

Foreword/Introduction

The issues caused by climate change will have a profound effect on the lives of everyone for many years or even decades. That is why in May 2019 North Herts District Council declared a climate emergency and committed to take action to address the causes of climate change across the district. We undertook to engage with the community to identify ways in which the council could work towards the goal of achieving a district with zero carbon emissions. We recognise that the influence of the council is wider than the services that it delivers.

This revised Climate Change Strategy updates our plans and commitments to build on the results of the work with the community and with other councils across Hertfordshire. Firstly, it sets out what the council will do to reduce its own carbon emissions to achieve a carbon neutral position by 2030. Secondly it describes how the council will change its policies to enable others to reduce their carbon emissions. Thirdly it explains how we will lead the way to encourage the residents and businesses of the district to reduce their own carbon emissions.

Achieving the goals set out in this strategy will not be easy but is essential if we are to avoid an even greater impact on the lives of people across North Hertfordshire.

What is Climate Change

Climate change refers to a large-scale identifiable change in the planet's weather patterns that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer.

The current period of warming is occurring more rapidly than in the past. Scientific evidence indicates that the natural fluctuation of temperature has been overtaken by a human-induced warming. This warming has come as a result of the changes that have occurred since the onset of the industrial revolution. These changes have serious implications for the future stability of the planet.

Mandate for Climate Action

At the twenty first meeting of the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris, member states, including the British government reached a historic agreement to strengthen the global response to Climate Change. This agreement included a landmark commitment to *“holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”*.

Following the Paris Climate Agreement, in 2018 the United Kingdom became the first major developed economy to assess how it will meet the terms of the agreement. After an original target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% on 1990 levels and transition to a low-carbon economy by 2050, in June 2019 parliament passed legislation requiring the government to reduce the UK's net emissions of greenhouse gases by 100% relative to 1990 levels by 2050. This target was adjusted on the recommendation of the UK Committee

on Climate Change (CCC), following both the Paris Agreement and a report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicating aspiration to limit warming to 1.5C rather than 2C. The CCC note that the target is achievable with current technologies and improvements in people's lives, but that it will require the introduction of more stable, challenging, and well-designed policies.

Already, the increase in temperature is having widespread impacts across the UK. Over the last ten years the UK has experienced a variety of climate-related extremes, including record wet winters, major floods and heatwaves. In 2018 the UK Met office scientists published their climate projections for the next century based on different rates of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. The high emission scenario demonstrated that:

- Summer temperatures could be up to 5.4C hotter by 2070; Winters could be up to 4.2C warmer
- The chance of a summer as hot as 2018 is around 50% by 2050
- Sea levels in London could rise by up to 1.15 metres by 2100
- Average summer rainfall could decrease by up to 47 per cent by 2070, while there could be up to 35 per cent more precipitation in winter.
- The Committee for Climate Change stated in its 2018 report – *Managing the coast in a changing climate*, that coastal communities, infrastructure and landscapes in England were already under significant pressure from flooding and erosion.

Subsequently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 special report on Global Warming highlighted that any effort to limit global warming to 1.5°C as agreed in the Paris accord would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society and the declaration of a Climate Emergency. In line with this, in their 2019 report the CCC similarly asserted that Climate Change requires more ambitious reductions and radical actions by national government, local authorities, businesses, communities and individuals. The CCC concluded that if radical steps are taken the UK can end its contribution to global warming within 30 years.

Current National Policy Environment

The Climate Change Act 2008 is the UK's long-term framework for tackling Climate Change. The Act aims to facilitate the UK's transition to a low-carbon economy by 2050. Since the Climate Change Act 2008, a number of national initiatives have been introduced to help meet targets.

- **The Carbon Plan 2011** identifies the emission reductions needed in five key areas of the economy; buildings; transport; industry; electricity; and agriculture to meet targets.
- **The Clean Growth Strategy 2017** outlines the plan to grow the national income while cutting greenhouse emissions.
- **The 25 Year Environment Plan** published in 2018, sets comprehensive goals and targets to improve the UK's air and water quality and protect threatened plants, trees and wildlife species.
- **The Resource and Waste Strategy 2018** outlines the actions the UK will take to minimise waste, promote resource efficiency and move towards a circular economy.

- **The Clean Air Strategy 2019** demonstrates how the national government will tackle all sources of air pollution and boost the economy.
- **Climate Emergency Motion** affirmed Parliament's commitment to addressing Climate Change. While there is no single definition of a Climate Emergency, the general consensus is to work toward becoming carbon-neutral by 2030.

At the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) Agreement placed emphasis on the notion that the real solution to climate change would require wide scale collaboration and sharing of best practices. Whilst Britain leaving the EU will not necessarily mean that Britain will stop collaborating with international partners, there may be a change in the manner this collaboration takes place

NHDC Approach

Climate action has been a long-term corporate priority area for NHDC, and it is currently pursued through our objective to *Respond to Challenges in the Environment*. The warming of the earth brings milder and wetter winters, hotter and drier summers, more intense downpours and more frequent and intense flooding for North Hertfordshire. These changes pose great risk to the Council's service delivery. In accordance with this, the Council will continue to provide a clean and safe environment, in consultation and partnership with local people. We will continue to protect the natural and built-up environments and address the impacts of the climate emergency; in our approach to waste and recycling, food hygiene, environmental crime and the management of air quality areas.

Over the last two decades the Council has worked continuously to reduce our waste, reduce our CO₂ emissions and improve energy efficiency across the district. In 2007 we signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change. In 2009 we published our original Climate Change Strategy, which we updated in 2013. Since then, the Council has passed several motions with the aim of encouraging residents, businesses and Council staff to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle plastics. Most notably, in 2019, the Council passed a motion to declare a Climate Emergency, in this motion the Council pledged their commitment to do everything within its power to make North Hertfordshire Carbon Zero by 2030. This declaration asserted the Council's commitment toward Climate Action beyond current government targets and international agreements.

Following this declaration, the Council established a Cabinet Panel on the Environment. The Panel is an advisory panel chaired by the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, and Recycling and Waste alternatively. The panel meets approximately six times per year, and the community and any person or body are welcomed and enabled to participate at meetings.

As part of the declaration, when Council policies are reviewed, specific consideration is given to how the policies and related decisions and actions affect our contribution to climate change, and where necessary, update these policies to reduce our impact where possible. The inclusion of an Environmental implications section within the report and delegated decision template will ensure that impacts and mitigation measures and risks are identified at an early stage.

The Council has formed a Climate Change Implementation Group which has begun meeting regularly. This group supports and receives input from the Cabinet Panel, co-ordinates and formulates climate change actions and makes recommendations in relation to policy development.

The Council will undertake to conduct regular analysis of our activities in order to identify gaps for further action.

The Climate Change Strategy relates primarily to the reduction of carbon emissions but in conjunction with the Environment Panel and the Implementation Group, the Council is enabled to address the full range of issues relating to climate change (both mitigation of and adaption to the effects of climate change) and environmental matters (such as biodiversity and waste) in North Hertfordshire.

As such, this Strategy contains certain actions related to waste and biodiversity in so far as they relate to carbon and greenhouse gas reduction. For instance, a particular form of organic waste management called anaerobic digestion captures the greenhouse gases that may be otherwise released from alternate waste handling practices and produces a source of renewable energy. As such, use of this management process has the potential to limit greenhouse gas emissions and to reduce future reliance on carbon.

High biodiversity levels can improve ecosystem reliability and increase the effectiveness of their functions, one of which is carbon capture. Recent research, for example, has shown that high levels of plant diversity can enhance storage of soil organic carbon.

Trees are probably those most often noted for their carbon sequestration abilities, but hedgerows, grasslands, and wildflower areas also have the capacity to absorb significant amounts of carbon, storing it in woody growth, in leaves, in roots and in the soil.

Efforts to increase biodiversity can therefore be an important means of reducing the amount of carbon dioxide currently in the atmosphere and of off-setting future carbon emissions.

The Council remains committed to playing a leadership role in local efforts to address the climate emergency. We will continue to approach climate action in an inclusive, fair and effective manner. However, with limited policy tools and resources available, successfully achieving carbon zero aspirations will require cross sector partnerships between NHDC, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) - which is comprised of HCC, all ten district and borough councils, and the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership - local businesses, and voluntary and community groups. We will also explore other means of appropriate funding, investment, and sponsorship opportunities with key suppliers, local authority partners and private enterprise to help us stay on the cutting edge of technology.

This Strategy will act as the foundation upon which actions arising from other service areas across the council are built.

Objectives

- Achieve Carbon Neutralityⁱ for the Council's own operations by 2030 (at least Scope 1 and Scope 2)ⁱⁱ.
- Ensure all operations and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Achieve a Net Zero Carbon district by 2040.
- Become a district that is resilient to unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Strategic Priorities

1. Taking Action – taking direct action to reduce the Council's carbon emissions.
2. Enabling Carbon Savings – ensuring that our policies enable citizens and businesses to reduce their emissions.
3. Inspiring the Community – encouraging citizens and businesses to take action to go further and faster in cutting carbon emissions.

1. Taking Action – taking direct action to reduce the Council's carbon emissions

Overview

The UK Committee on Climate Change has identified reducing emissions from local authority owned buildings, estates and operations as a key responsibility for local authorities. NHDC has made significant efforts to reduce emissions from its estate and operations over the past eighteen years and will continue to plan our work with a view to reducing our energy usage from our own estate. The **three** key areas of focus, below contribute most to the Council's carbon footprint and are areas where the Council has the most scope to influence emissions:

- A. Reducing emissions from the District Council's estate and operations.
- B. Reducing the need to travel and improving use of sustainable transport in our operations.
- C. Reducing our consumption of resources, increasing recycling and reducing waste.

2. Enabling Carbon Savings – ensuring that our policies enable citizens and businesses to reduce their emissions

Overview

The UK Committee on Climate Change emphasises the leadership role local authorities have in supporting residents and businesses to reduce their emissions. The Council will continue seeking to ensure that its policies open up opportunities which enable and make it easier for citizens and businesses to reduce their own emissions.

This will include seeking to provide leadership and support for both businesses and residents to switch to renewable energy, and to adapt to the impacts of planning projects. The Council can play an important role as local planning authority, in reducing carbon emissions and providing further supplementary planning guidance to encourage more sustainable development and work towards carbon neutrality. This is especially

important given the strategic amount of growth planned in the district, and the need for the Council to secure sustainable communities through a masterplan-led process and through place leadership.

Alongside this, the Council's overall transport vision for North Hertfordshire remains one based on sustainable transport. We recognise the many benefits of sustainable transport, both to individuals, places, and the environment more widely, and want to seek to reduce car use overall across the district in favour of public transport and active travel. Encouraging people to move towards ultra-low emission vehicles and other forms of sustainable transport is critical to help us achieve our climate change and air quality ambitions.

The Council will thus seek to progress policies in support of the transition to low and zero emission vehicles in line with national targets, ensuring that residents can take advantage of technological changes and that North Hertfordshire remains accessible and attractive for all. Due to limited resources, and acknowledging the advancement of technology through significant private sector investment, this will entail broad partnership working and exploring other means of appropriate funding in order to best and maximally enable carbon savings across the district.

3. Inspiring the Community – encouraging citizens and businesses to take action to go further and faster in cutting carbon emissions

Overview

The Climate Emergency is a wide-spread cross-cutting issue, and requires a concerted and coordinated effort. In recognition of the value of community-led responses in helping contribute to the wider decarbonisation of the district and to reaching the national net zero target of 2050ⁱⁱⁱ, inspiring the community forms a key part of the strategy. Local authorities can play a key role in stimulating community-led action and in encouraging behaviour change which will see residents, community groups, and businesses reduce their impact on the environment and make more sustainable choices. We will continue to work in partnership with those in our community in order to consult, inform, and inspire action which will ensure we mitigate and adapt to the Climate Emergency.

Measuring, Monitoring and Evaluating Impact

This strategy is accompanied by an Action Plan (appendix A), and a List of Achievements (appendix B). Impact and delivery of the strategy will be measured and monitored annually, and a fuller evaluation will be undertaken in 2025. In addition to this, the Strategy will undergo an annual review which will consider whether it needs to be amended or added to, based on developments in national policy, new research, changed circumstances, available funding opportunities, or our own gap analysis (see NHDC Approach).

ⁱ *Carbon Neutrality* is defined by Oxford Languages, as 'making or resulting in no net release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, especially as a result of carbon offsetting'. *Net Zero Carbon* is typically held to indicate the same concept, often being described as the balancing of carbon emissions with removal (i.e. you offset or sequester the same amount of carbon emissions that you emit). Though, as The Carbon Trust noted in November 2019, 'Net Zero' does in fact lack an official or commonly agreed definition.

Appendix 1

In contrast, *Zero Carbon* is typically considered to mean that there is no emission of Carbon Dioxide at all from a product or service, and therefore no use of offsetting.

It should be further noted, however, that all of the above terms have frequently been used interchangeably and without precision in public discourse.

ⁱⁱ According to the Carbon Trust, Scope 1 covers direct emissions from owned or controlled sources. Scope 2 covers indirect emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heating and cooling consumed by the reporting company. Scope 3 includes all other indirect emissions that occur in a company's value chain
<https://www.carbontrust.com/resources/briefing-what-are-scope-3-emissions>

ⁱⁱⁱ In June 2019, parliament passed legislation requiring the government to reduce the UK's net emissions of greenhouse gases by 100% relative to 1990 levels by 2050. In December 2020, the Prime Minister announced a new target to reduce the UK's emissions by at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sets-ambitious-new-climate-target-ahead-of-un-summit>