

**CABINET**  
**6 JANUARY 2026**

---

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURE RECOVERY PROGRESS**

---

**Responsible Cabinet Member -  
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -  
Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy & Public Protection**

---

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To update Cabinet on progress towards both the Council's net zero target and its nature recovery ambition.

**Summary**

2. As agreed in the Climate and Nature Emergency Declaration, this report is the 6-month interim report.
3. The emissions data we gather is available annually, so there is no update on current emissions.
4. The increase in emissions reported for 2024/25 is partially due to the opening of Hopetown and works on the Dolphin Centre. Unfortunately, we do not yet have a definitive answer for the rise in emissions at Allington Way. Investigations are ongoing here.
5. The Climate Change Officer has been working with officers across the Council to revise the climate change action plan.
6. A new tool has been developed to identify potential projects that will require funding. We are also working with the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub for areas where they can support us with finding funding.
7. Following the nature recovery emergency motion in May 2025, a combined climate change and nature strategy was approved by Cabinet in September.
8. The Ecologist is developing a nature recovery action plan, which will align with the regional nature recovery strategy currently in development for the Tees Valley.
9. The Ecologist is also gathering data for our statutory biodiversity duty report, which is due to be submitted at the end of March.

10. She is also reporting to Natural England, on the management status of all Council managed local wildlife sites.

### **Recommendation**

11. It is recommended that Cabinet acknowledges the report.

### **Reasons**

12. The recommendations support our declaration to act on climate change and nature depletion. We run the risk of significant damage to our reputation if we do not deliver on our stated commitments to dealing with the Council's contribution to climate change and ambition for nature recovery.

**Trevor Watson**  
**Executive Director**

### **Background Papers**

No background papers were used in producing this report.

Margaret Enstone : Extension 6229

Council Plan	<p>This report reflects the Council Plan Core Principle in Tackling Climate Change.</p> <p>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 turns means fewer days of school (or work), improved educational attainment and better work opportunities.</p> <p>Consultation responses on the Council Plan demonstrate that residents value nature and biodiversity. A healthy and vibrant natural environment will benefit people's health and the economy; people want to live and work in nice places. Alongside this, the links between nature and climate change are clear: climate change impacts on the natural environment, and a healthy natural environment can help manage climate change impacts.</p>
Addressing inequalities	<p>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.</p> <p>Studies show that people living in more deprived areas, minority ethnic groups and younger people are more likely to live in areas with less access to green space. Darlington is a relatively green town, but we must make sure that all members of our community have equitable access to good quality green spaces.</p>
Tackling Climate Change	<p>The Council has recognised the need to consider the carbon impact of the decisions it makes. This report is a progress report</p>

	<p>of our journey to reducing our carbon emissions and adapting our services to the unavoidable effects of climate change.</p> <p>The motion that was passed in May 2025 and the joint climate change and nature strategy demonstrate the interlinkages between climate change and nature.</p>
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. Alongside this, nature plays a crucial role in human health and well-being – with both physical and mental health benefits, including reduced stress, improved mood, enhanced cognitive function and lower risk of chronic diseases. This report is a progress report of our journey to becoming a net zero 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 and how we are delivering on our nature recovery ambition. The nature recovery action plan will benefit all wards in Darlington.
Groups Affected	This report covers how the Council is addressing its own carbon emissions and resilience and how we are delivering on our nature recovery ambition. It will not affect any particular group, but the nature recovery action plan will benefit the whole Borough.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

- As agreed in the Climate and Nature Emergency Declaration, this report is the 6-month interim report. The emissions data we gather is available annually, so there is no update on current emissions.

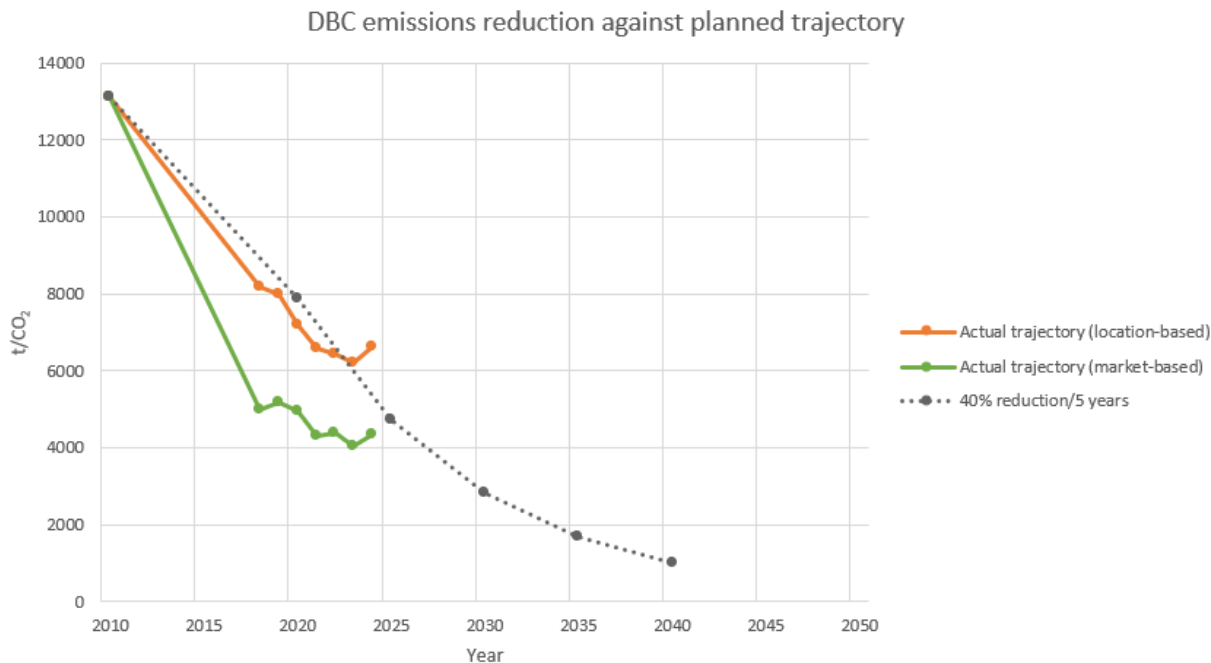
14. At the end of March 2024, our emissions were as follows:

	2010/11	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>	t/CO <sub>2</sub>
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
Total estimated working from home emissions/tCO <sub>2</sub> e during lockdown				125				
Total	13,101	8,196	7,985	7,080	6,592	6,449	6,190	6,642

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

	2010/11	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	Generation kWh	Generation kWh*	Generation kWh	Generation kWh	Generation kWh	Generation kWh	Generation kWh	Generation kWh
Total		1,008	7,846	8,597	9,015	9,028	12,720	19,058

16. Trajectory:



17. The increase in emissions has been investigated and to some extent can be attributed to the opening of Hopetown. It is a reminder that all decisions the Council makes has an impact on our emissions target. We are working with the Corporate Landlord to see how future emissions can be reduced.
18. The works on The Dolphin Centre have also increased emissions while the combined heat and power (CHP) unit is out of action. This should be temporary but will be monitored. Once the solar panels are showing generation and the CHP is back online, savings should become evident here.
19. The third anomaly relates to Allington Road, where the increase is related to the installation of a new meter. Our supplier EDF and their subcontractor are looking at the meter to check that the set-up of the new meter is correct, and whether the old meter was set up incorrectly. The Corporate Landlord team will run their own tests to verify the information we are getting.

20. During the year, the Climate Change Officer has been working with officers across the authority to revise the climate change action plan to ensure continued relevance and boost progress across teams.

21. Highlights from activity to date include:

(a) Highway Asset Management

- (i) Sustainable Materials: Ongoing use of sustainable road maintenance materials to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with continuous exploration of new options.

(b) Capital Projects

- (i) Carbon Reduction in New Builds: Carbon reduction measures actively considered and implemented in housing and commercial projects.
- (ii) Modern Methods of Construction (MMC): Standard wall designs under review; Sparrow Hall Drive identified as a test site for MMC.
- (iii) Renewables & Batteries: Presumption in favour of renewables and battery integration across the estate.
- (iv) Low Carbon Technologies: Whole-system approach adopted for building design; supporting electric vehicle infrastructure at Arriva depot for delivery of electric buses.

(c) Corporate Landlord

- (i) Air Tightness & Renewables: Air Source Heat Pumps included in Skinnergate Housing Scheme; renewables considered for future schemes.
- (ii) Loft Insulation: Additional insulation installed at several sites; ongoing review.
- (iii) Pipework Insulation: Mostly complete; proactive jackets added to valves when discovered.
- (iv) Office Rationalisation: Central House Annexe vacated
- (v) Low Carbon Heat & Power: New CHP unit installed at Dolphin Centre (awaiting commissioning).

(d) Transport Planning

- (i) Bus Service Improvement: Active collaboration with TVCA on service reviews and infrastructure improvements. Awaiting funding announcement from DfT to understand and finalise plans for improving bus services in 2025/26.
- (ii) Car Club Feasibility: Completed and decision documented; future consideration linked to TVCA mobility hubs.

- (iii) Active Travel Engagement: Delivered events during Modeshift Month; launched Active Travel Ambassadors Programme in schools.
  - (iv) EV Charging Points: DBC are working with TVCA on the LEVI Capability Fund, which will see the introduction of charge points on street, where there is a need to do so.
  - (v) Cycling Infrastructure: LCWIP route finalised; safe routes to school implemented.
- (e) Housing Services
  - (i) Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (Wave 2): Project completed in Q2.
  - (ii) Warm Homes Programme: Secured £3.549m government funding for upgrades (insulation, windows, solar panels) to 650 social homes; overall programme (including non-grant funded work) aims to upgrade 1,000+ social homes.
- (f) Economy & Public Protection
  - (i) Taxi Policy: Continued incentives for electric and hybrid taxis with plans to retain the licence fee reduction for emission-free and hybrid vehicles; Euro 6 standards adopted.
- (g) Adult Social Care
  - (i) Seasonal Weather Guidance: Comprehensive advice developed for vulnerable groups to stay safe during extreme weather.
  - (ii) Equipment Recycling: Discussions underway to enable Medequip recycling at council sites.
  - (iii) Carbon Footprint Awareness: Ongoing team discussions promoting sustainable travel and energy efficiency.
- (h) Countryside Services
  - (i) Tree Planting: Target of 100,000 new trees by 2031 achieved (including partnership with Tees Forest).
  - (ii) Wildflower Planting: Continuous review for drought-resistant and wildflower planting.
- (i) Waste & Transport Services
  - (i) Fleet Transition: Infrastructure installation scheduled; funding identified.
  - (ii) Food Waste Collection: Progressing contracts for new service.
- (j) Leisure Services (Dolphin Centre)

- (i) Solar Panels: Lower roof installation completed; upper roof nearing completion.
    - (ii) Energy Efficiency: New CHP plant installed; variable speed fans completed; major glazing and M\&E upgrades funded and scheduled.
  - (k) Hopetown Darlington
    - (i) Local Sourcing: Food, retail stock, and event supplies sourced locally.
    - (ii) Plastic Reduction: No single-use plastics; sustainable packaging adopted.
    - (iii) Food Waste Reduction: Leftover food offered via discount schemes.
    - (iv) Recycling & Reuse: Exhibition walls reused; nitrile gloves and acid-free paper recycled.
    - (v) Digital Marketing: Preference for digital over paper communications.
    - (vi) Energy Saving: Internal screens switched off during closing hours.
    - (vii) Community Engagement: Visitors encouraged to adopt sustainable practices.
  - (l) Library Service
    - (i) Sustainability Events: Plans for quarterly events on recycling and climate change.
    - (ii) Sustainable products across sites: continuous review of the products and materials used on both sites to improve environmental sustainability where possible.
22. The Climate Change Officer has developed a simple form for teams to let us know what projects they have in mind. This will enable the climate change team to help look for funding. Often, funding opportunities arrive with very short notice, and we cannot wait until they are announced before we start to develop projects.
23. The North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub is also looking for a pipeline of projects that they can then help support with finding funding. The recent Mayoral Renewables Fund arrived with no notice at all, so those authorities with ready projects were at an advantage.
24. In May 2025, Council passed a motion declaring a nature recovery emergency to sit alongside the climate change emergency. This recognises the links between the two areas of work.
25. A combined climate change and nature strategy was accepted by Cabinet in September 2025.
26. The Council's Ecologist is developing a nature recovery action plan, and we will produce combined reports to Cabinet and Council on the same timetable as the existing climate

change reports. We hope that a draft of the nature recovery action plan will be ready for the annual report in July.

27. Initially, the nature recovery action plan is focusing on internal actions. This will require engagement across the Council.
28. We will need to ensure that the nature recovery action plan aligns with the upcoming local nature recovery strategy for the Tees Valley. Publication is due June 2026.
29. Once a draft has been produced, the plan will be taken out for public consultation. Unlike the climate change plan's council only target, the nature recovery plan will affect the whole borough.
30. We will also ensure that the climate change and nature recovery action plans will indicate clearly where actions impact (both positively and negatively) on each other.
31. The Environment Act 2021 requires us to produce a biodiversity duty report every five years. The initial report is due on 26 March 2026. The Ecologist is gathering data for this report, which will go to Cabinet on 3 February.
32. The Ecologist is also reporting to Natural England, on the management status of all council managed local wildlife sites.
33. Other work includes significant time spent on responding to planning applications and the biodiversity net gain implications.
34. This links to the identification of a site to be used as a habitat bank for biodiversity net gain allocation within the borough. This site has the potential to generate income from sales of habitat units.

### **Communications**

35. We have been working with the Communication team on a revised communications plan.
36. We continue to include a dedicated page in each issue of One Darlington and sharing appropriate social media posts.

### **Financial Implications**

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

### **Legal Implications**

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

### **HR Implications**



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

#### **Estates & Property Advice**

40. 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**

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

#### **Equalities Considerations**

42. 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**

43. 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.