

REPORT TITLE: Development of the Climate Change Strategy (2026-2031)

To:

Cabinet, 25th September 2025

Lead Cabinet Member: Cllr Rosy Moore, Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Environment

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Wards affected: All

Director Approval: Director Lynne Miles confirms that the report author has sought the advice of all appropriate colleagues and given due regard to that advice; that the equalities impacts and other implications of the recommended decisions have been assessed and accurately presented in the report; and that they are content for the report to be put to the Cabinet/Cabinet Member for decision.

1. Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Provides approval to progress to public engagement to help inform the development of the new Climate Change Strategy (2026-2031)
2. Delegates finalisation of engagement documents and plans (Appendices A, B and C) to the Director of Economy and Place

2. Purpose and reason for the report

2.1 The current Climate Change Strategy (2021-2026) ends in March 2026, and an updated Climate Change Strategy is required from April 2026 to continue to direct the Council's work on addressing climate change and working towards the Council's net zero target.

The purpose of this report is to set out how the new Climate Change Strategy will build upon the previous strategy, take account of changes in national policy and context and how we will ensure the strategy reflects the views, needs and priorities of residents,

businesses and key stakeholders via public engagement.

A decision is required for approval to proceed to public engagement in October.

3. Alternative options considered

3.1 The alternative options considered were:

- i) Let the current Climate Change Strategy end after March 2026. This option was rejected as it would mean the de-prioritisation of efforts to tackle climate change, isolated and fragmented project delivery, risk slower progress in carbon reduction, and decrease the Council's ability to achieve net zero by 2030.
- ii) Extend the current Climate Change Strategy for a year to cover the period up to the elections in April/May 2027 for the new Unitary Council under Local Government Reorganisation. This option was rejected as there are important new issues to be considered in the next year, South Cambridgeshire District Council are also developing a new Strategy in parallel, and a longer time horizon is needed to plan for and deliver the Council's major decarbonisation projects in development such as the Civic Quarter and District Heat Network.
- iii) Develop a Climate Change Strategy for Greater Cambridge in partnership with South Cambridgeshire District Council. This was rejected in favour of working together on a co-ordinated approach to the development of both Councils' strategies that enable residents, stakeholders and businesses in both Council areas to participate in the engagements, be clear on the decisions being taken by each Council, understand how our shared services are involved in the delivery and enable alignment in the future as part of Local Government Reorganisation implementation.

4. Background and key issues

4.1 Background

The [Climate Change Act](#) 2008 established the world's first legally binding national framework to reduce emissions. It introduced carbon budgets to systematically reduce emissions by 2050.

The UK has committed to reaching [Net Zero by 2050](#): to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030 and at least [81% by 2035](#) (compared to 1990 levels) announced in 2024 as its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement.

The Council has been taking action to address climate change since the launch of the first Cambridge Climate Change Charter in 2007 and our first Climate Change Strategy in 2008. The Council declared a Climate Emergency and a Biodiversity Emergency in 2019, and the Council's current Climate Change Strategy 2021-2026 shared a vision for the city of Cambridge to be net zero by 2030. The strategy also set a target to reduce the Council's own direct carbon emissions from its operational and administrative buildings, fleet vehicles and business travel to net zero by 2030, as detailed in the Council's Carbon Management Plan 2021-26.

Although the Council was only responsible for 0.7% of total city emissions in 2023, the Strategy recognised both the community leadership role it could play by acting where we have direct control or influence and working with residents, businesses and institutions in Cambridge as part of a collective effort to reach net zero carbon.

Real progress has been made to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the city, and by the Council in reducing our own emissions:

- The city of Cambridge's GHG emissions have reduced by 47.3% since 2005 and per capita emissions have reduced from 8.4 tCO₂e to 3.5 tCO₂e in 2023 and
- The Council's own greenhouse gas emissions were 8.1% lower in 2024/25 than 2023/24 and 51.9% lower than the 2014/15 baseline.

- Cambridge was named an 'A' list city in 2023 and 2024 in the Carbon Disclosure Project's global rankings.
- The Council is a top performing council in Climate Emergency UK's Council Climate Action scorecards.

However, the need for local action is still critical as we continue to see the effects of climate change in Cambridge, which is increasing the risk and frequency of extreme weather such as increased summer temperatures, water shortages and droughts and more frequent flood events.

Our economy is also playing an important role in delivering the national government UK Industrial Strategy and Economic Growth Mission. Alongside our own policies, work on a new joint Greater Cambridge Local Plan is currently underway, this will be the first joint Local Plan for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. Work has been ongoing since 2019, with public engagements taking place in 2020, and late 2021. The Local Plan will plan to meet the need for increased homes and jobs within the area. The two strategic priorities of climate change and biodiversity have enabled ambitious policies in the new plan to demand significant carbon emissions reductions and deliver a high degree of climate resilience. The development of the new Climate Change Strategy will incorporate the principles and policies of the new Local Plan.

Of the reduction in carbon emissions in the city, much has been delivered through the greening of the national grid, technology and appliances becoming more efficient rather than through direct action taken locally.

However, according to the Climate Change Committee (CCC), approximately one-third of the emissions reductions needed in the UK by 2040 depend on decisions made by individual households, and action delivered at the local level, particularly in key areas such as housing, transport, waste, energy, and land use.

The CCC has also highlighted that local authorities are currently constrained by limited powers, fragmented short-term funding, and unclear mandates, all of which reduce their ability to act at scale and pace.

We also need to consider the budgetary implications of the new strategy and impact of our decisions on the future Unitary council that will be created via Local Government Reorganisation in 2028.

As we get closer to 2030 and to help lay the foundations for work to create the new Unitary Council, a greater focus is required on understanding the more challenging aspects of reducing the Council's emissions such as how to deal with unavoidable residual emissions, understanding the potential cost of reaching net zero and securing grant funding or finance to deliver our most ambitious projects such as the District Heat Network.

New Climate Change Strategy

In response to these challenges and changing policy environment, we are now developing a new Climate Change Strategy (2026 – 2031) to build on the achievements to date, respond to changes in policy and to set out how we plan to work towards our net zero vision for the city and for the Council; and to deliver the associated benefits of improved health, wellbeing, and livelihoods for current and future generations.

To develop the Strategy the following work is underway or planned over the next six months to inform the detailed Strategy and accompanying Action Plan which will be brought back to Cabinet for approval, alongside the February budget and will need to take affordability into account.:

- Communications and public engagement to gain feedback and insights that can be used to develop the strategy and raise awareness of the need for continued and renewed action on climate.
- Analysis of the Council's greenhouse gas emissions for 2024/25.
- Action Plan review of progress in 24/25 and development of Actions for 26/27 onwards.
- Peer Review to understand how other Councils are addressing climate change and net zero targets including approach to offsetting

- Studies to define the specific requirements and investment for decarbonising the council's vehicle fleet, and those council owned corporate, community and commercial premises, which have not already been addressed and potential residual emissions that may need to be offset.
- Continued development of specific proposals for the Civic Quarter project which will deliver close to net zero for the Guildhall, Corn Exchange and Market Square, and the District Heat Network which could be a significant part of decarbonising heat for our city centre assets.
- Co-ordination with the Council's work on updating its Biodiversity Strategy and Urban Forest Strategy which will detail actions that will preserve and increase Biodiversity Net Gain and tree canopy cover and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Co-ordination with the work of our Shared Services and the development of the New Local Plan.
- Co-ordination with South Cambridgeshire District Council on the development of the Council's new Climate Change Strategy
- Coordination with the Council's Budget engagement
- Input to corporate work on performance and development of broader KPIs for co-benefits alongside GHG reductions and impact measurement

New Strategy Outline: The new Climate Change Strategy builds on the Council's previous strategy (2021–2026) but will include several key changes in structure and focus outlined below.

We have drafted an outline of the objectives and areas of focus proposed in the new strategy which we will seek feedback on as part of the public engagement.

Given the overarching nature of the strategy and the number of interlinked pieces of work happening within the council, and the work by South Cambridgeshire District Council on their Climate Change Strategy, we have also designed and a co-ordinated public engagement process that aims to make best use of the time and feedback given by participants and show how we are approaching the issues in an integrated and holistic way.

Proposed differences from previous strategy: While the previous strategy was organised around five objectives, it is proposed that this updated version sets out seven listed below, aligning more closely with South Cambridgeshire District Council's new Climate & Nature Strategy. This alignment reflects our integrated approach across shared services—such as the Shared Planning Service and Shared Waste Service—and anticipates potential future changes into a unitary authority as part of local government Reorganisation

Objectives and Areas of Action

1. **Transport:** Reducing the need for fossil fuel powered- travel and encouraging the use of low and zero carbon modes of transport to reduce emissions
2. **Energy & Retrofit:** Improving energy efficiency and climate resilience of homes and buildings across Cambridge
3. **Nature & Water:** Enhancing nature, increasing tree canopy cover and safeguarding water to support Cambridge to adapt to the impacts of climate change
4. **Sustainable Food:** Increasing access to local, low impact, seasonal food and reducing food waste
5. **Waste Minimisation:** Reducing waste and supporting a circular economy
6. **Supply Chain & Finance:** Reducing emissions and maximising social and environmental value of procurement and partnerships across the city
7. **Community Support & Behaviour Change** ensuring a just transition: providing accessible and inclusive support to communities and residents to empower and enable low carbon behaviour change

Although many of the core themes of the Strategy remain the same, such as sustainable transport, energy efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable food, and biodiversity, the updated strategy will integrate climate adaptation actions throughout, rather than treating adaptation as a separate objective. This reflects our commitment to mitigation and adaptation to climate change in a coordinated way. In addition, we have introduced two new standalone objectives: one focused on supply chain and

procurement, recognising the growing importance of working with our supply chain to reduce emissions and delivering wider social and environmental value.

We also have an additional objective focusing on community support and behaviour change. While the Council has long supported behaviour change through projects and partnerships, this Strategy places more emphasis on the importance of this for the next five years and gives greater prominence to the importance of engaging, empowering and motivating individuals and communities, particularly those most vulnerable to climate impacts, to adopt low-carbon lifestyles.

In addition to the significant work that will be detailed in the new strategy under the Objectives above, the Strategy also has additional areas of focus:

Co-developing a collaborative city-wide plan for climate: This Strategy aims to build a more united approach to addressing climate change in Cambridge by co-developing a collaborative city-wide climate plan in 2026-27. We are calling for evidence and input from businesses and organisations to help shape a collaborative, city-wide climate plan for Cambridge that builds a picture of what is happening across the city including how others are decarbonising their operations, to help develop a shared framework for scaling impact and explore how efforts can be clustered at a neighbourhood level to support local engagement and place-based action .

Offsetting unavoidable emissions: The Government defines net zero as: “any emissions would be balanced by schemes to offset an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, such as planting trees or using technology like carbon capture and storage”. To reach Net Zero Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions which are emitted by the council would therefore need to be offset by an equivalent amount of emissions which are removed from the environment through activities that actively remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, such as carbon capture and storage, afforestation (creating new woodlands) and reforestation (replanting trees in areas that were once forested).

Carbon offsetting, involving the payment for certified emission reductions or removals, has emerged as a widely adopted mechanism for entities to fulfil net-zero pledges,

particularly for residual emissions that cannot be directly eliminated. Its role is intended to complement, not replace, direct emission reduction efforts.

To date, the Council has prioritised, and will continue to prioritise, reducing emissions as far as is reasonably possible. We are starting to explore how councils might compensate for unavoidable residual emissions to meet net zero targets, often referred to as “offsetting”.

At this stage the engagement will ask for feedback on the following general principles when considering options to offset, which should be:

- Local – offsets should be generated locally, within the UK (not overseas)
- Additional – contribute to projects that would not happen otherwise.
- Credible - permanent and verified to comply with independent, recognised standards and avoid double counting.
- Prioritise Carbon removal – actively removing carbon from the atmosphere - over avoidance offsets which prevent new emissions

Beyond this we plan to watch and wait and prepare the necessary evidence and data to inform future decisions that may be needed by the Council or the newly formed Unitary Council following Local Government Reorganisation. The offset market is demonstrably evolving. Criticisms, particularly those concerning greenwashing, non-additionality, permanence and leakage, have necessitated a profound re-evaluation of how carbon offsets are generated, verified and used.

As many local authorities and other public sector organisations have set similar net zero targets, it is likely that closer to 2030, national guidance on offsetting for local authorities, or similar organisations, is produced (e.g. by Local Partnerships) and perhaps even a regional or national carbon offsetting scheme developed, with local benefits (‘insetting’ which removes emissions in the atmosphere of Cambridge/ Greater Cambridge). This could be in the form of a combination of creating new woodlands, replanting trees in areas that were once forested, restoring peatland and increasing biodiversity net gain.

Measuring Council Scope 3 emissions: As part of the Council's commitment to reducing its emissions further, the Council will look to understand, manage and reduce emissions from our suppliers. These are Scope 3 emissions that arise from the Council's operations but occur at sources which the Council does not own or control (and are also not classed as Scope 2 emissions). Reporting on emissions from suppliers and setting targets to reduce them is recommended by the Climate Change Committee who advise organisations to 'measure and report Scopes 1 and 2 as a minimum, define and report on Scope 3 as actively as possible'¹

The Council's annual [Greenhouse Gas \(GHG\) report](#) currently includes the following Scope 3 emissions:

- Business Travel (by means not owned or controlled by the authority): Staff and Councillor mileage, rail journeys, flights.
- Outsourced Activities: Leisure sites gas and electricity consumption, hotel stays, Transmission and distribution losses from Scope 2 and outsourced activities electricity consumption (leisure sites).

We recognise that usually, the majority of an organisation's greenhouse gas emissions are their Scope 3 emissions, accounting for anywhere between 80-95% of the total value chain of an organisation's carbon footprint.² For example, Cambridgeshire County Council estimate that 99% of their greenhouse gas emissions fall under Scope 3³. Therefore, by seeking to measure and record additional Scope 3 emissions ensures a more comprehensive view of the Council's overall emissions is reported and enable us to engage suppliers and partners in reducing emissions across the value chain, supporting decarbonisation locally, regionally, and nationally.

Supporting Community Energy projects: As detailed in the previous Strategy, the Council has supported residents to reduce their energy demand, by providing grants through the Sustainable City Grant to encourage organisations to reduce energy consumption; by providing free advice on energy efficiency improvements through Action on Energy; and securing government funding for energy efficiency improvements

¹ Climate Change Committee - [Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget](#)

² <https://newclimate.org/resources/publications/corporate-climate-responsibility-monitor-2022>

³ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/CCC-Carbon-Footprint-Report-2023-24.pdf>

in council and private homes. In this Strategy, the Council will assess the possibilities for supporting the development of community energy projects by providing advice, capacity-building support, and helping to unlock national funding opportunities. Through this approach, the Council aims to empower residents to take meaningful community-led climate action while delivering long-term benefits in energy savings, local resilience, and social equity.

Reducing emissions from Commercial Properties: Where the Council is responsible for providing heating and lighting to communal areas used by tenants of commercial properties, this energy consumption is included in the Council's annual Greenhouse Gas (GHG) report. In 2025/26, the Council will review and update its Asset Management and Decarbonisation Plan which sets out how the Council will manage the commercial property portfolio and corporate properties efficiently and effectively so that they meet energy efficiency standards for Council-owned leased properties to comply with legislation and are fit for the purpose in terms of function, size, environmental performance, cost, financial return and location now and in the future. .

As part of this process, we will identify priority sites for improvement, assess the decarbonisation measures required, and determine potential funding routes. This will inform the development of a targeted improvement programme to reduce emissions across our corporate and commercial estate.

5. Corporate plan

- 5.1 Mitigating climate change through decarbonisation and sustainability is embedded in the council's work. It is the [first priority in the Corporate Plan](#): *Leading Cambridge's response to the climate and biodiversity emergencies and creating a net zero council by 2030* and is a core part of the [Council's Vision](#): *Decarbonisation and sustainability are central to prosperity. Cambridge is a net zero carbon city, where people and nature enjoy a clean river, clean air, and biodiverse green spaces.*

6. Engagement and communication

- 6.1 We are seeking approval to carry out a communication and engagement exercise on the new Climate Change Strategy (2026-2031). This is due to launch on 1st October and run until 9th November.

The communication and engagement aims to:

1. deliver an open, balanced, evidence-based platform to increase engagement with the Climate Change Strategy, encouraging participation in the issues survey
2. reach groups of people who may be disproportionately negatively impacted by climate change and likely therefore to gain from action to reduce emissions and improve climate resilience, ensuring engagement methods used are accessible.
3. help build a more united approach to addressing climate change in Cambridge by providing an opportunity for co-developing a collaborative city-wide climate plan.
4. achieve a call for evidence response that reflects the depth and breadth of climate action taking place across the city and provides a shared framework for scaling impact.
5. Gain insights into opportunities and barriers to action to inform and improve the new strategy

The plan is to take an umbrella approach for a co-ordinated engagement on two inter-related Strategies: Cambridge City Council's Climate Change and South Cambridgeshire's Climate Change Strategy. This will enable us to gather more holistic insights to inform all the strategies and make best use of the time committed by participants across the Greater Cambridge.

The Engagement will involve an online survey hosted and a series of engagement workshops with key organisations and groups across the city and a campaign to promote the survey.

The online survey will be supported by an engagement document (Appendix A) and the survey (Appendix B) will be used to capture feedback to inform the detailed the strategy

and to help us to understand the motivations and barriers of individuals and organisations for climate action.

It also includes a Call for Evidence invitation asking stakeholders and organisations to share their plans which will help to build a city-wide picture and identify opportunities for collaboration or area-based working and stimulate opportunities for innovation.

See Appendix C for full details of the key groups, networks and organisations in the city we plan to engage. The approach aims to broaden the stakeholder composition base and integrate diverse sources of knowledge, including different cultural values, local insights and scientific knowledge.

Local people and representatives from local businesses, especially those with limited knowledge or experience of climate change, can help us to identify the barriers to action.

7. Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact

7.1 Benefits of this approach include:

- **Broadening stakeholder composition:** Local citizens, especially those with limited knowledge of climate change, as well as representatives from local businesses.
- **Involving vulnerable groups:** It is important to include minority groups and low-income households in the plan preparation process to prevent "maladaptation," which disproportionately affects these vulnerable populations and can increase existing inequalities.
- **Integrating diverse knowledge:** Inclusive planning should be informed by a variety of knowledge sources, including cultural values, local knowledge and scientific knowledge. This approach leads to more legitimate and effective local actions.

8. Implications

8.1 Relevant risks

The main risk is low participation due to lack of awareness, time or motivation to participate especially lack of participation from vulnerable groups and from people who are not already engaged in climate action. These risks are mitigated in our communications and engagement plan which has also been informed by our Equality Impact Assessment.

Financial Implications

- 8.2 There are no financial implications given that this decision is approval to consult and the work outlined is being delivered within existing budgets. The financial implications of the new strategy will be developed throughout the engagement process with a view to any required budget bids being included as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process"

Legal Implications

- 8.3 There are no legal implications relating to the public engagement however the strategy will consider legal requirements such as Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) regulations and the proposed target of requiring commercial properties to achieve an EPC rating of B or higher by 2030.

Equalities and socio-economic Implications

- 8.4 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) focussed on informing the engagement phase has been completed and attached as an appendix to this report.

During the development of the Strategy and its actions following the public engagement, a new EqIA will be produced to inform and assess the equalities impacts of the proposed Strategy and its actions.

Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications

- 8.5 The Climate Change Strategy will have a high positive impact on the net zero, climate change and the environment by setting out a planned approach to: reducing the Council's carbon emissions; setting high standards for residents, businesses and organisations to reduce their carbon emissions and manage climate risks; and working in partnership with, influencing and learning from other organisations to address the causes and effects of climate change.

Procurement Implications

- 8.6 There are no procurement implications

Community Safety Implications

- 8.7 There are no community safety implications.

9. Background documents

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 Cambridge City Council Climate Change Strategy 2021-2026
[Climate Change Strategy - Cambridge City Council](#)
Annual Climate Change Strategy and Carbon Management plan Update 2023/24
[Climate Change Strategy Update Committee Report September 2024.pdf](#)
www.cambridge.gov.uk/carbon-management-plan

10. Appendices

- 10.1 **Appendix A Engagement Supporting Document**
Appendix B Engagement Survey
Appendix C Engagement Plan
Appendix D Equality Impact Assessment

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:
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