St Albans
City & District Council

Sustainability & Climate Crisis Strategy 2024-27

Prepared by

AECOM Delivering a better world

Introduction

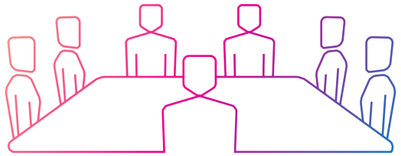
Every aspect of our lives is dependent upon the health of the global environment. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the materials that make the products we use, and the energy that powers our homes and businesses all come from this 'natural capital'. It is therefore vitally important that we conserve and sustain the health of our environment.

Sustainability is about ensuring we don't create irreversible impacts or use so many resources that others in the future suffer at our expense. It's about thinking of the future today and making sure that we protect the health of ourselves and the ecosystems we depend upon. Done well, it can also ensure that our actions are cost effective, delivering economic and public health benefits, creating jobs, and cutting spending on energy.

As a Council we recognise that we have an important part to play in acting on climate change and becoming more sustainable through our combined role as a community leader, a service provider, and an estate manager. We want to do as much as we can to treasure our environment and community and ensure resilience in the face of a changing world. There is no denying that if we are to create a new, more sustainable way of living, significant changes will be needed in the way we travel, use energy, and consume materials and food.

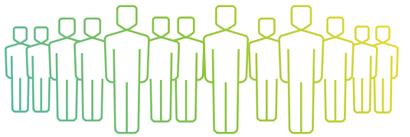
We have already set ambitious sustainability goals and produced The Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy and associated Action Plan in 2020. This document provides an update to the original strategy, setting out the agreed actions for 2023-2026 that we have committed to taking. These actions will reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions, save energy and water minimise waste and pollution, and enhance local habitats and green space. To read the original strategy and the accompanying background information please visit our website. You can also find information on the website on the latest Council and District emissions as well as details of the work we have already done to reach our goals.

Our Goals & Themes



Council Emissions

We have committed to reduce our corporate carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.



Community Emissions

We will continue to support and encourage local residents, schools, businesses and the non-profit sector to reach net zero carbon emissions across the District by 2030.

Governance & Leadership

Circular Economy Waste & Food

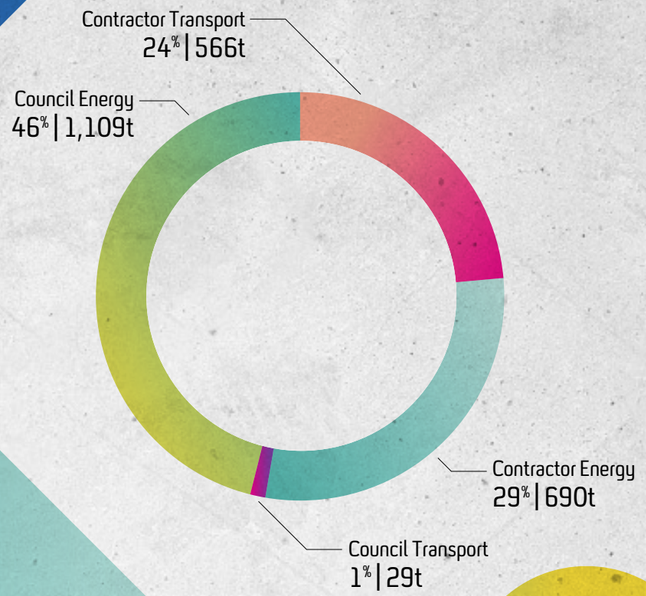
Energy & Buildings

Water Resources & Flooding

Natural Environment & Biodiversity

Transport & Air Quality

Council Greenhouse Gas Emissions



We have been working hard to reduce the Council emissions since we first set our targets in 2008/09 and we have reduced our emissions by 43%. This reduction is a combination of specific Council actions and activities at a national level.

The carbon impact of electricity has reduced by 60% between 2005 to 2021 due to national action to decarbonise the energy system with nuclear and renewable energy.

The actions we have already taken have had a positive impact on our emissions but there is a still a lot of work to do to meet our Net Zero 2030 goal.

More than half of the Council's emissions arise from our contractors' activities, and this includes our waste collection, ground maintenance and leisure services.

We are working hard with our contractors to reduce these emissions by setting sustainability requirements that they must follow, and requiring them to set out how they will be reducing emissions over the period of the contract.

The majority of the remaining emissions are from the Council's energy use, primarily from the Council buildings. We are working hard to make our buildings more energy efficient, but this is an ongoing challenge.

Community Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In 2020, 45% of the total District CO_2 emissions came from using energy in domestic properties, mostly from heating homes and using electricity, and a further 35% from road transport.

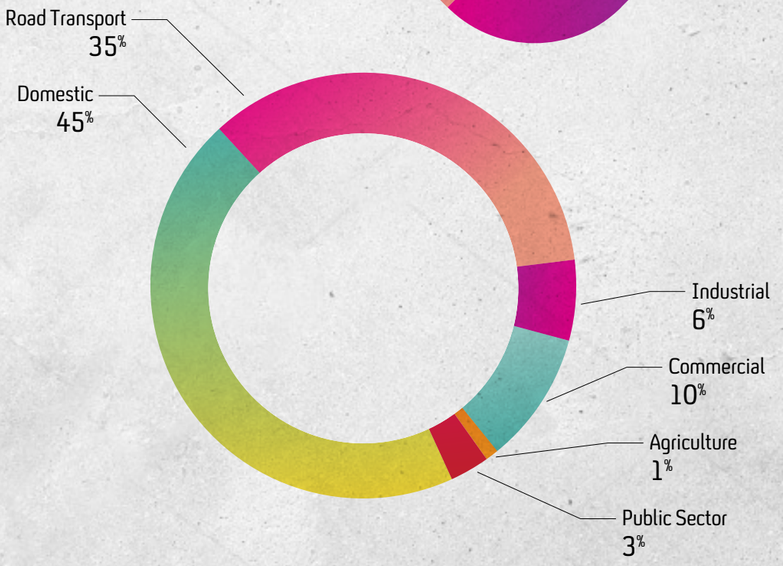
Emissions from the public sector account for only 3% of the District's CO_2 emissions and a further 16% are from businesses within the District.

We need to work together to reduce CO_2 emissions from activities within the District and to combat climate change.

As a Council, we have committed to working with the community to reach net zero emissions across the District by 2030.

To tackle climate change and reduce emissions, we each need to reduce our consumption of carbon dioxide (and equivalent) emitting fuels through changing our behaviours, making our homes and buildings more energy efficient 'decarbonising' our heat by getting off gas, switching to active and sustainable travel wherever feasible, and generating more of our own electricity. This way we can save CO_2 and it can help to save money.

Look out for information on our webpage and social media for ways that individuals and businesses can make changes to reduce emissions.



Climate Change Risks

Even if we make the necessary changes to dramatically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions there will still be changes to our climate due to the impact of carbon emissions already in the atmosphere. We must therefore be prepared to reduce the risks and manage the impacts.

These are the key climate change risks expected for the UK and St Albans District:

Air Quality

Changes in temperature and weather patterns can negatively affect impact air quality which can be detrimental to our health.

Winds + Storms

More extreme weather and storms is expected as a result of higher temperatures. High winds and storms can result in people needing to stay indoors, and can lead to property damage.

Drought

Longer and more intense heatwaves can worsen droughts by drying out soils. Also, hotter summers and less predictable rainfall may lead to water shortages in the UK.

Flood Risk

The country will experience wetter winters and drier summers, with greater potential for extreme rainfall events and flooding.

Heavier rainfall, in a shorter time frame and over a smaller area can cause flash flooding leading to property damage. Flooding also poses significant risks to infrastructure services, potentially causing damage, transportation disruption, and power cuts.

Infrastructure

High and low temperatures, high winds, and lightning associated with climate change can damage infrastructure and transportation systems. Consequently, this may cause widespread disruption.

High Temperatures

The frequency and severity of heatwaves will increase. We will experience warmer winters and hotter summers, with greater potential for heatwaves and increased humidity.

The increase in temperature poses a much higher risk of overheating. Overheating will increase the UK's mortality rate, as well as having detrimental impacts on physical and mental health.

Get Involved

Click here to find out how we are delivering the strategy

Sign up to our newsletter

Governance & Leadership

To succeed in our carbon reduction and sustainability goals, structures and processes need to be in place to ensure that all areas of the Council reflect our commitment to achieving net zero 2030. It is important that the commitment is embedded into the Council culture and that our staff and elected members have all the tools available to deliver the Action Plan.

As a community leader, it is also important that we speak up about the environment and the changes that are needed to promote a healthy and sustainable District. We are in a prominent position to raise awareness of environmental issues and encourage communities to take action and be part of the solution.

1. **Ensure all Council plans, strategies and decisions support the corporate emissions reduction commitment, help to deliver the Strategy, support biodiversity and promote climate resilience.**
We will reflect the strategy in all areas of Council decision making.

2. **Embed positive behaviour change to reduce Council greenhouse gas emissions in all service areas and assets.**
We will ensure that all service areas take account of the strategy and make the most of every opportunity to help meet our commitment.

3. **Ensure our commitment to reduce corporate emissions to net zero by 2030 is reflected in the Council's procurement process.**
We will expect the organisations who work with us to help us to deliver the strategy.

4. **Manage, monitor and report progress on meeting our commitment to reduce corporate emissions to net zero by 2030.**
We will measure our progress to meet our commitment and publish reports on our website.

5. **Communicate effectively with the local community to raise awareness, reduce district greenhouse gas emissions, improve the resilience of the district to climate change and support biodiversity.**
We will proactively work to promote the strategy within the St Albans community.

6. **Work with partners, including the County Council, to deliver, support and promote opportunities and projects for communities to mitigate and adapt to climate change, support biodiversity and promote sustainability across the District.**
We cannot deliver the net zero 2030 commitment ourselves, therefore we will proactively work with others to make a real difference in the District.

7. **Ensure the Local Plan fully addresses climate change, promotes sustainability, supports biodiversity and helps to deliver the strategy.**
We will include ambitious climate change policies in the emerging Local Plan.

Energy & Buildings

Roughly 60% of the CO_2 emissions from the wider St Albans District come from energy use in buildings. If we want to reduce these emissions, we will need to use substantially less energy, and the energy we do use will need to come from renewable sources. This means making sure that new buildings are built to the highest standard, and making changes to our existing buildings to improve energy efficiency and the way they are heated.

Renewable energy will play an important part in reducing carbon emissions, from the small scale by having solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on buildings to larger scale energy generation projects

1. **Decarbonise all Council-operated built assets.**
We will reduce carbon emissions from all our buildings.

2. **Identify, invest in and deliver energy infrastructure to decarbonise Council operations, increase the renewable energy mix, generate income and embed resiliency.**
We will seek to generate our own energy to support Council services and assets to increase recycling.

3. **Support and promote sustainable building practices and sustainable development, that is consistent with net zero carbon.**
We will ensure new development is built to high sustainability standards and support retrofitting opportunities.

4. **Support residents and businesses championing the reduction of their own energy use, emissions and cost in existing developments.**
We will help our communities learn how to reduce their own energy and support schemes that will help to improve energy efficiency in existing buildings.

5. **Implement low-carbon energy generation and storage and carbon offset schemes.**
We will explore and support appropriate renewable and low carbon energy schemes.

6. **Support energy efficiency measures in low income households to tackle fuel poverty and raise living standards.**
By improving energy efficiency, we can also ensure that everyone, even the most vulnerable, can afford to stay warm enough in their home. An important part of this will be to develop a programme to re-educate households on how the new technologies should be operated in order to maximise potential energy savings e.g. a different mode of operation is required to that of a gas central heating system.

Get Involved

- **Save energy at home** – find out ways you can save energy at home
- **Use renewable energy** – find out more about how to generate your own energy from renewables

Get Involved

Walk or get on your bike – make more journeys by foot or cycle. Not only is it better for the environment but it is also great for your mental and physical health, and can often be quicker than driving or public transport for short journeys.

Leave your car at home – can you switch to public transport, join a car share, or use an electric vehicle instead? And when you do need to drive, could you be more efficient and turn off your engine, when possible, to avoid idling?

Idling Action St Albans - Find out more

Transport & Air Quality

Transport is one of the main sources of carbon emissions generated within the District with road transport accounting for approximately 35% of the total. As well as being a source of greenhouse gas emissions, road transport is also the main source of air pollution in St Albans District.

We are not the transport authority, but we will work with Hertfordshire County Council and our community to transform our transportation system. We will work to make positive changes, remove barriers, and make the most of opportunities to help create a system that is low carbon and sustainable.

1 **Decarbonise the Council fleet.**
We will reduce carbon emissions generated from the Council-owned and contractor fleet by improving efficiency and transitioning to low emission vehicles.

2 **Decarbonise corporate travel emissions.**
We will continue to reduce Council emissions from business travel by introducing and promoting a range of green travel options.

3 **Promote active and sustainable travel.**
We will support the uptake of cycling and walking across the District, helping to improve the infrastructure and delivering the improvements set out in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

4 **Reduce transport emissions and support the transition to low-carbon vehicles.**
We will work with communities, businesses, and Hertfordshire County Council to encourage the switch to low emission vehicles by improving the electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, proactively engaging with public transport providers, and supporting new sustainable transport alternatives.

5 **Work with partners and the local community to improve air quality across the District.**
We will work to improve poor air quality in the District through tackling transport emissions.

Circular Economy, Waste & Food

The waste hierarchy principles to reduce first, then reuse and finally recycle have been promoted for many years and over 60% of the District's household waste is recycled. Recycling saves energy and money by avoiding the need to use new materials to make products. It also prevents waste littering our natural environment.

Reducing waste isn't just about disposing of it sustainably; it is also about the way we use and consume products. A circular economy ensures that nothing goes to waste, and everything has value, keeping materials and product in use for as long as possible.

Food production is a major contributor to carbon emissions in the UK. Changing diets to eat less meat and better quality, more local and seasonal produce can have large positive impacts on emissions, and on land-use by freeing up large amounts of land for other uses.

1. **Reduce the levels of waste from Council assets and events.**
We will seek to reduce overall levels of waste from the Council. We will reuse where possible and increase our own levels of recycling.

2. **Ensure Circular Economy principles are embedded into all Council processes and projects.**
We will promote circular economy principles in our processes, ensuring we reuse and repurpose where possible.

3. **Provide and promote sustainable and inclusive food options at Council sites and events.**
We will provide a range of sustainable food options and prioritise local producers and suppliers.

4. **Work with partners and communities to reduce waste and increase recycling across the District.**
We will work with our community to promote the waste hierarchy and reduce levels of waste across the District. We will also help to educate residents to increase recycling.

5. **Promote Circular Economy principles across the District.**
We will seek to work with communities to provide more opportunities to implement a circular economy.

6. **Work with partners and communities to promote sustainable food.**
We will raise awareness of the importance of sustainable food production.

Get Involved

- **Reducing your waste** - Recycling, composting and reducing your waste is easy and can make a big difference to the environment. There are lots of ways we can all play our part. Find out more
- **You are what you eat** – find out how you can be more sustainable with your food choices

Get Involved

Make space for nature at home – There is a lot you can do to support nature and wildlife at home. Choosing wildlife friendly plants can support bees, butterflies and other insects, which in turn supports birds and other wildlife. Find out how you can make space for nature.

Get your hands dirty – St Albans is lucky to have such a dedicated community of passionate environmental supporters and there are plenty of ways to volunteer and help the natural environment. Find out more

Natural Environment & Biodiversity

In St Albans we value our high-quality natural environment. We know the important role it plays in providing healthy communities and supporting wildlife. Globally, wildlife and habitats are in decline, and changing temperature and rainfall patterns due to climate change are part of the reason for this. It is imperative that habitats are restored and protected wherever possible so that there is a net-gain in biodiversity.

Natural green spaces are also important as they help to clean the air, absorb excess rainwater to reduce flooding, absorb noise and provide cooling. The natural environment also helps to remove CO_2 from the atmosphere. Plants and trees absorb CO_2 through their leaves and use it as fuel, and soil can also absorb and trap CO_2. This is known as carbon sequestration.

1. **Ensure Council land is managed to maximise carbon sequestration whilst meeting other land use requirements.**
We will use our land to absorb CO2 from the atmosphere through planting trees and other vegetation.

2. **Manage Council land to promote climate resilience and support biodiversity.**
We will make our land more wildlife friendly and help it cope with extreme weather events such as drought and flooding.

3. **Work with communities, landowners, partners and local groups to make the natural environment more resilient to climate change.**
We will work with others to help the natural environment cope with the changing climate including extreme weather, storms, drought, and flooding.

4. **Work with partners and communities to identify opportunities to improve areas for biodiversity and create new habitats.**
We will work with others to increase biodiversity across the District. We will support projects to restore and create new areas for wildlife to live and thrive.

1 **Achieve high levels of water efficiency in Council assets.**
We will look for ways to save water and reduce water use from all our assets.

2 **Reduce the flood risk of Council assets.**
We will look for ways to help reduce the risk of flooding on our land and buildings by investigating ways to reduce surface water runoff.

3 **Work with partners and the community to deliver projects that manage water resources more efficiently.**
We will work with communities, businesses, and water companies to find ways to improve water efficiency. We will encourage the use of water harvesting measures, including water butts.

4 **Work with partners and the community to reduce the risk of all types of flooding.**
We will support projects to reduce flooding across the District, particularly where they provide other benefits for the environment such as tree planting.

Water Resources & Flooding

Climate change impacts the water cycle by influencing when, where, and how much rain falls. It will cause periods of drought as well as periods of intense rainfall leading to flooding. Both of these are risks for St Albans. The southeast of England is classified as water stressed because we have such high population density using higher than average amounts of water. Periods of drought can cause river levels to drop dangerously low, meaning that households will be faced with restrictions in water use. Using less water around the house through shorter showers, smaller baths etc , as well as collecting rainwater for use in the home and garden will help to save water and this also saves energy used at the water treatment plant too.

In the UK and Europe, flooding is one of the most economically and socially disruptive natural hazards with impacts on transport, housing, infrastructure, and energy supply. The risk of flooding from rivers in the St Albans District is limited to London Colney and Colney Heath. The risk of flash surface flooding from heavier downpours is likely to grow in the future and can affect properties all across the District.

Get Involved

Let it soak in - Reducing the amount of hard surfacing around your home and replacing it with permeable surfaces such as grass or planting can help water drain into the ground and reduce the risk of flooding.

- **Don't make a splash** – Think about how much water you use; are there ways you can make savings? Find out how:

Visit our Website
https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sustainability-and-climate-crisis-strategy

Email Us
sustainability@stalbans.gov.uk