

FOREWORD



Back in May 2019, one of the first actions of the newly formed Dorset Council was to declare a Climate Emergency, acknowledging that the Council needs to act on the causes and impacts of climate change. In November 2019, this was updated to a Climate and Ecological Emergency so that the protection and enhancement of Dorset's natural environment and wildlife biodiversity is also considered in our climate emergency mitigation work.

To monitor and strategically guide this work, Dorset Council formed the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Executive Advisory Panel. Made up of elected members from different political parties, the Panel is responsible for gathering information and working with officers to make recommendations to Dorset Council's Cabinet on actions that will help mitigate against climate change. They have also met with various organisations to hear their evidence and ideas on how Dorset Council can help reduce the environmental impact of its own services, as well as support Dorset communities to do the same.

Since the Climate Emergency declaration was made, Dorset Council has recruited and employed full-time Corporate Sustainability Officers to lead and coordinate our response. They have also distributed somewhere in the region of £1.8m in Low Carbon Dorset Grants and secured around £10.5m from the Transforming Cities fund to create new active travel walking and cycling routes over the next 3 years. As well as securing a certified 'green' renewable energy tariff for electricity supply from September 2020.

As I've stated before, while other councils around the country may have chosen to set deadlines for carbon reduction and then work out

how they'll achieve them, I've always wanted us to do the investigation and information-gathering first before setting out our strategy.

This ensures that our action plan and timetable is both realistic and achievable, as well as ambitious.

This strategy brings together a considerable amount of work, made more challenging due to a lack of comparable data as a result of Local Government Reorganisation and recommends areas for action that will deliver a realistic and achievable approach to ensuring Dorset Council is carbon-neutral by 2040, ahead of the UK government target. Carbon reduction targets towards this are presented in the strategy as an approach to ongoing monitoring and annual evaluation of progress to ensure the pathway to carbon neutrality stays on track whilst also being adaptable to benefit from future funding opportunities and technologies

This strategy was finalised during the COVID-19 lockdown era when we have seen just what can be achieved when society pulls together behind an emergency situation and what positive change can occur when unilateral effort is focused on a shared outcome. The positive impacts on climate and ecological change brought about by the lockdown period, global CO₂ emissions dropped by approx. 17% to levels not seen since 2006. In Dorset, the significant drop in road traffic brought about an estimated 27% reduction in carbon emissions. This shows us as a society what is possible in a short time when "business as usual" is adjusted. We must not lose some of these gains and rush back to how things were before the pandemic.

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The ambitions and actions set out in this strategy must be viewed alongside the financial pressures that are facing not just Dorset Council but all Local Authorities, exacerbated at the current time by the additional pressures brought about by Dorset Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst this strategy illustrates it will be possible to tackle the low hanging fruit and combine carbon-reducing actions with other priorities - placing climate change response at the front and centre of our wider priorities - there will still be a need for imaginative and innovative solutions working in partnership with central government and the private sector.

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