

## Environment Strategy Progress Report - Quarter 1 2021/22

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The updated Environment Strategy and Climate Emergency Response Plan were agreed unanimously by committee on 1 October 2020. This progress report provides a summary of delivery of the Environment Strategy between April to June 2021. Previous reports are available on the council's website.
- 1.2. Key highlights of the quarter include the installation of a new recycling point at Sutton Central Library to recycle biscuit, cracker and cake bar wrappers, the launch of a council staff environment champions network and the restoration of Beddington Farmlands featured on BBC Springwatch in May. COVID-19 has continued to impact delivery of some projects, however as restrictions ease, we will seek to restart those projects which have been on hold for the last 18 months.

## 2. Cleaner Air

### *Sustainable Transport*

- 2.1. During January - March 2021, the council published its draft [Sustainable Transport Strategy](#) for consultation. The strategy aimed to provide opportunities for greater use of walking, cycling and public transport for those who live, work and visit the borough. As well as giving residents more choice, the Strategy seeks to improve their quality of life by improving road safety, reducing air pollution and making transport more accessible, especially for children, families, older people and other people who are vulnerable. Responses have now been reviewed and updates made to the strategy. The final draft will be presented to the Environment and Sustainable Transport Committee in Autumn 2021.
- 2.2. In June 2021, the council submitted a £29.5 million bid to the Government's Levelling Up Fund. If successful, the funding will be used to install twin tracks on the railway between Sutton and Belmont as well as rebuilding Belmont Station. In addition to supporting the Mayor of London's strategic case for Metroisation in South London, the improvements will provide increased accessibility to the Royal Marsden, London Cancer Hub and the new emergency care hospital due to open in 2025.

### *Low Traffic Neighbourhoods*

- 2.3. The council remains committed to seeking modal shift to increase rates of active travel as well as improving air quality for those who live, work and study in the borough. During the period 15 March - 4 April 2021, the council undertook a consultation on 11 school street programmes. This includes two timed closures per day on weekdays, to be enforced during term time only. Nearly 1,500 responses were received and the 11 programmes were approved by the Environment and Sustainable Transport Committee in June 2021.

### *Cycling improvements*

- 2.4. At the end of 2020/21 it was reported that the council had been successful in securing funding from Transport for London to deliver cycle parking improvements. Since then, cycle parking infrastructure has been installed at six schools and two housing developments as well as scooter parking in Schools. The council is awaiting confirmation from Transport for London regarding further funding for 2021/22.
- 2.5. Covid-secure cycling training has now recommenced in the borough. This includes provision for beginners as well as those who have cycling experience. The council is

awaiting confirmation from Transport for London regarding further funding for cycle maintenance and cycle safety training in 2021/22.

### **3. A Greener Borough**

#### *Parks and open spaces*

- 3.1. Updates and creation of new and existing management plans for the boroughs parks and open spaces has continued during the start of 2021/22. During quarter 1, draft management plans were completed for Cuddington Recreation Ground and Sutton Common Park. Management plans are an important tool in ensuring parks are managed in a sustainable way which supports biodiversity.
- 3.2. Green flags are a prestigious award for parks, recognising those which are managed sustainably. In 2020, three parks achieved Green flag status. Applications have now been submitted to the 2021 scheme for four parks - Manor Park, The Grove, Beddington Park & The Grange and Oaks Park. Judging is due to take place over the summer, which if successful will place the parks among the best in the country.
- 3.3. In quarter 4 of 2020/21, it was reported that the council was reviewing the frequency of mowing some grass verges to allow pollinators and wildlife to thrive. Since then, volunteers have started working with the council to undertake surveys of road verges in the borough. In doing this, they have identified verges which are suitable for either a reduced or no mowing schedule. Since the start of the trial, one location has been removed from the scheme following resident feedback. The council will now work with its contractor Idverde to agree a new mowing regime.
- 3.4. The council is continuing to support existing pocket parks in the borough, including the Plant Up Hackbridge. This project has been funded by the council and is being maintained by the council's contractor. Working with the Hackbridge Development Group, the council will be supporting them during the year ahead to deliver the group's objective to improve biodiversity and landscaping in Hackbridge.
- 3.5. Studies have shown that access to green space is important for our physical and mental health as well as improving the environment and creating habitats for species. Funding has been allocated through the Council's Ambitious for Sutton Transformation Programme to improve access to green spaces in the borough and improve resilience to climate change. Officers have started to scope the work and identify potential locations. Consultation with residents will then be undertaken to identify the most suitable location to implement an initial scheme.
- 3.6. In 2020/21 the council appointed a warden to monitor and advise on the creation of new wildlife habitats throughout the restoration of Beddington Farmlands. Following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, the warden is now working on site, undertaking survey work with the site ecologists. It is hoped that this work will be extended in late summer to include a programme of volunteer activities. The restoration of Beddington Farmlands was also featured on [BBC Springwatch](#) in May 2021.
- 3.7. The [Sutton in Bloom](#) competition has returned in 2021 to recognise top green-fingered enthusiasts who help to brighten the borough. The competition includes six categories including best front garden, best community garden, best business frontage, best allotment garden, best school garden and best container garden. A number of entries have been received and the judging period is now underway, with winners due to be announced in quarter 2.

### *Tree Planting*

- 3.8. Tree planting activities take place annually during the planting season, October to March. During quarter 1, activity has focused on compiling funding bids to support our ambitions to plant 2,000 trees per year. This has included applications to the councils' My Neighbourhood Fund (Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy), the government Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge and the Local Authority Treescapes Fund. If successful tree planting for these schemes will commence in autumn 2021.
- 3.9. The council is also working with the Beddington Tree Wardens and various Friends Groups for the parks to identify future tree planting projects. Park management plans are also being used to identify planting locations and suitable trees, ensuring the right tree is planted in the right location.

### *Biodiversity*

- 3.10. The council continues to work with the South East Rivers Trust to support and enable delivery of the River Wandle and the Beverley Brook Catchment Plans. In 2020/21 funding was secured to undertake minor works along the Carshalton arm of the River Wandle and river restoration work at Richmond Green. These works are scheduled to take place in late summer 2021 through to winter 2021/22. Other work includes an initial scoping site visit to consider river restoration projects within Beddington Park.
- 3.11. Last year we reported that funding had been secured to create butterfly banks in the borough. The banks will be increased further in 2021/21 through partnership working with the 'Brilliant Butterflies' project. New banks, estimated to be worth £20,000 will be created in Mellows Park and Roundshaw Playing Fields.
- 3.12. The relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions has enabled school visits to recommence at Sutton Ecology Centre. In total, 614 children and 126 adults were engaged as part of school visits in May and June 2021. A small number of events were also held, bringing the total number of children engaged to 654 and 159 adults - a cumulative total of 813 people.
- 3.13. Volunteers heavily support the delivery of biodiversity improvements in the borough. During the quarter, 32.5 task days were held with Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteers providing 149.5 volunteer days as well as four days to deliver volunteer-led events. The volunteer Biodiversity Assistant provided a further 22 volunteer days and Biodiversity Education Service volunteers have donated 19 volunteer days. This brings the total number of volunteer days to 194 during the period April - June 2021, equating to £10,325 of in kind support.
- 3.14. The council has now adopted a validation checklist which requires all green spaces of 100m<sup>2</sup> or more are required to be assessed for impacts on biodiversity. This builds upon the previous requirement for all major planning applications to be accompanied by a green space factor assessment and to ensure that a score of at least +0.2 continues to be enforced for 100% of all qualifying developments.

### *Allotments*

- 3.15. As of March 2021, there were a total of 37 allotments and 2,362 plots within the borough. Combined, they cover a total area of 40.8 hectares. Of these, 143 (6.1 per cent) of plots were vacant and there were 859 applicants on the waiting list. A full analysis is set out in the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) 2020-21. Year on year

trends in relation to allotment coverage, use and availability will be reported annually in future AMRs.

#### **4. Achieving Net Zero Carbon**

##### *Energy use in the council estate*

- 4.1. As part of its ambition to become a net zero carbon borough, the council is undertaking a review of its highest energy consuming corporate properties. The surveys are due to be undertaken during quarter 2 and the outcome will be used to inform a bid to future rounds of the public sector decarbonisation scheme, expected to launch in Autumn 2021.
- 4.2. At the end of quarter 1 the My Neighbourhood Fund (Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy) was open for applications. A bid has been submitted to retrofit the lighting system in the underpass between Sutton High Street and Civic Offices. The outcome of this is expected later in 2021, as projects are subject to public consultation.
- 4.3. Last quarter it was reported that a electric vehicle charging point survey and feasibility report was undertaken for the council's Civic Offices in 2020/21. The outcome was positive, indicating that installation of EV charging stations is possible, however large infrastructure works will be required. This work will be progressed further during the year ahead with further survey work and tendering options are required.
- 4.4. In 2020/21 it was announced that the council's Denmark Road offices in Carshalton would close with staff being relocated to the Civic Offices in Sutton. This work is underway and the council's Workwell project is engaging all teams across the council to identify approaches to flexible working. Where possible, staff will continue to undertake elements of working from home, enabling a reduction in travel use as well as office space requirements. The project team is working with staff to ensure as much furniture, stationery and other fittings is reused where possible, rather than disposed of, taking a circular approach.
- 4.5. A project is taking place to introduce electric vehicle charging via street lamp columns. Working with its contractor, the council expects to have 96 charging points installed by the end of quarter 2 2021/22.

##### *Greener Homes Grant - Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LAD) and Sustainable Warmth*

- 4.6. In August 2020 Sutton was successful in securing funding from the first round of the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LAD). The fund required local authorities to deliver retrofit improvements to low income, energy inefficient households. In Sutton, this has been used to install triple glazing to a selection of Sutton Housing Partnership Properties. A number of delays have been encountered due to COVID-19 restrictions, however work has now completed on six homes with the rest due to be completed by September 2021.
- 4.7. Work has continued during the quarter to identify properties within the borough that may be eligible to access the £557,000 of government funding allocated to Sutton for LAD 2. The funding is available to undertake retrofit measures to poor performing, low income homes in the borough. The council is currently awaiting contract documentation from the Greater South East Energy Hub who are overseeing delivery of this scheme in London and the South East.
- 4.8. In Spring 2021, the Government announced it's new Sustainable Warmth programme - a combination of LAD 3 and the Home Update Grant. Similar to previous rounds of

LAD, the programme is aimed at retrofitting low income private properties which have an EPC below E. The council intends to submit an application during quarter 2.

#### *Sutton Housing Partnership*

- 4.9. A stock condition survey has been completed to assess the current condition of all SHP properties. The results will be used to inform plans for energy efficiency work and retrofit, supporting the borough's plans to become net zero carbon. Analysis will commence in the summer to identify the works strategy.
- 4.10. Work continues to deliver Energiesprong, a project to pilot whole house retrofit to 8 SHP properties. The first five projects are due to be completed in July. A contractor has been appointed for the second phase of the project with pre-contract and design works currently underway. To date, an additional 75 properties have been identified for this phase of work.

#### *Housing - new builds*

- 4.11. As mentioned in the quarter 4 report, the council has been undertaking work to assess the feasibility of moving from a reduced carbon to net zero carbon build for its housing new builds. The initial costs have indicated a potential increase of 5-8 per cent to achieve zero carbon. The first zero carbon housing project is in the design stages and subject to change as it goes through the planning process.

#### *Fuel poverty and energy efficiency*

- 4.12. A procurement exercise was completed at the end of quarter 4 2020/21 to appoint a contractor to deliver a Sutton Healthy Homes service throughout 2021/22 - 2022/23. Funded by the Council, this is building upon the existing service (funded by the GLA). Work during quarter 1, has focused on establishing multi-service referral routes. This has included services such as Encompass, Sutton Housing Partnership, the St Helier community fridge and the council's regulatory services team.
- 4.13. The service will support residents through the provision of energy efficiency measures as well as assistance with switching energy tariffs. Where relevant, the provider will also support residents to apply for funding to deliver larger energy efficiency measures, therefore improving the energy efficiency of their property and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The majority of support is expected to be undertaken in autumn / winter when people start considering their fuel bills.

#### *Solar Together 4*

- 4.14. In early 2021, the council secured funding from the GLA to participate in a fourth round of the Solar Together Scheme. Operating as a collective purchasing scheme, Solar Together provided residents with the opportunity to purchase solar panels or battery storage for their homes. In total, nearly 1,000 residents registered for the scheme (the highest number to date) with the average cost of the panels being 33% lower than market price. To date, 91 residents have accepted their offer and are proceeding with the installation of solar panels on their roofs.

## **5. Creating a Circular Economy**

### *Reducing waste and increasing recycling*

- 5.1. A series of clothes based circular economy events are being delivered by the council's cultural services team, including clothes swaps. An event held in June 2021 had over 80

participants who swapped over 1,000 items of clothing. A 'fix your clothes' darning and patch repair workshop is due to take place in July 2021.

- 5.2. As mentioned in the quarter 4 2020/21 report, funding has been provided by the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy to install a Library of Things in Sutton Library. The lending library, once open, will allow people to hire items that they may have otherwise purchased and used 'once a year' or less frequently e.g sewing machines or drills. This is a demonstrator project for the circular economy, as it helps to reduce the amount of natural resources consumed by buying new products, and ensures items are used to their maximum benefit. Work continues to establish the Library which is due to open in autumn 2021.
- 5.3. In June 2021, the council joined the Terracycle biscuit and snack recycling programme, a scheme which enables biscuit and cracker wrappers to be recycled. The recycling point is available in Sutton Central Library and residents are invited to save up their plastic wrappers from non-savoury biscuit packs, crackers and cake bars and place them in the bin located in the library's main reception area.
- 5.4. During the quarter, the government published a series of consultations regarding changes to the waste and recycling systems in England. The council provided responses to changes to the extended producer responsibilities, introducing a consistent waste and recycling collections and introducing a deposit return scheme for items such as single use plastic bottles.
- 5.5. During June the council contacted all schools in the borough to understand how they are managing food waste. Only a small number of schools have facilities in place to compost this waste, however many were interested in participating in a food waste collection. The council will now work with schools and the South London Waste Partnership to support schools to implement a food waste collection service. It is expected that this will require a collective procurement exercise.

## **6. Tackling Climate Change**

### *Flood Action*

- 6.1. The council had previously undertaken work to assess the feasibility of large-scale schemes to tackle flooding issues in the Beddington Gardens, Wallington Station and South Beddington areas. Due to the size and cost being deemed unfeasible, work is being undertaken to identify options for schemes with alternative flood alleviation return periods.
- 6.2. The outline business case for a flood alleviation scheme in Worcester Park is now ready for submission to National Project Assurance Service for final approval. If successful, the scheme will proceed to the detailed design, engagement and construction phase.

### *SuDS*

- 6.3. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are a way of reducing flood risk in an area. A variety of measures may be installed such as rain gardens or swales and act to slow the rush of surface water run-off (e.g. rainwater) into our drains which in turn reduces the flood risk.
- 6.4. The draft Sustainable Transport Strategy (see Cleaner Air section above) introduces a new objective for all transport schemes to incorporate SuDS measures. Recent examples include the Beddington Lane improvement programme, a project to improve the highway for all users. As well as reducing flood risk in the area, this has improved the drainage of the scheme and decreased the overall costs of the programme.

### *Planning*

- 6.5. The Local Plan requires new dwellings to limit internal water consumption to no more than 110 litres per person per day (l/p/d). This is in line with the higher of the two efficiency standards under Part G of the Building Regulations and was met for 85.6% of new-build dwellings completed during the 2019-20 financial year (500 out of 584). Further details of policy compliance are set out in the [AMR 2019-20](#) which was published in March 2021.
- 6.6. In June 2021, the Housing, Economy and Business Committee gave authority for the Strategic Planning team to begin preparation of a new evidence base to inform the next Local Plan. It is intended to strengthen the council's zero carbon and other environmental policies as far as possible.

### *Emergency Planning*

- 6.7. Extreme weather, including heatwaves, is a known effect of climate change. A [Cool Spaces map](#) has now been produced by the GLA and is now available for use. This identifies areas where Londoners can take respite on hot days. The map currently includes outdoor spaces, with indoor spaces due to be added as social distancing restrictions ease further.
- 6.8. The council receives heat wave alerts which it uses to help notify relevant services when action is needed. In particular, this helps to ensure action is taken to safeguard vulnerable residents. The council also utilises Heat Health resources published by Public Health England, to advise the public of actions they can take to stay well during periods of extreme heat.

### *School meals*

- 6.9. The council continues to procure a school meals service on behalf of 27 mainly primary schools in the borough. Working with the contractor, a number of measures have been put in place to minimise the environmental impact of the school meals provided. This includes a weekly 'meat free Monday' whereby no meat products are served. Vegan and vegetarian options are also provided throughout the week and 'added plant power' dishes are now available on the menu. These dishes have a 50% reduction in meat which is instead substituted for plant based products. The kitchens have all attained the silver Food for Life accreditation mark and use only free range eggs as well as a number of Fairtrade items. All fish and fish products have Marine Stewardship Council certification and 'chain of custody' traceability. All tuna is pole and line certified and milk used is fresh and organic.
- 6.10. As part of the school meals contract, the council also supplies and maintains the catering equipment including ovens. Funded by the council, a trial has commenced to pilot replacing gas ovens with electric in line with the councils ambitions to reduce carbon emissions. To date, four end of life gas ovens have been removed and replaced with electric ovens. Monitoring will take place to ascertain the environmental impact of this, however it is expected to contribute towards a reduction in CO2 emissions.

### *Partnership work*

- 6.11. Sutton is part of the Renewable Power for London working group, one of the seven climate change priority programmes adopted by the London Councils and facilitated by

the London Environment Directors Network. The group will seek to progress renewable power and identify where action is required for change to support this agenda.

- 6.12. The council continues to meet with the representatives from the Ministry for Housing, Community and Local Government to identify areas for national investment and change to support the climate change agenda.
- 6.13. Community Action Sutton have successfully exceeded their funding target for the community garden project at Hill House. Having raised over £18,000 the project will see the installation of 10 raised planters, a large greenhouse for all year planting and a new sensory garden for people with learning disabilities. Work on the garden is expected to commence in summer and continue throughout the planting season in autumn 2021.

## **7. Communications**

- 7.1. The council has launched a staff environment champions network, bringing together staff with a passion for improving the environment. Launching in July 2021, over 30 members of staff have already signed up to the network. The champions will meet monthly, undertaking themed months, delivering environmental activities and competitions as well as raising awareness across the wider council and community. An external network of community environment champions is due to launch later in the year.

If you want more information or have any questions please visit [www.sutton.gov.uk/climate](http://www.sutton.gov.uk/climate) or email [sustainability@sutton.gov.uk](mailto:sustainability@sutton.gov.uk)