

The following is from a draft chapter for the new (2019) edition of Zero Carbon Britain. We welcome any feedback....

4.5 Developing a climate emergency action plan for your area

A great many people and organisations across the UK are calling for climate emergency action plans for their local areas. They are working with Local Governments to explore net-zero transformations in transport, energy, housing, food, waste, and buildings and land-use. Many Local Governments, often in the front line of dealing with climate impacts such as flooding, fires, storm damage, have now made climate emergency declarations – and are working on climate emergency action plans. This process is happening on many different scales - for urban cities such as Edinburgh or Bristol, for large devolved areas such as Manchester or London Metro Regions, for rural market towns such as Machynlleth or for villages like Wedmore.

But how on earth do local groups and councils start such projects?

Developing your Action Plan

Exploring a climate emergency action plan to reach zero carbon can help inform new development pathways, offering economically viable and resilient futures for your area. Key elements of the process include:

1. **Declare an emergency:** Work with a wide range of independent local groups, backed by a citizen's petition calling on your council to make a climate emergency declaration, backed by a commitment to planning and delivering the necessary actions, with a clear timeline to a net-zero end point. Some communities have also called for a combined climate and biodiversity declaration. Once successful, this offers civic ownership of the climate emergency planning process, so widening its engagement, resources and influence.
2. **Make it public:** Make a clear civic announcement of the climate emergency declaration and launch the action planning process, calling for input from citizens, funders, experts and other key players. By using local and social media and through presentations to universities, community groups, campaigners and policymakers, it is possible to create a significant level of public engagement in building the plan.
3. **Make it open:** The process by which the plan is then developed should be as inclusive as possible, as local citizens, businesses, and community groups will better engage if their voices have fully been heard from the outset.
4. **Connect local:** The framing of any process should reflect and respect the needs, traditions and culture of the area, thereby linking to important local opportunities such as agriculture or industry. This helps by embedding any research work around the key issues and language which are relevant to your locality.
5. **Boundaries:** Be clear on what areas your action plan has responsibility for, working out who has control of what, at which level. Making effective action plans means being clear on what the village or town council, local government you are making the action plan for has exclusive control over (as opposed to national and regional authorities): and where the complex and diffuse boundaries of responsibility lie.

6. **Cross-fertilise:** Identify and build links with relevant research already underway. Are other similar towns or villages further ahead with their action planning process? Are there already plans from councils above or below your level?
7. **Clear Process:** Reach consensus on the development process; such as the roles for steering groups and working groups, how membership of these groups is defined and how minutes can be shared, including to those who don't go on-line, for example copies in the library.
8. **Mapping:** Identify and engage relevant collaborators – e.g. local universities, industry, experts, non-governmental organisations, funders, young farmers, think-tanks and of course citizen expertise. You can also map out processes such as transport or food waste.
9. **Multi-solve:** Think across disciplines - the changes needed to reduce emissions can also increase resilience, create jobs, offer health benefits, reduce council expenditure, improve wellbeing etc.
10. **Tools:** Explore energy modelling support tools (e.g. Open Source Energy Monitor)
11. **Resources:** It is good to recognise that planning and delivery of the necessary actions must be publically reflected in the annual council budget. It will involve a great deal of detailed work, so it may be worth seeking initial kick-start funding for your 'project team' from key funding organisations, individuals and agencies. But even if there is little initial funding, the current wave of citizen commitment can un-leach a great deal of expert volunteer time.
12. **Zero Carbon 'expert seminars':** Expert seminars can bring together a selection of leaders relevant to a working group. It is useful to have a high-profile partner organisation to make the invitations, plus an independent facilitator.
13. **Keep up the momentum:** Agree a timeline, including consultations and make key milestones public so everyone knows what's happening.
14. **Celebrate:** come together as a community to recognise key milestones and celebrate the achievement!

Potential multi-solving benefits of a climate emergency action plan:

- **Co-benefits** - Councils can create healthier, more resilient local communities powered by locally generated zero carbon energy, served by affordable public transport, cleaner air, more efficient and easy to heat housing stock, greater employment, stronger local supply chains, healthier food and land systems with more space for biodiversity.
- **Stronger local social cohesion** – At a time when society is divided on many key issues, involving citizens through a collaborative process to deliver an ambitious carbon reduction target and engaging with the difficult choices that implies can bring us together in common purpose across barriers and across generations.
- **Un-do business as usual** - We can replace austerity with a 'green new deal' approach, re-think corporate delivery contracts, reverse costly policies and investments in carbon-intensive infrastructures such as roads or airports and divest from fossil fuels.

How can plans deliver action?

Councils can simultaneously make change happen in several key ways.

- **Upward:** Once they have declared, local councils can collectively lobby district or county councils for actions beyond their own jurisdiction, and to make available the resources needed to enable actions in their areas. They can also advocate for action from National Government, including the funding and commitment needed to implement a UK climate emergency mobilisation plan.
- **Sideways:** Leading by example encourages others to act. Councils can share both their declaration, plan and actions achieved so far – openly communicating on what works, and what doesn't. This can include; councils near-by, or councils they work with, those they are twined with and via council networks e.g. Local Government Management Board.
- **Downward:** Councils can undertake policy and budgetary development to drive action within their own jurisdiction for example in the transport systems it runs, its food purchasing contracts for schools or hospitals, the land it controls, the education system it manages, its libraries arts and culture etc. To increase resilience, a Council can also make it clear when key subcontracting tenders are up for renewal and encourage bids from social enterprises and local supply chains, as Preston Council has done. For every aspect, from mass retrofit, to community renewables, to transforming transport - there are real life case-studies which show what can be achieved. Researching and sharing relevant case-studies can demonstrate locally that change is achievable, help scale-up plans, avoid mistakes and highlight the co-benefits such as jobs, cost savings, health benefits or community cohesion. It is worth considering quick wins – changes that are can be achieved rapidly and offer significant emissions reductions. Councils also need to support those they have responsibility over - for a district council, this could include development of 'climate emergency action packs' to support parish councils within its area.
- **Inwards:** Councils will need to educate their own staff about the climate emergency, its causes, the potential actions and the role it can play in driving a broader climate emergency response. This could include Carbon Literacy training within the council, developing a new approach to decision-making, from the CEO downward. The council can also take strong and immediate action on its own infrastructure including; energy it buys, the buildings it uses, the roof spaces potentials for PV etc.

Councils will not be able to reverse global warming by themselves, but working in these four directions can help deliver meaningful practical actions and put pressure on national government to act.

More information and resources can be found on the CAT website (www.cat.org.uk), including training courses, conferences, and our free information service. Please do get in touch if you have any questions and we'll do our best to help. Good luck!

Other useful links include:

<https://climateemergency.uk>

https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/0861_GP_ClimateEmergency_Report_Pages.pdf

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a8b2f10017db29af12740d5/t/5c5105ac4ae23755fa8e3739/1548813761390/Darebin_Climate_Emergency_Plan_lo-res_-_web-ready_June_1_2018.pdf

<https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/33-actions-local-authorities-can-take-climate-change>

<https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/policy-changes-needed-enable-local-authorities-england-deliver-climate-change>

<https://www.labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Bringing-Energy-Home-2019.pdf>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/31/labour-businesses-public-sector-contracts-climate-emergency>

<https://climateoutreach.org/resources/report-are-the-public-ready-for-net-zero/>

<https://www.local.gov.uk/councillor-workbook-acting-climate-change>

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/planning-for-climate-change>

https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/1986/5-year-plan-branded_3.pdf

<http://unlockingsustainablecities.org/A%20Civic%20Plan%20for%20a%20Climate%20Emergency.pdf>

http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/RSTI/Local=first-implementation_local-govt.pdf