



Buckinghamshire Council Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy 2023/24 Progress Report Summary

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Introduction

This report provides a high-level summary of progress made against the aims and objectives of the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy in the reporting period from October 2023 to September 2024. Full details can be found in the progress report.

Progress against targets

Progress against Aim 1: Work alongside national Government with the objective to achieve net zero carbon emissions for Buckinghamshire as a whole by 2050.

Buckinghamshire carbon emissions continue to reduce, with a **37.6% reduction** from 2005 to 2022 (2.63% per annum). Emissions in 2022 (the most recent data available) were higher than 2021, impacted by the COVID pandemic and recovery, but lower than 2019. **Transport** is the **largest source** of greenhouse gas emissions, followed by **domestic sources**.

The council's **gross emissions** for the reporting period were **7,965 tCO_{2e}**. **Net emissions**, which include reductions from electricity backed by Renewable Electricity Guarantees of Origin (REGO), were **4,476 tCO_{2e}**. **Building gas consumption** represents over **50%** of the council's net emissions, followed by **non-electrified fleet**, at over **25%**. Emissions have **reduced by 78.2%** compared to our 1990 emissions, in line with our target of a 75% reduction by 2030. We remained within our indicative annual allocations for our Carbon Budget, largely achieved through the purchase of 100% renewable electricity.

Progress against Aim 2: Improve air quality across Buckinghamshire pursuant to achieving national air quality objectives

Most of Buckinghamshire already meets the Air Quality Objectives for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) with a consistent **reduction** in recorded levels of **NO₂** at most monitoring locations for the **last five years** (2019 -2023). Monitoring data in **four of the nine** Air Quality Management Areas has been **below the annual mean objective** for NO₂ for five years or more. In 2023, there was a general decrease in concentrations recorded at most monitoring locations. Air quality monitoring undertaken in 2023 showed that there were **no exceedances** of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective of 40 µg/m³.

Activity against actions

Eight interdepartmental working groups have been created or identified as working toward the implementation of the Climate Change & Air Quality Strategy. (Action 3)

Scope 3 emissions for the **supply and treatment of water** used in council buildings have been reported for the first time. (Action 5)

Two updates of the **action tracker** have been published along with a **quarterly newsletter** containing updates on actions to minimise council emissions. (Action 6)

80% of non-half hour **electricity meters** and **68%** of **gas meters** compatible with automatic meter reading, have been **upgraded** in our Automatic Meter Reading rollout to provide better data for energy saving projects and reduce staff time for manual readings. (Action 7)

The Environmental Protection Team, with Spelthorne Borough Council and Ricardo, was awarded a grant of £91,273 from Defra's Air Quality Grant in 2021/22 to create **air quality toolkits** which were offered to each community board area. On Clean Air Day (15th June 2023), Buckinghamshire launched the new '**Clean Up Our Air**' initiative. (Actions 8, 16, 59)

The **NO₂ diffusion tube monitoring** locations present throughout the county underwent their **annual review** in December 2023. The 2023 review resulted in **8 sites** being **added** to the monitoring network and **4 sites** being **removed**. (Action 8)

The latest **Annual Status Report on local air quality management** for Buckinghamshire was submitted to Defra for appraisal in June 2024. In the appraisal report Defra stated it supports the **revocation** of **four Air Quality Management Areas**. (Action 9)

The **2023/24 Annual Progress Report** will be the **third progress report** published since adoption of the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy. (Action 9)

Over the first three years of the **Bucks Tree Mission** to plant 543,000 trees within a decade **192,994** have been planted, **meeting** our **annual** and **cumulative tree planting targets** for the first three planting seasons. In the last 12 months, **23,000 trees** were planted in Wing Wood, including over **600** planted by **volunteers** from the local community. (Action 13)

Over **£264k** of funding was secured from the Forestry Commission's **Local Authority Treescapes Fund** for **five "Tiny Forests"** planted on council owned land (3,000 trees). These were planted at Hamilton Academy, Wycombe; Booker Park Rec. Ground, Wycombe; Totteridge Park, Wycombe; Cannock Rd., Aylesbury; and, Walton Ct., Aylesbury. The bid included **partners** from across Buckinghamshire. (Action 13 and 27)

The **Woodland Creation Design Plan** for **Grange Farm** includes work to **restore a pond** on site. In June 2024, a site visit was carried out with our woodland maintenance contractors to assess what would be required for restoration and agree a programme of works. (Action 14)

In February 2024 we ran our first in-house **Carbon Literacy Training** for 16 officers. Two external training sessions were run in November 2023 to 18 officers. **59 officers** are now **certified** as **Carbon Literate**, alongside several Members trained in 2022. Buckinghamshire Council has been a **Bronze tier Carbon Literate Organisation** since June 2023. (Action 16)

The council has **encouraged staff** to adopt more **sustainable behaviours** through a range of **internal communications** including BucksNet articles, stands, staff blogs, newsletters and a re-usable cup competition. (Action 16)

BetterPoints Bucks, an app and online behaviour change programme, enables Local Authorities to incentivise, track, reward, and measure sustainable and active transport via direct engagement with residents. **3,066 users** had registered by the end of 2023, with over 159,000 car journeys replaced by sustainable transport and 35t of CO₂ and ~300kg of NO₂ mitigated. (Actions 16, 59, and 60)

Solar PV and **battery storage systems** were installed at **four council-owned sites**: Aylesbury Family Time Centre, Castlefield Family Time Centre, Chesham Library, and Hazlemere Library. The 80kWp of solar PV and 89kWh of battery storage capacity are estimated to **reduce** the council's **annual electricity consumption, costs** and **carbon emissions** by 41MWh, £18k, and 9tCO_{2e}, respectively. Chesham Library also underwent installation of an air source heat pump, LED lighting, solar film, and additional loft insulation during its renovation. (Action 17)

Two new schools are currently in the **feasibility stage**: a second primary school for Kingsbrook and a new Primary School for the Hampden Fields development in Aylesbury. The **objective** for both schools is to be **net zero in operation**. (Action 18)

Between October 2023 and September 2024, a further **2,750 streetlights** have been **retrofitted with LEDs**. (Action 19)

The **Cycle to Work Scheme** continues to be promoted, with a competition run in November 2024. The **Tusker salary sacrifice car leasing** scheme continues to offer low emissions vehicles, with over 70% of live/on order contracts for an EV or ULEV. Tusker **offset** all **tailpipe emissions** and any from **EV charging**. Since the scheme launched, **735 tonnes of CO₂** have been **offset**. (Action 22)

The **Country Parks Team** received a new **electric van** in January 2024. There are **8 electric vehicle charge points** installed across the council estate for use by fleet vehicles. (Action 24)

"Work Smart" practices continue to enable home working, where feasible. (Actions 26, 46)

The council have continued to work with **Buckinghamshire Community Energy** to produce a set of template documents to progress the **Wharf Road decarbonisation project** and to make available to other community energy groups in the future. (Action 27)

There are now **72** accredited **School Travel Plans** across Buckinghamshire, with the Travel to School team also delivering initiatives such as the Footsteps training scheme, bikeability and balanceability training, and Walk Once a Week (WOW) incentive scheme. (Action 28)

In December 2023, the leisure centre management contract at five sites included commitment for centre-specific **environmental plans; energy champions; supporting cycle to work schemes** for staff; **reducing single use plastics**; and **supporting the council** with Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme/Salix funded **proposals/implementation**. (Action 32)

Procuring **100% renewable “REGO backed” electricity** for the reporting period, has **saved 3,489 tCO_{2e}**. The new three-year electricity contract from October 2024 will have a **minimum 25%** renewable energy content. (Action 33)

Work on the **fifth Local Transport Plan** and **Buckinghamshire Local Plan** is underway. **Commitments to climate change and sustainability** are referenced in the objectives. The new **Buckinghamshire Housing Strategy** adopted in April 2024 includes commitment to support the Buckinghamshire Council Energy Doctor Scheme, and schemes such as Sustainable Warmth and Solar Together. (Actions 38, 42)

Over **£70,000** of funding was received from the Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles as match funding for the **Wendover EV pilot scheme**, which will include the installation of **10 on-street lamppost charging points** and **in-pavement cable channels**. (Action 42)

The council is **identifying sites** that might be suitable locations for **EV hubs**. High Wycombe’s **Handy Cross park and ride** is a ‘pilot site’ for developing the council’s approach to the delivery of Ultra Rapid charging hubs. (Action 42)

Transport Strategy have developed and consulted on a council-wide **Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan** that will outline a high-level walking, cycling and wheeling network across Buckinghamshire. (Action 42)

The **South East Aylesbury Link Road carbon management plan** estimates that over 109ktCO_{2e} will be saved over 60-years through the delivery of this infrastructure, compared to a “do minimum” scenario. (Action 43)

Buckinghamshire Council are participating in the **extended electric scooter rental trial** with the Department for Transport. In 2023, more than **100,000 rides** covering approximately **107,000 miles** were made on the trial e-scooters. (Action 44)

A **Demand Responsive Transport** service around High Wycombe has been extended to include Flackwell Heath. It now provides over **1,500 rides per week** to residents living in parts of the town not serviced by regular bus routes. (Action 44)

The **Sustainable Drainage team**, as the Lead Local Flood Authority provides **ongoing advice** to the Local Planning Authority on whether **surface water drainage schemes** are fit for purpose. (Action 50)

The **Climate Response Team** provided guidance to the Heritage & Archaeology Team on considerations of **embodied carbon** within buildings and how this might impact decisions on renovation or demolition and new build. (Action 51)

Buckinghamshire Council secured **£540k** through the Government funded **Home Upgrade Grant 2**. The scheme supports **energy performance improvements** in off-gas grid homes up until March 2025 to reduce carbon emissions and lower household bills. (Action 53)

Just under **£2m** has been allocated to support the **Energy Doctor** scheme from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Energy Doctors have been visiting eligible homes since April 2023 to provide advice and implement low-cost easy retrofit resource efficiency measures. The scheme aims to visit **1,200 homes** by March 2025, with residents estimated to save over **£120** on their energy bills per year on average. (Action 53)

The **Domestic Building Envelope Energy Efficiency grant scheme** was launched in May 2024, enabling eligible owner occupiers to fund the installation of energy efficiency measures, such as insulation and window and door replacement. Over **55** applications have been returned as of August 2024. (Action 53)

A second round of the **Buckinghamshire Solar Together** scheme launched in Spring 2024. **623** residents accepted their quotes for solar PV, with **598** including battery storage. **43** accepted an offer for installation of battery storage to an existing solar PV array. (Action 53)

Promotion of the **travel planning support** for **local businesses** has continued. A travel plan consultant has been appointed and Buckinghamshire Business First has started recruiting businesses. (Action 56)

Several **flood risk management projects** are ongoing, with Environment Agency support, including Natural Flood Management Projects, feasibility studies and Property Flood Resilience packages. (Action 57)

Social media campaigns took place for **Clean Air Night** (24th January 2024) and **Net Zero Week** (July 2024). Quarterly climate change **newsletters** have also been circulated (Actions 59, 60)