



Title of report: Allocating the Climate and Nature Reserve Phase 2

Decision maker: Corporate Director, Economy and Environment

Decision date:

Report by: Head of Environment

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To seek Cabinet approval for the allocation of £256,672 from the Climate Reserve to support the delivery of Herefordshire Council's climate and nature ambitions. This funding will enable the implementation of a programme of projects aligned with the Council's environmental ambitions.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) Approve the proposed allocation of £256,672 from the Climate Reserve;
 - b) Endorse the three investment themes;
 - I. Supporting Herefordshire Communities
 - II. Investing in Herefordshire
 - III. Research, Development and Policy
- and
- c) Delegate all operational decisions to Head of Environment to enable the full spend of the balance of the reserve and delivery of the programme.

Alternative options

1. **Seek external funding:** To date we have been successful in securing external funding, replacing precious reserve monies with external grant. While desirable, and a priority of the

teams to do so this is not guaranteed and would delay implementation if we were to rely on this alone.

2. **Do nothing:** This would delay or prevent delivery of key climate and nature projects, risking failure to meet environmental targets and loss of external funding opportunities.

Key considerations

3. In response to increasing awareness of the impacts of climate change, Herefordshire Council declared a climate emergency on 8 March 2019, and on 11th December 2020 this was strengthened to a Climate and Ecological Emergency. The Climate and Ecological Emergency was reaffirmed by Full Council on Friday 28 July 2023.
4. At the Full Council meeting on 14 Feb 2020 £200,000 of revenue funding from the New Homes bonus and future dividends from West Mercia Energy operational surplus was allocated as a new dedicated climate and nature reserve.
5. In January 2022 a citizens' assembly brought together a randomly selected group of people who broadly represent the county. The people who attended learned about issues, discussed them with one another, and then make recommendations about how the Council should tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency.
6. £155,368 of external grant funding has already been secured to support delivery to date.
7. The council aims to leave the environment in a better state for future generations without excessively burdening the present – protecting jobs, keeping costs down, strengthening energy independence and positively contributing to tackling local issues like flood resilience.
8. The proposed programme has been aligned with the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024–2028 and builds on the Climate and Ecological Emergency declaration. It supports both council operations and countywide environmental ambitions.
9. From March to May 2026 a review of all existing projects and proposals was undertaken by officers to inform the proposed programme in this report. The balance of the reserve currently stands at £256,672.
10. The programme includes:
 - a. Investments to support communities such as farmers, residents and schools to take their own action to contribute to carbon reduction in the county;
 - b. Enhanced community resilience through adaptation projects (e.g. flood prevention, tree planting), and;
 - c. Increased public engagement via education, events, and communications.
11. Benefits of the programme include:
 - a. Improved Public Health
 - i. Cleaner air from reduced emissions and pollutants lowers asthma and respiratory illness rates¹.

¹ [Air Pollution and Asthma: Critical Targets for Effective Action - PMC](#)

b. Increased Community Resilience

- i. Flood prevention through natural infrastructure (e.g. tree planting, permeable surfaces) protects homes and livelihoods.
- ii. Local food systems reduce reliance on distant supply chains and improve food security.
- iii. Emergency preparedness improves through climate adaptation planning and community-led risk assessments.

c. Lower Living Costs

- i. Energy-efficient homes reduce heating and electricity bills.
- ii. Waste reduction saves residents money and reduces volumes sent to landfill.

d. Enhanced Local Environments, greener, cleaner, and more attractive public spaces

- i. Increase property values.
- ii. Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
- iii. Encourage outdoor recreation and tourism.

12. Cabinet Member Culture and Environment was briefed on the proposed programme, the programme received their support.

Community impact

13. The council aims to build a more secure, prosperous, and sustainable future through working in partnership and delivering local priorities. This is something that is important to local residents, as seen in recent engagement.
14. Working towards a lower carbon future supports the delivery of the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028, specifically the 'Place' priority: *We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire remains a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place and do everything we can to improve the health of our rivers.*
15. The specific priorities are:
- a. Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive.
 - b. Value nature and uphold environmental standards to minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity.
 - c. Work towards reducing county and council carbon emissions, aiming for net zero by 2030/31 and work with partners and communities to make the county more resilient to the effects of climate change.
 - d. Support our local culture and heritage and make Herefordshire a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit.
16. Ultimately the programme will help the council make progress towards its ambitions of energy resilience and improve biodiversity whilst protecting nature.

Environmental Impact

17. Climate and environmental impact are intrinsically linked. Activities that impact the climate impact biodiversity and local air, water and soil quality. Emissions reduction and climate adaptation will also have associated environmental impacts. Tackling climate change is not only an environmental necessity but also a significant economic opportunity. It sits alongside other important environmental priorities such as improving biodiversity and tackling pollutants such as phosphates through innovative practice.
18. The programme includes support for farmers and businesses to take climate action, improving their resilience to climate change, reducing their carbon emissions, helping to improve air quality and in the case of farmers help improve soil health, manage nutrients and mitigate their loss from land.
19. Carbon emissions reduction is supported by reducing countywide emissions, supporting households, businesses, and farms to reduce emissions through audits and education.
20. Tree planting and habitat creation will see increased canopy cover, improved habitat connectivity, and reversal of biodiversity decline.
21. Water quality improvements and phosphate reduction will see reduced phosphate runoff into rivers, improved soil health, and enhanced water quality.
22. Capacity building and policy innovation will see stronger policy frameworks, better-informed leadership, and increased potential for future innovation.
23. Climate adaptation and resilience will see increased resilience to flooding, heatwaves, and other climate risks.

Equality duty

24. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
25. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this decision and it has been found to have low impact for equality.
26. Due to the potential impact of this programme being low, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations will be systematically considered at all the stages of the programme, from planning through to delivery and monitoring. This includes how we engage communicate and engage with minority groups:
 - a. Reaching and involving diverse communities
 - i. Understand the Community
 - Using local data and the new 'Britain Talks Climate' toolkit from Climate Outreach
 - ii. Involve community members in planning and delivery
 - Engage with community groups and representatives, including those who may be most impacted by climate change
 - iii. Respect cultural values, lifestyles, and accessibility needs
 - iv. Focus on Shared Values
 - b. Communication and Events
 - i. Tailor communication to different audiences

- ii. Partner with local groups and communication outlets
 - iii. Use familiar platforms and trusted channels
 - iv. Use plain language, visuals, translations, and accessible formats
 - v. Emphasise health, community, and fairness
 - vi. Inclusive events
 - vii. Ensure venues and activities are physically and culturally accessible
- c. Continuous Improvement
- i. Monitor and adapt
 - ii. Gather feedback and adjust strategies as needed

27. Environmental inequalities tend to disproportionately adversely impact areas of deprivation and those with lower household income². These places are often those with populations that suffer from multiple deprivation. Factors associated with deprivation, such as language barriers, ability to earn, old age, and health status, often affect people's vulnerability to other pressures, including those caused by environmental inequalities. The Chief Medical Officer for England recently highlighted the 'triple jeopardy' experienced by deprived communities, who face higher risks from social determinants of health, air pollution exposure and greater susceptibility to the impacts of pollution³. By reducing the Council's emissions and working with partners to help reduce county emissions we seek to improve the quality of the environment in Herefordshire for all.
28. The move towards net zero carbon supports the commitments outlined in the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028 which are outlined under Environmental Impact.

Resource implications

29. The 2026/27 approved earmarked reserve drawdown is confirmed at £256,672. This balance remains in the reserve due to a few key factors;
- a. The delivery of projects in house where possible rather than using external contractors/consultants;
 - b. The effective procurement of projects where bids came in under budget; and
 - c. The securing of £155,368 of external grant funding in the past, reducing our reliance on this reserve in previous years.
30. Projects will be delivered with oversight from the Environmental & Energy Management team and Natural Environment team.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-environment/the-state-of-the-environment-the-urban-environment>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-environment/the-state-of-the-environment-the-urban-environment>

Revenue cost by priority (R = revenue)	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Future Years	Total
Community (R)	£92,902	£0	£0	£0	£92,902
Investing (R)	£76,000	£0	£0	£0	£76,000
Research, Development & Policy (R)	£87,770	£0	£0	£0	£87,770
TOTAL	£256,672	£0	£0	£0	£256,672

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>Climate and Nature Reserve</i>	£256,672	£0	£0	£0	£256,672
TOTAL	£256,672	£0	£0	£0	£256,672

Revenue budget implications	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>note any impact on revenue budget, good or bad</i>	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
TOTAL	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0

Legal implications

31. There are no specific legal implications in this report.

Risk management

32. Delays in implementation could exacerbate climate impacts and biodiversity loss whilst jeopardising the council's progress against its public commitments. Delivery risk is mitigated through phased implementation, oversight by the Environmental & Energy Management team and Natural Environment team, and alignment with existing council strategies.
33. Financial risk will be offset by leveraging external funding where possible, reducing the need for reserve funding.
34. Failure to act could undermine public trust and Herefordshire's leadership on climate issues. Through delivery of the programme, Herefordshire Council will maintain momentum delivering environmental projects for which it has been recognised nationally⁴.

⁴ [Herefordshire Council gets 'the triple' in Sustainability benchmarking – Herefordshire Council](#); [Innovative wetland project recognised with award – Herefordshire Council](#)

Risk / opportunity Reputation (both risk and opportunity) – There is a reputational risk of not delivering priorities within the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028.	Mitigation This proposal seeks to support priorities within the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028.
Project delivery capacity and capability – the Environmental & Energy Management team and Natural Environment team will deliver the projects inhouse where capacity and capability allows.	Where there is not capacity or capability for specialist work within the team, then work will be commissioned with support of the Commercial team.
Project delivery – timescales – the programme has been worked up with the relevant officers over the course of spring 2026 and realistic timeframes provided.	Where project delivery risk does arise, it will be escalated to the relevant programme board to ensure the SRO and others where necessary are sighted and a course of action agreed.
Reputational impact if environmental targets are missed - failure to meet published targets could result in public and political scrutiny.	The council regularly reports performance publicly and transparently and works with organisations and bodies across the county in these aims.
Without the proposed allocation of dedicated communications support to promote and engage residents there is a risk that the council is unable to successfully engage with all residents. This would negatively impact the council's ability to deliver the climate and ecological emergency commitments.	Dedicated communications support is proposed within the recommendations.

35. The relevant risks will be managed at a service level, escalated to project board and the senior responsible officer (SRO) as required.
36. The strategic and operational risks associated with the Climate and Nature Reserve – Phase 2 programme have been assessed and are being managed in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Strategy. Ongoing oversight and escalation of risk will take place through established governance and programme delivery frameworks to ensure that risks are effectively monitored, reviewed, and addressed in line with the council's environmental priorities and statutory responsibilities.

Consultees

37. None.

Appendices

None.

Background papers

None identified.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms

Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)