

Action for our environment



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Introduction



Keith Melton, Chair of the Green Liberal Democrats

Four years ago, Green Liberal Democrats (GLD) helped to produce a pamphlet, in partnership with the LGA Lib Dem Group, containing great examples of Lib-Dem-led initiatives on environmental issues in our councils. With a huge set of local elections coming up this year, we thought we would update the examples from around the country and we have teamed up once again with the Lib Dem Group at the LGA (Local Government Association) and ALDC (Association of Lib Dem Councillors) to do this.

Wow! There are some fabulous examples of what Lib Dems do when we have the POWER to change the world. Indeed, there are so many great ideas here that, if you have even the least sense of environmental anxiety and responsibility, you will be delighted with the contents of this publication. And, if it doesn't motivate you to match these initiatives in your local area, I have no idea of what will!

I wanted this introduction to whet your appetite to read on by mentioning just a few of these ideas and achievements. I don't have enough space here to mention them all, but I know you will not be disappointed by any of the articles that follow.

We have the "World-leading City" of York, one of 122 cities awarded an A listing for climate action leadership by the Carbon Disclosure Project, with help from nearby Leeds University.

You can read about the waste-recycling leadership of Three Rivers District Council under Leader, Councillor Sarah Nelmes. Indeed, four of the top five English councils for waste recycling are Lib-Dem-led. Over the border in Wales, Lib Dem led Powys is doing even better!

It does not rely on the size of councils to be leaders in their fields. Barnstaple Town Council shows that, whatever level of council you work on, you can really change the world locally! I am particularly fascinated by the “Carbon Pledge-O-meter” mentioned by contributor Councillor Janet Coates - Chair of the Environment Committee on Barnstaple Town Council.

Bedford Borough Council’s 62 per cent reduction in carbon emissions between 2011-2018 shows the importance of measurement. I was delighted with the Archimedes Screw on the River Great Ouse. Every council should have a “Pothole Hit Squad” and promote investment in their cycle lanes.

In the Highlands of Scotland, Councillor Ross Moreland talks of motivation. I won’t steal his quote about WHY we are Lib Dems – but when you read it you will surely know that it’s true!

By now, you should have noticed that our examples come from all around the country, indeed, the countries and regions of the UK, wherever Lib Dems hold power.

In Wales, too, Lib Dems there have been thinking about ‘Wellbeing’, an important concept in Green Liberal Democracy. Councillor Jackie Charlton asks... “Should we be seeking to drive a similar proposal in England to underpin future generations?” – My answer is “YES! Unequivocally!”

The Wokingham Borough Council example shows that Lib Dems can really hit the ground running even in less than a year since taking control. They have been concentrating, on energy and the built environment – thinking in the long-term. Councillor Sarah Kerr (Executive Member for Climate Emergency) points out that councils can keep “up to 100 per cent” of the business rates on renewable energy installations, and should keep... “the maximum amount of business rates possible, and if possible, try and get them ringfenced for environmental schemes.”

In Bath and North East Somerset, Councillor Sarah Warren’s examples range from the very young to the very old. She tells us about the primary school getting “Passivhaus accreditation” and, at the other end of the age range, about the elderly care homes being upgraded with solar panels, LED lighting and heat pumps. All that plus thermal energy for their world-famous Roman Baths.

As well as whetting your appetite for continuing your reading, I also wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you to all our contributors and collaborators in bringing this publication to life. Thank you, especially to Rob Banks, Pippa Heylings and their Lib Dem colleagues at the Local Government Association; and to Ed Stephenson, Charles Quinn and colleagues at ALDC. Both LGA and ALDC shared the workload and the LGA Lib Dem Group the financial costs of production and distribution of this tome of Environmental Excellence.

Thanks also to our GLD Political Assistant, Sam Campling, who orchestrated the collation of examples and has seen them through to final production. Thanks, too, to all the GLD members who contributed efforts along the way to see these initiatives through and help to bring them to life. Finally, thanks to the support of the GLD Executive Committee in pushing to get these examples into the public realm.

Many of the article-writers are GLD members, of course, and will be “GLD-accredited” candidates again in the forthcoming elections. I suspect that many of the first batch of readers will be GLD accredited candidates, too, looking for examples we can share during our election campaigns later in 2023 (and beyond, of course). Good luck to us all. If you are yet to be accredited, please make sure you are a member of the Green Liberal Democrats and head to tinyurl.com/gldaccreditation.

Finally, I should say thank you to previous generations of environmental campaigners, for pushing hard for the kind of campaigns that have been brought to life so brilliantly in these pages. On a personal note, I have been campaigning on the environment for over 50 years, starting back in Liberal Party days, urging for more public transport to reduce the numbers of cars on the road in Greater Manchester. So, it is wonderfully rewarding to see many of those campaigns being turned into reality once Lib Dems get the opportunity of POWER to change the world.

Reducing carbon and aiming for net zero in York



Councillor Keith Aspden, Leader of City of York Council

Councillor Paula Widdowson, Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change

As a Liberal Democrat led council we have embarked on a major challenge since the 2019 election – to reduce carbon and become more climate resilient on our way to becoming net zero.

This major and challenging piece of work is underpinned by an ambitious and extensive climate change strategy with an accompanying 160-point action plan that sets out a Net Zero Carbon Pathway for York. Based on the world-leading scientific insight from Professor Andy Gouldson from the University of Leeds, and work by our carbon reduction team, the strategy is the result of extensive work with a multitude of experts, city and regional partners, including businesses, leading employers and organisations, as well as our residents. Only recently this approach and the ongoing work was recognised to be world-leading, when York was amongst only 122 cities across the world to be awarded an A listing for climate action leadership by the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP).

From this work York's carbon footprint splits into three main segments; homes 30 per cent, commercial buildings 31 per cent, and transport 27 per cent with the rest split between industry and waste. Hence our policy focus is set out mostly to do with homes, buildings and transport.

The housing retrofit programme is aimed at improving the energy efficiency of current homes and addresses that fuel poverty is making progress across the city. The Government schemes in this area have been disjointed and difficult, but York has attracted large grants enabling major investment in refurbishing and retrofitting council housing, using the very latest low carbon technologies in construction. Alongside this, we have addressed the worst 10 performing council buildings and have been awarded Net Zero Funding to support this work.

Our housebuilding programme is the biggest since the 1970s. Work is well under way to deliver more than 600 new homes across the city, including at least 250 affordable homes, each designed to have a net carbon emissions figure of zero.

York's housing delivery programme focuses on taking a holistic approach to the low carbon future of our city. It is not just about energy efficient materials – it's about rethinking the approach to sustainable neighbourhood building. Every element of the scheme, from the front door out into the transport network, is aiding in our efforts to tackle the climate emergency head on.

A design manual, 'Building Better Places', is key to the wider programme, and sets a new standard for zero housebuilding. As one of the many proposals for the new planning system set out in the Government's Planning for the Future White Paper is using design guides at local plan making stage, manuals such as this will be the cornerstone for the next generation of communities and neighbourhoods.

Given the decades of central government underfunding, particularly for northern councils, we have had to make the development model self-sustaining, with 60 per cent of the homes set for market sale in order to cross-subsidise 40 per cent affordable housing, half of which will be for social rent.

Zero carbon housing has been an ambition for innovative councils for the last 20 years. However, first the lack of technological know-how followed by the lack of political willpower from the Conservative Government, has meant that housebuilding has failed to reach the zero carbon standards necessary to aid in cutting carbon emissions across the country.

Housing is just one element of the work we're doing to tackle the climate emergency. Our target of reaching zero carbon by 2030 requires a bold and holistic approach to tackling the climate crisis.

Currently, we are leading the way nationally by introducing ambitious plans across the city to improve York's air quality – from the largest zero emission Park&Ride fleet in the country and the first voluntary Clean Air Zone in the UK, with ambitions to become the first all-electric bus city. Alongside this we have a successful e-scooter and e-bike scheme, travelling a total of 1,000 miles a day.

York is also delivering the largest and most accessible EV charging facilities outside London. This network is owned by the council and we work in partnership with BP. At least five per cent of all council carpark spaces have EV chargers and the price is below the commercial rate, to encourage use. We are also maximising the generation and storage of renewable electricity on council land and buildings with plans being drafted for a solar park with one of our partners.

We are also creating the largest community woodland in England, planting 50,000 trees by January 2023, with many more trees and biodiversity plans in place, including a green streets project.

Finally, we have invested £110 million in flood defences across the city, better protecting more than 3,000 properties, and we are now working across Yorkshire on nature-based solutions for the city and the region, which will involve planting trees and reshaping rivers on the 3,000 square miles that drain into the Ouse.

As Sally Godber, Director of Warm, the Passivhaus consultancy working on the York Housing Delivery project, said in an interview to the Guardian, "... there's no aspiration or leadership from government. It's left to progressive councils, like York, to lead the way."

It is councils leading the way in delivering for residents with ambitious and progressive long-term thinking to build for the carbon free future.

All of this despite decades of underfunding, outdated and counterproductive national policies. It comes down to Liberal Democrats in local government to make real, tangible change happen for our communities.

Topping the English recycling charts - the Three Rivers experience



Councillor Sarah Nemes, Leader of Three Rivers District Council

There are a number of factors which have led Lib Dem Three Rivers to be one of the best recyclers in England (currently the highest in England at 63.5 per cent according to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) March 2023 data). Our in-house service, our staff, membership in WasteAware, and residents are among the top.

We run our service in house, which means we collect all the waste ourselves, and don't contract it out, allowing us to change our service regularly over the years in order to promote recycling and composting over refuse, and adapt our service to residents.

Since 2002, we have had six service changes in the district, including the introduction of recycling and composting bins, and later changing the frequency of collections, bin sizes, and charges for garden waste bins.

Our recycling, food, and garden waste collections are weekly, while our refuse collections are fortnightly, which combined with a smaller 140 litre refuse bin means more recyclable and compostable materials are forced out of the refuse bin and can, instead, be reused.

Our staff have introduced these changes over the years along with communications to inform residents of changes, and educate them on how to use their bins – and they continue to do so. Crews also continue to empty our household and public litter bins around the district, while keeping an eye out for contamination, to ensure loads aren't rejected, and recycling isn't wasted.

Across Three Rivers, you may notice that we don't have public recycling bins. This is not because we don't want people to recycle outside their homes, but because we have found it is far more effective to collect all waste together, and sort it by hand back at our depot. There is a national issue with contamination in public litter bins, however sorting this relatively small volume by hand, removes contamination, and ensures we capture all recyclable items possible.

Our residents continue to recycle right and engage with us through emails, phone calls and social media to ask us about a wide range of materials – checking which bin they belong in, and where they can recycle if not at home. Schools and volunteer groups also have access to talks and assemblies to help share information answer questions residents have about waste, and why we do what we do.

Thirty per cent of our recycling is organic waste. As a rural district, we have many residents with gardens, who continue to recycle their garden waste, thereby increasing our recycling tonnages. Despite fears that charging for garden waste collections would mean we capture less organic waste and our recycling rates would drop, our residents have continued to use this service, and are recycling more than ever.

We also continue to work as part of the Herts WasteAware partnership which has members from every council in Hertfordshire as well as county council. This county-wide approach to education and communication improves efficiency, as we share time and resources, allowing for bigger campaigns and projects than those which would be possible alone.

Key points for us include:

- It has taken a long time to reach this – over 20 years of belief that it is the right thing to do and continuous development of the service to get better and better.
- We make it as easy as possible for our residents, collecting food, garden, mixed dry recycling, and residual from the doorstep (with additional doorstep collection of textiles and bulky items with a bookable service).
- We have an extensive education programme both to the public but also (importantly) in our schools.
- We run public events on Reduce/Reuse/Recycle themes like sustainable fashion shows, clothes swap events, reducing food waste events.
- The education is shifting to waste reduction especially on food and reusable period products and nappies.
- A great relationship with our county council and other districts and boroughs.

The work of Barnstaple Town Council in relation to the environment



Councillor Janet Coates, Chair of the Environment Committee on Barnstaple Town Council

Barnstaple Town Council, of which I have been a member since May 2019, has had a history of strong connections with many aspects of the local environment. The council is responsible for the maintenance of public highway verges, certain green areas such as one of the two main parks in Barnstaple, five allotment sites containing over 250 allotment plots across Barnstaple and some footpaths. Its remit is also to promote health and well-being and to organise events and activities for the local community. Much of this work falls under the remit of our Environment Committee of which I have been Chair since May 2022.

On 22 July 2019, the town council declared a climate emergency, incorporating the vision that Barnstaple should become carbon-neutral and carbon cost-neutral by 2030. This enabled us to set up a Climate Emergency Working Group. This group reports to our Environment Committee and was tasked with drawing up a Climate Action Plan, the principles of which underpin our approach across all committees of the council.

The priorities for this working group include collaborating effectively with other stakeholders such as councils, community groups and the public, committing to reducing the council's carbon footprint through its own actions and procurements and improving the natural resources of the council's green spaces.

Although we are a Lib-Dem controlled council, we do work collaboratively with all our councillor colleagues and are fortunate to have the tremendous support of the hard-working officers and town clerk. On the Climate Emergency Working Group we encourage participation from various community groups and individuals as well as with our colleagues and officers from the local district council and benefit immensely from their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. One of the first actions of the council, following our declaration of a Climate Emergency, was to ask a local social enterprise group - 361 Energy CIC - to conduct a baseline survey of our utility and carbon footprint in our council buildings to establish a baseline and to suggest ways forward. Although the completion of this work was delayed due to the regulations in place during the pandemic, the council has started to make changes, for example in moving to renewable energy suppliers when contracts are renewed, and in changing to LED lighting.

Many of the changes have been made through the hard work of our estates team and town rangers. They have created many different wildflower areas across the town and have given valuable advice and support to volunteer groups such as Barnstaple in Bloom and Pilton and Bradiford Pocket Garden groups. They also have made changes in the schedule and manner of mowing to provide support to pollinators in grassy areas such as in our park, on grass verges and even on one of the main roundabouts on the edge of the town. The council has also purchased three Amberol tiered planters, compost and plug plants for floral displays in the town centre. They also shred 90 per cent of green waste and use this as mulch.

The council now has an electric vehicle for the town rangers and has purchased battery electric versions of ground maintenance tools such as strimmer and blowers.

Barnstaple Town Council has also made changes in the rules and regulations of our five allotment sites, in order to support our climate change agenda. We have banned the use of bonfires and actively encourage allotment holders to compost green waste.

Councillors actively support litter-picking events around the town and have set up Residents Against Pollution (RAP) groups, actively encouraging the involvement of members of the local community. The council received funding from the High Streets Community Clean Up Fund and were able to purchase litter-picking equipment to loan to various groups and also to purchase cleaning kits for graffiti and street signs. We have also supported a River Clean event. More recently the council has contributed to action days in the town centre to raise awareness of the problems associated with litter and councillors have collaborated with Environmental Protection Officers from the district council to look at areas where litter is prevalent.

The council has made efforts to promote our climate change and wider environmental messages through involvement in community events. We ran a stall at a local Green Man Day in the summer and one of our councillors devised a “Carbon Pledge-O-meter”, where members of the public, while visiting the legendary Green Man Festival in Pilton, were invited to commit to taking concrete action to reduce their carbon footprint. Pledges included cutting food waste, starting conversations about climate change, and considering more eco-friendly conversations about climate change. This proved to be extremely popular with members of the public and generated interesting discussions. We hope to repeat this in the future in other community events.

We are under no illusion that much remains to be done but we continue to be committed to improving our environment for members of our community, alongside many other committed groups and individuals from whom we can learn so much.

Bedford Borough's action on the environment and climate



Mayor Dave Hodgson, Directly Elected
Mayor of Bedford Borough

Our key message is that we have been taking action on climate for years and will continue to take a leading role locally, regionally and nationally on our march towards net zero. I set up the Climate Change Fund in 2009 which has provided hundreds of thousands of pounds of investment in carbon reducing solutions for community buildings.

Since then, Bedford Borough Council has taken significant steps to reduce its own carbon emissions: declaring a climate emergency and pledging to become carbon neutral by 2030; modernising Borough Hall and installing smart LED lights, a biomass heating system and evaporative cooling system for the data centre; and extending the electric vehicle fleet to three times the national average. These measures have led to the council achieving a 62 per cent reduction in carbon emissions from council buildings between 2011-2018.

As well as saving energy and reducing carbon, the council has also looked for innovative ways to generate clean energy across the borough. The first renewable project was the installation of the Archimedes screw on the River Great Ouse in 2012.

The hydro-electric power plant generates about 168,000 kilowatt hours of energy and saves 70,000kg of carbon dioxide each year. The council has also installed a number of solar panels across Borough Hall, car parks and other council buildings. More recently the council has funded a huge solar farm made up of over 8,000 solar panels. The site is capable of generating up to 4.2 megawatts of electricity and is enough to power approximately 1,000 homes. The council has also helped residents reduce their carbon emissions through partnerships with Solar Together and Enterprise Car Club, as well as installing double the regional average number of electric vehicle charging points.

When we took over from the Conservatives in the county council, we were left with a mess of potholes and crumbling roads. Since then, we have made it a key priority to fix this for our residents. Each year we are spending much more than we get from the government on roads and pavements. We have also introduced a Pothole Hit Squad to act fast to fix potholes across the borough. We have also put cycle lanes in wherever safe and viable as part of investing more money than ever into cycling. We have made major improvements to cycling in the borough, including a new smart shelter, more cycle lanes and changes to roads to make it safer for cyclists. In terms of public transport, we have managed to maintain our subsidised bus mileage despite that figure halving nationally since 2009. We are also strongly campaigning for better rail connectivity and fighting for residents over delays to decisions regarding East West Rail, and strongly opposing six tracks and home demolitions, as well as campaigning for electrification from day one.

We also want to be champions for nature and biodiversity within our borough. We have made sure we have invested into our green spaces, parks and play areas. We have planted and given away thousands of trees every year, most recently planting over 30,000 trees in a single planting season. We are proud of our four Green Flag Award winning parks across the borough, with two of them winning the award for the 15th and 21st year in a row. Recently we have invested more into play area refurbishment to provide fun and accessible spaces for children to enjoy. Our ability to maintain these areas relies on the hard work of our park staff, as well as putting in protective measures including verge protection, quickly clearing up litter and fly tipping, and fining offenders.

Protecting the environment in the Highlands



Councillor Ross Moreland, Policy Lead for Climate Change and Environment Services at Argyll & Bute Council

A long time Lib Dem member said to me at conference once “nobody gets into the Lib Dems for the career opportunities, there aren’t many of them, they get into it because they actually want to try and change things.”

This simple comment, said in a passing conversation really stuck with me, I had not long come off a loss in the council election of 2017 and wasn’t sure if I would run again, but the long-time member was right, we fight campaigns, protest, drop off countless leaflets and everything else a Lib Dem member does not for ourselves but to try and change things for the better.

I was surprised to say the least, as a newly elected first-time councillor, to be offered a policy lead role, however I was delighted to be offered the role of Lead for Climate Change and Environment Services. Taking on any new job is always a challenge, however as with all challenges there comes great opportunities.

Argyll and Bute is a very large area and has an extremely challenging geography which can make our goal of being net zero by 2045 more difficult. However, this can be seen as an opportunity, such as when the council partnered with businesses and outside groups to create 30-hectares of native woodland in Argyll and Bute.

We are also looking at moving as much of our fleet to electric as possible, looking at a large roll out of electric charging points, and most excitedly this year the majority of the councillors underwent carbon literacy training and we are moving the council towards becoming a carbon literate organisation, with many of our staff having done the training and many more booked in to do so.

There is still a lot more we can do, and many hurdles in the way. Councils in Scotland have seen their funding cut many times over, limiting their ability to deliver large transformational projects. You also have to battle against the climate deniers within your own council (yes they still exist) who would rather money is not spent on “green stuff”. As well as people who grasp the magnitude of climate change but don’t grasp the scale to the changes that will be needed in order to combat it. These attitudes can at times be frustrating but it is important, I keep having to remind myself, that every step forward and win for a greener future no matter how small that step forward, is still a step forward that may not have been taken if I wasn’t there to fight for it.

This is all to say that being a councillor and policy lead for climate change is a huge challenge and responsibility, but a task that I am more than up for and a challenge that has to be met. One thing that has become clear to me in the short time I have been a councillor is that we need more people in positions of power, all positions of power from highest to lowest who are willing to fight for real change, stand up to the status quo and meet the many challenges that our society currently faces. Without more people willing to take seriously the imminent danger posed by the climate emergency and other problems, we won’t see the fundamental change our society needs.

As that long-time Lib Dem member said to me “nobody gets into the Lib Dems for the career opportunities, there aren’t many of them, they get into it because they actually want to try and change things” I sincerely wish every Liberal Democrat and also every politician who “actually wants to change things” the best of luck in these upcoming and all future elections, because only together can we change things for the better.

A view from a Welsh devolved perspective



Councillor Jackie Charlton, Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys at Powys County Council

Welsh Liberal Democrats believe in devolution and have supported the Labour administration since 1997. In that time the focus has been on sustainability for the nation. Welsh Government has taken a distinctly different path on how future generations will be impacted by the decisions we make today.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 was a culmination of work which focused on a legal obligation to “think about the long-term impact [of decisions], to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.” The Act is unique to Wales and of interest around the world. It is now effectively used by councils focusing on seven principles or connected well-being goals in all of its corporate decisions, which are:

- a prosperous Wales
- a resilient Wales
- a healthier Wales
- a more equal Wales
- a Wales of more cohesive communities
- a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- a globally responsible Wales.

The well-being goals form the principles which must be in all the work we undertake at local authority level.

The important impact of this legislation enables councils to deliver on the way we measure the carbon footprint we leave behind us. We can link this with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and Planning (Wales) Act 2015 to form the sustainable development legislation to encourage and support development to net zero.

A growing number of local authorities, town and community councils have pledged to reduce carbon emissions, and support a nature emergency. The route map to support all of us sets the scene for the journey and was published in 2021 setting out 'Moving up a gear 2022-2022' to 'Well on our way 2022-2023' and reaching 'Achieving our goal 2026-2030'

www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-07/a-route-map-for-decarbonisation-across-the-welsh-public-sector.pdf

The obvious areas for action in that route map include procurement, mobility and transport, buildings and land use. By helping local authorities to link into the three Welsh Acts, looking at the route map and committing to net zero by 2030 gives the strong framework we need to succeed in an ambitious outcome for the people of Wales. In April 2022 the Welsh Government pledged to reach net zero by 2030. The published strategic plan in September 2022 outlines the 54 initiatives that can be set at local authority level to achieve this.

www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-12/welsh-government-net-zero-strategic-plan.pdf

Drilling this down into local authorities, the Welsh Government expect things in return too. We all have to complete an annual Carbon Account which is scrutinised by the Welsh Government, and it challenges the journey, helps decision makers to reach further and make the changes that are needed.

www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-06/welsh-public-sector-net-zero-reporting-guide.pdf

Across the UK the Liberal Democrats have a power base at the local level. Should we be seeking to drive a similar proposal elsewhere to underpin future generations?

Here in Powys where I am a councillor, we are the largest rural county in England and Wales. We embraced the need to deliver on the goals set out in the well-being principles. In 2020, ahead of the Welsh Government, a motion put by the Welsh Liberal Democrats proposed a climate emergency declaration and in 2022 we added the nature emergency to that declaration. In 2022 the Welsh Liberal Democrats took over the administration in Powys for the first time ever after the 2022 local elections. We are in a progressive partnership with Welsh Labour. Not only is it the first time the Welsh Lib Dems have succeeded to take the administration in Powys, but it was also the first time a political administration had taken over having been dominated by Independents since its formation in the 1970's.

Our first task as a cabinet was to give a focus on the climate emergency that was declared in 2020 by forming a cabinet role of A Greener Powys. That portfolio encompasses the route map and therefore the milestones which can demonstrate our progress and achievements for net zero by 2030. It's my job a Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys to make sure we stick to the route map.

It was a Welsh Lib Dem that proposed the nature emergency in 2022 making that further important commitment. Our new corporate plan, which must encompass the seven well-being goals reflects the governance focus for all our services to embrace a 'Greener Powys'. It has been welcomed by everyone from highways to social care. It has fundamentally changed the way we are working and making it clear to the electorate what our principles are and how we will follow the route map and reach the 2030 ambitious goal to be net zero.

*The current estimate for total Welsh public sector emissions is 3,353 kt CO₂e in 2019-20 and 3,279 kt CO₂e in 2020-21. These figures include estimates to fill gaps in the data (46 per cent gap filled for 2019-20 and 11 per cent in 2020-21). Per Capita Local Authority emissions – with and without supply chain, 2020/21 www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-05/public-sector-net-zero-data-recommendations.pdf

The first year in charge of Wokingham Borough Council



Councillor Sarah Kerr, Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services at Wokingham Borough Council

The Liberal Democrats took over running Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) when it went into no overall control in May 2022. Having been run by the Conservatives for circa 20 years, we have had a steep hill to climb in most aspects of the council, but in particular, the council's response to the climate emergency, having declared one in July 2019, which has required a lot of work to remove the greenwash and bring about meaningful action.

In terms of energy and the built environment, we have focused on the following:

- With our own social housing (circa 2,600 properties) we have undertaken an EPC stock survey. Our aim is to ensure all our social housing stock is EPC type C or above by 2025 (five years ahead of the government's target). Just over 350 properties don't meet the EPC C or above rating, and we have put in a bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to bring them up to standard.
- For our other non-residential assets, we are aiming for our portfolio to be of carbon neutral standards by 2030. We are taking a fabric first approach to reduce energy consumption on site, then fit a range of on-site energy generation to make them as energy self-sufficient as possible. We are funding this through the capital programme resulting in revenue savings from reduced operational costs.

- We are in the early stages of developing a policy that considers the whole-life carbon of our assets. Currently, the only policy in place is standard planning policy and adhering to the very weak building regulations. Given the competing priorities we face in local government, having an adopted policy that ensures the minimisation of both operational and embodied carbon in our own built environment, means these requirements cannot be pushed aside by other factors.
- We are in the procurement process for the build contractor for our first council-owned solar farm (a scheme that was started by the previous administration). On part of the land sitting alongside the solar farm, we planned to plant a number of trees. Instead of the council doing this now, we are working on a lease agreement (peppercorn rent) with a local community orchard charity who will plant their stock on this strip of land and use it to propagate new trees for the community orchards. This saves them money from having to purchase their stock, saves us money from having to source and maintain the trees ourselves, and reduces carbon emissions not only in the form of sequestration, but in transportation miles for shipping trees from outside the borough.
- We are having a feasibility study put together to put solar panels above our park and ride sites. In addition to the solar panels, we will have battery storage and EV chargers. We will sell the generated energy to the grid at the optimum time from both the battery storage and from EVs using the facilities through a contractual arrangement with the EV owners.
- We are having additional feasibility studies put together for two more agricultural sites to put in solar farms, and wind turbines for energy generation. Whether we will sell to the grid or do a Power Purchase Agreement is yet to be decided.
- We are about to sign an agreement with the other Berkshire local authorities on proceeding with Solar Together which we aim to launch in Spring 2023, giving residents the opportunity to purchase solar PV for their properties at a reduced cost.

- We are doing a soft launch in April, and full launch in October of our Home Decarbonisation Service. We have purchased software (low cost enabling it to come from existing budgets) from a company called Parity Projects. This provides two interfaces, one for us, the council and one for residents, to look at home improvements that can be made to properties to reduce energy consumption, increase onsite energy generation and move away from gas boilers. It will provide data to us to target specific areas in our borough, and for homeowners to understand the big picture and return on investment. Once a homeowner has had an initial assessment, our in-house team (energy, climate and customer services) will work further with residents to assist with any financing schemes or other options that are open. This scheme aims to remove one of the common barriers of consumer inertia due to lack of information/understanding.
- We are assisting with the roll-out of the ECO4 scheme. We are working with three companies who we have vetted and monitor their work and proactively work with the community to get them to take up this scheme. It should be noted that the ECO4 scheme is significantly more selective than previous iterations so less households will benefit.
- We apply for all home improvement schemes available such as GHG-LAD and currently have an application in for HUG2.
- Whilst this wasn't fruitful for us, do ask your officer team about any renewable energy installations in your borough/district and the business rates. Councils can keep up to 100 per cent of the business rates from these installations, so if you have any solar farms, wind farms etc. in your geographic region, check that you're keeping the maximum amount of business rates possible, and if possible, try and get them ringfenced for environmental schemes.

Putting climate action at the heart of the Bath and North East Somerset Lib Dem administration



Councillor Sarah Warren, Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel and Deputy Leader of Bath and North East Somerset Council

Our Lib Dem administration is putting climate action at the heart of everything Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES) does.

We're working to become a net zero council, supporting renewable energy and decarbonisation across the district, and aiming for our district to be Nature Positive by 2030.

We are particularly proud that B&NES is the first council in England to successfully adopt an energy-based housing policy which will create truly net zero homes and push new-build energy standards to unprecedented heights.

This policy sets specific kWh/m²/annum limits on the total energy use and demand for space heating in new homes, requires developments to be self-sufficient in on-site renewable energy, and limits embodied carbon emissions.

In addition to halting greenhouse gas contributions from new housing, the policy will ensure homes are comfortable and cost-effective to run, increase local energy security and boost rooftop renewables installation.

The new standards were agreed through a local plan partial update (LPPU) process, allowing policy revisions outside of a full local plan process. We have a dedicated planning policy forum for councillors to discuss and feed into proposals from an early stage and build cross-party consensus. The policy update sets a precedent we hope other authorities will follow.

Beyond energy standards, the LPPU also addresses biodiversity net gain and sustainable transport. It breaks boundaries with a new process for identifying land for renewables and takes our park and ride sites out of the Green Belt to allow solar panel canopies and charging for electric vehicles.

B&NES is making the most of opportunities for energy saving and generation schemes across our buildings.

Care homes are being upgraded with solar panels, energy efficiency improvements, LED lighting and heat pumps, through grants from the public sector decarbonisation fund.

Our flagship capital project is a new energy-efficient waste and recycling centre in Keynsham, which will be a landmark sustainable development, in terms of design and construction best practice, and will provide most of its own operational power through a 3800m², 783kwp solar panel array.

Also in Keynsham, a new primary school has achieved Passivhaus accreditation, thanks to Section 106 funding we allocated. This helped upgrade the building with solar panels, excellent insulation, triple glazing, two electric air source heat pumps and a mechanical ventilation system incorporating heat recovery.

In Bath, the thermal energy from the world-famous Roman Baths is being captured by a new 100-kilowatt heat system (the equivalent of heating 20 or 30 average domestic homes) to provide carbon neutral heat to the Bath's complex and education centre. This is a great example of innovative climate action on a sensitive heritage site.

Besides adopting planning policies, we are also looking at practical ways to help improve energy efficiency and renewable energy. Key to this is working with partners to unlock funding and make home improvements more accessible.

We worked with the West of England Combined Authority to promote a pilot group buying scheme, 'Solar Together', which helped more than 300 households in B&NES get a cheaper deal on solar panels and 20 households also got battery storage systems. This was a step forwards in accelerating take up of solar, and is a model we hope to repeat, as well as inspiring some local communities to replicate the approach.

In rural areas, with a high potential for renewable energy generation, we commissioned the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) to run workshops with residents about the types and scales of renewable energy which are acceptable to them. This is a bottom-up approach which helps build support for energy installations and aligns with the strong community energy sector in B&NES.

Our longstanding advice service, 'Energy At Home', provides information on home improvements and points people to the latest grant schemes. Recently we have provided affordable warmth grants using money from several local and government funding pots and helped people locally to reduce their energy costs.

Our Lib Dem councillors are ambitious for the future of our area. We will keep pressing ahead with climate action and aim to keep B&NES at the forefront of policies related to the climate and ecological emergencies.

Campaigning for a sustainable Somerset



Councillor Sarah Dyke, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change on Somerset County Council and Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Somerton & Frome

Somerset is a great, diverse, and varied county, which is what makes it so special. In May 2022 something else made Somerset special when the Liberal Democrats took control of the county council and in so doing the new unitary authority, Somerset Council from April this year.

The landscape since the local elections last May has changed dramatically, we face many difficult decisions and there will be many challenges to overcome, but the new council presents an irrefutable opportunity to reset and enhance our journey to net zero. We recognise the need to take action urgently to tackle the climate emergency and as we develop our Council Plan, we will ensure environment and sustainability is integrated across all our services and is at the heart of our decision making. A low carbon future will be hugely beneficial for Somerset, providing a more resilient and equitable society, experiencing better health and wellbeing, a thriving green economy and nature restored.

Our key manifesto proposals centred around tackling the government on sewage in rivers, introducing discounted bus travel for teenagers, safe cycle routes and planting more trees. Alongside this we will ensure that addressing both climate and ecological emergencies are integrated into all areas of our work, including housing, flooding, land and planning policies, transport, economic development, and access.

We want Somerset to become a leader in green technologies and renewable energy by unlocking opportunities for clean economic growth and seeking new ways to invest in technologies that can help reduce carbon emissions.

Transport is one of the key drivers of our carbon footprint. Active and sustainable travel options, including walking and cycling, and encouraging modes of transport that use renewable energy, will help reduce air pollution and green-house gas emissions, and give a wider choice of options for local journeys. Alongside this an effective public transport system that meets the needs of more of our residents is an integral part of our climate change strategy.

It is our duty to enable provision of homes, economic development, and services for current and future residents. There is frequently tension around what is appropriate development and there is no one-size-fits-all answer to this. As we develop our Local Plan, we will consider introducing local policies and will work with developers to support responsible, sustainable development to deliver the best environmental standards possible.

We are fortunate to have food production as part of our local economy. It is worth more than £500 million to Somerset, we have a network of more than 8,500 farmers and food producers, the highest number of any UK county. There are important choices to be made about how to farm our land and how to balance the complex mix of things we need from it. Our county farms have a vital role to play providing new entrants with opportunities to start in agriculture in the heart of rural communities, allowing fairer access to land and farming in the county. They also afford opportunities to introduce regenerative practices with tenants and moving towards net zero carbon emissions.

Sadly though, our government seems to be creating conditions to stymie these ambitions, as free trade deals drive down prices paid to our hardworking farmers and create greater pressures for intensification, instead of creating and protecting more ambitious regenerative and nature-friendly farming systems which also produce food and a sustainable livelihood.

Somerset already has a strategy that was independently recognised as the best County Council strategy in the country. We must be ambitious to try to deliver a net zero council by 2030, and this can only happen if the council is able to work in partnership with government, because councils have a key part to play in net zero delivery. The next decade will be critical for ensuring we are on the right track to transition our places, communities, and economies to a net zero future. If we are going to be successful, we cannot stand still, we must look forward and provide local leadership in the net zero race. Reform is required including investment in infrastructure and governance arrangements. There needs to be a framework which should provide strategic direction and clarity on the roles and responsibilities of national and local government along with long term funding security to deliver our targets.

Here in Somerset, we are determined to play an active part in ensuring local government is spearheading the drive to tackle climate change. Strong political leadership underpins our ambition and supports action that will be critical to meeting our net zero targets.

Switched on Solar Portsmouth



Councillor Kimberly Barratt, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment at Portsmouth City Council

Portsmouth City Council is powering up solar with a wide range of projects around the city which reduce carbon emissions and prioritise green energy with the goal of reaching net zero by 2030.

The council is funding the installation of solar panels on their own portfolio of council-owned, domestic, and non-domestic buildings and for other businesses within Portsmouth. In 2021, the council had invested more in roof mounted solar power than any other council in the UK since 2014.

Lib Dem led Portsmouth City Council have installed 7.5MWp of solar panels across their portfolio (approximately 25,000 panels), with a further 4.5MWp due to be installed within the next 12 months. We have achieved a number of UK-first installations, including at Hilsea Industrial Estate and Portsmouth International Port.

Portsmouth International Port, the UK's largest municipal port, has switched on 2,660 solar panels, which generates 1,197,000 kWh of renewable energy and contributes 35 per cent of the port's energy needs per year. Now complete, the 1.2 MW solar panel system and 1.5 MWh battery system is the largest such installation the council has completed so far and will reduce annual carbon emissions by 239 tonnes, the same as 140 return plane trips from London to New York.

The project also includes solar canopies, which are a UK first at a port, and the scheme won the Commercial Solar and/or Storage Project of the Year award at the Solar & Storage Live 2022 Awards. The system will eventually allow the port to offer shore power to smaller ships without drawing from the local electricity network.

In spring, we will begin work at Lakeside North Harbour on rooftop and canopy solar and large-scale battery energy storage. This project is estimated to have a saving of 739 tonnes of carbon dioxide from being emitted each year, equivalent to boiling 17.5 million kettles.

Through our Switched On Portsmouth brand we offer a range of energy saving measures for houses; these measures reduce emissions and the cost of running a household. Over £70 million was secured to support fuel poor, low income and vulnerable homeowners with solar panels, air source heat pumps and solid wall insulation.

The Switched On Portsmouth team leads a consortium of 22 councils (mainly situated in Hants and West Sussex) in a scheme called Warmer Homes. The scheme provides free heating systems, insulation and solar, including fully funded solar panel installations to qualifying households (those with low-income with poor EPC-ratings). By the end of 2022 the project had installed

- 1,684 solar panels
- 37 air source heat pumps
- 545 solid wall insulations.

This means 2,266 houses in the South East are now warmer, safer and cost less to heat.



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