



A Progress Report Marking The 2nd Anniversary Of Wiltshire Council's Climate Emergency Motion

1. The Urgency of Now

“Unless we take urgent action, we will get 3C hotter. As a country, as a society, as a planet and as a species, we must now act” Boris Johnson, February 2020

Two years ago, on 26th February 2019, Wiltshire Council voted to acknowledge the climate emergency, and to seek to make Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030. Soon afterwards the Council committed to decarbonising as an organisation by 2030.

Wiltshire Climate Alliance (WCA) was founded in January 2020, in the run-up to the first anniversary of the Climate Emergency motion, to maintain pressure on the Council, and give a united voice to the many local environmental groups across Wiltshire. We now have over 300 individual members representing over 30 local groups whose membership exceeds 1,500 people. WCA has pledged to support the Council's climate change efforts, and to hold it accountable in keeping its commitment to seek to make Wiltshire carbon neutral by 2030. In this report, we review the progress the Council has made in the last two years, highlight its shortcomings, and set out recommendations to accelerate the pace of change.

The science could not be clearer: we must all reduce our greenhouse gas emissions significantly, year on year, to avoid catastrophic and irreversible global heating. Following the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report on 1.5 degrees¹, the UK Government adopted its own new target of net zero carbon by 2050². The Committee on Climate Change's Sixth Carbon Budget³ now requires a 68% reduction in emissions by 2030 on the path to net zero. **This is not about 2050, or 2030: this is about acting now and with urgency⁴.**

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C
<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

² New target will require the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-becomes-first-major-economy-to-pass-net-zero-emissions-law>

³ Sixth Carbon Budget <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget/>

⁴ Climate expert emphasizes the fierce urgency of now <https://news.mit.edu/2019/economist-nicholas-stern-warns-renewable%20energy-0411>

It is also widely acknowledged that the UK has the potential to become a leader in the green economy, creating jobs that will help to preserve our beautiful countryside and enable us all to live in a healthy environment. The recent Treasury backed report, 'The Economics of Biodiversity'⁵, concluded that economic growth must be aligned with action on the environment, stating: 'the solution starts with understanding and accepting a simple truth: our economies are embedded within Nature, not external to it'.

Yet two years on from Wiltshire Council's Climate Emergency declaration⁶, with nearly 20% of the time to the 2030 deadline already passed, very little material change has yet been delivered. The Council has taken some action, mainly on planning to reduce its own emissions. However, it is clear from the limited progress made so far that **without a significant change in approach, no meaningful reduction in countywide emissions is going to be achieved with the speed that is necessary.**

We understand the constraints the Council has to work within, but the Council does have real power to achieve meaningful change, not just through planning but also through encouraging businesses and communities to change. The Council **can** take urgent and decisive action now to accelerate the delivery of carbon reduction strategies, plans and policies. In particular, it can and should stop or postpone developments that are directly contradictory to that goal.

Whether or not the Council believes net zero is achievable by 2030, the action taken should be the same in terms of investing in a net zero future: the Council needs to aim for the maximum achievable reduction. The lack of substantive progress so far simply increases the problem, as every year of emissions in excess of the carbon budget makes the reduction required in future years even greater. Acting now, at local, national and international level, will allow us to mitigate the worst consequences of climate change. **The Council needs to demonstrate it is treating this issue as the emergency that it acknowledged two years ago.**

2. Wiltshire Council has made limited progress made over last two years

Two years ago, Wiltshire Council voted to acknowledge the Climate Emergency, as over 300 local authorities and the UK Parliament have done. The motion committed the Council to achieve zero carbon on its own emissions, and to seek to make the county carbon neutral by 2030. Since then, the Council has made some progress on planning to reduce its internal emissions (representing less than 1% of the county's total emissions), but very little on decarbonising the county.

A Climate Emergency and Global Warming Task Group (made up of councillors) was established under the Council's Environmental Select Committee in June 2019 and began its work in October of that year. This Task Group has recently submitted

⁵ The Dasgupta Review. Final Report of the Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>

⁶ Climate Emergency Motion: 26th February 2019
<https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/g11678/Public%20minutes%20Tuesday%2026-Feb-2019%2010.30%20Council.pdf?T=11>

comprehensive recommendations on energy, transport (first report published Sept. 2020) and planning (second report published Dec. 2020), which have been endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Environment Select Committee respectively. A Carbon Reduction team was later set up and officers appointed, with budget allocated to enable them to formulate a Climate Change Strategy and plans to deliver on the climate emergency goals.

The Task Group's recommendations were aimed at guiding this strategy, and the Group will continue to make recommendations as the strategy develops. We understand that a Climate Strategy discussion document⁷ was submitted to Cabinet in February, although the Strategy itself may now not be finalised until Autumn 2021.

The Council has developed plans for reducing some of its own emissions, including energy efficiency and renewable generation in its own estate, building more energy efficient new council houses, and introducing LED lighting on public highways. The Council has stated it is on track to achieve zero carbon by 2030 in its own scope 1 and 2 emissions, although so far there is no public reporting against emission metrics. However, the Council appears not yet to have considered its Scope 3 emissions⁸ (e.g. investments, procurement, business travel, employee commuting, waste). The recent switch to a green electricity tariff, whilst commendable, is not equivalent to cutting energy use or generating renewable energy locally.

Some support has been given on wider emissions, including support for the introduction of electric buses in Salisbury, and improvements in cycling infrastructure in some towns, with funding being sought for further improvements in public and active transport, although this has not yet resulted in any strategic, long term network improvements.

The Council has also formed partnerships with other organisations to work on joint programmes, including joining the Countryside Climate Network to lobby central government on climate policies.

The Council has stated publicly that carbon reduction will be a key theme in the recovery from COVID-19, and that carbon reduction will be 'an integral theme' within the updated Local Plan and the fourth Local Transport Plan. The 'Addressing Climate Change and Biodiversity Net Gain' document raises some important issues and questions. However, other local plan documents barely make reference to climate change and contain policies that directly conflict with the Council's stated climate change goals. Furthermore, there are no specific policies identified which will reduce carbon emissions, nor any specific targets for reductions. Even if the updated plans do incorporate meaningful climate change policies, they will not be adopted until well into 2023, over four years after the Climate Emergency vote.

⁷ The Wiltshire Council Carbon Reduction team strategy discussion document issued to Cabinet in January 2021: https://2912b012-09d1-4857-9589-b6408ce7e8c6.filesusr.com/ugd/d71e9e_205ecc17f5e6477bad109953ad9bbdf4.pdf

⁸ Greenhouse Gas Protocol: Scope 3 Technical Calculations Guidance: <https://ghgprotocol.org/scope-3-technical-calculation-guidance>

3. Little material action has been taken, while the situation gets worse

Two years on from the Climate Emergency vote, the reality is that the limited action taken so far will not result in any material, sustainable reduction in Wiltshire's carbon emissions.

Other local authorities in similar circumstances have made much more rapid progress. Cornwall Council, for example, declared a climate emergency on 22 January 2019 (one month before Wiltshire) and by 24 July 2019 had a plan fully developed and approved by the council. Cornwall is very similar to Wiltshire in land area, population and its rural nature. BANES, which acknowledged the climate emergency in March 2019, is also making considerably more progress, particularly with revisions to its own Local Plan.

The Executive has not yet accepted the recommendations on Energy and Transport⁹ from the Task Group, and those on Planning¹⁰ have yet to be responded to. Our understanding is that it is likely to be several months before it is clear which of them have been incorporated into the emerging Climate Change Strategy. The run up to the local elections and the normal pace of Council decision making indicates further delay is likely. At current rates of progress, it will be many more months before a comprehensive Strategy and Action Plan is adopted by the Council, and **on the current trajectory it is unlikely that any material actions will be taken until well into 2022, over three years from the initial vote.**

Achieving the radical greenhouse gas emissions reductions required to meet net zero in 2030, or even the 68% reduction in the 6th Carbon Budget, will require all the plans developed by the Council to work in an integrated way. In particular, the Local Plan, the Local Transport Plan and the future Carbon Management Plan will have to complement each other in order for all the sources of emissions to be addressed. What is lacking at present is a formalised baseline of current emissions, the actual carbon budget that Wiltshire has to work within, and any targets or milestones by which progress and success can be measured and scrutinized. **Without these metrics, there is no basis for assessing whether actions taken are sufficient in scale and timing to deliver the required reductions.**

Of particular concern is the lack of a joined-up approach, for example:

- **The Council continues to invest in road building at scale**, but will only invest in limited active travel when government grants or developer contributions allow.
- **Its Stone Circle housing company continues to commit to building council houses that do not meet net zero carbon standards**, in contradiction to the Council's own stated objectives.
- **Some planned housing developments involve building on publicly owned County Farms that are important carbon sinks**, vital for future food supply and which could be used to generate renewable energy.

⁹ Report of the Global Warming & Climate Emergency Task Group (Part One)

<https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=94731>

¹⁰ Report of the Global Warming & Climate Emergency Task Group (Part Two) https://2912b012-09d1-4857-9589-b6408ce7e8c6.filesusr.com/ugd/d71e9e_e08220ad060747b2a2e76f0ae1562cf6.pdf

- **The Executive has stated that it will not prioritise investing in renewable energy** unless it can maximise the return compared to other forms of investment – which may include fossil fuel related investments.

Existing planning decisions are adding to the county’s greenhouse gas emissions, making it even harder to achieve meaningful reductions. These include:

- **Continuing to approve the building of thousands of new houses to less than carbon zero standards**, resulting in the need to retrofit these houses (at much greater cost) within a few years of completion. The UK Climate Change Committee reported in February 2019¹¹ that building to ultra-high energy efficiency standards adds only 1-4% to the capital cost of a new build (with the savings to householders in energy costs offsetting this many times over), and saves 90% of the lifetime emissions from the house, whereas retrofit costs up to 5 times more. Delaying just 10 years between build and retrofit results in three times greater emissions over 60 years. Whilst the Future Homes Standard will cut emissions from new homes by as much as 75% from 2025, by then many thousands of houses will have already been built. Wiltshire Council already has the power to set net zero carbon planning policy standards, under the Planning and Energy Act 2008, as leading local authorities are already doing.
- **Planning to build 5,000 houses in excess of the controversial housing numbers ‘standard method’ calculation.** This will further exacerbate the problems outlined above, and undermine Neighbourhood Plans through which communities have been trying to put carbon reduction measures into place.
- **Supporting housing plans which include huge suburban extensions**, increasing private car dependency and embedding huge quantities of tailpipe greenhouse gas emissions as a result of increased commuting. Some of these, such as the massive commuter extension proposed for Chippenham, will require millions of tonnes of concrete and tarmac to build two extended crossings over the River, two heritage canal crossings, a main line railway crossing and many miles of meandering distributor roads. While the carbon implications of these have not been calculated in putting the proposals forward, they will no doubt wipe out Wiltshire Council’s internal carbon reduction savings many times over, and undermine the county-wide carbon reduction targets.
- **Continuing to invest in new road schemes**, which will encourage increased road traffic, with associated emissions within Wiltshire, while destroying more of our natural environment and carbon sinks. This is inconsistent with the Committee on Climate Change predicting a 6% reduction in road traffic by 2030, and changes in design of new housing developments and patterns of working, which will reduce reliance on private cars.
- **Potentially giving planning permission for the Westbury incinerator.** Incinerators of this kind not only threaten people’s health, but also lock us into a system of burning and releasing greenhouse gases, as opposed to moving away from non-recyclable packaging and more effective recycling. This is a Merchant plant, requiring a life of at least 25 years to be viable. Once planning has been

¹¹ Committee on Climate Change: UK housing: Fit for the future? (2019)
<https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/uk-housing-fit-for-the-future/>

given the Council will have no control over the materials being burnt or where they come from. The planning proposal has been reviewed by Exeter University, who found that the plant would increase the County's carbon emissions by approximately 3% in 2025, more than doubling the present estimated emissions and making net zero by 2030 much harder to achieve¹². The report also identified other major environmental concerns with the plant.

- **Not currently having any policies to promote tree planting in Wiltshire.** This currently stands at 9% coverage, compared to the national average of 13%, and the Woodland Trust's target of 19%¹³, echoed by the Government's ambition to plant 11 million trees under its 25 Year Plan¹⁴ for to Improve the Environment.

In addition, some councillors appear, from recent public statements, to be less than 100% convinced of the need to act urgently on climate change. The Council should provide training for councillors and officers, such as the online courses offered by the Centre for Sustainable Energy¹⁵. This would help increase the level of urgency and commitment. It would also be useful to ask Cabinet members to formally sign that they personally support the motion adopted by the Council, which states 'the consequences of global temperature rising above 1.5°C are so severe that preventing this from happening must be humanity's number one priority.' Climate change is a matter of scientific fact, not personal opinion. Would the Council be happy for Cabinet members to promote COVID denial or anti-vaccine misinformation?

We understand the Council's claim to be constrained by factors outside its control, including aspects of government policy, and the rural nature of the county. However, as the Task Group has pointed out, much existing national legislation already places obligations on Local Planning Authorities to address the causes and impacts of climate change, and the intent of Government policy to radically reduce carbon emissions is clear. The UK Court of Appeal ruled in January in the Drax case that planners must consider a project's carbon lock-in risk, and that they can refuse permission on the basis of climate impacts¹⁶. Lord Deben, Chair of the Climate Change Committee, in January highlighted 'the critical importance of local councillors and planning authorities considering the implications of their decisions on climate targets'¹⁷. **These obstacles, which may be more perceived than actual, must not get in the way of acting on the Climate Emergency.**

¹² Consultation on proposed waste incinerator, Westbury Wiltshire. Planning Application 20/06775/WCM https://2912b012-09d1-4857-9589-b6408ce7e8c6.filesusr.com/ugd/d71e9e_0785f2c0f87649a8af2f687edab24745.pdf

¹³ Woodland Trust: Emergency Tree Plan for the UK: How to increase tree cover and address the nature and climate emergency: January 2020 <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/47692/emergency-tree-plan.pdf>

¹⁴ HM Government: A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf

¹⁵ Centre for Sustainable Energy <https://www.cse.org.uk/>

¹⁶ Client Earth: Court upholds gas plant approval but sets important climate planning precedent https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/news/court-upholds-gas-plant-approval-but-sets-important-climate-planning-precedent/?utm_source=drax-ruling&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=

¹⁷ Committee on Climate Change: Letter: Deep Coal Mining in the UK <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/letter-deep-coal-mining-in-the-uk/>

4. Wiltshire Council needs to take decisive action now, to accelerate the pace of delivery and achieve material year on year carbon reductions

The Climate Emergency Motion¹⁸ gave the Council a democratic mandate to act on the Climate Emergency, and as the Council's own survey found in 2019, climate change is the top priority for Wiltshire residents, so there is popular support for this approach. The Council has powers under existing legislation to take much more decisive action. The Task Group noted that there is a misalignment between Wiltshire Council's commitment to addressing the Climate Emergency, and its existing strategy and policies. It is the latter that need to change, and much existing legislation enables this, even before the Council's strategy and policies are updated.

We urge the Council to adopt a different way of working, as the current approach is not delivering. COVID has shown that radical action can be taken in response to an emergency – and the Climate Emergency will have far greater impact than COVID in the longer term, requiring radical action now if this is to be mitigated.

We recommend the Council urgently take the following five key actions:

- 1. Publicly recommit to acting on the Climate Emergency across the whole County as the Council's top priority** (after the immediate COVID crisis), and to:
 - Report on progress regularly, including implementation of actions and reductions actually achieved in carbon emissions against annual targets. This will require establishing a carbon baseline for the County, a commitment made in the original Motion.
 - State publicly what 'making carbon reduction an integral theme' in new policies actually means in practice. This should encompass the Local Plan Review and the next iteration of the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP4).
 - State what the emergency means for existing policies, strategies, plans, projects and investment proposals, to ensure these compatible with a net zero carbon reduction target. This will require interim measures to address urgent issues that occur prior to the new policies being implemented.
- 2. Develop a comprehensive climate change and carbon reduction strategy and action plan by end April 2021.** This should be based on the Task Group's recommendations on Energy, Transport and Planning, as well as on recommendations still to come on land use, waste and local economy, and should include allocating sufficient budget to enable implementation of the Strategy. The Council has previously committed to deliver the strategy before the local elections in May.

¹⁸ Climate Emergency Motion: 26th February 2019
<https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/g11678/Public%20minutes%20Tuesday%2026-Feb-2019%2010.30%20Council.pdf?T=11>

3. **Use existing powers under the Planning and Energy Act 2008 to set net zero standards for all new build houses in Wiltshire.** Current central Government policies are incompatible with UK climate objectives, by allowing houses to be built to lower standards, requiring much more expensive retrofit. Waiting for national policy to change, or for the Local Plan to be updated before doing this makes the problem much worse. The Council already has the power to set higher standards. It therefore needs to:
 - Ensure its council housing and any future homes built through its Stone Circle housing and development companies are net zero carbon.
 - Introduce a net zero carbon development policy under the revised Local Plan.
 - Immediately reinstate (and preferably enhance) Core Policy 41, to ensure homes built between now and the adoption of the next Local Plan, are at least to a higher energy efficiency standard than are currently being constructed in our county.
4. **Start investing in projects that help to reduce emissions.** These have been identified in the Task Group recommendations, and include: investment in solar PV, EV infrastructure, tree planting, active travel, and creating a supportive planning environment for renewables, including onshore wind. Funding could be diverted from high emission projects to achieve this. Carbon reduction must be placed far higher in determining investment priorities, whether through carbon accounting or using greenhouse gas abatement cost curve¹⁹ type of approaches.
5. **Use existing planning powers to stop making the situation even worse.** It is irrational to allow high carbon projects to proceed now, of a type that would not be permitted once zero carbon is incorporated into policies in the next few years, where the Council has powers to do this already. While the Local Plan Review has the potential to set the framework for a more sustainable planning approach, it will not be adopted until mid-2023, four years after the initial Climate Emergency vote. In the meantime, the Council needs to:
 - Make emissions reductions a top priority in all on-going planning decisions.
 - Establish a councillor-led scrutiny group to review all policies, forward capital programme, planning and procurement guidance, and to develop appropriate new carbon reduction procedures and policies. Examples of proposed developments that would need to be thoroughly appraised in terms of climate impact include the Westbury incinerator, major road schemes and major urban extensions. All decisions on these should be put on hold until these impacts have been properly calculated and made explicit.
 - Make the Council's Carbon Reduction team a consultee on the impact of carbon emission from all planning applications.
 - Where national legislation genuinely inhibits the ability to act, publicly challenge this, either directly with Government or collectively via its involvement in the Local Government Association and forums like the Countryside Climate Network.

¹⁹ McKinsey: A revolutionary tool for cutting emissions, ten years on <https://www.mckinsey.com/about-us/new-at-mckinsey-blog/a-revolutionary-tool-for-cutting-emissions-ten-years-on>

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The Council needs to act boldly, as other leading local authorities have done, to prioritise action on climate change and push the boundaries of normal ways of working. The Council already has the power to do much of what is needed to achieve the goals of the Climate Emergency Motion. The plans and investments it makes now will be critical in determining how quickly we can achieve net zero. There is no more time to waste. Wiltshire Council needs to start treating climate change as the emergency it has already acknowledged, and start acting quickly and decisively in bringing about the radical change that is required. **The Council can, and must, show leadership to ensure we create a better world and a sustainable future for our children and ourselves.**

*"We have to change. People can see the problem, particularly young people can see the problem. That must force governments to take action. We have to realize that this is not playing games, this is not having nice little debates and then coming away with a compromise. This is an urgent problem that needs to be solved and what is worse we know how to do it. We are refusing to take steps that we know have to be taken and every year that passes makes those steps more and more difficult to achieve." **David Attenborough***

Wiltshire Climate Alliance Steering Group, February 2021