £300. One organisation to benefit from a grant is Countesthorpe Parish Council. The grant enabled them to install two 5000L water harvesting tanks in the village hall grounds. The tanks collect run-off rainwater that is used by the parish council for such things as watering planters around the village, keeping the area in bloom without negatively impacting on the environment.

Burbage Parish Council used the money to plant hedges in popular green spaces to create new habitats for native animal species. South Kilworth Parish Council ran another of the projects which benefited. Their bird box scheme saw a total of 94 RSPB birdboxes placed around private houses, the church and the school in time for the 2021 breeding season. Cotesbach Parish Council improved the village pond to improve biodiversity, Melton's 103 'The Eye' ran a radio recycling and repair scheme and the Loughborough Wellbeing Centre are running textile reuse and upcycling sessions.

**Litter Picking Equipment** – in February 2021 the Council offered support to local litter picking groups by helping them to access the equipment they need. Across Leicestershire, there are hundreds of groups who collect litter from Leicestershire streets, parks, verges and other public spaces. Practical support was offered through a new fund which supplied these groups with road signs and hi-vis jackets to help keep them safe, and extra-long litter pickers to reach under bushes and hedgerows. The benefits are numerous, litter-picking keeps our public spaces clean, aids wildlife, promotes walking and increases recycling.

**Tree Strategy** - last year we agreed a Tree Strategy and Action Plan with the aim of significantly increasing tree coverage in the County. Leicestershire is one of the least wooded counties in the country and this will only get worse as we deal with the effects of Ash Die Back. Our Strategy will make a significant contribution to

increasing tree planting working with partners and landowners and help to deliver our commitment of planting 700,000 trees, one for every resident in the County.

**Tree and Hedge Planting** – the Tree Strategy identifies the need for a substantial and sustained programme of tree planting to offset the effects of tree loss throughout the County. In November 2020, during National Tree Week, the Council once again teamed up with the Woodland Trust to offer free packs of trees to local landowners and farmers, to help restore Leicestershire’s woodland and hedgerows. Trees are an essential resource that provide a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits, and our focus is to continue to build upon our ever-growing green infrastructure.

In July 2021 we kicked off our new plan to make Leicestershire greener by planting 700,000 trees. We currently manage around 321,000 trees (including 404 hectares of woodland), but with diseases such as Ash Die Back placing more trees under threat, the authority’s strategy and action plan will see the number of trees across the county increase dramatically. It has already started to improve, thanks to the National Forest, which has increased forest cover in the north west corner of the county to 21%. Tree planting will also support the council’s pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030. Trees and woodlands enhance our quality of life: they support wildlife, help combat climate change and add beauty to our towns, villages and countryside. Research also shows that a walk among trees reduces stress and improves mental wellbeing.

**New Biodiversity Plan** – in June 2021 we agreed a new approach to protecting and improving Leicestershire’s natural environment and biodiversity. Called ‘Action for Nature’, the plan sets out key areas to focus on, including rivers and wetlands such as the River Anker and parts of the River Soar near Quorn, and a decline in mature trees and grassland areas. It also identifies a number of areas for action including improving land management practices on land owned or managed by the council and supporting tenants of council land to do the same. We aim to ensure biodiversity is included in the development of council policies and plans and those of other partner organisations. We also continue to support awareness raising and education on biodiversity.

**Wildflower Initiative** – in September 2020 the Council became the first local authority in the midlands to join the BLUE campaign, which aims to promote biodiversity by re-introducing wildflowers and plants to roadside verges. The BLUE campaign was started in 2014 by wildlife film maker, Fergus Beeley, in response to a report on the State of Nature published by the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology that year, which highlighted the dramatic decline in biodiversity and biomass across the UK. A blue heart symbol, made out of recycled materials, is placed in the ground where rewilding is taking place. Currently there are 12 wildflower verges across Leicestershire, with the Council hoping that the BLUE campaign will inspire more communities to get involved. This year also marked the largest reduction in the areas of rural verges the council have cut, to allow wildflowers to thrive and encourage pollinators. We are working with our parish councils to roll out our wildflower verge scheme, improving the biodiversity of our communities and providing vital habitats for our native species.



## Waste Management

**Environment Bill** - the Environment Bill 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. The Bill will also provide a domestic framework for environmental governance and contain specific environmental policy areas including waste, air quality, nature and biodiversity.

**Leicestershire Municipal Waste Management Strategy** – this strategy guides delivery of a range of waste and recycling services to Leicestershire’s residents, including kerbside collections, provision of Recycling and Household Waste Sites, and a range of initiatives designed around the principles of the waste hierarchy (in order of preference: to prevent waste, reuse materials, recycle and compost, treat waste and finally dispose of what’s left). The Leicestershire Waste Partnership commenced the review of the Strategy in October 2020.

**Resources and Waste Strategy** – the National Resources and Waste Strategy sets out how the Government will preserve material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency and moving to a circular economy. During May 2021 we responded to a second round of consultations including Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging, a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers and consistency in household and business recycling collections.

**Waste Education** – in Summer 2021, 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 offered free educational workshops, activities and talks to community groups in Leicestershire. Owing to the pandemic most were held online with some held in person where social distancing allowed. Classes included Healthy Eating – Zero Waste where residents learnt how to cook healthy meals from scratch and how to make the most from leftovers, and textile reuse classes exploring how reusing old garments to make new items can be good for the environment and also help save money. In 2021 we also launched a new public newsletter covering a range of waste and environmental topics and opportunities to get involved.

**Take - Charge Campaign** – from November 2020 we highlighted the risks involved in disposing of batteries and their potential to cause fires. We ran a social media campaign and displayed posters at our Recycling and Household Sites reminding people to recycle their batteries correctly.

**Food Waste Prevention** – in March 2021 the Council joined with WRAP, the UK’s leading sustainability charity, to promote its inaugural Food Waste Action Week. Food Waste Action Week aimed to highlight easy, everyday actions to avoid food wastage and halt its contribution towards climate change. 70% of all food wasted in the UK is from our own homes, with each year seeing households throw away 4.5m tonnes of food which could have been eaten. The council’s Adult Learning Service

hosted an online cooking course, “Let’s Cook Tea”, which ran during March 2021 and featured lots of food waste prevention tips. People were also asked to reduce the amount of food they waste at home and take part in activities hosted throughout the week on Love Food Hate Waste’s Twitter and Facebook platforms and the Love Food Hate Waste website.

**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. We continue to offer cut-price compost bins to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. We also supported Compost Awareness Week in May 2021, an annual event to promote all aspects of home composting. Residents can also call on the support of a Master Composter; volunteers who use their skills to raise awareness of the benefits of home composting.

**Recycling** – in September 2020 we teamed up with Recycle Now as part of Recycle Week to create a video, thanking residents for continuing to recycle through the pandemic and to keep reducing contamination. 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 also joined forces with Keep Britain Tidy to back its #TedSays campaign to encourage residents to recycle responsibly and not put nappies in recycling which can result in loads of good recycling being rejected. Digital contamination messaging was also utilised with the use of a ‘digital van’ sent to targeted areas and seen by over 67,000 residents.

**Environment Action Volunteers** – the Environment Action Volunteers 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. As restrictions are eased our volunteers will once again be attending events and delivering talks.

**Waste Treatment** – the Council continues efforts to reduce reliance on landfill and increase the use of waste treatment. 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.

**New Waste Transfer Station** – in July 2021 we began building a new waste transfer station at Bardon Business Park to help manage household waste and reduce the amount of rubbish sent to landfill. The new waste transfer station is being built on land at Interlink Way South, Bardon by Willmott Dixon. The development will include a warehouse style building and associated weighbridges, outside bays, office space and parking. With the county’s two current waste transfer stations at Whetstone and Loughborough operating at capacity, the new site is much needed. The site will have solar panels and an energy efficient office building including sensor lighting and

water saving taps and toilets. This is in line with the council's pledge of reducing energy consumption throughout its buildings alongside reducing the amount of carbon produced through its operations. There will also be electric vehicle charging points at the premises. It is hoped that the new site will open in 2022.

**Waste Infrastructure Improvements** – maintenance and improvement schemes have continued to be delivered at Leicestershire's Recycling and Household Waste Site (RHWS) and waste transfer stations (WTS). In April 2021 work was completed to replace an ageing section of bay walls at Coalville RHWS to ensure customer safety. In the same month the pushwall at Whetstone WTS was rebuilt to prolong the life of facility, which is essential for day-to-day disposal services. A planning application was submitted in June 2021 for the redevelopment of Kibworth RHWS, which if approved would result in a much improved split-level site, making it easier for residents to recycle whilst also improving health and safety on site. Planning was secured to allow improvements to be made to the drainage at Bottesford RHWS, and a new staff welfare facility was provided at Somerby RHWS in August 2021.