

21 November 2024

Walsall Net Zero 2041 Strategy

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr Flint – Health & Wellbeing

1. Aim

1.1. Walsall has committed to become a net-zero borough by 2041.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that committee members provide feedback the draft Net Zero 2041 Strategy.

3. Report detail – know

3.1. In January 2024, a Climate Emergency Action Plan Update report advised the committee that the council would prepare a draft Net Zero 2041 Strategy. The strategy would be considered for approval by Cabinet in 2025.

3.2. The draft Net Zero 2041 Strategy is attached at Appendix A.

3.3. The strategy identifies the key priorities and the actions necessary to eliminate the borough's carbon emissions and adapt to the consequences of climate change. The strategy draws on the vision of the We are Walsall 2040 Borough Plan and its accompanying evidence base. It seeks to embed climate change action across all council services, acknowledges climate change is very much a public health issue and, emphasises the need for a just transition to a net zero economy to ensure no one is left behind.

3.4. The strategy aims to frame net zero is an economic opportunity and emphasises need to seize the opportunities of the 'green industrial revolution'. It aligns with the Walsall Council Economic Strategy (ECAP) and the draft Place Based Strategy.

3.5. The aspirations of Walsall Net Zero 2041 Strategy are summarised on five vision statements:

3.5.1. We will eliminate greenhouse gas emissions by leading the green industrial revolution to increase prosperity and ensure a just transition to a green economy.

3.5.2. Our transport infrastructure will be smart and fit for the future, we have an integrated clean and affordable public transport system, and our communities have access to safe active travel networks.

3.5.3. Our buildings will be carbon neutral in their operations, with new homes Net Zero ready, residents will be able to smoothly transition from fossil fuel consumption to low carbon heating.

3.5.4. We are a clean and green borough where all our residents have access to clean air, green space, healthy and ecologically rich neighbourhoods.

3.5.5. We have the necessary infrastructure to enable residents, business, and communities to adapt to climate change and be resilient to challenges such as extreme weather events.

4. Financial information

- 4.1. There are significant financial implications to pursuing a Net Zero 2041 target for the borough. The actions required will represent a mix of committed and desired interventions by multiple partners.
- 4.2. Significant additional investment will be needed for the Net Zero 2041 vision to be realised. There will be a need to explore potential sources of funding through existing avenues as well as develop innovative approaches to ensure projects can be delivered.
- 4.3. Some actions, such as retrofit programmes, already have funding committed while other programmes will require feasibility studies or business cases to be developed to determine their viability and funding will need to be secured to make them happen. This is particularly relevant for some of the larger projects.
- 4.4. Partners will need to develop financial business cases which consider the whole-life-cost of projects. Low carbon projects often pay for themselves because of reduced energy costs but require higher up-front investment than fossil fuelled alternatives.
- 4.5. The cost of delay in delivering the measures necessary to avoid the worst consequences of climate change are likely to be significant.

5. Reducing Inequalities

- 5.1. Tackling climate change at the local level helps to address inequalities within our communities.
- 5.2. Climate impacts—like flooding, poor air quality, and energy insecurity—often affect low-income areas more severely, where residents may lack the resources to cope or recover. By investing, and encouraging our partners to invest, in green infrastructure, affordable public transport, and energy-efficient housing, we can create jobs, lower energy bills, and improve health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- 5.3. Supporting sustainable local businesses and community-led projects also promotes economic resilience. Through fair climate policies, the council can ensure that the benefits of a greener, healthier future are shared by all residents.

6. Decide

- 6.1. The scrutiny committee is asked to provide feedback on the five vision statements set out at 3.5 and the Draft Walsall Net Zero 2041 Strategy at Appendix A.

7. Respond

- 7.1. To deliver the elements of the strategy the council can influence are detailed in a three-year Walsall Council Net Zero Action Plan. Delivery of this action plan will be overseen by the council's Climate Change Task Force.
- 7.2. The borough wide objectives will be the responsibility of the proposed Walsall Net Zero Partnership of which the council will be a key partner. The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, Network Rail, Walsall College have already (enthusiastically) committed to join this partnership. We are approaching the Environment Agency, National Grid Distribution and other stakeholders. Suggestions of commercial entities that could be approached would be welcome.
- 7.3. The aim is to establish the Walsall Net Zero Partnership in January 2025 and for it to be initially chaired by the Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Communities.

8. Review

- 8.1. The strategy focuses on Walsall's geographic emissions as collated by DESNEZ - the metric by which progress to our climate emergency declaration Net Zero 2041 target will be measured.

9. Background papers

- 9.1. Appendix A: Draft Walsall Net Zero 2041 Strategy
- 9.2. E&E Security Report: Item 7: Climate Change Update

<https://cmispublic.walsall.gov.uk/cmisis/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/3812/Committee/504/Default.aspx>

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