

Sustainability Forum - 14 March 2023

The Sustainability Forum included two presentations and a round table discussion:

- Updates, including the Environmental Strategy
- People Power and moving the borough towards net zero carbon.

Updates

Watford's Environmental Strategy:

The Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency was approved by Cabinet on 13 March 2023. As part of developing the strategy we held a consultation exercise in November and December 2022. The outcomes from the engagement are:

- We had over 650 responses to our consultation
- Most people were generally positive about our approach
- We reviewed all the comments against targets and made adjustments as appropriate
- We added in more interim targets
- We created a summary document, to make the strategy more accessible.

We have now developed the Delivery Plan for the Strategy for 2023-25. The delivery plan includes actions and timeframes. It will be reviewed annually and updated every two years. We will have an internal working document of the delivery plan, which will be reviewed more regularly, and include designated people responsible for actions.

The Strategy and Delivery Plan will be available on the [website](#). Currently it can be found at [within the council Cabinet papers](#) (see item 11 appendices 1-3).

Other Updates:

- [Rediscovering the River Colne Tap Out campaign](#) deadline for getting involved is end of March 2023.
- [Great Big Green Week](#) is happening again in Watford between 10 to 18 June
- It is [Earth Hour](#) on 25 March between 8:30pm and 9:30pm. Join in and turn your lights out.
- Watford Family Cycling Day and SPOKES Cycle Gathering – 11 June 2023

Dates for the forum in 2023/24:

- Thursday 13 July 2023
- Tuesday 24 October 2023
- Wednesday 7 February 2024.

People Power: Moving the borough towards Net Zero Carbon

It is important for us to address the climate emergency and reduce our carbon emissions. We can see the impact of climate change with an increase in global temperature of over 1°C compared to preindustrial levels. We saw the impacts of this in summer 2022, with UK summer temperatures reaching 40°C for the first time, and in Watford over 38°C. We have also been seeing increases in severe weather incidents, such as heavier rainfall, with corresponding flooding.

Scientists have identified that we are reaching natural boundaries for planetary tipping points, where we could see changes accelerate, and a move to a different stable system. The scientific consensus is that humans are overwhelmingly the cause of us reaching these tipping points (more information on climate change emissions can be found on the [IPPC website](#), along with its regular reports, through issues such as burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, reduction in the number and areas of wildlife habitats and the increase of human population, and its corresponding requirement for resources.

What can we do about this? We can make a difference. We need to work together, for everyone to take action, for us to build momentum and make the environmentally sound option the easiest option. It's easy to say it is someone else's responsibility, but we all can take action and do something.

The council is addressing this through our Environmental Strategy. One of the overarching themes is People Power, how we get people (businesses, residents, visitors) within Watford to take action to reduce carbon emissions across the borough. We have seven targets in the People Power section, and a further 21 targets across the four sustainability topics which are identified as borough and people power.

Within the People Power section our targets are:

- 10% of Watford Households signed up to Count Us In or equivalent by 2025; 25% by 2027; 50% by 2030
- Engage with 50% of fuel poor households on how they can reduce their energy costs by 2025; 75% by 2027 and 90% by 2030
- 50% SME and large businesses signed up to sustainable business charter by March 2025; 75% by March 2027
- 25% micro businesses signed up to sustainable business pledge – March 2025; 50% by March 2027
- Increase uptake of local climate initiatives by 10% year on year from 2024 to 2030
- Increase by at least 10% year on year opportunities for people to be engaged with educational or voluntary activities in this area
- Develop a skills and employment plan, with green skills and jobs as a key strand by 2024, implementing the targets and actions thereafter

We are looking at how to engage with people in the borough, and get them to sign up to take action. Two examples we are looking at are:

- [Count Us In](#) – there are 16 actions for people to sign up to. Can set up a local page within their system and allow the potential emissions saved to be calculated.
- [Take the Jump](#) – Six shifts for people to sign up to do for one month (or longer).

We are also looking at developing a local People Power Portal, which provides local information, actions that can be taken and estimate reductions in emissions achieved.

You can help by:

- Taking one (more) step to reducing your environmental impacts – recognising that many of the issues are interlinked.
- Talk to others and encourage them to take action.
- Lobby people to ensure this remains seen as an important issue, so national action is taken.
- Work with us and others to make change happen.

Sustainability Forum – Roundtable Discussion

The audience split into six groups to discuss seven questions. Not all groups managed to discuss each of the questions. We have grouped the feedback from all groups for each question.

What will a net zero Watford look like?

- May be better to ask what a ‘more sustainable Watford’ will look like – better conveys all the environmental issues we’re looking to address
- Less car traffic
 - Electric buses
 - Cheaper/free public transport
 - No reason to drive through the town centre
 - More Beryl Bikes, Last mile on bike
 - Build infrastructure for bicycles
 - Better access to buses – joined up bus companies, information on bus routes etc.
- More biodiversity/ greenery (wildflower meadows)
 - Garden sharing (AllotMe) for a greener Watford
 - Incredible Edible model
 - Keep food local, grow local, seasonality
- Questions over the amount of development – may need to be controlled
- Sewage in the Colne – council project
- Less waste
 - Repair cafes
- Working with local businesses
 - i.e. Planting.org.uk: working with locals to empower them to become food secure – food forests and protected green spaces; permaculture boxes; create spaces for foraging and integrating with nature
- Long-term goal – all plant based (it will take generations)
- More efficient insulation

What actions are you taking to move towards this?

- Reducing habitat loss e.g. No Mow May, promoting biodiversity projects, growing native flowers in the garden
- Active travel (walking and cycling more), car sharing, electric flights
- Reducing flights
- Carrot and Stick (easy alternatives - easy and coordinated public transport network)
- 2nd hand everything – reuse, reduce, recycle
- Following a plant based diet

- Thinking how we use water every time the tap is run – using cold water when we can

What other actions can you take?

- Insulation
- Electric car
- Improve/ nourish soil in garden
- Use 100% renewable power companies i.e. Octopus
- Allotment participation
- Campaign for a unified recycling system
- Challenge yourself every time you shop re; plastic boxes and packaging

What is stopping you?

- Inertia / hesitation to change
- Electric cars not viable yet – problem of rare earth materials/materials
- Cost of insulation, renewing a boiler, heat pumps, solar panels etc.
- Difficulty getting solar panels or EV charging points for older properties
- Time-poor
- Campaigning sometimes feels pointless; feels like it may cause friction with friends and family
- Feels pointless volunteering, for example, when the rivers can be polluted under flood conditions

How do we capture your and others' commitment?

- Keep talking
- Local community events
- Media promotion/ support
- Carrot (not stick)
- Fine tune the message to be thoughtful and relatable

What might help you do more?

- Break down actions into small step-by-step approach – large problems feel impossible to tackle
- Subsidies, grants, schemes
- Community projects
- Crowd funding
- Ratings system for schools and businesses?

What might you do encourage others to take action?

- People power/lobbying
 - Kids – parents – schools
 - Employees – companies
 - Voters – government
- Talk, encourage, explain benefits
- Assist – speak with neighbours and friends

- Set an example
- Vary the time of consultations to be inclusive