Our Journey to Net Zero: Delivering Energy Self-Sufficiency

1st Annual Report – December 2025

LANCASTER CITY COUNCIL

Promoting City, Coast & Countryside

Introduction

Climate change remains the challenge of our generation and for future generations.

Governments from all around the world acknowledge that urgent change is required.

The UK Committee on Climate Change states that the ten warmest years on record in the UK have all occurred in the 21st century.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) recently reported that levels of the most abundant greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, increased to record levels during 2024.

The impacts of climate change are accelerating, and they directly affect our residents, our businesses and other organisations. We must act faster to adapt to a changing climate and become more energy resilient.

Lancaster City Council is publishing this first annual report, **Our Journey to Net Zero**. This provides a summary of the authority's progress towards making all of the City Council's own operations and activities net zero by 2030.

The Council will aim to publish similar annual reports at the end of each year in order to closely monitor progress.

Cover Image: *Burrow Beck Solar Farm, Scotforth under construction (2025).*

Explaining our Emissions

Greenhouse gases are those gases in the Earth's atmosphere that trap heat. They include carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide.

Whilst some greenhouse gases occur naturally, human activities are increasing the concentration of some of them in the atmosphere. This contributes to changes in our climate, including increases in global average temperatures. In order to avert the predicted worst-case scenarios of climate change, we collectively need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

'Net zero' means 'net zero emissions'. For Councils to reach net zero, this requires them to balance the amount of greenhouses gases that are emitted with the amount that are removed.

Emissions are sometimes referred to as being within Scope 1, Scope 2 or Scope 3.

The City Council's Scope 1 emissions are released as a direct result of the Council's activities. This includes combustible fuel (e.g. gas) for heating, and fuel that is burned (e.g. petrol) in Council-owned vehicles. **These direct emissions are the target for the Council's 2030 net zero commitment.**

Scope 2 emissions are those that are released as an indirect consumption of an energy commodity, such as purchased electricity. For the City Council, this will include the use of electricity in its buildings.

The Council's Scope 3 emissions are those 'other' emissions that occur indirectly and which are beyond the full control of the Council.

This Annual Report explains the global and national context that informs our journey to net zero. It sets out the case for change, citing the wider economic benefits that will also accrue over the long term. The Report then focuses on the City Council's efforts at a local level.

The Global Context

Climate change is a global problem that requires a global response. It threatens humans, the natural world and environmental wellbeing. It is critical that we act rapidly on climate adaptation, mitigation and community resilience. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that *"there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all."* [1]

The climate crisis does not affect everyone equally. Research published this year added further evidence to prove that *"those least responsible often bear the greatest impacts"*. [2]

It disproportionately affects those countries with the fewest resources, whose economies are often more dependent upon agricultural, forestry and fishing activities. The failure of crop yields and the scarcity of clean water accelerates the spread of hunger and disease.

Climate extremes are increasingly displacing millions of people. In 2025 alone, the devastating impacts of extreme flooding in Pakistan and the record-breaking droughts across eastern and southern Africa are examples of an unjust climate breakdown.

The impacts are frequently experienced by the most vulnerable people, often women and children, indigenous peoples, or those living in poverty.

The World Bank previously estimated that the effects of climate change could result in between 68 and 135 million additional people living below the poverty line by 2030.[3]

Without action to adapt to climate change, these inequalities will continue to amplify.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was created in May 1992, and it represents the main forum for global action.

[1] IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf
[2] High-income groups disproportionately contribute to climate extremes worldwide | Nature Climate Change
[3] Global Action Urgently Needed to Halt Historic Threats to Poverty Reduction

Today there are 198 parties to the UNFCCC. Preventing "*dangerous human interference with the climate system"* is the ultimate aim of the Convention.[4]

A series of legally binding protocols and agreements have emerged as a consequence of the work of the UNFCCC.

These include the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted in December 1997 (but was ratified much later, in February 2005). This commits industrialised countries to limit and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with agreed, individual targets.

The (December) 2015 Paris Agreement is an international treaty on climate change that came into force a year later. It was a landmark agreement with an overarching objective to maintain the *"increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrialised levels"* and to pursue efforts *"to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels."* [5]

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said that breaching the 1.5°C threshold risks unleashing a greater number of more severe climate change impacts, including more frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves, rainfall and flooding.

To limit global warming to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions would have had to peak before 2025 at the latest and decline 43% by 2030. However, emissions reductions are not on target to achieve 1.5°C.[6] In other words, the next few years are critical to restore our pathway to 1.5°C. this requires immediate and significant reductions across all sectors.

[4] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change | UNFCCC
[5] The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC
[6] Rise in carbon dioxide off track for limiting global warming to 1.5°C - Met Office

The National Context

The Climate Change Act 2008 legislated the United Kingdom's framework for setting carbon budgets. The Act has also been instrumental in halving the UK's greenhouse gas emissions since 1990, with the pace of reduction doubling since it came into force.

In 2019, on the advice of the Climate Change Committee, the UK committed to reaching net zero emissions by 2050. This means that the total greenhouse gas emissions would be equal to the emissions removed from the atmosphere, with the aim of limiting global warming and resultant climate change.

The UK Government has previously adopted a suite of policies to assist with reaching net zero. This included the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (March 2023), [7] which was produced as a statutory duty under the Climate Change Act.

The Carbon Budget Delivery Plan sets out how the Government would meet the emissions reductions required for each five-year carbon budget period (i.e. Carbon Budget Period 4, 2023-2027; Period 5, 2028-2032; and Period 6, 2033-2037).

The Climate Change Committee's 2025 Progress Report (June 2025) [8] concluded that the net zero target is *"within reach, provided the Government stays the course"*. The Committee noted that while historic progress had been driven by decarbonisation of the electricity system, more recent progress could be attributed to the transport sector, alongside the increased roll out of measures such as heat pumps and policies such as tree planting and peatland restoration.

Revisions to the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan were, at the time of compiling this Annual Report, anticipated in late-2025.

[7] Carbon Budget Delivery Plan
[8] Progress in reducing emissions - 2025 report to Parliament - Climate Change Committee

The case for change has never been more convincing, and it was comprehensively set out in the Climate Change Committee's recent letter to Government (October 2025). [9] The key headlines were that:

- Climate change is increasingly driving extreme weather events;
- We are not yet adapted for the changes in weather and climate that we are living with today, let alone over the coming decades;
- Further climate change is inevitable because it will take *"several decades…to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero and global temperatures will continue to rise"* until we get close to that point;
- The UK should be prepared for climate change beyond the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement;
- The most ambitious set of scenarios considered by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) see global warming peak around 2045;
- Once global temperature is stabilised sea levels are expected to continue to rise for *"tens to hundreds of years";* and,
- The complexity of the climate system means that extreme outcomes, including (at the highest end of possibilities) a 4°C rise above preindustrial levels by the end of the century cannot be ruled out, and *"should be considered as part of effective adaptation planning"*.

The Committee advised that global warming temperatures will likely rise beyond 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels in the 2030s and around 2°C above the same levels in the 2050s. Continued warming along current trajectories suggests rises of between 2.5°C and 3°C by 2100.

The extreme changes in the UK's weather and climate mean that the country will need to adapt to become far more resilient. The Committee's assessment of the scale of these impacts is sobering reading. It suggests that the likelihood of heatwaves in England will double (from a 40% chance between 1981-2010 to 80% chance each year).

[9] CCC letter to Emma Hardy MP 13 October 2025

Similarly the time spent under drought conditions due to low rainfall is expected to double at 2°C warming. Conditions for wildfires will become more favourable, with the wildfire season in the UK becoming longer, extending into the autumn.

Extreme (peak) rainfall is anticipated to increase by 10-15% for the wettest days at 2°C. Peak river flows will increase by up to 40% for some UK river catchment areas.

In an era of significant global and national economic challenges, the case for expenditure on climate change mitigation and adaptation can be lost or in some cases is seemingly outweighed by other demands on the public purse.

However, in its Fiscal Risks and Sustainability Report earlier this year,[10] the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) also set out the *"significant risks"* that climate change damage poses to the economic and fiscal outcomes in the UK.

The OBR considered detailed scenarios which assessed the costs from (i) transitioning the economy to net zero emissions; and (ii) from damage to the economy caused by climate change. They concluded that (ii) was *"the more significant fiscal cost in the scenarios that we present"*.

The analysis estimated the costs to Government of the transition to net zero at 21% of gross domestic product (GDP). The estimated costs of climate damage continue to rise, and the OBR estimates that these costs (in the below 3°C scenario) will increase debt by 56% of GDP compared to a hypothetical scenario where there is no climate change. **In short, the cost of achieving net zero targets is lower than the costs of inaction.**

The OBR accepts that there remains a degree of uncertainty to their estimates of the fiscal costs of climate change. The uncertainty includes negative and positive risks. The negative risks include a fear that the climate damage estimates might be too low; or that irreversible 'tipping point' changes to the climatic system are highly probable and they underplay the significant economic damage that would also ensue. There is also a risk that there is a reduced local, national or global commitment towards transition.

[10] Fiscal risks and sustainability – July 2025 - Office for Budget Responsibility

More positively, the OBR consider that there might be an accelerated global transition to net zero; or that the damage estimates may be too high; or that new or lower-cost technological solutions to reduce temperatures or remove emissions at scale may be found.

In returning to the content of the recent Climate Change Committee letter, these positive messages of hope are replicated. The Committee believes that achieving the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement is possible, and that *"significant progress on the cost of low-carbon technologies"* has reduced the central expectations of future warming in the latter half of the century.

Additionally, if combined with rapid decarbonisation and the setting of ambitious adaptation policy, the impacts of climate change and the risks posed to society by mid-century can be reduced. The Committee considered that 2050 is *"sufficiently far in the future to support ambitious objectives delivered through action over long timescales"*. However there is also caution that adaptation objectives must be set to be achieved by 2050, or they may not happen soon enough to be effective.

By taking action to adapt to the likelihood of the above events, the UK will minimise the impacts upon people's health and wellbeing. Food security is more likely to be preserved, and the objectives for protecting and enhancing the environment and nature are more likely to be delivered. The potential for disruption to our cities, towns and villages and our public services (and the key infrastructure that supports them) will also be reduced.

The Local Context

Lancaster City Council declared a 'climate emergency' at a meeting of Council in January 2019. [11]

The declaration included a commitment to convene a People's Jury to help identify how the City Council's own activities can be made net zero by 2030. During 2020, at different in-person and online sessions, the Jury heard from a range of people ('expert witnesses') as well as sharing their own opinions, experiences and ideas. [12]

A series of recommendations were developed for the City Council to consider.[13] Those recommendations that the City Council had direct responsibility for were progressed for decisions regarding action and priority. [14] Recommendations that were beyond the remit of the City Council were forwarded to the appropriate other organisations.

Since the People's Jury, the City Council has launched several projects aimed at meeting the Council's corporate 2030 net zero commitment.

[11] Our declaration - Lancaster City Council
[12] Lancaster district People's Jury: sessions overview - Lancaster City Council
[13] People's Jury report (2).pdf
[14] Jury People Recommendations & Actions taken since 2020

The most strategic projects include the decarbonisation of the Council's buildings and vehicular fleet, and the delivery of new sources of renewable energy.

The Council Plan 2024-2027 [15] sets out the City Council's priorities, ambitions and a strategic vision for the district. It is underpinned by four principles:

- A Sustainable District;
- An Inclusive and Prosperous Local Economy;
- Healthy and Happy Communities; and,
- A Co-operative, Kind and Responsible Council.

One of the four themes of the Council Plan is taking action to meet the challenges of the Climate Emergency. The Council Plan describes how it will do this via a series of individual ambitions. They include achieving net zero carbon by 2030 whilst supporting other individuals, businesses and organisations across the district to reach the same goal. Other ambitions include increasing the amount of sustainable energy produced in the district, while decreasing the district's energy use; supporting our communities to grow more food, be resilient to flooding and adapt to the wider impacts of climate change; and to increase biodiversity, protect our district's unique ecology and ensure habitats provided for wildlife are maintained and improved. The ambitions also seek to move towards zero residual waste heading to landfill; and to transition to an accessible, inclusive and low-carbon and active transport system.

When making decisions regarding climate projects, the City Council aims to balance the significant rewards arising from emissions reduction with financial responsibility.

Several of the projects referred to in this Annual Report have benefitted from innovative funding bids, supported by capital investment by the Council and based upon data-driven evidence.

The Council has secured approximately £9.2m in external funding for major corporate decarbonisation and renewable energy projects, and it estimates that for every £1 of its own money that has been invested in the Council's Energy & Sustainability Team, it has seen a £12 return (2021-2025).

[15] Council plan - Lancaster City Council

Meanwhile the delivery of new, long-term energy-generation assets across the district is providing the Council with new sources of revenue.

The economic rewards associated with project delivery are also stimulating the local supply chain and are supporting job creation and skills development, including apprenticeships.

Lancaster City Council is already seen as a national leader in this sector. Over the next couple of pages, we explain why.

External Recognition

Whilst this Annual Report provides an assessment of the City Council's journey to net zero, it is useful to reflect on how other organisations are evaluating Lancaster's efforts.

The most comprehensive national evaluation of climate action is undertaken every two years by an organisation called Climate Emergency UK (CE UK). CE UK were founded in 2019. They advocate for local authority climate action, and they lobby nationally for greater local government powers and funding.

CE UK created and published Local Authority Climate Action Scorecards in 2023, and they repeated the process in 2025. The scorecards represent an independent assessment of each Council's progress towards net zero. They are scored across 7 different sections (Building and Heating; Transport; Planning and Land Use; Governance and Finance; Biodiversity; Collaboration and Engagement; and Waste Reduction and Food).

After topping the Action Scorecards for all English District Councils in 2023, the City Council achieved the same top ranking in 2025, with an improved total score of 69% and the highest score in the 'planning and land use' category in the country. [16]

In 2024, the City Council won the Local Government Chronicle Net Zero Category Award. The award recognised the Council's efforts to partially review their existing Local Plan specifically in terms of climate adaptation and mitigation in response to the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration (also known as the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review).

The Council was lauded for their *"unparalleled tenacity and determination in pushing boundaries and leading the charge on a national scale. Their commitment to addressing climate adaptation and mitigation through revised planning policies has set a shining example for other local authorities to emulate."*

[16] District Councils' Climate Action Scorecards | Climate Emergency UK

The judges said that *"this impactful initiative showcases how planning authorities like Lancaster City Council can create lasting, sustainable change for local communities, especially for the most vulnerable."*

The Local Government Chronicle's Idea Exchange further highlighted the Climate Emergency Local Plan Review following its formal adoption in early-2025, commenting that *"Lancaster City Council has taken on this fight against inconsistency and uncertainty…not just for its own district but for the rest of the country too."* [17]

The Local Plan work was also recognised at the 2025 Municipal Journal Achievement Awards, where it won the Award for 'Leadership in Responding to the Climate Emergency'.

The award was recognition for the work in delivering the Council's Climate Emergency Local Plan Review, which was formally adopted earlier this year. The judges commended the Council for showing *"determined leadership by embedding climate action at the core of planning policy. Punching above its weight, it has challenged national barriers through its climate first Local Plan. Judges praised its quiet confidence, community engagement and national influence. Lancaster is an excellent blueprint for local leadership on the climate emergency*".

[17] How we adapted our local plan for climate change | Local Government Chronicle (LGC)

At the same awards, the Council's Principal Climate Policy Officer, Susanna Dart, was one of six shortlisted in the Rising Star category.

Earlier, work to decarbonise Salt Ayre Leisure Centre was recognised in the Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE) Awards 2022.[18] Utilising funding from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, the Council replaced the Leisure Centre's gas boilers with a two-stage heat pump system, LED lighting and upgraded glazing to reduce energy consumption. A solar farm was also installed on the adjacent former landfill site to generate electricity.

Across all of its Services, Lancaster City Council is putting climate adaptation at the centre of its work. Amongst other projects that have been recognised as best practice are:

- Council of the Year at the North West Energy Efficiency Awards 2021, for its commitment to making its properties more energy efficient for tenants;

- Transforming and Innovating Public Services (TIPS) at the iNetwork Innovation Awards 2022, for its use of data and technology to change culture relating to the Co-Wheels Car Scheme;

- North West best Future-Ready category at the Federation of Small Businesses Awards 2022, for its efforts to address skill gaps, help high streets adapt to shifting consumer habits and help local firms on their own net zero journey;

- Sustainability in Home Adaptations at the National Healthy Homes awards 2022, recognising the holistic strategy of the Home Improvement Agency;

- Continued Green Flag Status for many of the Council's parks and public spaces, most recently in 2025;

Over the following pages, the Report describes the contribution that our recent and live projects will make regarding emission reductions.

[18] We're so proud of our net zero leisure centre providing Lancaster residents with a healthy community hub | Salix Finance

Salt Ayre Leisure Centre (SALC) was the Council's single largest carbon emitter, due to its gas heating and year-round energy demands. Through a £6.8 million project (Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) Phase 1), Salt Ayre became the UK's first fully decarbonised leisure centre.

Essential upgrades during 2021/22 included installing a two-stage heat pump system to replace the gas boilers; the fitting new double-glazed windows and LED lighting; and the construction of a 1.3 megawatt (MW) solar farm on the adjacent former landfill site to supply SALC via a direct wire.

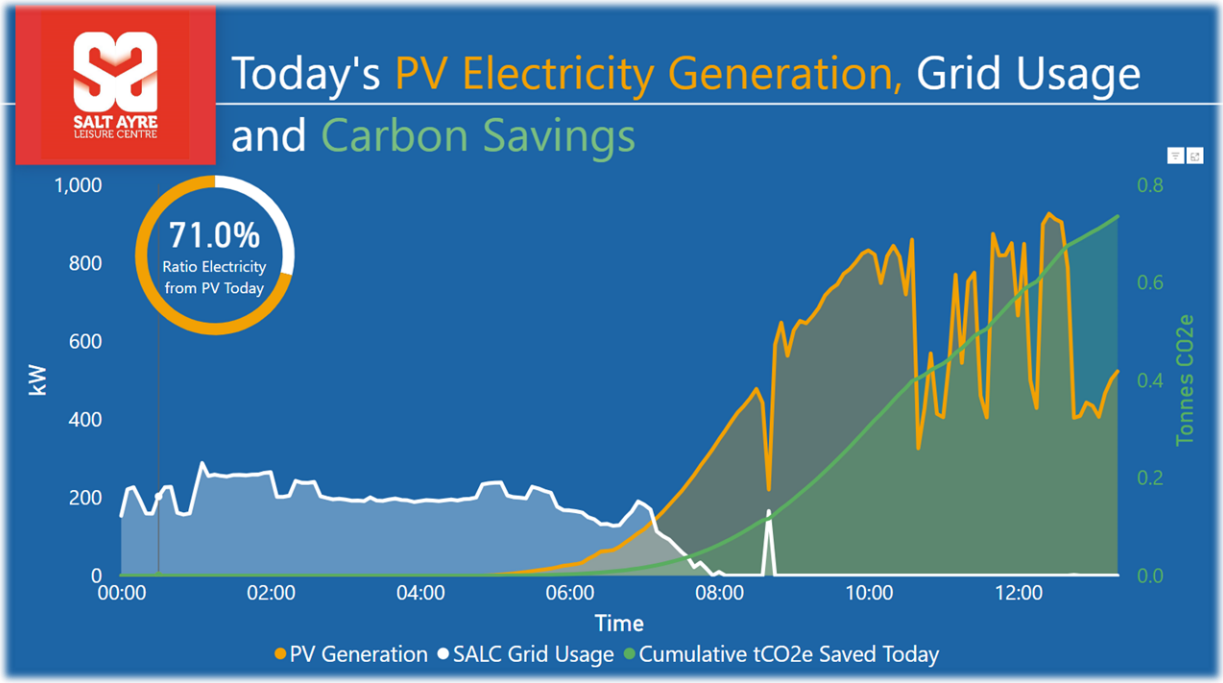
The results have been transformative. The work has delivered a 34% reduction in the Council's total gas consumption (completely eliminating SALC's fossil fuel use).

The solar installation and efficiency measures now save over 600 tonnes of carbon dioxide (tCO_2) each year, making SALC one of the first carbon-neutral leisure centres in the country. By 2024, the project had accumulated 1,300+ tonnes of CO_2 savings.

The investment makes economic sense too. Financially, the measures have saved approximately £480,000 in energy costs (2022/23 to 2024/25) compared to the old gas system.

The site can even operate off grid for up to 12 hours a day in spring/summer using its solar power and batteries.

This flagship project won an Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) award in 2022, showcasing Lancaster's leadership in retrofitting public facilities.



In addition to SALC, Lancaster City Council has successfully utilised funding under the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) to provide energy efficiency upgrades across 10 civic sites.

This work amounts to 3,500 LED light installations; secondary glazing across 6 sites; the installation of Building Management Energy System upgrades across 5 sites; pipework insulation at 3 sites; and the delivery of roof-mounted solar photovoltaics at CityLab.

These measures have combined to reduce energy consumption by 558,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per annum. This yields an 83 tCO_2 saving per annum and equates to financial savings of approximately £200,000 in energy costs over the two-year period of 2023/24 to 2024/25.

Progress Report – Burrow Beck Solar Farm

During 2025, planning permission was granted for the Burrow Beck Solar Farm. This set out to deliver a 3.8 MW solar array on its land at Scotforth. The work represents a £3.3M capital investment by the Council.

At the time of writing the solar array is under construction and the Council is working to a 'go live' date of April 2026.

It consists of approximately 5,400 panels, which will generate approximately 4 Gigawatt Hours per year (GWh/year). This has the potential to fully power the equivalent of 1,000 homes or meet 80% of the Council's current annual electricity consumption.

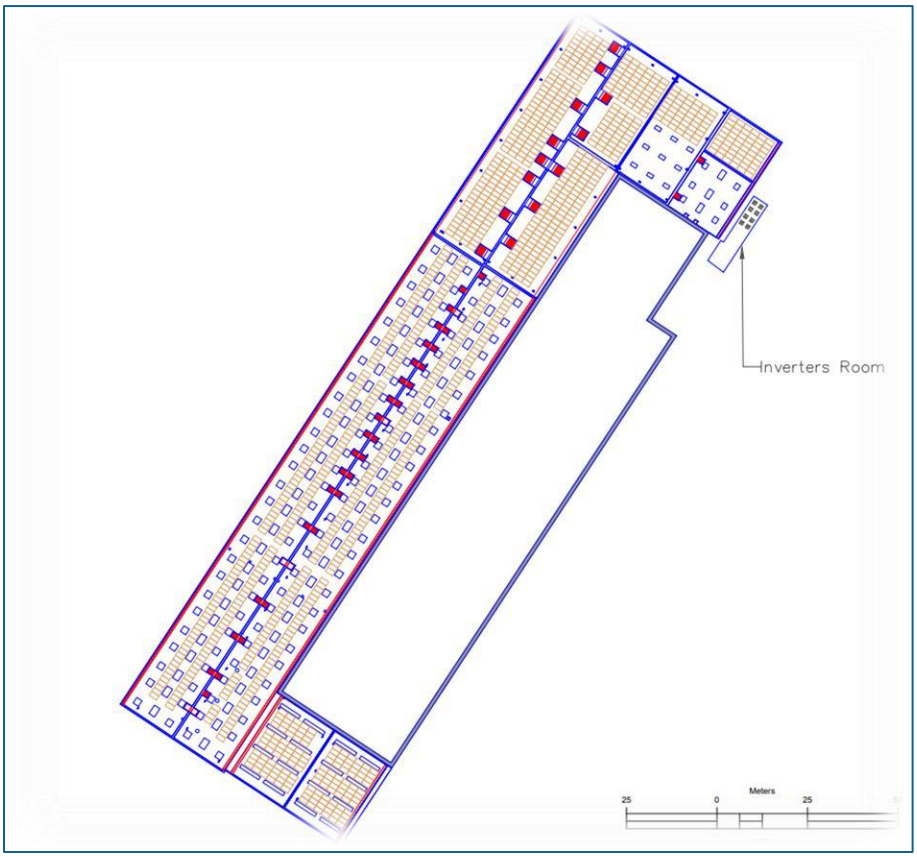
The scheme will provide a saving of approximately 800 tCO_2 per year; essentially offsetting the bulk of any remaining emissions from council operations.

The other benefits include the delivery of a habitat bank, providing 19 habitat units which can also generate income for the Council, as well as improving the diversity of our biodiversity habitats.

The construction project also delivers an Employment Skills plan, which (in terms of job creation and training) has a monetary equivalent of £39,000. The Council is currently forecasting a potential £300,000 income stream per year from 2026/27. This helps to insulate the Council against energy shocks – if energy prices rise then export income deriving from the project rises too. This project delivers energy and financial resilience.

The revenue for the Council could potentially be used to deliver additional, financially-sound, climate action projects.

This project illustrates the Council's strategy of investing in renewables to hit the final stretch of the 2030 target.



Another project that is currently being delivered is the provision of roof-mounted solar photovoltaics at the Council's Gateway Building, at White Lund Industrial Estate.

This 774 Kilowatt Peak (kWp) solar array represents a £700,000 investment from the Council and is due to be operational by April 2026.

The income projected from the scheme is estimated to be approximately £80,000 per annum from 2026/27.

60% of the energy that is produced will be consumed directly by the building's tenants, with the remainder being exported to the grid. There is a saving of approximately 134 tCO_2 per annum.

This project is another example where there will be improved energy security for the tenants during any periods of energy volatility, whilst also increasing the value of the Council's asset.

Following lengthy consideration by the Planning Inspectorate, robust challenge by the City Council, and changes to national planning policy, Lancaster City Council formally adopted their Climate Emergency Review of the Local Plan in January 2025.

The Plan was lauded as being at the forefront of integrating net zero into local planning policy. In particular, the Council's drive to raise energy efficiency standards above those required by the building regulations attracted national attention. [19]

The result has been the implementation of a policy that takes a tiered approach to all new housing in the district. From January 2025, a fabric first approach is used to reach a minimum 75% reduction in carbon emissions against Part L of the (national) Building Regulations 2013, expressed as a % uplift of the dwelling's target emission rate (a rate which sets the standard for the energy performance of a building). By 1 January 2028, this requirement increases to 100%.

This policy now influences every residential development in the district, including those development proposals taken forward by the City Council. Earlier this year, the Council delivered highly energy-efficient homes as part of an independent living development at Alder Grove, Lancaster. [20]

More recently the Council successfully secured £780,000 in funding from the Government's Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund Wave 3. This is a three-year programme of improvement to Council properties with poor energy performance. The funding will help reduce fuel bills, lower carbon emissions and create warmer, healthier living environments for tenants. To support residents in understanding how to best take advantage of their newly retrofitted homes, funding was secured from the Centre for Net Zero and High Density Buildings, to co-develop an accessible handover guide for residents.

[19] Council's climate change work highlighted by Channel 4 - Lancaster City Council

[20] Lancaster City Council unveils new energy efficient council homes - Lancaster City Council

Lancaster City Council continues to work closely with the authority that is responsible for transport and highways in the district, Lancashire Combined County Authority, regarding plans and projects that will help to decarbonise the local transport network.

At the time of compiling this report, the City Council was in the process of formally responding to the Combined County Authority's draft Lancashire Local Transport Plan (2025-2045).[21] This Plan will inform decisions regarding travel and transport improvements.

With regard to the City Council's own activities, it has launched the Lancaster District Car Club (initially with Co-Wheels, now being delivered with Hiyacar). This award winning scheme provides access to electric vehicles for City Council staff, which in turn has reduced mileage reimbursements for staff travel and improves air quality.

The electric vehicles can also be used by local residents. The opportunity for third-party use means that there is now a local alternative for those residents who do not wish to own and maintain a car, but who do still wish to make occasional private vehicle journeys.

Meanwhile the People's Jury continues to play an active role in climate adaptation, particularly with regard to the travel and climate change conversations (2023).[22] Lancaster's desire for improved public and active travel networks will be communicated to Lancashire County Council as part of the consultation regarding the Lancashire Local Transport Plan.

The People's Jury have also been collaborating with Council officers and artists from the Good Things Collective regarding amenity and safety improvements at the Bay Rose Crossing at the end of the Greenway Cycleway in Morecambe. [23] As well as improving connectivity, this project made a positive contribution to the public realm and biodiversity of the site.

[21] Lancashire Local Transport Plan 2025 to 2045 | Lancashire Combined County Authority
[22] Local Climate Engagement
[23] People's Jury on Climate Change - Bay Roses Crossing

The most recent State of Nature Report (2023) confirmed the worrying, continuing trend for fragmentation of the country's habitats and degradation of the natural environment. [24]

The Government established a series of plans and legislation to help improve and protect nature, including the 25-Year Environment Plan (25YEP) (2018). Since the City Council's Climate Emergency declaration, the Government has published a review of the 25YEP (2023). This review makes commitments to increase species abundance by at least 10% by 2030; restore or create at least 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats; reduce the risk of species extinction; and restore 75% of the 1 million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater sites to a favourable condition.

The legislative driver for these ambitions is provided by the Environment Act 2021. This sets statutory targets for the recovery of the natural world in four priority areas; air quality, biodiversity, water and waste. Central to this is a new legal duty for all public bodies, including the City Council, to conserve and enhance biodiversity. A Biodiversity Duty came into force on 1 January 2023. The timeline and subsequent obligations for the City Council are:

Environment Act takes effect	1 January 2023
First Consideration Report	1 January 2024
Biodiversity Report 1 Period Ends	1 January 2026
Biodiversity Report 1 Publication	By 26 March 2026
Biodiversity Report 2	1 January 2031
Subsequent Biodiversity Reports	Every 5 years from 2031

When the Council prepared the First Considerations Report, it adopted a Biodiversity Action Plan. [25]

[24] State of Nature 2023 - report on the UK's current biodiversity

[25] Fulfilling the Biodiversity Duty First Considerations

- Objective 1 – To improve biodiversity evidence base;
- Objective - To work with key partners to support biodiversity delivery across the district;
- Objective 3 – To deliver a measurable increase in biodiversity across the district;
- Objective 4 – To embed biodiversity in leadership and decision making;
- Objective 5 – To promote education and awareness; and,
- Objective 6 – To promote and support projects that deliver enhancements in biodiversity.

To support the delivery of all 6 objectives, a series of individual actions have been identified as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan. Progress regarding the delivery of these actions is being compiled ahead of the end of Biodiversity Reporting Period 1. It is then envisaged that the Biodiversity Report will be presented to the City Council's Cabinet in February/March 2026, with publication of the report no later than 26 March 2026 (in accordance with the statutory reporting periods).

Details of this Report will also be included in next year's Journey to Net Zero Annual Report (December 2026).

Since 2022 the Council has also worked with Lancaster University and Cornwall Council, and a range of Government, industry and professional stakeholders on the development of guidance and innovative model policies for soils at construction sites. [26] Soil carbon loss due to development is estimated to be higher than emissions from the concrete industry. Soils are the largest terrestrial carbon sink, and they support above and below-ground biodiversity and they are critical for water management.

[26] Reports | Soils Task Force

The City Council has also been involved in a Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) funded programme regarding safeguarding our coastal communities. In 2021, DEFRA allocated £150m to 25 individual projects as part of their Flood and Coastal Resilience innovation Programme. The Programme aims to research and test practical actions to improve climate resilience by reducing the future costs and damages from flooding and coastal erosion.

One of those 25 projects is the 'Our Future Coast' project. Led by Wyre Council, the project includes several case study sites along the north west coastline. Lancaster City Council, with support from the Morecambe Bay Partnership, manages three of those sites at Hest Bank, Bolton-le-Sands and Jenny Brown's Point, Silverdale. [27]

Aside from the Biodiversity Action Plan and the Our Future Coast Project, smaller, more local schemes have a big role to play in creating new or improved habitats for wildlife and, consequently, helping the district become a greener, healthier place to live and work.

The biodiversity projects that have been supported by the City Council since the climate emergency declaration include:

- The grant of a 12-year license agreement between the Council and the charitable residents' group, Hermitage Field Community Meadow, for a wildflower meadow at the Crook of Lune;

- Development of a small nature reserve at Uggle Lane, Scotforth;

- Regular Council-run wildflower seed sowing events (including at Heysham, Silverdale, Wray with Botton, and along the Bay Gateway);

- Planting of cherry trees, hedges and snowdrops in Ryelands Park; and,

[27] Our Future Coast

- Hosting litter picks, weeding and gardening as part of the #LoveParks events in Regent Park, Happy Mount Park and Ryelands Park.

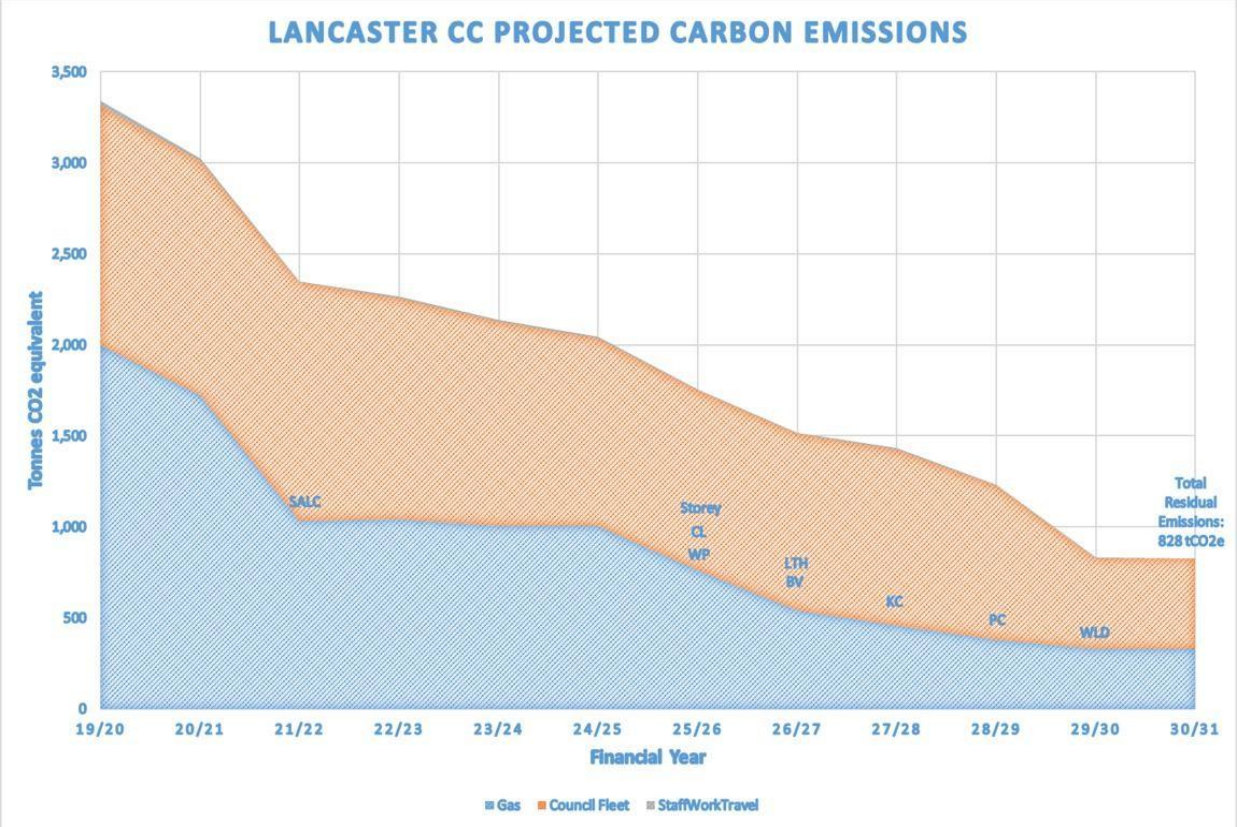
The Council will also be publishing its Climate and Nature Strategy shortly.

The Government's *Simpler Recycling in England* policy requires Councils to make changes to their waste and recycling collections. The changes that Lancaster City Council are introducing will make it easier to recycle, reduce waste and support our commitment to moving towards zero residual waste to landfill and incineration.

The changes require Councils to collect food waste separately by 31 March 2026, and to increase the amount of waste that it sends to recycling.

The existing waste recycling boxes (55 litre) are being replaced by 240 litre recycling wheelie bins. This increase in capacity will also reduce incidents experienced during extreme weather events when recycling is blown away in strong winds. Collections of recycling and grey bin (non-recyclable) waste will occur on a three-weekly basis.

In early 2026 the Council will also issue a food waste recycling pack which will contain a 7 litre kitchen caddy; a 23 litre caddy for outside with a lock mechanism, a starter pack of kitchen caddy liner bags and an information leaflet. Food waste collections will begin the week after delivery (and will continue on a weekly basis), with the waste being taken to Farington Waste Recovery Park to be processed into biogas, to generate electricity.



The above graph illustrates the progress made in reducing the City Council's carbon emissions. The data is separated to indicate the Scope 1 (direct) emissions caused by gas (shown in blue); those that are caused by the Council's fleet of vehicles (shown in orange); and an amount caused by staff travel (which is barely perceptible in the graph because the amount is so comparatively small). The text within the graph refers to key local authority sites (e.g. Salt Ayre Leisure Centre; The Storey; CityLab, Williamson Park; Lancaster Town Hall; White Lund Depot and sheltered housing sites such as Beck View, Kingsway Court and Parkside Court).

The estimates are predicated on the continued successful implementation of the remaining PSDS building decarbonisation projects, and the electrification of the Council's fleet including the electric vehicle car club. There are also opportunities to offset 850 tCO_2e of residual emissions by 2030 via the renewable energy schemes at Burrow Beck and at Gateway.

This data indicates that the Council is currently on target to meet its 2030 net zero timeframe.

The next pages discuss the potential risks to that progress, before the report concludes by outlining the likely priorities for the next 12 months.

Whilst the City Council's progress has been encouraging, there are risks that may prevent the authority from achieving its 2030 net zero target.

Key decarbonisation projects, particularly at high-emission sites such as Williamson Park and The Storey, are dependent on planning approval. The risks posed by delays, or the failure to secure planning permission/listed building consent at all, would mean that the Council will struggle to reduce Scope 1 emissions by December 2030. These two sites represent approximately 45% of our remaining emissions from corporate buildings.

Additionally, the ability to deliver on the net zero commitment has been heavily reliant on the Council's Planning & Climate Change Service (Energy & Sustainability Team) securing external funding. One of the main sources of funds was the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), which aimed to reduce emissions from public sector buildings by 75% by 2037.

However, the Government's Spending Review 2025 confirmed that there are no plans for further rounds of PSDS funding. Existing phases 3C and 4 would continue until their existing deadlines (31 March 2026 and 31 March 2028 respectively). Unless an alternative external funding model is announced, Councils will have to consider self-funding any future projects.

A further risk is that the Council's Fleet Programme now assumes internal combustion engines for its remaining vehicles, including its refuse collection vehicles. This decision equates to an additional 1,400 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Success in achieving the 2030 date is dependent upon buy-in from all Service areas throughout the Council. Climate considerations need to continue to be embedded in all decision-making processes. Of course, decisions might not always result in an outcome that delivers the greatest climate mitigation, and there may be other compelling reasons (including financial reasons) that justify decisions. But the Council must always avoid short-term silo thinking that fails to appropriately consider the long-term climate impacts of decision-making. Otherwise it

increases the Council's risk of not achieving the 2030 target and, critically, it fails the long-term future of our residents.

The Lancaster District is fortunate to have a collection of individuals and groups that are passionate about the health and wellbeing of our cities, towns and villages. But that continued support, engagement and participation in climate and biodiversity projects cannot be taken for granted. The Council must continue to make the environmental, economic and social case for climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience at every opportunity.

Maintaining momentum is also dependent upon staff retention. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) promises notable benefits, including a greater decentralisation of powers and funding from Government. But the uncertainty created by LGR may have a detrimental impact upon staff retention.

To ensure that the City Council stays on track, the priorities for 2026 are:

- To consider alternatives to replace Public Sector Decarbonisation Funding;
- To ensure that existing projects are delivered on time and budget; and,
- To assess the implications of the decision not to continue electrifying the fleet and consider what alternative (such as the potential use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil as a clean burning biofuel) may be appropriate.

This first Annual Report highlights the many benefits associated with the City Council's pursuit of net zero for its own Scope 1 emissions by 2030.

By being less reliant on fossil fuels, the Council is creating the conditions for greater energy security and lower fuel bills. Renewable energy schemes are also helping to upskill local people in the sector.

The changes that the Council are making will help our district adapt to our changing climate, and by doing so will reduce the emotional, health and financial costs arising from extreme climate events.

Our projects will combine to deliver a thriving district today and in the future. This means cleaner air, more affordable living, more connected communities, increased biodiversity and greener, healthier spaces.

We are proud of the progress that we have made so far. There is still much to do, but we will look forward to continuing to share our progress annually up to December 2030.