

RECOMMENDATION FROM CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP – FUTURE OF PLANET WOKING

Executive Summary

Planet Woking was launched in September 2020 as an awareness raising programme of the Council's work to date and future priorities for local climate and ecological action.

Community engagement is at the heart of the programme and as demonstrated by the continuing reach of its case studies, webinars and social media communications, it is successfully raising the profile of local climate change and biodiversity matters. The programme has been praised by the South East Climate Alliance (SECA) and as a result the Council was recognised as one of just a few councils in the South East communicating well on climate change. As the Council works towards borough wide carbon neutrality as per its climate and ecological emergency declaration, the continued momentum of Planet Woking will become ever more crucial in continuing to engage with and encourage the public to make sustainable choices.

The initial funded Planet Woking programme concludes in July 2021. Options to maintain its lasting profile and growth, particularly with regards social media communications and digital marketing, were presented to the Climate Change Working Group at its meeting on 18 March 2021.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

funding be identified, in this financial year and then through the next available Investment Programme to deliver Option 1 over the two year period July 2021-July 2023 at a total cost of £66,000 excl. VAT. In contractual terms, it is proposed that Air Social would be employed for one year, with an option to renew for a further year July 2022 to 2023.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To build on the success of the initial funded phase of Planet Woking, maintaining its profile and growth for a two further years, to continue public awareness of and engagement in local climate and ecological matters.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

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Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction and background

- 1.1 On 24 September 2020, Woking Borough Council launched Planet Woking – a programme dedicated to climate change, sustainability and biodiversity in the borough.
- 1.2 Following the Council's climate and ecological emergency declaration on 25 July 2019¹, the Environment Portfolio Holder wanted to develop a programme of engagement with Woking residents and businesses to raise awareness of the Council's work to date and future priorities for local climate action. Originally based around the idea of an annual conference, the brief evolved into a programme of online talks supplemented with online case studies and articles.
- 1.3 The premise behind the programme is that, as per Mike Berners-Lee book "There is no Planet B", we should all be working together to secure the future of our borough by taking action to address climate change locally. As a key local influencer, Woking Borough Council can help to encourage the public and local companies to look after "Planet Woking".
- 1.4 The purpose of the Planet Woking programme is three-fold:
 - To share what the Council has been doing to date to address climate change and sustainability locally;
 - To raise awareness about what the Council is doing to meet its carbon neutral targets; and
 - Inspire local people to get involved and make, or continue to make, changes to live a greener, more sustainable life and gather their feedback for new project ideas.
- 1.5 In order to deliver these objectives, the Council contracted Air Social – a local digital marketing and social media agency – to work with officers in the Green Infrastructure team. Air Social has provided marketing expertise for other Council projects including Woking Works, Best Bar None and Too Good to Go. The year-long Planet Woking contract began in July 2020. As well as branding and logos, Air Social also developed the standalone website, which Green Infrastructure colleagues have then populated with case studies and resources. Air Social has also been crucial to social media messaging and associated content plans.
- 1.6 Since its launch, many activities have been undertaken as part of the Planet Woking programme. These are detailed in Appendix 1. Community engagement is at the heart of the programme and, as demonstrated by the continuing reach of its case studies, webinars and social media communications, Planet Woking is raising the profile of local climate change and biodiversity matters. A number of resources have been put together collaboratively with individuals and community groups to inspire others to get involved. Social media activity has resulted in almost 1,000 followers; almost 15,000 engagements (likes, comments and shares) and has reached over 120,000 people.
- 1.7 At its meeting on 18 March 2021, the Climate Change Working Group received a paper on the future of Planet Woking beyond July 2021 when the initial funded project closes. Although Planet Woking will remain an established brand and framework through which the Council can continue to promote and share its climate change and sustainability projects, the paper explored possible options for its lasting profile and growth.

¹ This cross-party declaration recognised the continued priority and commitment the borough gives to addressing climate change, both through mitigation and adaptation. The Council pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030 across its own estate and operations and by 2050, or before, across the borough.

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1.8 The current programme continues until July 2021 during which time communications and engagement will continue to further raise the profile of what the Council and its partners are doing locally to address the climate and ecological declaration. Activities include:

- a further themed webinar on sustainable transport;
- regular communications and engagement through social media;
- possible Planet Woking sponsored community engagement activities;
- continued expansion of case studies and resources on the Planet Woking website; and
- future engagement opportunities through the [Big Conversation](#) and Woking Residents' Panel. The Residents' Panel will also provide people who live in the borough with ongoing opportunities to shape the borough's future, by acting as a sounding board for future initiatives. This will provide further opportunities to raise awareness and strengthen community understanding and engagement with the borough's climate emergency declaration.

2.0 Next steps

- 2.1 Officers have considered the future of Planet Woking beyond July 2021 when the initial funded project closes to maintain its lasting profile and growth.
- 2.2 Mindful of budgetary constraints, officers plan to build on the resources put together so far and do all that is possible in-house. The original investment during 2020/21 has secured some outputs that will not require significant ongoing financial contributions (e.g. an established website, branding and growing case study depository). However, there are aspects that will benefit from continued financial support in order to maintain the momentum and exposure established so far.
- 2.3 Expert input in terms of social media communications and digital marketing in particular will be key to the continuing success and public awareness of the programme and in preventing its stagnation. This will be important in continuing to engage the community in positive action to tackle our borough wide commitments with regards to the climate and ecological emergency declaration.
- 2.4 In this regard, three potential packages of financial support to secure a further two years of Air Social's services were presented for consideration by the Working Group at its meeting on 18 March 2021. These are shown in Appendix 2.
- 2.5 In addition to the core activities included in each package, an additional contingency budget has also been suggested for possible ad hoc activities arising through the year. This could cover additional campaigns, events, etc. The costings are presented per annum.
- 2.6 In consideration of these packages and in the context of the prevailing economic climate, officers advise that Option 1 would best offer continued momentum of the Planet Woking programme, particularly via a continuing presence on social media which is key to public engagement. Officers also support maintaining these services through Air Social given the successful quality delivery of outputs so far and vested interest in the Planet Woking brand.
- 2.7 A total budget of £66,000 excluding VAT will be required for delivery of Option 1 for two years from July 2021 to July 2023. A two year extension to the programme rather than one year is recommended to give continuity to the Planet Woking messaging over a longer period. This would better support the continuing embedding of the brand and its messages in local consciousness and in affecting local action and positive environmental behavioural change. The Climate Change Working Group was minded to recommend this to the Executive.

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2.8 Whilst additional items included in Options 2 and 3 would bring a wider range of engagement, it is considered that any future online talks could be organised and managed in-house with the recordings edited and published as ad-hoc expenditure through the identified contingency budget, as and when required. The same approach could be taken with promotional videos for particular items if it is deemed their additional cost brings added value. As seen with coverage and engagement so far in the programme, there is much value in blogs, case studies and social media posts, which can be maintained with minimal spend, particularly given the foundation of outputs secured to date.

3.0 Conclusions

3.1 Since its launch, Planet Woking has established a recognisable brand and “one stop shop” for matters dedicated to climate change, sustainability and biodiversity in the borough.

3.2 Looking ahead to July 2021 and the conclusion of this initial funded phase, it is clear that some continuing financial support for the programme will be required to maintain momentum and importantly ongoing engagement of local residents and businesses. This is, and will become ever more crucial, in encouraging the public to make sustainable choices as we work towards borough wide carbon neutrality as per the Council’s climate and ecological emergency declaration.

3.3 At its meeting on 18 March 2021, the Climate Change Working Group resolved to note Planet Woking’s achievements so far and its planned activities for the remainder of the funded programme. In consideration of the packages of financial support presented, the Working Group was minded to support, by way of a recommendation to the Executive, Air Social’s continuing involvement at an Option 1 level for two years from the end of the initial contract period.

4.0 Corporate Strategy

4.1 The Planet Woking initiative proactively raises awareness of Woking Borough Council’s past, current and planned future actions to address climate change and support local ecology. These actions are progressed in partnership with a wide range of organisations and individuals.

4.2 Community engagement is at the heart of this programme, through which the Council aims to inspire local people to get involved and make, or continue to make, changes to live a greener, more sustainable life.

4.3 For these reasons, Planet Woking is a significant contributor to the Corporate Plan objectives of engaging our communities and improving the borough’s biodiversity and green infrastructure. In so doing, the initiative also provides benefits to other objectives, including supporting the health and wellbeing of residents, sustainable development and effective use of resources.

5.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

5.1 A total budget of £66,000 excluding VAT will be required for delivery of Option 1 over two years from July 2021 to July 2023.

5.2 It is requested that funding be identified, in this financial year and then through the next available Investment Programme to deliver the two year programme on this basis.

5.3 There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

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Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.4 There are no equalities implications associated with this report.
- 5.5 There are no additional human resource or training and development implications. Officers plan to build on the programme resources put together so far and do all that is possible in-house. The original investment during 2020/21 has secured outputs such as the established Planet Woking website, branding and growing case study depository, which can continue to be expanded within existing staff resources.

Legal

- 5.6 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Sustainability

- 5.7 Since its launch, Planet Woking has established a recognisable brand and “one stop shop” for matters dedicated to climate change, sustainability and biodiversity in the borough. The programme has been praised by the South East Climate Alliance (SECA) and as a result the Council was recognised as one of just a few councils in the South East communicating well on climate change (see Appendix 1).
- 5.8 Continued financial support will help maintain momentum and continue engagement of local residents and businesses in environmental matters. This is, and will become ever more crucial, in encouraging the public to make sustainable choices as we work towards borough wide carbon neutrality as per the Council’s climate and ecological emergency declaration.

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 6.1 The Climate Change Working Group was consulted on this proposal at its meeting on 18 March 2021 and was minded to recommend it to the Executive.

REPORT ENDS

Planet Woking Programme to Date

Officers from Green Infrastructure have worked with Air Social to deliver key Planet Woking activities prior to and since its launch on 24 September 2020, including:

- Standalone website launched at www.planetwoking.co.uk that has a range of case studies and articles designed to engage local people and organisations to do what they can to make a positive difference. There are also information and activities to inspire younger audiences on the site's Little Planet Woking pages (www.planetwoking.co.uk/little-planet-woking).
- Communications through the dedicated Planet Woking Facebook and Instagram accounts.
- Hosted three well-received online events as part of a programme of themed talks aimed at residents, schools and businesses. The first event was centred on what individuals can do to improve sustainability at home. The second celebrated the great outdoors and the need to balance access to and enjoyment of our natural habitats and wildlife, with protection of local biodiversity. The third online event held at the end of May 2021 focused on urban life and adaptation to climate change. For each topic audiences enjoyed a series of presentations given by expert guest speakers. Each online talk is followed by an open discussion during which viewers have the opportunity to share their own experiences of living greener; and to ask panellists and Council representatives questions. These discussion sessions have proved to be a good forum through which to gather ideas to later share through Planet Woking. Recordings of the webinars are available via the Planet Woking website for those that were not able to view the live event.
- First two of a series of informative short videos highlighting local environmental work, available to view at www.planetwoking.co.uk.
- A growing set of community focused case studies inspired by local individuals and groups published to the "Get Involved" section of the Planet Woking website.
- In October 2020, the Natural Woking newsletter was relaunched as a Planet Woking newsletter which carries all the latest climate change, sustainability and biodiversity project updates. The October 2020, January 2021 and April 2021 editions can be viewed here: www.planetwoking.co.uk/get-involved/newsletters/. The newsletter now has a circulation of circa 600 readers. New subscribers can sign up to the newsletter at www.planetwoking.co.uk.
- The Council's website has been updated with a direct link to the Planet Woking website from the climate change pages at www.woking.gov.uk/nature-and-sustainability.
- Social media competitions and activities including the Planet Woking pledge; sustainability book giveaway; #kids2030 challenge for Little Planet Woking champions and Christmas stocking competition in collaboration with Bare+Fair local refill company.
- As a result of Planet Woking, Woking Borough Council was highlighted in an article by the South East Climate Alliance (SECA) as one of just a few councils in the South East communicating well on climate change. The article is available at <https://seclimatealliance.uk/council-communication/>. Officers from Green Infrastructure were subsequently invited by SECA to further share what the Council has been doing to address climate change locally via a blog which is available on their website at <https://seclimatealliance.uk/planet-woking/>

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- Full page features in the winter 2020, spring 2021 and forthcoming summer 2021 edition of the Woking Magazine. The Magazine is circulated to all households in the borough and available online at www.woking.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-council/woking-magazine.
- Planet Woking was a sponsor of the CREST 21 awards (the Transforming Food category), which promoted the positive work by businesses based in the Woking area to protect the environment and promote more sustainable working and lifestyle habits. The awards took place on 20 May 2021 and were organised by Woking News and Mail in collaboration with the University of Surrey. More information about the awards, nominations and winners can be viewed here: <https://crestawardssurrey.co.uk/>

Options for continuing financial support

As stated in section 3 of this report, three potential packages of financial support to secure a further two years of Air Social’s services were presented for consideration to the Climate Change Working Group at its meeting on 18 March 2021. These are shown in the table below. In addition to the core activities included in each package, an additional contingency budget has also been suggested for possible ad hoc activities arising through the year. This could cover additional campaigns, events, etc. The costings are presented per annum.

	Air Social Services	Air Social Cost per annum	Contingency budget for ad-hoc activities per annum
Option 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Account management • Digital advertising • Social media management • To include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Monthly content plans; – Monitoring reports; – Management of Facebook and Instagram accounts; – Ten posts per month on Facebook and Instagram; – Responding to comments and audience engagement; – Data analysis of social media engagement to improve interaction. 	£28,000	£5,000
Option 2	All of the above, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 15 posts per month on Facebook and Instagram (rather than ten); – Three virtual events per year. 	£37,000	£5,000
Option 3	All of the above, plus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 20 posts per month on Facebook and Instagram (rather than 15); – Four videos per year (including their planning, filming and editing). 	£55,000	£2,000
Ad Hoc Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editing of event recordings at £100 per hour – circa £400 - £500 total for each webinar. • Videos at £100 an hour. Using the green spaces video as an example this required one day’s filming at £800 plus VAT, plus editing at £400 and account management time at £200-£300 on average. Total circa £1,400 per video. • Graphic design services at £100 per hour. As an example, the full page adverts for the Woking Magazine cost £200 each. 	See left.	See left.

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