

Agenda Item No: 10
Report To: Cabinet
Date: 11/02/2016



Report Title: **Climate Change and Sustainable Environment – Annual Progress Review**

Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Culture and the Environment, Jessamy Blanford

Report Author: Policy and Performance Officer, Nicholas Clayton

Summary:

This report, the third such annual review, summarises actions and initiatives undertaken throughout the authority during the last year in the complementary areas of a sustainable environment, carbon and energy reduction and responding to the threat of climate change. These had been brought together previously within the council's Position Statement.

Many new initiatives were set in train over the previous year (the details of which were included in the February 2015 annual progress report). As such, much of the emphasis over this year has been to consolidate these, whilst adding a smaller number of additional projects.

Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: ALL

Recommendations: **The Cabinet be asked to:-**

- Note progress over the last year across the authority in achieving the aims and objectives of the *Position Statement on Climate Change and a Sustainable Environment*.**

Policy Overview: The Position Statement was originally adopted in August 2011 and updated in February 2013. When it was adopted by Cabinet it was agreed that an Annual Report should be produced to capture progress against its aims – this report fulfils that obligation.

Financial Implications: The measures outlined within this report, when taken together, have a positive impact on both the environmental impact of the council's services and our residents' carbon footprint, and aim to secure long-term financial savings.

Risk Assessment N/A

Equalities Impact Assessment N/A

Background Papers:

Portfolio Holders Comments

Ashford Borough Council takes its role in ensuring a sustainable future for the borough very seriously. This summary provides a comprehensive overview of the varied array of individual projects, initiatives and efficiency measures which provide an overall positive impact on the efficiency and sustainability of the council's operations and the borough overall.

I am pleased to see that good progress continues to be made, and I am encouraged at the ever-increasing uptake of electric vehicles across the borough and improved understanding of the council's own energy use – initiatives which were set in motion last year and which are now bearing fruit. The council will continue to focus on its new recycling service, leading to an improvement in the overall recycling rate.

Many of the projects are still ongoing, and I look forward to providing colleagues with further updates as these - and other initiatives - developed during the year.

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Report Title: Climate Change and Sustainable Environment – Annual Progress Review

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the Cabinet with the details of work undertaken during the last year by departments across the authority which, taken together, further the aims and objectives of the council's *Position Statement on Climate Change and a Sustainable Environment (the Statement)*.
2. This annual update provides a concise summary of actions and initiatives undertaken during the last year, rather than a wholesale restating of the Statement itself.

Background

3. The Statement was originally adopted in August 2011 and updated in February 2013. When it was adopted by Cabinet it was agreed that an Annual Report should be produced to capture progress against its aims – this report fulfils that obligation.
4. The Statement did not create new policy as such, rather it provided a framework capturing the varied and complementary work undertaken throughout the authority which – taken together - have a positive impact. As such it states the council's commitment to carbon and energy reduction, including the promotion of sustainable policies and practices affecting the borough, our residents and businesses more generally. Through the Statement members and the wider community have a single reference point for the council's work on a sustainable environment, carbon and energy reduction and responding to the threat of climate change.
5. The Cabinet has previously received an annual update on the progress seen during 2014 (in February 2015). As such, this report builds upon (and updates) the actions set in train during the previous year.

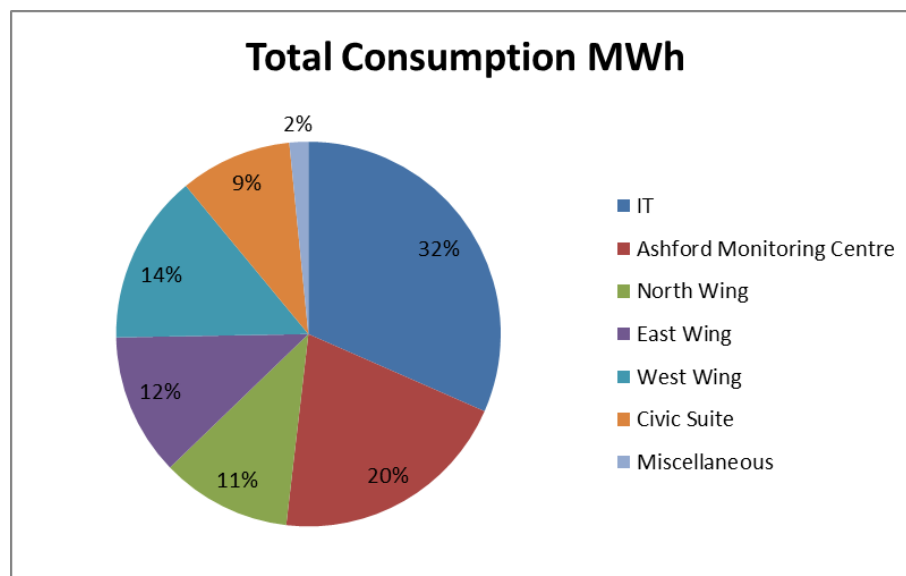
Progress in the last year

6. The Statement sets out a number of overarching themes, bringing together the many elements of this agenda and our plans for each. Progress against each of these themes during the last year is set out below.

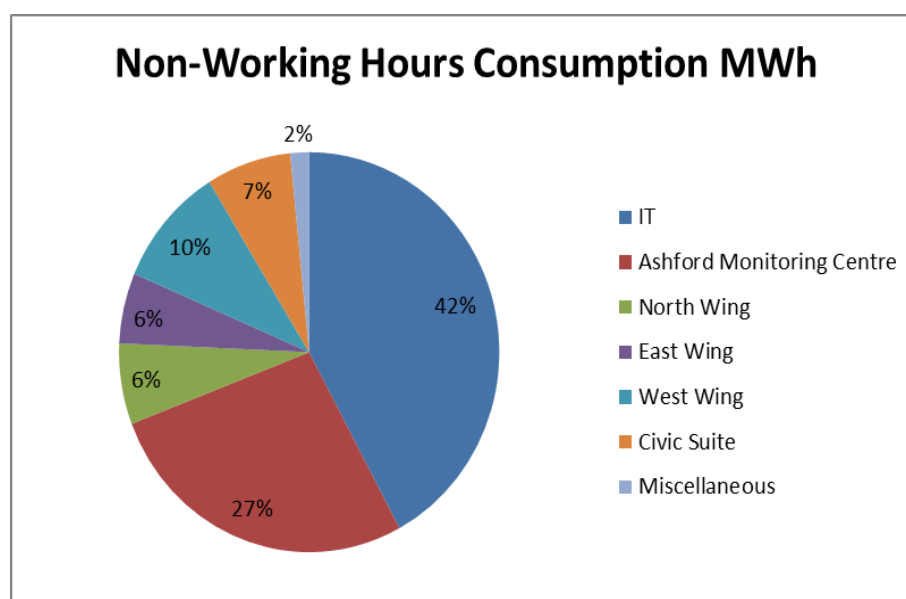
A. Our Estate and Operations

Reducing our own energy use

7. As part of the council's ongoing commitment to reduce its impact upon the environment and to provide best value services, the council aims to ensure that its own operations remain as efficient and effective as possible.
8. Building on the large number of initiatives set in train during 2014, energy efficiency measures began to bear fruit during the last year.
9. Submetering systems, installed during early 2014, now provide improved and disaggregated information on energy consumption across the Civic Centre. Officers continue to monitor consumption and target actions to address high and unexpected usage. As can be seen, IT and the Ashford Monitoring Centre are the main energy consumers within the Civic Centre estate, accounting for over half of total consumption:



10. Both areas also account for the majority of non-working hours consumption:



11. Accordingly, efforts are being concentrated on both areas to reduce consumption. By the end of January 2016 officers will have completed the installation of energy efficient lighting in the Monitoring Centre, which will reduce their monthly electricity consumption from around 6,000KWh to around 5,000KWh (approximately a 16% reduction saving £75 per month).
12. By using in-house electricians and large scale reuse of salvaged light fittings and sensors, the council has been able to make these changes very little outlay.
13. During the summer a thorough, investigative survey was undertaken on the Stour Centre. This audit sought to establish the current electrical consumption of equipment, and to identify any opportunities to reduce electricity usage and maximise the efficiency of gas energy.
14. A report was considered by the council's Management Team in October 2015, which endorsed recommendations for a series of energy efficiency measures to improve utilities usage at the leisure centre.
15. Overall, these additional measures (building on the new initiatives set in motion during 2014), have ensured that energy consumption across the Civic and Stour Centres continues to fall, while electricity consumption for the Civic Centre fell by 7.5% over 2015 compared with the previous year.

Solar PV and CHP

16. 180 solar panels were installed on the Civic Centre roof in March 2012, alongside others on Trumpet House. On both sites, the panels continue to perform above initial estimates – with the Civic Centre panels providing almost 20% more electricity than was forecast, performance which is in line with generation in the previous two years.

B. Our Services and Procurement

Ashford's recycling rates

17. During the first full year of Ashford's new recycling service quadrupled its average recycling, reuse and composting rate, hitting around 55% by the end of 2014.
18. During 2015 Ashford built on this success, and now sits within the top 10% of recycling councils in the country. The borough posted a recycling rate of 55.3% in 2014/15, an improvement of 13.4% on the year before. This was the second largest improvement nationally, whilst being the very best in the county at producing the least waste per household.

Largest increases in Recycling (2014/15)					
Authority	Region	Authority Type	Percentage Household waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2014/15 (EX NI 192)	Percentage Household waste sent for Recycling, Reuse, or Composting 2013/14 (EX NI 192)	Improvement (Percentage points)
South Bucks District Council	South east	Collection	50.7%	33.4%	17.3%
Ashford Borough Council	South east	Collection	55.3%	41.9%	13.4%
East Cambridgeshire District Council	Eastern	Collection	56.6%	45.5%	11.2%
Gravesham Borough Council	South east	Collection	34.2%	24.5%	9.7%
North Warwickshire Borough Council	W Midlands	Collection	48.7%	39.8%	8.9%
Middlesbrough Borough Council	North East	Unitary	36.3%	27.7%	8.6%
Lambeth LB	London	Collection	28.3%	21.1%	7.2%
Halton Borough Council	North West	Unitary	46.8%	39.8%	7.0%
Dudley MBC	W Midlands	Unitary	42.2%	35.7%	6.5%
Waverley Borough Council	South east	Collection	51.7%	45.2%	6.5%

19. While the new recycling contract is a key component in contributing to the continued reduction in the borough's carbon footprint, the council is aware that – following two straight years of impressive increases in recycling rates – the important next step is to consolidate this improved performance. As such, a Kent-wide "Recycle Now" awareness campaign was launched by the Kent Resource Partnership in December, which seeks to build upon these improved recycling figures with a targeted campaign focussing on metal and plastic items.



20. The campaign is designed to engage with, and inform, residents of the benefits of recycling these materials via existing local recycling services. By example, plastic bottles already account for 40% of all household plastic packaging waste – however not all residents are currently aware of the plastic

bottles, pots, tubs, and trays from around the home that can also be recycled. Residents will receive leaflets on plastic and metal recycling during early 2016.

Continually improving our own housing

21. The council constantly seeks to ensure that the housing our tenants enjoy is as efficient as possible – this keeps them up to date and reduces energy bills. To this end, over the last year the council was active in upgrading and improving our own housing, including –
 - a. Installing around 170 ‘A’ rated gas boilers and 9 ‘A’ rated oil boilers with Part L compliant controls such as thermostatic radiator valves and room thermostats.
 - b. As part of our affordable warmth programme (which focuses more towards off-gas properties) the council plans to gradually install electric storage heaters that are better designed to be more efficient with greater control coupled together with PV and a hot water optimiser. Due to recent cuts in feed in tariffs, officers were only able to install 2 of these systems. Nonetheless, the new storage heaters alone represent better savings and control over and above the original storage heaters installed. More widely, 56 homes received new high efficiency storage heaters.
 - c. The council’s insulation programme continues to improve the thermal insulation levels by increasing loft insulation depth and rectifying failed cavity wall insulation. This programme is primarily focusing on off-gas areas, but addresses those properties on gas when required. By the end of the year the council was on target to address 65 properties with cavity wall insulation, 63 properties with loft insulation and 13 hard to treat homes will have received external wall insulation.
 - d. One sheltered scheme received a new high efficiency gas boiler and three schemes received commercial sized PV arrays.

Our procurement procedures

22. Procurement is important to the Council’s environmental strategies and the well-being of the borough as a whole. “Green” or environmentally friendly products are not necessarily more expensive – while initially cheaper products may cost more in the long term when whole-life costs are taken into account.
23. In September the Cabinet approved new procurement guidance, in light of wider legislative developments and a comprehensive review audit during 2013 which made a number of recommendations. This refreshed guidance now includes additional sustainability measures, namely:
 - a. Measures to encourage smaller companies and local supplier to participate in the Council’s procurement processes – and in doing so reduce the carbon footprint of contractual arrangements. The rules have been redrawn with a focus on providing contracts to local firms.

- b. The Social Value Act now encourages councils to consider the environmental impact of purchasing decisions. Possible examples include purchase of 'low emission' vehicles and the use of low energy equipment. Councils have a certain amount of freedom to specify environmentally-friendly requirements, for example that harmful materials are not used.

C. Our Workforce

24. Officers try to minimise the use of vehicles when carrying out day-to-day council operations. More energy efficient biodiesel vehicles were commissioned for the new recycling contract, and officers have further reduced the miles they travel by car. The last full financial year saw a continued reduction of 10% overall in the miles travelled by the council's lease car fleet compared to the previous 12 months - with a reduction in the use of petrol cars by around 35%.
25. Over the last two years, 11 members of staff have taken advantage of the council's participation in the government-backed cycle to work scheme, making the switch from coming to work by car or other carbon-emitting transport to commuting by bike.

D. Our Future Plans for Ashford

Striving for quality place-making

26. The council seeks to ensure that any new development meets the quality standards – including environmental - both we and our residents expect. To this end the council's adopted Core Strategy sets challenging energy efficiency standards for new homes and employment buildings (policy CS10).
27. This adopted policy CS10 (sustainable design and construction), sets out guidance on how to meet required environmental performance standards for all new major developments within the borough. These are based upon the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH), a national accredited standard for key elements of design and construction which affect the sustainability of a new home. The CSH scheme covers nine environmental categories and uses a sustainability rating system indicated by 'stars', to communicate the overall sustainability performance of a dwelling. A home can achieve a sustainability rating from one (*) to six (*****) stars depending on the extent to which it has achieved the Code standards.
28. In October Cabinet endorsed a new Quality Monitoring approach for new housing development – further embracing the importance of good design and lasting place-making.
29. Over the last few years, the council has increased its design skills and shown a real determination to deliver better quality development and create better

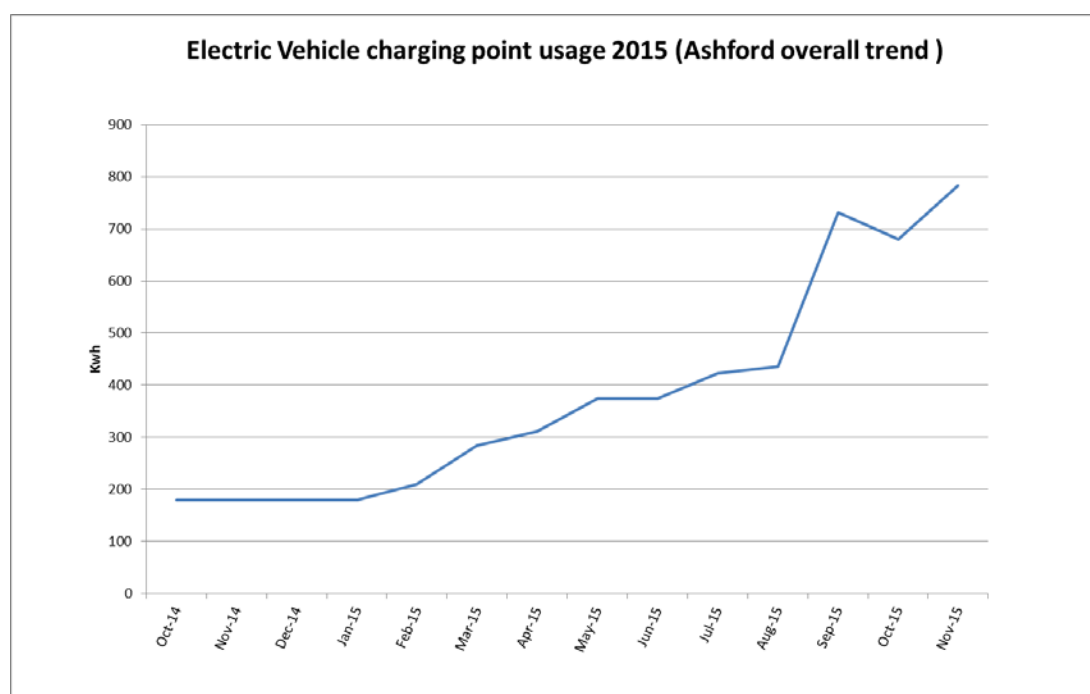
places. Efforts made locally to do this go well beyond the typical response of local government and include:

- a. Design Workshops for major developments for the last 15 years
 - b. Setting up the independent Ashford Design Panel
 - c. National recognition with a Government 'Charter mark'
 - d. Working with rural communities on Village Design Statements and design workshops
 - e. Comprehensive development briefs for key sites
 - f. National Design Coding pilot at Repton Park
 - g. Study visits to exemplar schemes
 - h. National and regional awards for masterplanning
 - i. Pioneering comprehensive space and parking design standards
 - j. Biennial 'Ashford Building and Construction Design Quality Awards'
30. The council's adopted Core Strategy emphasises the importance of delivering high quality development (policy CS9 and pages 50-55) as does the Chilmington Area Action Plan (CG1, CG22 for example) and the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD (paras 4.10 – 4.13). At Chilmington Green a new initiative – A Quality Agreement – has been signed by the Council and the developer team, giving even greater emphasis to achieving lasting design quality.
31. However, as expectations about design standards and the quality of environment people expect rise, so does the importance of spotting problems early before they need expensive rectification or are repeated elsewhere.
32. The Quality Monitoring approach will provide a more rigorous regime for checking quality, working with house-builders and their site managers to spot problems early so they can be corrected. This goes beyond the scope of the building control inspection of the building works themselves and encompasses checking the planning conditions – for example, on the materials used and the detailed design drawings (e.g. of window design). But it also includes the environment around the home – for example, the adequacy of tree pit construction and planting; the construction of recreational footways and cycleways.
33. The Quality Monitoring regime proposed will initially be trialled on three development projects deliberately chosen to cover the range of sizes of schemes which come before the council:
- Aldington, Calleywell Lane – 41 homes
Tenterden, TENT 1 site – 250 homes
Chilmington Green – up to 5,750 homes
34. For each site a bespoke monitoring system and short business plan will be set up.
35. The council is also helping to set up a Community Management Organisation for the Chilmington Green development, to ensure that this quality is maintained as the new community develops.

36. Similarly, any new social housing is finished to a good sustainability level. It should also be noted that the new 100-space dementia friendly accommodation constructed at Farrow Court was built to our lifetime living standards.

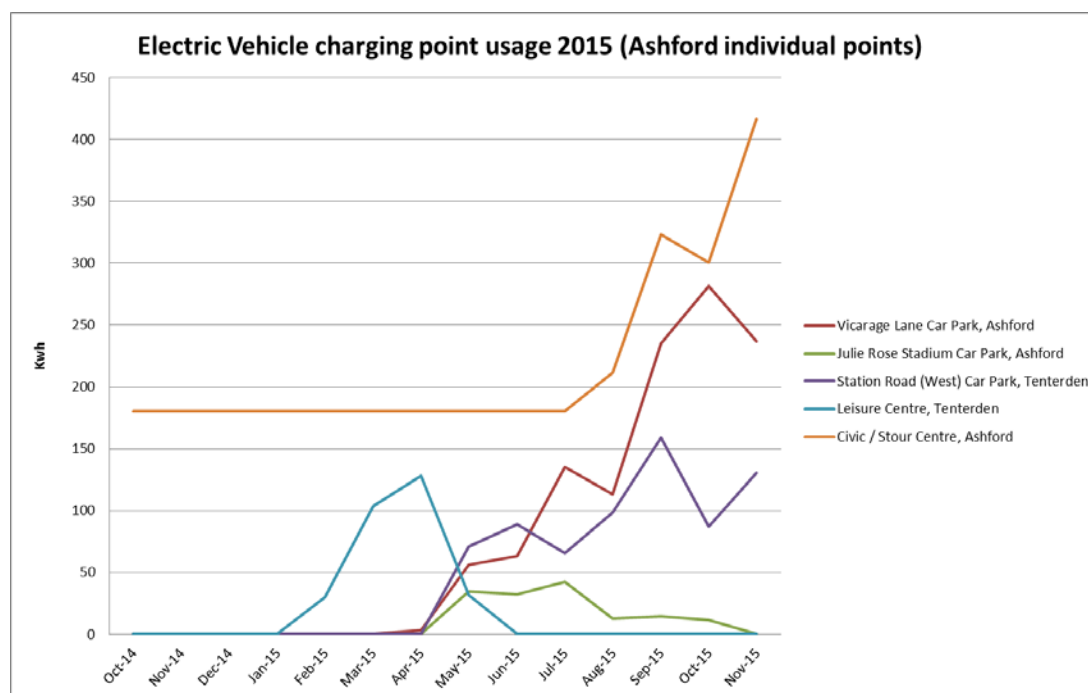
Electric vehicle charging

37. At the beginning of 2014 the council (in partnership with KCC) agreed to install a total of five double electric vehicle charging points within the borough¹, as part of a 43-strong network across Kent. This is part of a wider government-backed initiative to provide the infrastructure to support electric vehicles. Although there are currently only a small number of owners of electric vehicles, statistics and surveys suggest that this will increase over the coming years with a lot of interest from companies to produce the vehicles at a reasonable price – provided the necessary infrastructure is in place to run (and re-charge) the vehicles.
38. All of Ashford’s charging points are operational, except for the one at Tenterden Leisure Centre which – while initially working - has encountered issues since June. KCC and the operators are liaising to resolve the problem.
39. Since installation last year, Ashford’s charging point locations have resulted in 952 charging sessions by 47 unique drivers. A total of 5,352 kilowatts have been drawn to charge the vehicles – round a third of the total for all of Kent. The Civic / Stour Centre location has been the second most used in the county.
40. Initial usage data suggests an increasing trend for electric vehicles:



¹ Ashford Civic Centre, Ashford Vicarage Lane, Julie Rose Stadium, Tenterden Leisure Centre, Tenterden Station Road

41. A breakdown of usage for each charging point is also available:



42. Initial analysis suggests the following:

- Time of plugging in* – There are peaks between 7am-9am, 1pm-3pm and after 5pm
- Day of plugging in* – The majority of charging events occur Monday – Friday
- Plug in duration* – The median was 2 hours 28 minutes. Some charging does occur overnight (3%)
- Energy* – the median charging amount per session is 5.62 kWh.

43. The council will continue to monitor the take-up of electric vehicles to inform future discussions with partners and others on sustainable transport and infrastructure.

E. Our Leadership in the Community

The Five Year Corporate Plan – for Aspiration, Action and Achievement

44. In December Cabinet endorsed a new corporate plan. This refocuses the council's priorities to 2020 and sets the overall approach – including on sustainability – for the near future.
45. Building on the Quality Monitoring regime noted above, Priority 4 (Attractive Ashford) includes an aspiration to “*achieve an environment that creates higher standards of public space...to safeguard and conserve our local heritage and areas of outstanding landscape quality to ensure the very best attractive environment*”.

46. This priority lays out a number of areas of achievement for the future, including to:
 - a. Create a Landscape Action Team and implement higher maintenance standards
 - b. Bring forward a new green corridor action plan to improve presentation, signage, planting and better water quality
 - c. Develop a cycle town strategy and connections between green spaces via cycle and footpath links

Green Travel

47. In 2014 the council, with grant funding from KCC's Health Inequalities fund, extended the 'Walk to School' program in Ashford. The delivery partner (the KM Charity group) targeted primary schools considered to have specified health inequalities when compared with other local schools. The programme encourages primary aged children either to walk, cycle or travel to school in some other active way, to improve road awareness, encourage physical fitness and improve local air quality (through a reduction in often short car journeys).
48. The Ashford walk to school program has continued to be a very successful program. Three schools have walking buses and 13 schools participate in the programme overall. One school is set to receive an award at a presentation in Dartford in February 2016.

Conningbrook Lakes

49. In May Ashford's newest country park officially opened. Conningbrook Lakes, set on a picturesque stretch of the River Stour next to the Julie Rose Stadium, will provide a real boost – not only to the borough's leisure and recreation amenities – but also to local countryside conservation and the sustainable environment of the borough.
50. Conningbrook Lakes now provides a gateway for families, walkers and cyclists to explore the Stour Valley, and a site for water sports organised and supervised by local clubs and associations.
51. The park will be managed by a partnership involving the council, Ashford Leisure Trust, Kent Wildlife Trust and Mid Kent Fisheries. A Conservation Community Warden works with the Wildlife Trust to run tasks and events to highlight and improve the wildlife across the country park.

F. Our Decision-Making

52. The council recognises that we must work with other local authorities and public-sector partners to make the most of the opportunities presented by the sustainable agenda. To this end we signed up to Climate Local Kent in September 2012, a Local Government Association initiative to capture the

collective effort local government has provided on the issue. Annual reporting against this agreement is compiled by KCC².

53. In addition, Ashford Borough Council adopted the Kent Environment Strategy in 2010. This document, developed by Kent County Council, looks at the challenges that Kent faces in terms of the environment, health and the economy over the coming decades and aims to support economic growth whilst protecting and enhancing our natural and historic environment.
54. The Kent Environment Strategy was revised and updated following Kent-wide public consultation. The updated Strategy will be considered for formal adoption by Council Members later in 2016.
55. Although Ashford has historically been well-prepared in terms of planning for floods, the council is keen to ensure that its plans remain relevant and responsive to changing weather patterns – namely the potential for more heavy rainfall and persistent flooding.
56. A key element of this crucial work of ensuring the awareness of longer-term flood preparedness will be taken forward by a new Member working sub-group specifically for Flood Defence planning.
57. This working sub-group will engage with relevant external bodies, such as water companies, the Environment Agency, Kent County Council and Drainage Boards to determine collective solutions.

Conclusion and Aims for the Next 12 months

58. Good progress continues to be made towards the general ambitions set out in the Statement. The range of initiatives included within this report show the importance of a package of measures to tackle what is a complex and multifaceted area. It is clear, however, that energy efficiency measures undertaken over the last year – although small individual changes - have delivered significant aggregate reductions in the energy used by the council to provide its services.
59. Many of the initiatives already set in motion have begun to influence the overall sustainable impact of the borough. The uptake of electric vehicle charging has only increased since the installation of a network infrastructure across Ashford, while the new recycling service continues to provide improvements in the amount of material recycled rather than sent to landfill.
60. The commitments set out in both the council's new corporate plan and the enhanced Quality Monitoring regime demonstrate a commitment to high-quality environmental and sustainability standards across the wide range of council involvement in the borough. Building on these general ambitions, over the next year the council will seek to –

² <https://shareweb.kent.gov.uk/Documents/environment-and-planning/environment-and-climate-change/Climate%20Local%20Kent%20monitoring%202013.pdf>

- a. Further refine the efficiency of our own operations, namely more routine monitoring of gas usage.
- b. Consider the longer-term use and impact of electric vehicle charging in light of the developing trends
- c. Set up a working sub-group to consider Flood Defence planning
- d. Explore further the areas of achievement set out in the *Attractive Ashford* priority of the council's new corporate plan.
- e. Consider the revised Kent Environment Strategy for formal adoption
- f. Continue to supported the Ashford walk to school program to ensure the program continues to grow and develop across the borough.
- g. Combine the above with taking advantage of other opportunities as they arise.

Risk Assessment

61. N/A as this is a summary of individual projects which will all have been subject to their own appropriate risk assessments.

Equalities Impact Assessment

62. N/A as this is a summary of individual projects which will all have been subject to their own appropriate equalities assessments.

Portfolio Holder's Views

63. Ashford Borough Council takes its role in ensuring a sustainable future for the borough very seriously. This summary provides a comprehensive overview of the varied array of individual projects, initiatives and efficiency measures which provide an overall positive impact on the efficiency and sustainability of the council's operations and the borough overall.
64. I am pleased to see that good progress continues to be made, and I am encouraged at the ever-increasing uptake of electric vehicles across the borough and improved understanding of the council's own energy use – initiatives which were set in motion last year and which are now bearing fruit. The council will continue to focus on its new recycling service, leading to an improvement in the overall recycling rate.
65. Many of the projects are still ongoing, and I look forward to providing colleagues with further updates as these - and other initiatives - developed during the year.

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