

**CABINET
9 SEPTEMBER 2025**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE RESTORATION STRATEGY

Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio

Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval of the combined Climate Change and Nature Restoration Strategy (**Appendix A**).

Summary

2. In May 2025, Council passed a resolution declaring a nature restoration emergency and combined it with the Council's existing climate change emergency.
3. We are also seeing that nature has become fragmented, demonstrating a need to rebuild the connectivity between habitats that has been lost.
4. We also need to create a wider variety of habitats in Darlington, increasing the resilience of our wildlife to climate change, human pressures and natural threats.
5. The attached strategy (Appendix A) sets out our approach to dealing with the challenge of both emergencies.
6. The target of a net zero Council by 2040 remains.
7. Separate action plans will be developed for the climate change and nature restoration actions, with clear linkages where an action will benefit both sides of the emergency declaration.
8. The existing Cross Party Climate Change Working Group will be expanded to also provide supportive review of the nature restoration actions.
9. The six-monthly climate change progress reports will expand to include reporting on the nature restoration actions.
10. The strategy and supporting action plans will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date.

Recommendations

11. Cabinet recommends that Council approves the adoption of the attached Climate Change and Nature Restoration Strategy

Reasons

12. The recommendations are supported by the increasing public pressure to act on climate change and on nature loss, we run the risk of significant damage to our reputation if we do not deliver on our stated commitments.

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 and nature restoration 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 turn leads to better educational attainment and job prospects.
Addressing inequalities	Climate change affects everyone, but it has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. This strategy sets out how we will approach reducing our carbon emissions and adapting our services to the unavoidable effects of climate change. An improved natural environment will ensure that all Darlington residents will have access to good quality green space.
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 strategy sets out how we will approach reducing carbon and adapting our services, to ensure that the Council can continue to support and provide services to Darlington's residents. Access to good quality natural environment is also well documented as supporting strong physical and mental wellbeing.
S17 Crime and Disorder	There is no expected impact on Crime and Disorder in Darlington.
Wards Affected	This strategy covers how the Council will address its own carbon emissions and resilience, and how it will approach nature restoration. It will not affect any particular ward.
Groups Affected	This strategy covers how the Council will address its own carbon emissions and resilience, and how it will approach nature restoration. It will not affect any particular group.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	Yes

Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

13. In May 2025, Council passed a resolution declaring a nature restoration emergency and combined it with the Council's existing climate change emergency.
14. The predicted impacts of climate change in Darlington include more frequent and intense flooding, drought, episodes of extreme heat and stormier conditions. These impacts are expected to lead to an increase in heat-related deaths, particularly amongst the elderly, damage to essential infrastructure, reduced availability of drinking water, increased cost and scarcity of food, disruption to supply chains and service provision, sea level rises, greater coastal erosion and impact on habitats from rising temperature and weather events and from invasive species.
15. At the same time, the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Since the industrial revolution, we have already lost half of all animals, plants and birds because of intensive agriculture, habitat depletion and climate change.
16. We are also seeing that nature has become fragmented, demonstrating a need to rebuild the connectivity between habitats that has been lost.
17. We also need to create a wider variety of habitats in Darlington, increasing the resilience of our wildlife to climate change, human pressures and natural threats.
18. The links between climate change and nature restoration are clear, and the attached strategy (Appendix A) sets out our approach to dealing with the challenge of both emergencies.

Climate change

19. The target of a net zero Council by 2040 remains.
20. The scope of our climate change reporting remains concentrated on those emissions we can measure and have direct control over.
21. However, we do have a responsibility, as a leader in the borough, to support and encourage others to take action themselves. The wider borough emissions will continue to be monitored and reported, using data from central government.
22. Five principles are set out, which underpin the actions we will take towards our climate change commitments:
 - (a) Reduce our overall energy consumption:

- (i) Increase the efficiency of our estate
 - (ii) Proactively manage our buildings to reduce energy demand
 - (iii) Train staff to be carbon literate so they change their behaviours
- (b) Reduce our demand for fossil fuel-based energy:
 - (i) Move away from gas heating
 - (ii) Increase on site renewables
 - (iii) Support renewables with batteries
- (c) Contribute to a greener grid:
 - (i) Increase off-site renewables.
- (d) Sequester carbon:
 - (i) Offsetting only residual emissions after all efforts to reduce are taken.
- (e) Adaptation:
 - (i) Ensure the Council adapts its services to climate change.
 - (ii) Signpost businesses to information on how they can adapt.
 - (iii) Support residents in simple changes they can make.

Nature restoration

23. Five principles are set out, which underpin the actions we will take towards our nature restoration commitments:
- (a) Improve the connectivity of habitats through the creation and/or enhancement of wildlife corridors and stepping stones:
 - (i) Identify and map key areas where green corridors can be either enhanced or created.
 - (ii) Where a continuous corridor is not possible, create stepping stones for wildlife.
 - (iii) Update Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013 – 2026 to reflect the current state of Darlington and the need to enhance and create wildlife corridors.
 - (b) Increase the resilience of natural environments:
 - (i) Create and/or enhance wildlife corridors and stepping stones.
 - (ii) Create a range of diverse habitats.
 - (iii) Increase the size and quality of habitats.
 - (c) Halt and reverse biodiversity decline:
 - (i) Deliver targets in Darlington Borough Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy.

- (ii) Create or restore alternative carbon sinks, such as wildflower meadows, grassland, and freshwater bodies and associated habitats.
 - (d) Ensure all developments in Darlington are designed for nature and climate:
 - (i) Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are the preferred approach to managing surface water runoff from hard surfaces.
 - (ii) Encourage the installation of wildlife features, such as swift, hedgehog and bee bricks, nest boxes and hedgehog highways within the landscaping plans.
 - (e) Review the environmental management practices within the Council's owned land.
24. Separate action plans will be developed for the climate change and nature restoration actions, with clear linkages where an action will benefit both sides of the emergency declaration.
25. The current climate change action plan is being reviewed. New actions will replace the completed ones and actions that better sit within the nature restoration action plan will move across.
26. The existing Cross Party Climate Change Working Group will be expanded to also provide supportive review of the nature restoration actions.
27. The six-monthly climate change progress reports will expand to include reporting on the nature restoration actions, once that action plan has been developed.
28. The action plans are likely to be rolling three to five year plans. These and the strategy will be reviewed regularly to take advantage of updates in government policy, examples of good practice and new technologies.

Financial Implications

29. The attached strategy sets out our approach to meeting both our climate change and nature restoration commitments. Work has been undertaken concerning the climate change strategy financial impact, however this has been ongoing as technology and new initiatives have been explored. Further work will therefore be undertaken to understand the anticipated costs of both strategies.
30. There are expected additional future costs related to habitat development and climate change, however some of these will be offset by energy efficiency measures and there will be opportunities to generate income, for example through biodiversity credits.
31. Any additional costs of implementing the strategy will be included within the normal budget setting process through the MTFP or will be presented to Cabinet as initiatives arise.

Legal Implications

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

Estates and Property Advice

30. As the strategy will impact on all Council activities, it may also affect Council's land holdings and management of Council land.

Carbon Impact and Climate Change

31. Climate change is a corporate priority. It affects everyone, but has a disproportionate impact on areas of deprivation. By ensuring the Council is resilient to the effects of climate change, we ensure that we will be able to continue providing services to all residents. Public scrutiny in this area is growing and we should consider and set out the climate impacts of decisions.

Equalities considerations

32. 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

33. This strategy relates to reducing the Council carbon emissions, increasing its resilience to the impacts of climate change and how we intend to proceed with nature restoration. No public consultation has been carried out.