

# **Oldham Council Environment Strategy**

**2023-2025**

**DRAFT**

**V1.0**

## Foreword (Leader/Portfolio/Chief Exec, Proposed Wording)

There is global recognition and acceptance that the climate crisis is one of the biggest risks faced by mankind, and if the world fails to address this challenge, fails to address the causal factors, and fails to take steps to mitigate the impact, the consequences could be significant for current and future generations. The impacts, on a local level could affect the lives, livelihood and wellbeing of every resident in Oldham and the Council's ability to deliver the services and to provide a safe, healthy and vibrant borough.

As a global community, we must do everything within our power, and more, to transition to sustainable modes of living and dramatically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible. However, even if all emissions were stopped today, we would continue to see a level of global warming occur for at least several decades to come. Therefore, there is an urgent need for us to adapt and become resilient to the increasing impacts of a changing climate and prepare for a future that is likely to present significant climate related challenges, some of which are already being witnessed.

Given the above, it is no surprise that Oldham will follow the same trend, this being warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers with less frequent but more intense extreme weather events including storms, droughts and heatwaves. These events have the potential to impact all areas of our lives through flooding, increased incidence of weather-related illnesses, damage to physical and environmental infrastructure and significant impacts on health and wellbeing and these will disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

Notwithstanding the above, all is not lost. While some of the effects of climate change will continue for the next 30-40 years no matter what we do now, we can affect what happens after that. Through introduction of the Oldham Environmental Strategy, by working with our residents, businesses, academia, regional and national groups, we can mitigate the impacts of our activities and, at the same time, become more resilient so we are better able to adapt to the climatic changes and are more resilient when / if the worst does happen.

Given the above challenge and obvious risks, we believe that this Environment Strategy, focusing on all the contributory factors and working with our partners across the City Region will help deliver the understanding, policy and practical steps that are needed to ensure Oldham is a borough that is adaptive and resilient in the face of the climate challenge.

## Introduction

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

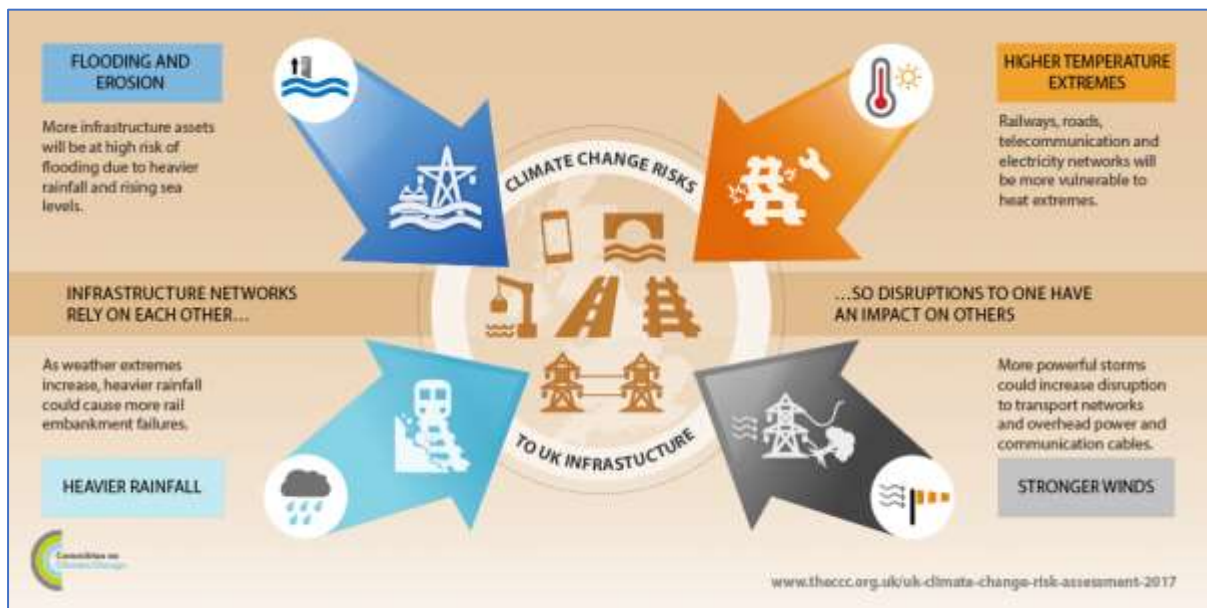
The Environment Strategy for Oldham has 3 main strands, which are listed below and are based on the GMCA 5-year Environmental Plan. These are:

- **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)

Although there are strenuous efforts to limit global warming, further climatic changes are inevitable, and the UK will need to manage the growing risks from climate change. UK Climate Projections 2018 (UKCP18), provides users with scientific evidence on projected climate changes. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also summarises the increasing impact of climate change, and highlights in its latest report that the projections are following a worsening scenario.

Even if we were to stop all greenhouse emissions today, the earth will continue to warm because of the volume of emissions in the atmosphere and the level of warming as we move forward is dependent on the decisions we make today and over the next decade. Given that we cannot undo the impact that has already, and continues to take place, it is important, for the reasons outlined above, that we have a coherent, balanced and supported climate adaptation and resilience strategy so Oldham is able to mitigate the impact of likely future weather extremes.

Adaptation and resilience are key elements of our climate change strategy and are essential measures to ensure business continuity in the delivery of the Council's services and the wellbeing of the borough. Therefore, this Environment Strategy will set out the way that Oldham Council will look to achieve adaptation and resilience, support the natural environment and manage and reduce the production & consumption of resources over the next 2 years until 2025. Given the commitments already made as part of the climate emergency declaration, the remainder of this report will focus on climate adaptation and resilience with the other two aspects (production & consumption of resources

& natural environment) running concurrently and feeding into the overall outcomes in terms of adaptation and resilience.

### **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.

Furthermore, the third Change Risk Assessment (outlined in the Climate Change Risk Assessment) is an official document assessing the ways in which climate change will impact the UK economy, environment, health and wellbeing. It informs the Government's National Adaptation Programme (NAP), last published in 2018, and due to be published again in 2023. The CCRA also reviews the costs and benefits of adaptation policies and concludes that many adaptation investments would deliver good value for money as well as many co-benefits. Although this is an overarching statement, the efficacy, value for money and environmental benefits of each scheme will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis. As part of this strategy, and the Council's overall approach, it is important to ensure that these key factors are considered at each stage of the decision-making process.

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.

### **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.

Adaptation and resilience measures can be planned or can be introduced in response to a local event. Measures could include large scale infrastructure changes such as building defences to protect against flooding, improving the quality of road surfaces to withstand hotter temperatures as well as behavioural shifts, such as residents utilising less water, increased recycling, reducing their energy usage and more households and businesses protecting themselves against the risk of flooding.

### **Why do we need to adapt?**

Climate change adaptation and resilience is significantly important to Oldham Council because the borough is likely to be impacted by climate change. In order to enable our residents, communities, businesses and infrastructure to have the capacity to survive, adapt and grow in the face of these challenges, efforts and investments need to be underpinned by robust action on climate adaptation (and resilience) to protect our economy, key infrastructure and our natural environment.

Climate Change is also more likely to have a greater impact on those residents who are already dealing with fuel or food poverty, those on low incomes and those with disabilities. Therefore, it is vitally important that we strengthen our adaptation actions, so that we may protect the most vulnerable within our communities.

Although, environmental concerns are a primary driver, there is also clear recognition that any changes and adaptation have to take place with economic considerations at the heart of the process as the long term prosperity of residents, business and environmental protection and wellbeing can only be assured when supported by a strong and sustainable economic base. This means increasing the use of renewables, reducing energy use, insulating properties, and maximising the use of electric vehicles. This also means investing more in active travel schemes, improving the walking and cycling infrastructure and supporting the shift to greater use of public transport.

### **Why do we need to be resilient?**

For the purposes of this strategy, resilience must be considered across the piece – it applies equally to residents, business and infrastructure and this must be firmly embedded. This means that future buildings, roads and other developments must be able to respond to the environmental challenges that arise. For example, where large areas of hard standing are introduced (buildings/car parks), we must ensure sustainable drainage systems are installed so as not to overwhelm the water network. Furthermore, when areas are being redeveloped and renovated, especially public space, introduction of soft landscaping and greenspace should be seriously considered as this also provides urban water management capacity. The above means that the Council must work closely with business and developers to ensure that the resilience aspect of the strategy is considered integral to future planning

and infrastructure developments. This approach extends to electric vehicle infrastructure, local development plans and planning policy to ensure these take account of current and future climate related challenges.

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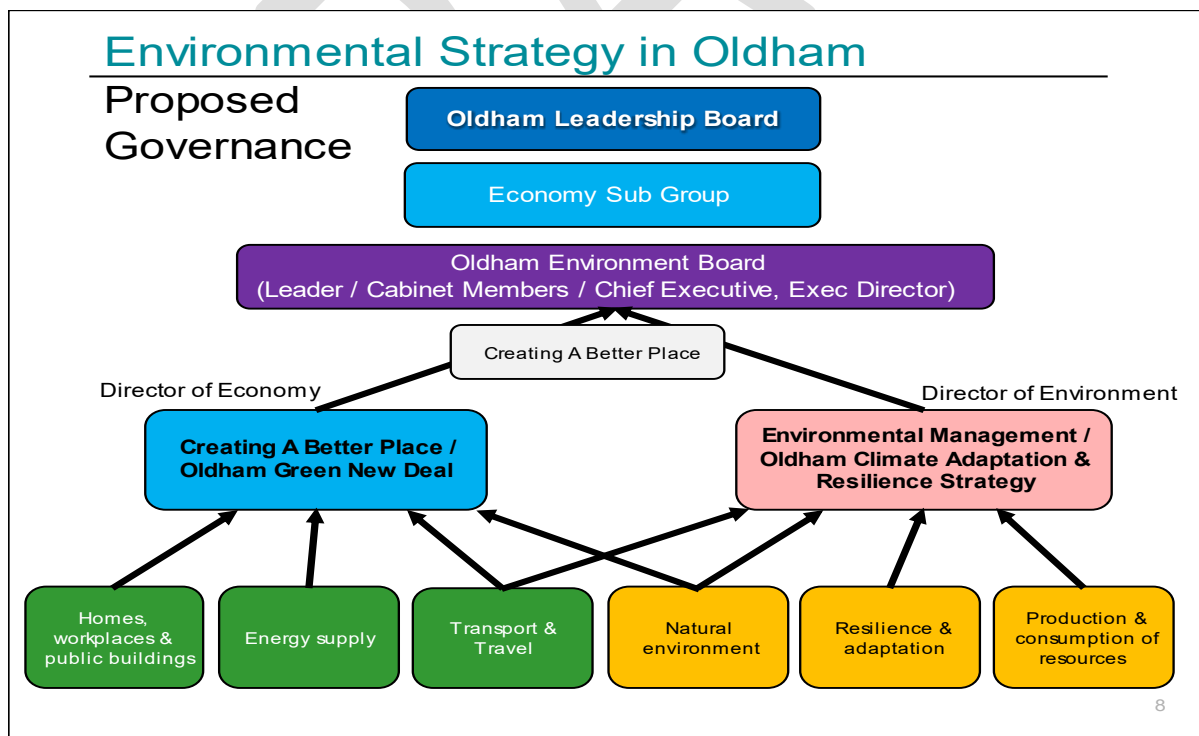
## Strategy & Governance

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.

### **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 to 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 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 resilience 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.

As a result of the above, Key outcomes from the strategy and associated working groups must include:

Need clear timelines for each of these actions – some will be ongoing and cyclic; others will have clear completion dates and this needs to be built into the forward plan. Also, list isn't exhaustive and more could be added – probably better in a table format which shows baseline / Identify Challenges and Confirm Vision, Strategic Objectives and Medium-Term Targets / Identify, Prioritise and Develop Actions / Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation – this format could be completed for each strand / service area and feed into the overall approach.

- Oldham Environment Board to meet in Summer 2023
- Collation of all climate change related strategies and policies adopted to date (flood risk / fires / droughts) – clear baseline of what's been completed and what is in the 'pipeline'
- Understand how planning policy, local development plans, public health, transport and infrastructure plans impact and contribute to the climate change challenges (recorded annually and reported through the governance process)
- Collation of all projects completed/those planned which have a direct / indirect impact on climate change
- Ensure Emergency Planning /Risk Register is complete and takes account of environmental risks
- Continue working with GM partners for clean air zone and electric vehicle infrastructure roll-out (subject to national government advice / direction)
- Continue to explore funding and development opportunities for flood risk / management and sustainable drainage
- Ensure climate resilience is a priority in all Council activities, including procurement
- Raise awareness and understanding of adaptation and resilience across Oldham
- Implement engagement and education activities that link in with the wider climate change themes and promote self-resilience for communities across the borough
- Collaborate with partner organisations who may have developed local resilience forums within the community
- Engage with local businesses and organisations to promote the development of their own adaptation and resilience plans