

COUNCIL
17 JULY 2025

CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRESS

Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio

Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Council on progress towards the Council's net zero target.

Summary

2. Following Council elections in 2023, the Climate Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040.
3. The Climate Change Officer recruited in January 2024 left service in January 2025. Recruitment for a new Climate Change Officer has taken place with the new starter joining the team in May 2025.
4. The Council's emission reduction trajectory of 40% reduction every five years is still in place. Council emissions for 2024/25 were 6,642 tonnes CO₂e. The emissions we report are made up of the energy use in council buildings; business mileage; fleet emissions, and streetlighting and signs. We do not currently measure emissions from our supply chain or from waste.
5. Our carbon emissions for 2024/25 have increased from 2023/24. Investigations are ongoing. However, the opening of the new Hopetown Museum will have impacted on our emissions.
6. We have requested data from the Met Office on numbers of days below expected temperatures during the winter period. If there were a significant number of days, this could have impacted on the amount of gas required for heating.
7. A carbon audit of the Council's land indicated that approximately 1000 tonnes of carbon are being stored each year.
8. Data on the wider Borough emissions are published by the Government in June, so this data is not yet available to us.
9. Of the 121 actions due to be reported at the end of 2024/25, 109 are on track and nine have been completed (see **Appendix 1**).

10. Following the recent motion declaring a nature restoration emergency, we will revise the climate change strategy and action plan.

Recommendations

11. It is recommended that Council notes the report.

Reasons

12. The recommendations are supported by the increasing public pressure to act on climate change, we run the risk of significant damage to our reputation if we do not deliver on our stated commitment to dealing with the Council's contribution to climate change.

Trevor Watson
Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Margaret Enstone: Extension 6229

Council Plan	This report reflects the Council Plan Core Principle in Tackling Climate Change. In turn, actions that we take for climate change impact on our Council priorities. For example, as we improve our council stock, we improve the quality of life for our residents, leading to better health outcomes, which in
Addressing inequalities	Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. This report demonstrates how we are addressing our own carbon emissions and resilience, giving us the ability to demonstrate through good practice what other people can do themselves
Tackling Climate Change	The Council has recognised the need to consider the carbon impact of the decisions it makes. This report is a progress report of our journey to reducing our carbon emissions and adapting our services to the unavoidable effects of climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	Our approach to reducing emissions will mean that resources are used more efficiently.
Health and Wellbeing	According to the WHO, climate change is the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. This report is a progress report of our journey to becoming a carbon neutral council.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no expected impact on Crime and Disorder in Darlington.
Wards Affected	This report covers how the Council is addressing its own carbon emissions and resilience. It will not affect any particular ward.
Groups Affected	This report covers how the Council is addressing its own carbon emissions and resilience. It will not affect any particular group.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

- Following Council elections in 2023, the Climate Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040. Further aims to increase engagement with residents and businesses were included with the intention of reducing wider borough emissions. A further commitment to monitor the Council's supply chain emissions was also added.

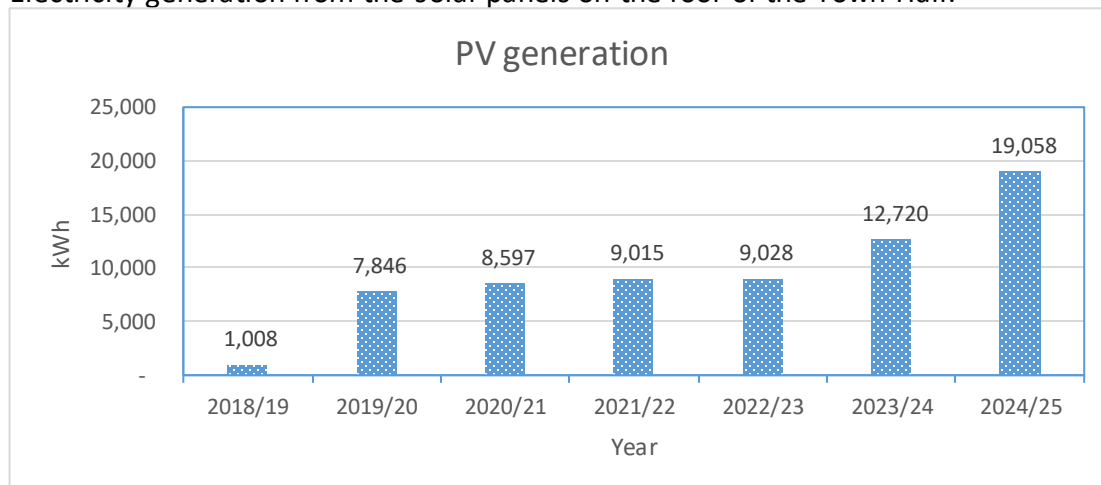
14. The Climate Change Officer recruited in January 2024 left service in January 2025. Recruitment for a new Climate Change Officer has taken place with the new starter joining the team in May 2025. For the interim period, the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer has carried out both roles, with some necessary delay in planned implementation of tasks.

15. The Council's emission reduction trajectory of 40% reduction every five years is still in place.

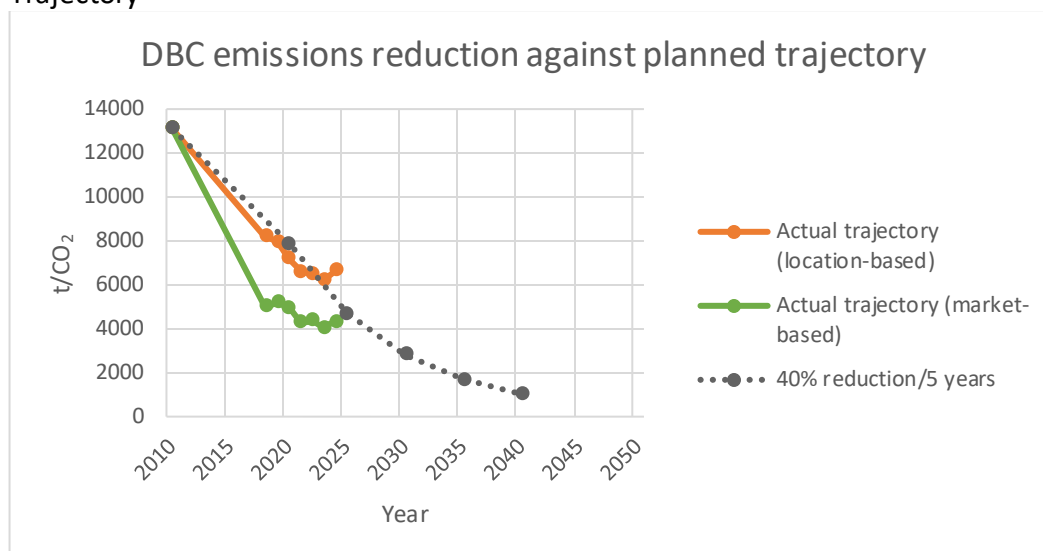
16. Emissions to date:

	2010/11	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	tCO ₂	tCO ₂	tCO ₂	tCO ₂	tCO ₂	tCO ₂	tCO ₂	tCO ₂
Streetlighting	3,487	759	596	515	458	412	418	418
Corporate Estate	7,564	5,928	5,907	5,014	4,864	4,709	4,579	4,968
Business Travel	2,050	1,509	1,482	1,426	1,270	1,328	1,192	1,256
Water	0	0		-	-	11.40	12.97	-
Total estimated working from home emissions/tCO ₂ e during lockdown				125				
Total	13,101	8,196	7,985	7,080	6,592	6,449	6,190	6,642

17. Electricity generation from the solar panels on the roof of the Town Hall:

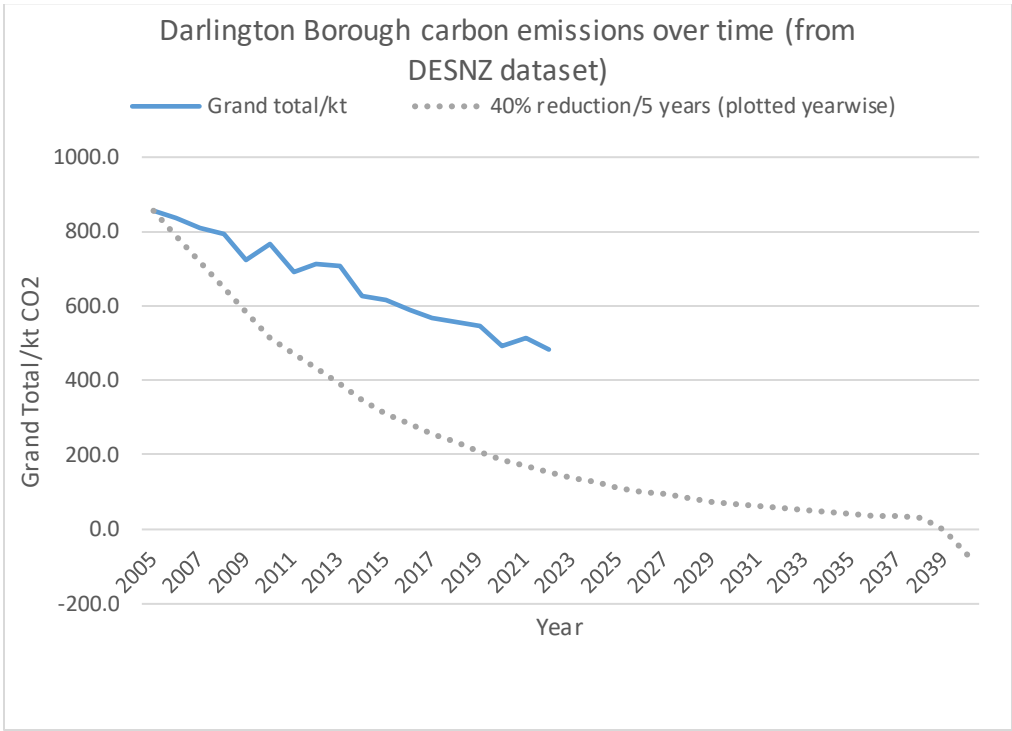


18. Trajectory



19. We report emissions as recommended by the Greenhouse Gas Protocol and show both location-based emissions, which use the average grid emissions that reflect the energy that we are using and market-based emissions, which take into account the zero carbon tariff that we have chosen. The emissions we report are made up of the energy use in council buildings (not including Council homes as we do not control how residents use the energy); business mileage; fleet emissions, and streetlighting and signs.
20. Clearly, the past year has seen a rise in emissions. We still need to investigate this further, but there are a few additional sets of emissions that we are reporting in this period.
21. Hoptown opened in 2024 after a period of refurbishment with a greatly increased number of buildings open to the public. The resulting increase in gas and electricity use is showing in the 2024/5 period. The listed building status of most of the buildings means that solar panels are not permitted.
22. This year also, for the first time, we have data from fuel cards for fleet and equipment used by Street Scene. As a proportion of our overall emissions, the impact of this is minor, but it is an addition to our reporting.
23. We have requested data from the Met Office on numbers of days below expected temperatures during the winter period. If there were a significant number of days, this could have impacted on the amount of gas required for heating.
24. Further investigation will take place and will be reported at the six-monthly report due in January 2026.
25. On the positive side, we carried out an audit of Council land to assess its ability to store carbon. The full report is on the website, but initial figures suggest Council land is currently storing approximately 1000 tonnes each year.
26. The 2023 motion bringing forward the date for carbon neutrality to 2040, also included a requirement to monitor Borough-wide emissions. These figures are drawn from the

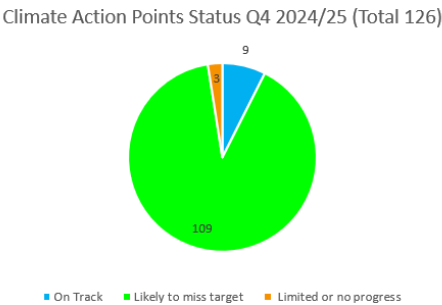
government’s published figures. These are published in summer, two years in arrears, so data for 2023 is not yet available to us. The figures below relate to 2022.



- 27. We have no target for Borough emissions, but we have mapped the Government data against a 40% reduction every five years trajectory, to align with our Council target.
- 28. The Council is directly responsible for 2-5% of Borough emissions. However, we do have the ability to influence up to 80% of them. The difference in the actual vs trajectory above, demonstrates that we must reflect on the wider implications of decisions we make.

Climate change action plan

- 29. At the end of March 2025, 109 actions were on track with nine completed (see Appendix 1). Three actions were likely to miss their target, mostly due to capacity issues.



- 30. Highlights include:
 - (a) In 2023, the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer was invited to take part in a project to develop guidance for local authorities to report to Defra on adaptation progress. This work culminated in a trial in 2024, for local authorities to report to the Secretary of State under the Climate Change Act’s Adaptation Reporting Power. Our report was submitted in December 2024 and was well received with feedback stating

that it was a “fair description of the climate issues facing the council and the steps to overcome these challenges using a wide range of data and statistics”.

- (b) Work on installing solar panels on the Dolphin Centre has begun and this and other actions within the Dolphin Centre are expected to be completed ahead of schedule.
 - (c) Against initial expectations, encouraging the taxi trade to switch to electric is proceeding well. At the beginning of the programme, we had 13 hybrid vehicles and no electric vehicles in the licensed fleet. We now have 76 hybrids and five fully electric, which equates to 31.7% of our fleet.
 - (d) The initial tree planting target was 20,000 trees by 2025. The team has worked with community groups, businesses and schools and the current total is approximately 47,700. The target has now been increased to 100,000 trees by 2030.
 - (e) In 2024, the Head of Environmental Services and the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer worked together to commission the first UK local authority audit of council land and its ability to absorb carbon. Following that audit, the Environment team is now running a trial on alternative seeding to increase the potential of council land to absorb carbon emissions.
 - (f) We have extended the HVO trial on our refuse trucks and have now added solar panels on five of the refuse trucks. These panels reduce the amount of fuel used on ancillary tasks such as the lifts, radios and lights.
31. Following the recent motion declaring a nature restoration emergency, we will revise the climate change strategy and action plan.

Financial Implications

32. A reserve fund allowing agreed savings from projects to be set aside for investment in future climate projects has been set up.

Legal Implications

33. There are no legal implications, but with increasing public pressure to act on the threat of climate change, we must demonstrate how we will deliver on the motion commitments and protect the Council from future legal challenge.

HR Implications

34. The report does not affect the terms and conditions of any staff or change their duties.

Estates and Property Advice

35. The report does not affect the Council's land holdings or involve a lease, or license or any transfer or purchase of land.

Procurement Advice

36. The report does not involve any purchase over £100k.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

37. Climate change is a corporate priority. Public scrutiny in this area is growing and we should consider and set out the climate impacts of decisions. This report shows how we are progressing on our journey.

Equalities considerations

38. Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. By ensuring that the Council is resilient to the effects of climate change, we ensure that we will be able to continue providing services to all residents

Consultation

39. This report is a progress report for the Council's commitment to reducing its carbon emissions and increasing its resilience to the impacts of climate change. No public consultation has been carried out.