



# **Warwickshire Climate Alliance response to Warwickshire County Council's climate emergency plan.**

**June 2021**



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# Background

## Warwickshire County Council's (WCC) Climate Emergency Plan

**The UN Secretary General, General António Guterres, described it as a 'code red for humanity'. The need for action on the climate crisis is urgent and all levels of government in the UK have a part to play, including WCC.**

In August 2021 the United Nation's (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a landmark report saying human activity is changing the climate in unprecedented and sometimes irreversible ways.

In July 2019 WCC unanimously declared a climate emergency and committed to make all corporate buildings and transport fleet carbon neutral by 2030 or sooner. There is no single document describing the climate emergency plan. WCC say they have integrated climate change into everything that they do, and how they work with partners. Therefore, the climate change plan is contained within the Council Plan 2020-2025. There is also a Covid Recovery plan which includes a priority around climate change.

### Documents considered in the writing of this report were:

- [The Council Plan 2020-2025<sup>1</sup>](#)
- [The Covid-19 Recovery Plan<sup>2</sup>](#)
- [Making Warwickshire Sustainable for Future Generations: Report of the Climate Change Adaption Task and Finish Group<sup>3</sup>](#)
- [Making Warwickshire Sustainable for Future Generations: Report of the Climate Change Mitigation Task and Finish Group<sup>4</sup>](#)





## Who are Warwickshire Climate Alliance (WCA)?

WCA was formed in 2020 as a means for people from different groups to work together. The active members come from across the county and a wide range of different backgrounds – from academia, local small businesses, local government, the health sector, and energy providers. We are united by deep concern that despite the declarations of climate emergency made by central and local governments across the UK, the pace of reduction in our carbon emissions is nothing like what is needed to decarbonise our own economies to meet the Paris goals that we are signed up to nationally.

We organised well-attended hustings for the local elections in May 2021, and are running a variety of other campaigns including around the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) bill, and pension-fund disinvestment.

More information is available on our website:

<https://warwickshireclimatealliance.org/>

and our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/WarwickshireClimateAlliance>



# WCA assessment of the plan

## The Council Plan 2020-2025

The Council Plan 2020-2025 obviously has a very wide scope. However, only 2 of its 23 pages are devoted to climate change. Although there are further references throughout the document, there is simply not enough detail for this to be considered a robust plan designed to deal with the climate emergency. For example, page 8 'Looking forward – our action on climate change' contains 14 actions. However, 5 of them have no date attached and 10 of them contain promises without firm targets eg 'by 2030 or sooner we will let a contract for and provide charging points for electric vehicles', with no mention of a target for the number of charging points.

## The Covid-19 Recovery Plan

It is not clear when the Plan was written. It says that it sets out priorities for the 'next six months', but also mentions preparing for a possible second wave. The second wave was underway well before Christmas 2020, so this Plan must have been written in mid-late 2020. Therefore the 10 priorities are already (June 2021) out of date. It also promises to deliver a refresh of the Council Plan in the 'next six months', and that there will be a combined Plan available describing priorities and actions from April 2021. At the time of writing in August 2021, this refreshed combined Plan was not yet available on the Council's website.

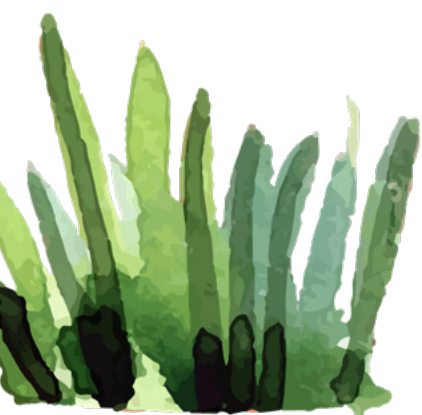
The Recovery Plan sets out 10 priorities, of which climate change is number 8. Priority 5 is to support business and grow the economy. It seems that the Council have not accepted the reality that we cannot have infinite growth on a finite planet. This dissonance must be resolved, and a different approach to growth adopted in order to tackle the climate emergency. There are three measures of success listed under the 'climate change' heading. However, they are light on detail.

For example, what is the baseline for ‘increased biodiversity and tree planting’, and how will this be measured? Much work in this area is carried out by volunteers, under the direction of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, for example. Yet, there is no provision for a re-assessment of the measure if there was a further ‘stay at home’ order during an anticipated second wave. We now know that there was a ‘stay at home’ order for much of the tree planting season January-March 2021 so it is likely that we have not seen ‘increased tree planting’ in this period, however it is measured.

The Plan then expands on each priority and climate change has 15 actions put forward. Some of these have clearly been delivered – the Green Shoots funding initiative, Warwickshire Switch and Save, and group buying of solar panels, for example. And some are laudable such as action 12 to embed climate change into everything the Council does. However, these need to be backed up by real action. One example is investment in transport - at the moment over 70% of Warwickshire County Council’s transport capital investment planned for the next four years is in road schemes for motor vehicles and the only mention of transport in the 15 actions is action 11 to run an active travel campaign and develop proposals for investment in walking and cycling infrastructure. This falls far short of embedding climate change into transport policy.

## **WCC’s plans and the Local Authority Climate Plan Checklist for Developing and Reviewing Action Plans**

We had intended to compare the Plans published by the Council to the [Local Authority Climate Plan Checklist for Developing and Reviewing Action Plans](#)<sup>5</sup> (the Framework), published in 2020 by the groups [Declare a Climate Emergency](#)<sup>6</sup>, [Friends of the Earth](#)<sup>7</sup>, and [Centre for Alternative Technology](#)<sup>8</sup>. However, the Plans published to date by the Council are not detailed enough for a meaningful comparison to be made. Some of the recommendations in the Framework, such as ‘the Plan development should be led a senior lead officer with a cabinet member/committee responsible for developing and delivering the plan’ may well be true, but the documents currently available do not make that explicit. Many of the recommendations, including that ‘the Plan should include education and schools as a key component across the different action themes in the Plan’, are clearly not being met by the current documents.





The Framework includes links to many examples of good practice:

**Set out target dates for actions and achievements, including interim emissions reduction target dates**

The Plan should clearly lay out timelines and target completion dates for actions the local authority will be responsible for, as well as their desired targets for actions taken by partners and residents. This should include ongoing as well as short, medium and long-term goals. There are some excellent examples from [Bath and North East Somerset Council](#)<sup>9</sup>, [London Borough of Wandsworth Council](#)<sup>10</sup>, and [Exeter City Council](#)<sup>11</sup>

**Identify the roles and actions needed across all sectors and identify key bodies to drive them, with reference to the target dates for actions**

The local authority will not be able to implement a comprehensive plan on its own. For each action, the Plan should identify who is responsible for delivering it. This may be the local authority, the local authority in partnership or other organisations/groups. This could include: local residents; local statutory organisations; VCSE/third sector; anchor institutions; local businesses; NGOs; other councils in the area; Distribution Network Operators (DNOs); Utility companies; the National Government; Arts organisations; Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs); community organisations. The Plan should set out how the local authority will work with these partners (e.g. through a climate action commission, climate boards or partnership) and how partners can help steer the delivery of the plan. [The Cool Wirral Partnership](#)<sup>12</sup> is a great example of this

**Identify the skills and capacity needed to transform the local economy at the scale and pace needed**

The Plan should include how and when these skills will be met. Education providers and careers services also need to be upskilled in identifying future employment trends and opportunities. Hull has a strong focus on education and skills, green jobs and fair transition in [their action plan](#)<sup>13</sup>.



**Outline how the local authority will support programs that bring people together to work to reduce emissions and achieve sustainability**

The local authority can increase community resilience by supporting programs that increase social cohesion, community engagement, and local self-sufficiency. Ideas that address climate action as well as community resilience include: community repair workshops; community fridges; community gardens; local food hubs; tool sharing clubs; kitchens for people to cook food and take it home; energy advice cafes and bicycle giveaway schemes. Some of this will be addressed by recipients of the Green Shoots grants. There are many examples of these schemes around the country, but where there are gaps in community provision, the council could adopt a capacity-building approach to support communities to develop these schemes.

**Recognise the intergenerational inequity of climate change impacts**

The Plan should seek to include youth at all stages to help ensure they have the tools to be resilient in a less climate stable future. The average age of councillors in England in 2019 was 59, with 43% aged 65 or over<sup>14</sup>. It is not this age group that will be most affected by climate change, but young people. WCC's plans should ensure that the old do not sacrifice the future of the young by insisting on the retention of inappropriate attitudes towards consumption. Innovative ways must be found to take account of this inequity in decision-making. An excellent example has been set locally by Ryton-on-Dunsmore Parish Council's consultation of its young people in the development of its Neighbourhood Plan<sup>15</sup>.

**Ensure the needs of under-represented groups will be included in future Plans**

There should be a plan to ensure that currently under-represented groups are actively supported in being part of the changing landscape. Bristol City Council's Climate Strategy<sup>16</sup> acknowledges the need for supporting greater diversity in the environmental sector. The vision in their 'One City Climate Strategy' is based on five key principles. The first of these is 'fair' which places the need for a just transition at the centre of the strategy.



### Include the arts sector

The arts sector can help with delivering climate action by engaging communities, creating the stories for how we want our cities to look, and contributing to placemaking. In Sweden, a group of cities have employed a Chief Storyteller to help write the future of a carbon neutral 2030<sup>17</sup>. Closer to home, Aberdeen City Council supported an arts festival focussed on involving communities in the story of our changing climate<sup>18</sup>.





# WCA recommendations

## 1 Develop an improved action plan

Warwickshire has not produced a single document describing the plan to tackle the climate emergency but has taken the alternative path of including the climate strategy within the Council Plan, and the Covid Recovery Plan. This is not a problem, but these Plans are not detailed enough to constitute a robust action plan to tackle the climate emergency. An improved action plan should be developed and published as soon as practical, with the support and involvement of the public. Warwickshire Climate Alliance would be keen to be involved and have the resources to make a significant contribution. Approaches could be made to other community groups including youth activists, faith groups and many others. The Framework referenced in this document is a useful guide for what needs to be included. There is a wealth of information, ideas and suggestions in the public domain produced by multiple organisations and interest groups. Involving community groups, interested members of the public and other non-professional experts will support councillors and officers in accessing this material and making full use of it. It will also mean many possible interventions are brought to the table for consideration.

## 2 Set interim targets for carbon reductions

The plans do contain some targets, mostly with a 2030 date attached. These targets need developing into pathways of reduction showing how they will be achieved. For example, if a tree is to be planted for every Warwickshire resident by 2030, how many of these 575,000 were to be planted in the winter 2020/21 season? How many were planted and where? This information should be publicly available on a dedicated website for the climate emergency

response. Furthermore, each target should have a carbon weighting attached showing how it contributes to the reductions we need to make. Although the public consultation referenced on page 7 of the Council Plan, said increasing recycling, reuse, composting and waste reduction are a priority, these things do not achieve large carbon savings and should be weighted accordingly. Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick District Councils recently jointly commissioned Anthesis<sup>19</sup> to produce a comprehensive baseline and pathways report<sup>20</sup> including recommended carbon budgets and emissions reductions pathways and interventions. It also includes five recommendations, the first of which is 'working together to develop a joint Climate Action Plan'. WCC could use this report as an easily accessible guide to understanding the carbon emissions of the whole county and what needs to be done to bring them down to the required level, working closely with all five lower-tier local authorities.

### **3 Appoint a cabinet member whose sole responsibility is climate change and the environment**

At the moment Heather Timms holds a portfolio for Environment, Climate and Culture. WCA suggest that she be relieved of responsibility for Culture to be able to devote sufficient attention to dealing with this massively complex issue, which includes engineering one of the greatest ever changes ever to our lives. Alternatively, another cabinet member could hold the portfolio for Environment and Climate Change, allowing Heather to concentrate on Culture.

### **4 Upgrade the climate emergency working group to a committee**

The most difficult and important challenge of the twenty-first century needs the status of a council committee rather than a working group. The portfolio holder for Environment and Climate Change would hold one of the most important and demanding roles within the Council and this needs to be supported by a cross-party committee. Locally, Stratford-upon-Avon District Council have a Climate Change Panel and WCC should instigate something similar.

## **5 Allow public scrutiny of the climate emergency working group**

Currently the agendas and minutes are not publicly available, and the public is excluded from these meetings. Dealing with the climate emergency is too important a task for this secrecy. Add the agendas and minutes to the climate emergency pages on the council website, and allow for public attendance (by prior arrangement if necessary). Again, the example of Stratford-upon-Avon District Council is exemplary.

## **6 Embed the climate emergency plan into all future WCC work**

The current plans say that the climate emergency is embedded into everything the council does, but this statement is not borne out by the evidence. In early 2021 the council consulted on the A46 link road scheme, a scheme likely to lead to an increase in carbon emissions if implemented. The consultation documents contained no mention of the climate emergency or emissions targets. Examples of this kind need to be consigned to history and the climate impacts of all WCC's actions and proposed actions put front and centre of the documents and consultations.

## **7 Use the Met Office worst-case scenario in all further work**

The Report of the Climate Change Adaption Task and Finish Group focussed on the best-case scenario of the Met Office's climate change predictions for the Midlands. However, over the last several decades, it is the worst-case predictions that have turned out to be the most accurate. In preparing for any potentially damaging situation, best practice is to ensure that the worst-case scenario can be dealt with. This may waste some resources if the worst does not come to pass but avoids disaster if it does. At the very least, the use of the best-case scenario needs a sound rationale behind it, along with a realistic risk assessment of this choice. WCA believe that the consequences of using the wrong scenario are extremely serious and should be avoided as far as possible.



## Endnotes

- 1 <https://api.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/WCCC-708-483>
- 2 <https://api.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/WCCC-1980322935-1740>
- 3 <https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/s1790/07%2520Climate%2520Change%2520App%2520Cab%252019.12.16.pdf>
- 4 <https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=3545>
- 5 <https://www.climateemergency.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/V8-Checklist-for-Council-Plans-16052021.docx.pdf>
- 6 <https://www.climateemergency.uk/>
- 7 <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/>
- 8 <https://cat.org.uk/>
- 9 <https://data.climateemergency.uk/media/data/plans/bath-and-north-east-somerset-council-f749e7b.pdf>
- 10 <https://data.climateemergency.uk/media/data/plans/london-borough-of-wandsworth-93ad29c.pdf>
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- 20 <https://www.stratford.gov.uk/doc/210437/name/Warwick%20and%20Stratford%20on%20Avon%20District%20Councils%20Baseline%20and%20Pathways%20V30.pdf>



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