

Sustainability Matters – A Sustainability Strategy for Solihull

1. Introduction

This is the sustainability strategy for Solihull, which aims to support the achievement of sustainable development.

- 1.1 The identification of the key issues was informed by a high level Sustainability Assessment based on objectives taken from the West Midlands Regional Sustainable Development Framework. The assessment included a review of existing strategic activity, likelihood of priorities being addressed, impacts if not addressed and opportunities.
- 1.2 Sustainable development is about making sure that people throughout the world can satisfy their basic needs now, whilst making sure that future generations can also look forward to the same quality of life.
- 1.3 It recognises that the three ‘pillars’ – the economy, society and the environment – are interconnected.
- 1.4 Sustainable Development is not a separate green issue, a ‘nice to have’ or a priority for a few services. It should be mainstreamed so that it is central to the way we make policy, run our buildings and purchase goods and services.
- 1.5 Why Sustainable Development? The past few decades have seen a growing realisation that our current model of development is unsustainable. Our way of life is placing an increasing burden on the planet through:-
 - the consequences of **unavoidable climate change**;
 - increasing **stress on resources and environmental systems** from the way we produce, consume and waste resources;
 - increasing **loss of biodiversity**.
- 1.6 The Government’s Vision for Sustainable Development is ‘the goal of living within environmental limits and a just society will be achieved by means of a sustainable economy, good governance, and sound science’.
- 1.7 Its commitment to Sustainable Development is expressed in Defra’s ‘[Mainstreaming Sustainable Development](#)’ 2011, which builds on the principles that underpinned the UK’s 2005 sustainable development strategy ‘[Securing the Future](#)’ .
- 1.8 In 2007 the Council adopted a set of broad [sustainability principles](#) to guide its policy development, resource allocations and actions.
- 1.9 This strategy is a key component of Solihull’s Integrated Growth Strategy, which sets out the Vision and ambitions for delivering ‘managed growth’. It supports the following Key Strategic Priorities;
 - Sustainability in its broadest sense- ensuring a lasting positive impact and legacy for Solihull’s communities from development and investment;

- Climate change, including green / low carbon opportunities; and the following Principles;
- Growth should enhance Solihull as a place – offering a high quality of life and environment with a dynamic and, high skilled, high value economy.
- It needs to take place in a way and at a pace that Solihull could sustain, underpinning the delivery of the vision and ambitions for the Borough.
- It both ensures environmental quality and meets economic needs, respecting the economic and social importance (as well as environmental value) of Solihull’s environment and quality of life.
- Growth through development will use land and energy resources and place additional demands on infrastructure. Its benefits and costs will, therefore, need to be balanced to ensure that development is sustainable and the benefits outweigh the costs.

1.10 The Integrated Strategy recognises the cross cutting nature of sustainability and the need to ensure all strategic activity supports the achievement of sustainable development. The Sustainability Strategy will support the achievement of this aspiration.

2 What have we found out about sustainability in Solihull?

2.1 Solihull is rightly known for its high quality environment. However its apparent affluence can mask important wider sustainability issues and disparities.

2.2 In our Sustainability Assessment we found:-

Sustainable consumption and production

- A) Parts of the borough experience traffic congestion during peak hours, public transport links are limited from the rural to the urban area and from the Regeneration Zone to south Solihull. Only 7.2% of working age Solihull residents either walk or cycle to work.
- B) Whilst the household recycling rate of Solihull has increased over the last ten years, the Councils Waste Strategy acknowledges that household waste per person is ‘relatively’ high at just under half a tonne of household waste per person, each year.

Climate change and energy

- C) Solihull’s domestic per capita emissions are 2.3 tCO₂, slightly higher than the West Midlands and England average of 2.1tCO₂ per capita (2009 figure). The borough faces the challenge of driving down energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions from new build but also crucially from its existing housing and commercial stock.
- D) Solihull is relatively limited in terms of the amount of renewable energy that can be provided, especially by decentralised wind or biomass. Greater potential exists for Combined Heat and Power (CHP) district heating networks. The Camco Study estimated the percentage renewable energy potential for Solihull as 3.3% (by 2021) - the lowest in sub region.

- E) Research indicates that all members of the community will be affected by climate change but the impacts will have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable members of our community, particularly the elderly and those with existing/chronic health problems (further aggravated in areas of deprivation). This is particularly pertinent given Solihull's ageing population and our areas of relative deprivation. There will also be impacts on our natural environment and biodiversity.

Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement

- F) The borough faces the challenge of the decline in biodiversity, including sites of national importance such as the River Blythe, loss of sites of local importance, fragmentation of habitats and degrading of the historic Arden landscape character in parts of the Borough.
- G) The river Blythe is currently in 'unfavourable condition' according to Natural England due to agricultural and sewage pollution. The Environment Agency classifies the majority of the Rivers Blythe and Cole as being of moderate status, with Cuttle Brook of poor status.

Sustainable communities

- H) Fuel poverty is a significant issue and is considered to be a contributory factor to excess winter mortality.
- I) Solihull has one of the most severe housing affordability problems in the West Midlands region. This reflects both a shortage of affordable housing and house prices that are significantly above the regional average
- J) The link between easily accessible, high quality parks and open spaces and countryside and health and wellbeing is well established. Health in Solihull is generally good and considerable activity is taking place aimed at reducing existing health inequalities. However, given the challenges our natural environment faces (decline in biodiversity, fragmentation of habitats etc.) we need to ensure the environmental quality and accessibility of our parks, open space and countryside is maintained and where possible enhanced, ensuring that the links between health and the environment are fully maximised.
- K) Solihull has relatively weak environmental presence within the voluntary and community sector, particularly in the area of climate change and wider sustainability issues.

3 Areas which need further investigation

- L) The 2006 study One Planet Living in the Suburbs found Solihull's Ecological Footprint to be 5.7 global hectares, 10% higher than the West Midlands average of approximately 5 global hectares.
- M) Defra's White Paper - Water for Life confirms the combined effects of climate change and a growing population are likely to put increasing pressure on our rivers, lakes and aquifers.

- N) There is currently no borough wide strategy or co-ordinated activity to encourage local sourcing of food, goods and materials.
- O) Ensure we are making the most of key low carbon economic opportunities that exist in Solihull, such as in construction, manufacture of motor vehicles and transport and manufacture of non metallic goods, environmental goods and services. (as outlined in the report 'Opportunities in the Low Carbon Economy' Atkins/AWM May 2010).
- P) Are we doing all we can to support a culture of enterprise and innovation, including social enterprise in areas that will support environmental sustainability.
- Q) Whist there is considerable activity taking place around the skills and learning agenda, are we fully engaged in the area of environmental skills development and could more be done to deliver learning programme for adults around sustainability topics such as energy efficiency?

4. Key opportunities

- 4.1 Maximise opportunities offered by development of the low carbon economy.
- 4.2 Maximise the opportunities to deliver sustainable development offered through adoption of Local Plan.
- 4.3 Maximise the significant opportunities for embedding sustainable development into North Solihull regeneration activity.
- 4.4 Maximising the benefits to Solihull from the Green Deal.
- 4.5 Leading by example in areas such as waste and carbon reduction, sustainable construction and procurement.
- 4.6 Supporting and enabling 'Big Society' through sustainability projects and initiatives.

5. What do we need to do about it?

- 5.1 The Strategy and Action Plan outlines tactical actions to improve the sustainability of Solihull, now and in the future.
- 5.2 There will be an annual update of the Action Plan, informed by an annual review of the Sustainability Assessment.

Sustainability Action Plan

Vision: Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

Strategic Intent

- **Sustainable consumption and production** – achieving more with less, reducing inefficient use of resources and taking into account impacts of products and materials across their whole lifecycle.
- **Climate Change and energy** – changing the way we generate and use energy and preparing for the inevitable climate change that cannot now be avoided.
- **Natural resource protection and environmental enhancement** – a better understanding of environmental limits, environmental enhancement and recovery where the environment is most degraded to ensure a decent environment for everyone.
- **Sustainable Communities** – creation of sustainable communities that embody the principles of sustainable development at the local level.

Objectives

1. Use natural resources efficiently and encourage and enable waste minimisation, reuse, recycling and recovery
2. Increase use of public transport, cycling and walking
3. Encourage local sourcing of food, goods and materials
4. Achieve a sustainable economy and prosperity for the benefit of all the Borough's inhabitants, encouraging and supporting a culture of enterprise and innovation, including social enterprise.
5. Reduce emissions of greenhouse gases from transport, domestic, commercial and industrial sources, increase energy efficiency and increase the proportion of energy generated from renewable and low carbon sources
6. Implement a managed response to the unavoidable impacts of climate change
7. Encourage land use and development that creates and sustains well-designed, high quality built environments that incorporate green space, encourage biodiversity, and promote local distinctiveness and sense of place
8. Value, protect, enhance and restore the borough's environmental assets and biodiversity
9. Minimise air, water, soil, light and noise pollution levels
10. Encourage local stewardship of local environments
11. Support the reduction of fuel poverty
12. Provide decent and affordable housing for all
13. Ensure that the borough's workforce is equipped with the skills to access high quality employment opportunities whilst recognising the value and contribution of unpaid work

Key Tactical Actions
Produce the Green infrastructure Strategy.
Produce the North Solihull Regeneration Sustainability Strategy.
Produce a Borough wide Climate Change Strategy (focusing on both mitigation and adaptation).
Work with Solihull Sustainability Visioning Group to encourage greater sustainability within the business community, in particular SME's (small and medium size enterprises) through delivery of the Sustainability Visioning Group Action Plan.
Maximise opportunities arising from the Green Deal.
Deliver actions aimed at reducing fuel poverty.
Ensure we are fully able to support/ respond to required growth in district energy networks and other low carbon energy opportunities.
Work with partners including Natural England and Environment Agency to support improvements to water quality particularly of the Rivers Blythe and Cole.
Work with partners and the local community on promoting links between health and the environment and sustainability, developing links with the Health and Wellbeing Board and Local Nature Partnership.
Work with partners to increase the capacity of the voluntary and community sector in the areas of sustainability and climate change including supporting the development of social enterprises.
Working with partners, promote and deliver Education for Sustainable Development to all ages and members of the community, through the continuation of successful initiatives such as Eco-Schools and the Environment Champions and through emerging initiatives such Eco-Centres and Eco-Communities.
Support local sourcing of goods and materials.
Maximise Solihull's key low carbon economic opportunities and develop environmental skills.