

Norfolk County Council's Climate Policy 2024

Introduction

It is beyond any reasonable doubt that climate change is taking place and its effects are beginning to be felt. This includes here in Norfolk, where our unique geography makes the county a special place to live but also one of the most vulnerable parts of the UK to a changing climate. What we do today can make a huge difference to protect our communities and natural places from the impacts of climate change, but also enable us to seize the real opportunities arising from the green economy.

As the upper-tier local authority, Norfolk County Council has a key role in shaping the local response to climate change in a way that reflects the specific characteristics and priorities of the county. The Council made a commitment to help address climate change in its Environmental Policy in 2019, and in June 2023 launched a comprehensive Climate Strategy. The strategy outlines how the Council will use its powers and influence to address climate change across seven focus areas. This Climate Policy:

- makes two overarching commitments; and
- brings out the key strategic priorities set out in the Climate Strategy for each focus area.

Overarching commitments

- 1) Norfolk County Council will lead by example through making its own estate net zero by 2030. Estate emissions include those generated from the council's buildings, streetlights and vehicle fleet.
- 2) In 2019, the UK became the first major economy to enshrine a commitment to reaching net zero by 2050 into law. Norfolk County Council commits to using its powers, influence and partnerships towards supporting the county's low carbon development in line with the UK-wide target to reach net zero by 2050. We will look to keep Norfolk in step with the ambitious trajectory set out in the national carbon budgets of a 78% reduction in emissions by 2035 compared to 1990 levels, whilst recognising Norfolk's agriculture sector's vital role in food security and the implications for its land use emissions in the national context.

Focus area 1: Reduce our estate emissions

The council's focus here is on reducing its carbon footprint rather than relying heavily on offsetting to achieve net zero. To this end, the council has set interim targets for

its (gross) estate emissions relative to its emissions in the 2016/17 baseline year as stepping stones towards reaching this target:

- 66% reduction by 2024/25
- 85% reduction by 2028/29
- 90% reduction by 2030/31 with suitable certified offsets for remaining 10%.

Achieving net zero by 2030 on the council's estate will be pursued through the following strategic priorities:

- Decarbonise and improve the energy efficiency of our council-owned buildings through a comprehensive retrofitting programme.
- Transition towards a low-carbon vehicle fleet and more sustainable modes of transport including e-cargo bikes.
- Upgrade the remainder of our streetlight stock to more energy efficient LEDs to reduce electricity consumption.

Focus area 2: Reduce our indirect emissions

Our indirect emissions (also known as 'scope 3' emissions) represent the council's wider carbon footprint that we have influence over but which is outside of our direct control. This includes the carbon resulting from our supply chain, the companies we own, and the buildings we lease, among other aspects. We will reduce our indirect emissions through pursuing the following strategic priorities:

- Work with our wholly owned companies to reduce their emissions.
- Improve data quality of supply chain carbon emissions.
- Create carbon reduction strategies for key procurement categories.
- Integrate emission metrics in our procurement activity.
- Use internal carbon pricing where appropriate to inform carbon reduction options appraisal.
- Work with other large public sector organisations to develop procurement standards where appropriate.

Focus area 3: Addressing Norfolk's county-wide emissions

This focus area steps back to address the bigger picture of how the council can support emissions reductions county-wide through its place-shaping activities and wider leadership role. The scale of potential influence here is much greater than with our estate and indirect emissions, but the degree of control we have over these wider emissions is also more limited.

The council seeks to take a pragmatic approach to supporting carbon reduction county-wide by prioritising the areas where we have the greatest opportunity to make positive change. This will be achieved across the sectoral themes set out below.

Transport

Our Local Transport Plan represents its overarching strategy in relation to transport infrastructure until 2036. This Climate Policy aligns with its goals but more specifically focuses on decarbonisation of transport through the following priorities:

- Working with transport providers, to continue to positively influence behaviour change and increase the range and number of sustainable travel options available to residents, visitors and businesses across Norfolk. This includes bus operators and building on the Enhanced Partnership relationship we already have in place with bus operators and implementing Norfolk's Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- To prioritise transport investment into more sustainable modes, such as public transport and active travel including micromobility options, to help support the journey to net zero. This is especially important in areas where there is poor air quality, and these will be prioritised.
- To prioritise investment into net zero initiatives, including implementation of our Electric Vehicle Strategy, as part of proactive transport network management, to help residents, visitors and businesses across Norfolk become more sustainable.
- To improve connectivity between rural areas and services in urban centres, with a focus on active travel and public transport.
- To focus on identifying the key risks from climate change and directing efforts to tackling these where they are likely to be most disruptive to journeys, especially on the most critical parts of the network.

The built environment

- Promote green skill development to support the domestic building retrofit agenda.
- Use our position to secure more resources, seek funding opportunities to support our partners in the retrofit agenda.
- With partners, help residents to understand and engage in retrofitting their homes by information provision and active promotion.
- Promote residential development that is sustainably located.

The commercial and industrial sector

- Support the Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Clean Growth Taskforce (and equivalent activity under successor arrangements) to facilitate behaviour change in the industrial and commercial sectors and encourage the sharing of best practice.
- Support the decarbonisation of the local commercial sector through continued funding schemes such as Carbon Charter.
- Work with local networks such as the LEP to support SMEs (small and medium enterprises) on their journey to net zero.

Energy

- Work with the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership to evolve our energy approach for Norfolk.
- Develop an energy strategy for Norfolk County Council aligned with our net zero agenda.
- Support national decarbonisation of the Grid by expanding appropriate renewable energy generation across the county.
- Support an Offshore Transmission Network to minimise the need for any onshore infrastructure associated with offshore wind farms.
- Support the upgrading of onshore transmission infrastructure where this provides appropriate benefits to Norfolk's residents and businesses and helps in delivering clean energy for housing and employment growth in Norfolk.

Digital solutions and connectivity

- Ensure high speed digital connectivity is made available to every property across Norfolk.
- Work to improve mobile phone coverage across Norfolk.
- Develop and allow free, universal access to IoT network connectivity.

Waste and circular economy

- **REDUCE:** use targeted messages and work with the Norfolk Waste Partnership (NWP) to drive behaviour change to help reduce the amount of waste produced with a strong focus on reducing food waste.
- **REUSE:** provide reuse facilities and promote and support opportunities for reuse and repair.
- **RECYCLE:** use targeted messages to increase recycling rates and drive down levels of contamination by working with the NWP. Provide easy to use and convenient recycling centre services, keep home composting as a priority and support the District, City and Borough Councils in their recycling services.
- **RECOVER:** focus on treatment and disposal options for residual waste that are sustainable and consider emissions and recovery, and that are flexible enough to allow for waste reduction and composition change.
- **POLICY:** influence the development of national policy to support the move to the circular economy and a shift from weight based to carbon-based performance metrics.
- **COSTS:** promote a total system approach to reducing costs with the Norfolk Waste Partnership and assessing the implications of future funding changes on waste services and the possibility of an emissions trading scheme and the changes they will lead to.

Focus area 4: Promoting a green economy for Norfolk

Technology improvements and government policy will drive demand for low carbon goods and services over the coming years. A workforce will be needed to match this,

so it is vital that Norfolk gets equipped with the skills to harness the opportunities of the green economy for jobs and business growth. Furthermore, promoting Norfolk as a sustainable tourism destination can help bring year-round value to the local economy. The strategic priorities for this theme include:

- Promote green skill development to support the development and installation of clean technologies to support decarbonisation county-wide.
- Grow the sustainable tourism sector to support year-round, well-paid, skilled careers.
- Support Norfolk's tourism and hospitality businesses to achieve Green Tourism accreditation.
- Provide access to green finance and investments through the Norfolk Investment Framework.

Focus area 5: Climate adaptation

The impacts of climate change and the risks to Norfolk's communities and natural places are set to intensify over the coming decades. As a council, we must ensure that the vital local services that we provide are resilient in the face of climate hazards, and that we support the resilience of Norfolk's communities to the risks brought by coastal and inland flooding and extreme heat among others. Our strategic priorities to this end include:

- Work with the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of East Anglia to understand better the risks of climate change impacts on Norfolk and potential adaptation responses.
- Ensure new infrastructure is designed against appropriate assumptions on the future impacts of climate change.
- Learn lessons from the extreme heat experienced in summer 2022 and the implications for public services.
- Be the voice of Norfolk residents to government bodies like the Environment Agency on securing appropriate investment on adaptation across the county.

Focus area 6: Ensure nature has space to recover and grow

Norfolk is a county of diverse and unique landscapes, some of which are recognised as internationally important wildlife havens. The natural environment also provides invaluable services for people, including water and air purification, flood protection, recreation opportunities, and carbon storage in soil and vegetation. These 'ecosystem services' are a vital component of climate change mitigation and adaptation in the county. The Council's Environmental Policy represents the principal policy expression on this theme, but complementary strategic priorities relating to climate include the following:

- Produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Norfolk that prioritises areas for action focusing on species, habitats, landscapes and land use of importance to Norfolk with potential for carbon capture.
- Embrace nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and mitigation.
- Ensure that our actions on land use and nature recovery reflect the interests of the farming community and public at large.
- In September 2024, we will put in place a new robust and resilient monitoring scheme for biodiversity.

Focus area 7: Engage and collaborate

Cutting across all the other focus areas is the need for engagement and collaboration. A key role for the council as the upper-tier authority in Norfolk is to use our position to bring together the businesses, academic, public and community and voluntary sectors towards delivering the right changes for the county. Our strategic priorities on this theme include the following:

- Work closely with the Norfolk Climate Change Partnership and the Integrated Care System to take forward mitigation and adaptation activities where collaboration can add maximum value.
- Create a carbon conscious culture at NCC by ensuring we engage with staff on the climate agenda.
- Develop and deliver a communications strategy to ensure that stakeholders are aware of the Climate Strategy, understand their role and know how to get involved.
- Facilitate a series of targeted engagement workshops with key stakeholders to refine specific aspects of the strategy and developing evidence-based action plans.