Clean Growth Agenda for Suffolk

Our changing climate is a looming, existential challenge to society and our economy, and has the potential to undermine all efforts to support economic development. However, within society's response to climate change are significant opportunities, particularly for Suffolk.

Potential sectors for focus are:

- The clean energy sector (solar, wind power etc.) at both large and small scale
- Domestic retrofit of sustainable technologies such as insulation and heat pumps
- Sustainable production of food and drink

Suffolk already has a comprehensive strategy in place, with all local authorities working together in the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership. This has the stretching ambition to make Suffolk a carbon-neutral by 2030. Measures to achieve this are detailed in Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan

This paper proposes a strategic plan for advancing clean growth within Suffolk, aligned with these broader decarbonization goals. The strategy hinges on two key pillars:

- Growing the Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services Sector (LCEGS)
- Improving Environmental Performance across Businesses, Communities, and Places

Through these pillars, we aim to drive EPIC (Environmentally Positive, Innovative, and Circular) growth, ensuring sustainability is embedded into all aspects of our local economy.

By adopting this comprehensive approach, Suffolk can lead the way in sustainable economic development, driving both local prosperity and environmental stewardship.

What is Clean Growth?

Clean Growth refers to fostering economic growth and development while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing waste, and optimizing the use of resources. It involves both expanding industries that offer low-carbon goods and services and improving the environmental performance of existing businesses and communities.

What Clean Growth Looks Like:

Economic Growth with Lower Emissions: Clean growth involves decoupling economic progress from carbon emissions, emphasizing the growth of low-carbon sectors and industries.

Innovation and Technology: Adoption of advanced technologies that improve energy efficiency, reduce waste, and enhance productivity in a sustainable manner.

Sustainable Resource Management: A focus on circular economy principles, where resources are reused, recycled, and regenerated, reducing reliance on finite materials.

Community and Business Engagement: Businesses and communities adopting sustainable practices that contribute to local and global environmental goals.

<u>1. Economic Growth Decoupled from Carbon Emissions</u>

Clean growth is characterized by an economy that continues to expand and generate prosperity while progressively reducing its carbon footprint. This is achieved through several strategies:

Low-Carbon Industries: The expansion of sectors such as renewable energy, electric vehicles (EVs), energy-efficient technologies, and sustainable agriculture. These industries not only reduce emissions but also create jobs, drive innovation, and attract investment.

Green Jobs: The growth of jobs related to the development, installation, and maintenance of low-carbon technologies. These jobs are vital for transitioning workers from carbon-intensive sectors into sustainable industries.

Resilient Economic Infrastructure: Investments in resilient infrastructure that can withstand the impacts of climate change, such as flood defences, renewable energy grids, and sustainable transport systems, ensuring long-term economic stability.

2. Adoption of Innovation and Technology

Innovation is at the heart of clean growth, enabling new ways to reduce environmental impact while enhancing productivity and competitiveness:

Advanced Energy Systems: The adoption of smart grids, battery storage, and decentralized energy systems allows for more efficient energy use, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and enhancing energy security.

Digital Transformation: Technologies like AI, IoT, and big data analytics are used to optimize resource use, improve energy efficiency, and reduce waste across various sectors, from manufacturing to agriculture.

Sustainable Transport: The shift towards active travel, improved public transport,electric vehicles and potentially hydrogen-powered vehicles, along with the development of supportive infrastructure such as charging stations and green public transport, contributes significantly to emission reductions.

3. Sustainable Resource Management and the Circular Economy

Clean growth emphasizes efficient use of resources, minimizing waste, and promoting the circular economy, where products and materials are reused, repaired, and recycled rather than discarded:

Resource Efficiency: Businesses adopt practices that reduce material use, energy consumption, and waste production. For example, manufacturers might employ design-for-recycling principles, while construction firms use materials that can be easily reused or recycled.

Circular Economy Initiatives: Industries shift towards circular models where waste is minimized, and by-products are repurposed. An example is using agricultural waste, like chicken pellets, to generate bioenergy, which can power local industries or feed back into the grid, reducing the need for fossil fuels.

Sustainable Supply Chains: Companies work to ensure that their entire supply chain, from raw materials to final product delivery, adheres to sustainable practices, reducing overall environmental impact.

4. Engaged and Sustainable Communities

Clean growth is not just about businesses and industries but also about fostering sustainable practices within communities:

Community Energy Projects: Communities invest in local renewable energy projects, such as solar panels on schools or community wind farms, reducing reliance on the national grid and fostering local ownership of energy resources.

Green Spaces and Biodiversity: Enhancing urban and rural green spaces to support biodiversity, improve air quality, and offer recreational areas, contributing to residents' health and well-being.

Behavioural Change and Education: Initiatives that promote sustainable living practices, such as reducing energy consumption, increasing recycling rates, and supporting local food production. Educational programs and campaigns are crucial to fostering a culture of sustainability within the community.

5. Integrated Environmental Policies

Clean growth involves comprehensive policies that integrate environmental considerations into all levels of decision-making:

Climate-Responsive Planning: Local authorities adopt planning policies that encourage the development of low-carbon infrastructure, energy-efficient buildings, and sustainable transport networks. This includes stringent building codes, incentives for green building certification, and the promotion of mixed-use developments that reduce the need for car travel.

Environmental Regulations and Standards: Implementation of rigorous environmental standards for businesses, ensuring that emissions, waste, and resource use are minimized. Compliance with these standards is supported through incentives, grants, and access to green finance.

Public-Private Partnerships: Collaboration between the public sector and private companies to drive innovation, fund large-scale clean energy projects, and develop green infrastructure. These partnerships can also involve shared energy systems, where businesses and communities collectively invest in renewable energy projects that benefit all stakeholders.

6. Holistic Approach to Decarbonisation

Clean growth requires a holistic approach that addresses both immediate and long-term environmental challenges:

Carbon Neutral Targets: Setting ambitious targets for achieving carbon neutrality within specific timelines, backed by actionable plans that include sector-specific emission reduction strategies.

Ecosystem Restoration: Initiatives aimed at restoring and protecting natural ecosystems, such as reforestation projects, wetland restoration, and biodiversity conservation, which help absorb carbon and enhance environmental resilience.

Climate Adaptation and Mitigation: Developing strategies that not only reduce emissions but also adapt to the changing climate, ensuring that businesses and communities can thrive despite environmental challenges.

Framework for the Clean Test:

To ensure our efforts align with clean growth principles, we propose the EPIC test for evaluating projects and initiatives:

- Environmentally Positive: Does the initiative reduce emissions, waste, or environmental degradation?
- Profitable: Does it contribute to economic growth and job creation?
- Innovative: Does it leverage new technologies or approaches to achieve its goals?
- Circular: Does it support a circular economy by optimizing resource use and minimizing waste?

Clean Growth Ambitions: Pillar One: Growing the Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services Sector

Our ambition is to position Suffolk as a leader in the LCEGS sector, attracting businesses and investments that contribute to a low-carbon economy. This will involve:

Supporting Local Enterprises: Providing incentives and resources to local businesses that contribute to or wish to enter the low-carbon sector.

Attracting Investment: Creating a conducive environment for investment in clean energy, sustainable manufacturing, and other LCEGS sectors.

Fostering Innovation: Collaborating with educational institutions and research bodies to drive innovation in clean technologies.

Encouraging cross-sector collaboration: Bringing together businesses, researchers, and public bodies to share knowledge and resources.

Implementing supportive policies: Crafting local policies that facilitate the growth of the LCEGS sector, such as incentives, grants, and streamlined planning processes.

Promoting local supply chains: Encouraging the use of local suppliers to reduce transportation emissions and support regional businesses.

Embedding Clean Growth: Pillar Two: Improving Environmental Performance Across Businesses, Communities, and Places

To embed clean growth in all aspects of local life and support Suffolk's broader industrial decarbonisation ambitions, the following steps will be crucial:

Raising Awareness: Launching campaigns to educate businesses and communities about the benefits and importance of clean growth.

Providing Tools and Resources: Offering practical tools, guidance, and support to help businesses and communities implement sustainable practices.

Monitoring and Accountability: Establishing clear metrics and reporting mechanisms to track progress toward environmental performance goals.

Targeting High-Impact Sectors: Focusing efforts on sectors with the highest carbon footprint, such as manufacturing, agriculture, and logistics.

Developing Energy Infrastructure: Facilitating the development of renewable energy infrastructure, such as wind, solar, and bioenergy which provides support local businesses.

Enhancing Supply Chain Sustainability: Encouraging businesses to source materials and services from low-carbon suppliers and adopt sustainable logistics practices.

Small Energy Businesses: Tailored support will be provided, focusing on cost-effective energy efficiency measures and access to renewable energy solutions.

Collaborative Planning: Working with large energy users to develop a program for local industrial decarbonization, leveraging shared infrastructure where possible. This will prioritize energy efficiency upgrades, support the adoption of renewable energy sources, and explore shared energy infrastructure opportunities, such as microgrids.

Incentives and Support: Offering financial incentives, technical assistance, and access to innovative technologies to accelerate decarbonization.

Circular Economy Initiatives: For example, promoting the use of waste products as bioenergy sources within local industries.

Proposed Approach to Delivering Clean Growth for Suffolk

Strategic Partnerships: Building partnerships with local businesses, academic institutions, and government bodies to drive clean growth.

Policy Integration: Ensuring that clean growth principles are integrated into all local planning and policy decisions.

Continuous Improvement: Regularly reviewing and refining our strategy based on feedback, technological advancements, and evolving environmental targets.

By implementing these strategies, Suffolk can realize a vision of clean growth that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. This approach ensures that the County is well-positioned to lead in the transition to a low-carbon economy, benefiting both current and future generations.