

 <p>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET - 7 JUNE 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 10
Subject	GREEN BUSINESS PLEDGE
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for the Economy and Council Transformation Email: tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Paul James, Economic Development Lead Tel: 01285 623558 Email: paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To endorse the Council signing up to the Gloucestershire Climate Commitment and undertaking to promote it to businesses in the District.
Annexes	None
Recommendation/s	<i>That the Council endorses the Gloucestershire Climate Commitment and resolves to use its various communications with businesses in the District to sign up to it and commit to reducing their carbon emissions.</i>
Corporate priorities	Responding to the climate crisis - Influence and encourage residents, businesses and partners to reduce their carbon emissions
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None.

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council declared a climate emergency and an ecological emergency and has signed up to the COP26 UK100 pledge, committing to net zero emissions from its own activities by 2030 and a net zero district by 2045 at the latest. The Green Economic Growth Strategy, adopted in December 2020, contains an action to “encourage local businesses to embed climate change objectives into their operations”.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The Council has been looking at adopting a “Green Business Pledge” in order to encourage businesses to review their operations with the objective of reducing their carbon emissions and ultimately becoming carbon neutral. The objectives of the pledge are:
- 1) To show commitment by business to addressing the climate emergency
 - 2) To lead to actions which will have a tangible impact
 - 3) To show the Council as demonstrating community leadership on this issue.
 - 4) To reinforce Cotswold District as a location for green business.
- 2.2 The Council initially considered a range of options - either using an existing pledge, coming up with its own pledge for the Cotswold District alone or joining with other councils to create a Gloucestershire-wide pledge. A report was taken to the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group who were supportive of such an initiative, but with some members expressing a preference for a countywide scheme. The report to the Economic Advisory Group set out a number of tests any pledge would have to meet. These were:
- a) be simple enough for businesses not to be put off by it, bearing in mind that the vast majority of businesses in the District are micro-businesses with 9 or fewer employees.
 - b) be equally applicable for businesses large and small.
 - b) lead to benefits for the business as well as the environment.
 - c) be recognisable, or become recognisable in a short space of time, for consumers who wish to support businesses who are environmentally responsible.
 - d) lead to tangible actions which are measurable.
 - e) lead to the sharing of best practice.
- 2.3 There are a considerable number of environmental commitments ranging from Business Declares (see www.businessdeclares.com) to the Terra Carta initiative endorsed by HRH Prince Charles (see <https://www.sustainable-markets.org/terra-carta/>). Some of these are rather long and complex and could be overwhelming for small businesses. Some also come with a significant cost for the business, which can also be a negative factor. It is important to remember that the majority of businesses in the District are micro-businesses with 9 or fewer employees. Any pledge needs to be simple enough not to be off-putting for small businesses who have many other pressures to deal with, particularly as we recover from the pandemic, and ideally come at no cost to the business. In fact, it should prompt the business to take action, which will reduce its costs and therefore help the bottom line.
- 2.4 There are other sound business reasons for signing up to the pledge. In these environmentally conscious days, many consumers make their buying decisions with sustainability issues in mind. A 2019 survey showed that 73% of people would change their consumption habits in

order to reduce their impact on the environment. In addition, a 2015 study showed that 62% of millennials wanted to work for a company, which made a positive social or environmental impact. The thrust of policy from Government, reflected in GFirst LEP's Draft Local Industrial Strategy, is that the environmental technology sector can stimulate innovation, create jobs and drive sustainable economic growth. Finally, the impacts of climate change if not addressed would have severe consequences for businesses of all types, so we all have a stake in responding to the climate emergency.

2.5 Eoin McQuone of Sustainable Business Design has been developing a pledge of this type. His pledge is very similar in content to what the Council is proposing and it therefore makes sense to work with him. Eoin's proposal, which is well-advanced, is for a "Gloucestershire Climate Commitment", which would have the advantages of scale of a countywide pledge. Eoin was introduced to officers at GFirst LEP and it is likely that a report will be taken to the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee to seek sign up from other councils in the county. As this Council's thinking in this area is already well-developed, we can be a leader in this area.

2.6 The basis of the Gloucestershire Climate Commitment is a three stage plan to:

- 1) Make a public commitment to climate action.
- 2) Calculate your total carbon footprint.
- 3) Pledge to achieve Net Zero emissions.

The pledge is to:

- 1) Halve your greenhouse gas emissions before 2030.
- 2) Achieve Net Zero emissions before 2050.
- 3) Publicly report progress on a yearly basis.

2.7 Engagement has also taken place with the Head of Environmental Strategy at St James's Place on this issue. As the largest employer in the District and a FTSE100 business, their sign-up would send a powerful message to other businesses in the area.

2.8 It is proposed that the Council proactively promotes the pledge to businesses in the District, using its channels including:

- Business Matters newsletter
- Council website business pages
- Social media channels
- Liaison with other key partners like the Growth Hub, Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Business
- Cotswolds Tourism's links with businesses in the visitor economy

2.9 A website has been developed – see www.climatecommitment.co.uk. It is not the finished article yet and there is the opportunity for it to be finessed as more businesses start to use it and experience is gained. The website includes two downloadable 'playbooks' which set out how businesses can achieve the reduction in carbon emissions the pledge seeks. For example, areas which businesses can review in order to reduce their emissions include energy, transport, waste, packaging and their supply chain.

- 2.10 It is proposed to pilot the commitment with a relatively small number of businesses, to test the system works, before promoting more widely. It is also intended that some larger businesses, such as St James's Place, will act as 'mentors' to smaller businesses. It is recognised that small businesses in particular will need support in measuring their carbon footprint and further work will need to be done to determine the best way in which to deliver that support.
- 2.11 Members will be aware that the UK is hosting the COP26 conference later this year in Glasgow. In the run-up to this, the Government has launched the "Race to Net Zero" which is similar in its aims to the Gloucestershire Climate Commitment. Sustainable Business Design is investigating options for joining Race to Net Zero for accreditation.
- 2.12 In terms of next steps, Officers will continue to work with Sustainable Business Design to continue to refine the way in which the pledge and the detail which sits behind it will operate, making changes as necessary as a result of the pilot. A communications plan will be devised for when the pledge is ready to be launched on a wider scale and progress will be reported back to Cabinet as part of the regular update reports on the Green Economic Growth Strategy.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. There is no cost to the Council endorsing the Gloucestershire Climate Commitment. Work to promote the pledge to businesses within the District will be done within existing budgets.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. There is a risk that businesses will not sign up to the pledge in sufficient numbers to make a significant difference. This will be mitigated by promoting it using the Council's various channels. The risk that it will be seen as too onerous by smaller businesses will be mitigated by the pilot referred to in the report. The biggest risk is to not do anything at all and fail to meet our climate change obligations.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 6.1. Failure to address issues of climate change will impact on people from all sections of society.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The Green Economic Growth Strategy seeks to deliver sustainable growth and includes a number of actions which will positively impact the battle against climate change, including growing the environmental technology sector within the District and encouraging businesses to build climate change considerations into their operations.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1 The District Council could choose not to have a Green Business Pledge but this would not assist us in meeting our climate change obligations. The Council could simply adopt an existing pledge or could develop one just for the Cotswold District. These options are not recommended for the reasons set out in the report.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1. None.

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