

WOKING ENVIRONMENT ACTION (WEACT) – RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

Executive Summary

Representatives of Woking Environment Action (WEAct) gave a presentation to the [Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 February 2023](#) on their work locally to address issues relating to climate change and sustainability. The presentation was followed by a series of recommendations for how the Committee could play a key role in driving climate action in Woking. The recommendations were provided to the Executive at its meeting on 23 March 2023 and referred for consideration by the Greener Woking Working Group.

The Government intervention has delayed the Council's response to WEAct's recommendations as consideration has been given to the deliverability of the draft Strategy and the recommendations made.

The recommendations of the Greener Woking Working Group will need to be viewed in light of the new circumstances facing the Council. Subject to the steer agreed by the Executive for the strategic direction of Woking Net Zero (also on the agenda of this meeting), the Council will revise the consultation version of that document to reflect the changed circumstances and do what is practical within the recommendations from WEAct. The Council welcomes continued close working with WEAct on making these refinements to the Strategy that will then be presented to Members for consideration later this year.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

WEAct's recommendations be noted and that the suggested next steps be actioned as part of the forthcoming updated Climate Change Strategy, Woking Net Zero.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To update the Executive in accordance with the resolution made at its meeting on 23 March 2023.

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

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Background Papers:	Woking Environment Action – Recommendations and Feedback – paper attached at Appendix 1.
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Woking Environment Action (WEAct) - Recommendations and Responses

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Woking Environment Action (WEAct) submitted recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive on 20 February and 23 March 2023 respectively in support of climate action to be taken or accelerated by the Council:

- i. The Council strengthens the Climate Emergency Action Plan to reflect the recommendations of the Anthesis carbon footprint assessment.
- ii. Officers consider the feasibility of joining the UK100 network of councils (giving due consideration for the financial and resource implications).
- iii. The Council continues to be a 'High Ambition' council on climate action.
- iv. Further support on embedding the Council's net zero ambition across the organisation.
- v. The Council continues its leadership role in encouraging community climate action.

2.0 Next Steps

2.1 The Government intervention and issuing of a Section 114 notice has delayed the Council's response to these recommendations. The Greener Woking Working Group has also since been disbanded as part of Woking Borough's Council's governance review.

2.2 As a result of the S114 notice the Council has had to make difficult decisions, focusing resources on statutory functions. This means that the Council's capacity to deliver the actions contained within the consultation version of Woking Net Zero is constrained.

2.3 In recent months, officers have looked again at the style and content of Woking Net Zero, and specifically the identified actions contained within the Strategy. Officers have considered how these actions can best be delivered, taking into consideration the feedback received through the consultation. This has led to reflection on what can be achieved with remaining resources and how best the Council can drive forward its Strategy.

2.4 Moving forward, the Council has two key roles:

- To run its own affairs in a way that reduces carbon footprint; and
- To influence and steer the actions and activities of others through its policies, plans and Strategies.

2.5 In specific response to WEAct's recommendations:

- i. The Council strengthens the Climate Emergency Action Plan to reflect the recommendations of the Anthesis carbon footprint assessment as far as resources allow.

The Council has used the Anthesis report to inform the refresh of the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). There are several recommendations which the Council is able to take forward, for example improving the energy performance of Council owned buildings and utilising Planning policy as a lever for climate action. However, there are other recommendations within the Anthesis report which the Council will regrettably not be able to fulfil as a result of its financial position. There may, however, be opportunities for some of these recommendations to be taken forward by partners or the community.

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- ii. Officers consider the feasibility of joining the UK100 network of councils (giving due consideration for the financial and resource implications).

Further investigation is taking place to see whether Woking Borough Council can join UK100 in light of the current financial position.

- iii. The Council continues to be a 'High Ambition' council on climate action.

The Council remains firmly committed to climate action and reducing its impact on the environment. However, going forward climate action will be focussed on reducing its own climate footprint and influencing the actions of others through statutory plans, policies etc.

- iv. Further support on embedding the Council's net zero ambition across the organisation.

Embedding climate action within service delivery will be a core focus of the refreshed CEAP. Rather than climate action sitting with a small number of officers, actions will be distributed across the Extended Leadership Team, ensuring that all services are working together to reduce the Council's carbon footprint. Training and awareness sessions are being arranged for the Council's Extended Leadership Team, to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities as part of the CEAP.

- v. The Council continues its leadership role in encouraging community climate action.

The Council will continue to encourage community climate action through its statutory plans and policies, particularly Planning policy. The Council is also committed to communicating community climate action, such as WEAct Repair Cafes, through its communications channels.

3.0 Corporate Strategy

- 3.1 The review and update of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, assists in the continued delivery of a number of corporate objectives. These include: efficient use of resources; improving the Borough's biodiversity and green infrastructure; engaging our communities; and supporting sustainable development and a strong economy.
- 3.2 WEAct's recommendations have been submitted in support of further climate action to be taken or accelerated by the Council and relate directly to the climate change strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).

4.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 4.1 There are no finance or risk implications associated with this report.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.2 There are no equalities or human resources implications associated with this report.

Legal

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

5.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 The draft Woking Net Zero strategy was subject to a six week public consultation until 30 June 2023. Residents and stakeholders were invited to review the strategy and feedback their views online via the Woking Net Zero hub on the Woking Community Forum and via in person roadshow events. WEAct was involved in this process as part of earlier engagement through

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its representation on the Greener Woking Working Group and as an invited stakeholder to the consultation.

- 5.2 Subject to the views of the Executive, the Woking Net Zero strategy will be updated to incorporate actions and themes that embrace the recommendations put forward by WEAct. The proposed new approach for Woking Net Zero will streamline and synthesize the actions from the consultation version to ensure sharper focus on those areas where the Council can maximise opportunities to reduce our environmental footprint at both the corporate and borough level.

REPORT ENDS

GREENER WOKING WORKING GROUP – 28 JUNE 2023

WOKING ENVIRONMENT ACTION – RECOMMENDATIONS AND FEEDBACK**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Representatives of Woking Environment Action (WEAct) gave a presentation to the [Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 February 2023](#) on their work locally to address issues relating to climate change and sustainability. The presentation was followed by a series of recommendations for how the Committee could play a key role in driving climate action in Woking.
- 1.2 Subsequently, at its meeting on 20 March 2023, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a follow up report '[Recommendations to the Executive following WEAct Presentation OSC23-021](#)' (item 13). The report reiterated WEAct's recommendations in support of climate action to be taken or accelerated by the council:
- i. The council strengthens the Climate Emergency Action Plan to reflect the recommendations of the Anthesis carbon footprint assessment.
 - ii. Officers consider the feasibility of joining the UK100 network of councils (giving due consideration for the financial and resource implications).
 - iii. The council continues to be a 'High Ambition' council on climate action.
 - iv. Further support on embedding the council's net zero ambition across the organisation.
 - v. The council continues its leadership role in encouraging community climate action.
- 1.3 The Committee agreed to provide the [recommendations to the Executive at its meeting on 23 March 2023](#). It was subsequently agreed that these be referred to the Greener Woking Working Group for consideration.
- 1.4 This report addresses each of the recommendations, providing an update and suggested next steps.
- 1.5 Pending feedback from the Greener Woking Working Group, it is proposed to provide this appraisal of the recommendations to a future meeting (date tbc) of the [Executive, as resolved at its meeting on 23 March 2023](#) (see item 10 of the linked minutes).

2.0 Recommendations – current position and suggested next steps

- 2.1 The table that follows sets out each of WEAct's recommendations alongside the current position and suggested next steps. Thanks to Rupert Devereux for providing more detailed explanation as context to each of these, set out in full in Appendix 1 of this report.

WEAct / O&S recommendations (Taken from WEAct report shown in Appendix 1)	Current situation	Suggested next steps
<p>The council strengthens the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) to reflect the recommendations of the Anthesis carbon footprint assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Anthesis Report made a number of recommendations which WEAct hopes will be reflected in the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) that is due to be updated later this year. • Of key importance is the recommendation from Anthesis that the CEAP includes measurable progress indicators. Performance against these indicators should be monitored at the GWWG meetings. 	<p>The findings of the carbon footprint assessment have been used to inform the review of the council's climate change strategy. Woking Net Zero, the draft follow up strategy currently out for public consultation, includes a chapter on WBC's journey to net zero and the recommendations suggested by Anthesis in order to adopt a "High Ambition" pathway for carbon reduction and a net zero estate by 2030.</p>	<p>The draft strategy is subject to public consultation until 30 June 2023. Pending any subsequent amendments it will be presented to the Greener Woking Working Group, Executive and Council for adoption this autumn. The CEAP will then be updated in line with the newly adopted strategy to reflect all new actions, including those arising from the carbon footprint assessment.</p> <p>It is the intention to strengthen monitoring of the strategy and the CEAP's actions in the style of RAG (Red-Amber-Green) monitoring with measurable progress indicators and performance monitored via future reporting to the Greener Woking Working Group.</p>
<p>Officers consider the feasibility of joining the UK100 network of councils (giving due consideration for the financial and resource implications).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no membership fee for joining the network which provides a wealth of benefits including the ability to knowledge and resource share with other councils and access tailored insight on how to best reach net-zero targets. Members are also given the opportunities to participate in research and working groups. • WBC would need to move its net zero pledge forward by five years to 2045. We believe that this target would enable WBC to remain a 'high ambition' council on climate action. It would also align WBC with Surrey County Council, who have already signed up to UK100. 	<p>Officers are supportive in principle of the UK100 network and furthering our climate activities as much as possible and their pledge largely aligns with the council's climate commitments. However we also recognise the challenge and the need to balance our targets with other socio-economic pressures.</p> <p>As part of the Woking Net Zero strategy consultation, we are welcoming views on whether we should embrace the 2045 target and amend our area wide pledge. Please see page 16 of the draft strategy where this is set out alongside information on UK100.</p> <p>Section 6.1 of the draft strategy, 'Climate change and the community – we need you', sets out the strategy's two overarching objectives to ensure we remain on track to meet our climate change commitments i.e. (1) A net zero council estate by 2030 and (2) A net zero borough by 2050 (or 2045).</p>	<p>The draft strategy is subject to public consultation until 30 June 2023. Feedback will be collated during the summer and incorporated where appropriate, including potential support for joining the UK100 network.</p> <p>It is however important to note that pages 80 and 81 of the draft strategy highlight delivery against our climate ambitions in the context of the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, which balances the priorities of the council with the resources available to deliver these priorities.</p>

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	<p>This acknowledges the potential to adopt the UK100 area wide target.</p>	
<p>The council continues to be a 'High Ambition' council on climate action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We recognise WBC's longstanding commitment to the environment and that for many years it has considered itself a leader on climate action. However, we are concerned that Woking is at risk of being left behind as other councils set more ambitious targets and action plans. ● Joining UK100 and bringing forward the council's net zero pledge to 2045 would be a strong statement of ambition, making it clear that WBC remains committed to climate action. 	<p>Woking Net Zero sets out the council's climate ambition across nine themes. Its core objectives are to be a net zero council estate by 2030 and a net zero borough by 2050 (or 2045) further to our climate and ecological emergency declaration made in 2019.</p> <p>The draft was prepared following a self-assessment and gap analysis to identify what the revised strategy needed to include based on good practice and external feedback. Sources included Ashden's 31 Climate Actions for Councils and Climate Emergency UK's 2021/22 scorecard assessment of WBC's climate activities. The draft also reflects WBC's CEAP and other local and national developments since the last strategy (Woking 2050) was adopted in 2015 including SCC's approved Climate Change Delivery Plan. It is felt the resultant draft reflects WBC's continuing commitment and high ambitions for local action on climate change.</p>	<p>The draft strategy is subject to public consultation until 30 June 2023. Feedback will be collated during summer 2023 and incorporated where appropriate, including new actions such as those arising from the carbon footprint assessment setting out a High Ambition reduction pathway and the UK100 area wide target.</p>
<p>Further support on embedding the council's net zero ambition across the organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WEAct remains concerned that WBC's net-zero ambition is not understood and embedded across the organisation. ● We strongly agree with the Anthesis recommendation that a staff training programme would have more impact than a staff communications programme in changing behaviour and helping the council reach its climate aims. ● We are concerned that the current staff e-learning package has limited reach and have 	<p>Quarterly CEAP updates demonstrate how climate action requires collaborative working across the organisation as well as with external partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>In drafting the Woking Net Zero strategy, officer consultation was carried out across the organisation. This gave the opportunity not only to ensure the strategy reflects work across the council but also to raise awareness of the forthcoming strategy and the core net zero objectives. Theme 9 of the draft strategy – "WBC's</p>	<p>The Green Infrastructure team shares WEAct's view that a staff training programme would provide an effective means of embedding the council's net zero ambition across the organisation. This was also recommended in Anthesis' carbon footprint assessment findings.</p> <p>As highlighted, the climate e-learning module is available to all staff. Take up has been limited but this must be considered in the context of various corporate training requirements for staff.</p> <p>The ambition to roll out staff climate training is shared by all Surrey districts and boroughs and</p>

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<p>been disappointed that it has not been possible to review the numbers of staff completing this course at GWWG meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend that the council commits to a programme of Carbon Literacy training, possibly through a Train the Trainer model to reduce costs. 	<p>journey to net zero” – sets out various actions that build on WEAct’s recommendation.</p> <p>To mark the launch of the consultation, Green Infrastructure hosted a staff drop-in session on 24 May 2023 to share information on the draft strategy and also to inspire people to get involved and make sustainable changes in their day to day life at work and home. We were joined by representatives from WEAct, WWF, Action Surrey and Surrey County Council.</p> <p>Green Infrastructure’s recent graduate placement officer undertook a survey to understand how well the council’s net zero targets are understood by WBC staff. The results will be analysed and used to inform communications and action on how we can better embed our targets across the organisation.</p> <p>Climate change e-learning is available for officers and Members on the Surrey Learn Portal. This was made available more widely to all staff in December 2022 following a trial by Neighbourhood Services. To date 56 staff have completed the training module. A senior policy officer has completed Carbon Literacy training courtesy of a free place offered by Surrey County Council that has been running a programme for its staff under the ‘train the trainer’ model to reduce costs.</p>	<p>SCC and is a topic of discussion at the monthly Surrey Climate Change Officers meetings. Carbon Literacy training is a well-known and trusted course however a potential obstacle noted across the Surrey authorities in wider roll out of this training is the cost and time requirement. A typical course requires two days’ of officer time. The Surrey Climate Change Officers Group has been discussing possible alternative training options to build on the Surrey Learn e-learning portal module with some authorities expressing an interest in other shared courses. Green Infrastructure officers will consult colleagues as these options develop.</p> <p>Green Infrastructure officers are developing a plan for staff and councillor engagement on the council’s climate commitments and the Woking Net Zero strategy. We recognise the need for this because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WBC’s net zero ambition by 2030 is challenging and we need everyone to be involved. The way we deliver services and run our buildings all impact on achieving our climate commitments. Every staff member and team can help contribute to our climate goals. We can all make a difference in our day-to-day actions. <p>We recognise that WBC would benefit from transitioning from being a “carbon articulate” organisation to one that is carbon literate. We have clear ambitions and targets, but we need to do more to reflect this in our behaviours. The plan will include recommendations on strengthening of climate considerations for reports and projects; staff training; promotion of Take the Jump following</p>
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		<p>the campaign's endorsement by the Executive; and a 'climate crib sheet' for the staff intranet offering a one-stop-shop for information on the council's climate commitments and sustainability tips and advice for both at work and at home.</p> <p>Green Infrastructure will review the findings of the recent staff survey (mentioned left) to understand how well the council's net zero targets are understood by staff and what more needs to be done to inform communications and action on how we can better embed our targets across the organisation.</p> <p>It is the intention to strengthen monitoring of the strategy and CEAP's actions in the style of RAG (Red-Amber-Green) monitoring with measurable progress indicators and performance monitored via reporting to the Greener Woking Working Group. This will involve input from across the organisation.</p>
<p>The council continues its leadership role in encouraging community climate action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WBC's net-zero ambitions will not be achieved without the support and actions of the local community. ● WEAct recommends that community climate action should form a key pillar of the new CEAP; with specific actions on how WBC can best support the local community in taking greater climate action. 	<p>Planet Woking, the council's climate change communications programme launched in September 2020, has been key to engagement on this agenda and in encouraging community climate action. Communications via the website, social media, webinars and the quarterly e-newsletter (the latest edition of which went to 1800 subscribers in May 2023) are aimed to inform the public on local action by the council and its partners and to inspire residents and businesses to make sustainable changes themselves.</p> <p>Many activities and projects continue to be made possible through working together with key stakeholders, commercial partners and volunteer organisations to meet our common environmental</p>	<p>The draft Woking Net Zero strategy has a wide range of actions on how the council can support the local community in taking greater climate action. These are highlighted in each of the nine themes, as well as in theme 7 which focuses on communicating and enabling change.</p> <p>The draft strategy is subject to public consultation until 30 June 2023. Pending any subsequent amendments it will be presented to the Greener Woking Working Group, Executive and Council for adoption this autumn. The CEAP will then be updated in line with the newly adopted strategy to reflect all new actions. These will be based around the nine new themes with council and community focused actions as suggested in the draft. By</p>

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	<p>goals. These activities are key to achieving net zero both across the council estate and borough wide.</p> <p>Take up of grant funding available by Action Surrey for household energy efficiency improvements is helping to make a difference to residents' carbon footprint.</p> <p>WEAct's community focused climate and ecological activities are also key to encouraging positive sustainable changes. This is most recently highlighted in their promotion of the Take the Jump campaign and the new Woking Repair Café.</p> <p>The draft Woking Net Zero strategy recognises that the borough's net zero ambitions will not be achieved without the support of the local community. Across its nine themes, the strategy offers advice on what residents and businesses can do to get involved and make a difference. Theme 7 of the strategy "Communicating and Enabling Change" sets out how although the public sector only accounts for 3% of borough wide greenhouse gas emissions, local authorities have an influence over roughly a third of emissions in their local areas. We recognise therefore that the council has a key role in leading, enabling, influencing and collaborating with the community and partners to act together on climate change.</p>	<p>adopting this new framework for the CEAP, it is felt this will pick up on WEAct's recommendation and its suggestion that community climate action form a key pillar of the new CEAP.</p> <p>Climate action and a 'Greener Woking' are core priorities of the council's current corporate strategy, Woking For All, and its supplementary priorities. This strategy is to be refreshed this autumn.</p>
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3.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

3.1 There are no finance or risk implications associated with this update report.

Equalities and Human Resources

3.2 There are no equalities or human resources implications associated with this update report.

Legal

3.3 There are no legal implications associated with this update report.

4.0 Engagement and Consultation

4.1 The [draft Woking Net Zero strategy](#) is subject to public consultation until 30 June 2023. Pending any subsequent amendments it will be presented to the Greener Woking Working Group, Executive and Council for adoption this autumn. The CEAP will then be updated in line with the newly adopted strategy to reflect all new actions.

5.0 Conclusions

5.1 WEAct's recommendations are welcomed and highlight the continuing role of the group as a 'critical friend' to the council in furthering its action on climate change.

5.2 This report sets out the recommendations alongside the current position and suggested next steps which outline ways to progress these further as part of the ongoing work to review the council's climate change strategy and CEAP.

6.0 Recommendations

The Group is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) WEAct's recommendations be noted and that the suggested next steps be actioned as part of the ongoing work to review the council's climate change strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan; and
- (ii) The appraisal of WEAct's recommendations, the current position and suggested next steps be reported to a future meeting of the Executive, in accordance with the Executive resolution at its meeting on 23 March 2023.

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

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Background Papers: None.

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REPORT ENDS

APPENDIX 1



WEAct Report to Greener Woking Working Group Comments on Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations

Background

On 20 February 2023, WEAct provided a presentation to Woking Borough Council's (WBC) Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members of that committee supported many of the recommendations in our presentation and put them forward to the [Executive for consideration at its meeting on 23 March 2023](#).

The specific recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Executive were as follows:

- That the council strengthens the Climate Emergency Action Plan to reflect the recommendations of the Anthesis carbon footprint assessment;
- That officers consider the feasibility of joining the UK100 network of councils (giving due consideration for the financial and resource implications);
- That the council continues to be a 'High Ambition' council on climate action;
- That the council's net zero ambition is embedded across the organisation;
- That the council continues its leadership role in encouraging community climate action.

The Executive considered the recommendations and referred them back to the Green Woking Working Group (GWWG).

WEAct are disappointed, given the council's declaration of a climate emergency, that it was not possible to come to a decision on the above recommendations at Executive meeting. It would like to encourage the members of the GWWG to consider the recommendations above and report back **quickly and decisively** to the Executive, asking that it approves the recommendations at its next meeting. To assist in this process, WEAct has made some comments on each recommendation below.

Comments on Executive Recommendations

WEAct recommends that the GWWG should endorse all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations to Executive.

Recommendation One: That the council strengthens the Climate Emergency Action Plan to reflect the recommendations of the Anthesis carbon footprint assessment.

- The Anthesis Report made a number of recommendations which WEAct hopes will be reflected in the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) that is due to be updated later this year.
- Of key importance is the recommendation from Anthesis that the CEAP includes measurable progress indicators. Performance against these indicators should be monitored at the GWWG meetings.

Recommendation Two: That officers consider the feasibility of joining the UK100 network of councils (giving due consideration for the financial and resource implications)

- The [UK100](#) membership pack details the benefits of joining this network in detail.
- There is no membership fee for joining the network.
- The network provides a wealth of benefits including the ability to knowledge and resource share with other councils and access tailored insight on how to best reach net-zero targets. Members are also given the opportunities to participate in research and working groups.

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- In order to join the network, WBC would need to move its net zero pledge forward by five years to 2045. We believe that this target would enable WBC to remain a ‘high ambition’ council on climate action. It would also align WBC with Surrey County Council, who have already signed up to UK100.

Recommendation Three: That the council continues to be a ‘High Ambition’ council on climate action.

- We recognise WBC’s longstanding commitment to the environment and that for many years it has considered itself a leader on climate action. However, we are concerned that Woking is at risk of being left behind as other councils set more ambitious targets and action plans.
- Joining UK100 and bringing forward the council’s net zero pledge to 2045 would be a strong statement of ambition, making it clear that WBC remains committed to climate action.

Recommendation Four: That the council’s net-zero ambition is embedded across the organisation.

- WEAct remains concerned that WBC’s net-zero ambition is not understood and embedded across the organisation.
- We strongly agree with the Anthesis recommendation that a staff training programme would have more impact than a staff communications programme in changing behaviour and helping the council reach its climate aims.
- We are concerned that the current staff e-learning package has limited reach and have been disappointed that it has not been possible to review the numbers of staff completing this course at GWWG meetings.
- We recommend that the council commits to a programme of Carbon Literacy training, possibly through a Train the Trainer model to reduce costs.

Recommendation Five: That the council continues its leadership role in encouraging community climate action.

- WBC’s net-zero ambitions will not be achieved without the support and actions of the local community.
- WEAct recommends that community climate action should form a key pillar of the new CEAP; with specific actions on how WBC can best support the local community in taking greater climate action.