

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	11 November 2020
Subject:	Response to the Environment and Climate Action Group's Report		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Environment		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. ECAG Report to LRF		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE.

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To adopt or otherwise the recommendations contained in the Environment and Climate Action Group (ECAG) report to the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) on how to best recover from the Covid 19 pandemic while taking on board wider environmental and climate change goals.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RECOMMEND** that:

- (1) the actions identified in section 7 are taken forward by the City Council as its response to the ECAG report.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) is a body set up under the Civil Contingency act 2004 that places a duty on public bodies to co-ordinate when planning a recovery from a major event. The Local Recovery Group (LRG) plans the recovery post event and, in this instance, invited the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) to draw up proposals on how to manage the recovery taking on board wider Climate Change and Environmental issues.
- 3.2 The ECAG report includes recommendations to public authorities to assist them in making their own decisions on how to take the recovery forward.
- 3.3 At the height of the Covid 19 lockdown there was serious disruption to the lives of everyone in Gloucestershire. However, there were some positive outcomes that

were well documented. Traffic reduced by up to 80%, there was a significant increase in active travel such as walking and cycling, parks and open spaces were full, people made more food from scratch often bought from local neighbourhood shops and began to use their gardens more for amenity and growing produce. These are real benefits that public health officials and those with an interest in the environment have been promoting for many years.

- 3.4 Taking on board the above the LRG recognised that Covid 19 presented a unique opportunity for those with an interest in climate change and environmental issues to take a strong lead and not just return to what we had before but to 'build back better'. As such the LNP was commissioned to draw together the relevant stakeholders in the county and come up with an action plan. It set up the ECAG and within a very short time frame it was meeting and quickly began to formulate the report. It is worth noting that the city council was instrumental recognising the need for a climate change/environmental response and was a key stakeholder in the ECAG.
- 3.5 The report was published in August 2020 and contains a lot of data and information drawn from national and local sources and importantly puts forward 21 recommendations. These are categorised by type and also grouped around 5 headings. This paper will look at each of the 21 recommendations and suggest how the city council should respond.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

- 4.1 The report is based on the 'build back better' concept. This understands that a return to the status quo is not actually desirable and for the vast majority of the population is not wanted. Most people enjoyed the sense of community, clean air and quiet streets, all of which address social value. The report supports these concepts

5.0 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 The ECAG report is all about how the county can 'build back better' post Covid ensuring that environmental and climate change issues are to fore. This report sees how best the city council can take forward the recommendations and therefore has clear beneficial environmental implications.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 Do nothing. This would be against the reported wishes of the wider population and will ultimately lead to a more degraded environment and economy.
- 6.2 We could go further than the recommendations suggest. This may get some support but there are risks to the general running of the economy and the speed of change may not be acceptable to some parts of the population.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 As mentioned, the ECAG report has in total 21 recommendations. This report will go through each one suggesting how the city council should respond. The recommendations are grouped into 5 headings underlined in the sections below.

Building a low-carbon, resilient economy

- 7.2 Recommendation 1: Do not separate the 'green' from the 'economy' in decision making
- 7.3 Environmental implications along with social value and other difficult to quantify benefits have long been a component of report writing and therefore decision making at Gloucester. However, to properly work it needs to be more than a section in council a report. To take this forward, as part of climate change agenda we made a commitment to value environmental worth as part of 'Social Value' when letting large contracts. Thus, if a company is offering environmental benefits as well as delivering on the core of the contract then they will score additional points for the social value element. In terms of the day to day decisions the most important aspect is to ensure that the staff and members at the city council are aware of the issues and can act accordingly when they make day to day decisions. To this end we are committed to training staff to understand the climate and wider environmental impacts of their jobs. While work started on this, Covid has limited the roll out but it is the intention to continue the process to include managers and all staff over the coming months. Climate Change is also part of the Member training package for new councillors. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.
- 7.4 Recommendation 2: Get ready to accept funding for housing retrofit from central government.
- 7.5 There have been numerous announcements from government over the past few months concerning retrofit funding. Roughly a third of emissions are from households and while new build can be very efficient the real challenge is to make existing stock better insulated, and heated/lit more effectively. To date the main announcement has been the Green Homes Grant (GHG) - one for private households and one for social housing stock. The city council did work with Gloucester City Homes (GCH) to submit a bid for the latter but because their housing stock was too 'efficient' they did not qualify. With regard the private homes proposal we have joined with other Gloucestershire local authorities and funded Severn Wye Energy Agency to help promote and deliver this scheme. Clearly this is an active area and the city council will need to be alive to what grants are forthcoming especially given the often-short time frame for bid submission. There is also an economic development component that should not be over-looked. We do not want retrofitting work to go out of county or even out of city. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council
- 7.6 Recommendation 3: Develop domestic renewable energy generation and improve energy measures for the fuel poor.

- 7.7 This recommendation is like the previous one in that delivery will largely be through government funded schemes and incentives. We will continue to support Severn and Wye Energy agency in delivering the warm and well scheme and with partners such as GCH seek out funding opportunities to deliver warm, healthy and efficient homes for those in most need. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.
- 7.8 Recommendation 4: Promote Community Engagement in, and ownership of, carbon reductions solutions, particularly renewable energy generation, alongside mainstream public sector, and commercial investment.
- 7.9 Gloucester has a very active community sector with a lot of interest around tree planting which we will continue to support. We also have a group setting up a community tree nursery on city council owned land. This will provide locally sourced young trees for planting in Gloucester. In terms of community energy, we had an early pilot in the form of the solar array on the City Works building in Alfred street. Although local energy collectives are challenging to get off the ground we will support and work with any group that comes forward. With regard our own estate we have employed a consultant to see how we can best make the most of our asset to generate renewable energy. The findings of the consultant will be central to the city council's climate change strategy. It is considered therefore that with the above caveat this recommendation is supported by the city council.
- 7.10 Recommendation 5: Accelerate the Heat Network Scoping Report
- 7.11 Heat networks preferably using low carbon technologies will have a role to play in driving down the emissions of Gloucester over the coming years and decades. They are long term, capital-intensive, expensive operations that will take many years to deliver. Notwithstanding this the county council secured funding for a high-level feasibility study for Gloucester and the city council has supported their work. It is hoped that this work can be taken to its second phase though will require further support from BEIS if this is to happen. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.

Changes in how we get around

- 7.12 Recommendation 6: Invest in infrastructure to support active travel and the decarbonisation of transport
- 7.13 Perhaps the most obvious change in the way people experienced lock down was how the private car and other vehicles did not dominate their lives. Streets were quiet, people walked and cycled and indeed in surveys, many people have expressed a desire to walk and cycle more than before the pandemic. Travel and transport are generally a county function and certainly we would expect them to take a lead on some of the quite detailed proposals put forward. The city council's role will largely be of support and where appropriate through the development control process, where for example, we will require cycle and other active travel initiatives to support planning applications. It is considered therefore that with the above caveats this recommendation is supported by the city council.

- 7.14 Recommendation 7: Support more carbon intensive sectors such as Gloucestershire Airport to account for, publish and actively work towards reducing the environmental cost of their activities.
- 7.15 It is a basic principle of sustainable development that business, organisations and individuals should pay the real cost of their activities. At the heart of the climate and other environmental crises' is that destruction of the environment and inevitably people's well being is not included in the calculation of buying and selling goods and services. Increasingly however, this cost is being incorporated into the equation. For example, the 'fuel price escalator' brought in in 1993 as a tax on fuel so the damage to people's health through pollution could be accounted for. Aircraft activity in part because the international nature of the industry and a perception that it is somehow different has always escaped such taxes and as such there is no VAT or fuel tax levied on aviation fuel. The report recognises this and because the owning authorities receive little in revenue from the airport it has led to the suggestion that the airport users should give a financial contribution to help offset the cost their environmental impact. The money could then be used on Carbon sequestration projects or addressing fuel poverty.
- 7.16 As joint owner of the airport this recommendation will need to be addressed by the city council in partnership with Cheltenham borough council and Gloucestershire Airport Limited (GAL). It is proposed therefore the 2 owning authorities approach GAL to look at options for reducing their carbon emissions and work together to review the airport's green policy. Of course, the airport is not alone in this respect and the city council will work with other large carbon heavy operations in order to address their carbon emissions. It is considered therefore that this recommendation should be supported in principle by the city council, but any carbon offsetting taken forward to be as a voluntary scheme in conjunction with reduction of CO2 emissions from ground-based operations. Any such scheme may be appropriate for other high emitting industries.
- 7.17 Recommendation 8: Local Transport Plan review is consistent with priorities for combatting ecological, climate and Covid emergencies.
- 7.18 The Local Transport Plan (LTP) is the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council. However, the city council as a stakeholder will play an active role during the consultation stages. The report calls for the LTP to have a clear carbon budget and reduction pathway. While we would reserve the right to comment on individual schemes we would broadly support the recommendation. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported in principle by the city council.
- 7.19 Recommendation 9: Encourage innovation in passenger transport, working with large employers/employment centres to maximise opportunities for modal shift.
- 7.20 Again as a transport-based recommendation this will largely be down to the county council. We would support the initiatives suggested and will assist if appropriate with the county to help them deliver. We would support any enhanced role for the Gloucester Transport Hub. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.

Blue and green spaces for a healthy society, thriving wildlife and a resilient economy

- 7.21 Recommendation 10 & 11: Invest in new and existing green spaces for people and nature, to at least meet and ideally exceed the accessible natural greens space standards (ANGSt) by 2030, and through the application of Building With Nature standards to ensure delivery of high quality green infrastructure in all new developments.
- 7.22 One of the more interesting developments during the pandemic has been people's use and appreciation of open spaces. Gloucester has a fine array of public parks and open spaces and indeed received some publicity over the summer being identified as one of the greenest cities in the UK. As well as the more formal open spaces we have Robinswood hill, Alney island and other semi-natural spaces managed for wildlife as well as for amenity value. With the river, docks, and canal we are also blessed with many accessible blue spaces. In the current financial climate, we will need to innovate in order to invest in these spaces, indeed the city council has done so in the past with numerous grants including recently a share of the 1.4 million urban greening project. Adoption of ANGSt standards (distance from home to a wildlife resource) while an ambition will be almost impossible to achieve in some of the older Victorian parts of Gloucester where whole neighbourhoods would have to be bulldozed to make way for green space. However, elsewhere in the city we fulfil the criteria and will ensure that new development contains appropriate open and semi natural green space. Building with Nature is incorporated into the JCS review and City Plan. It is considered therefore with the caveat around achieving ANGSt standards that these recommendations are supported by the city council.
- 7.23 Recommendation 12: Develop a County-wide approach to biodiversity net gain and visitor pressure mitigation.
- 7.24 Biodiversity net gain where developers offset the negative impact of their development through positive interventions elsewhere is seen as a sensible way forward, where developers benefit from reduced delays and nature benefits from increased funding. The city council and other authorities in the county already have a scheme in place to compensate for newt habitat lost through development that although only in place a year has seen some notable successes. This is seen as a positive way forward and is being supported through the JCS and City Plan. To enable a level playing field across the county there is an understanding that some sort of co-ordination between authorities is required. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council
- 7.25 Recommendation 13: Accelerate significant carbon sequestration activity e.g. woodland and wetland creation, whilst maximising co-benefits for people, nature, and the economy.
- 7.26 Tree planting has long been a staple, largely community-based activity in Gloucester dating back to the free tree scheme introduced in the 1990s to the more recent member tree planting scheme. Large scale tree planting within Gloucester is, however, limited so we will need to work with partners in other authorities in particular the county council and organisations such as Gloucestershire Wildlife

Trust (GWT) to bring about significant increased woodland cover. The same can be said for wetland creation. We also support the Natural Capital Map in guiding investment to the most appropriate site. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.

- 7.27 Recommendation 14: Secure the Seven Vale as a Regional Park, investing in access to blue and green space for current and future residents of Gloucestershire's largest conurbations, maximising co-benefits for people, nature, and the economy.
- 7.28 The idea for a Regional Park along the washlands of the River Severn grew out of the city council's severnside countryside management project a few years ago and is part of the JCS Green Infrastructure Strategy. Of late it has received attention from a number stakeholders and 2 small working groups have been set up one of which a Gloucester officer sits on. Given the many benefits to wildlife, local economy, and landscape we will continue to support the proposal and work with key stakeholders to identify funding streams to ensure the park will have a long term financially secure future. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.

Food Farming and the Rural Economy

- 7.29 Recommendation 15: Collaborate with public health, economic development, and environment partners to create and resource a Gloucestershire Food strategy that ensures the population of Gloucestershire is fed sustainably, affordably, and securely and that nutritious food is accessible to all.
- 7.30 This will be largely be driven by partners but clearly Covid has exposed the risk of poor diet to overall health and well-being. Our community development team will continue to support partners such as the Gateway Trust as they deliver on the ground benefits of affordable nutritious food. The pandemic led to a surge in interest in growing food and requests for new allotments. To address this, we are looking at a new allotment site in the Netheridge area and we continue to negotiate allotments as part of large developments. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council
- 7.31 Recommendation 16: Immediately roll out Dynamic Procurement Systems.
- 7.32 Local authorities are large procurers of services and are generally moving towards processes where other factors other than cost are built into the purchasing process (see recommendation 1 above). Gloucester too is moving this way and we will work with county colleagues on taking this component forward. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.
- 7.33 Recommendation 17: Develop support for farmers to access facilitation, advice, and support through a co-designed platform to improve the economic and ecological resilience of their activities in the face of rapidly changing regulation and the impacts of climate change.
- 7.34 Only a modest amount of farming is carried out within the city. While supporting the principle there is little the city council can do other than support the LEP and others

to deliver on the recommendation. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.

Mainstreaming the environment and climate through strong leadership and good governance.

- 7.35 Recommendation 18: Adopt a joined-up, systems-thinking approach to decision making in the county, which balances climate change mitigation with the principle of social justice, to maximise the economic, environmental, and social benefits.
- 7.36 This is similar to recommendation 1 and requires that organizations such as the city council do not pursue one goal at the expense of climate or wider environment. As for recommendation 1 we will include social and environmental value in the procurement process, ensure that reports address social and environmental concerns and that staff and members are trained in climate and environmental issues. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.
- 7.37 Recommendation 19: Ensuring strategic development plans are both climate and environment led.
- 7.38 Both the City Plan and the JCS review have climate change as their over-riding principle. Location and form of development will be key to delivering a low carbon economy as not only will new development be around for many years to come but technologies and building practices incorporated into new build will help drive down prices for the existing building stock. As mentioned for recommendation 11 the Building with Nature Standard will be promoted as a policy within the JCS and City Plan. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council
- 7.30 Recommendation 20: Establish a Gloucestershire Natural Capital Investment Trust to lever multiple funding streams to enhance biodiversity, sequester carbon, reduce flood risk, and increase access to green space.
- 7.31 Clearly funding will be a major issue taking this agenda forward. As the report makes clear local authorities and other organisations will be suffering from a drop in income and as such a Natural Capital Investment Trust is a way of leveraging in further income to help deliver climate and wider environmental goals. Earlier this year all Gloucestershire local authorities agreed to fund a county wide climate co-ordinator to be hosted by the city council. It envisaged that this appointment could help deliver on this recommendation. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council
- 7.32 Recommendation 21: Develop a suite of indicators for Gloucestershire to measure and publicly support progress towards the achievement of the county's shared climate and environmental goals.
- 7.33 Measuring progress will be fundamental to achieving success. Any indicators will need to be agreed by stakeholders across the county and this work would fit well with the new county co-ordinators role. It is suggested that this is how it is taken forward to be adopted by the various stakeholders at a later date. It is considered therefore that this recommendation is supported by the city council.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 8.1 The ECAG report was a significant piece of work with 21 detailed recommendations being put forward. Responses to some of the recommendations are already in train others will require existing work to be re-focussed or even re-thinking. All of them require a degree of co-ordination between the various organisations and stakeholders within Gloucestershire and if District and County Council partners agree it is something that could form the part of the work plan for the new county coordinator post soon to be employed by the city council but working on a county wide remit. Delivery of the recommendations will be a long-term goal and it is envisaged that take up of the recommendations along with reporting on the indicators will monitored on an annual basis. An annual review will also allow re-appraisal of the recommendations as what deemed a priority will inevitably change over time. To conclude the city council is able to respond to the ECAG report in a positive manner and broadly supports the recommendations put forward, many of which will be taken forward in the forthcoming climate change strategy.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Most of the recommendations are in train or will need existing work to be re-focused. Commitments such as the county co-ordinator have already been made. Any costs associated with the recommendations will need to be absorbed by the current climate change budget allocated earlier on in the year. Many of the proposals are dependant on external funding which by its nature will not impact on budgets but also may not materialize.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 The Civil Contingencies Act 2014 and related regulations set out the broad framework for preparing for and responding to civil emergencies. The Act required the establishment of Local Resilience Forums; multi-agency partnerships responsible for identifying and planning for local civil resilience risks and coordinating recovery activity. The LRF is not a legal entity and does not have any decision making powers meaning that each council within the LRF is responsible for the recovery process in its area.
- 10.2 This report does not have any specific legal implications but there will be legal implications relating to a number of the recommendations. Officers are advised to consult with One Legal at the earliest opportunity so that timely legal advice can be given.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

11.1

Risk	Impact	Level of impact	Likelihood of impact	Mitigating measures
Finance not available to deliver outcomes	Projects may not come forward. Carbon and wider env benefits potentially not realised	2	2	Work with partners to bring in external finance
Not enough officer resource to deliver outcomes	Projects may not come forward. Carbon and wider env benefits potentially not realised	2	2	Prioritize work to ensure at least some outcomes are realised
Partners do not deliver intended outcomes	Projects may not come forward. Carbon and wider env benefits potentially not realised	2	2	Expectation management over extent of potential outcomes. Work closely with partners
Grants and other support are not available as expected	Projects may not come forward. Carbon and wider env benefits potentially not realised	2	3	Be clear as to expectations and work closely with funders
Opportunities	Impact	Level of Impact	Likelihood of impact	Maximising measures
Co-benefits of Carbon management/adaption projects	Increased amenity and health benefits	3	3	Ensure that co-benefits are integral to projects
Better working with neighbouring authorities/County	Greater aggregate impact	3	2	Potential for a countywide climate co-ordinator to help deliver

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

12.1 No safeguarding or related issues were identified during the Screening stage.

12.2 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact; therefore, a full PIA was not required.

13.0 Community Safety Implications

13.1 Climate change will have a negative impact on community safety as unpredictable weather patterns in the form heat waves and floods become the norm. The report understands this, and the recommendations go some way to try and address the root cause through mitigation and resilience measures

14.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

14.1 None

Background Documents: Environment and Climate Action Group Actions Report