

County halves carbon emissions in eight years

West Lothian has nearly halved its carbon emissions in eight years, building on the 40% cut it achieved after declaring its climate emergency policy in September 2019.

Reports set to go before the council next month will show that the CO₂ emissions for 2020/21 will be approximately 30,700 tonnes CO₂e – down from the first year of measurement 2013 where the figure was 61,061 tonnes.

In a report to the Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel Energy & Climate Change Manager, Peter Rogers, counselled caution on the plunge in figures because of the pandemic lockdowns. He said: “It is clear that the figure has been significantly impacted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and is, therefore, likely to increase again in 2021/22 as recovery progresses.”

However figures also show the council did make a dramatic start, cutting the annual emissions figure to 36,635 tonnes in its first year under the new policy.

Mr Rogers was optimistic that the council’s target of net zero-carbon emissions by 2045.

The report added: “There are a number of direct actions that have contributed to our emissions reductions including the implementation of energy efficiency projects, replacing street lighting with low energy LED equivalents, investing in

renewable and low carbon technologies such as biomass boilers and solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and reducing the volume of waste being sent to landfill.”

He laid out the development of the climate emergency strategy that has been building since autumn 2019.

Significant challenges that face the council lie in redeveloping transport strategies as 37% of the total CO2 emissions for the West Lothian area. It is also the only major sector where emissions have increased since the council’s baseline year. Emissions targets can only be achieved with a shift away from petrol/diesel car use, and significant improvements in the public transport sector.

Obvious actions include de-carbonising the council’s transport fleet and promoting the development of cleaner public service transport. More tricky is the change of attitudes away from individual car use towards public transport and active travel.

The council is actively pursuing a policy of encouraging the development of EV charging points across the county but Mr Rogers acknowledged that the council “can only be a part of it” as EV infrastructure has to develop to encourage greater use of Environmentally friendly transport.

The introduction to the strategy document sums up in its foreword: “No single person or organisation can tackle climate change alone, so we are asking our partners, businesses, community groups and individuals to embrace the changes that must take place. There are many small changes we can all make to reduce our impact on the environment that, together, will help secure a better future for everyone in West Lothian.”

Councillors across the chamber praised an “impressive piece of work” in the 51-page document. Regular updates on progress of the strategy will come before the [Environment PDSP](#).

by Stuart Somerville Local Democracy Reporter

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