West Suffolk Council

Annual Environmental and Climate Change Update Report 2025 to 2026

Report number	**CAB/WS/26/034**	
Report to and date	**Cabinet**	21 July 2026
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Decisions plan: **The decisions made as a result of this report will usually be published within 48 hours and cannot be actioned until five clear working days of the publication of the decision have elapsed. This item is included on the decisions plan.**

Wards impacted: **All wards**

Recommendation: **It is recommended that Cabinet approves, for implementation, the Annual Environment and Climate Change Report 2025 to 2026, and in doing do, notes and endorses the Environmental Annual Statement 2025 to 2026 and accompanying appendices.**

1. Context to this report

1.1 Environmental Resilience is one of West Suffolk Council's four strategic priorities and commits the council to bringing about environmental improvements that support progress towards net zero carbon emissions, adapting to climate change and working alongside residents, businesses and partners to improve environmental outcomes and biodiversity.

1.2 The council declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in 2019 and subsequently adopted a target to achieve net zero carbon emissions from its own operations by 2030, with an associated action plan.

1.3 In May 2025, Cabinet approved an updated and fully costed Net Zero Route Map which sets out the actions required to achieve this ambition by a revised target date of 2039. The Annual Environment statement provides an overview of progress made during the first year of delivery following adoption of the revised route map. This statement (attached at Appendix A) also demonstrates how environmental considerations continue to be embedded across wider council activity including housing, waste and recycling, transport, economic development, parks and open spaces, procurement and partnership working.

1.4 The update report at Appendix B shows detailed progress against the council's full Environment and Climate Change Action Plan. Progress on the newest added actions is also summarised in section 4 below.

2. Executive summary of progress

2.1 In 2025-2026, West Suffolk Council continued its commitment to delivering meaningful action to address the climate emergency and enhance the local environment. Building on a strong track record, this year saw further investment in renewable energy, biodiversity, waste reduction, sustainable transport, and partnerships that support greener communities. This work can be briefly summarised as follows.

2.2 The council and Abbeycroft Leisure reduced carbon emissions to 5,181 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e) during 2025 to 2026, compared with 8,215 tonnes in the baseline year of 2010.

2.3 Gas heating systems at The Apex were removed and replaced with low-carbon alternatives including air source heat pumps. Ddecarbonisation works progressed at Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre and Haverhill Leisure Centre, and work has started on the installation of solar canopies at Mildenhall Hub.

2.4 The council secured £4.749 million through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to support decarbonisation works at leisure facilities, with a council contribution of £555,212.

2.5 The Solar for Business programme continued to support local businesses to reduce both carbon emissions and operating costs. During the year a further 503kW of solar photovoltaic capacity was installed.

2.6 A major focus during 2025 to 2026 was preparation for the introduction of the Better Recycling service, West Suffolk's response to the Government's Simpler

Recycling reforms. Work completed during the year included procurement and delivery of new recycling bins, procurement and distribution of food waste caddies, recruitment and operational planning, fleet and depot preparation, resident communications and engagement activity and coordination with Suffolk Waste Partnership authorities. The service introduces weekly food waste collections and expands the range of materials residents can recycle from home.

2.7 The council continued to support innovative approaches to recycling and waste reduction. Reverse vending machines located in Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket collected 10,122 containers between April 2025 and April 2026. Since the scheme commenced, more than 32,000 drinks containers have been recycled and over 1,160 kilograms of carbon emissions have been saved. The council also installed 24 Recycling on the Go bins across West Suffolk which generated an estimated 1.476 tonnes of recycling in their first year.

2.8 Through funding secured from Material Focus, the council installed 18 electrical recycling banks across the district. Between January and March 2026, almost 18 tonnes of electrical waste were collected for recycling.

2.9 The continued move towards digital and paperless services delivered both environmental and financial benefits. Across the Anglia Revenues Partnership: 96,000 more electronic bills were issued than in the previous year, approximately 289kg CO2e was saved, annual billing savings of around £83,000 were achieved and over 24,000 West Suffolk residents signed up to paperless billing. As a result, 50 per cent of West Suffolk residents now receive annual billing communications electronically compared with 22.7 per cent in the previous year.

2.10 The council has sought to retain six Green Flag Awards for the sixth consecutive year (results to be confirmed after publication of this report):

- Abbey Gardens
- East Town Park
- Brandon Country Park
- Aspal Close Nature Reserve
- West Stow Country Park
- Nowton Park

2.11 In addition, the council planted 61 standard trees and 345 whips during the year and continued to support community litter-picking and environmental volunteering initiatives.

2.12 Toggam Solar Farm generated 12,526 megawatt hours of renewable electricity during 2025 to 2026, exceeding annual targets by approximately 10 per cent. The electricity generated is equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of between 3,000 and 4,600 typical UK homes. As referenced in 2.5, through the Solar for Business programme, an additional 503 kilowatts of solar photovoltaic capacity were installed during the year.

2.13 The programme now supports 116 businesses and has delivered approximately 9 megawatts of installed solar capacity, helping participating businesses save an estimated 2,100 tonnes of carbon emissions annually. The council continued to

work with Suffolk County Council on delivery of the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure programme.

2.14 This programme will support the future rollout of additional public electric vehicle charging infrastructure, particularly in locations where residents do not have access to off-street parking.

2.15 The council also continued to work with transport partners including Transport East, Greater Anglia, Network Rail and National Highways to support improved sustainable transport infrastructure across the district. To date 46 on-street sockets have been installed under the scheme in West Suffolk.

3. Proposals in this report

3.1 It is proposed that Cabinet approves for implementation and notes and endorses the following reports and appendices.

3.2 **This covering report - Annual Environmental and Climate Change Update Report 2025 to 2026 -** This paper provides an overview and annual update on the council's progress towards tackling the climate emergency and enhancing the local environment. It highlights achievements over the past year, including investment in renewable energy, biodiversity, sustainable transport, waste reduction, and community engagement.

3.3 **Appendix A – Annual Environmental Statement**
This appendix sets out West Suffolk Council's annual performance in managing its environmental impacts. It provides an overview of the Council's operations and achievements in areas such as energy use, waste management, biodiversity, sustainable procurement and resulting carbon emissions. The statement reflects the council's commitment to environmental stewardship and continuous improvement in supporting a greener, more sustainable West Suffolk.

3.4 **Appendix B – Environment and Climate Change Action Plan Update.**
This appendix provides a detailed summary of progress against the actions set out in West Suffolk Council's Environment and Climate Change Action Plan, and any current work programmes. It highlights achievements, ongoing work, and planned activity aligned to the council's strategic priorities on environmental sustainability and climate resilience. This update supports transparency and helps track delivery of commitments to reduce carbon emissions, protect natural resources, and enable communities to respond to climate challenges.

4. Progress on environment and climate change action plan

4.1 The environment and climate change action plan is a dynamic document, kept under review continually by the Cabinet's reference group of councillors and officers. An update on the full plan, as is stands at July 2026, is set out in Appendix B. Most of the action plan relates to ongoing activity which has now become 'business as usual' for the council (achieving one of the original 2019 objectives of the taskforce). However, as part of the major review of the plan and net zero target in 2025, there were a number of new actions added to the

plan by Cabinet last year. To assist Cabinet to check on progress, these are extracted in this section of the covering report as follows:

Communities and communication

4.2 Continue to deliver compost giveaways and plastic reduction campaigns as part of national events such as Plastic Free July, Zero Waste Week, and World Refill Day.

Progress: Ongoing

The council continued to support national awareness campaigns including Plastic Free July and wider waste reduction initiatives through communications activity and public engagement. Promotion of recycling and waste reduction also continued through Suffolk Recycles and council communication channels.

4.3 **Focus on communications with communities and businesses to ensure successful implementation and adoption of Simpler Recycling.**

Progress: Completed and ongoing

Significant communications activity was undertaken throughout 2025 to 2026 to support the introduction of Better Recycling, West Suffolk's response to Simpler Recycling. Information packs, collection calendars, guidance materials and online resources were provided to residents. New bins and food waste caddies were delivered to approximately 80,000 households ahead of the June 2026 service launch.

4.4 **Implement and promote new electrical recycling banks where practicable, funded by Material Focus, across West Suffolk for small domestic appliances**.

Progress: Completed

The council secured Material Focus funding and installed 18 small electrical recycling banks across West Suffolk. Between January and March 2026, 17.97 tonnes of electrical waste were collected for recycling, helping divert waste from disposal and increase recycling opportunities for residents.

4.5 **Explore ways to prevent or reduce single-use plastics at events hosted on council land or in council venues.**

Progress: Ongoing

Environmental considerations continued to be promoted through council communications and event management processes. Opportunities to reduce waste and encourage reuse have been considered through wider environmental awareness campaigns and engagement with event organisers. Further work is planned as part of the ongoing delivery of the Environment and Climate Change Action Plan.

4.6 **Continue to ensure residents have ongoing opportunities to shape and influence the delivery of the Environment and Climate Change Action Plan.**

Progress: Ongoing

Residents continued to engage with the council through consultations, community engagement exercises and public participation opportunities associated with environmental projects, recycling service changes and strategic planning initiatives. Environmental performance reporting remains publicly available through annual reporting arrangements.

4.7 **Ensure relevant climate-related communications clearly highlight how the council is engaging with communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.**

Progress: Ongoing

The council continued to support vulnerable households through programmes including Warm Homes Suffolk, energy efficiency initiatives, financial inclusion activity and wider cost-of-living support measures. Communications linked environmental improvements with support available for residents most affected by rising energy costs. See: Keep the Heat scheme celebrates positive impact on residents.

4.8 **Seek to reduce food waste through initiatives such as Simpler Recycling, Feel Good Suffolk and the council's Building Resilience and Nutrition Fund (BRAN).**

Progress: Ongoing

Preparations for weekly food waste collections were completed during 2025 to 2026 through the Better Recycling programme. The BRAN programme continued supporting projects that reduce food poverty, improve nutrition and reduce food waste. Feel Good Suffolk also continued to promote healthier lifestyles and behaviour change.

4.9 **Complete an Equalities Impact Assessment for the Environment and Climate Change Action Plan to ensure fair and inclusive delivery.**

Progress: In progress

Work commenced to ensure environmental initiatives are delivered in a fair and inclusive manner. Equalities considerations continue to be incorporated into project development and implementation processes across the council.

Corporate action and governance

4.10 **Continue to aim to decarbonise remaining sites** that have **Combined Heat and Power (CHP) systems, specifically Newmarket Leisure Centre followed by Mildenhall Hub when opportunities arise.**

Progress: Ongoing

Decarbonisation works progressed across the council's estate, including major investment at leisure facilities. During the year, gas systems at The Apex were removed and replaced with low-carbon technologies, while decarbonisation

projects progressed at Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill Leisure Centres. Work commenced on installing solar canopies at Mildenhall Hub, which will generate over £130,000 of electricity and save over 124 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. A project has also started to decarbonise West Suffolk House where the existing heating plant is end of life. Cabinet approved an updated and costed Net Zero Route Map in May 2025 to guide future investment decisions.

4.11 **Ensure climate change commitments continue to be reflected within strategic and operational documents.**

Progress: Completed and ongoing

Climate change and environmental resilience remain one of West Suffolk Council's four strategic priorities. Environmental objectives continue to be embedded within key corporate strategies, service plans and investment decisions, including the updated Net Zero Route Map approved in May 2025.

4.12 **Keep under review how climate implications are considered in the development of policies and projects.**

Progress: Ongoing

Climate implications continue to be considered through policy development, project appraisal and decision-making processes. This has included implementation of climate-related policies within the adopted West Suffolk Local Plan and supporting guidance.

Environment and biodiversity

4.13 **Seek sites for the planting of the first of the 5,000 trees on council land included in the new Net Zero Plan.**

Progress: Ongoing

During 2025 to 2026, the council planted 61 standard trees and 345 whips across West Suffolk. Work continues to identify further opportunities for tree planting and habitat enhancement on council-owned land.

4.14 **In partnership with local interest groups build on existing work to improve the district's river corridors and neighbouring meadows.**

Progress: Ongoing

The council continued to work with environmental partners and community organisations to enhance biodiversity and support habitat improvements across West Suffolk. Further activity is reflected within the council's Biodiversity Duty reporting and environmental programmes.

4.15 Implement further habitat enhancements on sites identified in Suffolk Wildlife Trust habitat surveys.

Progress: Ongoing

Habitat improvement activity continued during the year, supporting biodiversity enhancement across council-owned land and open spaces. This work contributes to wider biodiversity objectives and delivery of the council's environmental commitments.

4.16 Strengthen delivery of Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Progress: Ongoing

The council continued to support Suffolk-wide environmental partnership work, including biodiversity improvement activity and contributions to countywide environmental objectives. This complements the council's Biodiversity Duty responsibilities and wider environmental resilience work.

Housing

4.17 Continue to deliver improvements in energy efficiency particularly focusing on low-income households, vulnerable residents and those in fuel poverty.

Progress: Ongoing

The council continued to support energy efficiency improvements through programmes including Warm Homes Suffolk and wider retrofit initiatives. Across Suffolk, 112 Warm Homes grants were delivered, including 15 properties in West Suffolk, helping residents reduce energy consumption and manage energy costs. The council also continued to promote financial inclusion and support vulnerable households through wider housing and community initiatives.

Planning and regulation

4.18 **Continue to provide training for planning and regulatory teams on biodiversity net gain, carbon literacy and active travel design.**

Progress: Ongoing

The adoption of the West Suffolk Local Plan and implementation of associated climate change policies has been supported through continued officer development and guidance. Biodiversity net gain requirements and climate considerations continue to form part of planning and regulatory work.

4.19 **Implement the climate change policies in the newly adopted West Suffolk Local Plan, including preparation and publication of the Climate Change Guidance Note.**

Progress: Completed and ongoing

The West Suffolk Local Plan was formally adopted on 15 July 2025. During 2026, the council published the West Suffolk Climate Change and Sustainable Building Planning Advice Note to support implementation of climate-related planning policies and provide clarity on information required from developers. The Planning Advice Note supports delivery of the Local Plan's climate change objectives and sustainable development requirements.

5. Consultation and engagement undertaken

5.1 Many of the specific environmental projects involve extensive consultation and engagement in their own right, as set out elsewhere in this report. The council's work on this agenda is overseen by the Cabinet's own Environment and Sustainability Reference Group (ESRG) of councillors, and an officer environmental management group, ensuring councillor and staff engagement and monitoring. The Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee provides ongoing scrutiny. The council also works in partnership across Suffolk with other public and community bodies in delivering environmental schemes.

5.2 At its meeting on 9 July 2026, the ESRG highlighted the following issues to Cabinet as part of their consideration of the report:

- The need for a continued focus on energy demand, generation and resilience in the next local plan.
- In respect of this, whether consideration could be given to indicating in the next local plan which types of land were best suited for new renewable energy infrastructure.
- The continued critical importance of addressing current issues in relation to water supply, disposal and conservation.
- The importance of continuing with current post-installation reviews of retrofitted domestic energy efficiency improvements funded through grants.
- Current market conditions affecting the viability of recycling certain materials.
- Raising awareness of/establishing cool spaces within communities to tackle extreme heat (which the ESRG will be exploring at a future meeting).

5.3 The ESRG also reviewed the current action plan and did not recommend any new actions for this year's annual review (given the major review carried out in 2025).

6. Risks associated with the proposals

6.1 Specific risks associated with individual activities in the action plan are identified and managed where necessary through the Council's project management and risk processes. The risks associated with this annual monitoring process itself are largely as explained in sections 5 and 7 of this report, that is the need for proper engagement, scrutiny and mitigating the risk of inaction on environmental matters.

6.2 There is an ongoing risk that the resources required to implement the actions will not be available. However, this risk will be monitored by the ESRG and officers, with any opportunities for securing external resources monitored and pursued as appropriate, and Cabinet advised of any serious delays in implementation or resource requirements.

6.3 National policy changes may impact the delivery of local actions, requiring adjustments to timelines or scope. Officers will monitor legislative developments and adapt plans accordingly.

7. Alternative options that have been considered

7.1 An alternative option would be to not record or report on our environmental achievements and progress. However, this approach would conflict with West Suffolk Council's strategic priorities and our commitment to transparency and accountability. It would also fail to meet our reporting Cabinet duties to inform stakeholders, partners, and residents about the council's actions to address climate change and protect the environment.

7.2 In relation to climate change generally, there is no 'do nothing' option. The ESRG is aware of national and international reports and events, particularly the reports of the Climate Change Committee.

8. Implications arising from the proposals

8.1 Financial - There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Where individual projects require new investment which is not covered by existing budgets this will be a separate business case or report.

8.2 Legal compliance – No implications.

8.3 Personal data processing – No implications.

8.4 Equalities (including impacts on families and communities) - Many activities in the plan are specifically targeted at families and communities, for instance those relating to housing and food poverty. The reference group expect that equality impacts should be positive because of their work, however this would need to be subject to further assessment based on each action and of the plan.

8.5 Crime and disorder – No implications.

8.6 Safeguarding – No implications.

8.7 Environment or sustainability – By definition, the recommendations will have a positive impact on the environment and sustainability.

8.8 HR or staffing - No implications from this report; further activity may require additional staff to support, and this will be subject to business cases or separate requests.

8.9 Changes to existing policies – No implications from this update itself, but changes to policies (for example local plan) are referenced in the report.

8.10 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) - potential partner organisations that will need to be involved with implementing recommendations. Officers therefore maintain a dialogue with partner organisations.

9. Appendices referenced in this report

9.1 Appendix A – Annual Environmental Statement

9.2 Appendix B – Environment and Climate Change Action Plan Update

10. Background documents associated with this report

10.1 Achieving Net Zero, report to Cabinet Achiving New Zero - CAB/WS/25/019 – 20 May 2025

10.2 Annual Environment and Climate Change Report 2024-2025 – 22 July 2025