



Progress Report on Local Climate Action in South East England

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I. Overview of Key Findings

1. Introduction

To meet the United Kingdom's international obligations in the Paris Agreement towards limiting global warming to 1.5 °C, we will need transformative climate action on all levels. Sub-national governmental authorities have been recognised as key to these efforts. In March 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the final instalment of its Sixth Assessment Report, the most comprehensive and robust analysis of climate science and impacts to date. The report stresses the fundamental importance of sub-national governmental action and its interaction with civil society and the private sector in enabling and accelerating shifts in sustainability and climate-resilient development.¹ The UK's sub-national government is organised into local councils, which we investigate in this report.

The 2019 Climate Emergency Declaration (CED)² triggered the adoption of similar CEDs at the sub-national level across the UK, though a few councils had already adopted CEDs ahead of the rest.³ Around 95% of the UK's population live under a local authority that has made a CED, although there are still outlying non-CED councils in the South East region.⁴ Studies have illustrated how the process of making a CED does have a positive, performative impact on committing to climate action and are valuable in changing social attitudes and perceptions of the climate emergency within the council structures and beyond.⁵ The Climate Change Act 2008 represents a commitment by the UK to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to below 1990 levels (NetZero) by 2050 in alignment with its international commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. This underlies the importance of transformative local governance in bringing about the drastic GHG reductions needed to meet the Paris targets. This is particularly true when considering that an equitable international distribution of the

¹IPCC AR6 report, C.1.2, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf>, p.24.

²House of Commons Debate, (1 May 2019) vol. 659, <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-05-01/debates/3C133E25-D670-4F2B-B245-33968D0228D2/EnvironmentAndClimateChange>>

³E.g., Bristol City Council & Brighton & Hove City Council were the first two authorities in the UK to declare climate emergencies, on 13 November 2018 and 13 December 2018 respectively, <www.bristolonecity.com/climate/>; <<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/climate-change>>.

⁴See Runnymede, Why the council has not declared a climate emergency (2020), <<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/council-policy/climate-statement>>.

⁵Ruiz-Campillo, X., Castán Broto, V. and Westman, L. (2021): Motivations and intended outcomes in local governments' declarations of climate emergency. *Politics and Governance*, 9 (2), p.25.

remaining global carbon budget would bring the deadline forward for the UK, as well as the environmental benefits of achieving RealZero rather than NetZero.⁶

In light of these motivations, aspirations, and the evident benefits of climate action for local council constituents, this report provides an overview of climate action in the South East of England following the widespread adoption of CEDs at the local government level since 2018. Our aim with this research is to support and contribute to the Environmental Law Foundation's policy campaign work in urging local authorities in the UK to act on their climate emergency declarations.

This report is divided into two parts: (I) a broad initial summary of our key findings, and (II) a more detailed analysis of the climate action undertaken by counties and their individual councils across South East England. For each county, we organised our findings on the following six axes: (1) ease of access to information on climate actions following CED adoption; (2) the depth and scope of CEDs and their associated monitoring and implementation processes and strategic documents; (3) adaptation measures envisaged by the councils; (4) biodiversity and natural carbon management and other carbon offsetting strategies; and (5) civil society and private sector engagement initiatives. We also highlight a few standout climate action initiatives for each county (6).

2. Methodology

Our methodology involved desk research and liaising with local authorities directly to gather up-to-date information on each council's actions following the adoption of their CED. We also engaged with local climate action groups in the region to better understand the reality on the ground. Our work charted climate action in the South East of England (see fig. 1. below – note that this report's remit excludes Greater London, Buckinghamshire, and Gravesham Borough Council).

⁶RealZero means producing zero carbon emissions, whereas NetZero means no more than GHG levels according to a fixed point in time (usually 1990). For an example, see the National Grid's approach, <www.nationalgrideso.com/future-energy/our-progress-towards-net-zero/net-zero-explained/what-net-zero-and-zero-carbon>.



Fig.1 Map of the South East Region of England, broken down into counties and major cities in each county. Image shared under a CC BY-SA 3.0 licence. Sourced from Wikimedia Commons.

If not otherwise indicated, the information in this report derives from councils’ strategy documents and published data or from our email communication with local authorities. We further recognise that this report is not a comprehensive reflection of every council’s effort but is instead a good faith effort to summarise and platform climate action efforts in South East England.

It is difficult to summarise these findings without considering the specific political and geographic local contexts. For example, the councils we surveyed operate on different scales, with different funding opportunities and local activities that may be beyond their control (for example, Crawley includes all of Gatwick Airport’s emissions; Dartford includes the increased traffic levels through the tunnel crossing). In addition, the internal politics and attitudes of elected and unelected council staff can have an impact on a council’s overall climate attitudes. Most importantly, some of the local climate action networks working alongside councils expressed frustration with the lack of national policy guidance and contributions.

3. Summary of Findings

a. Access to Information

In line with their commitments to CEDs and Net Zero pledges, many councils have made commitments to transparency and information accessibility. However, the implementation of these commitments varies among councils. For instance, councils like Windsor and Folkestone & Hythe consistently publish frequent updates on their climate emergency actions on their websites. Similarly, councils such as Lewes and Eastbourne promptly and thoroughly responded to our requests for updated information regarding their ongoing initiatives. Conversely, some councils, like Rother and Dartford, exhibited less consistency in providing accessible and publicly available updates on their climate action efforts. The type of information provided does suggest that councils would benefit from easier access to carbon footprint calculators or assistance.

b. Climate Emergency Declarations (CEDs)

The majority of councils we surveyed had adopted a CED between 2018 and 2023. Of those councils who did not adopt a CED, some have adopted other climate pledges as was the case in Ashford, Sevenoaks, Havant, Gosport Borough and Runnymede – see Chart 1 below. Bracknell only adopted their CED in January of 2023, after initially publishing a statement explaining that it was not in a position to facilitate an appropriate response for an emergency, unable to ‘drop everything to tackle climate change [in light of its] other legal duties and responsibilities’.⁷ However, the majority of councils have embraced the CED framing.

The councils broadly utilise the Carbon Trust’s taxonomy in reporting on their progress and carbon footprints, which separates emissions into scopes 1, 2 and 3. Scope 1 emissions refer to emission sources that are directly controlled or owned by the council, such as local busses. A scope 2 emission is an indirect emission that derives from purchasing and using energy through electricity, heating, and cooling. Scope 3 includes all other indirect emissions, like those of purchased goods or services.⁸

⁷Climate Change Strategy: Bracknell Forest Council 2020-2024 (2021), <<https://cape.mysociety.org/media/data/plans/bracknell-forest-council-e48430b.pdf>>, p.45.

⁸Carbon Trust, *Briefing: What are Scope 3 emissions?*, <www.carbontrust.com/our-work-and-impact/guides-reports-and-tools/briefing-what-are-scope-3-emissions>.

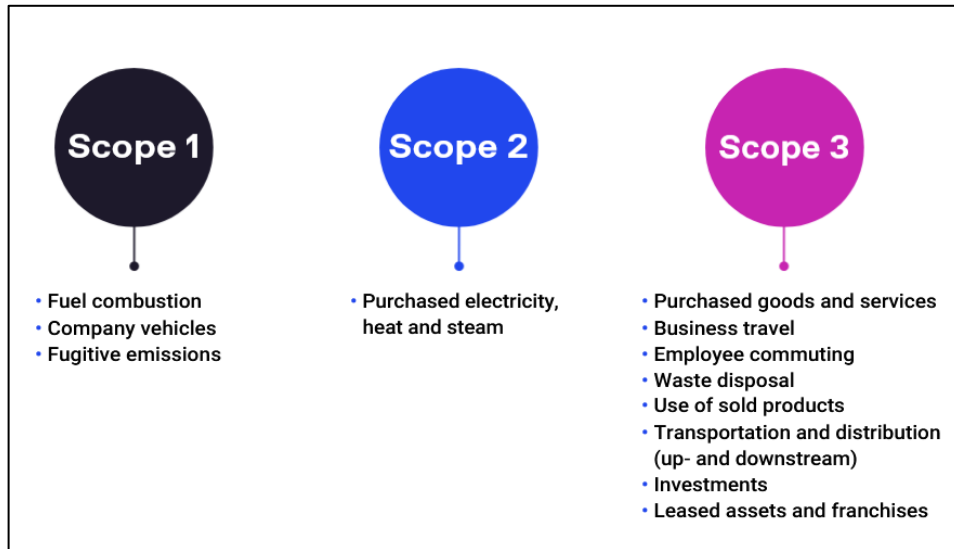


Fig 2. Image sourced from the Carbon Trust, *'Briefing: What are Scope 3 Emissions?'*

Councils frequently put more of their efforts into controlling Scope 1 and 2 emissions, with a smaller proportion of efforts going into accounting for Scope 3 emissions and little engagement in instigating social change on a broader scale. While many councils tracked their internal actions and piecemeal community engagement efforts, fewer were able to show that they had managed to orchestrate effective cross-departmental changes in behaviour.

Councils generally set their strategy timelines to 2030 or 2040 as goals for the scope 1 and 2 emissions of the council itself to achieve NetZero, with the spectre of whole council emissions pushed to the nationwide target of 2050. There are limited realistic plans for achieving this wider scaling down of emissions. During our outreach with climate action networks in the South East, it was raised that this may be connected to the frequently junior positioning of Sustainability Officers within a council's organisational structure. The concern here is that the structural positioning of sustainability as an extraneous consideration promoted by a relatively junior officer is a structural barrier to change that could better account for important scope 3 emissions and more substantial climate action in general.

c. Adaptation

The majority of the councils surveyed shared plans to implement climate adaptation measures at the local level. However, upon closer examination, we observed that many of these measures were still largely in planning stages and had limited implementation. Our research also noted a correlation between councils undertaking proactive climate adaptation work and their geographical vulnerability

to climate change threats. Notable examples include Portsmouth City Council's remarkable coastal defence scheme and Lewes Council's Sussex Flow Initiative, both aimed at addressing coastal flooding.

Furthermore, many councils also undertook efforts to adapt and restructure their internal workflows and frameworks in order to effectively address climate change. Several councils partnered with the Carbon Literacy Project, striving to attain Platinum status for their employees. The objective behind this initiative is to set a leading example and ensure that council employees are equipped and motivated to reduce GHG emissions as individuals, through their council work, and as members of a community.⁹

d. Biodiversity and Natural Carbon Management

'Biodiversity' describes the variety of life on Earth, representing all living things as the result of over 4.5bn years of evolution.¹⁰ The most recent State of Nature Report highlights a 13% decline in the average abundance of wildlife from the 1970s, and under the Environment Act 2021, all grants of planning permission in the UK (with some exceptions¹¹) will need to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain from a currently unconfirmed date in November 2023.¹²

The objective to strengthen biodiversity often overlaps with councils' natural carbon management aims, which involves efforts to speed up the rate of carbon sequestration in natural systems through measures such as tree planting and vegetation and marine management. Biodiversity efforts can also overlap with adaptation objectives, illustrated clearly by the example of the Kelp Recovery Project in West Sussex, a marine rewilding initiative launched in 2021 to restore nearly 200km² of lost kelp forest along the Sussex coast.¹³ With that said, we also noted troubling trends in pricing for some private sector biodiversity infrastructure: for instance, Chichester District Council sets the estimated cost of 'biodiversity enhancements' by Network Rail at £385,000 (not including costs to Network Rail of £75,000 for the 2022/23 financial year) for a wildlife tower and dormouse bridge.¹⁴

⁹ Carbon Literacy Project, <<https://carbonliteracy.com/>>

¹⁰ UNEP and Biodiversity (2020), <www.unep.org/unep-and-biodiversity>.

¹¹ UK Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Understanding Biodiversity Net Gain, <www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-biodiversity-net-gain>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Sussex Wildlife Trust (n.d.), <<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/helpourkelp>>.

¹⁴ Chichester Progress Report <https://www.chichester.gov.uk/media/37871/20230103-Web-2023-Climate-Action-Plan-Progress-Report/doc/20230103_Web_2023_Climate_Action_Plan_Progress_Report_-.docx?m=638107624381330000> p.27.

Tree planting was an action prioritized by almost every council we investigated, due to its benefits for both biodiversity and carbon offsetting. While tree-planting is evidently valuable, the weak carbon accounting practices that can sometimes accompany tree-planting in a Net-Zero strategy means it does not necessarily amount to a meaningful offset of emissions, distracting from the biodiversity benefits and actual need for transformative change. Overall, relatively few councils are overly reliant on offsets in their carbon management plans, focusing more on mitigation efforts, with the heavily forested council of Wealden being an exception.

e. Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement

Many counties emphasise the importance of involving local communities and the private sector in climate action for wider acceptance and longer-term sustainability. One common approach is to utilize existing local networks such as rotary clubs and parish councils. In Winchester, carbon footprint impact reports for parishes are collected through the community-led Winchester Climate Action Network project WeCAN.¹⁵ Representatives from the group noted that they were trying to “fill the gaps in the ecosystem of change”.

Cross-council collaboration is encouraged in some counties through initiatives like bike rental schemes and the development of cycle paths, as seen in Adur and Brighton. The Ouse Valley Climate Action Project is a significant community-led scheme in the South East, receiving £2m funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to pioneer climate action at the local level. In the whole of South East England, the Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) is a fund available for businesses to help implement low carbon solutions.¹⁶

Councils also offer financial and social incentives to reduce carbon emissions from local businesses. Hastings, for instance, provides complete financing, installation, and management of solar plants through the Solar for Business scheme.¹⁷ Cherwell's "Social value policy" aims to promote low-carbon practices by guiding the Council's future contracts with businesses. However, we also noted the risk of councils over-emphasising small-scale actions that may not significantly impact the overall carbon emissions of businesses.

¹⁵WinACC, Carbon Impact Reports for Parishes in Winchester District, <www.winacc.org.uk/carbon-impact-reports-for-parishes-in-winchester-district/>.

¹⁶LOCASE, Low Carbon Across the South and East, <<https://locase.co.uk/>>.

¹⁷Hastings Online, Solar for Business, <www.hastings.gov.uk/my-council/climate-change/solar-businesses/>.

4. Gaps and Challenges

There are several gaps and challenges we identified while conducting this research. Some of these can be attributed to the limitations of desk research, but others point to the challenges councils face in producing sustainable and transparent climate policy and action.

Overuse of generic sustainability language: It was difficult to validate much of the data provided by the councils in their reports. Many of the reports used generic environmental sustainability phrases and jargon, it was at times difficult to decipher what was genuine.

Difficulties in comparative analysis: The differences between the goals and targets in each council makes it more difficult to compare their actions and progress.

Impacts of COVID-19: Many councils refer to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in their reports given the pandemic's interrupting effect on the rollout of various climate measures. Some also found that reduced emissions during lockdowns contributed to creating a statistical artefact in their carbon reduction trends, showing improvements to emissions which were not representative of their climate strategy.

Challenges beyond local authority control: Many councils met challenges outside of their control that affected their ability to effect change within their respective boroughs, districts, or counties. While many councils have developed robust and commendable plans, progress reports indicate that several planned actions are not being completed according to schedule due to funding and other issues.

Limited data availability: A significant portion of councils did not measure Scope 3 emissions or include them in their Net Zero targets, an omission that overlooks a substantial source of emissions. In terms of our own data-gathering experience, conducting our research has sometimes proven difficult due to limited published data. Whilst many councils maintained updated and accessibly comprehensive webpages explaining their climate actions, others were more opaque, requiring us to fill out multiple online forms and search for email addresses to request further data.

II. Individual County Analysis

1. Berkshire

Councils researched: West Berkshire Council, Bracknell Forest Council, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Reading Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council.

Access to information. Berkshire's six councils have been generally proactive and consistent in publishing information online regarding their climate actions, although some of these pages were less frequently maintained than others. The councils' update frequency seemed to have a strong connection to the affluence of the district. For instance, Slough council have produced three separate reports that outline implemented policies relating to climate change but are not regularly publishing data on progress, whilst Windsor Council are able to produce frequent updates and progress reports on their strategy plans, every six months to a year. Of the six councils investigated, three responded to our information requests. Moreover, all councils have committed to publishing annual/biannual updates on their progress on their climate action plans. The Borough of Windsor are particularly proactive on this front as they regularly highlight which plans are 'in action', 'delayed', 'completed' or 'on track'.

CEDs. Five out of six councils made a CED between January 2018 and July 2019. Bracknell Forest initially showed a less urgent response to the climate emergency but eventually conceded and made a declaration in January 2023 under pressure from neighbouring councils. Even though CEDs were established around four years ago, a considerable number of actions required to achieve their climate goals are still in the planning stages. While half of the counties have developed and implemented timeframes for their climate action plans, some councils have presented ideas without progress reports or specific timeframes. Overall, the reports indicate encouraging and noteworthy progress. Notably, councils like Windsor and Reading demonstrate significant advancements and consistently provide updates on their performance, highlighting the effectiveness of setting specific goals and clear timeframes in facilitating a comprehensive overview of the work being undertaken.

Two out of the six councils (Bracknell Forest, Windsor) stated that they aim for their district to be carbon neutral by 2050. Three out of the six councils (West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham) have

a more ambitious goal of meeting Net Zero by 2030, and Slough have not released an overall carbon neutral goal but instead have focused on smaller steps 10-year carbon management plans.

Adaptation. All in all, adaptation does not seem to be a major priority for the county of Berkshire. All the counties in Berkshire acknowledge the necessity to incorporate adaptation into their implementation action plans. However, although there are references, with all counties except Reading and Windsor, adaptation references are somewhat vague and minimal. Windsor, on the other hand, have stated that their carbon management and environmental strategy plan focused mostly on mitigating efforts. Although, they confirm that a separate adaptation report developed in ‘consultation with relevant bodies’¹⁸, this has not been published yet. Although separate from the council, the Reading Climate Change Partnership commissioned a separate adaptation plan in February 2020 which forecasts key climate impacts for Reading at the end of the century and then outlines the opportunities for the town to adapt. The councils that do not go into significant detail on adaptation plans instead refer to the fact that it will be necessary in the future as climate change impacts become more well known.

Biodiversity and Natural Carbon Management. There is a strong understanding of the importance of biodiversity in most of Berkshire’s councils. Examples include Bracknell’s “Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces” (SANGS), which are designed to reduce potential harm to other Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead current environment and climate strategy does not provide baselines for other areas than carbon dioxide emissions but plans to include them in a future biodiversity action plan.¹⁹ Similarly, Wokingham Borough Council in its chapter on carbon sequestration declares that nature-based carbon-removal and biodiversity solutions such as planting trees “are an expanding area which will look to be included more in future through the upcoming adaptation plan.”²⁰ As part of the key themes for the Environment Strategy for West Berkshire, developing a Nature Recovery Plan is mentioned as a tool to help improve biodiversity and wildlife in the district.²¹

¹⁸Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Environment and Climate Strategy 2020-2025, page 5.

¹⁹Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Environment and Climate Strategy, <www.rbwm.gov.uk/home/environment-and-waste/energy-and-sustainability/environment-and-climate-strategy>.

²⁰Wokingham Borough Council, Climate Emergency Action Plan Third Progress Report (2022), <www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings/open-data/climate-emergency/>, p.44.

²¹West Berkshire Council, Environment Strategy 2020-2030, <<https://cape.mysociety.org/media/data/plans/west-berkshire-council-731c1fe.pdf>>.

To offset carbon emissions, with the exception of Windsor, the councils in Berkshire generally refer to offsetting in the context of new development projects or as a means to reduce carbon footprints, rather than incorporating it directly into their action plans. Windsor, on the other hand, explicitly states a preference for following the recommendations provided by the UK Government's Committee on Climate Change. These recommendations encourage councils to prioritize mitigation efforts through domestic regulations and emission reduction, rather than relying on offsetting schemes. As a result, Windsor's action plan does not include any reference to offsetting schemes. In contrast, Wokingham places significant emphasis on offsetting, particularly due to its affluent rural character and the desire to enhance biodiversity net gain. To achieve this, Wokingham requires all new development projects to contribute to afforestation through the implementation of offsetting schemes and the promotion of tree diversity. This emphasis on offsetting stems from their strong commitment to major development schemes within the area.

Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement. In total, every council has significant plans for improving community engagement and action. Most notably, the Reading Council regularly holds popular meetings in town halls to facilitate climate updates and listen to public concerns.

Highlighted actions. Bracknell's "Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces" (SANGS)²² represent an interesting trade-off in the important wider effort to encourage communities to participate in and enjoy the natural environment whilst reducing the pressure on Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

²²Bracknell Forest Council, <www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/suitable-alternative-natural-greenspaces>.

2. Hampshire

Councils researched: Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, East Hampshire District Council, Fareham Borough Council, Eastleigh Borough Council, Gosport Borough Council, Winchester City Council, Havant Borough Council, New Forest District Council, Portsmouth City Council, Rushmoor Borough Council, Southampton City Council, Hart District Council and Test Valley Borough Council.

Access to information. Out of the thirteen local authorities we contacted, seven provided individualised responses.²³ Most councils have updated their actions and released reports within the past year, showing progress on climate objectives. However, only a few reports provided meaningful data on reduced carbon emissions. Southampton has an extensively updated website with detailed climate target updates, although the metrics remain unclear to the layperson. East Hampshire published an update in February 2023 through a dashboard, outlining actions such as fund establishment, tree planning, Green Team formation, and Action Plan development.²⁴ Fareham Borough Council plans to release another Progress Report for 2022/23. Basingstoke and Deane, as well as Eastleigh Borough Councils, reported key developments in their Action Plans, with Eastleigh Borough Council completing initiatives like carbon offsetting consultancy, establishing baselines, promoting sustainability for businesses, funding solar farms, and implementing green home initiatives. Basingstoke and Deane's reported actions are still 'in progress'.

CEDs. With two exceptions, all of Hampshire's councils declared CEDs in 2019.²⁵ The majority of the councils aim to be CN by 2030, and some by 2050. Three aim to be CN by 2024/2025 which is quite ambitious.²⁶ Despite the CEDs being announced approximately four years ago, a significant number of the actions required to achieve their climate goals remain in the planning stage.

Hampshire's local councils set targets for carbon footprint and emission reduction. Basingstoke achieved a 16.5% reduction in emissions from 2018 to 2020.²⁷ Fareham Borough Council reduced their carbon footprint by 9.06% in 2021/22, equal to 331.31 tCO₂e.²⁸ Eastleigh Borough Council

²³Basingstoke, Fareham Borough, East Hampshire, Winchester City, Test Valley, Havant and Hart.

²⁴East Hampshire, Our Green Dashboard (2023), <www.easthants.gov.uk/media/8153/download?inline>.

²⁵Gosport Borough, Havant Borough.

²⁶Winchester, New Forest District and Eastleigh.

²⁷Basingstoke and Deane carbon footprint 2021/22, <www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/doclib/3762.pdf>.

²⁸Fareham, Climate Change Action Plan 2022, <www.fareham.gov.uk/PDF/about_the_council/protecting_the_environment/ClimateChangeActionPlan2022.pdf>.

acknowledged their actions are insufficient for carbon neutrality by 2030.²⁹ Gosport's emissions increased by 2% (location-based) but decreased by 23% (market-based) in 2021/22.³⁰ Winchester City Council successfully reduced emissions by 26% since 2005. Overall, the councils are making efforts to track and reduce emissions, but progress varies in alignment with long-term goals.

Local councils in Hampshire are combating climate change through a variety of strategies: Basingstoke has a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, leading to the adoption of solar panels, electric vehicles, energy-efficient buildings, and reduced carbon emissions from waste trucks. East Hampshire Council focuses on a Green Action Plan, including tree planting and creating a Green Team. Fareham Borough Council has reduced its carbon footprint through measures such as using vegetable oil fuel, renewable energy, and biodiversity protection. Eastleigh Borough Council aims for net-zero emissions by 2050 through community engagement, energy reduction, waste management, and supporting electric vehicles. Gosport Borough Council focuses on partnerships, renewable electricity, tree planting, and sustainable policies. Winchester City Council is making progress towards climate neutrality goals but wants to do more. Hart District Council aims for carbon neutrality by 2035 through energy reduction and renewable energy. Havant Borough Council tackles challenges like home retrofitting and community engagement. The New Forest District Council aims for carbon neutrality by 2030 and monitor progress. Portsmouth Council aims for net-zero emissions by 2050 through leadership and skill enhancement. Rushmoor Borough Council is committed to carbon neutrality by 2030 through efficiency measures and community engagement. Overall, these councils have committed to actively addressing climate change and reducing carbon emissions in their remit.

Adaptation. Most Councils lack detailed explanations of their adaptation schemes, merely mentioning them in their action plans. However, Portsmouth City Council stands out with the South Seas Coastal Scheme, a project aimed at improving the seafront and reducing flood risk. This project covers a 4.5 km stretch from old Portsmouth, benefiting approximately 700 businesses and 10,000 houses, thanks to government funding awarded in 2020. Havant Borough Council also mentions collaboration with coastal partnerships for their adaptation strategy. The New Forest District's action plan emphasises an Adaptation Action Plan focusing on flood and coastal erosion risk management, green housing, and

²⁹Eastleigh, GHG Emissions Report July 2021, <www.eastleigh.gov.uk/media/10719/ebcghgreport2021.pdf>.

³⁰Gosport, Gosport Borough Council greenhouse gas emissions 2021-22, <www.gosport.gov.uk/media/4012/Gosport-Borough-Council-Greenhouse-Gas-Emissions-2021-22/pdf/GBC_greenhouse_gas_emissions_2021-22.pdf?m=638011927383530000>.

other methods. Rushmoor City Council aims to build resilience by working with communities and businesses. Fareham Borough Council collaborates with Coastal Partners, including Hampshire County Council, for coastal resilience, such as the Hook Lake Coastal Management Study, supported by a £556,000 Defra Grant. This funding aims to restore lost intertidal habitats in the Solent area. Another project is the Fareham Quay and Cadour Drive flood risk reduction study, backed by over £450,000 from the Environment Agency and a £30,000 Council contribution, protecting 400 at-risk properties and preserving landfill sites.³¹ Gosport Borough conducts a review of its Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) policies to address climate change challenges, aligned with the North Solent SMP refresh.³²

Biodiversity and Natural Carbon Management. Several councils have engaged in biodiversity related actions. Promoting biodiversity is listed as a priority for Fareham Borough Council. They are actively planning initiatives such as sustainable planting practices, wetland projects, and the creation of natural habitats. The council also implements measures to protect trees through Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and collaborates with Coastal Partners to safeguard the coastline and enhance the natural environment. Balancing planning growth and preserving the natural environment is a key focus through their Local Plan. In Eastleigh Borough Council, a consultancy has been engaged to forecast emissions trajectory and provide advice on offsetting and carbon reduction projects within the local authority boundary. This allows for the inclusion of long-term projects like tree planting. The council is in the process of establishing a carbon and ecological baseline, with plans for a Biodiversity Strategy, Biodiversity Action Plan, and Nature Recovery Strategy. They have already adopted a Tree Strategy, increased tree nursery stock levels, and planted over 1,000 trees across the borough. Winchester has a dedicated Biodiversity Action Plan and has successfully implemented over 60 actions in 2021. Hart District Council's monitoring report in 2021 revealed approved applications for solar farms in Warnborough and Rotherwick, with ongoing applications from other areas. Additionally, they have initiated work on the Green Garden project at Edenbrook Country Park to encourage voluntary action and engage community groups through activities like running sessions and inclusivity efforts.

³¹Fareham Borough Council, Climate Change Action Plan, <www.fareham.gov.uk/PDF/about_the_council/protecting_the_environment/FBCClimateChangeActionPlan.pdf>.

³²Gosport Borough Council, Climate Change Action Plan 2022, <www.gosport.gov.uk/media/2995/Climate-Change-Action-Plan/pdf/Climate_Change_Action_Plan_Public_20220310.pdf?m=637831150297270000>.

Most Councils focus on tree and garden planting for their offset targets. Winchester plans to plant 100 trees annually.³³ Some councils adopt an "offset where we can't reduce" approach, and offset plans are still in progress. Hart District Council emphasizes developing living walls and green roofs in car parks.³⁴ Rushmoor Borough Council implements projects like community gardens and food waste collection to achieve offsets. Portsmouth City Council includes compensation offsets in their climate action plan.³⁵ The New Forest District Council employs various methods such as tree planting, nutrient reduction, and sustainable fleet replacement to reach offsetting targets.³⁶ Havant Borough Council also mentions carbon offsetting in their action plan.³⁷ Basingstoke and Deane's community offset program with local landowners to create woodlands and green space is delayed due to insufficient data on green space ownership.

Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement. Test Valley's climate actions are closely aligned with its Corporate Climate Action Plan, though they are reaching out to local rotary clubs and creating a new Resident Communication plan through their website. The action plan of Basingstoke and Deane Council places significant importance on the principle of 'Action by All.' This approach encompasses a range of actions aimed at promoting sustainability and engaging various stakeholders. The Council is actively involved in training its staff, updating internal policies to facilitate sustainable practices, and providing support to local residents. They also focus on raising awareness among businesses and funding initiatives like LoCASE (Low Carbon Across the South East). Engaging with schools and implementing educational programs further contribute to their comprehensive approach to sustainability. The Council has also collaborated with Hampshire County Council and other local authorities in Hampshire for the Solar Together scheme, a group-buying solar initiative for residents. Additionally, they set up the "Green Team" to engage communities and businesses in the transition to

³³Winchester, Carbon Neutrality Action Plan, <www.winchester.gov.uk/climate-change-and-energy/carbon-neutrality-action-plan>, p.11.

³⁴Hart District Council, Climate Change Action Plan (2020), <<https://data.climateemergency.uk/media/data/plans/hart-district-council-0617549.pdf>>.

³⁵Portsmouth City Council, Climate Change Strategy (2022), <<https://cape.mysociety.org/media/data/plans/portsmouth-city-council-3b34922.pdf>>.

³⁶New Forest District Council, CLIMATE CHANGE & NATURE EMERGENCY ANNUAL UPDATE 2023 <https://newforest.gov.uk/media/2983/Climate-Change-Annual-Report-2023/pdf/Climate_Annual_Report_2023_v6.pdf?m=638127519509400000>.

³⁷Havant Borough Council, Climate Change and Environment Strategy 2021-2026, <<https://cdn.havant.gov.uk/public/documents/Havant%20Borough%20Council%20Climate%20Change%20and%20Environment%20Strategy%202021-2026.pdf#:~:text=Tackling%20Climate%20Change,-Our%20response%20to&text=Through%20Havant%20Borough%20Council's%20Climate,in%20line%20with%20national%20legislation>>.

a greener and more sustainable future. The Green Team, consisting of council officers, promotes sustainable practices and engages with stakeholders, local organisations, and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint through events, workshops, networking, and providing support and guidance on energy-efficient practices and waste reduction.³⁸ Rushmoor Council was specifically working on community engagement by engaging with the Hampshire County Council and developing food waste collection and behavioural change projects. For this Council, community engagement was given priority with working on COVID-19 recovery by encouraging involvement and behavioural change. The Hart District Council developed partnerships with local authorities for the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area to establish a zero zone around the area and introduced provisions for Suitable Alternative Natural Greenpace.

Highlighted Actions. Basingstoke and Deane Council is carrying on a Solar Panel study by ABSolar is looking at all of the non-domestic properties over 30m² in the borough and assessing their solar PV potential with the aim of aiding the uptake of solar panels in the borough.³⁹ East Hampshire District Council adopted a Community Climate Action Fund. The fund supports a range of initiatives, such as renewable energy projects, *energy efficiency* measures, *sustainable transport*, and *biodiversity enhancement*.⁴⁰ Moreover, the Green Loop Wayfinding project in Whitehill and Bordon creates a circular route for pedestrians and cyclists to promote sustainable transport and enhance the local environment.⁴¹ In terms of transport, Fareham Borough Council introduced Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) into parts of our vehicle fleet. HVO is a biofuel which reduces carbon emission significantly. As per the Council, use of this has been successful and will help reduce our 2022/23 carbon footprint. During 2022, the Council has been involved in the LAD2 scheme, which is a Government Local Authority Delivery scheme focused on improving household energy efficiency for those on low incomes. The Council successfully implemented a total of 177 improvements to 159 properties in its housing stock.

³⁸Local Government Association, Creating a green team to engage with communities and businesses in Basingstoke and Deane, < <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/creating-green-team-engage-communities-and-businesses-basingstoke-and-deane>>

³⁹Basingstoke, Solar Panel Study, <www.basingstoke.gov.uk/solar-panel-study>.

⁴⁰East Hampshire District Council, Community climate action fund, <[www.easthants.gov.uk/climate-and-environment/community-climate-action-fund#:~:text=The%20Community%20Climate%20Action%20Fund%20\(CCAF\)%2C%20supports%20new%20projects,many%20residents%20does%20it%20support](http://www.easthants.gov.uk/climate-and-environment/community-climate-action-fund#:~:text=The%20Community%20Climate%20Action%20Fund%20(CCAF)%2C%20supports%20new%20projects,many%20residents%20does%20it%20support)>.

⁴¹Whitehill and Bordon, Green Loop and Wayfinding, <<http://whitehillbordon.com/green-loop-wayfinding/>>.

Rushmoor Borough and Portsmouth City Council both plan to switch to green energy to improve *energy* performance. Portsmouth further decided to ensure accountability through engaging all PCC staff and counsellors to introduce net zero emission as all future decision making. The Council also initiated the South Seas Coastal Scheme project to improve seafront and reduce the risk of flooding. The project stretches up to 4.5 kms from old Portsmouth and reduces the flooding of approx. 700 businesses and 10,000 houses- using the funding awarded by the government in 2020.

3. Isle of Wight

Councils researched: Isle of Wight Council.

Access to information. The Isle of Wight (IoW) provided a detailed response to our information request, & explained they are preparing a full progress report expected by August/September 2023. IoW also included its unsuccessful funding applications in its reporting (applied for woodland planting funding twice without success, as well as applications for Bus Service Improvement and Reinstating Railways funding. Despite the disappointing outcomes, it is still a commendable show of transparency to the public.

CEDs. Where many councils took a dual approach to their net-zero goals, the Isle of Wight, took a *threefold* approach, pledging Net zero by 2030 as a council, by 2035 across its school estate, and by 2040 as an island community.⁴²

Adaptation. As a smaller island, IoW is at unique risk of flooding and coastal erosion. Significant regions of IoW are projected to be 1 metre underwater by 2030 in a 2021 study by Climate Central (see image below). The IoW Council is working in partnership with the Environment Agency on coastal flood defences refurbishment plans in areas at particular risk of the increasingly extreme weather (Yaverland, Shanklin, Embankment Road [Bembridge], and Ventnor).⁴³

⁴²Isle of Wight Council, Mission Zero: Climate and Environment Strategy 2021-2040 <<https://www.iow.gov.uk/azservices/documents/2570-Mission-Zero-Climate-and-Environment-Strategy-2021-2040-final.pdf>>.

⁴³Environment Agency, Isle of Wight Coastal Defence Schemes Information Page, <<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/solent-and-south-downs/isle-of-wight-coastal-defence-schemes-information/>>.

4. Kent

Councils researched: Ashford Borough Council, Canterbury City Council, Dartford Borough Council, Dover District Council, Folkestone and Hythe District Council, Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Medway Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Swale Borough Council, Thanet District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

Access to information. Worth highlighting out of the local authorities in these 14 councils in Kent is the accessible information from both Dover District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Medway Council and Kent County Council. These councils provide a structured overview showing their concrete plans, making it easy for the general public to understand the council's approach to climate change and to track the progress made. On the other hand, many of the plans provided by the other local authorities used quite general, and in some cases quite vague, language when outlining their goals and the measures they would take to achieve them. For example, Dartford Borough Council's 2021 Topic Paper and the Climate Change Impact Assessment document would be hard for a layperson to understand as they are quite information dense.

CEDs. Out of the 14 councils we have looked at in Kent, only Sevenoaks District Council and Ashford Borough Council have not made a Climate Emergency Declaration (CED). However, those councils are working towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030 and have published plans on their websites on how to reach this goal.

In terms of measuring emissions in councils like Dartford, it is important to keep in mind that they may be significantly higher due to the fact that large amounts of traffic pass through this borough due to the Dartford crossing and tunnel.

Adaptation. In Kent County Council there are currently several adaptation projects.⁴⁶ One example is the project aiming at reducing the impact of higher temperatures in the summer and the flood risk.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Kent County Council, Kent's changing climate, <www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/climate-change/kents-changing-climate>.

⁴⁷Kent County Council, Making Margate a cooler, greener place, <www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/climate-change/kents-changing-climate/making-margate-a-cooler,-greener-place>.

Another project is the Adaptation Catalyst, which is a tool helping decision makers with the planning and justification for local climate adaptation.⁴⁸

Biodiversity and Natural Carbon Management. To increase biodiversity and naturally manage carbon emissions, tree planting has been the most popular action taken in councils in Kent.⁴⁹ For example, more than 37,500 hedges and trees were planted across Kent County Council in 2021.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Kent County Council also created six urban woodland sites in 2021.⁵¹

Carbon offsetting that is unrelated to tree-planting is also included in several of the reports from the councils in Kent. One example is Kent County Council's plan from 2020 which mentions the possibility of establishing a renewable energy investment fund and a carbon offsetting scheme. This scheme might enable residents, the public sector and businesses to offset their emissions locally through investing in climate projects in the area. The work on the investment fund/offset fund is according to the 2021 progress report expected to have begun late in 2022.⁵² Furthermore, Maidstone Borough Council's Action plan mentions the possibility of assessing the viability of using community energy projects for carbon offsetting.⁵³

Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement. Different steps are being taken by the councils to involve and engage the communities in actions related to climate change. Kent Green Action is a campaign aiming at inspiring and supporting action that can help improve the environment,⁵⁴ Ashford Borough Council has a Community Climate Action Forum,⁵⁵ and several other councils have information for residents on how they can take action to prevent and adapt to climate change.⁵⁶

⁴⁸Kent County Council, The Adaptation Catalyst e-tool, <www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/climate-change/kents-changing-climate/adaptation-catalyst>.

⁴⁹Kent County Council, Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy Implementation Plan 2020-2023, <www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/140330/ELES-2021-Progress-report.pdf>, p.16.

⁵⁰Kent County Council, Highlights 2021: The Kent & Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy, <www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/138372/ELES-infographic-2021-highlights.pdf>.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Kent County Council, Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy Implementation Plan 2020-2023, <www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/140330/ELES-2021-Progress-report.pdf>, p.16.

⁵³Maidstone, Our Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan, <<https://climatechange.maidstone.gov.uk/home/our-biodiversity-and-climate-change-action-plan>>.

⁵⁴Kent County Council, Kent Green Action, <www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/kent-green-action>.

⁵⁵Ashford Borough Council, Our Strategy and Performance, www.ashford.gov.uk/environmental-concerns/climate-change/our-strategy-and-performance/.

⁵⁶See for example: Folkstone and Hythe, Climate Change – What can you do?, <www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/climate-change/climate-change-what-can-you-do>.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the community in the creation of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Borough-Wide Climate Change Strategy is worth highlighting.

Highlighted Actions. The progress report from Kent County Council from 2021 highlights the trials of six new transport projects.⁵⁷ Furthermore, there are projects that are working towards the transition to Ultra Low Emission Vehicle for public transport.⁵⁸ Work is also being done to reduce dependency on cars in the area.⁵⁹ Moreover, Solar Together Kent is a scheme for group-purchasing solar panels and batteries and by the end of 2021 it had installed more than 2000 solar panels across Kent and Medway.⁶⁰ Kent County Council has achieved the International Standard for Environmental Management (ISO 14001).⁶¹

5. Oxfordshire

Councils researched: Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

Access to information. Oxfordshire's six councils generally published information online regarding their climate actions, although some of these pages were less frequently maintained than others. For instance, the most recent publicly available net zero reports from Cherwell Council were dated approximately two years ago. On the other hand, West Oxfordshire District Council maintains a quarterly bulletin via its Climate Action Network, providing seasonal updates in addition to its updated climate action webpages. Similarly, the latest performance report from Vale of White Horse is from January 2023 and is available on their website. Of the six councils investigated, four responded to our information requests.

CEDs. All six councils made a CED between the months of January-July 2019. Despite all six CEDs

⁵⁷Kent County Council, Highlights 2021: The Kent & Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy, <www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/138372/ELES-infographic-2021-highlights.pdf>.

⁵⁸Kent County Council, Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy Implementation Plan 2020-2023, <www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/140330/ELES-2021-Progress-report.pdf>.

⁵⁹Ibid., p.28.

⁶⁰Ibid., p.42.

⁶¹Kent County Council, Our net zero action plan, <www.kent.gov.uk/environment-waste-and-planning/climate-change/reducing-emissions/our-net-zero-action-plan>.

being created approximately four years ago, a significant number of the actions required to achieve their climate goals remain in planning stages to date. However, some progress is being made. The Vale of White Horse Council's performance updates illustrate how setting specific goals and clear timeframes helps contribute to a good overview of the work that is being done.⁶² Many councils took a 'dual approach' to Net Zero, distinguishing between the carbon footprint of the council and that of the region.

Adaptation. Oxfordshire County Council's 2022 'Tree Policy' introduced a 'presumption in favour of trees' recognising trees as a critical element of climate change adaptation infrastructure, aiding in flood alleviation and landscape resilience, amongst other objectives.⁶³ Oxfordshire County Council also signposts businesses and organisations to the UK Climate Impact Programme's Adaptation Wizard,⁶⁴ comprising of a set of steps and recommendations.

Biodiversity and Natural Carbon Management. Councils have been increasingly recognising the essential role of biodiversity loss in the climate crisis, with some even declaring an ecological emergency as well as a climate emergency (South Oxfordshire District Council April 2021). West Oxfordshire has backed and helped deliver habitat creation schemes, such as the planting of over 1,300 hedgerow whips in honour of the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.

Regarding offsetting, Cherwell's latest climate action plan discusses efforts to launch a tree planting opportunity tool for the county as well as to develop funding models for investments to increase tree cover, and the Vale of White Horse developed plans for tree planting and a new wildflower meadow.⁶⁵

Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement. Councils recognise the importance of engaging various stakeholders in their communities in order to achieve net zero goals in the long run. This engagement ranges from consultation – assessing commercial tenants' interest in 'buying into' zero carbon schemes, for instance – to direct guidance and oversight. For example, several Oxfordshire

⁶²Vale of White Horse District Council, Climate Action Plan (2023), <www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/03/22-23-Q3-Vale-CAP-v3.pdf>.

⁶³Oxfordshire County Council, Tree Policy for Oxfordshire, <www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/countryside/TreePolicyforOxfordshire2022.pdf>.

⁶⁴UKCIP, Tools, <www.ukcip.org.uk/wizard/>.

⁶⁵Vale of White Horse District Council, Corporate Plan and Performance Reports 2020-2024, <www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/about-the-council/corporate-plan/>.

councils such as Cherwell have integrated a ‘social value policy’ to guide their future contracts, with the idea being to help guide and platform business best practices in the low carbon sector.⁶⁶ In addition to outreach and volunteering schemes, Oxfordshire County Council has connected with schools to this aim, delivering energy efficiency support via the ACE initiative.⁶⁷ Some councils developed new hubs and networks to engage businesses and the community such as Vale of White Horse’s Climate Action Fund that will support climate action projects, and is also considering setting up Climate Action Groups.⁶⁸ Other councils like South Oxfordshire plan to connect to existing business networks like Oxfordshire Greentech to support local businesses in reducing their emissions.⁶⁹

Highlighted Actions. Many councils referred to leading by example and ‘getting [their] own house in order’ in order to facilitate net zero efforts more widely.⁷⁰ In the pursuit of achieving a ‘climate-active’ council, Oxford City Council is taking steps to integrate net zero and biodiversity goals into its governance documents, alongside planned internal governance and funding audits to gauge potential gaps. Other councils such as Oxfordshire County Council have rolled out carbon literacy training for its staff. Another example is the dedicated section by the Vale of White Horse District Council’s Corporate Plan on climate change and open & inclusive procedures.⁷¹ Additionally, Oxfordshire County Council has moved to a REGO-backed (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin) electricity supply for its estate and highway assets, which includes all of its streetlights. The Council has recognised that 46% of its emissions come from streetlighting in the first place, and in response has replaced 65% of its streetlighting with energy-efficient LEDs, aiming for 100% by 2024.⁷² South Oxfordshire District Council has incorporated climate criteria into their grant funding applications.⁷³ Oxford City saw the experimental introduction of low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) to facilitate safer and quieter streets and encourage residents to make local journeys by bike or by foot.⁷⁴

⁶⁶Cherwell DC Executive, CDC Social Value Policy cover report, <<https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/documents/s48934/Executive%20CDC%20Social%20Value%20Policy%20cover%20report.pdf>>.

⁶⁷ACES, Sparking Action on Energy, <<https://ace-schools.org/>>.

⁶⁸Vale of White Horse District Council, Climate Action Plan Performance Report (2023), p. 4.

⁶⁹Oxfordshire Green Tech, About us, <<https://oxfordshiregreentech.co.uk/about-us/>>.

⁷⁰Oxfordshire County Council, Carbon Management Plan 2022-2025, <www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/environment-and-planning/OCC-CarbonManagementPlan2022-25.pdf>.

⁷¹Vale of White Horse District Council, Corporate Performance Report (2023), <www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/03/22-23-Q3-Vale-CPR-v4.pdf>.

⁷²Oxfordshire County Council, Net zero by 2030, <www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/energy-and-climate-change/net-zero-2030>.

⁷³South Oxfordshire District Council, <www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/grants/>.

⁷⁴Oxfordshire County Council, About our Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, <www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/connecting-oxfordshire/low-traffic-neighbourhoods/about-our-ltns#paragraph-14968>.

6. Surrey

Councils researched: Elmbridge Borough Council, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, Guildford Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Runnymede Borough Council, Spelthorne Borough Council, Surrey County Council, Surrey Heath Borough Council, Tandridge District Council, Waverly Borough Council and Woking Borough Council.

Access to information. All councils had dedicated web pages on their websites for climate or sustainability concerns and the council's approach. Information is not very clearly signposted on the Guildford Borough Council or Tandridge District Council websites, and Tandridge District Council's action plan does not appear to be available in full on the website. We did not receive responses from all councils so final data may not include some progress made by certain councils.

CEds. Almost all of Surrey's councils made a Climate Emergency Declaration (CED) between 2019 and 2020, with the exception of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, whose Executive Committee formally recognised the need for urgent action on climate change in 2020,⁷⁵ and Runnymede Borough Council, which viewed a prioritisation of the work which needs to be done as more important, more long term, and more strategic than what a CED would signal.⁷⁶ All of these councils have a dedicated climate change action plan, which include a set of specific environmental planned actions with timeframes; financial considerations as well as estimated carbon reductions are included in some of these plans. Most councils refer to net zero targets for emissions within council operations by 2030 and within the borough/district/county by 2050 or earlier, although Epsom and Ewell Borough Council instead adopted a target of being a carbon neutral council by 2035 in their Climate Change Action Plan.⁷⁷ Most action plans have been followed by progress reports or some progress has been shared on the councils' websites.

Most councils show evidence of decreasing carbon emissions over the past couple of years, suggesting positive results from their climate action. Surrey County Council's progress report claims that collectively local authorities in Surrey have reduced their carbon emissions by 20% since 2019, when

⁷⁵Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Agenda, <<https://reigate-banstead.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=137&MIId=1413&Ver=4>>.

⁷⁶Runnymede Borough Council, Climate Statement, <www.runnymede.gov.uk/council-policy/climate-statement>.

⁷⁷Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, Climate Change Action Plan, <www.epsom-ewell.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Climate%20Change%20Action%20Plan%20Final.pdf>.

many councils declared a climate emergency, and that they are on track to meet a 40% emissions reduction by 2025, the end of the Delivery Plan period.⁷⁸ However, the report also acknowledges that the scale and pace of activity and investment needs to increase substantially in order to decarbonise the county. The progress report also states that emissions from petrol and diesel vehicles are the greatest cause of emissions in Surrey, followed by use of gas and electricity in residential and commercial buildings.⁷⁹ The largest source of emissions varies across councils although most councils refer to energy use or transport as the greatest source of emissions. Many councils suggest that Scope 3 emissions are not currently included in their reporting and targets and aspire to include these as soon as possible given the significant contribution of these types of emissions. For example, Surrey County Council, Guildford Borough Council, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, and Spelthorne Borough Council explicitly state that only Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions are included in their targets. Some councils do attempt to measure or estimate Scope 3 emissions, including Waverley Borough Council and Surrey Heath Borough Council; however, many councils state that these emissions are harder to measure and track accurately.

Adaptation. Councils pay more attention to climate mitigation measures but some references to climate adaptation are included in most cases. Several councils refer to more focused adaptation plans to be developed in the future. Surrey County Council, Waverley Borough Council, Guildford Borough Council, Mole Valley District Council, and Spelthorne Borough Council all refer to plans to develop a specific climate adaptation or resilience plan in the coming years, something which will be worth monitoring and following up on. Runnymede Borough Council and Spelthorne Borough Council both refer to their participation in the River Thames Scheme, a flood alleviation scheme protecting 11,000 homes, 1,600 businesses and roads, rail, power, and water from the worst effects of flooding with anticipated opportunities for carbon sequestration and enhanced biodiversity project.⁸⁰ Spelthorne Borough Council also refers to adaptation measures around food resilience and encouraging retrofitting of cool roofs.⁸¹

⁷⁸Surrey County Council, Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan Progress Report, <<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s89447/ANNEX%201-%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20WHOLE%20PROGRAMME%20ASSESSMENT.pdf>>, p.303

⁷⁹Ibid., p.313.

⁸⁰Runnymede Borough Council, Climate Change Strategy 2022-2030, <www.runnymede.gov.uk/downloads/file/1533/climate-change-strategy>, p.8.

⁸¹Spelthorne Borough Council, Climate Change Strategy 2022-30, <<https://cape.mysociety.org/media/data/plans/spelthorne-borough-council-22e5e0c.pdf>>, p.19-20.

Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement. As expected, many councils appear more focused on their own organisational emissions which they have more control over, with many actions around council buildings and vehicles. Nonetheless, many councils have schemes or campaigns which encourage community participation in reducing emissions, as highlighted above. Some councils also show effort to involve their communities in various decision-making processes. Tandridge District Council's CED included a resolution to include residents, businesses and communities in the preparation of the action plan as well as proactive engagement with young people in discussing the climate change action plan.⁸² Runnymede Borough Council is setting up a Citizens' Panel which will be a conduit for stakeholders to inform the council's decisions as well as for stakeholders to share their own ideas and progress.⁸³

Highlighted Actions. Frequent actions across the county include installing energy efficient lighting, increasing the number of electric vehicles in the council's fleet, switching to green tariffs for the energy supply for council buildings, installing electric car charging points, installing PV panels, and planting trees. Apart from these common actions, the individual councils highlighted the following actions in their communication with us.

Since Surrey County Council set the net zero target was set, emissions in Surrey have reduced by over 1 million tonnes (17%), aligning with the carbon reduction pathway to 2050 set out in the Strategy and Delivery Plan.⁸⁴ Notable schemes include Sustainable Warmth Programme investing in low income homes to improve energy efficiency,⁸⁵ and the Solar Together scheme providing for solar panel installation for domestic roof tops across the county.⁸⁶ 73 eco schools supported, 13 community energy projects, 65 warm hubs, 300,000 trees planted, £200k grants for sustainable farming, £1.2m business grants allocated.⁸⁷

⁸²Tandridge District Council, Minutes 13 February 2020, <<https://tandridge.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Full%20Council/202002131930/Agenda/Council%20Minutes%2013.02.20.pdf>>.

⁸³Runnymede Borough Council, Climate Change Strategy 2022-2030, <www.runnymede.gov.uk/downloads/file/1533/climate-change-strategy>, p.9.

⁸⁴Surrey County Council, Greener Futures Climate Change Delivery Plan Progress Report, <<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s89447/ANNEX%201-%20CLIMATE%20CHANGE%20WHOLE%20PROGRAMME%20ASSESSMENT.pdf>>, p.302.

⁸⁵Action Surrey, <<https://www.actionsurrey.org/funding/sustainable-warmth#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Warmth%20scheme%20encompasses,or%20G%20will%20be%20prioritised.>>>

⁸⁶ Solar Together, <<https://solartogether.co.uk/surrey/home>>

⁸⁷Supra 84.

In Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, a Carbon Literacy Training has been delivered to 10 officers and 10 managers, leading to the council being awarded the Bronze Carbon Literate Organisation status.⁸⁸

Woking Borough Council launched Planet Woking in 2020, which is a communications programme dedicated to climate change, sustainability and biodiversity, sharing stories of local action and getting people involved.⁸⁹ Wild About Woking event in May 2022 to help raise awareness of how the public can help care for the environment through local biodiversity and greenspace projects.⁹⁰

Spelthorne Borough Council started an 'Engines off' campaign to reduce engine idling.⁹¹ Furthermore, they constructed a state-of-the-art Passivhaus leisure centre which will use between 60-70% less energy than a modern leisure centre.

In Mole Valley District Council, the 'Refill Mole Valley Initiative' was set up to encourage a reduction of single use plastics.⁹² Additionally, the 'Mole Valley Community Lottery' is raising money for local community causes and the Environment Fund.⁹³

⁸⁸Reigate and Banstead Borough Council, Annex 1: 2021/22 Progress on ES Strategy Actions and Indicators, <<https://reigate-banstead.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s21935/Annex%201%20Annual%20Progress%20Report.pdf>>.

⁸⁹Planet Woking, <<https://planetwoking.co.uk/>>.

⁹⁰Planet Woking, Wild about Working, <<https://planetwoking.co.uk/events/wildaboutwoking/>>.

⁹¹Spelthorne Borough Council, 'Engines off' idling campaign, <<https://democracy.spelthorne.gov.uk/documents/s37191/Report%20-%20Engine%20Idling%20Campaign.pdf>>.

⁹²Mole Valley District Council, Refill Mole Valley Initiative, <www.molevalley.gov.uk/home/community/climate-change-sustainability/refill-mole-valley-initiative>.

⁹³Mole Valley Community Lottery, <www.molevalleylottery.co.uk/>.

7. East Sussex

Councils researched: Brighton & Hove City Council, Eastbourne Borough and Lewes District Council (responded together), Wealden District Council, Hastings Borough Council and Rother District Council.

Access to information. All six councils have dedicated a section of their website to climate action and have last updated their information in late 2022. Eastbourne, Lewes and Hastings provided a detailed response, while Rother and Wealden just referred to their websites in their responses. Compared to the other councils, the available public and requested information from Rother was significantly lower. Due to limited resources, we did not contact Brighton & Hove City Council with an information request.

CEds. All councils made a CED in 2019 and pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030 or 2050 (Wealden). To plan and monitor progress of these goals, the councils have adopted strategy documents such as the 2030 Carbon Neutral Programme (Brighton & Hove), the Climate Emergency Strategy (Eastbourne), the Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy (Lewes), the Climate Emergency Plan (Wealden), the Environment Strategy (Rother) or the Climate Change Strategy (Hastings). These plans identify 4 (Wealden), 7 (Lewes), 8 (Eastbourne, Rother) or 10 (Hastings) priority areas and except for Rother, they encompass a Climate Action Plan (with varying degrees of specificity). Through updates of the plans (Eastbourne, Lewes, Hastings) or monitoring reports (Wealden) these implementation pathways were last re-evaluated for most districts in November or December 2022. For Rother, the Climate Steering Group's most recent information is from March 2022.⁹⁴

Eastbourne and Lewes reduced their total GHG scope 1 and 2 emissions by 9 and 15% since 2018/19. Hastings managed to reduce emissions from the council-operated buildings by 48.5% since 2018/19 due to the "council's decision in 2020 to procure electricity from renewable energy sources only."⁹⁵ Rother has reduced its emissions from direct council operations by 18% since 2019/20. The largest source of emissions varies across councils: For Eastbourne, Wealden and Hastings, the main source of

⁹⁴Rother District Council, Climate Change Steering Group, <<https://rother.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CommitteeId=250>>.

⁹⁵Hastings Borough Council, Climate Change Strategy 2022, <www.hastings.gov.uk/content/my_council/decisions_how/policies_strategies/pdfs/Climate_Change_Strategy_March_2022.pdf>.

council emissions is gas used in domestic buildings, followed closely by transport. For Lewes, fleet vehicles are the council's biggest emitters, followed by gas. Lewes will transfer to 'renewable diesel' in 2023.⁹⁶

Adaptation. Except for Wealden and Rother, all councils refer to adaptation in their implementation plans, yet it is only a dedicated focus area in Hastings. Hastings aims to make the town climate resilient primarily through natural capital solutions and carbon offsetting.⁹⁷ Actions that are worth mentioning include the development of one of the country's largest coastal flood risk projects in Eastbourne, which aims to make the coastal area from Pevensey Bay to Eastbourne resilient to flooding.⁹⁸ Another example is provided by the Sussex Flow Initiative (now: 'Wilder Ouse') which is a partnership approach developed by Lewes to reduce flood risk on the Ouse.⁹⁹

Biodiversity and Natural Carbon Management. Most councils (Hastings, Eastbourne, Lewes) engage in actions such as wildflower planting to increase biodiversity. As a big step to protect nature and biodiversity in Lewes, the Council passed a Rights of Rivers Motion to safeguard the River Ouse.¹⁰⁰ Lewes also has a Green Consultancy Team "consisting of specialists across water, coast, ecology and parks management"¹⁰¹ to advise the council on nature topics. Rother recently conducted a 'biodiversity audit' of the council's assets. Wealden does not include biodiversity issues in its climate plan.

The councils in East Sussex rely mostly on natural solutions to offset carbon emissions. While Rother does not mention offsetting in its climate documents at all, Wealden - which is a district that is largely covered by natural parks - refers to offsetting as one of their four priority areas. For Wealden, offsetting should be done via identifying "existing sources of LULUCF [Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry] emissions and further opportunities for sequestration", as well as by undertaking "an

⁹⁶Lewes District Council, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy 2022, <www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/323256.pdf>.

⁹⁷Hastings Borough Council, Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan Refresh, <<https://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s48890/Climate%20change%20strategy%20and%20action%20plan%20refresh%20Cabinet%207th%20Nov%2028102022.pdf>>.

⁹⁸Pevensey Bay to Eastbourne Coastal Management Scheme (2023), <www.pevenseyandeastbournecoast.co.uk/>.

⁹⁹Sussex Flow Initiative, <www.sussexflowinitiative.org/>.

¹⁰⁰Environmental Law Foundation, The Rights of Rivers Motion: Protecting Rivers for Present and Future Generations, <<https://elflaw.org/past-cases/rights-of-rivers-charter-protecting-rivers-present-future/>>.

¹⁰¹Lewes District Council, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy 2022, <www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/323256.pdf>.

assessment of opportunities for offsetting residual CO2 emissions through investment in renewable energy technologies.”¹⁰² The Sussex Local Nature Partnership is a central actor in this regard, as the organisation advises, guides and monitors the council’s offsetting.¹⁰³ Hastings, Eastbourne and Lewes mention offsetting, but only as a minor theme. In fact, Lewes states that offsetting should only be considered as a measure of ‘last resort’.¹⁰⁴

Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement. In all district councils, the public and the business community are involved in certain projects. For instance, in Lewes, the *Ouse Valley Climate Action* project “is a National Lottery-funded project which aims to bring the community together to inspire positive action to mitigate the effects of climate change.”¹⁰⁵ Working together with the Council, the project develops Community Energy Groups or provides educational workshops on climate action. Lewes also has an array of community-led nature projects and collaborates closely with the University of Brighton, as they for instance mapped out the *Sussex Flow Initiative*. On the business engagement side, Hastings council initiated the *Solar for Business Scheme*, which helps businesses to plan, finance and install PV on their roofs.

Highlighted Actions. For Eastbourne, according to the December 2022 update, 70% of the actions included in the local action plan are labelled ‘green’ and thus display a performance that is ‘at or above target’. Only four actions (6%) are expected to not be completed on time. Actions to highlight include the Solar Together scheme that ran first in 2021 and is running again in 2023. This action refers to a ‘reverse auction’ where “building owners/homeowners signed up as interested in installing PV panels and suppliers then bid for the work, with the lowest price winning.”¹⁰⁶ As an outcome, 53 PV systems were installed. Furthermore, for the first time and with the aim of reducing emissions in the future, the council collected data to estimate the emissions resulting from the annual Airbourne airshow.

¹⁰²Wealden District Council, Climate Emergency Plan Monitoring Report, <<https://council.wealden.gov.uk/documents/s81174/Climate%20Emergency%20Plan%20%20Monitoring%20Report.pdf>>.

¹⁰³Ibid.; Sussex Local Nature Partnership, <<http://sussexlnp.org.uk/>>.

¹⁰⁴Lewes District Council, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy 2021, <www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/310115.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵South Downs National Park Trust, Ouse Valley Climate Action, <www.southdownstrust.org.uk/south-downs-projects/ouse-valley-climate-action/>.

¹⁰⁶Eastbourne Borough Council, Eastbourne Climate Emergency Strategy Update (2022), <www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/324047.pdf>.

In Lewes, the *Fleet Replacement Strategy 2030* represents the most significant climate project in terms of GHG reductions, as the council aims to acquire a new fleet of ultralow emission refuse and recycling vehicles by 2030. This year, in 2023, the “existing diesel vehicles will move to an ultralow carbon renewable diesel made predominantly from used cooking oil, and food waste collection pods.”¹⁰⁷ Other actions include the *Active Travel* and *Engines Off* campaigns to improve air quality. A special action Lewes Council participated in was the *Climate Action Festival*, which featured a screening of local climate films.¹⁰⁸

Hastings highlighted the following actions in their responses: the installation of 14 new EV car chargers in its car parks, the commitment of the council to purchase 100% renewable energy and the installation of photovoltaic (PV) energy systems on some of its operational buildings.

In their Monitoring Report 2022, Wealden highlights the installation of air source heat pumps in 184 properties and PV systems in the retirement accommodations. Another big climate project is the aim to equip all public car parks with EV charging points and a “cutting-edge EV charging hub to be constructed in Uckfield.”¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the small fleet vehicles shall be replaced by electric vehicles soon.

Rother’s web page lists a couple of climate actions put forward by the council. As such, 17 councillors and 24 officers completed *Carbon Literacy Training* and the council introduced the *Climate Emergency Bonus Fund* which sets aside a certain percentage of the Community Infrastructure Levy for projects with particular environmental advantages. Moreover, the Blackfriars development site is a special construction project in Rother, which will provide 200 low-carbon dwellings, including several Passivhaus and earth-sheltered properties.

¹⁰⁷Lewes District Council, Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy 2022, <www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/323256.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸Lewes District Council, Lewes district climate change and sustainability, <www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/community/climate-change/lewes-district-climate-change-and-sustainability/>.

¹⁰⁹Wealden District Council, Climate Emergency Plan Monitoring Report, <<https://council.wealden.gov.uk/documents/s81174/Climate%20Emergency%20Plan%20%20Monitoring%20Report.pdf>>.

8. West Sussex

Councils researched: Crawley Borough Council, Chichester District Council, Mid Sussex District Council, West Sussex County Council, Horsham District Council, Arun District Council, Adur District Council and Worthing Borough Council.

Access to information. Relatively recent information on progress is available online for all councils. These are often documented in the form of a detailed breakdown of progress on individual projects rather than an overview of their emissions and collective impact. In particular, Adur and Worthing have an excellently updated blog and run the *Sustainable AW* magazine. In many instances though, the language used on the websites and in their progress reports is quite vague, which often makes it difficult to determine the implementation of their planned actions.

CEDs. All of the councils have declared CEDs, mostly during 2019 with the latest being Arun in Jan 2020. Their progress reports demonstrate progress on a number of actions, but there are few calculated reports which meaningfully identify reduced carbon emissions. Arun, Adur, and Worthing have committed to become carbon neutral by 2030 while the rest have set their target in line with the national average, 2050. The short-term initial focus is on reducing scope 1 and 2 emissions within the local councils' operations within a faster timeframe before dealing with external factors.

Adaptation. There is some ambiguity in the literature as to the necessity of adaptation action compared to more general mitigation efforts that suggests the need for further climate literacy training. The very real changes to climate that will unfold in the next twenty years do not seem to be fully accounted for nor are the efforts that are being taken being adopted in an 'emergency' timeframe. While climate resiliency is being incorporated, for example Chichester have committed to not building new development projects in flood-risk areas, the concept does not seem to have penetrated all areas of the councils' work.

Biodiversity and Natural Carbon Management. There is a promising understanding towards the importance of biodiversity, including Arun's 'Biodiversity Net Gain study' and Biodiversity Action plan. Various areas, often those identified as flood risk areas, are now being protected for biodiversity flourishing across West Sussex. Even beyond the coast, the Adur & Worthing collaboration on the seabed KELP Restoration fund is particularly promising as it may offer key adaptation value in

addition to its ecosystem benefits. One area of concern may be the exorbitant pricing by private companies for biodiversity infrastructure – including the pricing by Network Rail for a ‘dormouse bridge’ and a ‘wildlife tower’ at around £385,000 with further costs to come.¹¹⁰

Carbon offsetting in West Sussex is largely dependent on tree planting. Tree planting has been embraced, with variation, across all of West Sussex as it provides multi-value for councils through increased biodiversity, mental health spaces and potential scope 3 carbon offsetting. For example, Arun’s has projected that its 10-year plan of planting 30,000 whips and 500 standard saplings will remove 1900 tonnes of CO₂. While the tree planting efforts are very important, the amount of space in the literature dedicated to covering these efforts as attempts at ‘credible’ carbon offsetting seems to displace truly transformative systemic action.¹¹¹ The Adur & Worthing report was excellent at distinguishing this nuance on how carbon offsetting may be useful, but the focus needs to remain on maximising demand reduction.¹¹² Horsham does also consider the creation of a Sustainable Transition Fund using carbon offsetting solutions, although it is unclear if these differ from tree planting.

Civil Society and Private Sector Engagement. All councils are said to be promoting environmental education to their citizens through various projects of social engagement and collaborating with local climate action networks. Strong focus on collaborating with businesses to reduce emissions, for example, Chichester has a funded officer dedicated to working to reduce emissions with businesses (and individuals). Focus on cycle path extensions and car-club schemes with other councils such as Brighton have also been very successful in West Sussex with the new infrastructure being put in place across all of the councils. Adur & Worthing have also implemented a commercial food waste collection to reduce/manage overall waste as well as creating a low carbon heat network grid.

Highlighted Actions. Adur & Worthing have completed a number of projects, including their A&W Climate Assembly, contributions to the FutureZero2020 conference and a sustainability magazine. The councils have commissioned a carbon audit to identify the source of their emissions, and many include scope 3, which is a feature rarely observed in local climate action reports.

¹¹⁰Chichester Progress Report, <www.chichester.gov.uk/media/37871/20230103-Web-2023-Climate-Action-Plan-Progress-Report/doc/20230103_Web_2023_Climate_Action_Plan_Progress_Report_.docx?m=63810762438133>, p.27.

¹¹¹Horsham, Horsham District’s Draft Climate Action Strategy (2023), <www.horsham.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/123053/Horsham-District-Climate-Action-Strategy-v2.pdf>.

¹¹²Adur & Worthing Sustainability Framework 2021-2023, <www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/media/Media,162919,smxx.pdf>.