



Northumberland County Council

CABINET

DATE: 10TH OCTOBER 2023

Northumberland County Council - Environmental Policy Statement

Report of: Councillor Sanderson, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change.

Lead Officer: Simon Neilson, Executive Director of Place and Regeneration

1. Purpose of Report

To propose the adoption of an overarching Environmental Policy Statement by Northumberland County Council to demonstrate the high priority being given by the Council to environmental matters, such as Climate Change, Nature Recovery & Biodiversity, Heat and Renewable Energy, Sustainable Waste Management, Travel and Transport, Water Quality, Parks & Green Spaces and Safeguarding Public Health. The Environmental Policy Statement covers the 4-year period from 2023/24 to 2026/27, after which time it will be reviewed and updated. It will clearly identify and communicate how the diverse range of environmental policy and service delivery activities undertaken by the Council are all part of its commitment to maintain, protect and enhance the environment. It is intended that the Environmental Policy Statement will then be used to help support improved public awareness, engagement and active participation on these important environmental matters.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

A) Maintain its commitment to tackling climate change and to the development of a new Climate Change Action Plan which will set out the actions, work programme and targets that will be progressed over the period 2024 to 2026.

B) Adopt the Environmental Policy Statement and continuously strive to meet the on-going commitments contained within the statement (see **Appendix A**) and the actions and targets (see **Appendix B**) to this report.

C) Widely communicate and publicise the Environment Policy Statement to help raise public awareness, engagement and active participation on environmental matters across the county.

D) Note the 'Potential Areas of Additional Environmental Activity' outlined in section 5.4 of this report. It is intended that these additional areas of activity will be subject to further development and, where appropriate, any associated budget implications will be considered as part of this year's MTFP budget setting process.

3. Link to Corporate Plan

Maintaining, protecting and enhancing the high-quality environment of the county is essential to support the delivery of the Council's three key corporate priorities, as set out below:

- **Driving Economic Growth** – A high quality environment is a key factor in supporting sustainable economic growth and attracting investment into the county. Green jobs, infrastructure, tourism, agriculture and forestry are all key sectors of the county's growing economy.
- **Achieving Value For Money** – The Council is committed to lead by example and continuously improve the environmental sustainability and value for money of its buildings, services, activities, and practices including its commissioning and procurement processes.
- **Tackling Inequalities** – The Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan seeks to ensure a just transition to a low-carbon economy. Passing on a healthy, clean and sustainable environment to future generations is essential if we are to ensure that Northumberland remains a 'Land of Great Opportunities' for all.

4. Key Issues

The Council recognises it has a key role to play in tackling environmental issues and that this work is critical to the successful achievement of its corporate objectives and that businesses, residents and other stakeholders all have an active role to play. However, it is considered that there is a need to strengthen the work being undertaken by the Council on the environment and to improve how the Council communicates and presents the work it is undertaking on environmental issues to increase the level of public awareness, engagement and active participation.

The adoption of an overarching Environment Policy Statement by the Council will help to strengthen and more clearly communicate the Council's commitment to maintain, protect and enhance the environment.

The Environmental Policy Statement will need to be widely publicised to help raise awareness, engagement and active participation on environmental matters.

5. Background

The council is committed to protecting and enhancing the environment for the benefit of everyone, whether this is dealing with littering and fly tipping, to creating more green spaces and woodlands, to tackling major societal issues such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity; the Council is working hard to ensure the county's stunning natural and built resources are protected and enhanced in the future. With plans to refresh and update the Council's Climate Change Action Plan to build on the successful work undertaken since it declared a climate emergency back in 2019, as well as details of our work to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of species and habitats in the county both due to be reported to Cabinet in November 2023, it is clear that the council remains dedicated to its role in protecting and enhancing the local environment.

However, whilst a great deal of successful work to tackle environmental issues has been undertaken, there is still a lot to be done to create a future environment that works for everyone across the county. The Council wants to strengthen the work being undertaken on the environment and wants as many individuals, organisations and communities as possible to play their part, however big or small. To achieve these aims it is necessary to improve public awareness, engagement and the level of active participation on environmental matters.

5.1 Environmental Policy Statement

This report proposes the adoption of an overarching Environment Policy Statement by the Council to help strengthen the Council's work on the environment and to support communications activity to improve public awareness, engagement and participation levels. The statement sets out a series of key commitments that the Council will make in respect of its duties and responsibilities for the environment which are grouped under themed headings. It also highlights some of the key actions and targets it will deliver over the next 4 years in support of these commitments.

The proposed Environmental Policy Statement and commitments is attached as **Appendix A** to this report with some of the key actions and targets highlighted in **Appendix B**.

5.2 Financial Commitment to Environmental Issues

The Council has already allocated over £62.825m of capital investment in its MTFP 2023/24 to 2026/27 towards the delivery of a wide range of projects and programmes that act to protect and enhance the environment and/or contribute to climate change targets (see table 1 below). This significant level of investment demonstrates the priority being given by the Council to maintain, protect and enhance the environment and improve local environmental services. The Council intends to consider additional

capital funding allocations to support environmental projects and programmes as part of its MTFP budget setting process.

Project Title	Gross Budget	External Funding	NCC Funding
Blyth to Bebside Cycle Corridor	£6,699,600	£4,578,720	£2,120,880
Great Northumberland Forest	£1,119,737	£1,119,737	-
Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure	£6,326,244	£3,462,244	£2,864,000
Housing Revenue Account – Energy Efficiency	£1,000,000	-	£1,000,000
Parks Enhancement and QEII Commemoration Programme	£520,175	-	£520,175
County Hall Solar PV	£98,939	-	£98,939
County Hall Solar Car Port	£2,700,000	£1,189,568	£1,510,432
Climate Change Capital Fund	£2,000,000	-	£2,000,000
Electric Vehicle Charger Installation	£400,000	£200,000	£200,000
Newcastle Northumberland Railway Line	£37,473,239	£14,599,000	£22,874,239
Public Toilets Improvement Programme	£1,109,057	-	£1,109,057
Lynemouth Bay Remediation	£3,379,000	£500,000	£2,829,000
Total	£62,825,991	£25,649,269	£37,126,722

5.3 Key Areas of Environmental Activity

To support awareness raising and engagement activity the following section of this report highlights the key areas of activity already being progressed on the environment by the Council over the next two years that have a high public profile and potential for broader engagement activity and/or active participation.

5.3.1 Engagement and partnership activity

Northumberland Environment and Climate Fund

The first round of the fund was oversubscribed following its launch in May 2022, with over 40 applications being received and the full £50,000 worth of funding was awarded to 25 successful applicants. These projects support the council's Climate Change Action Plan and demonstrate longevity as well as a commitment to engaging with the wider community. It is intended to launch an expanded scheme in October this year that will include other environmental priorities and the fund will be increased by 10% to enable more schemes to be supported.

Free tree scheme

Offers every household the opportunity to obtain and plant a tree as part of the Council's commitment to tackling climate change, with the scheme now entering its 4th year of operation. A further 15,000 trees are due to be given out to residents, schools and community groups in October and December this year for planting in gardens, school grounds and other green spaces

Love Northumberland Awards

'LOVE Northumberland – caring for our county' is a campaign that aims to promote the work of the council and its partners in preserving and improving the environment in the county, celebrating community spirit and promoting county pride. It's aimed at getting everyone in Northumberland involved in keeping the county clean and green. Northumberland is known for its breathtaking scenery and wide open spaces but it also has a reputation for its environmental quality.

The aims of the campaign are to:

- promote the work of the council and its partners in keeping Northumberland beautiful for residents and tourists
- encourage more people to report environmental problems and get involved in work to protect our public spaces
- raise awareness of environmental issues
- promote our key messages on the environment to help us meet targets
- create a sense of joint ownership around LOVE Northumberland issues

The campaign is in its 12th year and plans for the next annual awards event in summer 2024 to celebrate all that is great about community environmental work in the county are already being developed and will be widely publicised.

Love Parks Week

Each year the Council participates in the national initiative led by Keep Britain Tidy, which celebrates parks, green spaces, and the dedicated volunteers and workers that look after them all year round. The Council will continue to use this initiative to promote parks as vibrant, living spaces that bring communities together and provide opportunities to connect with nature in the heart of our towns and neighbourhoods – to ensure that these spaces remain cherished, accessible places for all to enjoy.

Love It Like It's Yours – Visitor Management Campaign

This is an annual campaign led by NCC with a broad range of partner organisations as part of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan. The campaign runs each summer and aims to promote a warm welcome to visitors to the county whilst also encouraging responsible behaviours that respect local communities and safeguard wildlife and the environment. The Council will continue to work with partners to ensure that we create an environment in Northumberland for tourism and the visitor economy to develop and flourish sustainably, maximising benefits and combating negative impacts, for the benefit of local communities, businesses, visitors and the natural environment.

Climate Change Website

The Council has developed a new NCC 'stand alone' climate change website specifically covering all things climate change. This is due to be launched imminently, which will be the platform for information on activities, information, how to get involved, schemes that are running etc. The URL for the web site is **netzero.northumberland.gov.uk** and will be widely publicised and promoted.

Parish and Town Council Climate Change Toolkit

This is a Toolkit to support Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs) to develop and implement a climate change action plan for their local area. The Council will continue to promote, encourage and support T&PCs in this work.

Community Climate Champions

Provides community groups with the knowledge, training and toolkits necessary to champion climate and environmental activities within their communities. It also provides a network across the county for those involved to share ideas, support each other and make connections. It also provides a two-way conversation with the Council, which is invaluable to both the Climate Team and the groups involved. The Council will look to grow and develop the network of community climate champions across the county.

Verge maintenance

The Council is seeking to improve the biodiversity of verges working with local wildlife groups, Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) and Town and Parish Councils to identify those sections of verge that have high ecological value and where effective alternative maintenance regimes can be considered, without compromising road safety or adversely affecting the efficiency and carbon footprint of the verge cutting service. It is therefore intended that more verges will be managed in this way, where it is both safe and efficient to do so.

Waste Education & Awareness Raising

To support improved recycling activity, we intend to build on the existing engagement and awareness raising activities outlined below:

- Advice & guidance to schools, attendance at community events to promote waste minimisation, reduce, reuse, and recycling activities.
- Provision of information and advice on recycling services through bin stickers, leaflets, NCC web-page, social media, press releases etc.
- Public tours at West Sleekburn Materials Recycling Facility to showcase the scale and complexity of the recycling activity in the county and promote active participation.
- Participation in national campaigns – Love Food Hate Waste; Compost Week to encourage residents to get involved and do their bit for the environment.

Northumberland Schools Sustainability Network (NSSN)

This is a regional branch of the UKSSN. The first branch to be facilitated and organised by a council in the UK. It brings together teachers who have an interest in climate and environmental education to share ideas and support each other. We are looking to grow the network next year to host an online meeting once every half term around related topics. We will also look to establish and grow the student-led side of the network.

Northumberland Climate Change and Sustainability Schools Resource Pack

NCC has been working with the Ministry of Eco Education to create a Northumberland focused resource pack for teachers to support teaching issues relating to climate change and sustainability with a keen focus on how this affects our local area, our communities, and our environment. The Council will officially launch

the resource pack in September 2023 and has had input from stakeholders across Northumberland working within the environmental sector.

Youth Voice event

This event will bring together secondary school students for a day in the Cabinet Chambers in October 2023, to capture the youth voice on climate and environment. This event is part of the wider commitment of the climate team to capture the voices of our communities and inform the next climate action plan.

Transport behavioural change activity

The following areas of activity are undertaken by the Council on transport behavioral change and community activity:

- NCC continue to support and fund school travel plan engagement via Modeshift STARS across Northumberland schools. In July this year Stannington First school reached the National finals of the Modeshift STARS awards, gaining recognition from the Bikeability Trust.
- We continue to fund ride leader training in a number of Northumberland schools, allowing staff and pupils to use cycles to support curriculum activities, and active journeys to and from school, both inside and outside of curriculum time.
- Our cycle libraries continue to allow schools and community groups free access and extended loan periods of cycles. For Autumn 2023 NCC will launch cycle libraries accessible for residents seeking further educational and employment opportunities, again for extended loan periods.
- In Autumn 2023 NCC will launch a 2nd cargo cycle project in Berwick, allowing community groups, schools and businesses access to a cargo cycle to transport goods and equipment sustainably within the town.
- This year Northumberland County Council will fund up to 100 free cycle training places for adults including complete beginner sessions, group rides and E-Bike cycling experiences.
- The Big Northumberland Gear Change campaign will continue to promote more walking and cycling across Northumberland.
- The emerging visitor travel strategy for the Northumberland Coast AONB aims to achieve modal shift away from private car use by visitors to the coast. The AONB team are investigating capital funding to implement the strategy.

Events and Shows

The climate team has been attending events held across the County that have environmental or climate change focuses. Over 2022, the team attended 37 engagement events including the County Show, Q&A events, local shows and much more. In 2023, the team has attended 18 events so far, and it is intended that continued participation will remain an important part of our awareness-raising activity.

Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership

The Council hosts the AONB Staff Team of five staff who are responsible for the preparation, review and implementation of the Council's statutory AONB

Management Plan. Current activities being undertaken by the AONB Partnership include:

- Prepare, review and implement the statutory AONB Management Plan
- Provide advice to planning, highways, neighbourhoods and other service areas to ensure NCCs statutory duty to conserve and enhance is met
- Run the Coast Care Volunteering Initiative which engages 140 volunteers (see section 5.3.2 below).
- Coastlands project bid submitted for a £4.5m scheme in the south of the AONB
- Run the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme which will see £650,000 worth of projects delivered on farms before March 2025.
- Deliver other projects and workstreams that contribute to Defra priorities and deliver the AONB Management Plan

North Pennines AONB Partnership

Northumberland, Durham and Cumbria all support the North Pennines AONB Partnership. Steered by its Management Plan, The Partnership leads an array of large-scale projects across the North Pennines to conserve and enhance the natural and historic landscape including peatland restoration, a range of geographically based schemes including the Allen Valleys Landscape Partnership and the Farming in Protected Landscapes grant scheme.

Berwickshire and Northumberland Coast Marine Nature Partnership

The Berwickshire and Northumberland Coast Marine Nature Partnership is a partnership of almost thirty authorities with a shared responsibility for managing the eleven inshore designated nature conservation sites between Fast Castle Head and the River Tyne. Northumberland County Council has hosted the Partnership's Project Officer since its inception in 1999 and contributes £9500 annually to the Partnership's budget. As well as providing technical support to member organisations, the Project Officer also runs 'citizen science' projects for local people to participate in, such as monitoring Eider duck populations and carrying out surveys of marine life.

5.3.2 Volunteering Opportunities

Coast Care

Coast Care is a volunteering initiative in the Northumberland Coast AONB. Over 140 volunteers are registered with the Council (as the AONB host body) and carry out litter picking, habitat management, wildlife surveying and practical conservation/access tasks in and around the AONB. Coast Care volunteers support the Council's '*Space for Shorebirds*' scheme and provide path rangers for the England/Northumberland Coast Path/St. Cuthbert's Way and Parish Path Rangers in four parishes. Coast Care undertakes work on Council owned land with support from NCC's Neighbourhood Service staff. Coast Care is not funded through the core grant.

Community litter picking champions

The Council will continue to support the development of litter picking groups across the County to undertake community litter picking activity within our towns, villages,

parks and green spaces. Details of how to organise or get involved in community litter picks are posted on NCC's web page at <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Highways/Street.aspx> and NCC's Neighbourhood Service staff can provide advice and equipment to support this activity.

'Friends Groups'

Primarily involved in parks and green spaces, with active participation in grounds maintenance activity within the parks, events programmes and improvement schemes. We will continue to support existing and encourage the development of new 'Friends Groups' to get more involved in the care of their local parks and green spaces.

Tree planting

Tree planting within parks improvement projects will include where possible involvement of school/community groups etc. Re-stocking activity following Storm Arwen will also be used to facilitate community involvement where possible.

Public Rights of Way (PRoW) Maintenance

Most volunteering activities currently involve vegetation clearance along PRoW. Broadening the scope to cover more construction tasks such as path/stile maintenance would require additional training and supervision resources/capacity.

Tree wardens

NCC is a Tree Council coordinator for the Tree Warden scheme in Northumberland. Volunteers look out for the trees across Northumberland. We are looking for ways to revitalise the scheme to increase its traction and promote volunteer opportunities, such as linking-in with the tree planting opportunities mentioned above.

5.3.3 Projects/Programmes

Climate Action Plan

The current Climate Action Plan covers the period 2021/2023 and work is currently being undertaken to produce a new action plan which should be ready to launch in Jan/Feb 2024. The launch of the new Climate Action Plan offers a significant public engagement and positive PR opportunity for NCC to showcase some of the work undertaken to date and to raise awareness of the projects/programmes being progressed going forward.

Enhanced Biodiversity Duty

Since 2006 all public bodies have had a legal duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. However, this duty has been considerably strengthened under the Environment Act 2021, such that all public bodies now have a duty to take action to conserve and enhance biodiversity, with a framework of planning and reporting that must be followed. A Cabinet Report on this subject is being presented in November 2023 concerning the Council's first consideration of action that it can take, which must be completed by the end of 2023, with its first action plan being prepared thereafter.

Review of Grounds Maintenance

The Council is committed to maintaining a high-quality local environment. A review of the Council's current grounds maintenance regimes is currently being planned especially around amenity grass cutting, so that consideration can be given to moving away from a blanket standard of 10-13 cuts per year to a range of different maintenance regimes tailored to be suitable for different areas of grassland to help improve biodiversity and nature recovery. There is a need to widely engage local communities/stakeholders on what these new maintenance regimes should be and which regime should be applied within each local area. This review is likely to commence in 2023/24 and span into 2024/25.

Parks Enhancement Programme and QEII Commemoration Schemes

A major multi-year programme of improvements to parks and country parks is currently being delivered with funding already secured in the Council's MTFP and p-proposals to increase the capital funding available to undertake additional improvements at parks and green spaces will be considered as part of the Council's budget setting process. Many of the current schemes include active involvement from local stakeholders (Friends Groups etc) in scheme development and delivery, with several also including the provision of infrastructure to support school environmental education visits.

Public Conveniences Improvement Programme

The Council is undertaking a multi-year investment programme to improve the standard and quality of its network of public conveniences across the county in recognition of the significant role that public toilets have in safeguarding public health and enabling people to access the local environment and our towns and villages.

Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan

A new PRoW Improvement Plan is being developed, scheduled for completion later in 2023/24. There will be a wide engagement opportunity during the consultation process and the publication of the plan will include communication activity to highlight the extensive PRoW network in the county and our beautiful countryside and natural assets.

Heating

- Work is progressing on the development of District Heat Networks across 8 main towns with approval now given to commence the procurement process to secure technical/legal support to assist in pulling together the procurement of a Heat Provider for the county.
- The 'Warmer Homes' programme is on-going, will provide funding to support a range of energy efficiency/retrofit activity for low-income, low-efficiency private and rented domestic properties. Measures include insulation, solar panels and heat pumps to reduce energy bills and carbon emissions from domestic heating. Two grant funded programmes are being delivered under the Warmer Homes banner covering both on-gas and off-gas properties. In total we hope to have provided measures to some 800 properties across the county by April 2025.
- Since 1st April 2023 the Energy Team have signed ECO4 Flex declarations for 51 Northumberland households. Six more applications have been received

but are still awaiting processing. The measures installed depend on the property but have included air source heat pumps, gas boilers, heating controls, high heat retention electric storage heaters, solar PV, internal wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, flat roof insulation, room in roof insulation, loft insulation and floor insulation. To date these applications have come from nine different TrustMark registered ECO installers but there are a number of other installers who have been in touch recently requesting the application forms and preparing to send Flex referrals through. The council published a new joint Statement of Intent with Newcastle and North Tyneside on 1st September 2023. This means that we can now accept flex applications for the Great British Insulation Scheme as well as ECO4.

Transport

- EV Charge Points – We intend to continue the roll-out of EV Charging Installations and will be submitting funding bids to the Government to support this. Any roll-out will involve opportunities for local members and T&PCs to propose new locations.
- Work is currently progressing on the delivery of Levelling-Up Funded active travel schemes for new pedestrian/cycle routes between Bedlington, Bedlington Station and East Sleekburn and Hexham to Corbridge, Active Travel Fund schemes for Ashington and Blyth and a Transforming Cities Funded scheme for Ponteland to Callerton.
- Local Cycling & Walking Investment Plans (LCWIP) - comprehensive work to identify LCWIP priority routes has been undertaken and is due to be reported through Cabinet imminently and work is progressing to develop proposals, so we have a pipeline of schemes to submit to various funding opportunities.

Energy

- There is on-going collaboration with communities developing renewable energy generation proposals (e.g. Humshaugh/Norham/Holy Island).
- Following the successful delivery of the County Hall solar car port and proof of concept, work is being progressed to investigate the viability of business cases for solar car ports on other Council owned public car parks.

Waste

- A pilot scheme for kerbside glass recycling is being undertaken to help inform the development of a countywide kerbside glass recycling service, the timing for roll-out being subject to Government funding announcements (anticipated to be 2025/26).
- Work to progress the expansion of the range of materials that can be included in household recycling bins to include plastic pots, tubs & trays and tetrapak cartons is being undertaken, the timing for roll-out being subject to Government funding announcements (anticipated to be 2025/26)).
- A pilot scheme for food waste recycling is being undertaken to inform the development of a countywide service, the timing for roll-out plans being subject to Government funding announcements (roll-out anticipated to be April 2026).

- Community reuse/recycling schemes are in place at several locations across the county primarily targeting furniture/bikes.

Sequestration – increase the removal of carbon from the atmosphere through nature-based solutions.

- Great Northumberland Forest (GNF) - is a plan to plant millions of trees across the county, increasing tree cover for the benefit of all. Now into the 2nd year of the programme, as well as facilitating and enabling landowners / managers to access national grants, the programme has secured additional funding to support tree planting at any scale and support Storm Arwen restoration. The GNF is supported by the Northumberland Woodland Creation Partnership which is made up of Northumberland CC, Forestry Commission, Forestry England, Northumberland National Park, Natural England, Environment Agency, Northumbria Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, NFU, CLA, Northumberland Community Action, MoD, DEFRA and CONFOR. Partners have been delivering woodland creation across the county and are keen to do more of various types and sizes – appropriate to the setting (right tree, right place). The GNF team are keen to explore further opportunities around agroforestry, integrating more trees in the farmed landscape where they can provide multiple benefits to the farming business as well as the wider community. The team are also keen to explore additional tree planting opportunities on the council's estate.
- Local Authority Treescape Fund – Fund administered by the Forestry Commission which local authorities can apply for. NCC have been successful in the first two rounds of funding. NCC is looking to build up a number of projects which can seek funding in 2024. The focus of this programme is to increase tree cover in and around communities with both “whips” and “standards” being funded. This is a great opportunity for further engagement – the GNF team have worked on targeted areas where tree cover per head is low. Team capacity has been a limiting factor as in most locations there are further constraints which need consideration, particularly infrastructure, utilities, and future proofing planting locations.
- Peatland Restoration Plans – The Council is part of the Northumberland Peat Partnership which is working to improve the condition of the peat resource across the county. Opportunities are focused primarily on the uplands. Work to date has focused on mapping the current condition of key peatland sites under the Peat Discovery grants. Applications are now being made to multiple fund pots for restoration, including the Countryside Stewardship funds, Peat Recovery grants and peatland code. Funding for the partnership and the team under the Northumbria Wildlife Trust has been provided by the various partners with additional capital coming from Natural England and the Nature for Climate Fund (DEFRA) but more needs to be secured to deliver further works.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Local Nature Recovery Strategies are statutory spatial plans to identify priorities for nature recovery introduced under the Environment Act 2021, and all public bodies

have a duty to have regard to them. There will be 48 LNRS across England and the Council is acting as the Responsible Body for the North of Tyne LNRS on behalf of the North of Tyne Combined Authority. Work is starting on the LNRS shortly, following the recent appointment of Responsible Bodies by the SoS and it is anticipated that the first iteration will be completed in about 18 months time.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Mandatory biodiversity net gain is being introduced in November 2023 through an amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act, requiring developers to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity value through the development process. Because it will often be impossible to achieve this on-site, developers will need to find other landowners willing to undertake habitat creation. The Council is making land available at Potland Burn former surface mine so that developers can pay us to create and manage suitable habitats, and we will also review other Council landholdings to identify areas where habitat creation and management could be undertaken, supported by a suitable income stream. This will ensure that the Council's growth agenda is not adversely impacted by developers being unable to secure net gain solutions, as well as funding the Council to undertake work that will assist with nature recovery and carbon sequestration.

Space for Shorebirds

Space for Shorebirds is the Council's coastal mitigation service, which is vital to ensure that the Council's development aspirations can be reconciled with its obligations to conserve nationally and internationally important coastal bird populations and dune grasslands. Space for Shorebirds employs three Wildlife Rangers and is 100% developer-funded. Independent project evaluation has shown strong support for Space for Shorebirds among local communities on the coast and it is held up nationally as an example of good practice.

Assessment of NCC owned woodland estate

Work is underway to assess the condition, function and potential future management of the NCC woodland estate with the aim of increasing the range of ecosystem services they provide including carbon sequestration, public access, enhancing biodiversity and improving air quality. Once this work has been completed it will indicate which woodlands can seek funding from the Forestry Commission to support their future management. We will also take forward opportunities to get local communities involved with woodland management as part of this programme.

Public Health – Adoption of a 'One Health' Approach

One Health is an approach to designing and implementing programmes, policies, legislation and research in which multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes. The One Health approach recognises that the health of people, domestic and wild animals, plants and the wider environment (and ecosystems) are all closely linked and inter-dependent. This approach is critical to addressing health threats in the animal-human-environment interface, such as tackling Avian Flu and the transmission to humans. The areas of work in which a One Health approach is particularly relevant include:

- food safety
- control of zoonotic diseases

- laboratory services
- neglected tropical diseases
- environmental health
- antimicrobial resistance.

All these areas cover complex issues that require close collaboration across sectors, stakeholders and countries. The Council has a key role to play in this area given its specific responsibilities relating to Public Health, Animal Health, Emergency Community Assistance and Civil Contingencies.

5.4 Potential Areas of Additional Environmental Activity

Waste Recycling

The Council intends to enhance its recycling collection services over the period of the MTFP 2024-2027, with the provision of new kerbside collection services for glass and food waste and to increase the range of materials that can be recycled via the existing household recycling bins. The roll-out of these enhanced recycling services, which is dependent upon confirmation of Government 'New Burdens' funding, will deliver a step-change in recycling performance in the county and will include a comprehensive public awareness and communications campaign to support the implementation of the new services.

Green Flag Parks

The Council has already increased the number of parks that hold the prestigious 'Green Flag Award' from just 9 in 2019 to 12 in 2023. This international award from environmental charity, Tidy Britain Group, recognises Northumberland's parks as being some of the very best in the country and is a sign to the public that the space boasts the highest possible environmental standards, is beautifully maintained and has excellent visitor facilities. As part of its on-going investment programme to improve and enhance its parks, country parks and green spaces the Council will expand the number of 'Green Flag' parks in the County over the next 4 years.

Designated Bathing Waters

Northumberland has 13 beaches that are designated bathing waters under the 'The Bathing Water Regulations 2013' and as such are subject to regular water quality tests. The bathing beaches are as follows: Amble Links, Bamburgh Castle, Beadnell, Blyth South Beach, Druridge Bay North, Druridge Bay South, Low Newton, Newbiggin North, Newbiggin South, Seahouses North, Seaton Sluice, Spittal, Warkworth. The water quality at these beaches is classified annually based on a rolling average of the monitoring results over a 4 year period, the latest published results are for 2022 and show 11 out of 13 beaches in Northumberland being rated as 'Excellent' the highest classification available, with Beadnell and Newbiggin South both being classified as 'Good'. The Council will work with key stakeholders to improve water quality, so that all its designated bathing waters are consistently being classed as 'Excellent' within the next 4 years.

Highway Verge Maintenance – Conservation Verges

Cutting highway verges is necessary to ensure road safety as well as being part of our highway asset's maintenance needs (stopping encroachment onto/over the carriageway and damage to drainage systems). Whilst we have to prioritise road safety, we recognise the need to adjust our arrangements where safe to do so in order to support habitats and nature recovery and this is an on-going process. The Council will continue to engage in dialogue with town and parish councils as well as other stakeholders to identify areas where alternative verge maintenance arrangements could be considered, particularly for those verges that have been identified as having a high ecological value.

Environmental Education and Awareness

The Council already undertakes work a wide range of activities in schools and supports school visits to learn about nature and to support/develop STEAM education programmes. Going forward we will work more closely with other organisations like Northumberland National Park & Northumbria Wildlife Trust as part of our approach to improving young people's awareness and engagement on environmental matters.

Additional Highway Verge Litter Picking

Most complaints are received early in the spring relating to litter accumulations along highway verges, most notably along the main arterial roads in the county (A1, A19, A189, A1068). For litter picking on the A19 and A1 the Council must secure the agreement of National Highways for the works, as they require lane closures to safeguard the staff involved and can cause significant disruption to the travelling public. For the A189 due to safety issues litter picking is co-ordinated with other highway maintenance activities and undertaken overnight under full road closures with diversions in place. Due to the significant traffic management costs involved in roadside verge litter picking it is undertaken twice per year on the A189/A19 around April/May and August/September. Most of the other main arterial routes, including the A1 are only litter picked once per year in the spring, with some localised reactive litter picking to deal with any highly visible accumulations where required.

The Council is currently developing options to increase roadside litter picking along key routes and/or the creation of a 'litter picking squad' with Traffic Management capacity, that could undertake a rolling programme of litter picking activity, which it intends to consider as part of the MTFP budget setting process.

Flytipping Action Plan

The Council is committed to reducing flytipping incidents through an on-going programme of education and awareness raising activity along with improving the effectiveness of its enforcement activity to hold perpetrators to account for their actions. As part of this programme capital investment is being made to create new communal bin compounds in the Hirst area of Ashington to help improve the arrangements for household waste storage and collection to reduce littering and flytipping and improve the overall quality of the local environment. Funding has also been secured for additional covert CCTV cameras that can be deployed at flytipping hot-spots to assist in identifying and taking enforcement action against offenders. The Council will refresh its flytipping action plan and set challenging targets to reduce the number of flytipping incidents in the county.

Implications

Policy	<p>The proposed Environmental Policy Statement aims to improve the way in which the Council's existing wide range of environmental policy and service activities are communicated and presented to the public to highlight how they are all aligned to maintain, protect or enhance the environment of the county and are essential to support the successful the delivery of the Council's key corporate objectives.</p>
Finance and value for money	<p>This paper does not include any direct financial implications. Proposals for financial investment associated with any of the environmental policy or service activities mentioned in the report will be made directly by the relevant service area as part of their response to the MTFP planning round.</p>
Legal	<p>The commitments made in the Environmental Policy Statement reflect policies and service actions that are already in place or are being progressed by the relevant service areas through the appropriate decision-making processes within the Council.</p>
Procurement	<p>There are no additional direct procurement implications arising from the adoption of the Environmental Policy Statement. However, it should be noted that consideration of our approach to sustainability in procurement is intended to be included in the Council's new climate change action plan 2024-26.</p>
Human Resources	<p>None at this stage.</p>
Property	<p>Improving the sustainability and energy efficiency of Council buildings and making best use of our property assets to support the delivery of Council policy and corporate objectives, including environmental activities such as tree planting, renewable energy generation and improved biodiversity, will require collaboration between property services and the relevant lead service area.</p>
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Whilst this paper does not directly impact issues of equality, the resulting strategic plans and any changes to service delivery arrangements developed to strengthen the Council's work on environmental issues will consider equality throughout and will be subject to EIAs, as appropriate.</p>
Risk Assessment	<p>The Council declared a Climate Change Emergency in 2019 and in July 2023 also declared an Ecological Emergency, as these environmental issues are recognised as key risks to the county's economy and the safety, health and well being of our communities.</p>

Crime Disorder &	The Council recognises the importance of maintaining a high quality local environment and will continue to use its powers to ensure that those responsible for environmental offences, such as littering, dog fouling, fly-tipping etc are held to account for their actions.
Customer Consideration	The Environmental Policy Statement aims to improve the way in which environmental policy and service delivery activity being undertaken by the Council is communicated and presented to the public, to help raise awareness and encourage more active participation in environmental matters.
Carbon reduction	Tackling climate change is one of the Council's key strategic areas of environmental activity and the work being undertaken to develop a new Climate Action Plan 2024-26 is referenced in this report.
Health and Wellbeing	It is recognised that the delivery of environmental policies and service activity also secure important health and well-being benefits, such as reduced fuel poverty, a high-quality local environment, active travel opportunities and improved access to green spaces and the natural world. The policy statement also includes commitments in relation to adopting a 'One-Health' approach that recognises the need for cross-sector collaboration to address the public health threats in the animal-human interface which are arising from a rapidly changing environment.
Wards	All.

Background papers:

1. Corporate Plan

(<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s14485/03.1%20CORPORATE%20PLAN%202023.pdf>)

2. Climate Action Plan

([Climate-change-action-plan-2021-23.pdf](#) (northumberland.gov.uk))

Report sign off.

Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:

	Full Name of Officer
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Director of Law and Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer	Neil Masson obo Stephen Gerrard
Executive Director of Resources and Transformation (S151 Officer)	Jan Willis
Executive Director of Place and Regeneration	Simon Neilson
Chief Executive	Helen Paterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Glen Sanderson

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Appendix A

Northumberland County Council's Environmental Policy Statement

Northumberland County Council recognises that maintaining, protecting and enhancing the high-quality environment of the county is essential to support the delivery of its three key corporate priorities of Achieving Value for Money, Tackling Inequality and Driving Economic Growth and that the Council, along with businesses, residents and other stakeholders all have an active role to play. It is our collective aim to ensure we pass on a healthy, clean and sustainable environment to future generations so that Northumberland remains a 'Land of Great Opportunities'.

Our Commitments

In recognition of its environmental responsibilities and duties the County Council makes the following commitments.

Green Governance

- We will make sure that environmental and climate change impacts are identified and fully considered within our decision-making processes, policies, strategies, projects and working practices.
- We will establish clear environmental Key Performance Indicators and targets so that we can regularly monitor and report on our environmental performance and endeavour to seek continuous improvement.

Lead by Example

- We will strive to continuously improve the environmental sustainability of our buildings, services, activities, and practices including our commissioning and procurement processes.
- We will ensure compliance with all environmental consents, regulatory requirements and accreditations.

Tackling Climate Change

- We will maintain our commitment to tackle climate change to achieve our aim of being a Carbon Neutral county by 2030 in relation to Carbon Dioxide emissions. In support of this we will set a new target to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, and agree a new Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 to clearly set out the work that will be undertaken to meet our climate change targets.
- We will also agree a new target to work with Government to achieve net-zero for all greenhouse gases for the county of Northumberland by 2040, a strategy for which will be developed as part of the new Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26.
- We will work with industry bodies, landowners, farmers, and our communities to help in facilitating an economically balanced transition to climate friendly agricultural practices and sustainable food production in our rural county.

Nature Recovery & Biodiversity

- We will take a lead role on work to protect and enhance the natural environment and support improved biodiversity across the county.
- We will review our own land management and grounds maintenance practices to identify opportunities to support nature recovery and biodiversity whilst maintaining an attractive and safe environment.
- We will use the biodiversity planning and reporting requirements introduced through the Environment Act 2021 to develop and drive forward our response to the ecological emergency.

Parks and Green Spaces

- We will ensure our parks and green spaces are well managed and maintained so that they continue to act as vibrant, living spaces that bring communities together and provide opportunities to connect with nature in the heart of our towns and neighbourhoods, so that these spaces remain cherished, accessible places for all to enjoy.

Safeguarding Public Health

- We will adopt a 'One Health' approach and ensure that we communicate and work together across multiple sectors when developing strategies, policies and programmes to address health threats in the animal-human-environment interface which are arising from a changing environment, so that we collectively achieve better public health outcomes.

Waste Management

- We will review and enhance our waste services and support residents and businesses to reduce waste and increase recycling and will work with others to deliver a more circular economy, so that we can better protect our natural resources through the efficient and ongoing reuse of materials.
- We will take effective enforcement action as part of a wider programme of activity to reduce offences such as littering and flytipping, to help safeguard and protect the quality of the local environment.

Heat and Renewable Energy

- We will progress the provision of District Heating schemes in 8 of our main towns to provide access to sustainable, low cost heat for businesses and homes.
- We will continue to support homes to access funding support to make them more energy efficient and to help address fuel poverty.
- We will continue to progress, support and facilitate the decarbonisation of energy and to increase renewable energy generation capacity.

Water Quality

- We will work with others to improve water quality in our rivers and at our beaches to help protect and enhance the natural environment.

Built Environment

- We will use our planning powers and influence to enable well-designed, thriving and truly sustainable towns, places and developments.
- We will listen to communities to prioritise action to tackle harm and blight caused by unauthorised or poorly managed sites and buildings.

Transport and Travel

- We will deliver a step change in sustainable travel across the county, by growing passenger transport and active travel to reduce transport related carbon emissions and improve air quality in our towns and villages. This will include major capital and revenue investment in projects such as the reopening of the Northumberland Railway Line to passenger services, new active travel routes, improvements to bus services, expansion of our network of electric vehicle charging points as well as supporting behaviour change activities.
- We will green our own fleet and seek to reduce the transport impacts of our services and activities through adoption of new ways of working.

Community Engagement

- We will raise awareness and engage with our staff, members, communities, and businesses, providing advice and support to enable and empower local action to maintain, protect and improve our environment and support the delivery of the county's climate change targets.
- We will continue to support and encourage environmental volunteering activity, such as the Coast Care volunteering initiative in the Northumberland Coast AONB, where volunteers can carry out litter picking, habitat management, wildlife surveying and practical conservation/access tasks in and around the AONB.

Appendix B

Key Actions & Targets

Northumberland County Council delivers a broad and diverse range of environmental services from waste recycling, grounds maintenance and street cleansing to improving public transport, EV-chargers, cycling and walking infrastructure and tackling climate change and loss of biodiversity. The performance of these environmental services is routinely monitored through Key Performance Indicators and Targets as part of normal service management arrangements.

To meet its commitment to 'Green Governance' the Council will ensure it maintains clear environmental Key Performance Indicators and targets to regularly monitor and report on key areas of environmental activity through our Corporate Performance Management arrangements and will endeavour to seek continuous improvement.

Some of the Council's key environmental actions and targets over the next 4 year period from 2023/24 to 2026/27 are highlighted below.

Northumberland County Council will:

- Maintain and improve standards of service delivery and value for money for its key environmental services through its 'BEST' service transformation process.
- Maintain our commitment to tackling climate change and agree and implement a new Climate Change Action Plan 2024-2026.
- Half the Council's carbon footprint by 2025 and make the county carbon neutral by 2030 in relation to carbon dioxide emissions.
- Develop and implement an action plan to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Introduce a new Environment and Climate Change Fund to support community projects that improve the environment and/or help tackle climate change.
- Improve access to high quality parks, country parks and green spaces through the delivery of our Parks Improvement Capital Programme, including the development of new nature trails.
- Increase the number of parks and green spaces in the county that have secured the prestigious 'Green Flag' accreditation from 12 to 14 by the end of 2026/27.
- Increase our household waste recycling rate from 32% to 45% by the end of 2026/27, subject to receipt of Government new burdens funding.
- Reduce the number of flytipping incidents by 5% by the end of 2026/27 (compared to the 2022/23 baseline).
- Continue to support 'Litter Picking Champions' and the development of litter picking groups across the County to undertake community litter picking activity within our towns, villages, parks and green spaces.
- Increase the Council's frequency of litter picking activity along our major roads to improve the cleanliness and visual appearance of these key transport corridors.
- Increase our active travel infrastructure through a programme of provision of new dual use pedestrian and cycle paths along key corridors identified in our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

- Complete the work to reopen the Northumberland Line to rail passenger services.
- Implement improvements to bus services to increase levels of bus patronage.
- Improve the standards of service and the accessibility of our public toilets and directional signage by delivering our Public Toilets Capital Improvement Programme.
- Continue to work with Town and Parish Councils and other key partners to increase the number of 'conservation verges' that have a high ecological value.
- Work with other agencies and key stakeholders to ensure all our designated bathing waters are consistently classified as having 'excellent' water quality by the end of 2026/27.
- Complete the remediation of the historic pollution at Lynemouth Bay to safeguard the local environment.
- Increase our work in schools to improve knowledge, awareness and young people's active participation in tackling climate change and protecting the environment.