

Colchester City Council Climate Emergency Action Plan

- Summary of Achievements 2023-2024

Colchester City Council published an updated Climate Emergency Action Plan in January 2023. The Action Plan aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the actions the Council was taking to respond to climate change and reduce its environmental impact across Colchester. The Plan also included a section at the end containing some ideas for residents to reduce their own environmental impact.

There has been lots of progress made with the Action Plan throughout 2023 and 2024. We are in the process of reviewing our Action Plan to bring actions up to date, and to add in new actions that we are going to be taking forward.

The current Action Plan is set out into 9 different themes, and progress against each of the themes is outlined below:

Theme 1 – Reduce emissions from our buildings and fleet

- Overall greenhouse emissions recorded in financial year 22/23 were 5547.28 tonnes, a reduction of 10.5% since the baseline recorded in FY 2018/19. This included reporting on the impact of the introduction of the Council's electric fleet vehicles on the Council's emissions which demonstrated a saving of 31.1 tonnes in greenhouse gas emissions. The Council's greenhouse gas report for financial year 22/23 can be found [here](#). Preliminary figures for financial year 2023/24 suggest emissions reduction of roughly 3-4% since 2022/23 (13-14% reduction on the 2018/19 financial year baseline).
- Purchased 8 new electric vehicles in 2023 for the North Essex Parking Partnership. There are now 20 electric vehicles in the Council's total fleet of 128 vehicles.
- Creation of an updated Fleet transition strategy to outline the Council's latest thinking about options for transitioning the fleet to low emission alternatives by 2030. This can be viewed [here](#).
- Completed full refurbishment of Rowan House, which includes improvements from an environmental perspective, including swapping out gas boilers for air source heat pumps, installing LED lighting, roof insulation and a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system to circulate fresh air throughout the building without the need for opening windows.
- Commissioned research on offsetting to understand considerations relevant to local authorities when wanting to offset. This includes considering costs, opportunities for verification, project types and locations and more.

- Secured £170,187 of funding to improve the energy efficiency of Leisure World Colchester through the [Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund](#). The funding will go towards the installation of pool covers at the facility as well as more energy efficient motors that will be installed on air handling units that provide ventilation to the facility.
- Worked to identify opportunities to save energy (and money) across the Council's buildings. The Council hired an energy manager in 2023 who has led on this work, and has done energy audits at several key buildings and got a better understanding of the energy and water use from our buildings. They have so far identified over £100,000 in savings on energy and water bills.

Theme 2 – Adapting to a changing climate

- Presentation of nature-based sea defence project to King Charles as part of the royal visit to celebrate Colchester's modern city status. The project investigated the feasibility of placing oyster shells on the seabed to help act as a breakwater to reduce wave energy and thus reduce coastal erosion. The project is not currently going ahead unless funding can be secured.
- Successful in signing up to the Government's national climate adaptation reporting pilot for local authorities to test completing an adaptation report including a climate change risk assessment and action plan. The Council has been researching past and present weather to analyse the impacts climate change has already had in Colchester and the East of England through extreme weather events and environmental damage. Future climatic projections have also been analysed to determine climatic risks that could impact Council operations.

Theme 3 – Renewable Energy

- The Council has been researching and keeping up to date with the outcomes of the Government's Energy Act, particularly that of the Heat Network Zoning proposals which will impact how heat is generated and used across Colchester, including in Council owned buildings. The Council has provided a comprehensive response to the Government's consultation on the topic and co-ordinated conversation about the topic with other North Essex local authorities.
- Proposals have been drawn up for a solar farm and microgrid at Seven Saints Farm. These works are currently on pause, as is the Northern Gateway Heat Network, while the future of Colchester Amphora Energy Limited is determined.

Theme 4 – Enhance biodiversity and protect our natural environment

- Re-enforced engagement with Colchester Borough Homes on supporting them to phase out the use of glyphosate on their green spaces, using approaches like

strimming and mulching to manage weed growth. We have continued to learn about the effectiveness of alternative products and approaches for managing weed growth.

- The Trees for Years programme, now in its 17th year, has given away over 10,000 free trees, shrubs and fruit bushes to residents in February and March 2024. The plants given away have all been chosen for their ability to promote wildlife in gardens and value to our local bee population. This event was funded by the Woodland and Biodiversity Project, now in its concluding phase. The events were a success as we got great feedback from residents about the scheme and how efficient the service was.
- The [Community Orchards](#) project is back up and running as we had a delivery of 170 orchard trees in January 2024, with apple, pear, plum and cherry tree varieties being given away to schools, community groups and charities.
- The Council has been understanding the potential opportunities that the mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain for new developments can pose, for example for ways that BNG investment could go into Council owned green spaces or green spaces across the city to boost nature recovery. This fits in with work Essex County Council are leading on the creation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy to identify areas to improve or create new habitat to provide the greatest benefit for biodiversity and the natural environment.

Theme 5 – Facilitate sustainable and active travel and improve air quality

- Trial of the eCargo bike Christmas delivery service to deliver Christmas shopping to shoppers' homes, this year with deliveries provided for free. This was completed in Winter 2023/24 replacing 516 miles of van deliveries with electric cargo bikes, equating to at least 103g of NOx saved and fewer vehicles congesting the city centre.
- Opened the [Secure Bike Hub](#), a first for Essex, a pin coded building in the city centre where people can lock their bikes up for £1 a day. In the same facility residents can now hire electric bikes and electric cargo bikes and can access support with bike maintenance in the neighbouring Colchester Bike Kitchen.
- Ongoing promotion of the [CAREless Pollution campaign](#), with murals being created such as that in St Mary's Car Park to promote actions to improve air quality. An update to the CAREless Pollution schools toolkit is also being rolled out with primary schools with a new officer starting to support this engagement.
- Supporting the introduction of hire electric bikes provided by TIER in Colchester, complementing the electric scooters that are also available.

- Supported the rollout of the Essex Pedal Power project which provides free bikes to residents in Greenstead for leisure and/or work purposes. As of the end of June 2024, 382 of the 800 available bikes have been given to residents. The project has also supported residents get access to free cycle training and led rides to support their use of the bikes.
- Measured reductions in air pollution in air quality management areas across Colchester, leading to the removal of two of these areas because of the improvement in air quality.
- Relaunched the [Bikewise campaign](#) to promote secure bike parking facilities, secure bike locks to use, alongside promoting the benefits of using the Bike Register to help recover stolen bikes.
- Trialling a new cycle training option alongside Essex County Council called 'Bikeability boost' for year 5 and 6 children to build upon the bikeability training these children receive at their primary schools, in order to encourage greater uptake of cycling after leaving primary school. Support offered includes help with basic bike maintenance, assemblies pre and post training with parents so they understand what their child is learning and more.

Theme 6 – Provide sustainable waste management and support residents to reduce, reuse and recycle

- Development of a draft Recycling and Waste Strategy for Colchester which went out to public consultation in July 2024. The Strategy will align with required changes for consistent recycling collections as outlined in the Environment Act, alongside working with changes made across Essex through the new Waste Strategy for Essex that is concurrently being developed.
- Introduced a new [Saturday household collection service](#) for bulky items not able to be collected at the kerbside for recycling, focussing on areas where residents have low disposable incomes. This helps residents to dispose of items responsibly if they cannot access a Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- Introduced partnership with Waste Investigations Support and Enforcement (WISE) service to help crack down on littering across Colchester, with patrols across Colchester helping to enforce this.
- Continue to maintain high recycling rates and low rates of residual waste produced, performing well in the Essex region.
- Continued introduction of [smart waste bins](#) across areas of Colchester such as on West Mersea that help to reduce waste overflows and improve collection efficiencies by compacting waste to fit more waste in bins and notifying staff when bins need emptying.

Theme 7 – Enable partnerships and community action for sustainability and low carbon development

- Promoting and supporting communities and schools to apply to the [Essex Climate Action Challenge Fund](#) for funding for environmental projects such as funding insulation programmes and the creation of forest schools. Several organisations based in Colchester benefitted from the programme including Community Energy Colchester, Stanway Fiveways Primary School and Heathlands Church of England Primary School. The fund has now closed.
- Supporting delivery of the 3rd volunteer run Eco Festival in Colchester Castle Park, with stalls promoting sustainable travel, energy saving, biodiversity projects and more.
- Delivered presentations and in-person engagement with several town and parish councils in Colchester to support engagement around various environmental projects.
- Working with businesses and organisations across Colchester to develop and implement workplace travel plans through [Colchester Travel Plan Club](#) (CTPC). CTPC is run from within the Council, providing advice on promoting sustainable workplace travel, hosting meetings to discuss the latest projects and support, as well as facilitating access to discounts and offers on public transport including the Park and Ride and other bus services.
- Worked with the University of Essex on several projects such as ‘[Walk with words](#)’ wayfinding and active travel project and the [Miyawaki forest project at Unity Primary Academy](#). We also signed the civic agreement between the Council and University of Essex in 2023, sharing our approach to net zero and tackling climate change and committing to work with each other on these issues.

Theme 8 – Sustainable Planning, built environment and green economy

- Creation and adoption of 3 new climate emergency supplementary planning documents (SPDs) to provide best practice guidance on delivering sustainable developments. The topics of these SPDs are climate change, active travel and biodiversity and can be viewed [here](#).
- Worked with Essex County Council to understand the evidence base for building net zero homes in Essex. The [Essex Climate Action Planning Unit](#) has been developing this evidence base, and the Council will consider the possibility of introducing a policy as part of the Local Plan to reflect the building of net zero homes in Colchester. Local Plan Committee agreed for a consultation to be issued on the ECC net zero policies as part of the Local Plan Review’s iterative

Issues and Options engagement asking stakeholders whether these policies are suitable and appropriate for Colchester. This was issued in April 2024.

- Introduction of a partnership with the National Energy Foundation's '[Better Housing, Better Health](#)' service to offer people energy advice and facilitate access to grant funding for energy efficiency measures. This service has helped over 100 residents to access energy advice, be forwarded for energy grants support or access fuel vouchers since the partnership began in late September 2023 – May 2024.
- Delivery of the Government funded Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phases 2 and 3, leading to spends of £121,167.46 and £392,337.39 respectively in the two phases, upgrading a total of 62 homes (26 in LAD2 and 36 in LAD3) to improve their energy efficiency and reduce energy costs for those living on low incomes and in cold homes. Funding was also secured to deliver further energy efficiency improvements for residents through the [Home Upgrade Grant](#), focussed on improving the energy efficiency of homes off the gas grid for heating. Promotion began in Autumn 2023 and the project will conclude in March 2025.
- Working with ECC on the Green Skills agenda to ensure Colchester has a workforce fit for the future and enable opportunities for those already in work to re-skill/upskill to realise the potential from 'greening' the economy. Local further education institution, [Colchester Institute](#), has recently set up a net zero centre for a range of courses to train people (mainly those in existing commercial companies) in installing low carbon technologies such as solar photovoltaics, electric vehicle charging, heat pumps, solar thermal and more, enabling installers to upskill in these areas. The centre is due to open in September 2024.

Theme 9 – Change the way we work to achieve our climate commitment

- Developed an elearning programme for staff to learn more about climate change, and the actions that they can take in their professional and personal lifestyles to reduce their environmental impact.
- Introduced a pilot member training programme on carbon literacy, with similar aims to our staff elearning, with a 4 hour workshop delivered.
- Successfully signing up to the [Green Events Code of Practice \(GECOP\) pilot](#) project being led by [Vision 2025](#) and [Julie's Bicycle](#) to enable the Council to learn more about ways it can encourage and mandate the reduction of environmental impacts produced from outdoor events taking place on Council owned green spaces. The Council will be testing the use of an environmental advisory and assessment tool with event organisers to understand how they are trying to reduce environmental impacts in the events they deliver and to identify the

barriers they face in trying to do this. The Council's Events Policy is also being reviewed for improvements that could be made related to event sustainability.

- Work on improving the Council's travel plan to promote staff sustainable travel to work. This included supporting free Park and Ride travel for staff, pool bikes for travelling to meetings and more. Recently an electric vehicle has also been procured which can be used for staff business travel instead of their own personal cars.