

Committee: Council

Date: 12 July 2023

Wards: All

Subject: Strategic Theme: Building a Sustainable Future

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Cllr Andrew Judge, Cabinet Member for Housing and Sustainable Development

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Recommendations:

A. That the Council note and consider the content of this report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Council, at its meeting on the 19th of March 2023, approved 'Building a Better Merton Together', the Council Plan for 2023 – 2026, which sets out three strategic priorities for the Council. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, delivery against these priorities is monitored by the Council. To facilitate this monitoring role, each meeting of the Council receives a report providing an update on performance against one of the three strategic priorities.

Building a Better Merton Together sets out how the Council will deliver its ambition with three strategic priorities that shape and guide delivery:

- i. Nurturing Civic Pride
- ii. Building a sustainable future
- iii. Creating a borough of sport

1.2. The achievement of these strategic priorities will require extensive engagement with residents, voluntary groups, and businesses, building on partnerships and alliances to reach a common goal.

1.3. This report provides the Council with an opportunity to consider progress against the Building a Sustainable Future strategic priority, with a particular focus on:

- (i) The Council's Local Plan policies on sustainable design and energy efficiency.
- (ii) The Council's Tree Strategy
- (iii) Parks and biodiversity

- (iv) Air Quality
 - (v) Climate Action
- 1.4. For each of the above five areas of focus this report provides:
- (i) An overview of the Council’s long-term ambitions.
 - (ii) Progress to date against those ambitions, including any specific decisions made since the Council last met in April 2023 as well as performance against key performance indicators where relevant.
 - (iii) Key deliverables and commitments over the life of the new Council Plan (2023 to 2026) and any identified risks or issues relating to these deliverables and commitments.
- 1.5. For air quality, additional commentary on recent Government announcements is included.
- 1.6. The report also provides an overview of how the various ambitions, commitments and deliverables support the Council’s Health in all Policies approach to improving health and wellbeing in the borough. The report concludes with an overview of ways in which young people in the borough are, and have been, involved in work on climate action.

2 DETAILS

THE COUNCIL’S LOCAL PLAN POLICIES ON SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY.

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.1. In July 2019, Merton Council declared a Climate Emergency and committed to working towards becoming a net-zero carbon council by 2030 and a net-zero carbon borough by 2050. Merton’s Climate Strategy and Action Plan sets out the pace and scale of change required to achieve these carbon reduction targets and was approved by Council on 18th November 2020.
- 2.2. With circa 80% of greenhouse gas emissions in Merton being generated from the energy used to heat and power our buildings, decarbonising our building stock will be a fundamental step in becoming net-zero carbon¹. All buildings in Merton will need to operate at net zero carbon by 2050. A building which operates at net-zero carbon does not burn fossil fuels, has ultra-high energy efficiency and is 100% powered by renewable energy².
- 2.3. Extensive retrofit will be required to decarbonise Merton’s existing building stock given that low carbon heat solutions require reasonable levels of energy efficiency (at least an EPC rating of C)³, and more than three

¹ Merton Council (2020) Merton’s Climate Strategy and Action Plan (available at: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/sustainability-and-climate-change/climate-emergency>).

² LETI (2020) Climate Emergency Design Guide (<https://www.leti.london/cedg>).

³ Mayor of London (2018) Zero Carbon London: A 1.5C compatible plan (https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/1.5c_compatible_plan.pdf).

quarters of Merton's 88,000 homes have an EPC rating of D or below⁴. The costs of achieving higher standards via retrofit are three to five times higher than for new buildings and the carbon impact of delayed action is significant⁵. Merton's decarbonisation pathways modelling estimated that retrofitting Merton's existing building stock would cost in excess of £2.7 billion⁶.

- 2.4. In order to achieve our carbon reduction target as cost effectively as possible, all new development must be fit for the future (i.e. be ultra-energy efficient and climate resilient, and maximise low carbon and renewable energy)⁷. Any new buildings which are not built to operate at net zero carbon will require expensive retrofit in the next 30 years. Policy must therefore ensure that new development in Merton does not create a legacy of poor performance that will require remedial action in the future and add to Merton's retrofit burden.
- 2.5. Merton's Draft Climate Change Policies are intended to go beyond the national building regulations and London Plan requirements to drive building energy performance which is compatible with our 2050 net-zero carbon target.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.6. The Council has set ambitious Climate Change policies to ensure that from 2025 all new development is compatible with operating at net zero carbon by 2050 without the need for expensive retrofit (i.e. does not burn fossil fuels, has ultra-high energy efficiency and is 100% powered by renewable energy) as set out in Table 1 below.
- 2.7. The new Merton Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for an Examination in Public in 2021 and went through two rounds of public hearings in 2022. Officers received post hearing comments from the Planning Inspectors in April 2023 and are working to finalise the proposed modifications to the plan in light of these comments.
- 2.8. In 2022 and 2023, Merton has also been collaborating with a consortium of 19 London boroughs to update the evidence base to support planning policies which deliver Net Zero Carbon developments in light of changes to Part L of Building Regulations which came into force in 2022. This updated evidence base will inform the final modifications to the plan.

⁴ Merton Council (2020) Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan (available at: <https://www.merton.gov.uk/planning-and-buildings/sustainability-and-climate-change/climate-emergency>).

⁵ Currie & Brown (2019) A Report for the Committee on Climate Change – The costs and benefits of tighter standards for new buildings (<https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-costs-and-benefits-of-tighter-standards-for-new-buildings-Currie-Brown-and-AECOM.pdf>).

⁶ Aether (2020) London Borough of Merton Climate Action Support (https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Merton_Support-Climate-Action_v3.1.pdf).

⁷ CCC (2019) UK Housing: Fit for the future? (<https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/UK-housing-Fit-for-the-future-CCC-2019.pdf>).

Table 1 Merton's draft Climate Change policies

| Policy | Description |
|---|--|
| Strategic Policy CC2.1 Promoting sustainable design to mitigate and adapt to climate change | This Strategic Policy sets out the overall aims of Merton's climate change policies and the case for going beyond Building Regulations and the London Plan. |
| Policy CC2.2 Minimising greenhouse gas emissions | This policy aims to drive further carbon savings on site, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending the Mayor's zero carbon target to all minor new build residential development of one or more units and all non-residential development of 500sqm GIA or more. • Increasing Merton's minimum on-site carbon reduction targets; and • Introducing a new approach to carbon offsetting. |
| Policy CC2.3 Minimising energy use | This policy aims to minimise energy use and carbon emissions through energy efficiency improvements and drive a fabric first approach, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing fabric efficiency targets which will gradually increase over the next five years. • Introducing Energy Use Intensity targets which will be enforced from 2025; and • Requiring increased disclosure of anticipated energy demand and post-occupancy monitoring. |
| Policy CC2.4 Low carbon energy | This policy aims to drive the decarbonisation of heat and maximise renewable energy generation in the borough, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring developers to use efficient low carbon heat and to maximise renewable energy generation on site. |
| Policy CC2.5 Minimising waste and promoting a circular economy | This policy aims to minimise waste and embodied carbon, and promote a circular economy, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring all developments to be designed to minimise embodied carbon; and • Requiring all development of 30 or more dwellings and/ or 1,000sqm or more non-residential GIA, and all proposals to demolish and rebuild a single dwelling, to carry out a Whole-Life Cycle Carbon Assessment. |
| Policy CC2.6 Sustainable design standards | This policy aims to drive higher sustainability standards, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring water use targets for residential developments; and • Requiring BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) 'Excellent' standards for conversions/ change of use resulting in the creation of 10 or more new dwellings, and all new build and change of use non-residential development of 1,000sqm GIA or more. |

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026:

- 2.9. Officers are looking to finalise the proposed modifications to the Plan in June 2023, and publish the final plan for a final round of consultation once these modifications have been approved by the Planning Inspectors.

THE COUNCIL'S TREE STRATEGY

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.10. The Council declared a Climate Emergency on 10th July 2019, followed by the development of a Climate Strategy and Action Plan, which outlined the Council's response to the declaration and the importance that our trees have in mitigating climate change and shaping a greener future.
- 2.11. Under the Greening Merton element of the Climate Strategy and Action Plan the Council committed to developing and implementing a Tree Strategy for the borough. In addition, the Tree Service was reviewed by Internal Audit in 2020 and it was noted during the audit that there was no Strategy, Policy and Business Plan for the management and maintenance of the Council's tree stock.
- 2.12. To support the Council's Climate Strategy and Action Plan, and to respond to the audit report, the Council commissioned the services of specialist arboriculture consultants to undertake the scoping, public consultation and development of a Tree Strategy for the management of council owned trees along with an associated Action Plan.
- 2.13. For the benefit of our local environment and that of future generations of borough residents, the Strategy seeks to achieve an optimised, sustainable Council-owned tree population that enhances our communities and protects the environment that we live and work in. Delivering the Strategy will make a positive contribution towards the London Environment Strategy's existing target of a 10% increase in canopy cover for the city overall. To meet this challenge the Strategy commits the Council to:
- i. Look after our existing trees and hedges well and in a structured and consistent way. This will mean that their benefits are maximised whilst tree-related problems and inconveniences are kept to a minimum.
 - ii. Protect all our trees and hedges to ensure their resilience in the face of many challenges and threats.
 - iii. Plant, establish and cultivate to maturity as many trees and hedges as we can on our land; promoting the need for trees of large mature size to enhance our green infrastructure; contributing to our local ecology; and enhancing the biodiversity of our green spaces.
- 2.14. Achieving these aims this will result in a range of quality-of-life improvements for present and future generations. It will also enable the Council to comply with our legal responsibilities and ensure that as a Council we are managing the risk of litigation.

- 2.15. The borough's trees contribute greatly to the character of Merton and its natural environment. They provide a wealth of benefits which are fundamental to our capacity to adapt to the climate change emergency by counteracting increasingly high summer temperatures; sequestering carbon from the atmosphere; and intercepting rainfall to lower the likelihood of flash flooding.
- 2.16. Beyond this, the Council recognises the principle of 'Biophilia.' This is the innate and intrinsic human need to have proximity to and contact with the natural environment. The hugely positive impact that trees and their many wildlife associations provide to our wellbeing is very widely documented and accepted. Trees are vitally important. We need as many healthy, well-managed trees as we can to make Merton a better place to live.
- 2.17. The final and adopted strategy will also include a dedication page to Dave Lofthouse (Dip. Arb. (RFS), M.Arbor.A.) who worked with the Council for 33 years. Dave was the 'voice of our trees' for all those years, a committed arboriculturist whose legacy is felt all around us through the trees he has planted.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.18. The Tree Strategy is being developed in two parts:
- (i) **Part 1** specifically deals with issues relating to council-owned trees. It sets out a mechanism for how the Council will look after our existing trees and hedges as best we can so that we achieve our vision.
 - (ii) **Part 2** will deal with more wide-reaching issues relating to Merton's Treescape or 'Urban Forest' – in other words, all the trees in Merton, whether publicly or private owned.
- 2.19. Part 1 of the Tree Strategy was approved by Cabinet in June 2023.
- 2.20. Working with council colleagues in other departments the Greenspaces Team have developed a range of policies to support the delivery of the Tree Strategy. These fall into four categories:
- (i) Tree Research.
 - (ii) Tree Maintenance and Management.
 - (iii) Tree Protection.
 - (iv) Enhancement and Optimisation
- 2.21. Part 1 of the Tree Strategy has an accompanying Action Plan, which will be used to guide the council in achieving the aims laid out in the Strategy.
- 2.22. Following the formal adoption of Part 1 of the Tree Strategy, covering the management of Council managed trees, the Greenspaces Team are currently liaising with colleagues in Future Merton to begin the scoping Part 2 of the Tree Strategy.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.23. During 2023 the council Greenspaces Team have embarked on an ambitious tree planting program on Merton council owned land. This has resulted in the Council successfully planting 10,000 trees, delivered through a range of external partnerships as well as well as through the councils own New Tree Planting program.
- 2.24. The Council's greenspaces team has also developed a partnership with Trees for Streets '*Sponsor a street tree*' that provides an opportunity for borough residents, businesses, and interest groups to support filling Merton's streets with trees.
- 2.25. Linked to the findings from the Internal Audit referenced at 2.11 above, the Council's Greenspaces Team are currently undertaking a thorough audit of all the 31,000 council owned trees during 2023. To aid progress on this important work two additional tree inspectors have been recruited on an interim basis and the team hope to have surveyed all 31,000 trees by November 2023. The data collected during the survey will be uploaded to the councils cloud-based Tree Database which will put the council in a strong position to progress delivery of Part 1 of the Tree Strategy.

PARKS AND BIODIVERSITY

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.26. Merton is lucky to have such a diverse range of greenspaces including Commons, Parks, Gardens, Sports Grounds, Nature Reserves, and Green Corridors. Parks and greenspaces are regularly identified by residents as the boroughs number one asset and Merton is one of the greenest boroughs in London.
- 2.27. Financially, green space in the capital is valued at as much as £5bn a year, while it is estimated the city's public parks save the UK £950m every year in NHS costs across physical and mental health services.
- 2.28. To improve the quality of our greenspaces in Merton the Council is currently carrying out an audit of its existing greenspace and undertaking a scoping exercise to develop a Parks and Open spaces strategy for the borough.
- 2.29. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy will guide the ongoing development of our parks and open spaces over the next ten years. The Council will develop a five-year costed delivery plan to set out the key activities to be progressed and this will be sufficiently flexible to reflect upon local need as well as evolving challenges and strategic priorities.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.30. In 2022-23, the borough's parks and greenspaces moved from 25th to 18th place in the Good Parks for London Guide. The Good Parks for London Guide is compiled by Parks for London and assesses participating London

boroughs' parks services each year against the ten Good Parks criteria. These criteria cover: Public Satisfaction; Awards for Quality; Collaboration; Events; Health Fitness and Wellbeing; Supporting Nature; Community Involvement; Skills Development; Sustainability; and Strategic Planning.

- 2.31. The council are working with Parks for London, Keep Britain Tidy, London In Bloom and are reviewing previous awards entries in the Good Parks for London Guide, Green Flag Awards, and London In Bloom with the aim of improving the Council's standings in these National Awards. This work also provides an opportunity to benchmark with other London Authorities and Statutory Consultees to improve our strategic offer.
- 2.32. The council continues to improve its management of greenspaces for nature including the expansion of the 'Wildways' verge management initiative, which aims to increase the number of grass verges managed for biodiversity from 10% in 2022-23 to 20% in 2023-24.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.33. As noted at 2.28 above, the Council intends developing a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy that will set out key commitments for, and beyond, the period 2023-2026.
- 2.34. In June 2023 the Council, with our contracted grounds maintenance provider Idverde UK; the RSPB; and Friends of Parks groups commenced a program of Phase 1 Habitat Surveys in some of Merton's Green Flag Award Parks and Nature Reserves. This work includes updating the conservation management plans and associated action plans for these spaces in line with Biodiversity Net Gain commitments achieved to date:
- Increased Wildflower Meadow Creation in boroughs Parks and open spaces by 10,000 square meters in 2022-23, adopting Pollinator Parks program
 - Increased Biodiverse machine bulb planting in boroughs parks and open spaces by 250,000 bulbs in 2022-23, adopting Pollinator Parks program.
 - Increased the square meterage of grass in parks under the drip line of trees to be managed as conservation cuts rather than amenity grass by 25,000 square meters.

AIR QUALITY

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.35. Air Quality in London, as with many cities in the UK and across the world continues to be a major health concern. It is now considered the most significant environmental risk to public health. This has been reinforced by the World Health Organization's (WHO) move to dramatically reduce its own guidance levels for air quality health exposure.
- 2.36. In Merton, like all London Boroughs, air pollution still exceeds the UK National Objectives for air quality in many locations throughout the borough.

These locations are in areas of high traffic and within our Town Centres. The primary cause of pollution in these areas are from combustion engines associated with road traffic. This traffic is responsible for around 60% of Pollution in the borough.

- 2.37. Merton will publish its Annual Status Report 2023 shortly. This will contain a full data summary for 2022 and include achievements against our existing Air Quality Action Plan. In addition, and throughout 2022, Merton Council piloted new innovative low-cost real-time monitors across the borough in partnership with Imperial College, as part of the Breathe London network. This project was funded through the South London Partnership.
- 2.38. This air quality monitoring included the use of the latest technology to review transport movements, by type, and at 68 key locations in the borough. This pilot project will show pollution in the borough at detailed level and help influence our new Air Quality Action Plan for 2023.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.39. The air quality team is currently in the process of delivering its Annual Status Report for 2022. Key activities of the teams work on air quality in 2022 will be reported as will the latest air quality monitoring results.
- 2.40. A peer review of the data captured through the Innovate Breathe London project is currently underway and will include information on ultrafine particulates PM2.5.

NATIONAL UPDATES

- 2.41. In April 2023 Defra announced a formal consultation on what was called it's *Air Quality Strategy*. The description of the consultation stated. *The air quality strategy (AQS) sets out the actions the government expects local authorities in England to take in support of achieving our long-term air quality goals, including our ambitious new PM2.5 targets.*
- 2.42. This consultation ran for a period of 10 days just after the easter holidays. Officers responded to this consultation and remarked that a consultation period of 10 days for a nationally important policy aimed at tackling what is the most significant environmental risk to health is not acceptable. It is understood that the reason for this was to meet a statutory deadline.
- 2.43. It was also noted that many local authorities were not made aware of the work building up to the consultation and found out through informal routes. Some London boroughs have questioned this, but it seems that they were not invited to any workshops nor initial planning for this consultation.
- 2.44. Responses to the consultation indicated that the strategy lacked ambition, it was truncated, it pushed actions to Local Authorities and leaves open many areas of regulation needed to adequately tackle pollution at a local level.
- 2.45. On the 28th of April the government published a strategic framework for local authorities and other partners. This sets out the powers, responsibilities, and further actions the government expects Local Authorities to take.

- 2.46. It is unclear at this time if there will be further updates on Central Governments overarching Air Quality Strategy.
- 2.47. Merton is an exemplar borough for air quality and complies with the standards set out in this document. Importantly the framework now includes the tackling of Non-Road Mobile Machinery (NRMM) on construction sites, this is a project that Merton has been leading on across London on behalf of the GLA and London Boroughs. This provides an opportunity for Merton to showcase this work and perhaps the potential for expanding their London project.
- 2.48. Local Councils cannot resolve the problems of air pollution alone as many levers are outside of our control, that's said we must play an active and leading role.
- 2.49. Air pollution needs to be addressed at all levels of government whilst moving in the same direction. Central government has a role to play in taxation, regulation, objective setting and incentivisation. The GLA continue to play a role in public transport, planning and regional traffic measures.
- 2.50. Local Authorities have a leading role in monitoring, engagement, managing the local environment, local infrastructure, public health and driving behaviour change.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.51. A key priority for Merton is the commitment to a new Air Quality Action Plan in 2023. This Plan will span the next 5 years and sets out our ambitions, and actions that will be taken to reduce pollution, to lobby where we have no control and influence and raise awareness to enable people to take their own action or reduce their exposure to pollution.
- 2.52. Any new air quality action plan must bring together and capitalise on the co-benefits of climate change, the need for active sustainable travel and objectives for improving public health.
- 2.53. Our Innovate monitoring project has put Merton in an excellent position to use real world data to help shape a new Action Plan.
- 2.54. It is anticipated that the drafting and oversight of the Plan will be by a Cross Party Working Group to deliver the best outcomes for air quality in the borough. A full public and key stakeholder consultation will take place in the Autumn to allow for public feedback, where we welcome ideas for improvements.

CLIMATE ACTION

OVERVIEW OF AMBITIONS

- 2.55. Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan was adopted in 2020 as Merton's response to our declaration of a climate emergency, which set net zero carbon targets of 2050 for the borough and 2030 for the Council.

- 2.56. This 30-year plan sets out our vision for Merton in 2050 and the key actions required to get to net-zero carbon across four thematic areas (the Green Economy, Buildings and Energy, Transport and Greening Merton), as well as how the Council is going to decarbonise its own operations by 2030. Merton's Climate Strategy and Action Plan were formed by extensive engagement and detailed technical work to identify carbon emissions in Merton and how we can get to net zero.
- 2.57. As set out in Merton's Climate Delivery Plan for Year 3, carbon emissions are everyone's responsibility. Of the borough-wide carbon emissions approximately:
- i. 44% of carbon emissions in Merton are from the electricity and gas used to power resident's homes
 - ii. 30% of carbon emissions are from business premises and other commercial buildings
 - iii. 22% of carbon emissions are from transport, primarily road travel
 - iv. <2% of carbon emissions are from Council activities
- 2.58. Each year the Council publishes a Climate Delivery Plan to set out what has happened in the previous 12 months and what is planned for the next 12 months towards reaching net zero. On 20th February 2023, Cabinet approved Merton's Climate Delivery Plan for Year 3, which included the proposed allocation of £2million in climate reserve funding allocated by Cabinet in June 2022 to increase capacity to deliver the Climate Strategy & Action Plan across the Council.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.59. Merton's Climate Delivery Plans for Years 1, 2 and 3 set out key areas of progress towards Merton's council and borough-wide net zero carbon targets since Merton's declaration of a climate emergency.
- 2.60. To move towards our net zero carbon commitments, the Council is undertaking a wide range of projects with partners, recognising that the majority (98%) of carbon emissions are outside the Council's direct control.
- 2.61. As well as saving carbon, climate actions have fundamental benefits for other Council priorities and services such as public health, greenspaces, active travel and cost of living. Details of these projects are within Merton's Climate Delivery Plans (years 1 to 3) and include:

Council estate

- 2.62. The Council has a long history of retrofitting our operational buildings and community schools to decrease our energy usage, reduce utility bills and lower our carbon emissions, as set out in a paper on retrofit taken to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8th March 2023 (<https://democracy.merton.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=157&MId=4215&Ver=4>).

- 2.63. Work is progressing across our operational and non-operational buildings, and community schools, towards the Council's 2030 net zero target. Recent work includes:
- i. 19 site surveys to identify potential retrofit and behaviour change works.
 - ii. The ongoing recruitment of a Climate Emergency Building Surveyor to oversee survey, planning and retrofit works. This role and the associated work will cover the entire council building portfolio of operational buildings, schools and non-operational buildings, of which the latter falls under the 2050 borough net zero target.
 - iii. Investigations into potential upgrades of catering equipment across the school and operational building portfolio will be undertaken in the coming year.
 - iv. A new retrofit programme for solar panels will be starting in the coming year (2023/24) focusing on identifying remaining roofs with potential for installation across the council's operational buildings and schools.
 - v. LED upgrades for approximately 15 primary schools are planned for the coming school summer holiday.
 - vi. We have successfully bid for approximately £3million of government funding to upgrade the heating of the civic centre and entirely remove gas from the heating and hot water system.
 - vii. Confirmed a commitment to build 400 genuinely affordable council homes, as exemplar zero carbon/passive house homes

Domestic retrofit

- i. Supporting Housing Associations in applying for government funding to retrofit the homes they own, also saving on energy costs for residents.
- ii. Helping Merton's low-income households access available government support to retrofit their own homes. This includes working with the GLA to provide funding to a local organisation, Thinking Works, who support Merton residents in the (sometimes complex) application process for government funding to retrofit their homes. Council officers, Thinking Works and representatives from the GLA have all attended Merton's Cost of Living Events to ensure residents can find out more about the retrofit schemes face-to-face, as well as accessing the support by email or telephone.
- iii. Merton's Climate Action Group (buildings and energy sub-group) providing good practice case studies to inspire other residents to retrofit their homes.
- iv. Recruiting Community Retrofit Officers to produce a Local Area Energy Plan and Retrofit Strategy. This will develop pathways and scenarios for Merton to decarbonise the borough including the upgrade of the power network to supply the additional electricity needed to replace gas use in our buildings and diesel/ petrol use in our vehicles.

Merton's Climate Action Group

- 2.64. Working with and supporting Merton's Climate Action Group of volunteers who play a leading role in the development and implementation of community-led projects, events and knowledge exchange that reduce Merton's greenhouse gas emissions, where joint efforts are more effective than the actions of individuals or the Council alone.
- 2.65. The Climate Action Group is organised into the same themes as the Climate Strategy and Action Plan: Buildings and Energy, Greening Merton, Green Economy and Transport. Climate Action Group projects include:
- i. Merton Garden Streets – a volunteer led project, delivered by Sustainable Merton, planting Merton's streets during summer months. With over 90 streets signing up to planting days over successive summers, community feedback highlighted positive impacts for mental and physical wellbeing, developing a greater sense of community, as well as improving local air quality, biodiversity and climate resilience.
 - ii. Energy matters – energy and carbon saving advice delivered in schools for children and parents
 - iii. The Wheel – a circular economy project bringing together waste reduction, reuse and upcycling projects in the borough under one umbrella brand "The Wheel" to raise awareness and to change consumer behaviour.

KEY DELIVERABLES AND COMMITMENTS 2023 TO 2026

- 2.66. Merton's Climate Delivery Plan for Year 3, approved by Cabinet on 20th February 2023, sets out the key priorities for 2023 and beyond. This is summarized in Figure 1 below.

What the Council is doing

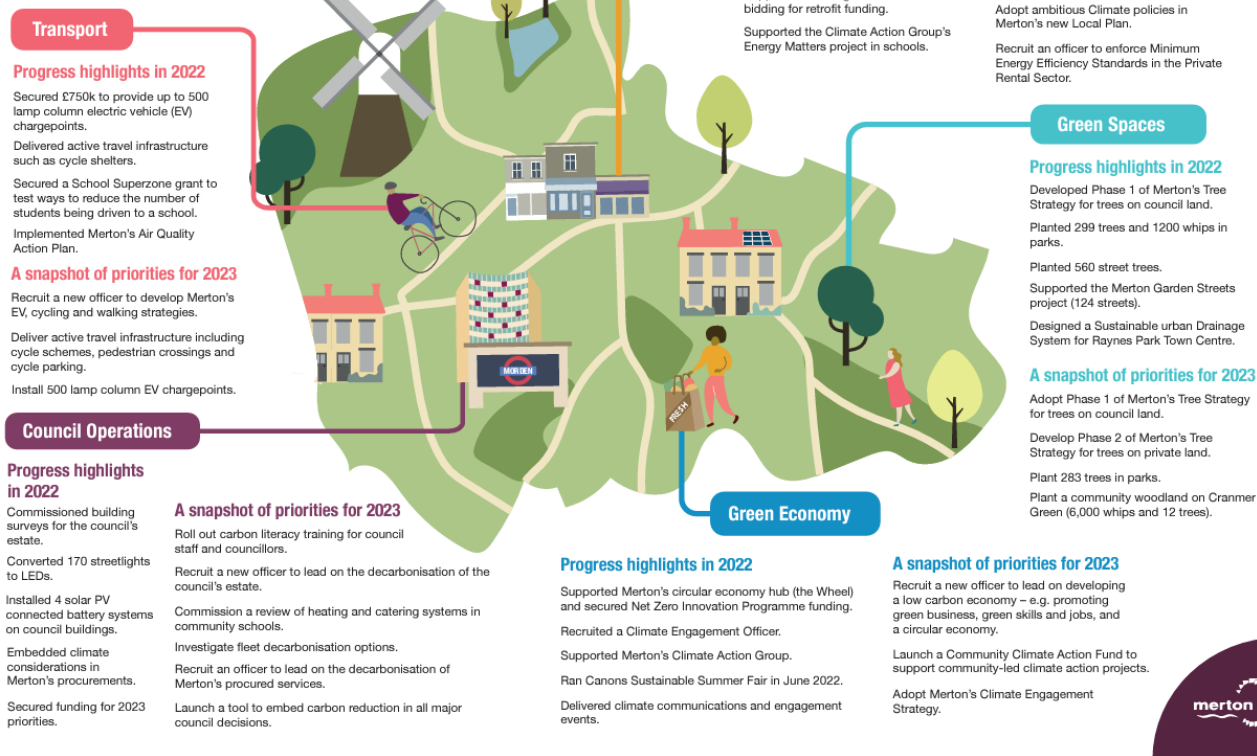


Figure 1 Key areas of progress against Merton's Climate Strategy & Action Plan in 2022 and priorities for 2023.

- 2.67. As part of Merton's Climate Delivery Plan, Cabinet approved the allocation of the latest £2 million in climate change funding for the following activities which will be developed and delivered over the next few years:
- i. **Green economy lead:** Recruiting an additional staff member to lead on the development of a Green Economy in Merton. This new role will enable greater engagement with businesses and Business Improvement Districts to promote low carbon business in Merton, greater support for local circular economy initiatives, as well as supporting the development of green skills and jobs in Merton.
 - ii. **Business retrofit support scheme:** The Climate Team are currently developing a business retrofit support scheme to help businesses in Merton decarbonise and save on their energy bills.
 - iii. **Climate engagement:** The Climate Team are continuing to support and strengthen climate engagement outreach to residents, businesses and community groups by making Merton's Climate Engagement Officer role permanent and securing a climate outreach budget for engagement events and materials.
 - iv. **Community Climate Action Fund:** Continuing to support the development and delivery of community-led climate projects by

committing funding towards a community climate action fund. The intention is to launch this fund in Autumn 2023 alongside the Civic Pride: Investing in Neighbourhoods Fund.

- v. **Community retrofit loan scheme:** The Climate Team are preparing to procure an FCA registered administrator to process loans for local homeowners and small landlords who aren't able to access regional and national funding. The loans are to decarbonise homes and reduce energy bills. Scheduled to launch the loan to the public in Autumn/ Winter 2023.
- vi. **Council rented properties - Legal Review:** Commissioning support to undertake a legal review of the leases for council-owned shops, business and industrial buildings and other non-operational buildings to help inform decarbonisation plans for these buildings. This will also feed into the Council's wider estate review.
- vii. **Council rented properties – EPCs:** Commissioning of Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) for all the Council's non-operational buildings, to ensure we are legally compliant and planning upgrades where needed. Assessor is due to be in place by end of June.
- viii. **Community schools heating and catering:** Commissioning a review of the catering equipment and heating systems in Merton's community schools to inform decarbonisation plans, future funding bids and future procurement of new catering and heating equipment for community schools.
- ix. **Supply chain decarbonisation lead:** Recruiting an additional staff member to support commissioners and contract managers across the Council in engaging with service providers to understand and reduce the Council's supply chain emissions.
- x. **Climate training for procurement:** Developing and delivering bespoke climate training for key staff involved in contract management and commissioning across the Council. This will build on the general carbon literacy training being rolled out for Council staff in 2023.
- xi. **Carbon in all major Council decisions tool:** Developing and implementing a tool for embedding climate change and carbon reduction in all major Council decisions to ensure that decisions are in keeping with Merton's net zero commitments.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE ACTION – THE CONTRIBUTION TO THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OUR RESIDENTS

- 2.49 Merton Health and Wellbeing Board has agreed a [Health in All Policies](#) (HiAP) approach. HiAP contends that by considering health impacts when making policy, including action on sustainability, the overall benefits can be increased. A sustainable future can promote health, equity and sustainability together, building the return on investment and maximizing overall impact. The Health and Wellbeing Board recognises that by working collaboratively,

with partners and residents we can build a sustainable future that has the health of all Merton's communities at its core.

2.50 Building a sustainable future is one of the biggest challenges of our time. Climate change presents a real emergency both globally and locally, with significant impact on residents' health. In March 2023 Merton Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) agreed its core priority for the year ahead as a whole systems approach of tackling air pollution, tobacco, smoking and respiratory disease. This acknowledges that a sustainable future will help to prevent climate related harms to health, including the impact of air pollution, and the resulting disease, deaths and costs for health and care.

2.51 The Health and Wellbeing Board also recently endorsed Merton's Annual Public Health Report 2022/23 on the [Health Co-Benefits of Climate Action](#): recognising how action on climate change can deliver real co-benefits to people's health and help reduce the health inequalities that exist across Merton. The report sets out how more energy efficient healthy housing, increasing access to biodiverse green spaces and improving air quality through promoting active travel, together with wider action, can both tackle climate change and, at the same time, help residents become healthier. Specifically it sets out:

- i. **Local Plan and Energy Efficient Healthy Housing:** Fuel poverty presents a direct risk factor to health including respiratory and cardiovascular conditions aggravated by exposure to cold temperatures and damp, and cold homes put children at over twice the risk of respiratory disease compared to those living in warm homes. Higher summer temperatures can also lead to some homes becoming overheated, itself a risk factor for health. Good retrofit of existing housing will both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and bring health co-benefits to residents. This, alongside the environmental and health considerations of future developments specified in the Local Plan, will help residents experiencing fuel poverty and help mitigate against current inequalities.
- ii. **Access to biodiverse green spaces:** Access to green space enables physical activity and brings the mental health benefits of spending time outdoors. People living closer to green space have been found to have lower levels of anxiety and stress. This is important as it is estimated that over 15% of Merton residents over 16 years have a common mental health disorder, which amounts to over 25,000 residents. Access to green space is important in planning, as is help for people to spend time in green space, especially those living in an area without ready access.
- iii. **Air quality and active travel:** Transport emissions have a direct impact on air pollution which is responsible for health conditions including heart disease, lung disease and cancer. The impact of air pollution on health is not equal. Those living in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods, and neighbourhoods where more than 20% of the population are from ethnic minority backgrounds, experience higher concentrations of air pollution

(whilst having lower levels of car ownership). Active travel refers to modes of travel that involve a level of activity including walking and cycling. This is important because data shows that just over 20% of adults are physically inactive in Merton, which amounts to over 30,000 adults. Promoting active travel as a way of reducing transport emissions can deliver health co-benefits and can be integrated into urban and transport planning to make it as easy and equitable as possible.

- 2.52 In this way, building a sustainable future helps to deliver Merton [Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) and its commitments to promote mental health and wellbeing, make healthy choices easy and protect residents from harm.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND CLIMATE ACTION

- 2.53 Climate and the environment are key issues for young people both locally and nationally. Our survey of the impact of COVID-19 on young people *The impact of COVID-19 on young people in Merton, 2021* highlights the importance of green spaces for young people in Merton.
- 2.54 Merton's Youth Parliament have an established sub-group working on climate action, with a particular focus on a campaign to reduce young people littering in our parks and green spaces.
- 2.55 Merton's Young Inspectors have been involved in contributing views on a range of climate and environment related programmes, including the 2021 iteration of the Air Quality Action Plan referred to earlier in this report.
- 2.56 The Council is facilitating a Green Schools Network, which started this year and is focussed on supporting schools in working towards fulfilling their sustainability duties.
- 2.57 Additionally, the Children's Trust Board has an outcome area titled 'My Merton' and 'Being Healthy' where Young Inspectors hold decision makers to account based on what young people have said and the actions taking place in response.
- 2.58 The current Children and Young People's Plan strategy is being refreshed via consultation with children and young people, which will include a refresh to the Children's Trust Board outcome areas referenced above.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. This report is for noting and discussing only, so alternative options are not being presented.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Any relevant consultation undertaken or proposed is referenced in the body of the report.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The body of the report includes details on a range of planned deliverables and commitments over the period 2023 to 2026.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The cost implications for the initiatives outlined in this report are covered within the current MTFS. Any further spending required beyond existing budgets will be reported to Cabinet.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This report has been prepared as required by part 4A, paragraph 2.3 (g) of the Constitution and there are no legal implications arising out of this report.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None immediately arising

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None immediately arising.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. A robust process for monitoring delivery of the Council Plan, including many of the commitments and deliverables referenced in this report, is being put in place to minimise the risk of non-delivery.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- None

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. None