

The landscape of leadership

Countryside authorities delivering Net Zero

Fiona Dowson
Karen Barrass

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Introduction:

The case for Rural Net Zero

This report highlights the need to consider the rural context on the journey to Net Zero. It shines a light on the work of UK100's Countryside Climate Network (CCN), in it's first year since creation, and on its diverse cross-party members that are striving to deliver Net Zero. Through the CCN they are working together to gain recognition of and support for their collective role in tackling climate change.

Rural Local Authorities are central to the achievement of the UK's Net Zero ambitions and this is demonstrated by the five in-depth case studies in this report, which outline activities underway in some of the CCN's most ambitious members (Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Herefordshire, South Lakeland, Wiltshire) and also by opinion polling that UK100 commissioned to understand regional variations in public perception about the issue and the appetite for action.

The decarbonisation challenges that rural areas face are significant, but have received less attention than those of our cities. Yet there are also huge opportunities to improve the lives of people in rural areas on our pathway to Net Zero. Delivering Net Zero can level-up rural areas and provide co-benefits in jobs, enterprise, health, leisure and recreation, nature recovery, biodiversity, food and climate resilience.

The role of rural communities is more significant than has been previously acknowledged. Our recent insight has revealed that for the UK to deliver on its Net Zero commitments, rural areas need to be supported to provide a greater contribution than urban areas, specifically in providing:

- Land for onshore renewable energy
- Land for carbon sequestration – providing capacity for carbon offset for the most difficult to decarbonise sectors such as aviation and heavy industry
- Emission reductions from agriculture.¹

Delivering these critical elements of UK Net Zero can bring good quality, green jobs to the entire country, and important economic opportunities to rural areas, harnessing existing skills and capacity for reskilling.

UK100 commissioned polling to better understand regional variations in public perception about the issue and the appetite for action and found that a majority of people in rural areas feel that green jobs would have a positive effect on their local areas, helping to re-invigorate communities and avoiding the need for people to leave in search of opportunities. They also see the need for more investment to support jobs and skills and greater investment in transport choices.²

1 - UK100 Rural Net Zero <https://www.uk100.org/publications/rural-net-zero>

2 - Ipsos MORI polling commissioned by UK100 (April 2021)



With public appetite for action and a better understanding of the role that rural areas can play, it is clear that we need a new vision for rural areas, which acknowledges their critical role in creating a thriving new Net Zero society and economy. One which includes:



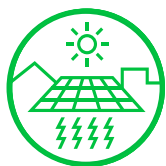
A thriving Net Zero economy: with low carbon and circular large industries, alongside efficient, innovative and varied smaller enterprises which are serving markets locally such as tourism, leisure, and local food, as well as national and international markets. Significant growth in jobs at all levels in the renewable energy and natural resources sectors: nature conservation, woodland, peatland, wetland management.



Better transport and connectivity: easy access to jobs and services locally or easily online through flexible, low carbon transport options such as demand-responsive public transport, electric vehicles (EVs), safe, dedicated active travel routes and high quality internet and phone services.



Efficient and Net Zero buildings: reduced energy demand and buildings optimised for local renewable energy generation with innovative solutions which are sensitive to the variety of building types in rural areas.



More renewable energy: large contribution to large- and small-scale renewable electricity provision: wind, solar, hydro, sustainable bioenergy and renewable heat options, supported by a robust, fit for purpose national energy grid and local microgrids.



Land use solutions: more land utilised for renewable energy, and for woodland, hedges, peatland and wetland restoration, sequestering carbon emissions, as well as boosting biodiversity, health and well-being.



Net Zero agriculture: increased agricultural productivity from diverse, efficient farms with much lower emissions which are adapting to provide for our changing national diet.³

Local Authorities are in a key position to influence action towards Net Zero in their areas. Although Council operations only account for 0.5 – 5% of emissions from their areas, the Committee on Climate Change estimated Local Authorities can influence around a third of overall emissions.⁴ And two in five people think that local authorities are best placed to tackle climate change at a local level.⁵ The majority of citizens in rural areas are ready to embrace the changes needed to

3 – Ibid. Footnote 1

4 – <https://www.uk100.org/publications/rural-attitudes-climate-change>

5 – Ibid. Footnote 2

create a Net Zero UK and can see that it can bring benefits to their communities. 87% of rural citizens across the political spectrum are concerned about the impacts of climate change.⁶ Rural communities are supportive of action to tackle climate change and 75% of rural citizens think cutting emissions is an opportunity to create new jobs in the UK.⁷

Unlocking the vast potential of rural areas will require collaboration and Local Authorities are at the heart of this action – uniquely placed to enable and catalyse the changes and ensure rural communities reap benefits from playing their part in this transition.

6 – <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Local-Authorities-and-the-Sixth-Carbon-Budget.pdf>

7 – Ibid. Footnote 6



UK100's Countryside Climate Network leading the way:

Local Authorities know the communities that they serve and understand their concerns. They are increasingly stepping up to take action on Net Zero, often working in collaboration with other local organisations, but are finding that policy debates and investment decisions overlook their significant potential contributions and unique challenges.



We set up the Countryside Climate Network with rural members of the UK100 Network⁸ to make sure voices from rural local authorities from across the political spectrum are represented in critical policy discussions and decisions about delivering UK Net Zero. They are critical to delivering Net Zero and must be part of the conversation if we are to create workable solutions.

Polly Billington, Chief Executive UK100, Vice Chair CCN

UK100's CCN launched in June 2020 and is made up of ambitious local leaders from rural councils. The Network's 27 members are working to achieve Net Zero and improve the resilience of their communities. Collectively they represent more than 45% of England's land area.

The CCN is actively supporting rural local authorities in three ways:

- 1. Information sharing and networking:** with peers to learn from each other, foster innovation and accelerate action that works for rural communities.
- 2. Shared policy asks:** coordinating and amplifying their voices in the policy discussions.
- 3. Research and insights:** to guide action and give authorities the tools they need to progress.



Rural areas have different strengths and face different challenges to urban areas. The CCN helps by sharing ideas across different rural areas which are making progress on different issues. And it is absolutely vital in providing a clear voice to Government to highlight our unique challenges and opportunities on the pathway to Net Zero.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader, Wiltshire Council, Chair CCN

Launched with 21 members in June 2020, the CCN has grown to 27 leaders who⁹ are actively working to put rural Local Authorities at the heart of the Net Zero effort. Initial activities have included research to gain insight and build evidence to support CCN's members' journey to Net Zero and make sure that the rural context is fully understood by Government policy makers. The Rural Net Zero¹⁰ report showcases the importance for action by highlighting the policy areas where rural Local Authorities can enact change, as well as the barriers that need to be overcome in order to do so. The CCN also commissioned a toolkit to provide our leaders more insight into the optimal ways to engage with their communities around Net Zero, as well as polling data to understand regional variations in public perception about the issue and the appetite for action. The in-depth case studies which are included in this report detail the activities underway in some of the CCN's most ambitious members and serve as a resource to help inform the activities of others.

Alongside this research, the CCN members have engaged in advocacy activities to highlight some key issues and call for change. These include:

- o Contributing to UK100's Resilient Recovery Task Force
- o Letters to Ministers in response to the Future of Transport: Rural Strategy call for evidence
- o Response to the Future of Transport: Rural Strategy call for evidence
- o Engagement with MPs in the run-up to the G7 Summit in Cornwall, June 2021 - highlighting the importance of the rural context.

⁸ - UK100 is the only network for UK locally elected leaders who have pledged to play their part in the global effort to avoid the worst impacts of climate change by switching to 100% clean energy by 2050. The most ambitious - our Net Zero Local Leadership Club - are doing everything within their power to get their communities to Net Zero as soon as possible, and by 2045 at the latest

⁹ - Ibid. Footnote 1

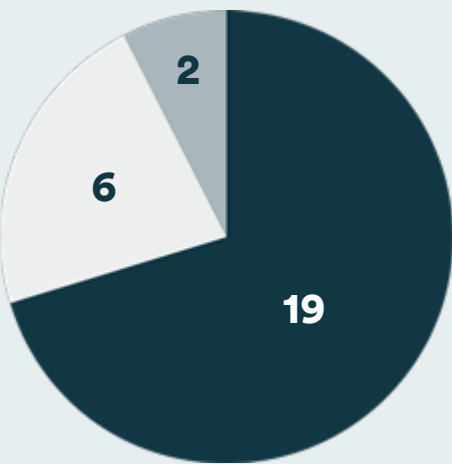
CCN members:

The members of the CCN are spread across England¹⁰ from Cornwall Council in the South to Durham County Council in the North. They represent a diverse array of communities ranging from areas with very high proportions of natural landscape and national parks such as South Lakeland and Staffordshire Moorlands District Councils, to many widely farmed regions such as Cambridgeshire and others incorporating significant urban settlements, such as Lancaster and Canterbury.

The image of beautiful, lush green shires which may come to mind when picturing a ‘countryside’ network, belies a huge diversity of wealth and deprivation across our members, and often within their boundaries. The proportion of their populations living in deprived areas ranges from zero in Cotswold District to more than 30% in Lancaster. Many have significant inequalities in income, health and quality of life due to varied access to work, local services and around 500,000 fuel poor households live in rural areas – many CCN members are trying to address the challenges of higher home heating costs and lower than average incomes.^{11 12}

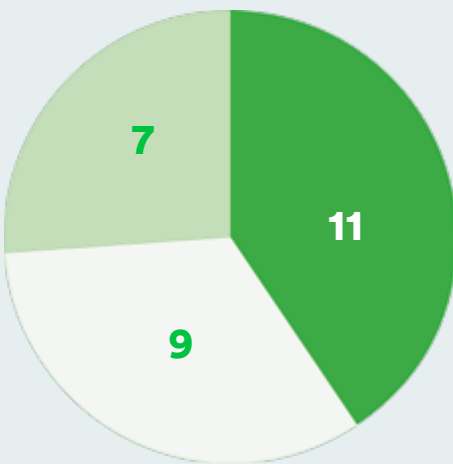
The members are administratively diverse too, a mixture of Districts, Counties and Unitary Authorities, some with additional powers via devolution, like Cornwall, but they are all united in aiming to use the powers available to them and collective influence the delivery of Net Zero. Politically the CCN is a truly cross-party network.

CCN Members - Political Control



- Conservative
- Liberal Democrat
- No Overall Control

CCN Members - Type of Authority



- District
- County
- Unitary

10 - Membership is welcomed from across all nations of the UK
11 - Ibid. Footnote 1
12 - Data on individual members is not available as a complete set. Government latest data shows that 9.9% of rural households are in fuel poverty, compared to 10.3% in urban areas. Defra, 2020, Fuel Poverty
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fuel-energy-and-fuel-poverty-in-rural-areas>

CCN Members

- Adur District Council

Cambridgeshire County Council

Canterbury City Council

Central Bedfordshire Council

Cheshire East Council

Cornwall Council

Cotswold District Council

County Durham Council

Derbyshire County Council

Essex County Council

Gloucestershire County Council

Hampshire County Council

Herefordshire Council
- Hertfordshire County Council

Lancaster City Council

Leicestershire County Council

North Somerset Council

North Yorkshire County Council

Shropshire Council

Somerset County Council

South Gloucestershire District Council

South Lakeland District Council

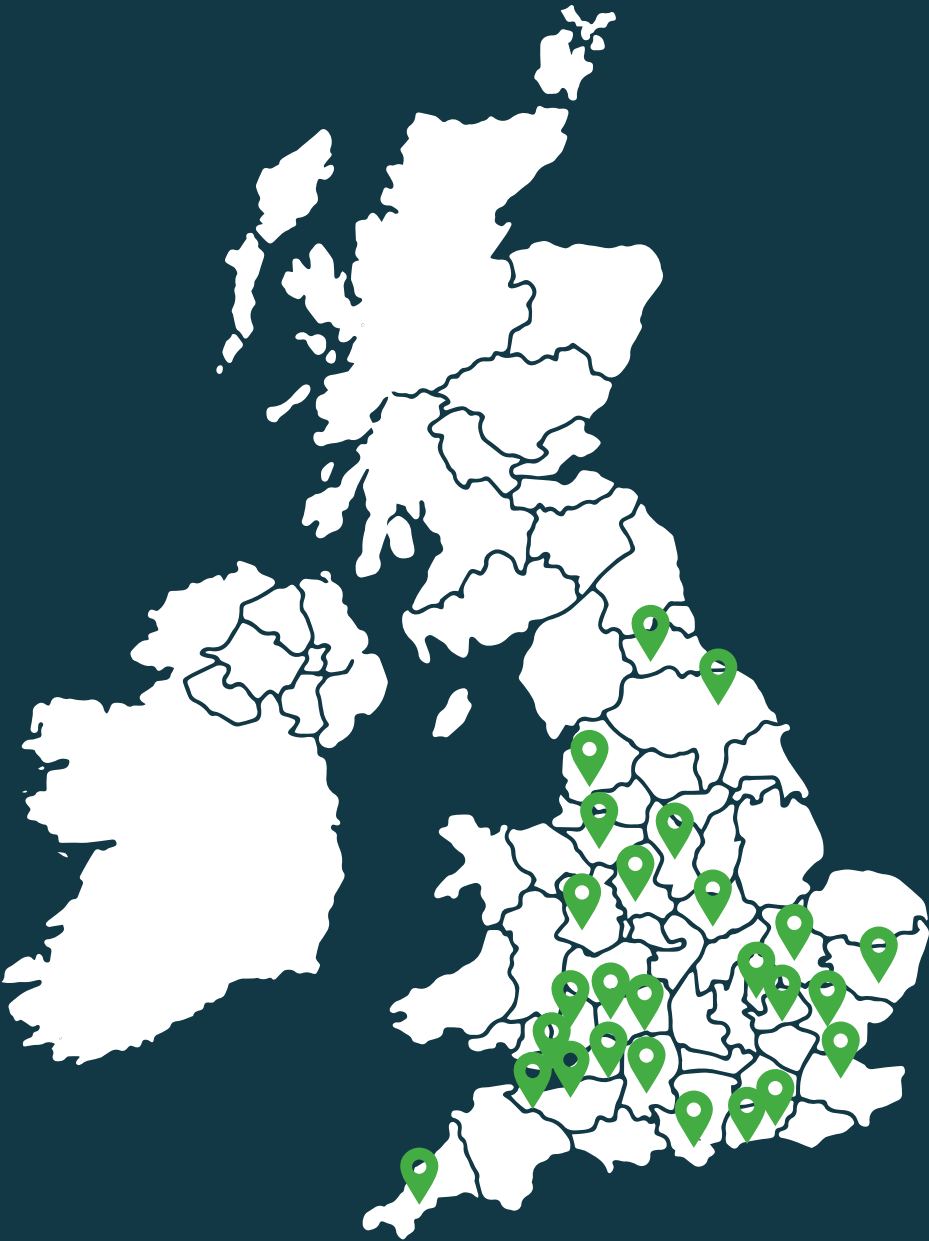
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

Suffolk County Council

Wiltshire Council

Worthing Borough Council

Wychavon District Council



How CCN members are taking action:

The in-depth case studies in this report detail the action taken by some of the most ambitious CCN members, and reflect the breadth, geography, administrative and political diversity of the Network. Here is a snapshot of the wider activity underway across the Network's membership to reach Net Zero.

Commit to Net Zero:

All CCN members have pledged to transition to 100% renewable energy across their operations, with 17 leaders already committing to UK100's Net Zero pledge to reach Net Zero Council emissions by 2030 and Net Zero community emissions by 2045 (or 2050 or sooner for county councils). These targets give a mandate to take the actions needed. It is also important to allocate clear responsibility for delivering the commitment by establishing a cabinet portfolio, and a relevant committee or working group to plan and monitor progress.

Plan for Net Zero:

It is important to systematically integrate action for Net Zero across all council departments, activities and relevant spheres of influence. Local Authorities have many opportunities: for example ensuring that their Local Development Plans align with their Net Zero goals and relevant supporting policies are in place.

Shropshire Council first agreed a Climate Strategy Framework which set out their climate risks; footprint; objectives and principles to guide development of a full strategy and action plan.

Build capacity to deliver Net Zero:

Some CCN members have maintained long standing teams and retained capacity for action and coordination, whilst others have appointed officers fairly recently to drive forward their climate ambitions. Ensuring that there is some capacity to coordinate and drive action and that officers across the Council and also elected members have the knowledge, skills and capacity to integrate action on Net Zero into their day-to-day roles is critical. General climate awareness training; tools to support effective decisions; performance management targets; technical training and understanding of policy and funding opportunities are all important.

Invest in Net Zero solutions:

Finding ways to invest in solutions is a key feature of many members' approach – from funding a coordinator's post to drive forward action, to leveraging large private sector funds for energy infrastructure, they are working hard to secure the funding they need to make progress towards Net Zero. Ensuring that procurement and commissioning decisions support Net Zero is also a big opportunity. Vehicle fleet, energy, buildings, and street lighting offer clear efficiency savings, but there are many more interventions that can be made, including opting for local, seasonal and sustainable food choices in catering services for offices and schools and designing services with Net Zero in mind, for example.

Many members are successfully leveraging private sector investments. **Durham County Council** has a strong low carbon team which has been successfully leveraging private sector investments and saving the Council money. **South Gloucestershire Council** has appointed an Energy Officer to enforce energy requirements in developers...and now developers know not to cut corners. **Lancaster City Council** has developed a CO₂ dashboard to inform decision making. **Hampshire County Council** has developed two innovative climate change decision tools, in partnership with the Carbon Trust. The tools have been designed to help assess all key decisions against its climate targets and to raise awareness of climate change across all departments of the County Council - with the aim of embedding climate change thinking into every aspect of the Council's activities.

Collaborate for Net Zero:

Working with delivery partners and communities is critical to both securing a commitment to Net Zero and delivering the action needed to make progress towards it. Community consultation can shape local plans to make sure they will deliver on multiple local needs. Collaborating with Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Health sector, other strategic partners, nearby local authorities and across District and County level are all critical.

In its Climate Emergency Strategy, **Cotswold District Council** committed to establishing a climate change panel (Councillors, residents, young citizens, climate scientists, solutions experts, businesses, others) to shape and promote a District-wide zero carbon strategy to maximise health/employment/wellbeing benefits across all sectors.

Harness powers for Net Zero:

Fully utilising the powers available to them is also an important factor driving success across our members. Local authorities do have many opportunities to play a role in Net Zero, not least their place-shaping powers via Local Planning Authorities which will influence infrastructure decisions, way beyond Net Zero targets for 2030, 2040, or 2050. It is imperative that these powers are harnessed to help deliver Net Zero. There is more that Councils could do with additional powers, such as power to raise funds for local priorities. The wide array of powers that are already available to Local Authorities and some of the gaps and challenges in powers to deliver Net Zero are set out in much more detail in UK100's Power Shift report.¹³

Net Zero opportunities:

CCN members are already working hard to build the skills and investment opportunities which can ensure their local areas benefit from a green recovery.

North Yorkshire County Council, with York via their joint Local Enterprise Partnership and North East Energy Hub are engaging local businesses on Net Zero and working with other councils in the Circular Yorkshire hub to support agri-food, manufacturing, construction, utilities and public sectors to cut carbon through circular economy activities. **Suffolk County Council**, in partnership with Groundwork East, the Environment Agency and the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, has established the Carbon Charter to support SMEs in Suffolk and neighbouring Norfolk in the transition to Net Zero. Following its 2019 Climate Emergency Declaration, Suffolk now asks all potential suppliers and their supply chain to adhere to its Climate Change Commercial Ask which aligns with its Net Zero targets and helping to move local economy actors away from business as usual.

With consistent, long-term policy commitments and powers to put in place the investments needed in reskilling and business transformation, rural Local Authorities can accelerate the economic transformation to deliver Net Zero and ensure their communities get a fair chance to benefit from the opportunities of the Green Industrial Revolution.

We invite rural Local Authorities to join UK100 and commit to the Net Zero pledge.¹⁴

We welcome new members to the CCN who have ambitious plans for reaching Net Zero and are keen to contribute to the collective voice of rural Local Authorities as critical partners on the path to Net Zero.

¹³ - <https://www.uk100.org/publications/rural-net-zero/>

¹⁴ - Ibid. Footnote 1





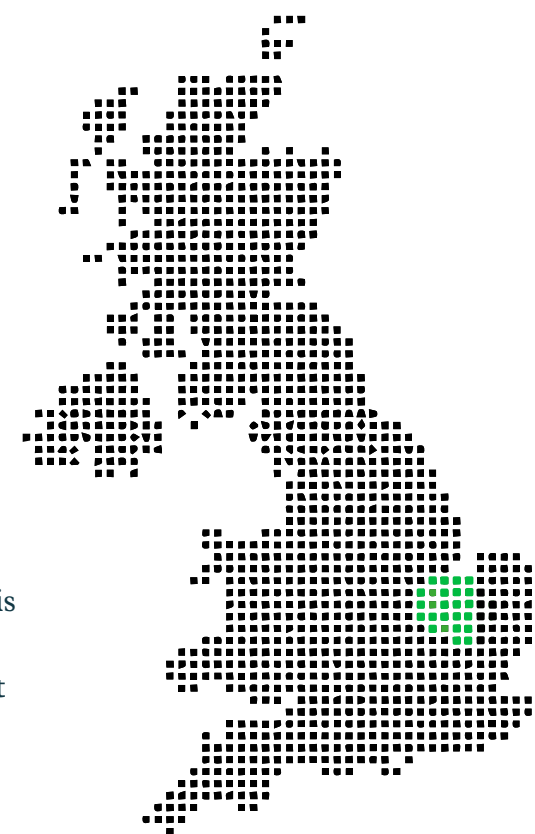
Cambridgeshire County Council

Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) was fortunate to have a well-established team working on a low carbon energy programme, having been involved in a substantial EU-funded programme on energy from 2012 to 2015. But in 2018, after elected members met with and listened to the concerns of Youth Climate Strikers who had been marching to their offices every Friday in late 2018, the Council realised it was time to set its sights higher and broader. In May 2019 CCC declared a Climate and Environmental Emergency¹ and has kickstarted a new, more ambitious approach to achieve Net Zero across its own operations by 2030 and the wider Council area by 2050.

CCC now has a renewed focus on upskilling officers, elected members and delivery partners to ensure that it is well-equipped to push forward further action. The Net Zero by 2050 target has been formally adopted – as a new 4th corporate objective and CCC has brought together a £100 million investment programme in support of its environmental goals. These activities include removing fossil fuel heating from Council buildings; leadership in green agri-tech on County farms, helping a whole village shift from oil to renewable heating and collaborating with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Planning Authority (CPCA) to plan for a green recovery.

At a glance:

- **Type of Local Authority:** County Council; also part of a Mayoral CPCA established in a Devolution deal in 2017
- **Region:** East of England
- **Population:** 855,800
- **Land area:** 3,389 km²
- **Classification:** 'a mix of 'Mainly Rural';² Largely Rural and 'Urban' Cambridge
- **Political control:** No Overall Control - joint administration of Liberal Democrats, Labour and Independents (Conservative until May 2021)
- **Key issues and characteristics:** Cambridgeshire is a diverse county including Cambridge City with its world-renowned university; nationally important industries alongside highly productive farmland and rich wetland ecosystems across the Fens. Wage levels are relatively high, but there are still areas of deprivation and inequality across the County, including a housing affordability challenge and poor connectivity in some towns and villages.³



1 - <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/climate-change-and-environment-strategy>

2 - Mainly Rural is Defined as 'rural, including hub towns, greater than or equal to 80%' by UK government definitions; 'Largely rural' (rural including hub towns 50-79%)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591465/RUCLAD2011_User_Guide_January_2017.pdf - NB Hub Towns in this sense are a subset of settlements within the 10,000 to 30,000 population band able to provide services to a rural population.

3 - Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER), 2018,
<https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/who-we-are/>

Recent Net Zero milestones:

Late 2018

Climate conversations with youth activists and elected members

Late 2019/early 2020

Council and wider area carbon footprint and potential pathways to Net Zero assessed (with the Cambridge University Science Policy Exchange (CUSPE))

April 2020

Environment and Sustainability Committee with responsibility for the climate change strategic objective and overseeing the Environment Fund set up

June 2020

First County Council signatory to UK100 and a founding member of CCN

May 2019

Climate Change and Environment Emergency Declaration

February 2020

A new corporate objective set to get to Net Zero by 2050 which then informed a review of the medium-term financial budget planning process

May 2020

Climate Change and Environment Strategy, Carbon Footprint Report for 2018/19 and Action Plan including 15 priority areas for action approved⁴

2021

Continued staff training and integration of climate change and environment into decision making processes.

What does the CCN mean to Cambridgeshire:



The Countryside Climate Network is so important because nobody is really looking at the rural oil challenge or the off-gas communities and they are in danger of being left behind, because they are more expensive. You will not get a commercial organisation to take on these types of projects unless there is government support because they can't make a commercial return.

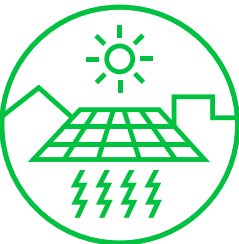
Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Leader, CCC

Activities and achievements:

CCC has developed a wide-ranging programme of work to systematically target greenhouse gas emission reductions across Council operations and in the wider area. Key highlights include:



Jobs and skills: CCC developed a Green Recovery Strategy with CPCA – which has the remit for skills and economic development – in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a key focus on skills for environmental jobs – engineers to retrofit energy efficiency measures and data specialists are just two of the skills gaps which were identified. CCC and CPCA are currently developing plans to incorporate climate change into their forward strategy.



Energy: The Council is taking oil and gas out of all its offices and retrofitting energy efficiency measures and renewables in 55 schools. It has also delivered a 12MW solar farm on farm estate land providing renewable electricity to power 3,000 homes, and plans for a further 30MW solar farm – enough to power a further 8,000 homes.



Transport and connectivity: CCC aims to make sure all communities, both urban and rural, can access a variety of low carbon transport – public transport, walking, cycling and providing charging infrastructure for alternatives such as autonomous vehicles, EVs and electric bikes, to reduce carbon emissions. It is planning to use Council assets to contribute to a credible EV charging infrastructure accessible to all, and electrify its own vehicle fleet. Trials of autonomous vehicles and electric buses are already underway.



Homes and buildings: The Council aims to help 10,000 existing homes in Cambridgeshire dependent on oil to shift to renewable energy.



Council operations and services: In addition to the work to decarbonise their buildings, the Council waste management private finance initiative arrangement includes targets and incentives for keeping food and garden waste out of landfill, as well as recycling. Further improving how to deal with waste is a key priority in the Climate Action Plan.

4 - <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/climate-change-and-environment-strategy>



Land use, agriculture and ecosystems: The Council has its own farms and is leading with some clean tech and agri-tech changes to demonstrate new technologies and business models that can support carbon emission reductions. Cambridgeshire has very large areas of peatland – it is working in collaboration with scientists to ensure good quality data on the carbon stored and potential implications for the Council’s Net Zero goal is available and CCC is also working with partners on innovative trials to protect wetland peat ecosystems.

Key insight:



To deliver on the climate change agenda everybody needs to be upskilled.

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Leader, CCC



- **Commit to Net Zero:** Alongside the Net Zero goal for Council operations by 2030 and for the wider area by 2050, CCC has specific targets for priority action areas. For example, a commitment to take all 69 of the buildings it currently owns or occupies off fossil fuel heating by 2023 and to replace all its fleet cars and vans with EVs by 2025.⁵ Only 4% of emissions are direct (scopes 1 and 2) so CCC has set a science based target to cut scope 3 emissions by 50.4% by 2030 and will set a similar target with partners, for the wider Council area by 2023.
- **Plan for Net Zero:** In 2021 CCC has been developing a Committee decision climate evaluation template and trialling shadow price for carbon on capital projects. It has a formal target for 100% of strategies to include climate policies.
- **Build capacity for Net Zero:** To upskill its own workforce CCC has developed regular training for officers, elected members and delivery partners. It is also providing carbon literacy training to senior managers – so they know how to articulate climate science and the case for action confidently, for example to the press.
- **Invest in Net Zero solutions:** CCC has created a £16 million Environment Fund to pump-prime changes within its Climate Action Plan. It is investing £11 million into 55 schools to improve energy efficiency and generate renewable energy to reduce both carbon emissions and energy bills. Altogether it has a £100 million investment programme in support of its climate goals. It already assesses whole lifetime savings assessments for projects, and are now working to add a shadow price for carbon, including embodied carbon, into its financial planning.
- **Collaborate for Net Zero:** The Council has collaborated with Cambridge University and CUSPE in developing the baseline and action plan and also works with many other public, private and community sector organisations to plan and deliver its climate and environmental action plan goals.



To get to Net Zero by 2050 is going to need collaboration across all powers and levels of governance – we need to align across Districts, County and CPCA to use our different sets of powers.

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Leader, CCC

- **Harness powers for Net Zero:** The Government’s City Deal programme created the Greater Cambridgeshire City Partnership and granted additional powers to enable improved public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure across Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. CCC itself realised that it had the power to generate, distribute and sell heat when investigating how it could support Swaffham Prior District Heating Network (see In Focus box).

5 - <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/news/plans-to-make-carbon-reduction-one-of-councils-top-strategic-objectives>



I value the work that is being done on Power Shift by UK100⁶ because until we get a strategic framework which coordinates across departments - for example to make sure schools are looking at this and not just going for gas boilers, and the Department for Transport are looking at cumulative impact and embodied carbon on road transport - we don't have a working system.

Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Leader, CCC

Future challenges and barriers:

- **Complexity of funding packages:** CCC has substantial experience in developing energy infrastructure projects, but even so, putting the funding package together was a challenging and stressful process. This needs to get easier.
- **Price and value disconnect:** the low cost of oil and gas and lack of monetary value placed on natural capital can make it difficult for project business cases to stack up – for example on housing retrofit projects the price of gas and oil can be too cheap to make a project work. The payment for public goods approach set out in the Agriculture Bill could be transformative for rural areas if done well.
- **Culture shift:** this challenge is much wider than the Council, but it is mindful of the need for culture shift in society when working amongst communities. It must be acknowledged that we are heading for a resource constrained world and will have to manage within these constraints. Local authorities can play a role in this culture shift, but there needs to be awareness that our residents are also influenced by many other factors encouraging them to keep their current habits.

6 - UK100 Power Shift report <https://www.uk100.org/publications/power-shift>

In Focus: Swaffham Prior

In summer 2021 contractors will start digging up the streets in Swaffham Prior, a village in Cambridgeshire, to kick off construction of a innovative district heating scheme which will represent a milestone in CCC's ambition to achieve Net Zero across its community area by 2050. Residents in the village of Swaffham Prior will soon be able to benefit from heating via a hybrid air and ground source heat pump heating system powered by local solar generation and including significant solar power stores. The new heat network has been designed to move all 300 homes in Swaffham Prior off of oil-powered heating, including the listed buildings, and will not require residents to change their existing radiators, minimising disruption. The heating tariff is capped to oil prices to ensure affordability.

The project started life when residents began exploring ways to cut the carbon footprint of heating their homes and surveyed local residents to gauge support for decarbonising their heating. They approached the Council for support. CCC secured Heat Network Delivery Unit support for a technical-economic feasibility study. A collaboration of the community, Council, a forward-looking supply chain partner, and helpful project managers from BEIS all pulled together to bring the project to life – with funding and contracts now in place, construction work will start in summer 2021.⁷



People often ask 'Why don't you just encourage houses to put in an air source heat pump each? We've looked at other options and it is clear this will be cheaper in the long run for residents and easier to install in their homes so we have a chance to move the whole village off oil more quickly.'

Sheryl French, Programme Director, Mobilising Action on Climate Change and Local Energy Investment, CCC

7 - <https://heatingswaffhamprior.co.uk>





Cornwall Council

Building a strategic consensus to take bold action on climate change has been a long-term project at Cornwall Council. The Council has been responding to both the climate concerns of many local residents, as well as the big opportunity to align action on climate with making progress on other local issues such as jobs, housing, fuel poverty and nature recovery.

After declaring a Climate Emergency in January 2019, on 24th July the same year, Cornwall's Councillors unanimously approved the Climate Change Action Plan committing the Council to hugely ambitious targets of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 across both their own operations and the wider Council area. They are now busy maximising the opportunities of their devolved powers, such as transport coordination, and building on their track record of delivering groundbreaking projects and harnessing the power of their strategic partnerships to step up to this ambitious goal.



We are ready to do more and continue working with local partners and National Government to unlock our potential to accelerate action on climate change...

Councillor Martyn Alvey, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cornwall Council

At a glance:

- **Type of Local Authority:** Unitary with devolved powers since 2015
- **Region:** South-West England
- **Population:** 569,578
- **Land area:** 3,563 km²
- **Classification:** 'Mainly Rural'¹ or 'Rural80'
- **Political control:** Conservative (No Overall Control - Liberal Democrat and Independent coalition until May 2021)
- **Key issues and characteristics:** Cornwall has a distinct cultural identity; unique natural resources including over 1,000 km of coastline, the longest coastline of any county in England. Deprivation and inequality are significant challenges, resulting from limited employment opportunities, and increasing costs of housing due to high demand for second homes.



1 - Defined as 'rural, including hub towns, greater than or equal to 80%' by UK government definitions: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591465/RUCLAD2011_User_Guide_January_2017.pdf - NB Hub Towns in this sense are a subset of settlements within the 10,000 to 30,000 population band able to provide services to a rural population. Otherwise known as 'Rural80' on RUCLAD2001.

Recent Net Zero milestones:

Cornwall has a long track record of action on climate change and has stepped up their ambition in recent years:

2015

Cornwall the first and only non-metropolitan Council to secure a Devolution deal, in part driven by desire to unlock opportunities to pursue local low carbon priorities

January 2019

Cornwall Council Declaration of Climate Emergency²

September 2019

First Cabinet reports assessed with Climate Decision Tool

April 2021

Climate Emergency Development Plan Document approved by Council (pending Central Government approval) to replace Local Plan, introducing new policies needed to support the Climate Neutral goal

2017

Establishment of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Leadership Board, initiating the development of Cornwall Together We Can 2050 Plan, adopted in 2020 incorporating climate as a key goal

July 2019

Climate Change Action Plan unanimously approved: committing Cornwall to achieve Net Zero by 2030 for Council own operations and for the Council area as a whole

June 2020

Becomes UK100's 100th member and a founding member of CCN.

What does the CCN mean to Cornwall:



Really important that we have a chance to connect with other local authorities to share ideas that are relevant for rural areas. It is also helping us to amplify our voices on a national stage to showcase the importance of rural local authorities, like Cornwall, in delivering UK Net Zero...

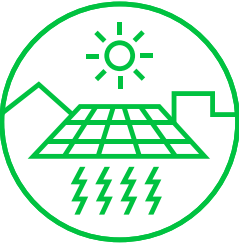
Councillor Martyn Alvey, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cornwall Council

2 - The motion called on the Council to provide resource to prepare a report within six months to establish how Cornwall can sufficiently reduce carbon emissions through energy efficiency, low carbon fuels and investment in renewable energy within a timescale which is consistent with an ambition to restrain global warming to 1.5°C. An amendment to the motion went further, declaring a Climate Emergency and calling on Westminster to provide the powers and resources necessary to achieve the target for Cornwall to strive towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

Activities and achievements:



Jobs and skills: The principle of a ‘just transition’ to a low carbon economy is baked into the Council’s climate change plan. The draft Industrial Strategy of the Local Economic Partnership has a focus on inclusive, clean growth and incorporates the Net Zero 2030 Vision, alongside an ambition to transition to a more circular economy. The Council is also exploring opportunities for increasing jobs in nature and environmental services with major environmental organisations that manage natural resources in the area. The Council has leveraged investments for renewable energy development, creating new jobs aligned to a low carbon future.



Energy: Since 2009 Cornwall has increased the amount of renewable electricity that can be generated from 90 to over 800MW, enough for around 40% of Cornwall’s electricity demand. The Council now has a 10MW renewable energy portfolio having directly invested in the installation of a 2.3MW smart grid wind turbine, which is generating enough for 1,400 homes and piloting responsive technology which will enable better management of energy supply and reduce Cornwall’s greenhouse gas emissions by more than 3,300 tonnes a year over the next two decades.³ It has instigated the first deep geothermal energy developments in the UK and also, on the back of lithium resources discovered during the exploration, supported the creation of Cornish Lithium to develop this resource – a key raw material for the renewable energy transition.



Transport and connectivity: Cornish devolution has enabled the establishment of Transport for Cornwall which has full bus franchising powers and leveraging of £17m of private sector investment into the network for improvements. Cornwall Council has used this opportunity to drive increased bus patronage from 9.7m to 11.1m journeys from 2015 to 2018⁴ against a backdrop of national decline in the use of bus services. A key improvement was delivery of a fully integrated public transport system with smart ticketing, the first example in a rural area of England.⁵ It also plans to work with partners increase EV charging points to over 300 by 2022.

3 - <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/xavjwbug/cornwalls-first-smart-grid-connected-wind-turbine-flier.pdf>
4 - Cornwall Devolution Deal Impact Assessment 2019 www.cornwall.gov.uk/devolution
5 - IPPR, 2021, Why Devolution Matters: The Case of Cornwall



Homes and buildings: Cornwall has made a commitment not to install fossil fuels in new Council-commissioned buildings and houses and created a sustainable design guide for all new Council homes. It regularly secures funding from multiple sources for energy efficiency retrofits for homes – having developed a £12.9m housing refit programme for Council houses,⁶ exploring retrofit solutions for solid wall and off-gas properties.



Council operations and services: In addition to its fossil fuel free new Council homes commitment, it has also implemented a wide range of changes across their operations including LED street lighting; 100% renewable energy tariff; a £30m renewable energy and low carbon technology fund; improving waste and recycling collections, trialling biofuels in their fleet vehicles and also switching to EVs.



Land use, agriculture and ecosystems: Cornwall Council is promoting sustainable farming, including through its own county farms where it is installing biomethane capture on six slurry lagoons and converting the gas as fuel for its farms and service fleet. The Council has initiated the ‘Forest for Cornwall’⁷ – project which aims to plant 8,000 hectares (about 2% of Cornwall’s land mass) of trees and hedges to absorb carbon and provide new outdoor spaces. So far 136,787 trees have been planted in partnership with community organisations with additional funding secured from The Woodland Trust and Defra’s Nature for Climate Fund.

Key insight:



Our biggest achievement is a strategic consensus built over many years.

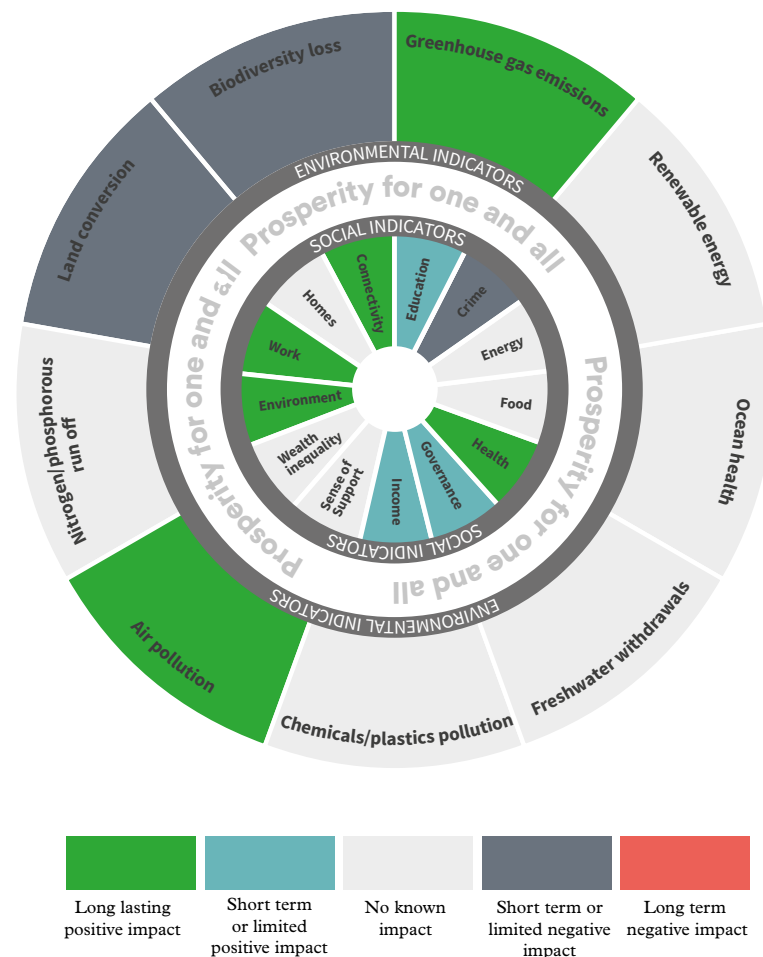
Councillor Martyn Alvey, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cornwall Council

6 - <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/psdojyji/whole-house-retrofit-project-flier.pdf>
7 - <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment/countryside/forest-for-cornwall-programme/>

- **Commit to Net Zero:** Cornwall set 2030 goals in 2019 which are driving significant action across the Council and with strategic partners. In order to achieve this commitment and strategic consensus it ensured that climate commitments and plans all demonstrate the ability to deliver on multiple local priorities including economic wellbeing and health.
- **Plan for Net Zero:** Climate change is systematically embedded in all decisions, using the Climate Decision Tool as a guide (see In Focus box). Specific service area commitments have also been developed to show how services can support of the Climate Emergency Declaration. It acknowledges its role as a local systems leader and the influence it can have on delivery at a local, regional and national level. The Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Leadership Board,⁸ who declared their own Climate Emergency, was created to allow a coordinated and strategic approach to planning and decision making across the region, which is critical for addressing climate change.
- **Build capacity for Net Zero:** Devolution has been critical in enabling the Council to act on its climate change ambitions. For example: The Council gained Independent Body status which allowed European funding programmes to enable the development of deep geothermal energy opportunities. This status meant it could call upon technical assistance from Central Government and ultimately secure a total of £18 million investment, including European and private investment via crowdfunding for the United Downs Deep Geothermal Project which is expected to generate enough energy for 3,000 homes and also resulted in discovery of a supply of sustainable lithium – an important mineral for energy storage batteries.^{10 11}
- **Invest in Net Zero solutions:** Cornwall Council implements ‘whole-life-costing’ analysis – considering both purchase and running costs through a product or service lifetime - on spending decisions which helps unlock low carbon investments which result in savings over a longer period. LED street lighting has cut energy bill by around £1 million a year⁹ and Cornwall has developed a solar framework to support local installers as they look to accelerate the decarbonisation of the energy sector. It is also leveraging private sector investment in areas such as housing retrofit and public transport facilitated by the commitments in its Devolution deal.
- **Collaborate for Net Zero:** Cornwall has extensive collaboration with local partners in a well-established strategic infrastructure including the Leadership Board, and also a Local Nature Partnership. It is practising ‘Double Devolution’ – where the Council devolve decisions and assets to local communities, for example planning, highway network, and libraries. In 2019 as part of the development of the Climate Change Action Plan, the Council spoke to thousands of residents across Cornwall¹² and established the Carbon Neutral Cornwall Hive.¹³

8 - Comprising MPs, Cornwall Council, Council of the Isles of Scilly, Police and Crime Commissioner, Cornwall Association of local Councils, Kernow Clinical Commissioning group, Cornwall Chamber of Commerce, Cornwall Health and Wellbeing Board, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Local Nature Partnership
9- <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment/climate-emergency/what-is-cornwall-doing/>
10 - Cornwall Deal Impact Assessment, 2019
11- IPPR, 2021, Why Devolution Matters: The Case of Cornwall
<https://www.ippr.org/files/2021-03/why-devolution-matters-the-case-of-cornwall-final.pdf>
12- <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment/climate-emergency/our-action-plan/>
13 - <https://letstalk.cornwall.gov.uk/carbon-neutral-cornwall>

In Focus: Cornwall's Decision Making Tool



Cornwall Council wanted to drive a socially just transition to Net Zero and also deliver on a range of other ecological and social goals, so it developed a decision making tool to help them make decisions which are aligned to these goals. The tool is based on the Doughnut Economics theory, and was adopted in 2019 as part of the Climate Action Plan. It is now used in all Cabinet decisions. To successfully implement this approach the Council invested in training officers all across the Council and developed a digital tool to help officers more easily, and consistently allocate significance and weightings to the various issues which the tool evaluates. Beyond the Council, the tool has been adopted as a metric to measure success of the Leadership Board and used to assess application for £500k of Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

One an example of a decision that was influenced by the decision tool was to allow Space Port development to go ahead. The carbon impact of Space Port was clearly going to be significant. The tool laid this bare and highlighted a need to redefine the project. The Council successfully made the case for the developers to fund carbon offsets to address the climate impact of project – but even so it was a difficult to balance the economic development and climate impacts.

Future challenges and barriers:

- Accelerating housing retrofit is key challenge:
 - There is a need for additional and longer-term funding and local control to provide the certainty required to delivery housing retrofit schemes and the scale required and enable the development of the necessary skills amongst local suppliers.
 - National Building Regulations and Planning Policy Framework need to be improved to push more actively towards energy efficiency and lower carbon standards for new housing stock and reduce the need for retrofit in the future.
- Cornwall has outgrown the existing Devolution settlement and can see significant opportunities for addressing the climate, ecological and economic challenges with further powers:
 - Greater control over environmental powers and resources could allow them to support their Local Nature Recovery Strategy and respond to the ecological and climate crisis.¹⁴
 - Devolved control of a UK Shared Prosperity Fund and adult education and skills budget to allow alignment with local priorities, including Climate and Ecological Emergency.
 - Need for a locally-controlled replacement for European Local Energy Assistance Funding to unlock more renewable energy investment.
- Constraints on electricity grid capacity are also a challenge - additional capacity would enable more renewable energy development and export to the UK grid to support the Government's Net Zero ambitions.
- Cornwall hopes to make more progress on nature based solution by working with the land-based sector in future. It sees an upcoming opportunity for the environmental and land resource-based sector to be a growth area for jobs, if it can build the right skills to capitalise on this.



We believe that delivering Net Zero will help level up rural areas and provide co-benefits in jobs, opportunities for enterprise, health, nature recovery and climate resilience and whilst we face different challenges to those in urban areas, we have demonstrated that rural areas like Cornwall hold many of the solutions to reduce carbon emissions, kickstart a green economic recovery and deliver the governments Net Zero strategy.

Councillor Martyn Alvey, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Cornwall Council

14 - Ibid. Footnote 13



Herefordshire Council

Herefordshire Council's ambitious 'Pathway to Net Zero' plan is its third 5-year carbon management plan and it is certainly gaining momentum. This latest 2025/6 plan reflects the step up in ambition that will be needed to deliver it's Net Zero by 2030 goal across the Council and the wider area.

The Climate Emergency motion which was proposed by the It's Our County group of Councillors and seconded by the Green Party received an unprecedented unanimous vote of support across all parties in March 2019. With more than 400 of the public attending, including supporters from the Fridays for the Future youth movement and Extinction Rebellion, it was clearly time to step up the level of ambition. The new Green and Independent coalition which was elected shortly after the Climate Emergency Declaration, broadened the declaration to include reference to the Ecological emergency.

The Council's previous 40% reduction target was exceeded two years early and the current reduction trend sets a solid foundation upon which to aim for carbon neutrality in the Council. Working with a wide range of community organisations through the Herefordshire Green Network (HGN), as well as with local businesses and other stakeholders through a soon-to-be-launched Climate and Nature Partnership, will be a critical component of widening the scope of the Council's activity to achieve it's wider area Net Zero target.



I'm proud that we are creating a shift in what is thought possible. It is no longer crazy to talk about Net Zero housing when you're starting to build houses — it's just simple good sense. We are now beginning to build affordable and Net Zero housing and have really changed the direction of transport policy... but we need to keep going until we are able to operationalise all the low carbon travel options we need - the cycle paths, the bus routes, and make sure all children can get to school by public transport or active travel.

Cllr Ellie Chowns, Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy, Herefordshire Council

At a glance:

- **Type of Local Authority:** Unitary Council
- **Region:** West Midlands, England
- **Population:** 192,801
- **Land area:** 2,180 km²
- **Classification:** Largely Rural (rural including hub towns 50-79%)¹
- **Political control:** No Overall Control - 'Independents for Herefordshire' and Green Coalition since 2019
- **Key issues and characteristics:** Herefordshire is known for its apple orchards, rolling fields and rural charm. It faces a low carbon transport challenge given it has more miles of road per head of population than almost anywhere else in the country. It also has plenty of hard-to-heat characterful homes which makes improving energy efficiency challenging.



¹ - 2011 Rural Urban Look up for Local Authorities <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes> - NB Hub Towns in this sense are a subset of settlements within the 10,000 to 30,000 population band able to provide services to a rural population

Recent Net Zero milestones:

March 2019	
Unanimous vote in support of Climate Emergency Declaration	
2020	May 2019
	Independent and Green Coalition elected
	2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Internal Task and Finish Group to plan how to achieve Net Zero by 2030 Council targetSteering Group with key local stakeholders to plan how to achieve Net Zero by 2030 wider area targetGovernance for all cabinet decisions and capital projects changed to take account of climate and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ongoing collaboration with wider community and more stakeholders to create wider partnership for carbon reduction action across the County.

For further information on Herefordshire’s long track record on climate action see Figure 1 below: Herefordshire Roadmap.

What does the CCN mean to Herefordshire:



We need to club together to amplify our voices – we, and other rural councils, face particular challenges on housing and transport – collaborative working with others who have similar challenges is very helpful. Being a member of the CCN also allows us to demonstrate our leadership on climate.

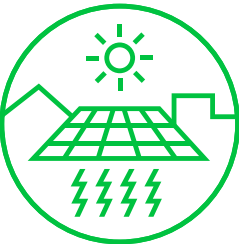
Cllr Ellie Chowns, Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy, Herefordshire Council

Activities and achievements:

Herefordshire Council has a very established programme of carbon reduction activities which it has developed with a range of partners over the period of their previous two carbon management plans. It is now instigating and exploring additional activities to contribute to its 2030 Net Zero targets.



Jobs and skills: At Herefordshire Council ‘environment and economy’ have been brought together in one cabinet portfolio which ensures the two agendas complement each other. A key current focus is on working with partners, such as building providers, to help develop more low carbon housing skills as part of the post-COVID economic recovery.



Energy: Herefordshire Council purchases green energy and helps enable schools and care facilities to do the same. It worked with local leisure provider Halo to install solar PV on Herefordshire and Leominster leisure centres in 2015 and also, via the Marches Renewable Energy programme, offers SMEs and other organisations a 50% grant toward new installations of renewable technologies on their premises to generate energy for their business.³



Transport and connectivity: Marches Local Enterprise Partnership have created a sustainable travel plan for the Enterprise Zone area – which sees the most travel in the county – to encourage decarbonisation of business-related travel. Herefordshire Council set up the popular Beryl Bike scheme in Hereford – it is an on-street cycle hire scheme of around 220 bikes, including 50 electric ones. This is just one option on the table for people who join the ‘Park and Choose’ programme – a buddy system to help people find ways to park up on the edge of town and choose an alternative way to travel the last mile of their commute, cutting congestion and cleaning up the city centre air. The Council also supports schools, businesses, provides children’s bikeability training, led walks and rides, and EV charging to decarbonise Herefordshire’s transport.



Homes and buildings: The Council has maintained the Keep Herefordshire Warm Service⁴ to provide free impartial advice to residents on energy efficiency and provide a one-stop-shop for navigating the different grants which have been available at different times, such as the recent Green Homes Grant.

2 - ‘The Marches’ refers to the local authority areas of Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin.
3 - <https://shropshire.gov.uk/funding-opportunities/marches-renewable-energy-project/>
4 - <https://keepherefordshirewarm.co.uk/>



Council operations and services: Following a Green Fleet Review, the Council has changed vehicles to electric (or hybrid for services requiring longer journeys) and invested in EV charge points. It was the first County in the country to transition to 100% LED street lights, which is saving almost 1,000 tonnes of carbon per year, saving money and improving the visual quality of lighting provided.



Land use, agriculture and ecosystems: Herefordshire is developing its work on nature and biodiversity including tree planting in the city centre and offering 600 trees to residents to boost the city's greenery.

Key insight:



There has been really strong clear leadership from the Executive on climate, it is in the Corporate Plan, it's all through our decision making and business case development processes for new projects and action is happening across our estate – we were already looking at how to address carbon but the new target has really accelerated that.

Ben Boswell, Head of Environment, Climate Emergency & Waste, Herefordshire Council



- **Commit to Net Zero:** Herefordshire's target to achieve Net Zero across the Council and the wider community area by 2030 is driving it to accelerate and increase the ambition of its carbon reduction activities.
- **Plan for Net Zero:** 'Net Zero Carbon' has been added as an objective in the Herefordshire Council Corporate Plan and since last year, all cabinet decisions need to consider climate and ecology impact and all capital project business cases must also assess their impacts. The Council is also rolling out a requirement for every infrastructure proposal to have a climate and ecology assessment; and has also changed business case format for all capital projects to ensure that commitment was reflected.
- **Build capacity for Net Zero:** Everyone bringing a decision to cabinet has to explicitly consider these requirements and the Council's Climate team provide guidance and support to officers on this. Alongside this capacity building and the internal processes, the Council is fortunate to have some enthusiastic advocates – including Cllr Ellie Chowns – who champion the carbon reduction goal and make sure the new decision making processes are getting properly embedded – this was especially critical in the early days as people got used to the new approach.
- **Invest in Net Zero solutions:** Herefordshire has an excellent track record for securing external funding for projects for example supporting business energy efficiency, grants for renewables through European Funding and sustainable active travel project funding through working with the Department for Transport (DfT). In its own capital programme, the Council routinely creates invest-to-save business cases – the environmental answer is often also the most economic, for example good LED lighting, advanced controls, smarter lighting and heating – have all been done on invest-to save basis, borrowing against future energy savings to fund projects without creating cost pressures.
- **Collaborate for Net Zero:** A Countywide Climate and Ecological Emergency Steering Group was initially created to work on the following themes: Energy, Transport, Waste, Food, Land Use and Agriculture and Community Engagement. Herefordshire is fortunate to have an active network of local community advocates – the HGN – which runs a project called "The Great Collaboration" which is working with Town and Parish Councils on achieving area based carbon reductions. The Council is working with HGN and other key partners locally to develop a much wider partnership with the aim of supporting the community to coalesce and enable even more action.

Future challenges and barriers:

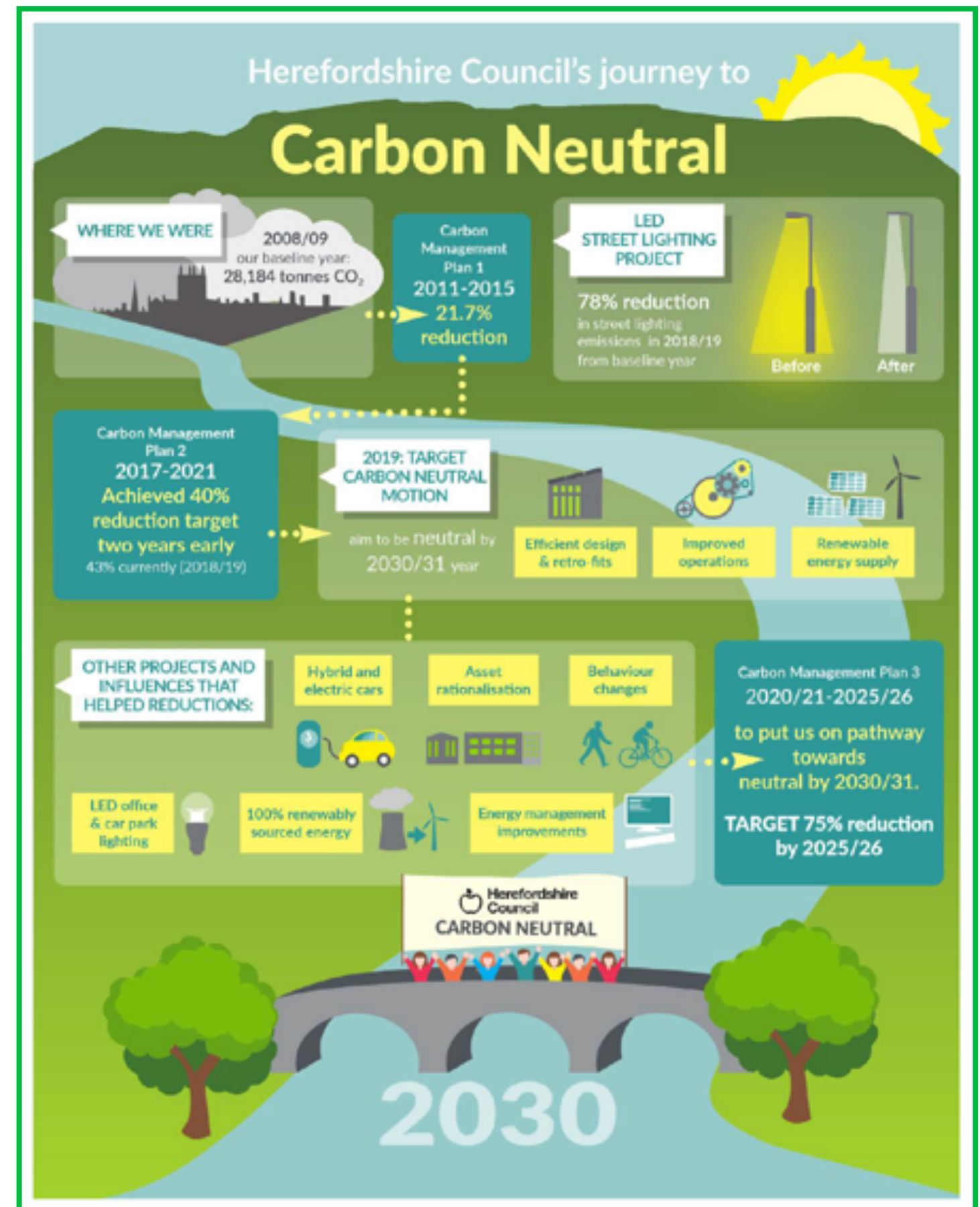
- **Long-term funding streams:** to get to Zero Carbon by a certain date it is essential to put in place a funding stream that matches that timescale and provides that level of certainty so that the organisations, the training bodies, the construction firms, the marketing organisations can all rally around and have confidence to act.
- **Transport and housing retrofit** are the most pressing examples of where a lack of a long-term funding commitment from government is a challenge – Herefordshire is making progress on these areas but could do much more with a clear, long-term commitment and a move away from very time-limited competitive funding rounds for individual projects.



We need the government to say “Every child should be able to get to school by public transport or active travel” and then act to make that happen by putting the funding in place to deliver that commitment”

Cllr Ellie Chowns, Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy, Herefordshire Council

Herefordshire’s Carbon Management Plan 2020/21-2025/26⁵ outlines the journey to Net Zero:





South Lakeland District Council

Since South Lakeland District Council (SLDC) began having ‘Climate Conversations’ in communities around the District 3-4 years ago, the interest amongst residents has grown significantly, adding to the impetus for action that was already being created by an active community sector. With support from the community, it has set ambitious Net Zero targets for its own operations (2030) and wider council area (2037) and launched its Climate Action Plan in 2020. The plan systematically identifies actions that it can take using its own powers and also opportunities to influence carbon reductions more widely.



South Lakeland and Cumbria have an opportunity to lead a new low carbon future, which is beneficial to all - giving us a more beautiful, cleaner Cumbria, where the economy thrives with the growth of green industries, sustainable tourism appreciating the natural beauty and local cultures of the area, and residents take pride in their local area, buying local produce and helping meet our sustainable goals.

South Lakeland Climate Action Plan¹

At a glance:

- **Type of Local Authority:** District Council
- **Region:** North-West England
- **Population:** 105,088
- **Land area:** 1,534 km²
- **Classification:** ‘Mainly Rural’² or ‘Rural80’
- **Political control:** Liberal Democrat
- **Key issues and characteristics:** South Lakeland District covers a large land area including parts of the Lake District National Park. The District has significant levels of rural poverty – even before the COVID-19 pandemic, almost 1 in 4 children in the District were living in poverty. Transport accessibility and internet connectivity are also particularly challenging.



1 - <https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/media/7208/climate-change-action-plan-accessible.pdf>

2 - Defined as ‘rural, including hub towns, greater than or equal to 80%’ by UK government definitions: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591465/RUCLAD2011_User_Guide_January_2017_.pdf - NB: Hub Towns in this sense are a subset of settlements within the 10,000 to 30,000 population band able to provide services to a rural population. Otherwise known as ‘Rural80’ on RUCLAD2001

Recent Net Zero milestones:

SLDC is building on the work of range of active community initiatives across the District and wider Cumbria area to step up its own ambition on climate change:

Feb 2019

Declared Climate Emergency which committed the Council to “working to achieve a carbon-neutral South Lakeland”

Feb 2020

Small World Consulting report recommended a Net Zero by 2037 target for Cumbria

May 2020

Climate Change Action Plan approved

June 2020

Formally adopted Net Zero by 2030 target for the Council’s own operations and 2037 as Net Zero target for community emissions

May 2021

1 year progress report published.

What does the CCN mean to South Lakeland:



It is really helpful to learn what others are doing and also to raise the visibility of rural issues – agriculture is one of the fastest increasing emissions areas and rural areas face real transport difficulties - even electric vehicles will be challenging on our hills! It is important to be aware of the impacts on rural communities of the changes we make.

Cllr Jonathan Brook, Leader, SLDC

Activities and achievements:

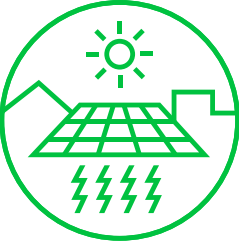


Jobs and skills: SLDC are working with their Local Enterprise Partnership, who have adopted a focus on sustainable inclusive economic growth. The Council is also encouraging businesses to decarbonise – for example encouraging all festivals and events to be low carbon and helping the tourist industry cut emissions. It supports small businesses through part-funding Green Audits with the Green Small Business Scheme and Future Fixers, supporting new starter businesses with climate and efficiency support.



We see a tremendous opportunity for green jobs – if the Government are going to invest in renewable energy, hydrogen, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, or carbon capture and storage we would welcome a chance to engage with this.

Cllr Jonathan Brook, Leader, SLDC



Energy: SLDC has solar panels on three Council sites already, and another three will follow. This year at is carrying out a full assessment of its buildings to create a roadmap to Net Zero emissions.



Transport and connectivity: SLDC is aiming to drive a greener travel network for example installing EV charging points, facilitating bike hire schemes, reviewing licensing and permits and campaigning for Cumbria County Council to improve walking and cycling routes across the District.



Homes and buildings: SLDC is promoting schemes such as Local Energy Advice Partnership/Cold to Cosy and offering grants for home energy efficiency improvements. It encourages local Registered Housing Providers to implement higher energy efficiency standards.



Council operations and services: in the first year since its Climate Change Action Plan was agreed SLDC has been investigating ways to cut carbon in its waste collection vehicles and van fleets.³ These are the Council's biggest carbon emitters, accounting for nearly half of all emissions, followed by leisure centres and offices and other buildings. The Council is starting to score potential contractors on their carbon-cutting credentials and will be monitoring emissions as they deliver contracts. It is implementing a green travel policy for staff, including options for Ev and bike use for council business.



Land use, agriculture and ecosystems: SLDC is exploring its carbon offsetting potential (to absorb carbon via land use, land use change and forestry) for improved land management on Council-owned land, as well as District-wide.

In Focus: Collaboration across communities for climate action

Community groups that are supporting action on climate and environment in South Lakeland and across the whole of Cumbria have been instrumental in helping SLDC and the County make progress on climate policies and action. SLDC has also been proactive in engaging communities across the District. It started visiting communities across the District to raise awareness of climate change and gather ideas for action a few years ago. Participation in the events has gradually increased (disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic aside). The ideas generated through these sessions have fed into SLDC's Climate Action Plan. SLDC is also supporting the pioneering Kendal Citizens Jury,⁴ which is now being rolled out across Cumbria and has made small grants available for local community groups, for example a local cycling group and biodiversity garden.

The Council is continuing to collaborate with community groups to work towards their targets – it has commissioned Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAfS) to work with communities in South Lakeland to reduce their carbon emissions, including the Ambleside to Zero project, the CAfS low carbon knowledge hub and online webinars for residents and businesses exploring low carbon homes. It is encouraging Town and Parish Councils to use a toolkit called the Greening Campaign which enables them to plan and start their own local actions. So far Ulverston Town Council, the Cartmel Peninsula under Grange Town Council, Staveley and Ings and Duddon Parish Councils have signed up to participate.

Key insight:

Collaboration with communities, community groups, other District Councils, the County Council and other organisations has given SLDC confidence and knowledge to commit to ambitious targets and will be critical for making progress towards these.



It's our role to keep the conversations about climate change live, to get our own house in order and encourage others to act where they can.

Cllr Jonathan Brook, Leader, SLDC

- **Commit to Net Zero:** SLDC adopted a 2030 Net Zero target for its own operations after assessing feasibility with Council officers. The 2037 target for the wider District was adopted after a report – jointly commissioned with the other authorities and organisations in the region – recommended that Cumbria could and should adopt this goal.
- **Plan for Net Zero:** Responding to climate change and enhancing biodiversity has been included as one of the four priorities in the new Council Plan which will guide action on housing, communities, economy, culture, health and the environment.⁵ The Council intends to develop a climate impact assessment tool to consider how everything that is proposed or implemented by the Council can be carbon neutral or contribute to reducing carbon.
- **Build capacity for Net Zero:** SLDC is providing carbon literacy and climate change training sessions for staff and members and now have a dedicated climate change officer boosting its capacity to drive forward change. A project board of senior officers and cabinet portfolio holders has been created and meets regularly to review progress with the Climate Change Action Plan.
- **Invest in Net Zero solutions:** SLDC has allocated a specific budget for climate action, including to hire the coordinator to ensure it keeps on track in funding community projects. Sustainability and climate change are considered in procurement decisions.
- **Collaborate for Net Zero:** SLDC Climate Action Plan has been developed collaboratively with input from many local organisations. The Council works with Cumbria County Council and is part of the Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership that successfully bid for £2.5 million of National Lottery funding to cut carbon emissions in the County. This ambitious programme will include community groups, Councils, the NHS, police, national parks, businesses and the farming community, among others.⁶ SLDC has also signed up to the Cumbria Joint Public Health Strategy to become a “carbon neutral” County and to mitigate the likely impact of existing climate change.

3 - <https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/news/one-year-on-climate-change-action-plan-is-driving-sldcs-carbon-reduction-commitments/>

4 - <https://www.kendalclimatejury.org/about-kendal-citizens-jury/>

5 - <https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/news/one-year-on-climate-change-action-plan-is-driving-sldcs-carbon-reduction-commitments/>

6 - <https://www.southlakeland.gov.uk/your-environment/climate-change-and-biodiversity/what-we-can-do-to-reduce-carbon-emissions/>

Future challenges and barriers:

South Lakeland experiences many of the challenges typical of rural Local Authorities and areas such as:

- **The lack of bus services** continues to be a real problem – there aren't any in many places.
- **The electricity grid connection** is a constraint for renewable energy.
- **Housing stock** which is energy inefficient and hard to retrofit with efficiency measures. Much of South Lakeland's housing stock, a lot of which is privately owned, is not built to modern energy efficiency standards and requires major intervention to retrofit. The mismatch between the scale of intervention required and the resources available to deliver it is one of the biggest barriers to achieving a carbon neutral South Lakeland.

SLDC is also concerned about some wider challenges:

- **National planning laws** which could help them by requiring higher sustainability standards in new housing.
- **Reducing emissions associated with consumption** will be a key challenge, particularly in relation to tourism – travel to and from South Lakeland, and consumption based emissions from tourists represents a significant portion of the area's emissions – the Council's work with the tourism sector is critically important, but transport and consumptions habits are influenced by many factors outside their control.
- **Many South Lakeland residents** are on low incomes and suffer from deprivation, despite the area being perceived as relatively affluent. Issues of deprivation can be more acute in sparsely populated areas where people have to travel some distance to access services and employment and public transport is inadequate. There is a challenge in ensuring that people of limited means are able to make sustainable transport and consumption choices and to make their homes energy efficient.
- **Knowledge and awareness gaps of climate change** and the dangers it brings are still variable across the wider region, including amongst some decision makers which is slowing the pace of coordinated action.





Wiltshire Council

Like many councils, Wiltshire Council realised it needed to step up its ambition on climate change as the public mood across the country, shifted in late 2018.

An opposition motion to declare a Climate Emergency across Wiltshire gained support from the Conservative administration, resulting in formal acknowledgement of the emergency and the need to seek to achieve Net Zero by 2030. And shortly afterwards, after reviewing feasibility with officers, Councillors had the confidence to set a target to achieve Net Zero across the Council operations by 2030.

The Council set about creating a strategy focused on delivering results – not just planting a few trees (although it will definitely be planting some!) – and began a comprehensive review of what was needed. Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck and delayed things. Undeterred, it is now pushing forward to finalise their strategy and looking forward to sharing it for consultation shortly. It is on track to cut its own carbon footprint by 80% on 2014/15 emissions by the end of 2020/21.

At a glance:

- **Type of Local Authority:** Unitary
- **Region:** South-West England
- **Population:** 500,024
- **Land area:** 3,485 km²
- **Classification:** Largely Rural (rural including hub towns 50-79%)¹
- **Political control:** Conservative
- **Key issues and characteristics:** Wiltshire can appear a quiet, green and affluent place to live dotted with prosperous market towns, but income is below national average, making housing costs challenging for many residents. There are still isolated rural houses reliant on oil heating and some rural poverty. Transport connectivity across the area is a challenge – key routes to nearby Swindon are better served but cross County connectivity is limited.



¹ - 2011 Rural Urban Look up for Local Authorities <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes> - NB Hub Towns in this sense are a subset of settlements within the 10,000 to 30,000 population band able to provide services to a rural population

Recent Net Zero milestones:

Feb 2019

Wiltshire Council “resolved to acknowledge a Climate Emergency and to seek to make the county of Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030”

July 2019

Wiltshire Council cabinet subsequently committed to also make the Council carbon neutral by 2030

Apr 2019

Global Warming and Climate Emergency Task Group was set up to gather evidence and develop recommendations for achieving Net Zero

Feb 2021

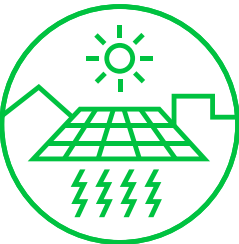
Climate strategy discussion document presented to the Full Council, in preparation for strategy to be consulted on later in 2021.



Activities and achievements:



Jobs and skills: Carbon reduction will be a key theme in the council’s recovery from COVID-19. It is fostering jobs and skills in the low carbon homes sector through their commitment to retrofitting (see In Focus Box) and working closely with Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership to integrate Net Zero considerations into the area’s economic plan.



Energy: Wiltshire Council is harnessing opportunities in its own estate to shift to renewable energy and increase local generation. It has switched to a 100% green energy tariff, is investing £5 million in making their own buildings more energy efficient and installing renewable energy generation in them. It has also secured £4.6 million of government funding to retrofit more difficult buildings to heat such as leisure centres. For example it worked with Nadder Community Energy and Tisbury Parish Council to install solar PV panels on the village swimming pool and changing facilities, as well as the Parish Council’s cricket pavillion. It hopes the Tisbury scheme will generate around 6100 kWh of electricity and save £800 per year in electricity costs.



Transport and connectivity: A grant of £671,000 has been secured to improve existing bus services or bring back services that had been discontinued, as well as further £0.68m from the DfT Active Travel Fund, to progress cycling schemes. The Council has been successful in its bid for £1.2 million from the Demand Responsive scheme run by the DfT in its bid to modernise and enhance the existing demand responsive transport (DRT) scheme in the Pewsey Vale. A project manager is to be recruited and community engagement will be key going forward. In the meantime existing staff are considering the opportunities for timetables and options for integration with fixed bus services at the edges of the DRT area, especially in light of the publication of the National Bus Strategy (NBS). The NBS - Bus Back Better, is a huge opportunity for Wiltshire. The Council has already accepted an initial £100,000 funding to be used to grow the staff resource to both meet the demands of, and maximise the benefit of, the NBS.



Homes and buildings: Wiltshire Council is taking action on its own housing stock, on housing from Registered Housing Providers and is also supporting other households to cut their energy bills and carbon emissions. It has committed to a long-term programme of low carbon retrofits for their own housing (see In Focus box). It is formalising partnerships with Registered Housing Providers, including commitments to improve the environmental standards of its properties.² The Council-backed Warm and Safe Wiltshire³ has advised 4,383 households since April 2018, on insulation and heating improvements, switching energy suppliers and claiming the Warm Home Discount.



Council operations and services: Wiltshire has put together a £5m 'Property Carbon Reduction Programme' to reduce carbon emissions across its estate by 25% over three years. It will update the heating systems and generate electricity at several Wiltshire Council buildings, including solar panels on 19 buildings. The works will cut emissions of 1,200 tonnes of carbon each year, and also bring the council financial savings. Its £12m programme to convert streetlights to LEDs is ongoing – energy consumption has been reduced by 39% so far.



Land use, agriculture and ecosystems: Wiltshire Council is preparing a 'Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy' which will shape policies within the next Local Plan, such as improvements to the natural environment and biodiversity. This is intended to deliver strong and well-connected natural environments across Wiltshire that are valued by communities and support sustainable development. It is also trialling wildflower verges on highways to increase biodiversity habitats and exploring what role its County farms can play in the Net Zero transition.

Key insight:



When you look at Net Zero from a rural perspective, the link to the natural environment is important. If we're going to take the people of Wiltshire on the journey with us we must remember that they care a great deal about the countryside. It is important to make this a positive experience which protects the things that our residents care about and recognise that day-to-day, people are busy balancing their environmental concerns with getting on with their lives. We must bring forward solutions that are easy for families and small businesses to adopt whilst ensuring our rural economy can thrive.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader, Wiltshire Council, Chair CCN

2 - <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/news/basis-for-new-partnership-with-housing-associations-to-increase-social-housing-and-fight-climate-change>

3 - <https://www.warmandsafewiltshire.org.uk/> Warm and Safe Wiltshire is provided by Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service in partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Energy

- **Commit to Net Zero:** Making a public commitment to ambitious Net Zero by 2030 targets across its operations and the wider Council area is stimulating a new ambitious programme of work. The community are expecting to see progress towards these targets – they provide a very clear benchmark which local community groups, such as Wiltshire Climate Alliance, can use to gauge the Council's progress.
- **Plan for Net Zero:** The Council is aiming to make climate objectives a key theme in its work to support a recovery from COVID-19. It is developing a new climate strategy, carrying out a review of the Local Plan and developing their fourth Local Transport Plan all of which will address climate objectives.
- **Build capacity for Net Zero:** Wiltshire has a dedicated climate team to take forward actions to achieve its commitments and develop the climate strategy.
- **Invest in Net Zero solutions:** Wiltshire Council has proactively sought funding from a variety of government grants and other sources to enable a range of carbon reduction projects and is using Salix / Public Works Loan Board for projects – such as energy efficiency and renewables – where there is a straight-forward financial saving opportunity.
- **Collaborate for Net Zero:** Wiltshire Council is engaging with other public sector organisations through the Wiltshire Public Service Board and with businesses through the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP). The SWLEP has published its emerging Local Industrial Strategy which includes commitments to improving strategic energy infrastructure and decarbonising the local economy.
- **Harness powers for Net Zero:** The Council is maximising the potential of its role as a housing provider to make improvements to its own housing stock and buildings to influence the low carbon skills development and markets which can have positive impacts on transforming the wider area. It plans to increasingly use its local planning and place shaping powers to make it easy for residents to live low carbon lifestyles.



In Focus: Long-term investment to kick-start greener homes retrofits

Wiltshire Council realised that rolling out greener homes retrofitting and achieving its goal of Zero Carbon new council homes was going to be one of its most difficult challenges on the pathway to Net Zero. Like many rural areas its housing is not concentrated in a single large urban area but is dispersed across a wide area and the supply chain for the necessary services was quite fragmented. The skills for greener homes are in short-supply, yet without a clear market and demand for courses the local education providers were reluctant to invest in developing new courses to fill this skills gap.

To unlock this impasse, Wiltshire Council committed to a longer-term investment programme to give education providers and businesses the confidence to invest in greener homes skills development and to help build the local supply chain. It has committed £50 million to a Housing Energy Efficiency programme which will raise all council homes to an energy performance rating of at least B over the next 10 years. Funding will come from a variety of sources, including the Government's Local Authority Delivery Scheme for the Green Homes Grant – it successfully bid for £546,500 for whole house retrofits of around 100 of the Council's least energy efficient homes beginning in April 2021.⁴ It has also used Salix Funding and Public Works Board Loan funding.

Future challenges and barriers:

- **Transport:** The focus of many discussions and campaigns on walking and cycling and demonisation of the car creates quite a lot of push-back from residents when everyone is living in small towns and villages with few other options to the car – the challenge ahead is to find transport and connectivity improvements which will make it much easier for people to decarbonise their travel habits and still have access to jobs, services and other things they need.



We've got to look for different ways to do low carbon rural transport such as electric and hydrogen vehicles alongside public transport and active travel – it's critical to get beyond the simple 'cars are bad narrative' to look for a diverse range of solutions for low carbon transport in rural areas.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader, Wiltshire Council, Chair CCN

- **House building:** The prevailing style of rural housing developments – often on the edge of towns with minimal investment in community facilities and sustainable transport planning needs to change – Wiltshire Council acknowledges the need for improvements in its own planning policies and is working to address this urgently to ensure future developments are aligned to its Net Zero goals. Improved building regulations and a really clear mandate to challenge developers to bring forward fit-for-purpose developments is also essential.



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