

NEWS RELEASE



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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EXECUTIVE TO APPROVE CLIMATE EMERGENCY PROJECTS

Wokingham Borough Council's decision-making executive will meet next week (Thursday 29 July) to discuss next steps on several climate emergency projects across Wokingham Borough, including public engagement, a tree planting project and a new solar farm.

The council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and the ambitious projects form part of its [climate emergency action plan](#), aiming to make the borough net zero carbon by 2030.

Amongst the items set to be taken forward to the next phase are plans to invest in a tree strategy for Wokingham Borough, including planting the first set of trees. The council has committed to planting 250,000 new trees during the next five years, adding to the 100,000 it already looks after.

Converting land to woodlands will play a key part in capturing and storing excess carbon, however it is the woodland ecosystem as opposed to single trees that will make the difference. Undertaking a feasibility plan and developing a strategy will enable trees to be planted in locations and ways that will create the greatest benefit for the borough.

Also being discussed is the proposed solar farm in Barkham. A planning application has been submitted to build the solar farm on council owned land and is set to be considered by the planning committee in the Autumn. It is proposed that funds will be agreed now to avoid delays in starting the work should the application be approved.

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The farm would cost around £20million to develop and last for 25 years, after which time the land could revert to farmland. The energy it would generate is equivalent to offsetting the whole of the council's own emissions, including offices, schools and civic buildings. The added benefit of the project is that excess energy can be sold, earning revenue that the council can spend on providing services for residents and projects across the borough.

Finally, the executive will be asked how to engage with the public on climate emergency. After a robust analysis of different methods of public engagement, it is proposed that the council use e-panels and focus groups, which topped the evaluation in terms of cost effectiveness, diverse participation opportunities and overall effectiveness.

Members of the public in the borough will be invited to participate from early 2022, which will give the council opportunities to hear their voices, collect their views and gather insight to inform future decisions.

Cllr Gregor Murray, executive member for resident services, communications and emissions, said: "Climate emergency is a key focus for Wokingham Borough Council, and we are committed to making Wokingham Borough net zero carbon by 2030. As a council we are implementing a wide range of schemes, including tree planting, a solar farm and public engagement.

"Having a solar farm will significantly offset our carbon emissions and is a big step in the right direction for a net zero carbon borough. There are, however, areas that it won't be possible for us to completely eradicate carbon emissions.

"The tree project will help carbon that we can't eradicate to be removed from the atmosphere. We need to carefully look at where these trees are planted. We think we will need around 250 hectares of land. We will be looking at our own land as well as talking to local landowners to identify the best locations.

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“We also need support from our residents and businesses to look at how we can encourage people to make changes. Things such as recycling more, choosing green energy suppliers and cutting down on using our cars.

“Being able to speak directly with residents, businesses and schools to see how the council can support and encourage people to make changes, as well as finding out what are their key drivers in supporting the climate emergency is really important to us to understand how we can work together to make the borough net zero carbon.”

- ENDS -

Further information:

1. More from Cllr Gregor Murray gregor.murray@me.com

2. Climate emergency

Wokingham Borough Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and has a wide-ranging action plan, with eight key priorities to make the borough carbon neutral by 2030.

- To find out more and see the progress, please visit our dedicated [climate emergency webpage](#).