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**Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy 2024-27**

**Annual Progress Report**

1. **Introduction**
   1. Our Phase 2 Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy 2024-27 was published one year ago, setting out the Council’s plan of action to move the organisation towards our net zero and sustainability targets. Service Areas are expected to show leadership in fulfilling the actions assigned to them and allocate resources appropriately.
   2. Lead officers are asked to report progress against their actions quarterly via the Sustainability Tracker spreadsheet which is our internal monitoring document. This is reviewed by Senior Leadership Team every 6 months and brief updates are shared with Sustainability and Climate Advisory Group (SCAF) twice a year. A summary version of the Sustainability Tracker spreadsheet can be found [here.](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Sustainability%20and%20Climate%20Crisis%20Strategy%20-%20Jan%202025%20Progress%20Spreadsheet.xlsx)
   3. This report provides a full annual update on our progress so far, an up-to-date analysis of our Corporate and Community-wide emissions and progress towards our Net Zero 2030 target.
2. **Corporate Greenhouse Gas Emissions**
   1. The Council has been calculating the greenhouse gas emissions associated with its buildings and services since 2008. The Corporate Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report for 2034/24 is available [here](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Corporate%20GHG%20Emissions%20Report%20202324.docx).
   2. Total emissions for 2023/24 were measured to be 3,603 tCO2e which represents a 51% reduction from the baseline year.
   3. We are *not* on track with the trajectory to Net Zero 2030 which was established in 2020 and required a -64% reduction by 2024/25. We are currently 2 years behind on our trajectory reduction aim.
   4. No reductions were achieved since the previous reporting year. Instead emissions have *increased* by 5%. Some of this rise can be attributed to work in 2024 to audit energy meters which will have led to some bills being higher after a period of estimation. It does not appear to be related to colder weather.

**Figure 1. Actual Emissions vs. Target Emissions and Milestones 2008/09 – 2029/30**

* 1. Much of the reductions observed in our corporate footprint are due to UK electricity grid decarbonisation and the closure of properties and associated energy accounts. Even with these external reductions taken into account, actual emissions still exceed our targeted emissions, and we will now need to reduce emissions at an even greater rate than forecasted if we are to meet our targets.
  2. To catch up in the next reporting year, emissions will need to be reduced by 1,392 tCO2e which is a 39% on our current footprint. Given we are already in 2025 it is unlikely this reduction will be met.

1. **Community-Wide Emissions**
   1. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) release area-wide emission statistics broken down by local authority area each year. The most recent St Albans City and District Community-wide Emissions Summary for 2022, can be found [here.](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/St%20Albans%20District%20Carbon%20Dioxide%20Briefing%20Note%20%282022%20Data%29.docx)
   2. District emissions are *not yet* on track with our determined trajectory to Net Zero 2030. By 2022 our aim was to have achieved a 52% reduction compared to the baseline year (emitting no more than 405,000 tCO2e). Actual emissions were 494,500 tCO2e which represents a 43% reduction. This is despite the pandemic-related restrictions reducing travel and economic activity in 2020 and 2021.
   3. Most reductions are due to the decarbonisation of the National Grid. Emissions were 7% lower than the previous year 2021, which reflects the national picture as less fuel was used for heating due to warmer temperatures and higher energy prices.
   4. Per capita emissions have declined from 6.6 tCO2 to 3.3 tCO2 between 2005 and 2022. Our per capita emissions are slightly lower than the England average (3.6 tCO2). Population density and rail commuting put us more in line with London per capita emissions (3.2 tCO2). Currently the lowest per capita emissions are in Hackney with 2.2 tCO2 per person.
   5. Each year that our decarbonisation targets aren’t met, more dramatic reductions are needed later. The target reduction has been increased previously and now needs to be increased once again. Emissions will now need to be reduced by 61,750 tCO2e each year between 2023-2030 if the District is to decarbonise from fossil fuels by 2030.

**Figure 2. Community-Wide Greenhouse Gas Emissions within the Scope of Local Authorities 2008/09 – 2029/30 showing trajectories to 2030 Net Zero Target.**

1. **Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy (SCCS) Progress**

**Theme: Governance and Leadership**

* 1. **Monitoring:** Officer Working Groups have been established this year to support Officers in working together, sharing progress, making links and inputting to each other’s projects. The groups are a space to find solutions to overcome obstacles. The four groups align to the themes as follows: Governance and Leadership, Energy and Buildings, Transport and Air Quality and Nature, Water, Waste and Food. Working Groups meet quarterly and are led by an Assistant Director or Manager.
  2. **Staff resourcing** is crucial to deliver the actions in the plan. In 2020 we recruited an Infrastructure Officer (Sustainability) who was responsible for project managing the installation electric vehicle charging infrastructure and then later became more focused on corporate building decarbonisation. A Graduate Management Trainee has also been in place supporting the work of the Sustainability Officer through 2024. There are two new Officers in the Housing Department focusing on asset management and decarbonisation. In 2024 two officers were recruited to deliver the St Albans Greener Together project. They will be in post until June 2025. A proposal to reorganise the Built Environment Team is being put together to increase staff resource focused on Sustainability, Building decarbonisation and energy management.
  3. **Policy Integration:** Addressing Climate Change is a key priority in the 2024-29 Council Plan and is being integrated to the 2025-2030 Council Plan. The SCCS is referenced in the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/accessibility-equality-and-diversity) and [Tree Strategy](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/St%20Albans%20Tree%20and%20Woodland%20Tree%20Stratagy%202024%20-%202029.pdf), and is a key driver in the developing Local Plan.
  4. **Minimising Impacts**: The Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) process allows us to assess the impacts of Council purchase, projects and policies on the environment, early enough that we can make changes. An SIA should be carried out by all staff introducing a new project or policy, making a significant change to an existing policy or making a purchase for goods or services over £25k. A requirement for a SIA has been incorporated into the Council’s procurement process which means many more are being completed. The SIA process requires the Sustainability Projects Officer to provide input to ensure all reasonable steps are being taken to minimise impacts and maximise opportunities. Since its introduction 93 SIAs have been completed across the Council. In 2025 this process will be reviewed to explore if there is potential for further improvement.
  5. **Climate Adaptation:** A Climate Risk Register has been produced and is reviewed annually. The risks have been integrated within the Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers to ensure that everyone is aware of and addressing climate risks. There are 3 risks in the Corporate Register and 2 in each Directorate register. The risks were most recently reviewed in December to ensure we are considering all possible risks that are within our control to mitigate, by comparing to risk registers produced by other Hertfordshire authorities. The updated risk registers will go to Senior Leadership Team (SLT) for approval in early 2025.
  6. **Training:** All staff are required to undertake an annual e-learning module on sustainability. A Climate Change eLearning module was developed a few years ago but not made mandatory. This is now being revised and transferred to the new eLearning system to cover the key concepts of carbon literacy. It will be rolled out in early 2025 for all staff to complete at least once. Councillors will be provided with an in-person climate change training and/or recording. Planning staff have been invited to take part in a Planning for Climate Change training run by Herts Growth Board in January 2025. Councillors and senior Officers have been invited to take part in a Climate Literacy Training offered by the Local Government Association in Spring 2025. Once the Local Plan has been produced, we will also provide training to the Planning Teams to ensure they are equipped with the skills to assess applications and installations.
  7. **Staff Engagement:** Progress towards the SCCS was covered in the December 2024 Staff briefing and Directorate Briefings in July and November 2024 highlighted environmental issues and the work taking place in the Council to minimise impacts. Staff are also engaged via new Working Groups, Performance Conversations and through the online staff discussion portal. From January 2025 we have included a new category within the Staff Awards for ‘Making green changes at work’.
  8. A new iTrent system is being implemented in Spring 2025 and will include an option for managers and staff to select an objective related to sustainability and climate as part of the objective setting exercise. Guidance will be provided in spring, for use during annual review conversations to encourage managers to ask staff what they can do to improve sustainability and reduce impacts.
  9. **Corporate Tenancies:** We have started researching what other councils do in terms of including green clauses when the Council leases out a commercial property. Whilst it is not feasible to mandate reporting of energy consumption, we may be able to set other expectations around sustainability,
  10. **Emissions Analysis:** The Council’s corporate greenhouse gas emissions are analysed and published annually. In the most recent year, a significant amount of off-contract energy use, not included to previous emissions calculations, was identified from temporary housing properties. This has now been incorporated for all previous years by estimating consumption from spend. Homeworking emissions have been included for 2 years and we aim to collate more specific homeworking data for the next calculation. We do not have access to specific SADC waste data, and it’s not possible to estimate the emissions of procured goods. We will however explore the possibility of including water consumption in the next analysis for 2024/25.
  11. **Finance:** Via the Innovate UK Fast Followers Funding Programme, we have received some consultancy support to help to quantify the high-level costs associated with some of the key actions in the SCCS action plan, particularly around corporate decarbonisation. We are currently gathering the data and the exercise should be completed by March 2025. Heat Decarbonisation Plans are currently being developed for specific buildings. Once we have a clearer idea of exactly what investment is required, we can take action to seek appropriate levels of funding. Invest to Save budget is available, but successful projects need to demonstrate return on investment within 5 years.
  12. **St Albans Greener Together (SAGT):** SAGT has been launched and is delivering regular communications on sustainability and climate change on social media. A communications plan which includes a monthly schedule of topics and social media focus has been produced and community stakeholders are being engaged to join and participate. Currently over 80 organisations are currently taking part.
* Presentation at Parish Council meeting (March 2024)
* Attended Visit Herts Spring Networking Event (March 2024)
* Creation of promotional video, materials (April 2024), website finalised and social media materials produced (May 2024)
* Attended both days of Sust Fest 2024 (June 2024)
* Presented at FACE meeting (June 2024)
* Hosted Retrofit Lecture with University of Hertfordshire (July 2024)
* Hosted SAGT Sustainable Transport Panel (July 2024)
* Attended Harpenden Sustainability Markets (Sept 2024)
* Distributed posters across city centre (Sept 2024)
* Attended Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce Wellbeing conference (Oct 2024)
* Presented at Communities 1st Environment Stronger Together network (Oct 2024)
* Attended St Albans Community Showcase (Oct 2024)
* Hosted Virtual Information Event for Net Zero Fund (Oct 2024)
* Attended Sustainable Schools networking meeting (Oct 2024)
* Hosted Heating your Home: Heat Pump Experience Talk (Nov 2024)
* Hosted Wider Community Discussion Event (Nov 2024) to encourage participation and gain input from the community on how to ensure SAGT is effective in its aims.
* Attended Christmas Cracker Event (Nov 2024)
* Member newsletter launched (Nov 2024)

SAGT is currently planning a ‘Just One Thing’ Campaign to encourage everyone to take small actions to make a big difference when we all work together. Also planned are a set of Business Briefings by the Carbon Trust.

* 1. **Net Zero funding**: Over £50,000 has been awarded by SAGT to [6 local community projects](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/St%20Albans%20Greener%20Together%202024%20Net%20Zero%20Fund%20recipients%20list.pdf) focused on provision of cycle training and bicycles to children, community food waste composting, provision of community engagement via the Sustainability Festival, establishing a pilot Library of Things in St Albans town centre, a sewing repair project to encourage reuse and an e-cargo bike project.
  2. **Community Engagement:** Sustainability and Climate section of the website has been restructured with new pages on Our Progress, Nature and Wildlife, Sustainable Transport, Climate Change Targets and St Albans Greener Together. The progress sections are updated quarterly as staff update the Sustainability Tracker. We continue to promote sustainability-related matters in Community News and Council social media, and have recently featured articles on Solar Together, Clean Air Day, St Albans Greener Together, Your Tree Our Future, Tree Strategy, Tree Wardens and Herts Retrofit Guide.
  3. **Businesses:** SAGT has been promoted to local businesses via Council newsletters as well as the Net Zero grant for the implementation of city-wide environmental schemes.
  4. **Partnership Working:** Sustainability is integrated as a standing item on the agenda at Strategic Partnership Meetings and we are allocating one meeting per year entirely to sustainability. Speakers at the Business Summit in February 2025 will be asked to reference sustainability and St Albans Greener Together will also have a stand. We continue to be actively involved in two Community Rail Partnerships (Abbey Line and St Albans/Bedford Line).
  5. **Lobbying Government:** In partnership with other Herts Councils, we have responded to consultations on the climate Resilience Roadmap and the National Planning Policy Framework Consultation.
  6. **Events Policy:** The SADC Sustainability Policy for Traders has been finalised and translated into online guidance. Finishing touches are being made to the guidance which is provided to Event Hosts and the overall Council Sustainable Events Policy. We aim to finalise the documents by the end of February 2025.
  7. **Local Plan:** The SCCS has been a direct influence on the Council’s Local Plan. A new ‘call for sites’ was undertaken and this involved, for the first time, seeking land for: Biodiversity improvements; renewable and low carbon energy and heat; and tree planting. Councillor Duty to Cooperate discussions with all neighbouring and nearby councils and a wide range of stakeholder groups have also taken place. The Local Plan Draft policies were agreed and submitted to the Secretary of State on 29th November 2024.

**Theme: Energy and Buildings**

* 1. **Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund (PSDF):** Due to the high competition rates and viability of projects, we have been unsuccessful in five applications to Salix for surveys, audits, and low-carbon heating systems. Recent feasibility studies funded by Greater South East Net Zero Hub grant examined the potential for low-carbon technologies at two major gas-fed sites. Sandridge Gate Business Centre was ruled out as it did not justify the energy savings needed for funding, Verulamium Museum did not receive funding due to high submission volumes and the Civic Centre application wasn’t submitted as the cost per tonne of carbon saved didn't meet the scheme eligibility threshold. These feasibility studies highlight how the Council’s aging estate and plant rooms require significant investment to upgrade. Consequentially this increased investment often means the schemes don't meet eligibility criteria for current funding schemes and increased internal match funding will be required to ensure these projects become viable.
  2. **Heat Decarbonisation Plans (HDP):** To support the progress of this action, we are obtaining heating decarbonisation plans for two of our operational buildings (Civic Centre and Verulamium Museum). These plans will detail the decarbonisation actions possible within those properties and the costs associated with each. The Civic Centre HDP is now complete and being internally reviewed. A further PSDF opportunity is expected to be available in March 2025, in which the Council can apply for funding for more HDP’s to be produced for the rest of the operational estate.
  3. **Energy Audits:** In 2019, energy audits were conducted on several of our largest buildings, including multiple leisure centres. Following these audits, initial funding was allocated for recommended energy efficiency improvements. Measures identified for the leisure centres were incorporated into the renewal of the leisure contract.
  4. **Lighting:** Over the past two years, we have focused on upgrading lighting across our estate. We have replaced fluorescent and halogen bulbs with LEDs at major sites and have adopted a policy of upgrading any individual lights to LEDs at the end of their life. We have installed occupancy sensors at the Civic Centre to reduce energy wastage.
  5. **Social Housing Decarbonisation:** The Housing Department has won various pots of funding since the Council’s climate declaration and continues to develop bids for future rounds to meet the targets in the new Housing Energy Strategy to raise the energy performance on each of its homes to EPC band B by 2030. A bid has recently been submitted to the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund Wave 3 in 2024 and successful applicants should be notified in early 2025.
* 2020-2022: £250,000 under the Green Home Deal Local Authority Delivery (Phase 1B) for a pilot to 45 social housing properties trialling whole house, fabric first approach to lifting the EPC rating to C.
* 2022-2023: £1.5M under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 1 to improve the EPC performance of 136 properties.
* 2023-2025: £8.78m from SHDF Wave 2.1, combined with £9.7m from the HRA for a total works package of £18.78m. to improve performance of 780 properties. Project will be completed in July 2025.
  1. **New Builds:** The Capital Projects Team have integrated requirements within tender templates to ensure that service providers are aware of the Council’s carbon reduction and sustainability aims. Teams are enhancing their knowledge of sustainable building methods and how they can achieve excellence in sustainability over the coming years. We are working towards an aim that new Council-led developments meet the RIBA 2030 standards for sustainable construction as a minimum and take account of both operational and embodied carbon. The two projects currently under construction (The Hedges and King Offa projects) will not achieve the RIBA 2030 standards but incorporate a number of sustainable design features as detailed below. Projects at feasibility and concept design stage will consider the requirements and budget implications of RIBA 2030 and related enhancements to sustainable design.

*Completed* projects

**2021/22:**

* Warner House: Green roof to main apartment block and bin/cycle store.
* Hawksley Court (formerly Mereden Court): Solar PV to main apartment block.
* Holyrood Crescent: 2x new homes with ASHP and EV charging points.
* Cottonmill Cycle Centre (Marlborough Pavilion): ASHP, solar PV, green roof.
* Harpenden Leisure and Culture: Solar PV + 10xEV charging bays.

**2023:**

* Viking Close (formerly Noke Shot): All 10 new homes fitted with solar PV, ASHP and EV charging point. Additional trees planted on site.
* Jenny Lane (formerly Leyland Avenue): All homes fitted with solar PV and EV charging point. Additional trees were planted on site.
* Ridgeview: Development included solar PVs, ASHP and EV charging points.
* Jubilee Square (formerly CCOS South): Key design features include:
  + Reuse of a brownfield site.
  + High fabric performance specification (thermally efficient).
  + High efficiency building services plant.
  + Air source heat pumps (ASHP).
  + Natural ventilation wherever possible (purge ventilation in apartments).
  + Extensive provision of metering and controls.
  + Energy efficient lighting with intelligent controls.
  + 1,225 m2 of green roofs and 540 m2 of brown roofs
  + Green Wall.
  + Responsibly sourced materials to minimise embodied energy.
  + SuDs strategies: 1) Green and brown roofs (as noted in a bullet point above) to intercept and store rainwater attenuating flows and improve water quality.

2) Attenuation tanks (total volume 155m³) installed below the lower ground floor slab to store and attenuate the water flow going into the main sewer system.

* + 25 EV charging points - 25% car charging.

Under construction:

* The Hedges – All units (6x houses and 6x flats) will have ASHP and EV charging points. Solar PV will be provided to the houses and flats (due to complete Spring 2025).
* King Offa – This 14x unit development includes ASHP and EV charging point infrastructure. The scheme will be delivered using off-site timber frame manufacture for all units (due to complete Summer 2025).

Planned:

* Abbots Avenue West garages – New homes will aim to achieve EPC A and include sustainable design features such as ASHP, solar PV, increased insulation. (subject to planning)
* Drakes Drive and Frobisher Rd garages – New homes to include ASHP, solar PV, building fabric enhancements and EV charging points (subject to planning and to be reviewed in Spring 2025 to whether RIBA 2030 standard can be met)

* 1. For new Social Housing schemes, home user guides and improved contractor handover information will be provided to ensure residents can effectively manage heating, cooling, and ventilation systems.
  2. **Energy Management:** In 2023 and 2024, work has been undertaken to audit our energy supplies, record meter readings, and consolidate them under a central parent contract for each utility where appropriate. This has given the Council better oversight of its supplies, a stronger purchasing position, and more favourable standing charges. It has also helped to save the Council in excess of £200,000. All commercial sites have been added to parent contracts through Crown Commercial Services and either sit with EDF (Electricity), Total Gas (Gas) and Business Stream (Water). The team have also been reviewing alternatives to Sigma (energy management software) to assess most appropriate alternatives in managing the Council's energy. The Housing Department continue to identify sites that are not on the main contract and a process for managing utility billing in a more robust manner within the HRA portfolio. A team restructure is being explored to ensure that energy bills and supplies are more effectively managed across the Council.
  3. **Corporate Solar Panels:** The District Office’s solar panels reduce emissions by around 60 tCO2e each year and save the Council around £1,600 per annum in electricity bills (the initial cost of investments has already been recouped). 193 new solar panels are currently being installed to Harpenden Swimming Pool roof. Westminster Lodge Leisure centre solar panels are currently on hold due to issues with roof. The Net Zero Hub have offered to provide desktop surveys of our buildings for solar PV and we are currently selecting properties that could be viable. Roof works are being undertaken on Verulamium Museum which will allow the installation of solar PV at a later date if funding can be sourced.
  4. **St Albans Solar Together** was launched across Herts to enable local householders and businesses to have solar panels installed at a discounted rate as result of bulk purchasing. 432 Solar PV, 386 batteries and 19 EV chargers were installed to local homes as part of the Solar Together 2022 and 2023, bulk buying solar panel scheme. Across the County, Solar Together Hertfordshire 2022 and 2023 have delivered 1,685 installations, made up of 16,636 panels, resulting in 6.2 MW capacity, and over £18 million in private resident investment in renewables. We have now announced the launch of [Solar Together 2025.](https://solartogether.co.uk/st-albans/home) iChoosr are trailing a bulk purchase ASHP programme which, if successful could be something offered in Hertfordshire in future. Statistics show there are now 2,918 solar panels and 5 wind turbines in the District[[1]](#footnote-2).
  5. **Solar Panels in the Conservation Area:** In 2024 the Planning Team have been working with Resident Associations to develop solar PV guidance to facilitate the inclusion of solar PV within the conservation areas while minimising impacts on character and appearance. Most applications will still be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but the main message of the consultation is to support and encourage anyone keen to install Solar PV. The guidance is available [here](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/solar-panel-guidance) and is also on the button menu for Planning and Building Control/Conservation and the Historic Environment.
  6. **Large Scale Renewables:** Local Plan Draft policies include the possibility for large-scale energy generation at East Hemel Central Broad Location.
  7. **St Albans Home Energy Advice Service,** provided byNational Energy Foundations (NEF) Better Homes Better Health service, is available to all households to support them to reduce energy use at home and access any funds which may be available. NEF have access to a network of installers to deliver Energy Company Obligation funds where applicable. SADC have funded the provision of advice to able-to-pay homes in the District since they are normally excluded from receiving free advice. In 2024, 134 residents have sought advice from the service.
  8. **Grants and Funding for Energy Efficiency:** NEF have delivered free Home Energy Retrofit Option plans under the Superhomes Herts & Beds (LEAD) project, to 45 local households We are consortium members for the Home Upgrade Grant 2 (HUG2) schemefor off-gas grid private properties. This was promoted to over 1000 households not connected to the gas grid. It is now closed to new applications. This was a largely unsuccessful scheme due to the lack of homes meeting the criteria for being not connected to the gas grid, under the income threshold and in a cold home. In January 2025 we submitted an Expression of Interest to submit an application for the three years of Warm Homes: Local Grant funding.Work is underway to explore the procurement requirements and delivery options for a potential scheme.
  9. **Hemel Garden Communities:** Joint work with partners including Dacorum Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council, the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (now Hertfordshire Futures) and the Crown Estate is ongoing to take forward for the potential 11,000 homes and 10,000 jobs envisioned here, subject to the Local Plan process. This involves the creation of compact and walkable neighbourhoods, improved infrastructure for sustainable and active travel, Country parks and biodiversity enhancement and delivery of most of the Hertfordshire Enviro-Tech Enterprise Zone.

**Theme: Transport and Air Quality**

* 1. **Fleet Replacement:** New Waste & Recycling vehicles have been purchased. These are mainly diesel as alternative fuelled vehicles, and required infrastructure, were beyond the Council's available budget. The new diesel vehicles are the most efficient available keeping emissions as low as possible being Euro 6 or above. We are exploring the possibility of introducing an overall Council policy to restrict the purchase of any fossil fuel vehicles in future.
  2. **Electric Pool Car Club:** There were some problems with the charging software that meant that for some of 2024 only one vehicle was available. Despite this, between Feb-Dec 2024 the cars have travelled 11,347 miles. Various promotions were undertaken in July via St Albans Greener Together to promote the car club.
  3. **EV Charging:** Over the last 3 years we have installed 17 electric vehicle charging pointsin our leisure centres and car parks, providing 34 spaces for EV’s to be charged. The projects have been supported by funding obtained from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles, the Council has gone through 2 successful rounds of funding applications. These chargers have provided charge for the equivalent of over 550,000 miles and in total saved 110 Tonnes of CO2 that would otherwise have been emitted by a modern diesel car. An investigation is underway to determine the costs and benefits of transferring the 5 existing on-street chargers from HCC’s ownership, over to the Council.
  4. **Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund (LEVI)**: HCC is due to receive £6.7m for the roll-out of public charging infrastructure across the county. SADC has completed the initial site identification and are currently reviewing the Terms of Reference and Procurement Process.
  5. **Business Travel:** The newSADC Green Travel Policy is due to be implemented in April 2025 to improve sustainable travel infrastructure and incentives for Council staff. We will consider the launch of a salary sacrifice scheme for electric vehicles if Finance consider the financial arrangements to be sufficiently robust to reduce any risk to the Council. New cycle storage will be installed for staff soon. Councillors are encouraged to share lifts and use public transport where possible, in line with the Constitution's Member's Allowances Scheme.
  6. **Cycling infrastructure**: HCC has provided 4 cycle maintenance stands which we have installed across the district. We are also planning to run some ‘Dr Bike’ sessions to educate local residents and schools on how to properly maintain their bikes as well as utilise the maintenance posts.
  7. **St Albans Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan:** has been adopted by SADC and HCC. HCC as the Highways Authority, leads on individual schemes and SADC plays a role in co-ordinating delivery and the collective approach through Transport Impact Assessments.
  8. **Sustainable Travel:** The Council is an active partner and supports both Community Rail Partnerships, and also attends high level Thameslink Govia meetings at least once per year. We attend the Public Transport Unit meetings at County Council focusing on public transport improvements and in December 2024 we attended the Intalink Enhanced Bus Partnership Annual Conference. There is currently no resource in the Council to directly manage a Bus Users Forum. The Council is not a transport authority so this would site outside our area of responsibility. The Net Zero Grant provided via St Albans Greener Together, has awarded funding to support cycle proficiency and access to bikes, in 2 schools. It has provided funding to enable London Colney Parish Council to purchase a Cargo Bike for its own operations and for hire in the community.
  9. **Taxi Policies:** An update to the Taxi Policy was approved in 2024 which set high emissions standards for licenced taxis.
  10. **District air quality** monitoring results demonstrate sustained improvements at two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) and DEFRA has approved the revocation of their AQMA status. Our new Air Quality Management Plan (AQAP) has been produced and we are currently assessing the feedback and producing a final AQAP which will be circulated in early 2025. We also supported HCCs air quality monitoring and engagement campaign including real time monitoring, air purification systems to schools and Clean Air Day and Night Campaigns to raise awareness of the impact of engine idling and wood burning on health.

**Theme: Nature and Biodiversity**

* 1. **Rewilding our Buildings:** All new development projects are assessed for appropriate incorporation of rewilding and biodiversity enhancements during feasibility/pre-planning stage of development. The Abbots Avenue West (HRA) project was assessed for rewilding and enhanced biodiversity in Autumn 2024. The design achieves good ecology and biodiversity improvements, including bird nesting (e.g. review with Herts Swift Group) but was not deemed appropriate for rewilding, due to the relatively limited space for communal soft landscaping. The Drakes Drive/Frobisher Rd garages (HRA) project will be assessed in Spring 2025.
  2. **Trees and Hedgerows:** The New Tree Strategy has been approved and implementation is underway. The following

2023/24.

* 300+ standard trees planted on SADC and HCC land within the District.
* 1,500 young trees planted in February across two green spaces sites in St Albans and Harpenden. The trees are being supplied free of charge by Carbon Footprint.

2024/25

* 11,000 trees were given to residents in the tree giveaway.
* 110 standard trees planted to replace felled trees (90 were funded through the Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LAFT).
* 2,055 whips planted in hedgerows.
* 560m of hedgerow planted across the 7 sites, and volunteers are provisionally booked to carry out the planting over 6 or 7 sessions in Dec/Jan as required.
  1. **Encouraging Volunteering:** We have been working with local community groups to encourage volunteering. Over the last year, Countryside Management Service (CMS) mid-week practical conservation volunteer teams have been working across several sites in the District. CMS volunteers provided 1,377hrs of work. The Friends Groups in the District provided 1,496 hours of work.
  2. **Biodiversity:** HMWT have successfully introduced water vole to the River Ver. Water vole activity has been seen Verulamium Park and Sopwell Nunnery Green Space
  3. **Meadow Enhancement:** Officers continue to identify areas of meadow enhancement, tree planting and hedgerow planting. 50,000 sqm of additional meadow has been created in the last 2 years. Annual seeding of flower beds are now planted with perennial seed mix to reduce need for replanting each year and excess watering. Officers continually identify locations to reduce mowing areas especially on Highway land. The old Abbey View Golf Course has been mapped and several areas for habitat creation have been identified. Officers continually identify locations to reduce mowing, areas especially on Highway land, plant trees and hedgerows. Countryside Management Service (CMS) volunteers are visiting areas that were planted in the last couple of years for aftercare.
  4. **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (**[**LNRS**](https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/partnerships/herts-nature-recovery-partnership/hertfordshire-nature-recovery-partnership.aspx)**):** Hosted St Albans and Dacorum Public and Stakeholder Engagement Session in St Peters Church (July/Sept 2024) which was well attended. A Priority Species Longlist has been created (~1000 species) which has been reviewed by County Recorders. GIS teams have started mapping sites of biodiversity importance. Key SADC Officers and Councillors attended an LNRS consultation workshop led by HCC in January 2025 to help shape the strategy.
  5. **River Ver Project** improvements are underway with the Environment Agency as follows and the below works should be completed by the spring 2025. The work is being funded by £250,000 the Council has obtained from the Government’s UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), £300,000 from the EA and £250,000 from Affinity Water.
* Reaches 1,2,3 - tree-work on both riverbanks stretching from St Michaels Street to the Cottonmill allotments. This work will reduce shading which is currently preventing much natural light reaching the river to the detriment of the general environment.
* Reach 2 and 3 - EA to undertake wetland restoration work by restoring he meadow adjacent to Westminster Lodge, to its original state and undertaking in-channel works. The wetlands will improve the park’s biodiversity by providing a habitat for a wide range of wildlife, such as wading birds, and different plant species. It will also connect with the river on this part of the flood plain, preventing stagnant pools of flood water from building up as can happen at present.
* Reach 3 – improving footpath between Holywell Hill to Cottonmill Lane and replacing footbridge.
  1. We are working with independent consultants to complete a full review and design for Reach 1 including Bell Meadow, to determine the best use of the Council's limited budget. This element of the project will take 2-3 years to complete.
  2. **Alternative Verge Management** sites agreed by SADC/HCC with reduced mowing across (around 30 streets). HCC are taking ownership of the process of identifying suitable verges. Hertfordshire Butterfly Conservation Trust are monitoring/ surveying low mow areas.
  3. **Community Right to Grow (Pilot) scheme:** is due to be launched in early Feb 2025. We currently have a number of community growing plots in the District. Incredible Edibles maintain the plots behind Russel Avenue Car Park and Civic Square

Francis Avenue Open Space is being managed by a local community group. Volunteers are working with JOC on Municipal Gardens in Charter Close. Section 106 funded tree and path works. working with Grow Sopwell and Sopwell Allotment Inclusive Garden project.

* 1. **Allotments:** We work with the Joint Allotment Management Group to educate allotment holders to reduce use of pesticides. Community pay back team have been to Sandridge road and Folly Lane Allotment sites to help with clearing rubbish off vacant plots as well as carrying out vegetation management. Community payback team have visited Camp and Cottonmill Allotments to help bring plots up to a manageable and lettable state.
  2. **Biodiversity Net Gain:** Notice has been placed on our website that we will begin work on our plan in 2025.

**Theme: Circular Economy, Waste and Food**

* 1. **Markets and Events Waste:** Trials utilising staff to direct visitors to use the correct bins at festivals, were successful in maximising recycling and composting. However the level of staff resource required makes it impractical to offer at each set of bins, at every event. At the regular markets, the risk of contamination is deemed to be too high to make food waste composting practicable. We have identified a contractor who can take pallets, but not a location where pallets can be stored for periodic bulk collections.
  2. **Plastic Free Action Plan:** has been updated in 2024 with new actions to address things like cable ties used in Council operations, and plastic flowers at new areas in the cemeteries, and prohibit the use of balloons at Council events.
  3. **Office Waste:** The cleaning contract is currently being retendered and will include performance indicators relating to the proper movement of recyclables to ensure they are not contaminated with other waste.
  4. **Construction Waste:** During thedesign stage, we review any potential to retain or repurpose existing buildings in the new development. Waste Management Plans are required from contractors on all new-build projects to assess existing or proposed incorporation of 'circular economy' principles. Any new schemes in development will be assessed for whole life cycle/impact, for example, the Abbots Avenue West and Drakes Drive/Frobisher Rd HRA schemes.
  5. **Recycling Awareness:** The Recycling Guide is included to all new Council Tax accounts so all residents receive the guide at least once. All collection vehicles have food waste recycling promotions on the side of them increasing promotion. Information was presented at the Sustainable Schools Network meeting to remind schools of the facilities available to them.
  6. **Flats Recycling:** We are working with WasteAware Herts to improve flats recycling**.** Waste in bin storesis no longercollected if it is not correctly placed in bins which is helping motivate managing agents to address issues. We are working to encourage managing agents to engage with their residents to promote recycling. We have also been working closely with Housing and some Housing Associations.
  7. **Litter:** We continue to promote and assist with community litter picks. Veolia have directly supported 8 in 2024. We also provide equipment to groups who regularly conduct litter picks, sometimes twice per week. Our Litter Strategy can be found on the [website](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/street-cleaning) along with the litter bins strategy. We have also added information to support local litter picking groups. The leaf clearing programme is nearly completed and has been one of our best years. Going forward we will collect data on quantity of waste collected and number of people litter picking so that we can report progress annually. We are undertaking a litter bin rationalisation exercise across the district and investigating the use of solar compaction litter bins to save resource for emptying bins. The introduction of Simpler Recycling will see other materials being introduced to the kerbside mix.
  8. **Sustainable Food:** The Leisure Management and Catering contracts work on providing sustainable menus within their cafes. We encourage event and market vendors to detail their sustainable food options and look favourably on sustainable food options. Applications from locally based and from sustainable traders are prioritised. In the event guidance we encourage each vendor to provide one complete vegan meal where possible.

**Theme: Water Resources and Flooding**

* 1. **Corporate Water Supply:** The Crown Commercial Services Framework Contract e-auction competition for a water supply contract is now complete and all corporate water supplies have been added to the contract. Further work will be required to determine whether any Housing assets could migrate across to this contract over time.
  2. **Water Efficiency:** Housing and the Buildings Teams fit low-flow showers and dual flush toilet cisterns as standard. Water harvesting is being considered in future phases of Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) related works on flats but is difficult and expensive to install retrospectively. Consideration is also being given to a rainwater harvesting project for the Civic Offices.
  3. **Flooding:** The River Ver Projecthas highlighted areas susceptible to flooding events. These will be reconnected and formulised within our parks. We promoted HCCs invitation for expressions of interest in a Property Flood Resilience Scheme which could see eligible properties receive a grant of up to £6000 for flood resilience measures. Work was underway for Flood Prevention Community Engagement work in London Colney in conjunction with the Environment Agency but as off Jan 2025 there has been no further activity. If there is a flooding incident that requires the Emergency Planning to be activated, advice and assistance will be provided in accordance with Emergency Planning and Statutory duties.
  4. **Climate Adaptation:** The Council has developed a new Emergency Plan which was agreed by the Senior Leadership Team in 2024. This equips the Council to deal with emergency incidents (as defined under the Civil Contingencies Act) and to call upon help as required through the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum. The Winter Operations Plan is reviewed, and agreed, annually by Officer's and Partners to ensure it is Fit for Purpose. The implementation costs are covered in existing Council Contracts.

1. **Conclusion**
   1. Despite the budget challenges affecting every Council, we continue to deliver on the commitments outlined within the SCCS though this is yet to generate the level of emissions reductions we were intending to see.
   2. Whilst every action is important in the decarbonisation process, the following actions will have the most direct impact on corporate emissions and should be prioritised over the coming year:

* Heat Decarbonisation Plans obtained for all appropriate operational buildings and a schedule of works developed for viable improvements.
* Delivery of energy improvements to Council-owned flats and blocks on the corporate energy contract.
* Installation of AMR meters at all sites to allow accurate monitoring of consumption.
* Streamlining the Council’s energy management process, including an appropriate level of staff resourcing, to ensure responsibilities are assigned and anomalies are addressed.
* Ensuring all energy bills are transferred to the central energy contract to allow effective monitoring.
* Continued application for Government decarbonisation funding, in collaboration with out Leisure contractor, whilst also exploring other potential funding routes such as private and community funding.
* Investing in renewable energy generation wherever possible.
* Securing an electricity contract that is backed by renewable energy at the earliest opportunity and enforcing similar requirement from its largest contractors.
* Ensuring Building Management Systems are regularly audited and that staff are trained to adjust things like boiler temperature settings.
* Exploring options for low emissions fuel in diesel fleet vehicles, especially those associated with large contracts.
  1. As a District Council we are limited in our powers to affect local transport or the way residents use energy to power their homes. To be successful in our net zero 2030 aim or aligning to the Paris agreement targets, we need the backing of ambitious national policy frameworks.
  2. In recognition of the urgency necessary, the Government is establishing a new target to achieve 81% net zero by 2035 which will be supported with a range of policy to improve public transport, increase green skills, create clean energy and improve home energy efficiency.
  3. To achieve our aims of net zero 2030 across the community we need to mobilise resources and expertise, to lead and promote the transition away from fossil fuels across all areas of influence with a particular focus on what we *can* control:
* Continuing to decarbonise the Council housing stock utilising national funding.
* Continuing to ensure the high standards of energy and water efficiency, and climate resilience, of new builds.
* Maximising the availability and promotion of home retrofit funding to local residents through the provision of schemes utilising national funding.
* Engaging and educating the public to increase knowledge levels.
* Working with local providers to ensure sufficient capacity and skills development for decarbonisation (e.g. tradespersons and households).
* Improving access to and availability of sustainable travel infrastructure (e.g. Car Club, EV charging network).
* Removing barriers to positive action for example through accessibility of charging points or cycle parking.
* Ensuring all Council policy supports sustainable development and decarbonisation including and especially via Planning Policy.
* Work with other regional bodies to pool resources and capacity to maximise project delivery at scale.
  1. Whilst these actions may require additional investment, they bring cost savings and greater resilience in the longer term. Research shows that for every $1 invested in climate action could have a $2-10 return in economic benefits. The cost of delayed action is predicted to be higher due to things like increasing energy costs, repairs following severe weather events, increased funding to deal with negative human health impacts and increasing insurance costs.
  2. Average global warming has now surpassed the 1.5C threshold for the first time in 2024. In the same year we have witnessed a wave of the most devastating floods, storms, fires and droughts across the world. It is imperative that action to reduce emissions and increase the energy and climate resilience of the community is sincerely prioritised at all levels of the Council to ensure we are meeting our commitment to doing all it can to address the climate emergency.
  3. As a District we are not immune to these impacts and at the current rate of warming can expect to experience more frequent and heavy rainfall and storm events leading to increased surface water flooding as well as less water availability in summer.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/regional-renewable-statistics#full-publication-update-history> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)