

Draft Environment Strategy

Portfolio Holder(s):

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31 August 2023

Reason for the report

Oldham Council declared a climate emergency in Sep 2019 and committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2025, with boroughwide carbon neutrality by 2030. The council is currently working towards the above targets as part of the Green New Deal, and this approach ties in with that of Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) 5 Year Environmental Plan.

The GMCA plan has 6 main strands; in Oldham, 3 of the strands are covered as part of the Green New Deal and, the other 3 strands, detailed below, will be covered through the Environment Strategy.

- Climate Adaptation & Resilience
- Production & Consumption of Resources, and,
- The Natural Environment

The Environment Strategy will apply until 2025, after which, the strategy will be reviewed and then sync with that of the GM Environment Plan – this will allow synergy in approach with GM partners and the Green New Deal, but also allow Oldham to focus its resource and attention on areas that are relevant and specific to its unique geography, climatic and environmental challenges, especially around adaptation and resilience.

The report also recognizes, as part of the three strands above, that there are other key areas and regulatory regimes that will feed into the Environment Strategy and must be incorporated into the planning and delivery of the Councils environmental aims and objectives. These are:

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- **City of Trees** – The Council aims to plant an additional 1,000 trees and 5 hectares of woodland each year from 2024. This will take place in conjunction with City of Trees, which is delivered at a GM level. Oldham has taken the lead in identifying sites that are suitable for planting trees and these have been put forward to maximise the number of trees that can be planted in Oldham – both in public areas as well as dedicated greenspaces such as country parks and our larger urban parks/networks
 - **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)** – BNG is a new requirement, coming into effect from Autumn 2023 and one that applies to all planning developments. The aim of this is to ensure that all developments through the planning process result in a ‘biodiversity net gain’ of 10% and this will be delivered at a GM level.

Developers cannot be compelled to make the investment in the area where the development is taking place – they can do this at a national level. In order to maximise the gain at a local level, Oldham Council Planning Services are working closely with the Environment Directorate to identify suitable areas and to then raise these at GM level to ensure they are considered when developments are taking place.

- **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)** – The government introduced legislation under the Environment Act 2021 outlining measures to support the reversal in the decline in nature and biodiversity. This included a new mandatory requirement for local areas in England to develop a spatial strategy for nature recovery, referred to as Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). The government will provide separate guidance to explain what this means in practice and has previously stated that LNRS will not be a barrier to development, nor will it introduce new/different designations.

The regulations state that the responsible authority must take reasonable steps to involve all supporting authorities (for GM, this includes the 10 GMCA metropolitan district councils, Natural England and Peak District National Park Authority). This work will be delivered at a GM level but will be delivered locally through planning policy and will complement the councils overall aim to increase green space, trees coverage and biodiversity.

The purpose of presenting this draft Environmental Strategy at Scrutiny Committee is to gain feedback and consideration for the approach being proposed with key elements of the Draft Environment Strategy outlined in the Summary section. The complete Draft report is attached in **Appendix A**.

1.0 Summary

Recognising the global environmental challenge and the impacts of climate change, Oldham Council declared a climate emergency in September 2019, and set the ambitious target of achieving carbon neutrality for the Council by 2025, and for the borough by 2030. This commitment recognises that, along with changes at a national level, the borough and the Council also need to make changes to many aspects of our lives to reduce the environmental impact of day-to-day activities and the damage they cause to the environment.

As part of this approach, Oldham Council will work closely with partners across the local, regional, and national landscape to ensure the ambitious environmental targets set are achieved, and where challenges are identified, we will work closely and collaboratively to overcome them by sharing resources, ideas and leverage the regional strength through the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). This includes rationalising the Oldham approach with that of the GMCA; for Oldham, this means that this Environment Strategy will last until 2025, after which, it will be revised and will work to the same timeframe as that of the GMCA Environment Plan. The main aspects of the current 5-year GMCA plan are outlined in **Figure 1**, below.



Figure 1: The GMCA 5-year Environment Plan

The Environment Strategy for Oldham has 3 main strands, which are listed below and are based on the GMCA 5-year Environmental Plan. These are:

- **Natural Environment** (green spaces / parks sustainable planting and land use, and air quality)
- **Resilience and Adaptation** (Blue Green Infrastructure/flooding/wildfires and heatwaves/public health & climate impact on services)
- **Production and Consumption of Resources** (recycling & waste, new ways of working/fleet and equipment electrification)

Oldham Council recognises the significant local and regional climatic variations as well as the scientific evidence from the Met Office which has shown that 20 of the warmest years on record, globally, have been in the past 22 years and the 10 hottest years in the UK since records began in 1884, have all occurred since 2002. Furthermore, UK Climate Projections (UKCP), which is used by the Met Office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), show that the northwest of England is projected to experience ‘warmer, wetter winters and hotter drier summers with increased unpredictability of extreme weather events’.

The weather extremes described above can have a range of economic and social impacts on the residents, businesses, visitors and environment of Oldham and the surrounding areas. Warm weather events, like those experienced in 2022, are likely to increase in frequency, leading to localised droughts as well as increasing the risk of moorland fires. Similarly, the other extremes of wetter winters /colder temperatures, can cause significant travel and transport problems but also, and more damagingly, result in increased and greater flooding events. **Figure 2**, below, shows the risks associated with climate extremes.

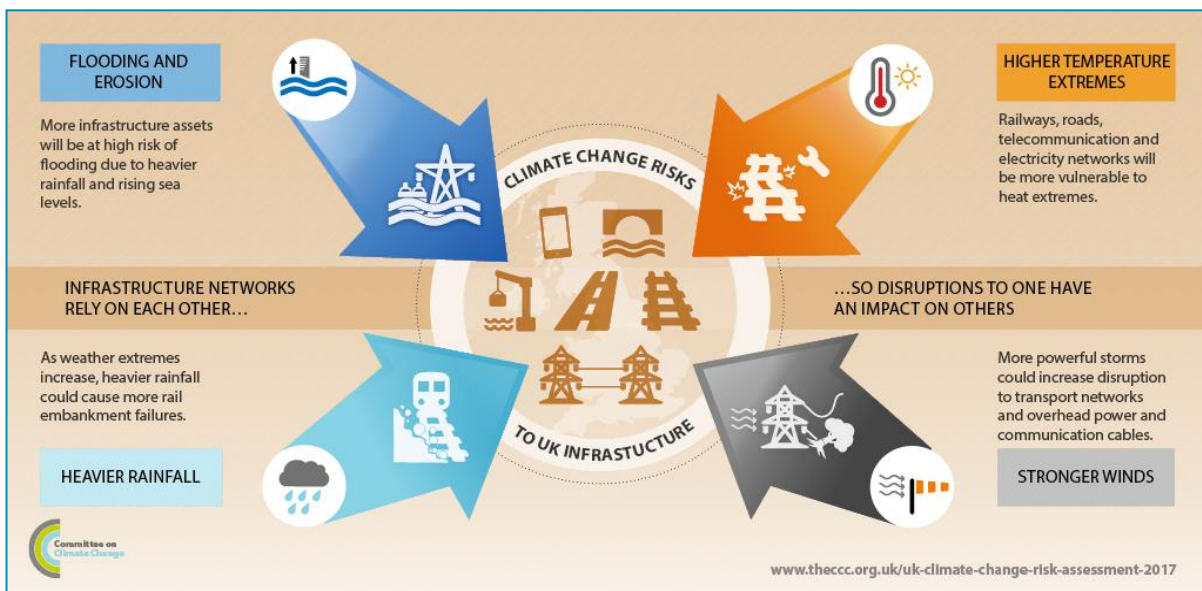


Figure 2: Image showing impact of climate extremes on UK infrastructure (Climate Change Committee, 2017)

2.0 Legislation, National Context and Duties of Local Government

England’s legislative adaptation and mitigation framework is primarily set out in the Climate Change Act 2008. The Act places a duty on Local Authorities to set out the actions that they will take to adapt to the challenges of climate change in the UK.

As a member of Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Oldham Council needs to ensure that its climate change actions are in sync with those of the GMCA. The current 5-year plan ends in 2024, with the next iteration running from 2025-2029. Therefore, as suggested above, this strategy will operate until 2025 and will be refreshed and operate in sync with that of the GMCA, ensuring consistency in approach, maximising use of government support and funding to deliver the best possible outcomes in Oldham.

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty on the local authority to respond to extreme weather events when they occur and to work in partnership with other key organisations through Local Resilience Forums. In addition, local authorities are required to maintain a Risk Register which takes account of both national and local risks – climate related challenges and extremes are a significant consideration. Once the risks are identified, clear action / mitigation plans must be drawn up, responsible individuals and organisations identified, and work must be done to ensure that the Council is able to respond to incidents and emergencies.

Finally, the National Adaptation Programme (NAP) sets out the government’s plan to prepare for and respond to the impacts of climate change. It also highlights the need for individuals, communities and organisations to better understand the risks from climate change and collaborate with authorities to put in place long-term plans to manage these risks. Going forward, the council’s work on climate adaptation will generally seek to support the delivery of the NAP at a local level and will work with partners, both public and private, residents, businesses, academia, and regional and national colleagues to ensure Oldham continues to meet the needs of residents and to increase the boroughs resilience.

3.0 What is Climate Adaptation and Resilience?

There is a recognition that society, business, industry and residents need to be more resilient and more adaptive to the impact of climate change given the likelihood of extreme events discussed above.

Climate adaptation is broadly defined as any ‘activity that minimises the impact of current, expected, and potential climate change and its effects’. Climate change poses a threat to lives, livelihoods and the local environment. Climate related risks will continue to increase—even if the global commitments of the Paris Agreement succeed in limiting warming to well below 2°C—until global net zero carbon emissions are achieved.

From an Oldham Council perspective, this means increasing and improving our Blue & Green infrastructure – more parks, soft landscaped areas, planting more trees and introducing systems that better manage, retain, and hold water in urban environments, thus reducing the pressure on urban water management systems and sewer networks. Whereas resilience refers to the ability to recover (bounce back to the original state before the exposure to shock) from the effect of climate change.

4.0 Strategy & Governance

Introduction and successful delivery of the Oldham Environment Strategy is an important step in meeting the wider objectives. This approach can only be successful if the correct strategy, governance, and reporting structures are in place to ensure direction, joined up approach and oversight. The Environment Strategy must also work alongside the Councils Corporate Plan that aims to deliver the following between 2022 and 2027:

- Healthy, safe, and well supported residents
- A great start and skills for life
- Better jobs and dynamic businesses
- Quality homes for everyone
- A clean and green future

The Environment Strategy is cross cutting across all the 5 areas listed above – all are susceptible to environmental factors and the above can be significantly impacted by the climate challenge. The Corporate Plan also identifies both the climate challenge and the importance of the environmental strategy in achieving the above outcomes for residents and businesses.

The Oldham Environment Strategy will be monitored through a new structure, which is outlined in **Figure 3**, below. The structure is split between Environmental themes (yellow boxes) and those that make up the Green New Deal (green boxes). The strands will report to the respective Director and then up to the Oldham Environment Board, Economy Subgroup, and the Oldham Leadership Board, which will oversee strategic decisions in response to the Climate Adaptation & Resilience. Overall progress will be monitored by the Climate Emergency Board, which will include senior management team and elected members.

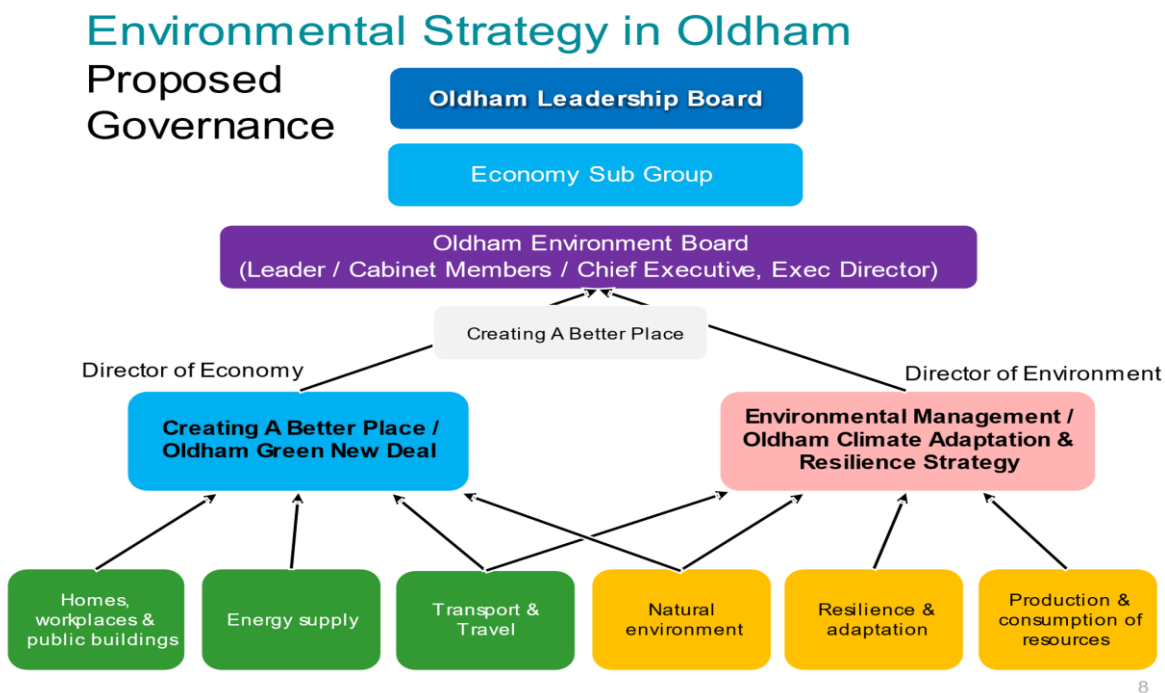


Figure 3: Outlines the proposed governance structure for the Oldham Council Environment Strategy & Green New Deal

The Oldham Environment Board, to be chaired by the Chief Executive and attended by the Leader and Cabinet members for Environment and Economy, the respective Portfolios, will be established and will meet in Spring 2023.

The new Board will provide governance for the two programmes with a view to a refresh in 2025 in line with the GMCA work and a new strategy, covering the period 2026-2030, will be produced for Oldham. The above governance will ensure that the Environment Strategy remains a priority for the Council across all business and operational areas. This will also need ongoing and sustained staff, resident (individual households, schools, community hubs, faith groups, voluntary organisations) and business engagement to embed behaviours, practices, raise awareness and educate all about the council strategy and direction. At the same time, the organisation and the board will have to be honest and pragmatic about delivery timescales, economic impact of decisions and where practical issues mean targets will not be achieved or implementation dates will be delayed.

5.0 Delivery, Implementation & Next Steps

As an organisation, there are many examples of good practice that have been introduced and worked on by Oldham Council as part of the 2019 Climate Emergency declaration. Workshops and staff conferences have been held to gauge the opinion and ideas of colleagues and there is also close working with GM partners. As part of this strategy, the various strands must be brought together and moving forward, the Environment Strategy and Climate Adaptation and Resilience must be considered at each stage of the decision-making process to ensure due consideration is given and the impacts / benefits of each proposed scheme and decision are clear.

To ensure all service areas are aware of, and working towards the same target(s), there will be an ongoing process through which respective service areas consider their role in addressing the climate challenge and a similar exercise for residents.

1. Council Adaptation and Resilience – this section focusses on how the authority will adapt and become resilient to a changing climate to ensure business continuity and essential service provision across the borough
2. Borough Adaptation and Resilience – this section focusses on the direction measures that the Council can provide to support residents, businesses, and communities to adapt and enhance their resilience to climate change

All of the above will feed into an action plan, set clear timelines, clear targets and a responsible person(s) or service area(s). Proposed actions will also provide key performance indicators, resources and financing that may be required, partner organisations and service teams that can provide additional support as well as political support or endorsement from elected members.

Many actions within the plan will be intrinsically linked to other climate change action themes, and also crosscut other Council priorities and strategies. Actions will have to be combined in order to avoid duplication and to ensure that lead service areas can include these actions within their targets as any other form of service delivery.

The purpose of this strategy is to raise awareness of the challenges surrounding adaptation to climate change and the ability of the borough in being resilient to its impact. It will also provide a strategic overview, guidance and planning to ensure that the Council and the borough are progressing towards a future that is more resilient to climate-induced risks and impacts.

6.0 Recommendations for Scrutiny Committee

The key areas of work, outlined above, will follow Council processes and additional reports/consultation will take place with relevant departments and stakeholders, internal and external before appropriate sign off. However, for the purposes of this report, it is requested that the Scrutiny Committee:

1. Discuss and consider the approach set out in this report as an interim Environment Strategy/Baselining position
2. Agrees with a refresh of the Environment Strategy in 2025 to sync with the GM Environment Plan refresh
3. Supports a climate adaptation and resilience driven approach
4. Supports the approach towards tree planting/woodland creation
5. Supports incorporation of BNG and LNRS into the 'Natural Environment' strand of the Environment Strategy