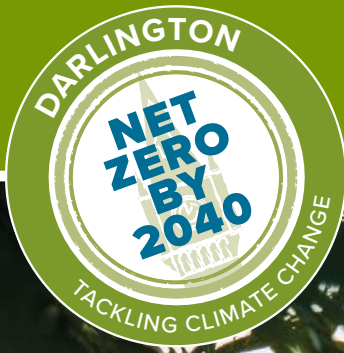




DARLINGTON
Borough Council



Climate Change Strategy

Darlington Borough Council
2023

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Foreword



Councillor Chris McEwan

Deputy Leader of Darlington Borough Council
Economy Portfolio Holder

Climate change is one of the greatest threats that face us, as a society and as a local authority. In Darlington, we have some of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK, and we know that those residents will feel the effects of climate change more severely than people in more affluent areas.

However, it is vital that the Council acts as a leader locally, regionally and nationally where we can. We must make the changes necessary to protect the future for our children and grandchildren. We are, of course, in a time of increasing financial pressures on Council budgets. Those financial pressures will make this task harder.

That is why we have brought forward our target for the Council to be net zero to 2040, in recognition of the importance of the issue. We cannot do this alone - as an organization, we are responsible for less than 5% of the wider Borough emissions. However, we do have the ability to persuade others to join us along the journey. We want to encourage young people to get involved. We will work with the business and academic community to demystify the science. And will provide information to our residents to enable them to make more sustainable choices.

Introduction

1. The 2023 report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for everyone.
2. Human activity has led to over 1°C of global warming from pre-industrial levels, which is resulting in damaging impacts on lives, infrastructure and ecosystems that are apparent today. As a result, we need to both rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.
3. The predicted impacts of climate change in Darlington include:
 - (a) more frequent and intense flooding,
 - (b) drought,
 - (c) episodes of extreme heat and stormier conditions.
4. These impacts are expected to lead to:
 - (a) an increase in heat-related deaths, particularly amongst the elderly,
 - (b) damage to essential infrastructure,
 - (c) reduced availability of drinking water,
 - (d) increased cost and scarcity of food,
 - (e) disruption to supply chains and service provision, and
 - (f) impact on habitats from rising temperature and weather events and from invasive species.
5. We are already seeing some of these changes.
6. The Council has been on a mission to reduce its emissions since 2010. In July 2019, the Council set its first net zero carbon emissions target. In July 2023, an ambitious target of 2040 for the Council's own emissions was declared.
7. The actions we have taken so far have successfully reduced the Council's carbon emissions by over 50% (as of 2022/23). Despite these successes we understand that we need to lead by example and do more, faster.
8. Our more ambitious target however, does come with potential pressures on our finances.
9. This strategy focuses on our plans to tackle the climate change emergency and the principles we have put in place to support the actions we need to take.
10. Alongside the work we are doing internally. We must use our position as a leader in the Borough to help everyone join us on the journey to become a resilient Darlington.
11. Our most vulnerable residents are at greatest risk; climate change has the most impact on those least able to do anything about it.
12. The strategy will be reviewed regularly so that we can embrace improvements in technology and any changes in government policy.

Managing the Council's own emissions

Principles for action

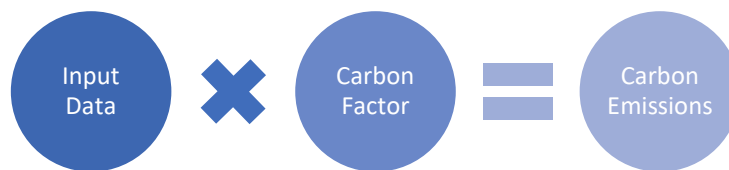
13. There are four core principles which underpin the actions within this strategy and are critical to our successful delivery of our goal of reducing emissions. These principles should be considered as an overarching hierarchy for action, and will set the direction for future work, and determine which actions are brought forward first.
14. The actions we choose to take will also see co-benefits, such as cleaner air and improved health and wellbeing. We must ensure that we identify and account for these additional gains, as well as ensuring that whatever actions we take are fair and equitable for all residents.
 - (a) **Reduce our overall energy consumption**
 - (i) **Increase the efficiency of our estate**
 - (ii) **Proactively manage our buildings to reduce energy demand**
 - (iii) **Train staff to be carbon literate so they change their behaviours.**
 - (b) **Reduce our demand for fossil fuel-based energy**
 - (i) **Move away from gas heating**
 - (ii) **Increase on site renewables**
 - (iii) **Support renewables with batteries**
 - (c) **Contribute to a greener grid**
 - (i) **Increase off-site renewables**
 - (d) **Sequester carbon**
 - (i) We would prefer not to rely on offsetting to achieve our target but to reduce our emissions so that offsetting is only required for a small proportion of our emissions.
 - (ii) Our [Tree and Woodland Strategy](#) sets out our aims and actions to manage and increase the number of trees in Darlington. These trees will not only provide offsetting opportunities but will also help protect, improve and maintain biodiversity within the district by providing habitats for many species.
 - (iii) Creation or restoration of alternative carbon sinks, such as wildflower meadows, grassland, and freshwater bodies and associated habitats is also an important element of carbon sequestration.
 - (iv) Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are the preferred approach to managing surface water runoff from hard surfaces. The Darlington Local Plan

states that developments of 10 or more dwellings and other developments with a floor space of 1,000m² or more must incorporate SuDS unless it can be demonstrated that it would be inappropriate.

- (v) We are a member of the Tees Valley Local Nature Partnership Steering Group and are working with them to protect and enhance our natural capital.
- (vi) We will be working closely with the Tees Valley Combined Authority to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for our region.

Methodology

- 15. Our target concentrates on those emissions we can measure and have direct control over.
- 16. The carbon footprint has been built from numerous data sources, with a specified calculation methodology applied to each.



- 17. We have and will continue to use the UK Government GHG Conversion Factors for Company Reporting, which are issued jointly by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs.
- 18. To establish the baseline, conversion factors for 2010/11 were used.
- 19. Conversion factors are updated annually, with the release of new data sets from UK Government.
- 20. If at any future point in time, additional data becomes available to us, we will include this within our reporting, but we must ensure that only robust data which is derived from an accurate and credible source is used to support our emissions calculations. If the quality of data deteriorates over time; or if it becomes unavailable, it will be reviewed, and a decision made on whether to exclude it from the baseline and future emissions targets.
- 21. Emissions data is reported annually, with a commentary provided for updates during the year. We are exploring how we can report emissions more frequently.

Our carbon emissions

Our target

22. The Council will achieve net zero carbon emissions across our own estate by 2040.

Scope

23. The scope of the Council's carbon reporting includes areas where carbon emissions are significant, where there is the ability to control and directly influence, to deliver change, and where there is robust data to demonstrate progress. This includes the:

- (a) Corporate estate.
- (b) Energy for streetlights, traffic lights, and signs.
- (c) Business mileage.
- (d) School estate for those schools still under LEA control.
- (e) Residential/care homes/communal areas of flats.

24. Across these areas of our operations emissions relating to the following sources have been included:

- (a) Power (electricity)
- (b) Heat (gas and oil)
- (c) Mileage
- (d) Fuel (diesel, gas oil)

Corporate Estate

25. All buildings which we operate council services from, or which we lease, but retain responsibility for the bill management and payment are included within the scope. This includes:

- (a) Town Hall
- (b) Central House
- (c) Leisure Centres
- (d) Theatre
- (e) Community Centres, Children's Centres
- (f) Gypsy and Traveller sites
- (g) Highway Depots
- (h) Cemetery and Crematorium
- (i) Salt Barns
- (j) Libraries and Museums
- (k) Allotments
- (l) Car Parks
- (m) CCTV
- (n) Leased buildings where we retain responsibility for bill management and payment

26. We will be reporting our electricity (scope 2) emissions using both location-based and market-based reporting as is considered good practice.
- (a) A location-based method reflects the average emissions intensity of grids on which energy consumption occurs (using mostly grid-average emission factor data).
 - (b) A market-based method reflects emissions from electricity that companies have purposefully chosen (or their lack of choice).

Streetlights, Traffic Lights and Signs

27. Although primarily consisting of the energy to power streetlights across the Borough, this category also includes power to light bridges and subways, operate signs and signals, and to power other fixed highway electrical equipment such as subway pumps.

Business Mileage

28. Business mileage is made up of data related to:
- (a) Grey Fleet – miles travelled by staff in their own car for council purposes.
 - (b) Corporate Fleet – miles travelled by staff in allocated, buses and minibuses owned by the Council, providing services to residents.

Excluded from this baseline are miles undertaken by contractors or suppliers, public transport, and air travel.

School Estate

29. Most schools in the Borough are now academies. As such, we have limited influence on their energy use. A number receive their electricity through the Council's contract, but no review of energy use is conducted.
30. The Council has visibility of the utility bills for the schools within the contract, but not for any schools outside of that. Therefore, the data for the school estate relates only to those schools and nurseries still under LEA control.

Residential/Care Homes/Communal Areas

31. The scope of our target covers those areas where we retain responsibility for bill payment or management. Therefore, we will include communal areas in flats but not the individual flats as the tenants manage their own energy bills.

Renewables

32. Renewable generation will be reported alongside our carbon emissions.
33. Where the Council has solar panels on a Council owned and used building, energy is directly taken and used from this renewable source. This reduces the overall grid energy consumed, and therefore the Council sees a reduction in carbon emissions. We

will report the amount of renewable energy generated across all our assets alongside our carbon emissions.

Managing future changes

34. If data changes during the reporting period, new emissions will be added or removed at that point. The baseline will not be adjusted. Any changes will be explained in the appropriate year's commentary.

Out of scope

35. Emissions from the following sources are currently excluded from reporting due to lack of data:
- (a) Energy use in Council housing where we do not retain responsibility for bill payment or management.
 - (b) Commuting.
 - (c) Disposal of waste from buildings.
 - (d) Business mileage using public transport.
36. A housing and climate change strategy is in production. This will help improve the energy efficiency of our council homes and reduce tenants' bills.

Baseline

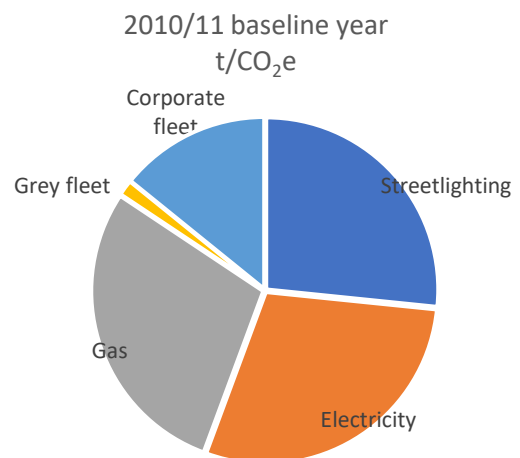
For 2010/11 our baseline is 13,100 CO₂e

37. Our baseline year is 2010/11 because this is the date of our original carbon reduction target and allows us to recognise the work that has been done from that date.

38. The emissions were attributed across these categories as follows:

- (a) Streetlighting.
- (b) Corporate estate.
- (c) Business miles in own car (grey fleet).
- (d) Fleet mileage.

39. Progress reports are published annually on the Sustainable Darlington webpages and include highlights of actions taken over that reporting year.



Adaptation

40. Darlington Borough Council's ambition is for a carbon neutral council by 2040 and plans are being put in place to achieve that. However, we are still at risk from unavoidable climate change resulting from greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere.
41. It is vital for our residents that we can continue to deliver our services and for our staff to be able to do their jobs in a safe environment. Our business continuity plans provide us with the tools to deal with emergencies but planning for future scenarios now will mean that we will not have to trigger those plans so often. Adaptation, of course, needs to be viewed as a system-wide approach, however investing in our future now will save money over time. We can avoid costs of constant recovery and, most importantly, our most vulnerable residents will still receive the services they rely on.

Principles for action

42. There are three strands to this element of work:
 - (a) Ensure the Council adapts its services to climate change.
 - (b) Signpost businesses to information on how they can adapt.
 - (c) Support residents in simple changes they can make.
43. A gap analysis has been conducted across Council services to identify what is already in place and what more can be done. The resulting actions are included in the revised action plan and will be reported on in the same way as emission reduction actions.
44. Following the additional focus on external engagement in the July council's revised climate emergency motion, we should conduct a borough-wide risk assessment, using the Climate Change Risk Assessment¹ report from the Climate Change Committee.
45. The Climate Change Committee recommended to government that local authorities should be added to the Adaptation Reporting Power designated to government in the Climate Change Act 2008. Carrying out such a risk assessment at the earliest opportunity will give us a head start should this power be enacted.

Influencing externally

46. We have a leading role in the Borough, so we have a duty to work with and encourage businesses, third sector, and public sector organisations to reduce emissions and ensure they are adapted.
47. Equally, we must support our residents, to do what they can to reduce their own emissions and become more resilient to the effects.
48. As well as the climate change strategy and action plan, there are several plans and strategies across the Council that will help us to do this.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-climate-change-risk-assessment-2022>

49. One of these is the Health Impact Assessment (HIA). A HIA is a practical approach used to evaluate the impacts a proposed development may have on the health and wellbeing of different groups of people.
50. The HIA results in recommendations to decision makers as to how the positive health impacts of a scheme may be increased, and any negative impacts reduced. Climate change impacts the social and environmental determinants of health and is therefore an important consideration in the HIA process. It is therefore included as a key theme in Darlington's Comprehensive HIA Tool, which is to be published soon.
51. We have significant emissions linked with our procurement and commissioning activities.
52. The Social Value Act requires us to take account of economic, social, and environmental impacts of procurements. The Council applies the Local Government Association's Themes Outcomes and Measures (TOMs) calculator to its large formal tenders. This includes savings in CO₂ emissions.
53. We will be working with businesses involved in our supply chain to persuade and influence them to reduce their own emissions and ensure they are resilient to climate change.
54. We will also work with our externally commissioned care providers to ensure that they are able to move towards more sustainable and resilient ways of working.
55. An air quality strategy is in production. Although this will be focusing primarily on nitrogen dioxide and particulate emissions from transport, many of the actions that will improve our air quality will also help with our climate change ambitions.

Communication Plan

56. It is important that there are clear communications paths both internally and externally to inform, engage, and influence.
57. A communications plan will be developed with the Communications Team, using all mechanisms for engaging both with staff and councillors and engaging with businesses and residents. A dedicated email address (climate@darlington.gov.uk) has been set up.

Reporting

58. A full public report outlining the progress made against our net carbon zero target is published on an annual basis. The key performance indicator will be total tonnes of carbon.

59. Borough emissions are reported through our corporate targets and will be tracked against the government issued emissions inventory.

Governance

60. A strong and robust governance framework to this work is another critical success factor.
61. The scale and magnitude of the change required to deliver this target means that overall responsibility needs to sit at the Executive Leadership Team level or above. However, a variety of key services need to own and drive forward this agenda. Lead Officers are tasked with investigating mechanisms and cost benefits to reducing their carbon footprint in their own department.

Existing Governance Arrangements

62. Within the Council there are robust governance arrangements, both at an officer and member level, to oversee both key decisions, as well as significant actions such as procurement and capital expenditure.
63. These existing mechanisms present an opportunity to ensure that alignment with the ambition and actions within this strategy are being realised.