



# Northumberland

County Council

**COMMITTEE : CABINET**

**DATE: 7<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2023**

---

## **Setting the Scope and Targets for the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26**

**Report of:** Councillor Sanderson, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Climate Change.

**Lead Officer:** Simon Neilson, Executive Director of Place and Regeneration

---

### **Purpose of report**

To agree the scope and targets to be addressed in detail in the Council's Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 and to ensure alignment with the Council's Environment Policy Statement.

## **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree that the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 is a key element of the Council's wider Environmental Policy Statement, which commits the Council to strengthen the work being undertaken to maintain, protect and enhance the environment through a broad range of policies and activities, including active travel, nature recovery, planning, procurement, public health/disease control and general environmental services provision.
2. Agree that the Climate Change Action Plan will include a focus on greenhouse gas reduction and climate change resilience through nature in collaboration with the Council's strategies for wider ecology and biodiversity issues.
3. Agree to restate the Carbon Neutral target for the county by 2030 and clarify that it refers to carbon dioxide only.
4. Agree a new target to work with Government and other key stakeholders to achieve net-zero for all greenhouse gases for the county of Northumberland by 2040, a strategy for which will be developed as part of the new Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26.
5. Agree that the local and regional adaptation response to the risks and impacts of a changing climate be included in the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26.
6. Agree a new target to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, a strategy for which will be developed as part of the new Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26.
7. Agree that the scope of the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 continue to only include direct, territorial emissions (i.e. those produced *in* Northumberland) as its focus for projects but that it should do more to raise awareness amongst stakeholders of scope 3 (indirect) emissions (i.e. those produced *outside* of Northumberland) and how they can be reduced.
8. Agree the core structure of the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 including a commitment to set out a strategy for planning in relation to the climate change targets.

## **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report recommends a number of key decisions which will set the foundations for the new Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26. That report will be relevant to the following key themes in the Corporate Plan for 2023-2026

- Driving Economic Growth – The new Climate Change Action Plan will focus on delivering economic growth through green jobs and infrastructure.
- Achieving Value For Money – The new Climate Change Action Plan will aim to reduce costs of living for heating, power and transport through a transition to low-carbon and low-cost technologies.
- Tackling Inequalities - supporting a just transition as part of tackling inequalities.

## **Key issues**

1. Northumberland County Council recognises that maintaining, protecting and enhancing the high-quality environment of the county is essential to support the delivery of its three key corporate priorities of Achieving Value for Money, Tackling

Inequality and Driving Economic Growth and that the Council, along with businesses, residents and other stakeholders all have an active role to play to ensure we pass on a healthy, clean and sustainable environment to future generations. In recognition of its key role in tackling environmental issues the County Council has now adopted an overarching environment policy statement that clearly sets out the Council's responsibilities and commitments across a broad and diverse range of environmental policy and service delivery activities being undertaken to maintain, protect and enhance the environment. The policy statement aims to help to raise awareness and improve the level of public engagement on these important environmental matters. The Council's Climate Change Strategy and Climate Change Action Plan are both key parts of the Council's wider environmental commitments.

2. The Council's current Climate Change Action Plan will expire at the end of this year. A new Climate Change Action Plan covering the years 2024-26 is required which will reflect on the delivery of the first action plan and set out in detail the Council's approach to climate change for the next three years.
3. Due to new data and developments, the Council's Statement of Intent published in June 2019, needs revisiting and updating with additional targets to reflect the changes in our understanding of Northumberland's contribution to climate change. In particular, the Council needs to set out its ambition for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions beyond carbon dioxide, to include both methane and nitrous oxide which make up a significant proportion of the county's greenhouse gas emissions.
4. Following COP26, it is best practice to combine climate mitigation measures (i.e. reduction of emissions) with adaptation measures (i.e. adapting to the impacts of climate change). This will need to be a new element of the Climate Change Action Plan incorporating our actions to mitigate risks such as flooding, coastal erosion, wildfires, energy security, infectious diseases and extreme weather events.
5. The Council is on target to achieve its target of a 50% reduction in its own carbon emissions against 2010 levels by 2025. It is therefore necessary to set out plans for further decarbonisation beyond this target.
6. The Council recognises that it has a key role to play in supporting nature recovery as set out in the 'Northumberland Stewardship and Rural Growth Investment Programme – Nature Recovery Response' which was approved by Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023. There is a need to ensure that the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 is closely aligned and complimentary to the Council's strategies to preserve our natural environment and address issues of biodiversity and ecological decline, ensuring that harmful greenhouse gases are reduced whilst the environment is protected and enhanced.
7. The focus of the climate change action plan on territorial emissions risks a perceived diminishing of the issue of global climate change beyond Northumberland and a lack of understanding amongst stakeholders of the greenhouse gas emissions produced outside of the county but for which they are responsible or can influence.
8. Engagement events with residents have drawn attention to the importance of aligning with the planning system to consider climate change and sustainability as

well as being transparent about our financial investments and pension contributions to climate change.

## **Background**

In June 2019, Northumberland County Council declared a Climate Emergency and published a statement of intent which set out two key targets:

1. Northumberland County Council is committed to working with Government to achieve carbon neutrality for the county of Northumberland by 2030.
2. To reduce its own carbon footprint by 50% from the 2010 baseline.

In early 2020 a climate change programme manager was appointed and in early 2021 a detailed action plan was published setting out the Council's approach to the above targets over the time period 2021-23. Following publication, a dedicated team was recruited to deliver the plan.

The first climate change action plan focused on seven key priority action areas

1. Policy
2. Partnerships and engagement
3. Heating new and existing buildings
4. Renewable energy generation
5. Transport
6. Carbon Sequestration
7. Waste

This plan will expire at the end of 2023 and a new version is therefore due. This document sets out the scope of the new climate change action plan and recommends a number of key decisions for inclusion. This will allow officers to progress the plans development over the coming months.

**Issue 1:** The Council's current Climate Change Action Plan will expire at the end of this year. A new Climate Change Action Plan covering the years 2024-26 is required which will reflect on the delivery of the first action plan and set out in detail the Council's approach to climate change for the next three years.

## **1. New Data and Developments**

### **1.1. Additional greenhouse gas inclusion**

At the outset of our work to address Northumberland's contribution to climate change and the targets set at the time, the data available from national government regarding greenhouse gas emissions from the county of Northumberland only included carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). As a result, the 2030 target for carbon neutrality was set.

In 2022, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) added two additional greenhouse gases to the Local Authority level emissions data; methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). These are measured as carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) for ease of comparison to carbon dioxide. The inclusion of these additional greenhouse gases has dramatically changed Northumberland's net emissions from 1,233.83 kilotonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>

only in 2021 to 2,068.97 kt CO<sub>2</sub>e including methane and nitrous oxide. Figure 1 below shows the trajectory of greenhouse gas emissions including CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>O since 2005.

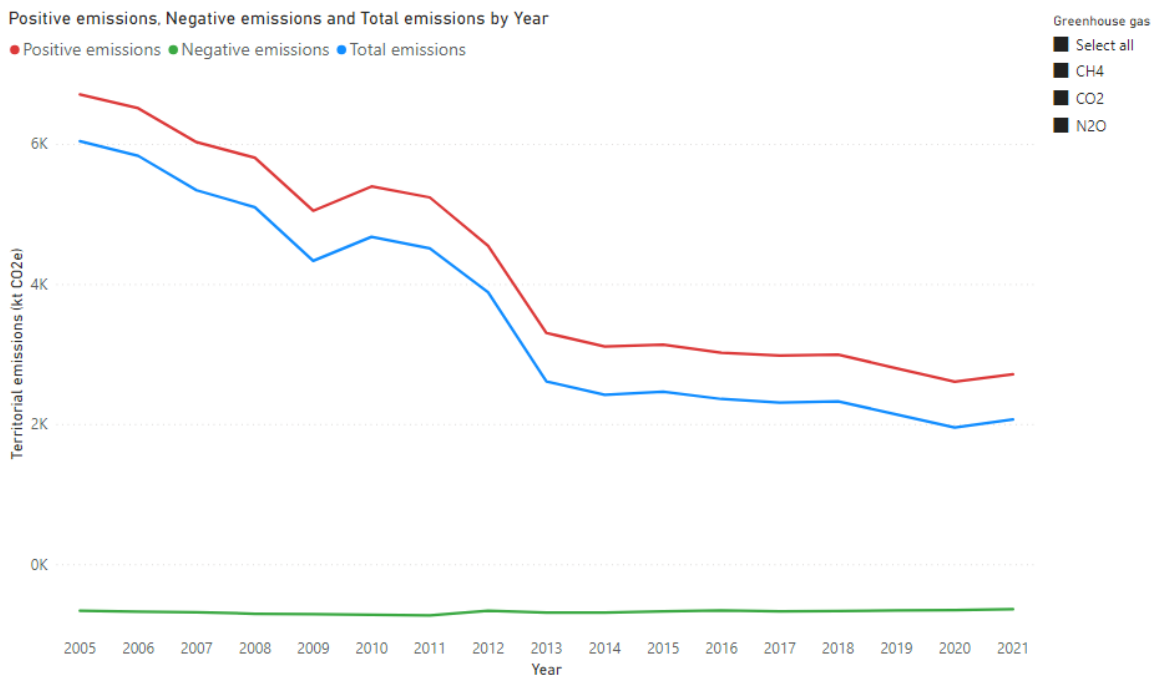


Figure 1 - Greenhouse Gas Emissions for Northumberland 2005 – 2021

Our existing statement of intent and portfolio of projects contained in the climate change action plan 2021-23 focus solely on carbon dioxide.

It is therefore recommended that the Council restate its Carbon Neutral target for the county by 2030 and clarify that it refers to carbon dioxide only (**Recommendation 3**).

**Issue 2:** Due to new data and developments, the Council’s Statement of Intent published in June 2019, needs revisiting and updating with additional targets to reflect the changes in our understanding of Northumberland’s contribution to climate change

The primary source of methane and nitrous oxide emissions is Agriculture, Soils and Livestock. For CO<sub>2</sub> only emissions, agriculture contributed 18.78 ktCO<sub>2</sub> in 2021, 2% of total carbon emissions. When including Methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and Nitrous Oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), this sector contributed 607.6 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e, 29% of total emissions.

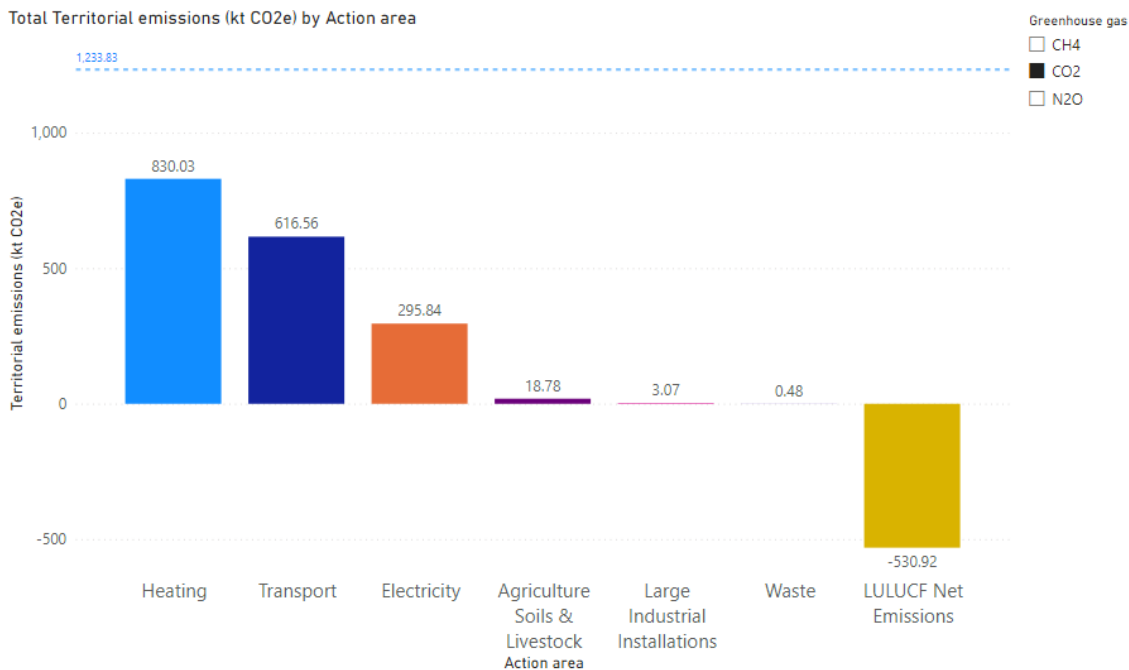


Figure 2 - Northumberland emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> only by sector in 2021

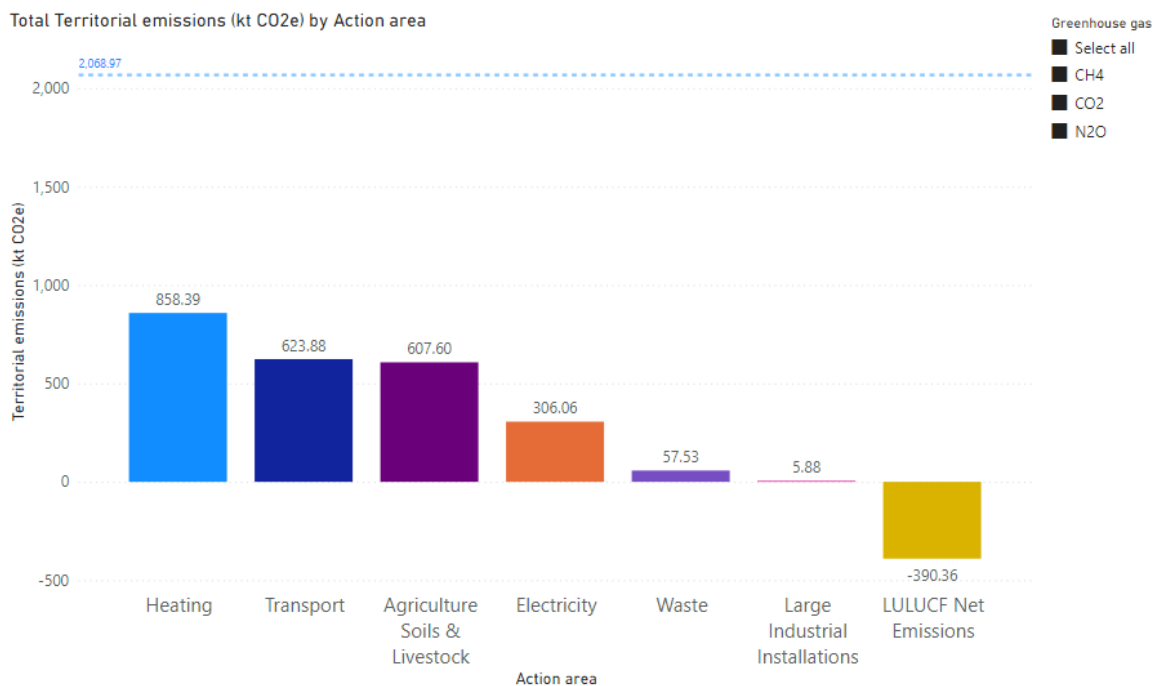


Figure 3 - Northumberland emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>O by sector in 2021

**Issue 3:** The inclusion of methane and nitrous oxide in national data for local authority level emissions has increased the county’s emissions footprint by 68%. These additional greenhouse gas emissions are largely from the agricultural sector. The Council needs to set out its ambition for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions beyond carbon dioxide.

There are no current plans or projects being pursued by NCC to reduce emissions of methane or nitrous oxide.

It is therefore recommended that NCC adopt an additional target alongside its pledge of carbon neutrality by 2030 and commits to working with Government to achieve net-zero for all greenhouse gases for the county of Northumberland by 2040 (**Recommendation 4**).

2040 has been selected as this is aligned to other industry bodies such as the NFU alongside governmental targets in their ambition to reduce emissions from the agricultural sector. It would allow the Council time to understand the potential solutions and our role in facilitating an economically balanced transition to climate friendly agricultural practices in our rural county in collaboration with key stakeholders such as the NFU, Tenant Farmers Association and Countryside Landowners Association.

A strategy relating to this new target will be addressed in the new climate change action plan 2024-26

### **Changes to Government Policy**

The Prime Minister announced changes to policy related to the Government's climate change targets in October 2023. These included:

1. A change to the date by which the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles will be banned from 2030 to 2035.
2. A change to the date by which the sale of new oil boilers will be banned from 2026 to 2035
3. Potential changes to consistent recycling reforms
4. Minimum energy efficiency standards regulations scrapped or postponed.

These changes are likely to have an impact on the Council's ability to reach its county-wide targets as they take key policy drivers beyond the 2030 date by which we aim to reach carbon neutrality. That said, additional details have been announced which will continue to support a decarbonisation of transport and heat including:

1. The Zero Emissions Mandate will still come into force from 1<sup>st</sup> January, requiring manufacturers to meet minimum targets for selling EVs. Car makers will be obliged to ensure that at least 22% of cars they sell have zero tailpipe emissions. That quota will rise steadily, reaching 80% by 2030.
2. The Boiler Upgrade Scheme which provides grants for homeowners to purchase low-carbon heating alternatives will be increased by 50% to £7,500.

These changes to policy highlight the importance of continuing to work with National Government as well as our communities, businesses, schools and other stakeholders to achieve our climate change commitments.

### **1.2. Adaptation to climate change impacts**

The previous climate change action plan focused entirely on the mitigation of climate change, that is to say the reduction of Northumberland's contribution to global climate change through emissions of greenhouse gases. It is now clear that the expectation of

both the public and international best practice is that adaptation measures are included in climate change strategies.

Adaptation measures include but are not limited to the prevention and/or response to the following:

1. Flooding;
2. Coastal erosion;
3. Wildfires;
4. Other extreme weather events and their impacts;
5. Infectious diseases;
6. Health impacts of temperature extremes.

**Issue 4:** Following COP26, it is best practice to combine climate mitigation measures (i.e. reduction of emissions) with adaptation measures (i.e. adapting to the impacts of climate change). This will need to be a new element of the Climate Change Action Plan incorporating our actions to mitigate risks such as flooding, coastal erosion, wildfires, energy security, infectious diseases and extreme weather events.

In reality, these risks are considered and assessed already in terms of both prevention and response.

Within NCC, our Planning, Flooding and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) and Public Health teams already consider the impact of climate change in their daily work and the need for adaptation measures. Going forward it is important that all services consider the implications of climate change and how services will need to adjust and adapt in response to a changing environment.

Our response to climate change related events is managed through the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF), a multi-agency partnership consisting of Category 1 and Category 2 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004), and organisations that are required to prepare for an emergency in the LRF area. These include the emergency services, Local Authorities, Health Services, Environment Agency, Maritime Coastguard Agency volunteer agencies and utility companies.

Risks associated with climate change are considered in light of their increasing likelihood and a detailed response has been published under the title *Northumbria Community Risk Register 2021-23*.

It is therefore recommended that the new climate change action plan includes a section referencing both the local and regional strategy for adapting to and responding to the potential impacts of a changing climate as set out above. This section of the plan will be developed in collaboration with key existing stakeholders (**Recommendation 5**).

## **2. Northumberland County Council's Emissions**

In its original statement of intent, NCC set out its commitment to reduce its own carbon footprint by 50% from the 2010 baseline.



This means taking our annual carbon footprint from 53,942 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2009/10 to 25,230 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> by the end of 2024/25.

We have recently calculated our carbon emissions for the most recent financial year 2022/23 at 26,143 tCO<sub>2</sub> meaning we are ahead of target for this year and on course to reach our 2025 target.

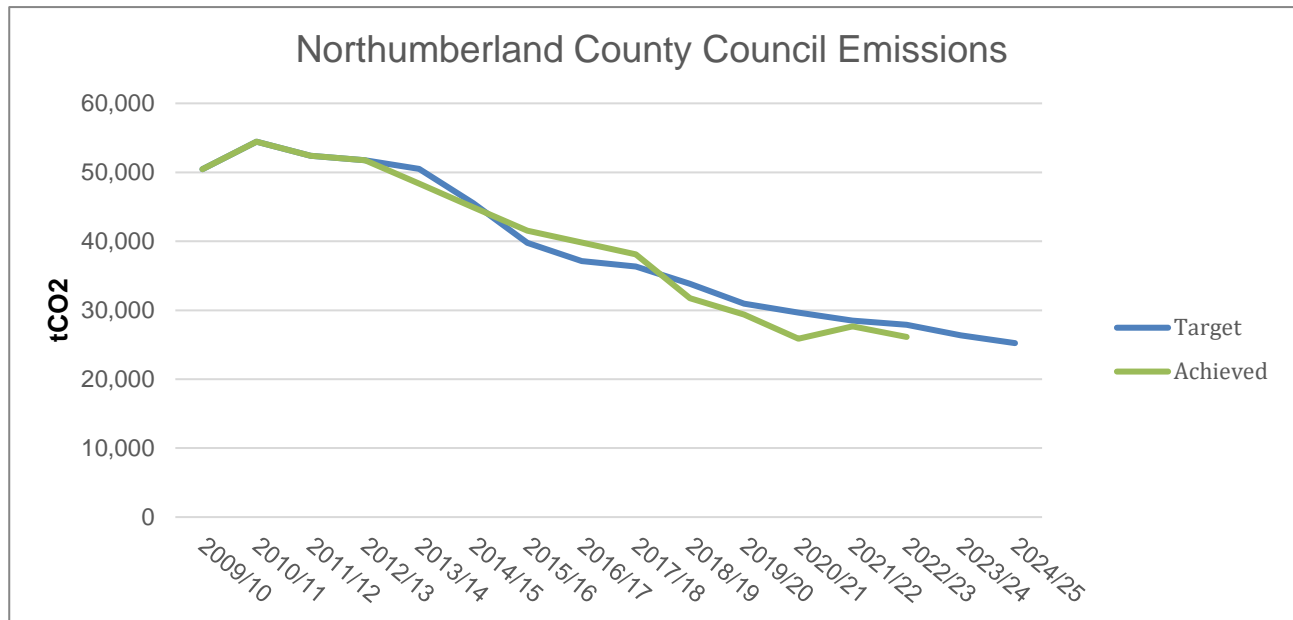


Figure 4 - Northumberland County Council Carbon Emissions since 2009/10

The target date of 2025 will fall within the timeframe of the next Climate Change Action Plan. It is therefore recommended that the Council review our targets as an organisation for internal emissions reduction.

Work has been undertaken to model scenarios for reaching carbon neutrality as an organisation. We have calculated the carbon sequestration of the woodland owned by Northumberland County Council as -13,365 tCO<sub>2</sub> which would leave a remaining reduction of 11,865 tCO<sub>2</sub> to reduce between 2025 and 2030 to reach carbon neutrality. There are a variety of viable routes to reaching this target which can be explored in depth as part of the climate change action plan 2024-26.

**Issue 5:** The Council is on target to achieve its target of a 50% reduction in its own carbon emissions against 2010 levels by 2025. It is therefore necessary to set out plans for further decarbonisation beyond this target.

It is therefore recommended that NCC adopt a new target to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030 in line with our ambitions for the wider county. A strategy for achieving this will be developed as part of the new climate change action plan 2024-26 (**Recommendation 6**).

### 3. Defining Scope

The climate change statement of intent, published in 2019 set challenging targets for Northumberland County Council. The additional targets set out in this paper are also ambitious.

It is important however that the scope of the climate change action plan is agreed and that areas out of scope are also defined.

### **3.1. Ecology and biodiversity**

Throughout the engagement we have had with residents and other stakeholders across the period of the current Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23, it has become clear that wider environmental and ecological concerns such as biodiversity, habitat protection, restoration and water quality are extremely important to our residents and should be addressed alongside efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

To respond to these concerns, the Council declared an ecological emergency in July 2023 and has published a strategy to address ecological concerns in Northumberland.

The Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 will sit alongside wider environmental strategies and, form a key part of the Council's approach to preserving and enhancing our natural environment. **(Recommendation 1)**

**Issue 6:** The Council has now declared an ecological emergency and there is a need to ensure that the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 is closely aligned and complimentary to the Council's strategies to preserve our natural environment and address issues of biodiversity and ecological decline, ensuring that harmful greenhouse gases are reduced whilst the environment is protected and enhanced.

It is therefore recommended that environmental concerns beyond those which directly impact greenhouse gas emissions are the subject of separate but complimentary strategies, working in tandem. This means in practice that issues such as tree planting, peatland restoration, regenerative farming practices etc. would remain in scope as they directly impact greenhouse gas emissions. **(Recommendation 2)**

### **3.2. Emissions scopes**

Greenhouse gas emissions can be divided into scopes 1, 2 and 3 to help define who takes responsibility for them. These three scopes can be defined as follows:

- scope 1: direct emissions from owned or controlled sources.
- scope 2: indirect emissions from the generation of purchased energy.
- scope 3: indirect emissions which are not included in scope 2 e.g. from goods and supply chains that generate emissions outside the county for example during the manufacture of a product

When considering greenhouse gas emissions at a County-wide level, using the above scopes is challenging as the County Council does not own or control the majority of emissions, therefore we tend to refer to 'territorial' emissions which we take to mean all the greenhouse gas emissions produced inside the county of Northumberland. The climate

change action plan 2021-23 focussed entirely on reducing these emissions in order to meet our 2030 carbon neutral target.

**Issue 7:** The focus of the climate change action plan on territorial emissions risks a perceived diminishing of the issue of global climate change beyond Northumberland and a lack of understanding amongst stakeholders of the greenhouse gas emissions produced outside of the county but for which they are responsible or can influence.

Whilst it is right that emissions produced in county are and continue to be our focus, more could be done to raise awareness of emissions produced outside the county but for which our residents, businesses and other stakeholders are responsible (for instance goods imported into the county). It is therefore recommended that the new Climate Change Action Plan include reference to these emissions and do more to promote solutions. **(Recommendation 7)**

## 4. Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 Structure

### 4.1. Areas requiring additional detail

Engagement events with residents and other stakeholders have taken place across the county since the start of the year to inform the development of the plan. Many suggestions and ideas have been gathered, most of which fit into the existing action areas. The main area which it was felt has not been addressed in enough detail in the current plan is Planning.

**Issue 8:** Engagement events with residents have drawn attention to the importance of aligning with the planning system to consider climate change and sustainability.

It is therefore recommended that a dedicated section on planning be included which would require the input of the Planning team covering the following specific areas:

#### Planning

- Renewable energy developments including supplementary planning guidance.
- Work towards a Design Code.
- Role of Neighbourhood Plans.

#### Finance

Financial investment in the climate change programme will be proposed through the MTFP planning process for consideration as part of the wider Council budget.

It is proposed that the new climate change action plan builds on the content of the previous one alongside the new areas set out above. Priority action areas would therefore cover the following:

#### *Enabling*

- Policy
- Planning
- Investment

- Partnerships & Engagement

#### Delivering

- Priority projects
- Heat
- Transport
- Renewable Energy
- Agriculture
- Sequestration
- Waste
- Adaptation

It is therefore recommended that the core structure of the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26 as above is approved including a commitment to set out a strategy for planning in relation to the climate change targets. **(Recommendation 8)**

### 5. Conclusion

Adoption of the recommendations set out in this paper will provide the foundations for a strong and ambitious new climate change action plan. Upon approval, the timeframe and tasks required to develop the new climate change action plan will be set out and it will be added to the Council's forward plan.

Preparation of the new action plan will be a cross-organisational exercise led by the Climate Change Team but requiring input from right across the County Council.

Whilst the County Council will also lead on the delivery of the Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26, it should be noted that its success depends on collaboration and input across the county of Northumberland from residents, businesses, the third sector, schools, tourists and more. The County Council cannot deliver a carbon neutral or net-zero county alone.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	New climate change targets associated set out in this paper will require policy alignment which will be developed as part of the new climate change action plan 2024-26.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	This paper does not include any direct financial implications. Proposals for financial investment in the Climate Change Action Plan will be made as part of the MTFP planning round.
<b>Legal</b>	The additions to our climate change declarations contained in this paper are pledges and not legally binding.
<b>Procurement</b>	No direct implications but consideration of our approach to sustainability in procurement will need to be part of the new climate change action plan 2024-26.
<b>Human Resources</b>	None at this stage.
<b>Property</b>	Adoption of a target to become a carbon neutral council by 2030 will require collaboration with property services as a strategy is developed to meet this target.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached)  Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Whilst this paper does not directly impact issues of equality, the resulting strategic plans developed as part of the climate change action plan 2024-26 will consider equality throughout and will be subject to EIAs.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	This paper includes references to risks associated with climate change.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	N/A
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Residents have been engaged as part of the process for developing and setting the scope set out in this paper.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	This paper's core purpose is carbon reduction.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Contains a recommendation to include public health risks associated with climate change in the next action plan.
<b>Wards</b>	All.

## **Background papers:**

1. Corporate Plan  
(<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s14485/03.1%20CORPORATE%20PLAN%202023.pdf>)
2. Climate Action Plan  
([Climate-change-action-plan-2021-23.pdf \(northumberland.gov.uk\)](#))
3. Responding to Climate Change  
([https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Cabinet/201906111000/Agenda/42500\\_M9487.pdf](https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Cabinet/201906111000/Agenda/42500_M9487.pdf))
4. Responding to Climate Change, A statement of intent.  
([https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Cabinet/201906111000/Agenda/42501\\_M9487.pdf](https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Cabinet/201906111000/Agenda/42501_M9487.pdf))
5. Environmental Policy Statement  
(<https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s16884/03%20Environment%20Policy%20Statement.pdf>)

## **Report sign off.**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

	Full Name of Officer
Director of Law and Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer	Stephen Gerrard
Executive Director of Resources and Transformation (S151 Officer)	Jan Willis
Executive Director of Place and Regeneration	Paul Jones (on behalf of SN)
Chief Executive	Helen Patterson
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Glen Sanderson

## **Author and Contact Details**

Paul Jones  
Director of Environment and Transport  
Email: [paul.jones01@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:paul.jones01@northumberland.gov.uk)

Nick Johnston  
Senior Project Manager (Climate Change)  
Email: [nick.johnston@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:nick.johnston@northumberland.gov.uk)