

# NHC Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027

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## Introduction

The issues caused by climate change will have a profound effect on the lives of everyone for many years and decades. That is why in May 2019 North Herts 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 net 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. It firstly sets out what the Council will do to reduce its own carbon emissions to achieve a carbon neutral position by 2030. It then sets out what we will do to help achieve a net zero carbon district by 2040, both by creating policies which enable other to reduce their emissions, and by encouraging residents and businesses 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. In other words, the UK should emit net zero greenhouse gases 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 that global warming should be limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels rather than 2°C, in order to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change. The IPCC have highlighted that achieving this will require rapid, far-

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fetching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society, and that we will need to remove some of the carbon that is already in the atmosphere as well as reduce the amount we continue to emit. Similarly, the CCC report found that more ambitious reductions and radical actions by national government, local authorities, businesses, communities, and individuals would be required. They note that the target is achievable with current technologies and improvements in people's lives, and that given more challenging and well-designed policies, the UK can end its contribution to global warming within 30 years.

In December 2020, the UK communicated its new [Nationally Determined Contribution \(NDC\)](#) under the Paris Agreement, which commits to reducing economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. In April 2021, ahead of hosting COP26 (United Nations Climate Change Conference) the Government [announced](#) that it would build on their commitments by setting into law the target to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels.

The most recent IPCC report (2022) finds that, globally, greenhouse gas emissions are continuing to rise and that current plans to address climate change are not ambitious enough to limit warming to 1.5°C. Moreover, the world's wealthiest countries remain responsible for disproportionately more emissions than the poorest countries (as has historically been the case), but the poorest countries are experiencing more severe climate impacts. Even so, climate change is affecting and will continue to affect all regions of the world. Already, the increase in temperature is having severe impacts in North Hertfordshire and across the UK. Over the last ten years the UK has experienced a variety of climate-related extremes, including record wet winters, major floods, heatwaves, and wildfires, with the ten hottest years on record all having occurred within the last twenty years<sup>1</sup>. 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.

## 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [Met Office, Top Ten UK's Hottest Years on Records All Since 2002](#)

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- **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.
- **The Climate Change Strategy 2021-24** outlines how the government will meet its climate commitments via five strategic pillars.
- **Net Zero Strategy 2021** sets how the UK will deliver on its commitment to reach net zero by 2050.

### North Herts Council's Approach

The Council has had a long-term focus on climate action and 'Sustainability' is one of our three key priorities outlined in our [Council Plan](#) (2022-2027). 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. We want to continue to provide a clean and safe environment for our residents and to deliver our services to a high standard, all in an environmentally sustainable way. This requires us to do what we can to protect the natural and built-up environments, and address the causes and impacts of the climate emergency across all areas, including planning, waste and recycling, greenspace and leisure, environmental crime, and the management of air quality areas.

Over the last two decades we have worked to reduce our carbon (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions and improve energy efficiency across the district.

In 2007 we signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change and in 2009 we published our original Climate Change Strategy. Since then, the Council has passed several motions with the aim of becoming more environmentally sustainable; 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 alternately. The panel meets approximately six times per year,

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and the community and any person or body are welcomed and enabled to participate at meetings. The Panel is a valuable forum for sharing learnings, ideas, and best practice, as well as for consulting residents on the Council's climate and environment work and providing a level of accountability. Terms of Reference for the group can be found on the [website](#).

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 (CCIG) comprised of Members, senior management, and key officers for the purposes of monitoring and progressing the aims and actions of the Climate Change Strategy. Each meeting of the group focuses on 'spotlighting' a few specific actions from the strategy to induce a discussion about how the action can be progressed.

The Council has also formed a Climate Change Officer Group (CCOG) which looks to draw together work relating to climate and environment from across the different Council departments and identify opportunities for joint working. Both groups meet regularly and the CCOG provides feedback to the CCIG on discussions and ideas arising from the group and the Environment Panel, as well as on any identified gaps in our approach to climate change. The annual review of the Climate Change Strategy, as conducted by the policy team, also allows us to identify gaps for further action.

### **Mitigation**

The Climate Change Strategy relates primarily to the reduction of carbon emissions but in conjunction with the Environment Panel, the Climate Change Implementation Group, the Climate Change Officer Group, and our involvement in the HCCSP and Herts Waste Partnership, the Council is enabled to address the full range of issues relating to climate and environment. This includes matters such as biodiversity and waste; and both mitigation and adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

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, different forms of waste management and waste handling practices can impact levels of greenhouse gases emitted. Innovative technologies also provide potential opportunities to produce renewable energy through certain organic waste management processes. 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.

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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.

Whilst we recognise that some level of offsetting will likely be necessary to meet our climate targets, reducing our emissions will remain our priority as we play our part to keep warming under 1.5C.

### **Adaptation**

The IPCC note that even if global warming does not exceed 1.5°C in the near-term, there will still be some unavoidable impacts which will create hazards for humans and ecosystems. Some of the unavoidable hazards may include extreme weather, floods, droughts, fires, and reduced crop yields affecting global and local food systems.

If warming exceeds 1.5°C over the coming decades, then hazards will become more severe and difficult to manage. In other words, as well as cutting emissions, we need to ensure our communities are resilient to the impacts of climate change. This is known as climate adaptation and involves adjusting infrastructure or the ways we do things to reduce hazards or our vulnerability and exposure to them. For example, an area which is vulnerable to flooding might need flood defence barriers or planting of trees and hedges to aid water absorption.

The HCCSP has recently established an Adaptation subgroup which is attended by officers from North Herts. This group aims to create a Strategic Action Plan on Adaptation which can be implemented across Hertfordshire. Officers have attended adaptation training as part of this and the group is currently working to create climate risk assessments for each district within the county.

### **Working in Partnership**

The Council remains committed to playing a leadership role in local efforts to address the climate emergency. Working in partnership with residents, local businesses, voluntary and community groups, and neighbouring Councils allows a cohesive and joined-up response across the district and county so that we can collaborate on wide-scale projects and share best practice across organisations. Partnership working also allows us to address the limited policy tools and resources available, as well as to explore further opportunities for funding, investment, and sponsorship.

Our climate and sustainability work with other authorities, including Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), and our fellow district and borough councils in Hertfordshire will principally be facilitated by the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP). This is comprised of HCC, all ten district and borough councils in Hertfordshire, and the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership which itself looks to bring together the private sector, local authorities, and academic and voluntary organisations.

The HCCSP's aim is to tackle climate, environmental, and sustainability issues across Hertfordshire and there are currently six priority areas identified. These are: Water; Biodiversity; Carbon Reduction; Transport; Behaviour Change; and Climate Adaptation. The Partnership has formed subgroups to develop Strategic Action Plans for each priority area and North Herts Council has led the creation of the Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan. Each

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of these Strategic Action Plans are intended as live documents which will undergo regular review in order to respond to changing policy, circumstances, and resources. Each plan's actions are intended to be filtered down into the service delivery plans within each individual council.

The work of the HCCSP and our contribution to it is therefore a major and vital element of our response to the climate and ecological crises. The HCCSP Strategic Action Plans can be accessed [here](#).

We will also continue to make use of more informal networks both within Hertfordshire and beyond it, as well as our Cabinet Panel on the Environment, to share learnings, ideas, and best practice, and to ensure we are approaching climate action in an inclusive, and effective manner.

## Decision Making and Strategies

We will embed the objectives and priorities of this Strategy into other relevant strategies and plans, including our [Greenspace Management Strategy](#), Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), [Transport Strategy](#) when it is updated, and other service plan actions around Electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure, and decarbonisation of homes. The Strategy will act as the foundation upon which actions arising from other service areas across the Council are built.

We are committed to making consideration of climate change central to our decision-making and actions. Councillors are reminded of the climate emergency we declared and our net zero target at the beginning of all Cabinet and Full Council meetings; and officers are required to consider environmental implications for all decisions taken by Council, Cabinet, Committees, and delegated decisions. Officers are required to conduct a fuller Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) if the initial analysis finds that there could be notable impacts. The creation of an Executive Portfolio for Environment and Leisure as well as the appointment of a Climate Change Lead from amongst our Service Directorate also allows us to ensure that climate change and our work around it is lead and considered at the highest levels within the Council.

## Objectives

- Achieve Carbon Neutrality<sup>i</sup> for the Council's own operations by 2030 (at least Scope 1 and Scope 2)<sup>ii</sup>.
- 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.

With clear objectives which relate to the Council's own operations and services, as well as to the wider district, this Strategy aims to set priorities and proposed actions to respond to both these elements. Below, *Strategic Priority 1. Taking Action* sets out how the Council intends to reach the target of carbon neutrality for our own operations by 2030; while *Strategic Priority 2. Enabling Carbon Savings* and *Strategic Priority 3. Inspiring the Community* set out our approach to achieving a net zero carbon district by 2040.

## 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. NHC 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 maximise 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. We recognise the value of community-led responses to the climate crisis and know that action from residents, community groups, and businesses, is needed to decarbonise the district and make North Herts net zero by 2040. Local authorities can play a key role in supporting community-led action, and in inspiring and encouraging behaviour change to help people reduce their impact on the environment. We will continue to work in partnership with those in our community to consult, inform, and inspire action which will ensure we mitigate and adapt to the Climate Emergency. We will make use of existing channels and forums such as our Cabinet Panel on the Environment, as well as our new digital engagement platform.

#### 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 NHC's Approach).

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<sup>i</sup> *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.

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.

<sup>ii</sup> 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>