

## **RECOMMENDATION FROM CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP – RENEWABLE ENERGY PLAN**

### **Executive Summary**

Further to Woking Borough Council's climate and ecological emergency declaration on 25 July 2019, the Council pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030 across its own estate and operations. The resultant Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) includes measures that will reduce (and eventually eliminate) the Council's carbon footprint. Priority actions include those that look to reduce emissions associated with energy used across the Council's estate – the largest contributor to the corporate carbon footprint. However, the declaration goes beyond this and seeks borough wide carbon neutrality by 2050 at the latest.

While reducing energy consumption and improving energy efficiency will continue to play a key part in this agenda, decarbonising our energy supply will contribute the largest gains in carbon reduction. A continuing ambition of the Climate Change Working Group is to consider the role of renewable energy technologies, including large scale wind and solar, in decarbonising the Council and borough's energy supply.

At its meeting on 18 March 2021, the Climate Change Working Group received a Large Scale Renewable Energy Plan (attached at Appendix 1) which was supported and recommended for adoption by the Executive. The Plan sets out a range of actions to facilitate our next steps to transition to net zero carbon, through achieving greater proportions of locally generated renewable energy and decarbonisation of our local energy supplies.

### **Recommendations**

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

- (i) the Renewable Energy Plan be adopted;
- (ii) the potential to establish a local community municipal bond for the financing of local renewable energy projects be explored by the Director of Neighbourhood Services in consultation with (a) the Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, (b) the Director of Finance and (c) the Director of Legal and Democratic Services; and
- (iii) if a local community municipal bond for the financing of local renewable energy projects is considered feasible and beneficial, further report(s) be presented to the Executive/Council.

### **Reasons for Decision**

Reason: In furtherance of the Council's climate and ecological emergency declaration, the Renewable Energy Plan sets out a range of actions to facilitate next steps to transition to net zero, through achieving greater proportions of locally generated

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renewable energy and decarbonisation of our local energy supplies.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.
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**Background Papers:** None.

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## **Recommendation from Climate Change Working Group – Renewable Energy Plan**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council declared a climate and ecological emergency on 25 July 2019. A Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) was subsequently developed and includes measures that will reduce (and eventually eliminate) the Council's carbon footprint in order to meet its pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030 across its own estate and operations.
- 1.2 Energy use is the largest contributor to the corporate carbon footprint so priority actions within the CEAP look to reduce consumption and improve energy efficiency. However, decarbonising our energy supply will contribute the largest gains in carbon reduction. The CEAP therefore includes a specific action to consider how renewable energy technologies, including large scale wind and solar, could be funded and installed as a way to decarbonise the Council and borough's energy supply. The Climate Change Working Group requested that a Large Scale Renewable Energy Plan be worked up in furtherance of this action.
- 1.3 At its meeting on 18 March 2021, the Climate Change Working Group received the resultant Plan, attached at Appendix 1, which was supported and recommended for adoption by the Executive.

### **2.0 Considerations and next steps**

- 2.1 The Plan includes a range of actions to facilitate next steps to transition to net zero carbon, through achieving greater proportions of locally generated renewable energy and decarbonisation of our local energy supplies. It considers the key factors required for its successful implementation, namely:
  - Policy framework;
  - Political will;
  - Site availability;
  - Funding mechanisms;
  - Public engagement and consultation.
- 2.2 The Plan is set in the context of a supportive and developing policy landscape, both locally and nationally. Political will is confirmed by the continuing ambition of the Climate Change Working Group in this agenda.
- 2.3 As the Plan explains, the identification of potential Council owned buildings and landholdings will help the Council understand what can be achieved with large scale and other renewables. It will determine next steps in terms of viability and further feasibility work required.
- 2.4 Governance and monitoring of the Plan will be conducted through the Climate Change Working Group with quarterly updates on associated actions being undertaken as part of the wider Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- 2.5 At its meeting on 18 March 2021, the Climate Change Working Group supported the Plan and recommended its adoption by the Executive. Further to that meeting, it has been agreed in consultation with the Chairman of the Working Group that the Plan be referred to as the 'Renewable Energy Plan' rather than the 'Large Scale Renewable Energy Plan'. This is felt to better reflect the nature of the Plan and its actions which advocate an energy efficiency hierarchy and which look to facilitate not only greater proportions of locally generated renewable energy but also decarbonisation through a range of technologies not just large scale photovoltaic (PV) or wind.

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### 3.0 Corporate Strategy

- 3.1 Adoption of the Renewable Energy Plan, and exploration of the potential for a local community municipal bond to finance renewable energy projects, will enable delivery of a number of corporate objectives, most notably effective use of resources, improving the borough's biodiversity and green infrastructure, engaging our communities, and supporting sustainable development and a strong economy.

### 4.0 Implications

#### Finance and Risk

- 4.1 Whilst it is not yet possible to identify the exact financial cost of accelerating the delivery of renewable energy projects across the borough, it is acknowledged that significant investment will be required. Innovative funding mechanisms will be essential given the tightening constraints on the public purse. Engagement with experts in this area will help identify possible funding avenues and initial steps to investigate these are recorded in the suggested actions.
- 4.2 There are no immediate risks associated with the Renewable Energy Plan itself. However, the potential delivery of renewable energy projects would be subject to individual feasibility studies and risk assessments in order to assess viability.
- 4.3 Given financial constraints, the delivery of such projects is subject to the identification of innovative and external funding sources. Funding models such as community municipal bonds would be subject to sufficient take up and interest. These risks will be discussed with experts in this area. Depending on the outcome of the discussions, further report(s) will be presented to the Executive/Council. These would include a full assessment of the finance and legal implications arising from such matters.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.4 There are no equalities implications associated with the Renewable Energy Plan.
- 4.5 There are no immediate human resource or training/development implications associated with the Renewable Energy Plan. However, the accelerated delivery of renewable energy projects will result in the need to engage officers from across the Council to secure their progression and that of our wider corporate carbon reduction goals.

#### Legal

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

#### Sustainability

- 4.7 Further to its climate and ecological emergency declaration, the Council has pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030 across its own estate and operations. Decarbonising our energy supply will contribute the largest gains in carbon reduction. A continuing ambition of the Climate Change Working Group is to consider the role of renewable energy technologies in this regard and this is captured within the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- 4.8 This Plan suggests a range of actions to facilitate next steps towards achieving greater proportions of locally generated renewable energy.

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### 5.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 Whilst the Council can help mobilise local delivery of renewables projects, the scale and nature of the task will require community engagement and support.
- 5.2 This will be an opportunity to emphasise links between what needs to be achieved to reduce carbon emissions and fostering public understanding and acceptance of large scale renewable energy as an important part of this equation. The public, and potentially investment by local business, will play a vital role in enabling delivery and roll out of large scale projects. [Planet Woking](#) is the natural platform through which to build on communications around renewable energy to help raise awareness and strengthen community understanding and engagement with the borough's climate emergency declaration and how renewables factor within this plan. Opportunities may also be available through the [Big Conversation](#) and Residents' Panel. The Woking 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.
- 5.3 Community energy projects such as those referenced in the Plan would also provide an opportunity for further direct public engagement and ownership, underlining that the community has a key part to play in the net zero solution. Public engagement and consultation will need to be undertaken as the Plan and actions within it develop, to set the task in the context of the wider needs of energy and environmental security and the commitment to achieve net zero across Woking borough.
- 5.4 The Plan has been subject to early consultation with officers across the Council with an inherent interest in its scope and also with ThamesWey, whose Business Plan is aligned to furthering the objectives of Woking 2050 and the CEAP.

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