



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**Electric Vehicles
Task Group**

February 2022

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Task group members

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Councillor Mark Hofman
Councillor Glen Saffery
Councillor Jessica Stiff
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Chair, Councillor for Stanborough Ward
Councillor for Nascot Ward
Councillor for Woodside Ward
Councillor for Park Ward
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Watford Borough Council

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Group Head of Place Shaping
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Senior Projects Officer
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Proposed recommendations to present to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. To extend and develop the communications around electric vehicles, including the development of an information hub, with a focus on preparing residents for the shift to electric vehicles and enabling access to clear information for users.
2. In order to help the council make the case for funding and to increase understanding of the interest in different areas, an online form should be developed to enable residents to make an expression of interest for a charging unit in their neighbourhood.
3. For the public Sustainability Forum to hold a session discussing electric vehicles with residents.
4. To continue to work collaboratively with Hertfordshire County Council to increase the charging infrastructure in Watford and to make the case to reinstate the use of lamp columns for that purpose as well as other public highway land.
5. To develop an Electric Vehicle Strategy for Watford.
6. To make further consideration about how the taxi fleet can be enabled to transition to more electric vehicles.

Background and wider context to the task group

Task group proposal

In recognition of the growth in ownership and use of electric vehicles as well as the sustainability benefits they offer, a proposal was made by Councillor Ian Stotesbury to review how the council was encouraging and enabling electric vehicles.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the task group at its meeting on 16 December 2021 and confirmed the membership and chair, as set out above.

National context

The government has announced a ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles from 2030 which has added significant impetus to the growth in this market. The level of sales in 2021 surpassed the numbers sold in 2019 and 2020 combined.¹

UK-wide initiatives for consumers

There are a number of policy initiatives in place at a national level designed to incentivise and enable the purchase and use of electric vehicles. As Watford residents are eligible for many of these scheme, the council's main role is to raise awareness of them. The incentives in place include the following:

- Plug-in grants of up to £1,500 are available to offset some of the cost of purchasing a battery electric vehicle (BEV) for vehicles with a retail value of under £32,000. The value of this grant has recently fallen from a maximum grant of £2,500 and a maximum retail price of £35,000.
- The Electric Vehicle Homecharge Scheme provides grant funding of up to 75% of the cost of installing a chargepoint in a domestic property. From April 2022, this grant will no longer be available to homeowners who live in single unit properties but will remain available to residents of flats and those who live in all types of rental accommodation.
- Electric vehicles are exempt from paying vehicle excise duty.
- BEVs are exempt from London's congestion charge. Hybrid vehicles no longer qualify for this discount. They are also exempt from charges in the London Ultra Low Emission Zone.
- There are a number of other areas outside London which are introducing congestion charges and exemptions for electric vehicles are anticipated in these areas too.

There are further schemes available which apply to businesses and commercial vehicles including plug-in grants and funding for charging infrastructure.

Details of relevant schemes for Watford residents are published on the [council's website](#).

The context in Watford

Watford has a high number of existing electric vehicle registrations. By the end of quarter 2 2021, 4,847 full battery electric vehicles had been registered in Watford, an increase of 45%, in the year to date over the total number of registered BEVs at the end of 2020.²

The total number of BEVs registered in Watford represents 50.9% of the total number of BEVs registered in Hertfordshire and 1.8% of the total in England. The table below shows the number of vehicles registered across the districts in Hertfordshire.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-funding-targeted-at-more-affordable-zero-emission-vehicles-as-market-charges-ahead-in-shift-towards-an-electric-future>

² DVLA/DfT data

Department for Transport statistics
[Vehicle Licensing Statistics](#)

Table VEH0132b

Battery Electric Vehicles or BEVs (subset of ULEVs 1) licensed at the end of the quarter by upper and lower tier local authority 2, United Kingdom from 2011 Q4

ONS LA Code (Apr-2019)	Region/Local Authority (Apr-2019) 3	2021 Q2	2021 Q1	2020 Q4
K02000001	United Kingdom	295,584	249,932	216,379
K03000001	Great Britain	291,997	246,942	213,808
E92000001	England	263,036	221,891	192,256
E10000015	Hertfordshire	9,506	8,023	7,008
E07000095	Broxbourne	209	174	162
E07000096	Dacorum	649	572	523
E07000242	East Hertfordshire	634	543	497
E07000098	Hertsmere	601	519	461
E07000099	North Hertfordshire	581	518	478
E07000240	St Albans	831	713	674
E07000243	Stevenage	149	116	99
E07000102	Three Rivers	501	442	397
E07000103	Watford	4,847	4,005	3,342
E07000241	Welwyn Hatfield	503	421	375
	Local Authority District unknown	c	0	0

Sales of new plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHEVs) are also to be phased out by 2035. The number of registered PHEVs in Watford rose from 1,312 to 1,807 (37.7%) in the same period.

Given the growth in ownership of electric vehicles and the impetus to ensure that residents have the confidence to choose electric vehicles over petrol and diesel cars, the charging infrastructure is an important priority for Watford Borough Council.

The first off-street charging units were installed in 2014 in a number of car parks and the programme has been developing at pace over the intervening years. As of December 2021, there were 23 on-street electric charging units in Watford. Further units are located off street in a number of locations including car parks and in private businesses, such as supermarkets.

In 2020 Watford was invited to join NetX, an innovation project involving the University of Hertfordshire and a number of other councils. The aim was to increase the number of charge points available at from existing apparatus. The project provided £53,000 of grant funding for residential on-street charging and seven additional charge points as a result.

Obstacles encountered in the rollout of charging infrastructure include the available footpath width in some streets, the withdrawal of use of lamp columns, connections to the UKPN supply and some resistance from residents to on-street charging infrastructure.

Future plans for the infrastructure roll out include making a new bid for funding from OLEV, installing more off-street units in a variety of locations working with residents to determine where there is demand for these units.

Overview of the task group's programme of work

The task group held two virtual meetings during January 2022. At the initial meeting, the group agreed the scope for the review as well as the programme of work for the two meetings. Members then received a detailed presentation on the electric vehicle charging infrastructure programme.

At the second meeting, the task group discussed other areas within the council where policies were in place, or forthcoming, to enable increased use of electric vehicles. A number of case studies of other councils were also reviewed. This information from the first meeting and the documentation allowed the members to discuss and agree their conclusions and recommendations.

Additional research work was carried out by Democratic Services to inform the task group's work and to produce this report

A list of the witnesses who provided evidence to the task group is listed on page 3 and a bibliography is provided at the end of this report.

Conclusion, recommendations and comments

Summary of the task group's views on electric vehicles in Watford

The transition to electric vehicles is vital in addressing climate change. Enabling Watford residents to use electric vehicles is a council priority and there has already been a significant uptake of EVs locally. Watford Council should maintain this as a priority in order to become a leading town for EVs. National policy changes demonstrate that incentivising the use of EVs is being replaced by a focus on enabling their use, reflecting the huge growth in the market. The principal way that the council can enable residents to switch to EVs is by developing and extending the local charging infrastructure. The development of an EV Strategy will provide a valuable framework for this priority. Focusing on infrastructure will address common concerns around range anxiety and the ability to charge vehicles. To that end, the willingness to trial new technologies in Watford is supported as a valuable way to meet growing demand for charging units locally as well as ensuring that existing technologies can be rolled out across Watford's neighbourhoods. The council, and councillors, also have a vital role in providing information and encouragement to residents to support the understanding of EV usage and charging infrastructure.

Recommendations

To extend and develop the communications around electric vehicles, including the development of an information hub, with a focus on preparing residents for the shift to EVs in the next few years and enabling access to clear information for EV users.

In order for residents to have the confidence to switch to electric vehicles, they will need to be well-informed about the facilities in place to serve EV users. This infrastructure is growing and the council already has a [map](#) detailing locations of charging facilities. This information is welcome and will be a valuable resource for EV drivers. The [webpages](#) on electric vehicles could be usefully extended to provide a wider range of information. The task group considered [Electric Brighton](#) to be a useful example of an information hub.

The council also has a role in sharing messaging to promote take-up of EVs by residents. The task group suggests that the Communications team look to promote EV uptake to an even greater degree. Such communications could include:

- Advantages of EVs and to having charging infrastructure in the neighbourhood.
- Overall costs of EV ownership
- E-car clubs
- Available grants and schemes for purchasing/owning an EV
- Location of chargers and how to use them
- Any parking restrictions
- How to express an interest in charging facility in a neighbourhood

There should be a particular emphasis on World Clean Air Day on 16 June 2022.

In order to help the council make the case for funding and to increase understanding of the interest in different areas, an online form should be developed to enable residents to make an expression of interest for a charging unit in their neighbourhood.

The council is currently extending the number of on-street charging facilities with a focus on areas that do not have off-street parking provision. Careful consideration is made of where would be most suitable to locate charging units. Factors which influence the suitability of locations include the amount of off-road parking, the capacity of the power supply in the road and the width of the pavement.

Officers would be further assisted in this by formalising the database of areas where residents have expressed an interest in having charging facilities. Although there can be no guarantee that they will directly lead to the installation of charging units, the information would help to build a picture of levels of interest in different areas. This data is invaluable for grant applications to install more charging infrastructure in the town. Currently, residents' interest in charging units are captured by the project team but a form on the council's website would provide a more efficient way for residents to express their interest and could be shared by the Communications team.

For the public Sustainability Forum to hold a session discussing electric vehicles with residents.

Watford is already a town with a high take-up of electric vehicles and this demand for EVs can be developed by maintaining active dialogue with EV users and those who are interested in switching to an EV. Holding a session with residents to discuss the obstacles and opportunities for using EVs in Watford would afford the opportunity to hear views and

maintain dialogue. It would also provide the opportunity to raise awareness of schemes and infrastructure which will benefit residents.

The Sustainability Forum is held virtually several times a year. It is chaired by the Mayor/ Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport and includes key officers from the council.

To continue to work collaboratively with Hertfordshire County Council to increase the charging infrastructure in Watford and to make the case to reinstate the use of lamp columns for that purpose as well as other public highway land.

In 2019 Watford Council declared a Climate Emergency and committed to an ambitious target of being carbon neutral by 2030. The government has also banned the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles from 2030. In recognition of this as well as the growth in sales of electric vehicles, increasing the charging infrastructure in Watford is a key priority for the council. Recent reports have also shown that sales of EVs are outpacing the supply of charging infrastructure.³ In order to meet the demand for charging facilities, there will need to be significant growth in the rollout of the infrastructure programme in a range of locations and which reflect the needs of local communities.

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), in its capacity as the Highways Authority, initially made lamp columns in suitable locations available for use as charging units. However, HCC's position changed and the focus is now on destination charging in shopping centres, car parks and other amenities and lamp columns are no longer being used. This was set out in HCC's [Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy](#). While the task group supports the importance of destination charging, members felt that the need to be able to charge vehicles at home for residents with and without off-street parking should not be underestimated. Research presented to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Electric and Automated Vehicles from the Electric Nation project in 2018 showed that 87% of charging connection events take place at home.⁴

There are a large number of roads in Watford where residents have little off-street parking and it will become increasingly important to enable those residents to choose an EV and have the confidence that charging facilities will be available.

Hertfordshire County Council are a key partner in the delivery of the transport and sustainability agendas and the task group recommend that Watford Council continue to work collaboratively with HCC to make the case for widening the range of locations where charging units can be located, including lamp columns where appropriate. HCC also have control over public highway land throughout Watford and there could also be opportunities to consider how these could be used to meet growing EV infrastructure needs.

³ <https://www.ciht.org.uk/news/warning-as-electric-car-sales-outpace-charge-points/>

⁴ https://www.r-e-a.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/REA_EV_Three_Phase_Report_FINAL-PDF-01-08-18-hi-res.pdf p7

To develop an Electric Vehicle Strategy for Watford.

The council has been very proactive in implementing EV charging at an early stage and has been effective at making use of grant funding opportunities and partnerships as they arise. The task group considered that this proactive approach should be formalised into a holistic Electric Vehicles Strategy for Watford.

There are a number of areas that merit further consideration and review which would assist the infrastructure roll out. These areas include:

- Hertfordshire is understood to need an additional 3,500 on-street EV charge points by 2030 to meet the demand of this growing market. This is an ambitious goal and a strategy should consider whether it would be appropriate to develop a target for Watford in delivering its proportion of that figure.
- A comprehensive review of charging needs across the borough to consider levels of need in different locations as well as the most suitable type of charger and the grid capacity. This could also feed in to how the locations for an E-car club could be determined. For example, the rapid chargers could be more suitable for destination amenities rather than residential areas.
- There is an opportunity to consider how best to capitalise on land owned by Watford Council to progress the charging infrastructure programme. The task group noted that there are sites, including underused garages, which could be suitable for siting charging units. Reviewing the opportunities on WBC land should be done in a strategic way to ensure the most effective use of resources. The council's partners could also be approached about opportunities to locate units on their land.
- Watford Council has been very successful in securing grant funding for EV charging units but given the costs and the demand, investigation could be made of other types of funding models for installing charging units as well as how best to partner with the private sector to deliver units as well as supporting the shift to EVs more widely.
- The task group supported the council's openness to participating in trials of new charging technologies, this approach could be set out in an EV Strategy. Consideration should also be given to how to plan for the obsolescence of charging technologies over time.
- Ensuring that the work undertaken in delivering EV amenities dovetails well with the recent Sustainable Transport Strategy. This strategy highlights the importance of EVs, most notably in the form of an E-car club, but sets them in a broader context of encouraging more active travel and use of public transport. There will be a need to consider the future street space of Watford carefully with the need for electric vehicles bays, cycle parking, bike hire and other forms of alternative transport in line with the Sustainable Transport Strategy.

To make further consideration about how the taxi fleet can be enabled to transition to more electric vehicles.

The task group had a brief discussion about electric taxis in the borough. This was outside of the scope for this review but it is an area where further work is needed to understand the

challenges and opportunities. Further work should be undertaken to understand the issues and any opportunities to enable further electrification of the fleet.

Bibliography/background papers

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – [New task group – electric vehicles](#)
December 2021.

<https://www.ciht.org.uk/news/warning-as-electric-car-sales-outpace-charge-points/>
Accessed January 2021

Hertfordshire County Council Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy
<https://democracy.hertfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s30322/04.%20Item%205-Electric%20Vehicle%20Charging%20Infrastructure%20Strategy.pdf>

The task group would like to thank all their witnesses who generously gave their time to assist with this review.

Appendix:

**Watford Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Task Group Scope and Terms of Reference**

Scrutiny review title	Electric vehicles
Scrutiny proposer	Councillor Ian Stotesbury
Details of specific area for review	<p>Watford Council has an important remit in enabling residents to make more environmentally-friendly transport choices.</p> <p>Transport emissions account for 91.8kt of CO2 each year in Watford and road transport is the biggest contributor to this. Electric cars can be part of the solution to addressing transport emissions in Watford.</p> <p>The government has banned the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030, and plug-in hybrid vehicles from 2035, and so the growth in ownership of electric vehicles is expected to continue to grow exponentially.</p> <p>The council's remit extends into a variety of areas including rolling out charging infrastructure, managing car parks and parking services and economic development.</p> <p>Watford already has a significant charging network; more than half of all electric vehicle in Hertfordshire were registered in Watford and 1.8% of all registrations in England were in Watford.</p>
Why this has been proposed for review, including the council priorities it supports	<p>With the development of the Sustainable Transport Strategy and the declaration of a Climate Emergency, enabling and supporting greener transport choices are a key priority for the council.</p> <p>Whilst not the highways authority, the council has significant influence and powers in a number of areas which affect vehicle ownership. The council also has a role in encouraging and communicating sustainable choices by residents.</p> <p>It is therefore important that the town continues to be accessible for these ultra-low emission forms of transport and the council has a role in encouraging greener forms of transport.</p> <p>It supports the council priority for a thriving, diverse and creative town.</p>
Purpose / objectives of the review,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the barriers to encouraging wider use/purchase of electric vehicles for residents?

including key questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the council currently encouraging/enabling the use of electric vehicles? • Where are the gaps in the charging infrastructure? • What are the issues being faced in rolling out more charging infrastructure? • How widely understood is the messaging around the priority of enabling electric vehicle ownership for residents? • Case studies of good practice elsewhere in increasing uptake of electric cars.
Any areas excluded from the scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric forms of public transport.
Desired outcomes / indicators of success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wider understanding of the context of the electric vehicle market and the incentives and barriers to ownership for residents. • An overview of the coverage of charging infrastructure in Watford and the barriers to extending the infrastructure. • A review of case studies of other local authorities which have high levels of electric vehicle ownership • Developing recommendations which add value to the various council work streams enabling electric vehicles.
Timescale and key dates, including proposed meeting format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report establishing task group to Overview and Scrutiny 16 December 2021. • To meet during January 2022. • Final report to Overview and Scrutiny on 24 February 2022. • Report to Cabinet 28 February 2022.
Key departmental lead officer	<p>Jodie Kloss, Senior Democratic Services Officer Ona Ehimuan, Democratic Services Officer</p>
Potential witnesses	<p>Andy Smith Head of Transport and Infrastructure Neil Walker, Energy and Housing Renewal Surveyor Susheel Rao, Sustainability Officer</p>
What activities need to be taken to achieve the outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarising information about relevant local and national incentives for electric vehicles. • Producing a summary of charging infrastructure in Watford and understanding the next priority areas. • Reviewing learning points from case studies.
Key policies / documentation / baseline information needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of national grants available for purchasing and owning an electric vehicle. • Hertfordshire County Council’s position statements / Draft EV charging strategy (if available)

Any other sources of evidence (e.g., site visit)	N/A
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of opportunity to understand how to encourage use of electric vehicles from councillors' perspective. • Insufficient engagement with backbench councillors on developing future priorities for electric vehicle infrastructure and strategies.