

This Report will be made public on 12 September 2023

Report Number **C/23/34**

To: Cabinet
Date: 20th September 2023
Status: Non key
Responsible Officer: James Farrar
Cabinet Member: Cllr Scoffham, Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Biodiversity

SUBJECT: Net Zero Toolkit

SUMMARY: The Net Zero Carbon Toolkit is a practical, easy to follow guide to help plan a net zero development project. It has been developed with joint funding from Homes England and through a collaborative approach involving Council teams across housing, strategy, development management and also Kent County Council. The report explains the four parts to the draft toolkit developed with the support of the same multi-disciplinary consultancy team responsible for the LGA funded toolkit. The report seeks Cabinet approval for publication as a best practice guide aimed at householders looking to retrofit or extend their existing property, small or medium-sized house builders, architects, self-builders and consultants. It is also recommended to form an evidence base document for a future review of the Local Plan and endorsement by Cabinet.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

So that Cabinet can approve the publication of the Net Zero Toolkit and the use of the documents as part of the Local Plans evidence base.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/23/34.
2. That Cabinet approves:
 - i) The publication of the Net Zero Toolkit, subject to final editing updates and corrections, together with associated communications to promote its use; and
 - ii) The use of the documents as part of the Local Plans evidence base.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Folkestone & Hythe District Council declared a climate emergency along with many other councils in 2019 and a budget has been set aside for initiatives which will help the council hit its net-zero carbon emissions by 2030.
- 1.2 Climate is also a key part of our new nine-year Corporate Plan: Creating Tomorrow Together. A key guiding principle for us is working towards a greener Folkestone & Hythe and one of our four service ambitions is a Thriving Environment. This means that climate is central to our planned priorities until 2030 when we also plan to achieve net zero carbon emissions.
- 1.3 In October 2021 the Government published the Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener that describes the pathway for the UK to transition to net-zero carbon by 2050. The pathway includes embedding 'green by design' into projects and financial support for development of new sustainable energy and natural infrastructure projects at scale.
- 1.4 Whilst the language of net zero is becoming normalised, few developers are consistently building such homes, and perceptions of excess cost and risk are holding such developments back. The approach, targets and responsibilities in the transition to net zero are described in the Government's Net Zero Strategy, October 2021, reflected in the Council's Carbon Action Plan and add clarity to the overall net-zero approach.
- 1.5 The Council is bringing forward an ambitious agenda of development and regeneration schemes and has declared a Climate Emergency. Smaller builders and architects often do not have dedicated expertise on achieving net zero, and new builds still tend to default to a 'comply with building regulations' approach. Self-builders are often very motivated to achieve net zero carbon but would still benefit from succinct advice such as a toolkit and to enable self-builders to be able to benefit from financial help from the Government, such as the Renewable Heat Incentive. The toolkit has sought to widen the scope to include advice around community, institutional, employment and commercial buildings as well as existing housing stock and historic buildings so it has a wider impact beyond housing alone.
- 1.6 *Funding* – given its cross-cutting use, the Council's contribution has been met by a £30,500 contribution from the Climate Change Reserve. The remainder has been met by a match funding grant from Homes England.
- 1.7 *Consultants* – the draft toolkit is an evolution of the work published by Cotswold District Council which collaborated with West Oxfordshire District Council and Forest of Dean District Council to produce a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit. Funded through the Local Government Association (LGA) Housing Advisers Programme, the guide has been produced by the same leading technical experts and adapted to suit our district.
- 1.8 *Status of toolkit* – the Toolkit will remain a non-statutory document but implementing the measures laid out in the new toolkit will help deliver net zero, environmentally friendly developments aligned to the targets, values and outcomes of the Council's crosscutting priorities outlined in the

Corporate Plan and Low Carbon Action Plan. It will also support the Council's future review of the Local Plan by acting as an important evidence base document to support more ambitious climate change policies. It will also support the Council's future review of the Local Plan by acting as an important evidence base document to support more ambitious climate change policies. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, which is expected to gain Royal Assent in 2024, will introduce a new requirement for local authorities to prepare district-wide Design Codes for their areas. The Net Zero Toolkit will provide valuable evidence for the district council to use in preparing its design code. Finally, it will provide an easy-to-use guide for homeowners, house builders, self-builders and consultants seeking to exceed minimum legal standards. Finally, it will provide an easy-to-use guide for homeowners, house builders, self-builders and consultants seeking to exceed minimum legal standards.

- 1.9 *Contents of Toolkit* - through evolution of the draft toolkit the Steering Group opted for a four-part structure to the toolkit. It comprises the following:

Part One – Decarbonising buildings – strategic objectives

- 1.10 This part is six pages long and aimed at Councillors, officers and other key stakeholders involved in the formation and adoption of the Net Zero Toolkit. It lays the foundations for the Toolkit documents by explaining legal climate change requirements and policy context. It also explain the “whys” for being ambitious with Net Zero Carbon new buildings.

Part two – New buildings

- 1.11 This part is sixty pages long and aimed at developers (small and large), architects, consultants, planning officers. Its main aim is to communicate how new developments that are consistent with climate change objectives can be designed and constructed. It covers both domestic and non-domestic developments and includes useful ‘one pagers’.

Part three – Retrofit

- 1.12 This part is forty pages long and aimed at F&HDC as it focuses mainly on the Council's own stock. It seeks to communicate the importance of retrofit, explain which key improvements need to be made in a simple way. It also signposts useful guidance on retrofit.

Part four – Planning policy recommendations

- 1.13 This part is twenty pages long and aimed at F&HDC planning policy department. It provides clear policy recommendations for the Council to consider for the next Local Plan update.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The Toolkit has been developed as a collaborative project on behalf of the Council and Homes England. An officer steering group was set up to review outputs and progress to ensure corporate objectives are met. This has

involved officers from Development Management, Strategy, Housing & Operations and Otterpool Park LLP as well as Kent County Council. Homes England also sat on the steering group. A presentation was made to the Council’s Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Group and comments incorporated into the draft together with officer comments. Finally, the draft toolkit was well received by the Place Panel and its comments were also incorporated.

3. OPTIONS

3.1 The Toolkit is a non-statutory document for publication that will also form an evidence base document for the Council’s development plan and design code. It is also a document that could help the evidence for other Council documents and strategies, such as the developing District-wide Carbon Action Plan. The options to consider are:

- i. Publish the Toolkit, or;
- ii. Do not publish the Toolkit;

3.2 *Communications* – a small amount of budget has been set aside for the consultants to prepare a short introductory video for each part of the toolkit to help explain its contents in an accessible way. This would then be uploaded onto the Council website and also promoted through the Council’s social media channels. Should there be an appetite to go further in promoting the toolkit this would require additional funding or be met through existing communications budget.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
That the toolkit has limited impact on influencing users in the use of net zero tools in the district.	Medium	Medium	Effective communications and promotion will help foster take-up. Using the toolkit and associated documents for general evidence to inform future reviews of the Local Plan and Design Codes will assist in strengthening its status and use in future.

7. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

7.1 Legal Officer’s Comments (TH)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

7.2 Finance Officer's Comments (RH)

See comments in 3.2 for financial implications – existing budget could meet the consultants costs for the explanatory video, however costs for any further work that is agreed will require additional budget (CLT contingency).

7.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

There are no equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report. The Net Zero toolkit if approved and published will be made available on the council's website and an introductory video will assist in explaining the content of toolkit in an accessible way to residents.

7.4 Climate Change Implications (AT)

Implementing the measures laid out in the new toolkit will help deliver net zero, environmentally friendly developments aligned to the targets, values and outcomes of the Council's crosscutting priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan and Low Carbon Action Plan.

8. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting.

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Net Zero Toolkit

Part 1 - Strategic Objectives

Part 2 - New Buildings

Part 3 - Existing Buildings