

New app to supports Essex's fight against climate change

Essex County Council
Friday 27 October 2023

Summary

The Carbon Cutting Essex app is focused on helping Essex reach its net zero targets by 2050. It encourages residents, businesses and schools to learn more about their carbon footprint and what actions they can take to reduce it. The app helps users learn more about their carbon footprint through a range of fun activities, including quizzes and videos.

Cllr Peter Schwier, Essex County Council's Climate Czar: "We are delighted to have launched the Carbon Cutting Essex app which we hope will play a significant role in helping us all to tackle climate change.

"We can all play our part in cutting greenhouse gas emissions so that we can protect the future of our planet for generations to come. I would encourage everyone across the county to download the app today."

The problem

Essex County Council has launched an ambitious and robust programme to tackle climate change. The council published its [Climate Action Plan in November 2021](#) in response to the Essex Climate Action Commission's report, "[Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral](#)" and [first annual report in November 2022](#). In July 2023 a revised [Climate Action Plan](#) as approved by cabinet.

Mirroring the rest of the UK, our county is also currently experiencing severe weather events and we can already feel their effects. Besides heatwaves, there will also be rising sea levels, flooding and loss of wildlife habitats, therefore it's essential that we take action against tackling climate change today.

It is a critical issue that we are currently facing, and it is therefore vital that we all play our part in mitigating the effects of climate change and helping to achieve our commitment of transitioning Essex to Net Zero by 2050. Using innovative technology to shape the future of our county plays a key role in this.

The new Carbon Cutting Essex app aims to help residents, businesses and schools to understand more about how they can reduce their carbon footprint and learn more about what daily actions they can take in order to reduce it.

The launch of the Carbon Cutting Essex App comes exactly a year after the Council launched its Climate Advice Packs for residents, schools and businesses to encourage the county to act on climate change. These advice packs provide tailored advice for residents, businesses and schools on how we can all reduce their carbon footprint.

The solution

Tackling climate change is one of the main priorities of Essex County Council, and in 2021 the environment was identified as one of four key areas of focus in [Everyone's Essex strategy](#).

The Essex Climate Action Commission was formed in early 2020 to examine how the council might be able to mitigate the effects of climate change and in July 2021, the Commission published its "[Net Zero, Making Essex Carbon Neutral](#)" report, which provides the county with a roadmap on how we can achieve our target of becoming net-zero by 2050.

The report includes 130 recommendations and measurable milestones across the six core key themes (including Land Use and Green Infrastructure, Waste, Transport, Energy, Built Environment and Community Engagement).

In November 2021, as per the recommendations in the report, Essex County Council launched a [£200million Essex Climate Action Plan](#), which sets out detailed strategies showing how Essex County Council will implement the recommendations set by the Commission.

One of the key recommendations of the Essex Climate Action Commission was to develop an online resource to empower Essex residents to take action and reduce their carbon footprint, and the app is the perfect tool for that. The [Carbon Cutting Essex App](#) can be downloaded free of charge and used by those living in the Essex area as long as they are over thirteen years old.

Essex County Council recognises that residents have a vital role to play in reducing the county's carbon footprint. Therefore, ensuring that individuals can access a wealth of online resources to learn more about their carbon footprint and how they can take action remains a key priority for the organisation as part of its strategy to address climate change.

Timeline

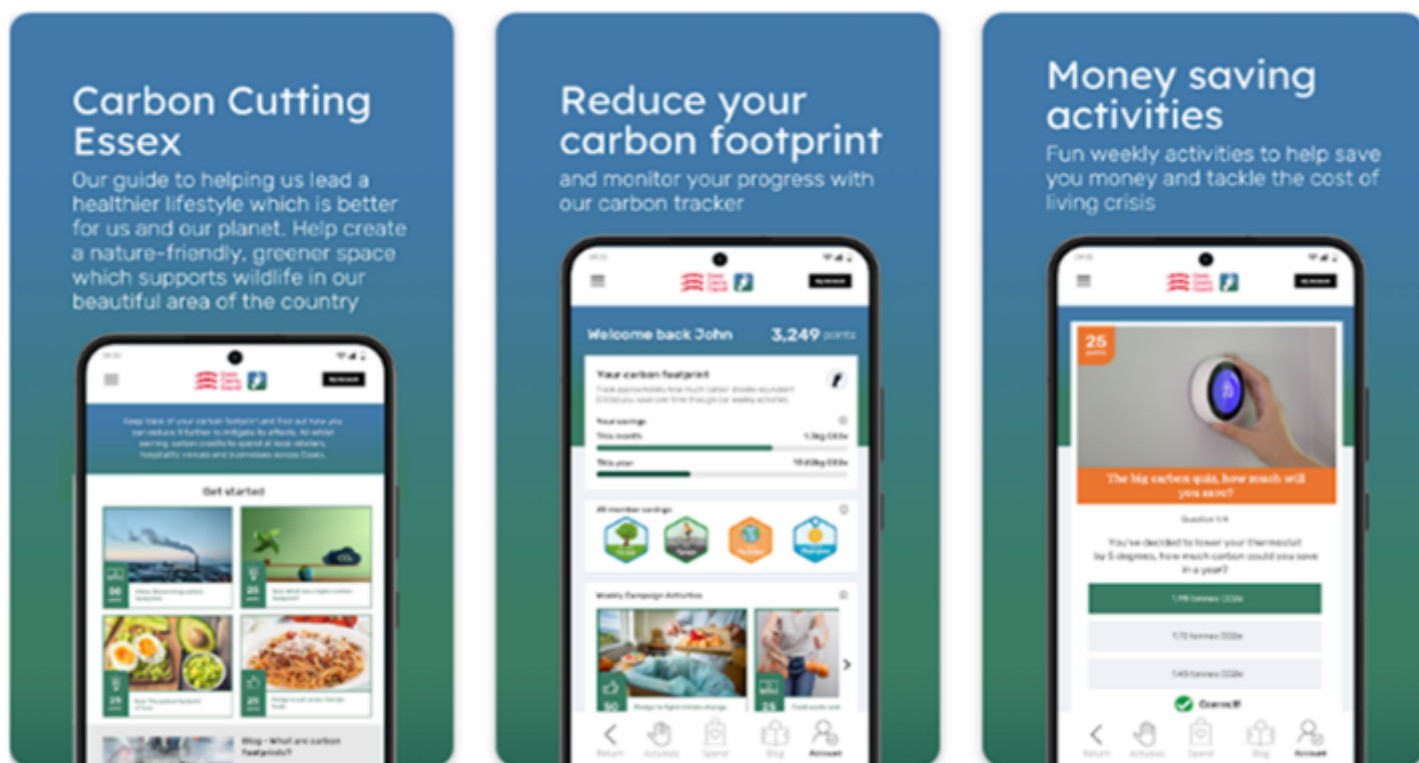
Work began with a requirement gathering phase in February 2022 consisting of a draft with specifications on the app, including a MoSCoW (Must Have, Should Have, Could Have, Won't Have this time) list, that was used to prioritise requirements for what the council was looking for in the app.

The Request for Quotation (RFQ) process followed soon after, where the team had a range of meetings with procurement and potential suppliers that would fit our requirements. As part of the process were things such as creating a list of specifications and questions, a contract compilation and an impact assessment to stakeholders and contract award.

Once this work was completed, the council went out to tender for the development of the app and Greenredeem won the tender. After the tender was secured, the app was in development and testing for 12 months which included consideration of accessibility, age ranges and how easy our main audience will find using the app and its tools.

The app was then officially launched on 22 May 2023, to coincide with the International Day for Biological Diversity.

Stakeholders



The Carbon Cutting Essex app was launched in collaboration with [Greenredeem](#).

Greenredeem were heavily involved in the whole process, from the design for the app and platform to handling statistics and the data the app collects.

Essex County Council recognises that stakeholders play an important role in sharing the news about the app to their target audiences and we continuously interact with them and provide monthly updates on the app.

The team also promotes the app through the council's partners and stakeholder channels to increase the reach of content among our target audience.

Some of our external stakeholders are but not limited to: Essex MPs, city, parish, town, city, district and borough councils, the main universities in Essex such as University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin University; community energy groups, the British Chambers of Commerce, water companies such as Anglian Water and Essex & Suffolk Water and more.

We also continuously work with a range of internal stakeholders that help us promote news of the app, such as internal councillors, Essex is Green, the Essex Forest Initiative, Explore Essex, Essex Libraries, Love Essex, the BLUEPRINT project and more.

Prior to the launch of the app, Essex County Council also held a meeting with Surrey County Council, as they have developed a similar app to reduce waste in Surrey and we wanted to get an insight into what worked best for them. Essex County Council is always keen to work with other local authorities in the fight against climate change.

Impact

The latest data regarding the app shows over 600 registrations to date, with an average of 5 daily registrations. App users have made a total of 1,901 pledges, have taken 1,908 quizzes and they have also watched 1,015 educational videos.

The most popular pledges were the 'reduce your carbon footprint this month', 'pledge to protect your toilet' and 'pledge to protect the kitchen sink'.

All these actions lead to massive carbon reductions and app users are able to see how much carbon they have saved by completing these activities.

Pledges include spreading the word around climate change in Essex, getting familiar with what a carbon footprint is, eating carbon friendly foods, reducing transport impact and so on.

Lessons learned

This project has been a continuous learning process, but we consider the app a great success that is most useful for our residents, helping them not only reduce their carbon footprints, but also very often, save money.

What we found most useful was holding a launch event for the app. This allowed both internal and external audiences to learn more about what the app is, how to use it to their advantage and most importantly ask questions and address possible issues.

The event was led by Essex County Council's Climate Czar, Cllr Peter Schwier and we had a range of speakers on the day, such as the Managing Director for Greenredeem. Some of the other speakers included Sam Kennedy - Director Environment and Climate Action Essex County Council and Prajwal – young Co-chair of the Essex Climate Action Commission.

What we have also found useful was developing various assets featuring climate related imagery as well as screenshots of the new app prior to its launch and also the development of a communications toolkit for our partners and parish, town, city, district and borough councils. The toolkit was packed with ideas such as template social media posts, newsletter articles and website copy, which made it easier for our stakeholders to share the news of the app to their target audiences.

What we plan to do is host more demo sessions and create a demo video, walking app users through all the steps on how to make the most out of the app, from downloading it, to how they can write pledges, watch videos and track their carbon footprint.

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The campaign supports Essex County Council's organisational £250 Climate Action Plan and its target of achieving Net Zero by 2050.

The Carbon Cutting Essex App is completely free of charge to download. The only associated costs are related to targeted paid advertising of the app. The communications channels to support with the launch of the new app focus mostly on but are not limited to no-cost and low-cost options.

We are also paying to attend a range of events across Essex, where we can interact with residents, businesses and schools and advertise the app.

Next steps

The app is constantly being developed and improved so that Essex residents can have access to the best experience possible.

We continue to engage with external and internal audiences and ask them to share, where possible and appropriate, news of our app. Soon the function of a community wall will be added in the app so that residents, businesses, community groups and champions will be able to interact with each other and gain more insight.

Businesses across Essex are also being engaged and they'll have the opportunity to offer up rewards or vouchers to their shops in exchange for points.

As a council, we understand that if we want to achieve our goal of transforming to net zero emissions by 2050, we can't achieve this alone. Everyone has an important role to play in protecting the future of our planet and county.

Each month will also focus on a variation of themes around climate action including sustainable travel, food, waste and energy, and we have created specific content for each theme, which will help us better focus on specific climate topics and generate tailored advice on how we can reduce our carbon footprint.

As a council, we are glad to see that so many residents are already downloading and using this great resource and we'd be happy to share our findings with other local authorities across the UK.

Links, contacts, and credits

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