

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Updated on the 16 January 2023

Next review by 31 January 2027

1. INTRODUCTION

In September 2019, the town council declared a Climate and Ecological Crisis. The council committed to reducing the negative impacts of its services on the wider environment, with the aspiration to be carbon neutral by 2030. The council is also committed to enhancing and conserving Chesham's immediate environment. The council also seeks to work with Chesham residents and businesses to encourage the development of a more sustainable community.

2. OBJECTIVES

- Become a carbon neutral council by 2030
- Promote biodiversity and protect habitats on council land
- Use resources efficiently, minimising waste and pollution
- Keep residents updated on the council's environmental activities and respond to feedback
- Support residents to adopt sustainable practices
- Work in partnership with organisations to conserve and improve local habitats

3. CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Human activities are estimated to have caused approximately 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels to date. This warming will persist for centuries to millennia, and will continue to cause further long-term changes in the climate system, such as sea level rises.

If global warming continues at the current rate, the temperature increase is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052. This further warming is expected to cause increases in mean temperatures in most regions, and extremes of temperatures and rainfall. This will lead to species extinction, biodiversity loss and climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply and economic growth. It is critical that we avoid temperature increases above 1.5°C, as the risks to our planet and ourselves will be so much greater.

Following the declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency in September 2019, the council underwent an independent carbon and eco-audit and created an action plan from the resulting report. The council will implement the action plan to get to zero carbon status and reverse biodiversity declines on its land. Progress on the action plan will be regularly reported to the CARE committee and communicated to residents via the town council web site and social media.

4. BIODIVERSITY

In compliance with The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), the council will have regard for the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of its functions. The council will implement the sections of its Climate and Ecological Emergency action plan that relate to improving biodiversity through the management of council land and report on this to the CARE committee.

The council is committed to the control and eradication of invasive plants on its land and will avoid the use of species in its planting schemes which are known to be invasive in the south east of England.

The council's Chemicals in Open Spaces policy commits the council to using pesticides in an environmentally responsible manner and to identifying alternative, non-chemical control methods where feasible.

The council will develop management plans for its open spaces to manage the land sustainably and encourage biodiversity. Where the council manages land on behalf of other organisations, e.g. Bucks Council's roadside verges, the council will seek to influence the landowner to enable more environmentally-sensitive management.

5. WATER

Mains water used in Chesham is imported from outside the catchment and has an associated carbon footprint. Water will be used efficiently for council activities and on council premises. Planting schemes and technologies will be used that reduce the need for watering, e.g. planting drought-resistant species and using mulches. The council will encourage visitors at all council venues to use water wisely.

The council will look to increase the amount of rainwater harvested, to provide an alternative to mains water where appropriate. The council will encourage its allotment tenants to reduce their water usage.

The Planning Committee will give regard to issues of water use, run-off and pollution when commenting on planning applications. The council will support the use of Sustainable Drainage (SuDS) to reduce flooding risks, manage stormwater, minimise diffuse pollution and help maintain groundwater levels. The Chesham Neighbourhood Plan will include a specific water policy that will cover how to reduce the detrimental impact of development on the water environment.

The council acknowledges that the River Chess that runs through Chesham, as a chalk stream, is a globally rare habitat that is important for the characteristic wildlife and landscape of the Chilterns. The council is committed to the conservation of this habitat and will lead on the Impress the Chess group, the remit of which is conserving and restoring the River Chess that runs through Chesham.

6. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The Planning Committee will consider sustainability, environmental impact and biodiversity when commenting on planning applications in Chesham and responding to consultations on the local planning authority's Local Plans.

The council will lobby on the need for developing sustainable drainage in Chesham, necessitated by Chesham's particular topography and urban development, in order to counteract surface water flooding.

A key aim of the Chesham Neighbourhood Plan will be to promote sustainable development and policies within the plan will detail how this is to be achieved.

7. WASTE AND RECYCLING

The council will minimise its waste production wherever possible, by reducing, repairing and reusing resources, and by recycling the waste its activities produce, where facilities exist. Rubbish

will be disposed of safely, following the correct procedures, and only licensed contractors will be used.

8. PROCUREMENT

Council procurement will be assessed for sustainability implications, with the aim of purchasing renewable/recycled, environmentally low-impact and recyclable materials with reduced packaging. The council will seek to purchase from companies that have environmental management systems in place. The council is converting to using paper-free systems wherever possible.

The council will ban the use, by the council or its contractors, of certain specified environmentally damaging products where an alternative product or method is available. These products are:

- Ozone-depleting chemicals
- Tropical hardwood that is not certified independently as coming from a well-managed forest
- Pesticides on the UK Red List and EC Blank List

The council does not use peat, and actively encourages its contractors to use alternative growing media.

Sourcing materials locally, where feasible, will reduce carbon emissions resulting from transporting produce. The council will promote local produce and products within the community as appropriate, which will have the additional positive effect of supporting the local economy. As part of this, the council works in partnership with Sustainable Chesham to run the Local Produce Market.

The council will continue to support Chesham's Fairtrade status, as part of its commitment to global environmental issues. Fairtrade production standards encourage sustainable agriculture and environmental protections.

Animal-based agricultural greenhouse gas emissions are known drivers of climate change. The council will provide animal-free food and drink alternatives as an additional option where it is responsible for the provision of refreshments. It will encourage concessions at its venues to do the same.

9. TRANSPORT

The council encourages sustainable transport systems, promoting public transport and non-polluting modes of transport within the town, such as cycling and walking. Contributing to this, the council will develop a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. The council supports Chesham's Walkers Are Welcome project. The council will investigate the purchase or lease of sustainable, minimally polluting vehicles as and when there is a need to replace its fleet vehicles.

10. AIR POLLUTION

The promotion of sustainable transport systems will help to reduce air pollution. The council will continue to host a green wall on the Town Hall, located adjacent to one of the main roads in Chesham. The council will lead on, or participate in, initiatives to combat air pollution, such as the Communi-Tree project in which trees are planted along urban roads.

11. AWARENESS, LOBBYING AND PARTNERSHIPS

The council will promote awareness of, and information on, environmental issues within the community. It will act as a voice for local environmental concerns to those agencies given statutory powers to tackle problems.

The council will engage in partnership working with the local community, organisations and other tiers of government in partnerships on environmental projects. The council will also support groups involved in environmental work in the town.