



Ryedale District Council

REPORT TO: Community Services & Licensing Committee

DATE: 24 July 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: S. Richmond, Environmental Health Manager

SUBJECT: Overview of Ryedale District Council's Environmental Policies, Strategies and Activities.

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide members with a broad overview of environmental policies, procedures, strategies, and activities within the Council's current operations.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that:

- a. Members support the suggested amendments to the Council's environmental policy.
- b. Members receive regular updates on progress with environmental policies, strategies and activities.

3.0 REASONS SUPPORTING DECISION

3.1 Consistency with Councils stated aims and objectives.

3.2 Adapting to changing evidence, national policies and public concerns.

4.0 BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

4.1 The Council has a long history of introducing environmental policies and actions. While some have been superseded by national policies, a significant number are still relevant, and action to deliver environmental improvements are to some extent embedded within a number of service units.

5.0 REPORT

5.1 The Council has a wide range of overlapping functions and responsibilities, many of which impact directly upon or are directly concerned with environmental issues. All service units have some environmental impact, but in terms of direct activity to improve our environment, certain Council service areas clearly stand out.

5.2 Action by Councils to improve their environmental performance is now more broadly recognised under the labels 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development', terms which, despite being overused, accurately summarise the complex interplay between environment, economics and broader society. In addition they serve to frame policy decisions in the mainstream of service delivery by ensuring a focus on evidence based policymaking.

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5.3 Summary of policies, plans and activities.

The following policies, documents and service areas present a summary of the Council's commitment to sustainability issues. The list is not exhaustive, since virtually all service areas have environmental impacts of some kind, however it provides a broad indication of the range of possible impacts, actions, and policies to be considered under any scrutiny of this topic within the Council.

5.4 Policies and Plans.

· Ryedale D.C. Environmental Charter.

The Council adopted an Environmental Charter in 1992 to guide policy development and service delivery. This document is now outdated and not suitable for current distribution. An updated, draft version of this Charter has been developed, but has not yet been approved by elected Members. The original Charter is included in Appendix A, while a proposed revision in the form of an Environmental Policy summarising the Council's current position is presented in Appendix B. This is needed to retain its relevance to current affairs and issues.

The suggested changes take into account movement of both international and national policy, as well as increasing importance of energy and related issues. For example, when the original policy was adopted, ozone depletion was a major issue, but has since declined in the developed world due to effective regulation. The new proposed policy shifts the focus towards, awareness, procurement, and is aligned with other Council policy on climate change and energy efficiency.

· Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change.

The Council agreed to become a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration in 2004, with a number of commitments contained within the declaration document.

Key commitments of the Nottingham Declaration:

- Work with central government to deliver the UK climate change programme.
- Encourage the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the local community.
- Commit to a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from RDC operations.
- Provide opportunities for renewable energy generation within the local area.
- Prepare a plan to address the causes and effects of climate change.
- Monitor and publish progress towards these goals.

· Climate Change Action Plan.

The Council adopted a Climate change action plan in 2005, which was updated in 2007. The key aim of this is to reduce carbon emissions within Ryedale, resulting from our own operations, as well as domestic and business premises. It focuses on our own operations, however it should be noted that there are conflicting priorities inherent to a number of actions, such as recycling versus greater fuel use.

As part of the plan, actions taken to reduce carbon emissions in the wider community have been more successful than within our own operations, and a number of community based actions initiated or supported by the council have had particular success.

- **Biodiversity Action Plan.**

The Ryedale Biodiversity Action Plan was written in 2005 and covers the Ryedale area outside the National Park. It has been produced on behalf of the Ryedale Biodiversity Steering Group and aims to ensure that future generations can enjoy the same rich variety of wildlife as is enjoyed today.

The plan is divided into four sections:

- Introduction.
- Details of the 13 Habitat Action Plans of particular importance in Ryedale.
- Details of the 19 Species Action Plans and 9 Species Statements of particular importance in Ryedale.
- General actions relating to implementation and monitoring.

As part of the plan implementation, the Countryside Officer works with partner organisations and local groups on specific projects, undertakes educational work and influences development related work across Ryedale.

- **Genetic Modification.**

In 2003 (Full Council, 26 June 2003) the Council resolved as far as possible, to keep Ryedale free of GM crops, animal feed and GM food. Key points were the decision to ensure that no GM crops are grown on land over which the council has control and to adopt a GM-free policy for all goods and services for which the Council is responsible.

- **Procurement policy: Sustainable procurement.**

As part of the Council's Procurement Strategy, Sustainable procurement has been considered in Annex A. This covers all goods and services.

While the policy has been followed in a number of major purchasing decisions, there is considerable scope for improving both the implementation and monitoring of this within all service areas.

5.5 Environmental activity within service units.

- **Housing Services.**

Private Sector Grants

Within Housing Services, the provision of Energy Efficiency Grants is the primary service area relating to the delivery of environmental improvements, through reductions in carbon emissions and improvements in air quality via the installation of efficient heating systems and insulation. Much of this work is done in coordination with national subsidy and grant schemes, achieving significant external funding as part of the programme. The number of residents in need of assistance has steadily risen and will continue to rise as a result of increasing fuel prices throughout 2008/9.

Embedding environmental aspirations within other private sector grant schemes has yet to be addressed, but opportunities do exist for improvement in this area.

Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) requires every UK local authority with housing responsibilities to prepare an energy conservation report identifying practical and cost-effective measures to improve the energy efficiency of housing in their area; and to report on progress made in a yearly report. The Act commits Local Authorities to a considerable improvement in energy efficiency. The Secretary of State has indicated that Local Authorities should aim for a 30 % improvement on 1995 levels, with a timescale for this improvement over the period 1996 to 2006-2010. The future of the Act is currently under review, and it is likely that progress in future will be measured against the relevant National Performance Indicator.

The Council's performance is assessed annually on this target by a standardised survey methodology, which is then reported to DEFRA. Officers are currently waiting for receipt of this years performance, however it is worth noting that in 2004, Ryedale District Council was assessed as the poorest performing district in the region, nearly 130 years behind schedule in achieving its target. Subsequently, large improvements have been made year on year, such that the Council has now successfully achieved similar levels of overall improvement to the regional average, despite the inherent difficulties in having no managed housing stock and a large dispersed rural community in older housing.

This programme has had a significant impact on levels of fuel poverty and has almost certainly delivered the biggest single enhancement to the local economy of any Council initiated action in recent years. Exact figures are impossible to obtain, but a very conservative estimate would put the value of total annual household energy savings achieved over the past four years in Ryedale in excess of £500,000. Of course, this figure increases long into the future as energy prices rise, and the benefits will continue to compound. Furthermore, whereas much of the cost of energy is currently transferred to multinational companies, economic research has shown that where savings such as these are achieved, a certain proportion is recycled into the local economy. In largely rural areas such as Ryedale, this can be up to 30%, which is multiplied each time it is spent.

• **Cultural Services delivery.**

The Cultural Services unit manages recreational public open space; Orchard Fields, Lady Spring Wood, Lakeside and Norton Ings. Due to the small budget for this service, the management tends to be 'reactive'. A large scale programme of works has been identified to for Orchard Fields and Lady Spring Woods, which has secured £30K of capital funding from the Council. However, this has been delayed due to lack of human resource available to implement the project. Other services come under the following broad headings:

Public Open Space – To maintain and develop a clean, pleasant and safe environment and ensure that the natural resources and heritage of Ryedale are protected and enhanced.

A small environmental play park is planned for the Riverside View Play Area, funded through the Big Lottery play programme. Consultation is due to commence on this over Summer 2008 and the project to be completed by January 2009.

Countryside Recreation – To promote rural conservation and enhancement initiatives through the promotion of countryside activities and events.

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Wild About Ryedale - operate a programme of walks and talks which brings together our own events and those run by other organisations such as Forest Enterprise. This is extremely successful, with nearly all events being fully booked.

Grants – The community development grants which we manage are largely allocated to community venues such as village halls, play areas, sports fields etc in our rural locations. The increase or improvement in the provision of services in villages can assist in the reduced need to travel by private transport to access services. We operate a grant scheme to encourage community groups and town and parish councils to improve their local environment and to encourage environmental awareness. Grants of up to £2,000 are available, up to 50% of the cost of the project. Recent grants have been awarded for; replacement low energy Christmas lights, green days, cotton shopping bags, renewable energy initiatives and community wildlife areas.

As a cross cutting theme, the environment features highly in service delivery. Examples are: Tourism Promotion – promoting ‘greening your business’ and promoting use of the public transport network.

- **Heritage Management.**

Heritage and Building conservation are dealt with under the following legislation and plans:

Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (Primary Legislation)
Planning Policy Guidance 15- Planning & the Historic Environment 1994 (Dept of Environment & Dept of National Heritage)
The Yorkshire & Humber Plan – Regional Spatial Strategy to 2026 Policy ENV9-
Historic Environment. Published May 2008
Ryedale Local Plan Chapter 9- The Historic Environment
The LDF is not yet adopted but will have historic environment policies.

As well as these policies to protect, preserve and enhance the historic environment, Ryedale District Council operates a grant scheme. The ‘Partnership Scheme in Conservation Areas’ targets grants for the repair and enhancement of historic buildings in the commercial core of Malton, Norton, Pickering and Kirkbymoorside.

- **Waste Collection and Waste Strategy.**

Commitments and targets pertaining to municipal solid waste were set out in a waste strategy, entitled ‘Let’s Talk Rubbish’, in 2002. This strategy was superseded in 2006 by the current strategy, entitled ‘Let’s Talk Less Rubbish’ 2006 – 2026. Informed by the ‘Let’s Talk Less Rubbish’ joint strategy, a Draft Recycling Plan for Ryedale District Council has been formulated. The Council’s Kerbside Collection Policy guides the containers, collections, and acceptable waste.

The Council is a Waste Collection Authority and works as a partner within the York and North Yorkshire Waste Partnership. The priority is to make progress toward greater levels of waste reduction through reuse, recycling and composting, and working towards more sustainable types of waste disposal. The partnership website, strategy documents and information about reducing waste going to landfill can be viewed at <http://www.letstalklessrubbish.com/>

Delivery of the Waste Collection and Recycling services is by far the largest single environmental impact that the Council has. This highlights the difficulty of balancing some contradicting aims within the Council's services. These will become more evident over time as the cost and environmental impact of fossil fuel usage increases.

- **Property Services.**

Property Services are responsible for building services, maintenance and renewal, as well as energy purchasing and monitoring. Over the past two years a number of measures have been implemented in the Council's main building stock to improve both energy efficiency and comfort levels, including insulation and building fabric improvements, pool covers and improvements to electrical distribution at the swimming pools.

A budget is available for further improvements, and current priorities are better energy monitoring arrangements, a programme of boiler replacements, and building fabric and lighting improvements at Ryedale House. Progress has been slower than desired due to a lack of staffing resource available to implement the programme of work.

- **Local Development Framework.**

The spatial strategy embodied in the emerging LDF will influence the location and distribution of development and will be compiled against objectives of sustainability and accessibility. The need to reduce the need to travel, avoidance of flood risk and protection of the landscape are all key considerations that will influence the future planning strategy for the District.

The LDF will also contain detailed policies to help protect and enhance built heritage, biodiversity and important open spaces and will set targets for the reuse of brownfield land and the reduction of carbon emissions from development sites. Planning policies for waste disposal and mineral extraction are prepared by North Yorkshire County Council.

- **Tree protection.**

The Tree Officer is responsible for implementation and enforcement of the following legislation and guidance:

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 - Tree Preservation Orders/ Trees in Conservation Areas

1995 Environmental Act - The Hedgerow Regulations

PPG 15 - Sustainable Landscape Quality

Anti-social Behaviour Act - High hedge complaints

Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) - Formal application is required to fell or prune trees subject to a TPO, with penalties for contravention.

Trees in conservation areas - 6 weeks written notice is required prior to carrying out work or felling trees within a conservation area. If the Council does not agree with proposal they can protect the tree(s) under a TPO.

Hedgerow Regulations - 6 weeks written notice is required to remove most rural hedgerows over 20m long. The hedgerow is assessed against historical/ ecological

importance. Hedgerow retention notices can be served to prevent removal, with penalties for contravention.

High hedges - public can complain to Council about high evergreen hedges that affect enjoyment of their dwellinghouse. A fee is payable and the Council is the last resort where neighbours cannot agree, or owners refuse to co-operate.

The Council can serve notice on owners requesting that a hedge is reduced in size by a specified amount, with penalties for contravention.

5.6 Other relevant factors.

· Environmental Forum.

The Ryedale Environmental Forum has been established by the District Council to provide the focus in Ryedale for all those with an interest in promoting, enhancing and maintaining the quality of the environment throughout the District.

The Forum aims to encourage and promote the widest consultation, discussion and debate of environmental issues relevant to the communities in Ryedale and to provide for co-ordination and co-operation between those groups and organisations involved in the environment.

The forum is not a Council committee or body, but can formulate views and advice on environmental issues for the consideration of Ryedale District Council's standing committees in the performance of their duties and responsibilities where appropriate.

The District Council has recognised the forum as a relevant and important consultation body and has undertaken to receive reports, advice and representations from the forum. The last meeting of the Forum was on 8 July 2008 on the theme of biodiversity.

· Corporate Objectives and Community Plan.

An explicit Corporate Aim of the Council is "To have a clean and sustainable built and natural environment." Corporate Objectives under this Aim are related to recycling, residual waste reduction, carbon emission reduction, and litter reduction.

The Landscape and Environment Theme of the community plan includes strategic aims:

- Planning for managed change and growth in Ryedale by ensuring that the right types of development come forward at the right time and in the right place.
- Safeguarding environmental air quality including air, land and water
- Waste Management
- Energy efficiency and use of resources
- Maintaining the diversity of landscapes and habitat, encouraging biodiversity
- Promoting nature conservation and enjoyment of the countryside

These are based on the views of residents consulted about things they would like to see in Ryedale in future, such as:

- 'Renewable energy and sustainable housing developments with local employment'

- 'No flooding'
- 'Restrict use of Greenfield sites for development'
- 'More housing on brown field sites'

The community plan also encompasses many of the goals and principles of sustainability at a local level. The plan acknowledges concerns about energy efficiency and the need for renewable energy developments and sustainable housing in Ryedale.

6.0 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 6.1 a. Approve the recommended revised Environmental Charter as presented.
b. Amend the current Environmental Charter as necessary.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Council currently has a wide range of policies in place as a sound basis for action, and currently achieves many environmental improvements and benefits alongside successful service delivery.

OFFICER CONTACT:

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Appendix A:

Ryedale District Council's Environmental Charter (Adopted July 1992)

The Council resolves that it will adopt a set of policies, which reflect its concern for the quality of the local environment and the need to conserve the finite resources of our planet. These policies also establish a proper balance between short-term economic requirements and the longer term ecological need of our community. The Council intends to develop its contribution to a healthy and sustainable balanced environment.

Therefore this Council will:

1. Continue to extend the use of recycled products and to expand recycling facilities (including those for the recycling of ozone harming refrigerants) using profits to support environmental projects including the development of new recycling schemes.
2. Promote more environmentally aware methods of waste disposal, avoiding pollution of air, of ground or surface water, or damage to natural or green areas.
3. Develop and pursue planning policies to ensure that in any necessary process of change, the green belt and areas of habitat (woods, meadows, roughland, moor etc) important to wildlife are protected from damage or destruction.
4. Involve local communities, landowners and businesses in establishing local environment conservation areas and introduce other appropriate measures.
5. Introduce and promote more environmentally aware methods of ground management and maintenance, avoiding the unnecessary use of pesticides and herbicides, and promoting a greater diversity of wildlife.
6. Continue to phase in the use of environmentally sensitive products, eliminating from use by the Council or its contractors, ozone destroying gases, non-biodegradable phosphate based detergents, tropical hardwoods and leaded fuels.
7. Promote the protection and environmentally aware management of our natural water bodies, including rivers, lakes and ponds, and of other areas of value and amenity use.
8. Promote and improve energy efficiency and conservation by the Council and the community so as to effect economic savings and reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.
9. Continue to promote the development of environmental monitoring services in order to detect all forms of pollution and environmental contamination and take all appropriate measures to minimise it, through publicity and enforcement.
10. Involve environmental, conservation and community groups in developing strategies for greening their areas and offer assistance and advice to enable people to care for their environment and also establish an environmental forum.
11. Establish an ecology and environment working party, to include both elected members and representatives of local conservation and environmental organisations, to develop further detailed policies and measures in support of this environmental charter.
12. Monitor progress against this charter by publication of a public progress report and by the regular commissioning of externally conducted environmental audits.

Appendix B :

Ryedale District Council's Environmental Policy (PROPOSED DRAFT 2008)

The Council resolves that it will adopt and implement policies, which reflect its concern for the quality of the local and wider environment and the need to conserve finite resources. These policies will establish a balance between economic, social and environmental requirements in our community. When developing its policies, the Council will work to ensure that they contribute to maintaining, or enhancing, a sustainable and healthy environment.

Procurement

Incorporate principles of sustainable procurement (considering social, economic and environmental issues) into the Council's procurement process. Work in partnership with the Council's suppliers and contractors to minimise environmental impacts of their goods and services

Planning

Develop planning policies to ensure that the long-term process of change protects or enhances the natural environment. Deliver campaigns with other organisations, local communities, landowners and businesses to promote conservation of wildlife habitats and amenity areas. Maintain or enrich the quality of the natural environment, following priorities set out in the local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Energy and Climate Change

Promote energy efficiency to householders and the business community, in order to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Continue to adopt the latest technologies that deliver reductions in CO₂ emissions from the Council's buildings and vehicle fleet. Support campaigns, which help reduce unnecessary use of fossil fuels, such as the reduction of food miles, farmers markets, food waste etc.

Transport

Implement actions, which minimise the environmental impact of the Council's fleet of vehicles and staff journeys to, from and at work. Work with other organisations to develop a local transport plan, which encourages cycling and walking to places of work, study, or for leisure.

Waste

Progress towards greater waste reduction and higher reuse, recycling, composting and recovery of value from waste, reducing dependence on landfill. Use recycled products wherever possible and expand recycling facilities (including those for hazardous materials) for residents and businesses. Promote more sustainable methods of disposal, which minimise pollution to air, ground or water.

Water

Implement actions to reduce water use within Council buildings, as well as encourage and support actions to reduce, reuse and recycle water within the District

Built Environment

Encourage sustainable design and management practices in new buildings, renovations and conversions and adopt the same practices for Council properties.

Management

Ensure compliance with all relevant environmental legislation and other requirements to which the Council subscribes. Carry out regular evaluations of the Council's environmental performance.

Environmental Awareness

Motivate staff to conduct their activities in an environmentally responsible manner. Raise environmental awareness, particularly amongst children and young people. Encourage and actively support local communities to undertake environmental projects within the District.