

West Berkshire Council - Declaring an Ecological/Biodiversity Emergency

What are we proposing?

We are proposing strengthening our current climate emergency declaration to reflect the need to protect and enhance West Berkshire's natural environment, wildlife, and biodiversity. We would propose doing this by updating our existing climate emergency declaration to a 'climate and ecological emergency'. The ecological and climate emergencies are closely linked and to solve one, we must address the other. Our Environment Strategy and Delivery Plan have therefore already taken steps to protect our District's natural environment. Updating the declaration to specifically mention the ecological emergency will reinforce the Council's commitment and raise awareness of the importance of protecting all aspects of the natural environment.

Why is this important?

The 2019 [State of Nature](#) report shows that 41% of UK species have decreased in abundance in the last 50 years and around 15% of UK species are threatened with extinction. West Berkshire has biodiversity of significant importance including 51 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 500 local wildlife sites (11% of the district) and three Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) which are of international importance. Improving nature also contributes to creating a strong economy and improves the health and wellbeing of residents.

Other proposed changes

- Terminology used in the current Climate Emergency declaration

Since the declaration of the climate emergency, terms in addition to 'carbon neutrality' have been used to describe carbon and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions leading to confusion. The Environment Delivery Team, set up as a result of the climate emergency declaration and adopted Environment Strategy, have revisited terms used to describe carbon and GHGs. This aims to reset and clarify terminology to members, officers, residents, businesses and community groups, and support effective and accurate communication.

Based on research, a separate briefing paper has been prepared which outlines several key definitions and how these definitions relate to the Council's activity at a Council and District wide level.

In relation to the climate emergency declaration and proposed amendment to include the ecological emergency, this has provided an opportunity to amend the carbon/GHG terminology used and provide clarity on the actual approach the Council has adopted on carbon and GHGs. Currently the climate emergency declaration details 'Carbon neutrality'. We propose to change the declaration to 'Net Zero Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions' or 'Net Zero' for short.

'Carbon neutrality' means balancing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by offsetting – or removing from the atmosphere – an equivalent amount of carbon for the amount produced. This means a commitment to carbon neutral does not require a commitment to reduce overall emissions. In contrast, a commitment to 'Net Zero carbon' or 'Net Zero GHG' / 'Net Zero' means making changes to reduce carbon or GHG emissions to the lowest amount – and offsetting as a last resort.

Making this change to using the term 'Net Zero' will also bring the Council in line with Government and business terminology.

- Clarification on targets

Since the declaration of the climate emergency in 2019, there has been a growing distinction between actions that the Council can take to reduce the impact from its own operations and activities, and those actions that can seek to influence and affect the net zero journey for the District as a whole. Data showing progress for both are reported separately within the Environment Strategy Annual Progress Reports. The control that West Berkshire Council has in each of these cases is very different. The proposed changes outlined above provide an opportunity for clarifying the targets that West Berkshire Council is focused on.

- Achieving net zero by 2030 for the Council's operations and activities; and
- Facilitating, influencing, promoting and encouraging a reduction in emissions across West Berkshire to enable net zero to be achieved as soon as possible for the District.

This recognises that there are factors affecting the District emissions that are outside the control of the Council. However, there is a key role for the Council to play in demonstrating climate action leadership and using its position to bring about action within communities and amongst businesses.

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Our current Climate emergency declaration:

This Council notes that:

1. All levels of government (national, regional and local) have a responsibility to limit the negative impacts of climate breakdown. It is important for the residents of West Berkshire and the UK that we commit to working towards carbon neutrality as quickly as possible.
2. The consequences of global temperature rising above 1.5°C are so severe that preventing this from happening must be of the utmost urgency.
3. Bold climate action can deliver economic benefits in terms of new jobs, economic savings and market opportunities (as well as improved health and wellbeing) but will also require changes in individuals' lifestyles and have a cost implication to both the individual and the state.

West Berkshire Council therefore:

- Declares a Climate Emergency.
- Will create a strategic plan for West Berkshire that aims to deliver carbon neutrality by 2030.
- Calls on HM Government to provide the Council with the powers and resources to make the 2030 target possible.
- Will work with other authorities to determine and implement where practicable best practice methods to limit global warming to less than 1.5°C.

Proposed Climate and Ecological emergency declaration:

The Council notes that:

1. All levels of government (national, regional, and local) have a responsibility to limit the negative impacts of climate breakdown. It is important for the residents of West Berkshire and the UK that we commit to working towards Net Zero as quickly as possible.
2. The consequences of global temperature rising above 1.5°C are so severe that preventing this from happening must be of utmost urgency.
3. The current rate of habitat degradation and loss of biodiversity within West Berkshire and the UK is likely to be having a detrimental impact and needs to be prevented.
4. Bold climate and ecological action can deliver social and economic benefits in terms of new jobs, economic savings, and improved health and wellbeing but will also require changes in individuals' lifestyles and have a cost implication to both the individual and the state.

West Berkshire Council therefore:

- Declares a Climate and Ecological Emergency
- Will take action to reduce emissions from its operations and activities in order to achieve Net Zero by 2030
- Will continue to revise and deliver on our strategic plan for West Berkshire that aims to facilitate and influence the achievement of deliver Net Zero for the District as soon as possible, by 2030-
- Will ensure the ecological emergency is highlighted alongside our climate action to maximise benefits.
- Calls on HM Government to provide the Council with the powers and resources to make the achievement of our Climate and Ecological targets possible.
- Will work with other authorities and external stakeholders to determine and implement where practicable to best practice methods to contribute to limiting global warming to less than 1.5°C and protecting the natural environment within West Berkshire and beyond.

Proposed 'Ecological Emergency' Actions:

- Ensure the Environment Strategy and the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan emphasise the importance of ecological protection alongside Net Zero.
- Work with local authorities and other partners in the development of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Berkshire ensuring the opportunities for biodiversity protection and recovery in West Berkshire are maximised.
- Introduce a 'Climate and Ecological impact assessment tool'. This will ensure climate and ecological priorities are at the forefront of the decision making and project planning processes within the Council.
- Develop a Green and Blue Infrastructure framework for the Council to highlight our priorities for ensuring the environment is managed for biodiversity and our residents.

Benchmarking Against Similar Declarations by Selected Other UK Councils

“Ecological Emergency”

- **South Oxfordshire District Council**: Ecological Emergency declared 11/02/21 which builds on the Climate Emergency declared in April 2019. Actions:
 - Renamed the Climate Emergency advisory committee to Climate and Ecological Emergencies advisory committee
 - Add ecological impact implications alongside those for climate and sustainability in committee and council reports.
 - Ensure the climate and ecological emergencies are considered strategic priorities for planning policy and design guides for new development.
 - Establish a biodiversity steering group.
 - Set measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, in both species and quantities.
 - Work with partners to develop the nature recovery networks and nature recovery strategy for Oxfordshire.
 - Look for opportunities to work in partnership with local charities and environmental organisations to deliver nature recovery in South Oxfordshire
 - Develop a district wide Tree Planting Policy and Strategy, including having Member Tree Champions, to support nature protection and recovery and carbon sequestration
 - Build on the work of the Thames Champion to improve the ecology of the Thames and its banks and flood plains, a hugely important habitat in our District
 - Ensure the Strategic Property Review considers opportunities for biodiversity enhancements and tree planting on Council landholdings
 - Investigate new approaches to nature recovery such as habitat banking that deliver biodiversity objectives and provide new investment opportunities
 - Embed climate action and ecological initiatives within all council work areas, including COVID-19 recovery projects and programmes.
- **Bristol City Council**: In February 2020 Bristol City Council declared an Ecological Emergency. Vision: *From today, we will work together as a city to ensure that 30% of Bristol’s land is managed for nature. We will create space for nature, and unite to find new, fair and inclusive ways to reduce and eliminate the threats to habitats and wildlife. Together we will take action for nature so that both people and wildlife can benefit.* They developed an ecological emergency [strategy](#) for the city. In response to the strategy they then produced an ecological emergency [action plan](#). The strategy has four main goals to support nature recovery by 2030:
 - 30% of land in Bristol to be managed for the benefit of wildlife
 - To reduce the use of pesticides in Bristol by at least 50%
 - For all waterways to have excellent water quality which supports healthy wildlife
 - To reduce the consumption of products that undermine the health of wildlife and ecosystems around the world.
- **South Cambridgeshire District Council**: In July 2019 South Cambridgeshire recognised both a climate and ecological emergency. They agreed to support the aim of doubling nature in South Cambridgeshire through the [doubling nature strategy](#) which sits alongside the sister

document South Cambridgeshire's zero carbon strategy. Vision: *Our vision is to double nature in South Cambridgeshire by 2050 and, in so doing, enable wildlife and people to thrive and businesses to prosper, this means more wildlife rich habitats, an increase in tree canopy cover and better accessibility to green space.*

- [Bath and North East Somerset Council](#): An ecological emergency was declared in July 2020. In response to this they produced an action plan. Vision: *Our vision is to be nature positive as an organisation by 2030. This means that B&NES Council will be making a positive contribution to nature recovery, with all parts of the council integrating the response to the Ecological Emergency into their decision-making. It will also mean that we are taking a regional and national lead in responding to the Ecological Emergency, working in step with communities and partners across the district to restore nature.* The actions follow the following themes:
 - Mainstreaming nature recovery in leadership and decision-making
 - Increasing the extent of land and waterways managed positively for nature
 - Increasing investment into nature-based solutions and wildlife-friendly interventions
 - Increasing the abundance and distribution of key species across B&NES
 - Enabling more people to access and engage with nature
 - Improving our evidence base and monitoring
 - Working in partnership

A combined climate and ecological emergency

- [Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole \(BCP\) Council](#): A Climate and ecological emergency was declared in July 2019. Can't find any wording to indicate how biodiversity is being tackled as everything seems to be focused on climate change.
- [Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council](#): In June 2019 an environment and climate emergency was declared. Vision: *Our vision is to be a Borough where the community collectively works together to achieve a sustainable future, protecting and enhancing our natural environment and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.* The Environment and Climate Strategy focuses on four key themes:
 - Circular Economy: More sustainable resource use, increasing recycling rates and supporting less resource-intensive lifestyles.
 - Energy: Reducing consumptions and decarbonising our supply of energy.
 - Natural Environment: Supporting biodiversity, health and wellbeing.
 - Transport: Reduce the need for carbon intensive travel by encouraging walking and cycling, as well as investing in digital infrastructure.
- [Brighton and Hove City Council](#): Declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in December 2018.

Changing climate emergency to incorporate ecological emergency

- [Herefordshire Council](#): In March 2019 Herefordshire Council declared a climate emergency, this was then strengthened to a 'Climate and ecological emergency' in December 2019.
- [Dorset Council](#): Declared a climate emergency in May 2019 and updated it to a climate and ecological emergency in November 2019.