

Report title	Net Zero Carbon Toolkit
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Department	Planning, Economy and Built Environment
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

- To note and to resolve

Synopsis of report:

This report follows on from a motion being carried at Full Council on 7 December 2023. This motion required a report to be brought to Corporate Management Committee to consider adopting an adapted version of the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit once a working draft had been scrutinised by the Climate Change Members Working Party.

The report asks Members to note the amendments made to the original Toolkit to ensure it reflects Runnymede's local context (summarised in Appendix 2 of the Toolkit) and recommends that Members adopt the Toolkit to be used as part of a suite of emerging guidance being developed to reduce carbon emissions generated by Runnymede's built environment.

Recommendation(s):

That the Corporate Management Committee:

1. Notes the amendments made to the original Net Zero Carbon Toolkit detailed in Appendix 2 of the Toolkit;
2. Adopts the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit at Appendix 1 of this report, allowing it to be promoted to relevant stakeholders as part of the 2024/25 Planning, Economy and Built Environment Service Area Plan;
3. Agrees to give delegated authority to the Corporate Head of Planning, Economic and Built Environment to update the Toolkit as appropriate to reflect updated policy, best practice guidance, regulations and legislation.

1. Context and background of report

1.1 A motion was brought to a Full Council meeting on 7 December 2023 requesting that a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit be adopted in Runnymede. The motion was brought forward to encourage local developers to go above and beyond existing minimum standards towards building energy efficient, net zero carbon homes that will reduce overall borough emissions and contribute towards tackling the climate crisis.

1.2 Following a debate, the below motion was carried:

The Council resolves to ask Corporate Management Committee to consider:

- asking officers in the Climate Change team to adapt the template published under Creative Commons by Cotswold, West Oxfordshire and Forest of Dean Councils to create a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit for the Borough of Runnymede, and to continue considering other measures and tools that can be deployed alongside this to reduce carbon emissions between now and the next Local Plan Review;
- adopting the Toolkit once a working draft has been scrutinised by the Climate Change Members Working Party;
- including the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit in the 2024/25 Climate Change Delivery Plan to ensure that the adopted document is promoted in a timely and effective manner to the local development community.

1.3 The original Toolkit was developed as an output of the Local Government Association Housing Advisers Programme, by Cotswold District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and Forest of Dean District Council. It was written by industry experts with a view to being adapted and distributed by other local authorities under a Creative Commons Licence. The Licence allows the Council to copy, change and redistribute the material in any medium or format under certain terms which are described on page 2 of the Toolkit attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

1.4 Action ID 1.1.4 of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) also commits the Council to consider adoption of the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit to encourage delivery of low carbon development as an interim measure ahead of a Local Plan Review. Several other local authorities, such as Somerset West and Taunton and Mid Devon District Council, have adopted a tailored version of the Toolkit to be used as a communications tool to aid the delivery of net zero carbon development, in the absence of net zero carbon planning policies. It is proposed that Runnymede Borough Council takes a similar approach.

2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended

2.1 The Council Estate and Area Greenhouse Gas Baseline Report identifies heating from residential homes as the second largest source of emissions in the Borough (21% of the total). The Emissions Pathways Report produced as part of the Climate Change Study highlights that rapid decarbonisation of the existing building stock in Runnymede is required to achieve net zero targets, as well as ensuring that any new buildings do not add to emissions in the area. However, evidence¹ suggests that there are critical gaps in existing national legislation and regulations (such as Building Regulations) to deliver the required net zero pathway for the building sector, and local authorities must therefore be proactive in influencing change at a local level if net zero targets are to be achieved.

2.2 Actions have therefore been included under the 'Greener Homes & Buildings' theme of the Council's CCAP to reduce emissions from the heating of both existing and new-build homes. Several actions relate to the introduction of stronger planning policies through a revision to the Local Plan, but this will take time to achieve, and work has been paused on the review until the new plan-making regime has been introduced. Full details are available in the [Local Plan Update Report](#) considered by the Planning Committee on 25 October 2023.

2.3 Other actions have therefore been included in the CCAP to drive up the energy performance of buildings as an interim measure, including adoption of a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit. The Toolkit would demonstrate the Council's ambition for new and retrofitted homes to apply net

¹ Climate Change Committee 2023 Report to Parliament, available at: [Progress in reducing UK emissions - 2023 Report to Parliament \(theccc.org.uk\)](#) and the Council's Climate Change Study, available at: [2030 Local Plan Review Evidence Base documents – Runnymede Borough Council](#).

zero carbon principles, and would encourage the delivery of energy efficient, net zero carbon developments until the Local Plan Review resumes.

- 2.4 The Toolkit sets out best practice approaches in design, specification, construction and fit-out of a net zero compliant new build or retrofit project. It provides a technical, go-to guide on what to consider in the very early stages of design, how to achieve fabric energy efficiency, what systems to consider and include, where to go for expert advice, and what to consider once a project has been completed and is being handed over to occupants.
- 2.5 The Toolkit has been developed for building professionals operating in Runnymede (developers, contractors, architects and engineers) as well as self-builders and homeowners across the Borough to build awareness of and confidence in implementing net zero carbon new build and retrofit projects. The Toolkit is designed to be relatively accessible and engaging, but it is primarily aimed at those with some existing knowledge or experience of construction. The Toolkit will also help planning officers and Members of the Planning Committee assess the environmental credentials of developments, and understand the extent to which they are bringing about positive climate change impacts.
- 2.6 Officers have adapted the original version of the Toolkit for use in Runnymede, with all changes set out in a new Appendix 2 of the Toolkit (in accordance with conditions of the Creative Commons Licence) for Members to note. Along with the inclusion of corporate branding, main changes include updating the document to ensure it reflects Runnymede's local policy context; updating references to the latest standards (and emerging proposed standards such as the Future Homes Standard); updating evidence where necessary such as statistics on the latest sources of emissions; inserting reference to relevant planning policies such as water efficiency and electric vehicle standards; and inserting new text on the importance of gigabit-capable digital infrastructure.
- 2.7 The draft Toolkit was presented to the Climate Change Members Working Party on Wednesday 24 January 2024 for scrutiny. Feedback was received about updating references to export tariffs, and officers have made the necessary amendments. Subject to these changes being made, Members supported the Toolkit being taken to Corporate Management Committee to consider for adoption.
- 2.8 Officers recommend that the Toolkit attached at Appendix 1 to this report is adopted, published on the Council's website, and promoted more widely as part of the 2024/25 Planning, Economic and Built Environment Service Area Plan to bring it to the attention of relevant local stakeholders, including the local development community.
- 2.9 Promotional activity is anticipated to include:
 - Publishing the Toolkit on a dedicated page on the Council's climate change website, with links to a YouTube video created by the original authors which explains the purpose and content of the Toolkit;
 - Providing links to the Toolkit on the Planning webpages and describing how its use can help meet, and exceed, energy-related policy requirements of the 2030 Local Plan;
 - Highlighting the Toolkit via the Council's social media channels;
 - Promotion via residents e-news, climate change and Business Runnymede newsletters;
 - Working with existing community planning contacts to assist with wider circulation e.g. through Residents Association newsletters and social media channels;
 - Promoting the Toolkit at local community events including summer fairs and through Great Big Green Week campaigns;

- Running a session (or more than one session depending on cost and demand) with local built environment professionals to promote the principles of the Toolkit, and other adopted guidance (see paragraph 2.10 below);
- Displaying hard copies of the Toolkit in local libraries.

2.10 The Toolkit is intended to be part of a suite of documents being prepared to help drive up energy performance standards of new and existing buildings in Runnymede, in accordance with the Council's CCAP:

- Action ID 1.1.3 will see the development of planning guidance to ensure existing 2030 Local Plan energy and carbon reduction policy requirements are implemented effectively and to encourage developers to go beyond minimum standards.
- Action ID 1.1.5 will see sessions being run with the local development community to raise awareness of planning guidance and Toolkit principles.
- Action ID 1.1.6 will see officers work with the Climate Change Planning Officer at Surrey County Council (SCC) to develop a county-wide Net Zero Carbon Toolkit, which will compliment Runnymede's version (which is being produced by the same authors). Officers will explore opportunities to work with SCC in promoting the principles of the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit to the Surrey Development Forum and to contribute to training sessions with local developers. SCC has already shared Runnymede's intentions to adopt its own Net Zero Carbon Toolkit at the Surrey Development Forum meeting on Monday 19 February 2024.
- Action ID 1.1.7 will see officers develop pre-application advice notes/checklists to prompt developers to consider climate change issues early in the development management process.

2.11 The national policy context for energy efficiency and reducing the carbon emissions of new homes and non-domestic buildings is expected to evolve over the coming months. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is currently consulting on the Future Homes and Buildings Standards, proposing to lay new Building Regulations in 2024 with an implementation date of 2025. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 also lays foundations for the introduction of new National Development Management Policies, which will potentially include net zero policies. The local context will also evolve as officers work on the development of a Design Code, which will ensure the design of new development responds to the impacts of climate change by being energy efficient and minimising carbon emissions to meet net zero targets by 2050.

2.12 Officers therefore recommend that the Committee gives delegated authority to the Corporate Head of Planning, Economic and Built Environment to approve future amendments to the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit to keep its advice up-to-date and reflective of changes in local and national policy and guidance, regulations and legislation.

3. Policy framework implications

3.1 The Toolkit sets out aspirational standards and is a guidance and communication tool, rather than a planning or corporate policy position. Policy SD8 of the adopted 2030 Local Plan requires major development proposals to apply the energy hierarchy and to demonstrate how a proportion of total energy needs will be supplied by renewable and/or low carbon technologies. Whilst the Toolkit sets out higher energy performance standards than the Local Plan, its principles align with those of Policy SD8 in terms of applying the energy hierarchy i.e. use less energy, supply energy efficiently and use renewable energy. Use of the Toolkit would therefore not conflict with the Council's existing Local Plan.

3.2 A key objective of the 2030 Local Plan is to increase resilience to climate change, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote water efficiency and the use of renewable and low

carbon energy. If adopted, the Toolkit would constitute guidance only and not form part of the Development Plan for the area. However, there would be scope for development proposals to follow advice in the Toolkit and be designed to achieve positive climate change impacts. These positive impacts would be a material consideration in decision-making (i.e. a matter that can be given weight in deciding a planning application), alongside other material considerations.

- 3.3 Through its Corporate Business Plan, Climate Change Strategy, CCAP and Empowering our Communities Strategy, the Council has committed to working with residents, community groups, stakeholders and partners to achieve net zero targets and tackle climate change. The Council's Economic Development Strategy also sets out a priority to encourage businesses to be more sustainable and develop the low carbon circular economy – businesses which can include those in the local development industry. Once adopted, officers would work with local stakeholders, including the developer community, to raise awareness of the Toolkit's principles and provide advice and support where needed, in line with objectives in these strategies.

4 Resource and finance implications

- 4.1 The Net Zero Carbon Toolkit will be used as a communication and guidance tool. Promotion of the Toolkit will be undertaken by officers of the Climate Change and Planning teams, with assistance from the Communications team, using existing resources. Officers will also provide in-house training/briefing sessions as required for Development Management Officers and Members.
- 4.2 No additional financial implications beyond that provided for within the agreed planning, economic and built environment budgets will be required to publicise and raise awareness of the Toolkit. Subject to sufficient funding being identified within the existing budgets, officers are exploring the option to appoint external experts to assist with stakeholder engagement, to provide support with the more technical aspects of the guidance. Officers are also exploring opportunities to work with Surrey County Council (SCC) in promoting the principles of the Toolkit to stakeholders such as the Surrey Development Forum, as SCC are currently preparing a countywide Net Zero Carbon Toolkit which will set out similar standards for the built environment. The countywide guidance is due to be completed by June 2024.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 It is not possible for a guidance document to set new planning policy or create new demands on development. New policy will be set through the Local Plan Review process which is subject to statutory processes, consultation and examination. As an explanatory document identifying how to deliver net zero carbon homes, the Toolkit is intended to be a useful resource for planning officers, Members of the Planning Committee, and planning applicants alike. It is not part of the statutory development plan for the area and there will be no planning-related legal implications associated with publicising the guidance.
- 5.2 However, adoption and promotion of the Toolkit will help the Council pursue efforts to reduce emissions generated by the built environment, respond to the climate emergency, and thus help meet the Climate Change Act 2008 legally binding UK-wide carbon budget and 2050 net zero emissions target.

6. Equality implications

- 6.1 The Council has a Public Sector Duty under the Equality Act 2010 (as amended) to have due regard to the nine 'protected characteristics' stated within the Act. The Net Zero Carbon

Toolkit has been screened to establish whether there may be an impact, whether positive or negative, on any of the nine protected characteristics. The EqIA screening report is attached at Appendix 2.

- 6.2 It should be noted that the Toolkit is a communication tool rather than a planning or corporate policy position. It simply provides additional explanation, guidance and context in relation to Council aspirations for the built environment. Use of the Toolkit is therefore voluntary, and in this regard, no adverse equality impacts are anticipated as a result of adopting the guidance.
- 6.3 However, the screening highlights how implementation of the measures within the Toolkit could be particularly beneficial for older and disabled people (protected characteristics of age and disability). This is because data and evidence from the Office for National Statistics and National Energy Action indicates that the homes that are least energy efficient in England are more likely to be occupied by older people, including those with disabilities, and those on lower incomes. An increasingly high proportion of older households and those with a disability are being affected by fuel poverty.

7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 Adoption of the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit will have positive environmental and sustainability impacts. The Toolkit will help deliver the highest possible standards of energy efficiency, low and renewable carbon and net zero development. By encouraging standards which go beyond a 2030 Local Plan compliant scheme, the Toolkit has the potential to help reduce emissions generated by the heating of homes – a significant source of emissions for Runnymede.

8. Risk Implications

- 8.1 There are considered to be two key risks associated with the successful implementation of the Toolkit. The first is that the Toolkit does not effectively reach its intended audience. As highlighted in section 4 of this report, the Toolkit must be promoted within existing identified budgets. Paragraphs 2.9, 4.1 and 4.2 describe the activities planned to maximise outreach potential. The risk will be mitigated through pro-active engagement with the local developer community, and by identifying synergies with Surrey County Council's Net Zero Carbon Toolkit engagement activities. Officers will undertake regular reviews of promotional activity outcomes – for example, number of visits to the Toolkit website – and continue to identify opportunities to publish the material widely at local events and by working with relevant partners to publish the Toolkit.
- 8.2 The second risk is that, even if the Toolkit is promoted successfully, it will have little influence over the behaviour of home-owners and built environment professionals – and that they will continue to deliver homes which meet minimum Building Regulations and 2030 Local Plan standards. Monitoring the outcomes of environmental communications activities is often challenging due to the difficulty in identifying causal relationships between promotion material and changes to individual behaviours. It is considered that this risk will continue to be high until such a time that the aspirational net zero policy requirements can be addressed through strengthened national and/or local planning policy, through the introduction of National Development Management Policies and/or through the Local Plan Review respectively. However, officers will monitor interaction with the Toolkit to help understand its degree of influence, including through monitoring social media responses, enquiries received, outcomes of discussions with applicants/developers, and monitoring the application of its principles in planning applications.

9. Other implications

- 9.1 In promoting the material to stakeholders and organising any awareness-raising sessions, data protection and General Data Protection Regulations requirements will be adhered to.

10. Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1 It is intended that following adoption of the Toolkit by this Committee, it will be published on the Council's website and officers will work with the Communications team to promote the material to relevant stakeholders across the Borough. Officers will also explore synergies with SCC's communications plan for the emerging countywide Toolkit. The full suite of guidance, including new planning guidance and pre-application advice notes/checklists, is timetabled for completion by summer this year.

11. Conclusions

- 11.1 The Council needs to drive forward action on climate change to ensure local and national net zero targets are achieved in the Borough. The Net Zero Carbon Toolkit is one means of helping to achieve this.
- 11.2 Officers have adapted the original version of the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit to emphasise the Council's aspirations for net zero standards to be achieved in new housing development and retrofit projects across the Borough. Whilst the Toolkit is not a planning document and will not itself be a material consideration in decision-making (although the value that its application could add to individual development proposals could be), the Toolkit will support the Council's net zero journey by:
- providing transparent, accessible and easy to understand guidance for building professionals, homeowners, development management officers and Members about how the Council's net zero ambitions can be achieved;
 - encouraging developers to go further than 2030 Local Plan planning policy standards to demonstrate excellence in sustainable development which better responds to the climate emergency.

12. Background papers

- 12.1 Members attention is drawn to:
- the Notice of Motion carried at Full Council on Thursday 7 December 2023: [Agenda item - Notices of Motion from Members of the Council under Standing Order 15 – Runnymede Borough Council.](#)
 - Runnymede Climate Change Action Plan: [Climate change – Runnymede Borough Council.](#)
 - Runnymede Climate Change Study: Council Estate and Area GHG Baseline Report (October 2023): [Appendix 1 Aether Baseline Report \(runnymede.gov.uk\).](#)
 - Runnymede Climate Change Study: Emission Pathways Report (December 2023): [emissions-pathway-report-1 \(runnymede.gov.uk\).](#)
 - Climate Change Committee Progress in reducing emissions, 2023 Report to Parliament (June 2023): [Progress in reducing UK emissions - 2023 Report to Parliament \(theccc.org.uk\).](#)
 - Local Plan Update Report considered by the Planning Committee on 25 October 2023: [DRAFT AGENDA REPORT COVER SHEET \(runnymede.gov.uk\).](#)

13. Appendices

- Appendix 1: Runnymede Net Zero Carbon Toolkit
- Appendix 2: EqIA Screening Assessment