

REPORT TITLE: Climate Change Strategy (2026-2031)

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

Committee 24th March 2026

Report by: Jemma Little, Head of Economy, Energy and Climate and David Wright, Inclusive Economy and Climate Manager

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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

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Notes progress made in carbon reduction and the high international ranking of the Council and the City for work to address Climate Change
2. Notes the outcome of the public engagement and feedback of the Services, Climate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. Approves the new Climate Change Strategy (2026-2031)

2 Purpose and reason for the report

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

- I. builds upon the previous strategy and progress to date, and takes account of changes

in national policy and context

- II. sets out how we plan to work towards our net zero vision for the city and net zero target for the Council by 2030; and to deliver the associated benefits of improved health, wellbeing, and livelihoods for current and future generations.
- III. takes account of feedback from the Services, Climate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- IV. reflects the views, needs and priorities of residents, businesses and key stakeholders shared via public engagement

A decision is required for approval of the new Climate Change Strategy.

3 Alternative options considered

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 has also been 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

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.

Progress to Date

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

- City-wide Emissions: Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Cambridge reduced by 47.3% between 2005 and 2023. Per capita emissions dropped from 8.4 tCO₂e to 3.5 tCO₂e in the same period.
- Council Emissions: Operational emissions were 51.9% lower in 2024/25 than the 2014/15 baseline. In the last year alone (2023/24 to 2024/25), emissions fell by 8.1% despite the carbon intensity of grid electricity increasing that year, highlighting the

direct impact of our work. It is also notable that the Council's emissions have fallen more quickly than those of the city overall.

- External Recognition: Cambridge has consistently been ranked as one of the UK's most sustainable cities. The Council has maintained a place on the Carbon Disclosure Project's 'A' list for the third consecutive year.

The Case for Action

Local action remains critical as Cambridge faces increased risks of extreme summer temperatures, water shortages and more frequent flood events. While the decarbonisation, or 'greening' of the national grid has driven much of the progress to date, future reductions will increasingly depend on behaviour change and local decisions regarding housing (specifically heating of homes), transport, and energy.

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 to meet the need for increased homes and jobs within the area. The new Climate Change Strategy has incorporated the principles and policies of the new Local Plan relating to climate change and biodiversity which aim to deliver significant carbon emissions reductions and a high degree of climate resilience, helping Greater Cambridge transition to net zero carbon by 2050. The Local Plan will do this by ensuring that development is: sited in places that help to reduce carbon emissions; designed to the highest achievable standards for energy and water use, adapts to and mitigates against climate change; and resilient to current and future climate risks, including flooding.

Affordability

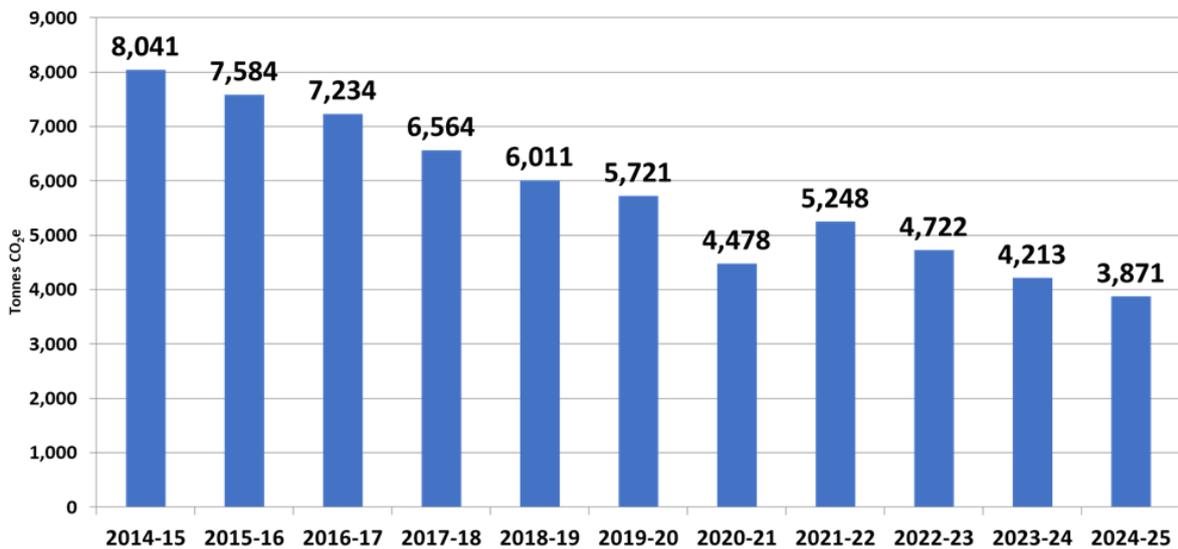
The strategy has been developed to set the direction of travel and highlight the work we plan to do or are developing. As we get closer to 2030 and to help lay the foundations for work to create the new Unitary Council, a greater focus is required on understanding the more challenging aspects of reducing 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 City Centre Heat Network.

Inclusion in the Strategy does not mean a project is agreed, funded or guaranteed for delivery. Projects arising from the Strategy are either covered by existing budgets or will be subject to detailed business cases and Council decisions. Managers will also need to keep resources and staff capacity under review for actions that are being delivered via existing staff resources.

Carbon Performance and Trends

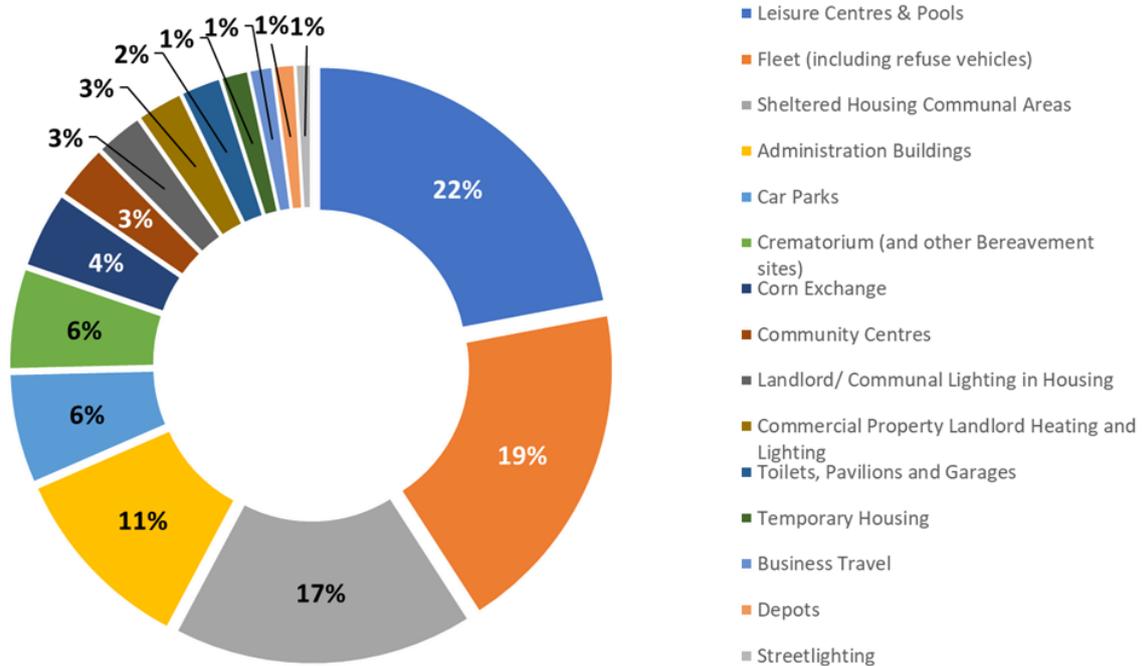
The Council has tracked its carbon emissions since a 2014/15 baseline. Total gross greenhouse gas emissions for 2024/25 were 3,871 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e), representing an 8.1% reduction from the previous year and a 51.9% reduction since 2014/15. The Council’s operational footprint is now only 0.7% of the total city emissions.

Figure 1: Cambridge City Council’s Carbon Emissions Trend (2014-2025)



This graph illustrates the steady decline in operational emissions over the last decade from 8,041 tCO₂e in 2014/15 to 3,871 tCO₂e in 2024/25.

Figure 2: Sources of Council Carbon Emissions (2024/25)



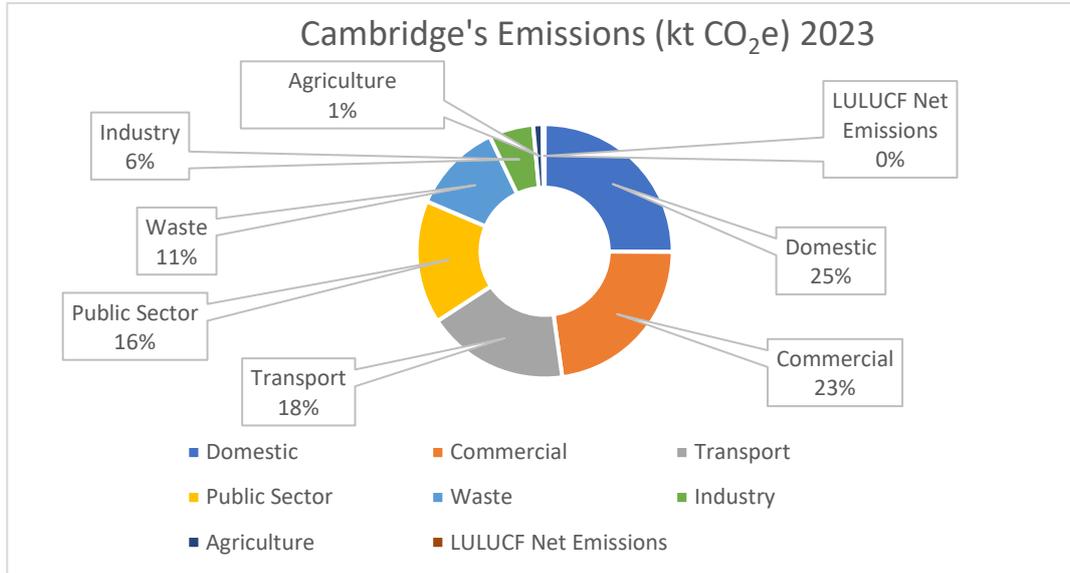
The Council's footprint is concentrated in a few high-impact areas, primarily sites with significant gas consumption and the service fleet, including refuse vehicles:

- **Leisure Centres & Pools:** 22%
- **Fleet (including refuse vehicles):** 19%
- **Sheltered Housing Communal Areas:** 17%
- **Administration Buildings:** 11%
- **Other:** (including Car Parks - 6%, Crematorium - 6%, and Corn Exchange - 4%).
Total 31%

Emissions from council homes are not included as the Council do not pay the energy bill (except in communal areas) and have no direct control over how energy is consumed (though we try to use our influence).

While the Council is directly responsible for only 0.7% of the city's total emissions, it plays a leadership role in influencing the broader community and also contributes to carbon reduction and adaptation in the city particularly where we have direct control over development, infrastructure, through our role as a residential and commercial landlord and developer, the services we deliver and our formal partnerships.

Figure 3: Sources of Cambridge's Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (2023)



City-wide emissions have reduced by 47.3% since 2005, with average per capita emissions dropping from 8.4 tCO₂e to 3.5 tCO₂e per resident.

- **Domestic:** 25% (The highest proportion, common in urban areas)
- **Commercial:** 23% (Significantly higher than the UK average of 8%)
- **Transport:** 18% (Lower than the UK average of 32% due to high cycling rates)
- **Public Sector:** 16% (High due to universities and hospitals)

The Strategy (2026 – 2031)

The Strategy is in Appendix A however a summary is outlined below

The Strategy sets out our continued and renewed drive to build on the achievements to date and sets out how we will work towards achieving a vision for Cambridge to be net zero carbon by 2030 and our target to reduce our own emissions to net zero by 2030.

It builds on the City Council's previous strategy (2021–2026) and brings in three new areas of focus.

New Focus Areas:

- **Integrated Adaptation:** Climate adaptation actions are now integrated throughout the strategy rather than treated as a standalone objective.
- **Supply Chain and Procurement:** A new objective focuses on reducing emissions and delivering social value through procurement and the Council's supply chain.
- **Community Support and Engagement:** Increased emphasis on engaging and empowering residents to adopt low-carbon lifestyles, reflecting that one-third of needed UK emissions reductions depend on household decisions.

The strategy is structured around three levels of Council influence:

- Sustainable City Council (High Control):** Reducing the Council's direct operational emissions (buildings, fleet, travel) and increasing resilience.
- Sustainable City (Medium Influence):** Working with residents and businesses to support the reduction of energy consumption and associated carbon emissions across the whole city, not only from our own estate but also through our services, such as housing provision, role as a developer and landlord and planning powers, to work towards achieving net zero carbon emissions in Cambridge.
- Working Together (Influence/ Facilitation):** Working with key partners in the community and with business to learn from each other and explore city-wide approaches to reducing emissions and work towards a net zero city.

The strategy covers the following **thematic areas and outcomes**.

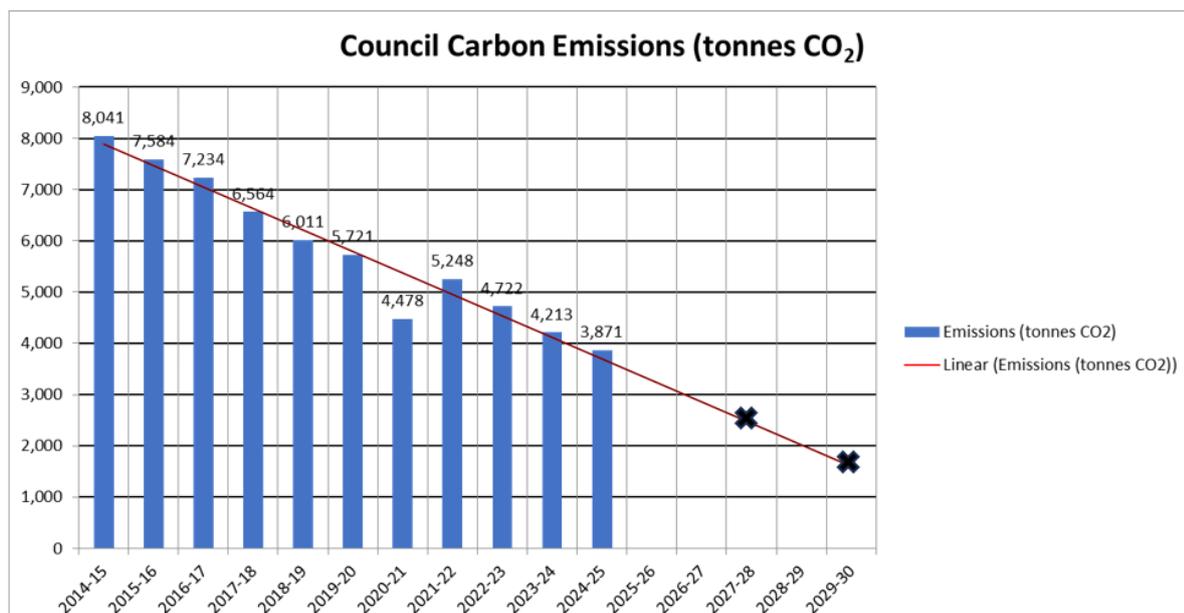
<i>Energy and retrofit</i>	Improving energy efficiency and climate resilience of homes and buildings across Cambridge.
<i>Nature and water</i>	Enhancing nature and safeguarding water to support Cambridge to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
<i>Transport</i>	Reducing the need for fossil fuel-powered travel and encouraging the use of low and zero carbon modes of transport to reduce emissions.

<i>Waste minimisation</i>	Reducing waste and supporting a circular economy
<i>Sustainable food</i>	Increasing access to local, low impact, seasonal food and reducing food waste.
<i>Supply chain and procurement</i>	Reducing emissions and maximising social and environmental value of procurement and partnerships across Cambridge.
<i>Community support and engagement</i>	Ensuring a just transition: providing accessible and inclusive support to communities and residents to empower and enable them in shifting towards more sustainable habits
Collaboration	Working together for a sustainable Cambridge - deepening relationships with and between key partners in the community and with business, innovation and anchor institutions in the city as part of a city-wide approach.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and 2028 Interim Target

The strategy acts as a bridge towards the anticipated creation of a new Unitary Council in 2028.

Interim Target: To maintain momentum, the strategy proposes an interim target for March 2028 for the Council's emissions. Current trends suggest emissions could be reduced to 2,500 tCO_{2e} by March 2028 and 1,500 tCO_{2e} by March 2030 if progress through delivery of carbon reduction projects is maintained and the decarbonisation of grid electricity continues.



The target assumes a reduction of approximately 500 tCO₂e per annum, driven by both Council projects and the ongoing ‘greening’ of the national electricity grid. As our planned projects come forward and start to achieve carbon reductions the actual figures will be captured and included in our annual greenhouse gas monitoring report.

Carbon Offsetting Approach: Influenced by public engagement, our approach follows a strict mitigation hierarchy and a watch and wait approach due to the immaturity of the market. We will continue to prioritise direct reductions, reserving offsetting only for unavoidable residual emissions in March 2030 and for consideration post LGR. Public feedback showed a strong preference for local offsetting projects (e.g. local nature restoration), that provide tangible social and environmental benefits to Cambridge residents, rather than international schemes.

Action Plan

As part of the development of the Strategy, there has been considerable internal engagement within the Council and partner agencies to ensure that the strategy is realistic and deliverable. This has included:

- Cambridge City Council Leadership Team
- Cambridge City Council Net Zero Programme Board

- Cambridge City Council Environment Policy & Projects Group
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Cambridge City Leaders Climate Change Group
- Cambridge Local Climate Change Forum

We have developed a detailed action plan with input across Groups in the council and Shared Services. This reflects current service plans, highlights the resource/budget position of each action and will be used as a programme management tool for co-ordination, reporting and communications throughout the strategy's implementation.

See Appendix B for Climate Change Strategy Action Plan

Monitoring and Reporting

Progress will be monitored by the Council's internal Net Zero Board, and through the Council's Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny functions. We will continue to publish an annual report detailing greenhouse gas emissions from our estate and operations and an update on the Climate Change Strategy action plan delivery.

Services, Climate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Members raised a series of questions and observations.

In summation, the Chair noted the following points on behalf of the Committee:

- I. Concern on the deliverability of the strategy if major projects such as the City Centre Heat Network and Civic Quarter did not progress as planned.

This is recognised in the risk assessment

- II. Support for the focus on innovation, efforts to tackle water scarcity and the principle of offsetting only as a last resort.

This has been reflected in the Strategy.

- III. Recognition that there was a balance moving forward between a focus on the Council's direct emissions (only accounting for 0.7% of overall city emissions) and the value of investing more in wider city reduction including business, commercial and private sector emissions.

This is recognised in the Strategy with an increased focus on city-wide collaboration and work with businesses, citizens and stakeholders on reducing emissions.

5 Corporate plan

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

Feedback from Public Engagement

A joint public engagement exercise was carried out in autumn 2025 with South Cambridgeshire District Council based on an outline of the proposed strategy. The engagement received 486 responses for Cambridge and revealed:

Strong Support: High levels of backing for the strategy's objectives, particularly nature and water protection.

Cost Barriers: High upfront costs were cited as the primary barrier to personal climate action for residents, (255 mentions).

Education and Information: Respondents requested more practical advice, grant information and visual communications on aspects such as home retrofit.

Concerns: Concerns were raised regarding the impact of rapid growth on biodiversity and the ethics of carbon offsetting.

The full report of the engagement is enclosed as Appendix C.

The findings from this exercise have informed both content and emphasis within the new Climate Change Strategy for 2026-2031, as illustrated by the following examples.

Prioritising Actions: The engagement exercise helped us to prioritise areas of work to take forward in the implementation of the strategy. For example, there was very strong support for one of the Strategy's new focus areas: supporting and applying research and innovation on climate change, so we will prioritise this within the implementation of the strategy.

Council Responsibilities: Some of the feedback suggested that recipients were confused about what different councils were responsible for, (e.g. suggesting that Cambridge City Council repaired potholes, when this is a County Council responsibility). We therefore identified a need to show clearly what the City Council is directly responsible for and therefore where we can have the most impact. In parallel, we also need to highlight the areas where we are not the lead organisation and do not have control over. We have created a diagram to help explain our direct areas of responsibility and we will also work with public sector, business and community organisations to help share what is happening across the city via the strategy's increased emphasis on collaboration.

New Projects: We received some helpful suggestions of ideas the Council could explore. Some of these are already included in our action plan so it helps us to understand that we are aligned with our residents and reinforces the need to implement these. We will also look to explore the feasibility of some of the additional ideas suggested such as more visual communications and engagement, and annual environment events.

Guidance and Information: A number of respondents requested guidance or a resource of information to help individuals take action on climate change. In some instances, we already produced guidance such as the Retrofit Guide and a Council approved list of retrofit

contractors. This highlighted the need for us to share these more widely, more frequently as part of our communications and engagement with residents. We will also use these ideas to create more resources such as best practice case studies.

Growth: There was some concern about the rapid growth in Cambridge potentially damaging biodiversity and undermining climate goals. This reinforced the need for the new Local Plan to include strong climate change mitigation and adaptation measures to ensure that new development is required to consider climate change and biodiversity, and to show within the Strategy how the Climate Change Strategy is aligned with the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service's work.

Impact of Climate Change: Responses reflected a need and appetite for further and continued training and awareness raising, both within the council and for the public, on the impacts of climate change and the solutions to build resilience. This is something the Council already provides for both staff and residents so reinforced the need to continue this education offering, raise awareness of it and explore the feasibility of increasing it in the future.

Offsetting: Concern was raised about the principle of using of offsetting. This reinforced the Council's stance that we need to continue to prioritise carbon reduction over offsetting wherever possible and explore how councils might compensate for unavoidable residual emissions to meet net zero targets in the future.

7 Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact

Anticipated outcomes from the Strategy include a substantial reduction in carbon emissions through the decarbonisation of council buildings and fleets, alongside a rise in urban climate resilience achieved by increasing the tree canopy to 20% and improving water management.

Residents are expected to benefit from lower energy bills through extensive housing retrofits, enhanced public health from improved air quality and a just transition that ensures vulnerable communities are supported.

Ultimately, the strategy aims to foster a sustainable local economy and a ‘nature-rich’ city where cleaner air, greener spaces and resilient infrastructure safeguard the quality of life for future generations.

8 Implications

Relevant risks

Risks	Mitigation
That the reduction in carbon emissions resulting from the ongoing decarbonisation/ greening of the national grid does not continue at a similar pace as over the last ten years.	Monitor trends closely and escalate to senior management and/ or Cabinet as appropriate.
That a change in government or national policies/ legislation reduce the level of political and financial support for climate adaptation and the reduction of carbon emissions, (e.g. current consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework is proposing to limit Planning Authority’s powers to set climate change and adaptation policies).	Monitor closely and escalate to senior management and/ or Cabinet as appropriate, with a view to participating in relevant consultations and lobbying government if deemed necessary.
That specific projects arising from the strategy prove to be unaffordable or undeliverable due to cost inflation or failure to secure additional funding/finance.	Monitor closely and consider alternative projects and funding routes if necessary.
That projects fail to deliver the carbon or financial savings anticipated.	Monitor closely and escalate to senior management and/ or Cabinet as appropriate.

That we fail to get the buy-in and support from key partners to progress specific projects.	Consider alternative partners, if appropriate and escalate to senior management and/ or Cabinet as appropriate.
That the transition towards Local Government Reorganisation delays or curtails progress on implementing the Climate Change Strategy.	Continue to monitor staff capacity and work with other councils for better alignment in advance of the new unitary formation and monitor closely, escalating to senior management and/ or Cabinet as appropriate.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications given that this decision is approval of the strategy.

Inclusion in the strategy does not mean a project is agreed, funded or guaranteed for delivery. However, the Strategy is underpinned by service delivery plans and an action plan programme which will be used to help co-ordinate delivery across the council and to report progress.

Projects arising from the Strategy are either covered by existing budgets or will be subject to detailed business cases and Council decisions.

For our strategic projects, long lead in times are required with phased decision-making points from outline to full business case and will be dependent on many factors including access to finance and external funding in addition to council resources.

Managers will also need to keep staff capacity under review as part of the implementation of the strategy.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications relating to the public engagement however the strategy

considers legal requirements such as Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) regulations.

Equalities and socio-economic Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) focussed on the Strategy has been completed and attached as an appendix to this report.

The actions that the Council plans to take to reduce its own emissions will not have equalities impacts for residents. Many of the external actions, impacting the City, will have positive impacts in that some groups, as detailed in the EqIA, are likely to be more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and therefore likely to benefit disproportionately from measures to support residents to be more resilient to a changing climate (increased risk of and severity of extreme weather) and the co-benefits associated with a transition to net zero carbon emissions, such as health benefits from reduced retrofitted insulation reducing fuel poverty and increasing health and wellbeing.

As part of the delivery of the Strategy and its actions, a communications plan will be developed, which will need to ensure all groups have access, are engaged, and any negative impacts of actions mitigated, using networks and tools available.

Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental implications

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

There are no procurement implications

Community Safety Implications

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

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](#)

Cabinet – Climate Change Strategy Development Report 26th Sept 2025

[Item 8 Climate Change Strategy Development Final.pdf](#)

Services, Climate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Climate Change Strategy Update Report 3rd Feb 2026

[Final Report to Scrutiny Committee - Climate Change Strategy - 3 Feb 26.pdf](#)

Appendices

Appendix A: Climate Change Strategy

Appendix B: Climate Change Strategy Action Plan

Appendix C: [Public Engagement Report](#)

Appendix D: Equalities Impact Assessment

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

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