

Colchester City Council Climate Emergency Action Plan

- Summary of Achievements 2025-2026

We published an updated Climate Emergency Action Plan in October 2024. The Action Plan aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the actions we are taking to respond to climate change and reduce environmental impacts across Colchester. We aim to keep the action plan updated at least twice a year to show residents the progress we are achieving and to keep us accountable. This summary of achievements has been published at a similar time to when the first progress update of the action plan was produced (March 2025).

There has been lots of progress made with the Action Plan throughout 2025 and the beginning of 2026.

The current Action Plan is set out into 8 different themes, and key progress and achievements made against actions within each of the themes is outlined below:

Theme 1 – Reduce emissions from our buildings and fleet

- Our overall greenhouse gas emissions in financial year 23/24 were 5379.83 tonnes, a reduction of 13.1% since the baseline recorded in financial year 2018/19. In the 23/24 financial year, the impact of the change of heating system at Rowan House from gas fired boilers to air source heat pumps powered by electricity was seen as was the continued use of our electric fleet vehicles, with the total number of fleet vehicles increasing to 20. Our greenhouse gas report for financial year 23/24 can be found [here](#); this explains how different Council services and operations contribute to the production of greenhouse gas emissions. Work to calculate our greenhouse gas emissions for financial year 24/25 are beginning, with the report to be published towards the end of 2025.
- Installation of several measures to improve energy efficiency and save water at Leisure World Colchester. This included:
 - An innovative [water filtration system](#) serving the Fitness Pool. The system treats pool water on site removing impurities and waste before returning this water to the pool (avoiding water being released to sewage systems every time pool water is topped up)
 - Pool covers on Fitness and Teaching pools. These are applied to the pools overnight, helping to reduce heat loss from the pool water and thus reducing the energy needed to maintain suitable water temperatures.
 - Energy efficient smart motors that will improve the operating efficiency of air handling units that contribute to ventilation of Leisure World.

The pool covers and smart motors were funded through the Sport England [Swimming Pool Support Fund](#) and the water filtration system was funded by the Council. Monitoring of these initiatives will take place during 2025 to understand how they are contributing to reducing energy and water use alongside the cost of utility bills.

- 530 [switchee](#) thermostats have been installed in our council housing properties to monitor use of heating and to detect likelihood of damp and mould occurring. Colchester Borough Homes staff can use this data to provide advice to residents about heating their properties appropriately and to help them access support for paying their energy bills where required. This data informs a wider assessment of resident vulnerability in the Council's managed housing.
- Continued delivery of funded energy efficiency works to council homes using the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. 48 out of the total 105 properties have been received energy efficiency upgrades, with grant funding used to date totalling £828,000.
- Continued work by the Council's energy manager to identify opportunities for saving energy (and money) on the Council's utility bills. This has been achieved through analysing utility bills to ensure these are accurate and improving monitoring of energy usage to target further opportunities for energy savings amongst other tasks.

Theme 2 – Produce and use renewable energy

- Begun a feasibility study for the creation of a new heat network based at the University of Essex but with the heat generated potentially being used in other areas of Colchester including parts of council housing and parts of the Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community that is to be built. The study is set to complete in May 2025.
- We have fed into consultations and have viewed data linked to the Government's work on developing [heat network zoning](#). This work will identify key areas for heat network development across the UK, with legislation introducing the need for buildings that meet a set criterion (based on its use, size, energy use, if it is new amongst other factors) to connect to a heat network. It will mean some of our buildings will likely have to connect to heat networks in future and this could provide a source of low carbon heat generation for these buildings.
- Supporting Essex County Council with their project to create Local Area Energy Plan for Essex, a spatial plan for identifying the changes required to the local energy system to accommodate building and transport decarbonisation and a

wider change in the supply and use of energy. We will integrate any relevant knowledge, projects and plans specific to Colchester within the Essex plan.

- Early investigation of opportunities for increasing renewable energy generation on some of our assets, particularly for installing rooftop solar on our buildings and creating car park solar canopies, as part of a joint project with other local authorities in the North Essex Councils Climate Change Partnership.

Theme 3 – Enhance biodiversity and protect our natural environment

- Completion of the river restoration project at Cymbeline Meadows to contribute to improving water quality. Cattle troughs with solar powered pumps were installed to help to stop the cows accessing the river for drinking water and damaging the riverbank. Coir rolls were installed in the river to provide support to the riverbank and to reduce erosion. They also narrow the river at key points to increase the speed, reducing silt and build up of plant growth.
- Funding is being sought to deliver improvement works at [Ferry Marsh](#) that will be of benefit to the public and biodiversity. This is mainly associated with improving drainage at the site to reduce flood risk to nearby populations and use of the Wivenhoe Trail.
- Continued work to manage our green spaces for beneficial outcomes for biodiversity, including exploring increasing the number of wildflower areas and ongoing use of non-peat based composts.
- In response to the Government’s Environment Act that placed a strengthened ‘[biodiversity duty](#)’ on public authorities, we are in the process of producing a report detailing all of our policies and actions that are supporting the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Colchester, both currently and into the future. This will be published at the end of 2025/in early 2026.

Theme 4 – Supporting active travel and improving air quality

- Progress with wayfinding projects to support walking and cycling in Colchester. This includes installation of a drought resistant planting scheme on the Albert Roundabout as part of existing wayfinding in place between North Station and the city centre, and signage as part of the [Walk with Words](#) wayfinding project. A new wayfinding project for signage between Colchester Hospital and Colchester Station, supported by the hospital and Greater Anglia is also being planned.
- Development of the [Cycle Colchester website](#) which contains lots of information on cycle security, maintenance, bike hire, cycle groups and a [cycling map](#) which displays off and on road cycle routes around the Colchester urban area as well as other features like cycle parking facilities. There are also plans to create a paper version of the cycling map.

- Supporting continued action on air quality, including updating the content in the [schools clean air toolkit](#) and promoting it to schools and consulting on a new [Air Quality Action Plan](#). Permission has also been received from Essex County Council for the reinstallation of the ‘switch off your engine’ signage in Brook Street and East Hill, with a planning application to be submitted for this.
- Increasing work to support businesses with encouraging active travel and improving air quality, with a new staff member joining in October 2024 focussing on engagement with businesses. An e-learning module on air quality is being developed for businesses and a series of visits and meetings with businesses are being carried out to offer support with all things active travel.
- Continue to promote the [Secure Bike Park](#), alongside the [Bikewise campaign](#). We are investigating whether permanent signage that provides information on cycle security can be installed near cycle racks. Recently we also secured funding from Greater Anglia to install [4 pay as you go secure bike lockers](#) at Colchester Town rail station.
- Introducing an e-bike/e-Cargo bike loan scheme for residents, alongside the business loan schemes. Promotion for the resident scheme has recently begun with more information on both schemes available on the [Council’s website](#).
- Supporting the rollout of the [Essex Pedal Power](#) project which provides free bikes to residents in Greenstead (as well as in other areas of Essex) for leisure and/or work purposes. As of the end of December 2024, 798 of the 825 available bikes had been given to Greenstead residents. The project has also supported residents to get access to free cycle training, cycle maintenance support and led rides to support their use of the bikes.
- Attending a range of events to attend to promote active travel choices and support in Colchester. We are also hosting a ‘Spring onto your bike’ event at the Secure Bike Park on the 16th April 2025 to help encourage people to find out more information about cycling projects, cycle maintenance and more!
- Working with a range of organisations in supporting the development of public transport solutions in Colchester. This includes working with [Transport East](#), a regional transport body advocating for transport investment in the East of England, who submitted a bid to Government to increase train services to and from Colchester Town station.

Theme 5 – Provide sustainable waste management and support residents to reduce, reuse and recycle

- Creation of the new [Recycling and Waste Strategy 2025-2040](#) for Colchester, aligning with and supporting Essex County Council’s [Waste Strategy for Essex](#),

both of which have been approved. However, in light of changes to the 'Simpler Recycling' regulations from Government mainly associated with recommendations for collection methods for recycling, we are reviewing the new strategy with a consultant and slight changes to the strategy may be made as a result.

- As part of our business waste service, we begun offering food waste collections to businesses in October 2024 and from February 2025 have enabled businesses to also have plastics, paper and card, glass, cans and food waste collected for recycling. More details on our business waste service are available on our [website](#).
- Cracking down on fly tipping, including installing CCTV cameras and increasing warden patrols in litter and fly tipping hotspot areas. We been supporting the [Love Essex 'SCRAP fly tipping' campaign](#) which aims to raise awareness about how to responsibly dispose of waste. Work with the community has increased which has reinforced the important of collective action in addressing issues like graffiti and fly tipping. In support of this, several 'make a difference' days are being planned to enable residents to support clean ups in their local areas.

Theme 6 – Working with others to take environmental action

- Continued regular communication with town and parish councils, providing environmental project updates, news and grants which might be of interest.
- Significant increase in ranger led events, forest school bookings and kids holiday activities being organised through the education rangers at Highwoods Country Park who have been in place as part of a 2 year funded project. Visit our [website](#) to see the range of events and activities on offer!
- Working with the North Essex Councils Climate Change Partnership (NECCP) on joint projects, one associated with developing energy generation/energy efficiency projects and the other on the creation of a climate risk register.
- Working with Essex County Council and [Community Climate Action UK](#) to plan a workshop to enable residents to brainstorm and develop ideas for local energy projects that can deliver benefits for their communities such as improving energy security, reducing energy bills, increasing renewable energy generation and more. The workshop is scheduled to be held at Firstsite on 18th May 2025.

Theme 7 – Sustainable planning, economy and energy efficient homes

- Continued promotion of energy advice and support services available to residents in Colchester. During November 2024 – January 2025, 10 pop up events, coffee mornings and community group sessions were attended to promote the support in addition to the information being shared with partner

organisations. Over 60 residents used the [Better Housing, Better Health](#) phone service between September 2024 – January 2025 receiving a range of support including provision of fuel vouchers, advice on pay plans for energy bills, funding for small energy efficiency measures such as thermal curtains and helping with registration for energy company priority service registers.

- Promotion of energy grant and discount schemes that can support with the installation of energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures such as insulation, boiler replacement and solar panel installation. The two main schemes promoted have been the Energy Company Obligation Phase 4 (ECO4) and the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2). 34 properties have been signed off for energy efficient upgrades through the ECO4 Flex scheme (the Flex scheme delivery is supported by local authorities and has wider eligibility criteria than the standard ECO4 scheme). 23 properties have so far received energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures through the HUG2 scheme, with a further 9 currently receiving upgrades and 2 awaiting the outcomes of surveys. A new service for residents to enquire about grant funding opportunities for energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures for their home has recently been made available. The service is called [Heat Essex](#) and is run by [Happy Energy Solutions](#).
- Supported the development of the Net Zero Homes and Buildings Policy led by Essex County Council's (ECC) Climate Action Planning Unit. The policy sets higher standards than current building regulations for the building of new homes and buildings that are compliant with achieving net zero emissions. The Council included this as a proposed new policy within the Preferred Options Local Plan that was considered by the Local Plan Committee in February 2025. Consultation on the Preferred Options Local Plan has been delayed while further evidence is collated.

Theme 8 – Change the way we work to achieve our climate commitment

- Promoting the Council's environmental awareness e-learning module within staff networks. 10% of staff have now completed the training (as of March 2025), up from a 2% completion rate in June 2024.
- Updating the Council's travel plan, a document produced to support and encourage staff to use active travel modes (e.g. walking, cycling, public transport) to travel to and for work. This included introducing an offer for staff to lease an electric vehicle through an electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme (the scheme enables staff to make monthly payments for a vehicle from their salary before tax, hence reducing the amount of tax that is required to be paid). The Council recently received a 'very good' accreditation for its travel plan from the [Modeshift Stars](#) programme which recognises organisations showing excellence in creating effective travel plans.

- Updating the [Council's Events Policy](#) to include more information on environmental considerations. This occurred following the participation in a pilot project led by the [Vision for Sustainable Events](#) and [Julie's Bicycle](#) that looked to understand the potential for introducing minimum environmental standards for outdoor events. The overall report and findings from the project can be found [here](#), as well as a summary written about the Council's involvement and outcomes [here](#).
- Researched climate projections for Colchester, alongside understanding more about the risks posed by climate change and how these could impact Council operations. This fed into the creation of an adaptation report we produced as part of participating in the '[Adaptation Reporting Power](#)' pilot project for local authorities organised by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). This report and summary information can be viewed on our [website](#).
- The Museums service has continued to support environmental initiatives within their area. This includes improving the thermal performance of buildings through works on the roof and windows at Hollytrees Museum, alongside securing funding for rooftop repairs to tackle issues with water ingress and damp at Colchester Castle. Also, National Lottery Heritage stage 1 capital redevelopment funding was awarded for the Natural History Museum which will help with ensuring the museum will be more energy efficient once it is redeveloped.