

**Report to:** Cabinet  
**Date of meeting:** 17 January 2022  
**Report of:** Head of Planning & Development  
**Title:** The Climate Crisis: A Guide for Local Authorities on Planning for Climate Change

## **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) have come together to create a guide for local authorities on planning for climate change. This guide, titled 'The Climate Crisis – a guide for local authorities on planning for climate change' sets out ways for local authorities to make a difference and features case studies of positive examples, two of which are from the emerging Watford Local Plan.
- 1.2 Organisations, including Watford Borough Council, have been invited to endorse this climate guide. This would involve the inclusion of the Watford Borough Council logo on the guide and the appropriate page on the RTPI and TCPA websites.
- 1.3 Officers have reviewed the guidance and its good practice examples in a comparative way with Council policies and initiatives to determine how closely Watford is following other best practice examples. This independent tool is useful in moving forward in our battle against climate change.

## **2.0 Risks**

- 2.1 There are no significant risks associated to this report.

## **3.0 Recommendations**

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves the endorsement by the council of the RTPI and TCPA report 'The Climate Crisis – a guide for local authorities on planning for climate change' as set out in the appendix.
- 3.2 That Cabinet note the self-assessment undertaken in the guidance, the exemplar status this report provides, the good progress made by the Council and our commitment to continue to work towards mitigation to and adaptation of climate change.

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**Report approved by:** Ben Martin, Head of Planning and Development

## **4.0 Detailed Proposal**

### **4.1 Introduction**

4.1.1 The growing risk and impact of climate change is becoming more widely recognised and the RTPI and TCPA believe that climate change should be the top planning priority in the UK as it impacts on so many aspects of creating sustainable places and vibrant communities. The RTPI and TCPA have jointly prepared informal guidance 'The Climate Crisis – a guide for local authorities on planning for climate change' which includes an introduction to climate change and also explains the role of planning, the legal and policy background, the role of plan making and of development management in minimising the effects of climate change. The guidance is attached as an appendix, however, a summary of the guidance and its general structure are set out below

### **4.2 Role of planning**

4.2.1 The role of planning includes seeking development with the largest carbon reductions, using climate change impacts in risk reduction and assessments and applying ways to mitigate or adapt to climate change which also have public benefit.

### **4.3 Legal and policy background**

4.3.1 The national and international targets in the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Paris Agreement are also reflected in the new Local Plan and are therefore consistent with the approach being proposed by Watford Borough Council.

### **4.4 Plan making**

4.4.1 The guidance produced by the RTPI and TCPA, share examples of best practice in terms of using plan-making as a tool to tackle climate change. The use of Local Plans is seen as one of the most highly effective mechanisms to address climate change. To comply with national guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), local authorities are required to set out a positive approach in their local plans to address climate change and achieve sustainable development. The Watford Local Plan has sought to achieve this for individual development sites and cumulative development as an overall objective. These will be achieved through planning policies, site specific considerations and corporate strategies the council has in place that reside outside of the planning service, yet are complementary to it. There are two case studies showcasing policies developed through the new Watford Local Plan (submitted version subject to Examination in Public) which are featured in the report. It is officers' view that the new Local Plan meets the expectations set in this guidance.

#### **4.4.2 Case study 17 Policy CC8.2: Sustainable Construction Standards for Non-residential Development**

Watford has been recognised in this guidance for the inclusion of Policy CC8.2 in the emerging Local Plan which states: 'Proposals should be designed to reduce their impact on the

environment and create high quality internal and external space for people to use. Proposals will be supported where it is demonstrated that resources will be used efficiently as part of the construction and operation of a building. This includes appropriate use of technologies, building design and layout, while taking into consideration the effects of climate change. To achieve this, non-residential major developments should achieve British Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) excellent standard.'

#### 4.4.3 **Case study 20 Policy ST11.4: A Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Improvement Town**

Watford has also been recognised for a second policy in the transport section of the emerging Local Plan which discusses cycle parking: –'All development proposals will be required to provide on-site cycle parking facilities in line with the cycle parking standards detailed in Appendix D. Secure cycle parking facilities should be designed at the outset of the scheme.'

4.4.4 Guidance principles for good practice in plan making focus on sustainable transport. Development should be focused towards areas which are seen as more sustainable or can be made to be more sustainable through an offering of greener, active transport modes that reduce the need for unnecessary car journeys, particularly for short trips. To support this modal shift, supporting on-site infrastructure is required such as quality cycle parking and storage facilities that are easily accessible and convenient to use. A point of good practice in the guidance states that policies should be included to encourage a move away from car-dependency using walkable places with facilities and shops nearby, prioritising development on or near town centres, use of car clubs and consideration of air quality for new developments. Watford has multiple policies and strategies which relate to this good practice guidance including; 'Policy ST11.3: Providing Sustainable Transport Infrastructure for Major Development' and 'Policy ST11.5: Electric Vehicles, Car Parking and Car Clubs' from the emerging Local Plan as well as Watford's emerging Sustainable Transport Strategy which includes key targets relating back to the goal of becoming net carbon zero by 2030. Additionally, this is supported by the preparation of the emerging Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

4.4.5 Another example of good practice in plan making is to use a Climate Emergency declaration to help make use of low-carbon energy generation and distribution and integrate local energy plans or promote community-led initiatives. Watford Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019 giving formal recognition that this is an important issue facing the borough in the future. To support this initiative, the submitted Local Plan has highlighted opportunities for community-scale energy generation schemes as identified in the Hertfordshire Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Technical Study (2010). While such a scheme is yet to be realised, this is an example of how the Council can use the guidance to aid in further work. The council has developed a cross cutting Sustainable Action Plan to tackle the Climate Emergency.

### 4.5 **Development Management**

4.5.1 This section discusses good practice and the presumption in favour of sustainable development in England which is set out in the NPPF. Decisions made in Development Management are based on evidence and policy and are therefore closely linked to the above section on plan-making. Within the guide there is emphasis given to adaptation issues which

have less national policy and guidance than mitigation issues do.

- 4.5.2 The design of new developments is highlighted in the report relating to issues such as high quality living environments, reduction of overheating potential, inclusion of green infrastructure and consideration of scale and placement of development. Although not mentioned in this guidance specifically, officers see Watford as taking positive steps in this area with the use and promotion of the Place Shaping Panel which provides impartial and independent advice for schemes around appropriate and sustainable design during the application stage. Using this Place Shaping Panel, Watford has been able to utilise national expertise on embedding sustainability within development proposals. This is facilitated by planning officers which use the information in the report, the process is seen to lead to better designed and more developed applications.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

- 4.6.1 The report concludes by reiterating the importance of keeping climate change as a priority within the planning system and how this can have positive effects.
- 4.6.2 When comparing the areas of good practice and case study examples throughout the guidance document it is clear that Watford is already working on the majority of these. In addition to the examples above, this includes provision of multi-functional green spaces which aid in flood risk mitigation, energy efficiency standards which exceed that of the current building regulations and making use of the waste hierarchy to prioritise reuse and recycling of materials to reduce embodied carbon. As a council we recognise that Watford needs to do more to tackle the Climate Emergency, however, benchmarking ourselves against recommendations within the guide indicates we are on the right path.
- 4.6.3 This guidance is welcomed and it aligns with the Council's already established objectives on climate change mitigation and adaptation, including the ambitious target to become carbon neutral by 2030. It is noted that the work done by Watford on the new Local Plan is being promoted as examples of best practice in this guidance and we therefore recommend that the Council endorses this guidance. The guidance supports the wider objectives to address climate change that are being undertaken by the Council, for example, the Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan, the development of a Sustainable Transport Strategy, biodiversity improvement actions and the Colne Valley project (which seeks to address the ecological emergency declared by WBC). The guidance can be embraced and made of use across council teams.

## **5.0 Implications**

### **5.1 Financial**

- 5.1.1 There are no financial issues associated to this proposal.

### **5.2 Legal Issues**

- 5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that by agreeing to endorse the guidance the council will permit the guidance to reference the endorsement and to

contain the council logo.

### **5.3 Equalities/Human Rights**

5.3.1 There are no implications in regards to equalities or human rights.

### **5.4 Staffing**

5.4.1 Current staff have prepared this report and there is no additional staffing requirement.

### **5.5 Accommodation**

5.5.1 There is no impact on accommodation.

### **5.6 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 There is no impact on community safety or crime and disorder.

### **5.7 Sustainability**

5.7.1 There could be positive impact on the sustainability of the Council and raise its profile in terms of the Council taking protective steps to address climate change.

## **Appendix**

Appendix 1 - The Climate Crisis: A Guide for Local Authorities on Planning for Climate Change

## **Background Papers**

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.