

# A blueprint for accelerating climate action and a green recovery at the local level

December 2020



With support from the Local Government Association,  
London Councils and Green Alliance

## About this report

**As a group of local government, environmental and research organisations, we have come together to set out a blueprint for how the Government can accelerate climate action and a green recovery from coronavirus at the local level. Councils are an indispensable partner in reaching the UK's national target of net zero by 2050 and hitting the milestones we will need to achieve along the way. This report sets out the national leadership, policies, powers and funding needed to empower local authorities to deliver at scale, working together with communities and businesses.**

In developing our recommendations, we have drawn extensively on the direct experience of many local authorities as they develop their own climate action plans, as well as their experience at the frontline of the coronavirus response. Insight into local authorities' priorities has been gathered via conferences, surveys, and regular contact with officers and councillors responsible for council services, including through events organised by ADEPT, Ashden, LEDNet, London Councils and the Local Government Association.

We identify five immediate priorities for how government can accelerate a green recovery whilst helping to set the foundations for longer term solutions to the climate and ecological crises we face. And we set out a proposal for how national and local government can develop the partnership approach that must underpin future action. The report also contains detailed proposals for how the Government can support councils to scale up action. This is not the final word on this complex topic, and not all of the signatories have detailed policy positions on every issue. Instead, we see this as a strong starting point for the discussions that are needed between government, local authorities, and others.

The proposals we have identified are grouped according to seven themes: growing the zero and low carbon economy; retrofitting homes and buildings; decarbonising transport; delivering zero carbon planning and development that protects and enhances nature; reducing waste and encouraging sustainable consumption; restoring nature for all; and developing local authority funding, governance and accounting systems that are fit for purpose. There are, of course, actions that the Government must take centrally, for example, identifying a phase-out schedule for the use of gas-fired heating in new and existing homes and businesses, but it is not the purpose of this document to identify these.

This is the first updated version of our blueprint. We will periodically update it in light of changing external circumstances, and as we continue to work with a wide range of organisations in order to secure councils the powers and resources they need to address the climate and ecological emergencies within the Covid-19 context.

### *Signatories:*

- Ashden
- Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Transport and Planning (ADEPT)
- Friends of the Earth
- Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment (Imperial College London)
- Greenpeace UK
- London Environment Directors' Network (LEDNet)
- Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN) - at LSE, University of Edinburgh, University of Leeds and Queens University Belfast
- Solace

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We welcome feedback on our proposals, and engagement from any organisation that wishes to support this work through closer collaboration.

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# Tackling the climate and ecological emergencies and delivering a green recovery

**The Covid-19 pandemic continues to be an unprecedented shock to our lives, but we have seen an amazing collective response at the local level, including from staff in local government. As major challenges to our wellbeing, our local communities, and economies continue, we must find a way to address the health, nature and climate crises together with a focus on local delivery. A green and fair recovery and meeting the UK's 2050 net zero carbon target will be dependent on empowering and resourcing the local response.**

## **Why we need a green and fair recovery**

The Covid-19 pandemic has raised many fundamental questions about the way we live our lives. Amongst other things it is a stark reminder that prevention is better than cure. As we move forward we need to translate that into a renewed commitment to tackling the climate and ecological crises, with a recognition that they are connected; the threat to human life and resilient economic activity is increased by damage to natural systems.

We know that there is strong public support for green recovery. Amidst the tragedy and stress of the pandemic, communities are valuing time spent in local green spaces, and many people have adapted to working remotely, spending more time in their local area. We have seen that individuals, communities and businesses are willing and able to adapt their behaviour to protect public health. A poll in mid-April found that only nine per cent of Britons wanted to return to life as normal after the end of the lockdown. In June 79 per cent of Climate assembly members - a unique gathering of more than 100 people from all walks of life - agreed that: 'Steps taken by the Government to help the economy recover should be designed to help achieve net-zero.'

As we recover, we must reduce the inequalities that Covid-19 has helped to lay bare. For example, places with high levels of air pollution have seen higher levels of coronavirus cases, and poor diet has also been linked to coronavirus susceptibility. Local place-making is needed to support the wellbeing of people and the environment, including through access to nature, ability to exercise for health, and access to essential services.

The Government's Climate Change Committee (CCC) has advised that action to strengthen the economy can, and should, also deliver on our climate goals. In its May 2020 letter to the Prime Minister, the Committee said that 'Actions towards net-zero emissions and to limit the damages from climate change will help rebuild the UK with a stronger economy and increased resilience.' This is supported by research from the Local Government Association which has shown that 700,000 direct jobs could be created in England's low-carbon and renewable energy economy by 2030, rising to more than 1.18 million by 2050.

## **The Ten Point Plan**

On 18th November 2020, the Prime Minister announced his Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. We welcome that government sees green investment as an opportunity to deliver significant jobs and growth, and not as a cost or add on. Like others, we have been calling throughout the pandemic for this to be a green recovery.

However, the Plan is only a start on the ambitious policy overhaul needed to demonstrate real international climate leadership in the run up to 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26). While the phase-out of petrol and diesel cars and the pledge to build a much larger offshore wind industry are very welcome, a bolder approach to renewable energy and ending gas-fired heating in our homes is still needed. We need more detailed plans and a coherent policy framework - for example, the role of planning is critical to creating sustainable and resilient places and is not just a vehicle for delivering volumes of houses as set out in the recent White Paper.

A green recovery must choose jobs and health, recognising that investment in a green recovery can create sustainable economic growth, public health, and social inclusion. Achieving this will also require investment in behavioural change, access to green spaces, and adaptation to current and emerging climate change impacts: we cannot rely on technological solutions alone.

### **Why local action and community engagement is vital**

Councils are an indispensable partner in reaching the UK's world-leading legislative target to reach net zero carbon by 2050, something that must be highlighted in the run up to the international climate summit, COP26, in November 2021. Councils' unique insight into local communities and circumstances, their service delivery and regulatory functions, and their convening power enable them to drive carbon emissions reductions and develop climate resilient services across their whole area in ways that can also deliver better public health, reduced inequalities, a healthier environment and thriving local economies. And with around 75 per cent of councils already having declared a Climate Emergency, we know that they are ready to play their part. To deliver this shared agenda, the Government's approach to net zero must therefore put place-based action at its heart.

The important role of councils has been demonstrated in their response to the Covid-19 crisis, including identifying and supporting vulnerable residents, joining up service delivery across agencies, and keeping central government on top of intelligence in every local authority area, often on a daily basis. This shows how councils can inform government policy and its implementation on the ground in a way that makes sense locally.

In its letter, the CCC sets out a list of principles and recommendations, including reskilling the workforce, retrofitting homes, encouraging active travel, and restoring nature. Our blueprint shows how the Committee's five specific measures can be rapidly implemented at the local level, with the right support in place.

We also know that there is public support for local place-based action. The UK Climate Assembly, commissioned by six select committees, concluded that there should not be a 'one size fits all' approach to important issues such as transport and housing and that communities must be able to shape solutions.

Community engagement and community projects will be critical to local delivery, especially for more challenging actions such as traffic reduction and the transformation of heating. Across the country, communities are leading the way with innovative climate initiatives including nature preservation, community energy schemes, local food growing and tackling fuel poverty. Working together with local authorities, community action can achieve a great deal, but more investment, particularly development funding, is needed.

### **How Government can work in partnership with local authorities**

This report sets out proposals, including five priorities outlined below, to enable councils to play their part in delivering on the Government's net zero target. Further support is needed to reach net zero ahead of 2050, as many councils have committed to do. Local authorities need multi-year supportive policy and resourcing frameworks.

Covid-19 has put local authorities in a vulnerable position, with new responsibilities and greater community needs combined with significant financial uncertainty. Although government funding to deal with the crisis has been welcome, councils have seen huge new spending demands at the same time as seeing normal revenue streams reduced or completely cut.

The Government should consider how it can join up and simplify the funding that is already available to local government, how this can be focused on carbon emission reductions, and where it should be accelerated. Simply providing certainty around medium / long-term resourcing is of considerable importance in enabling councils to deliver climate action. But there will also be a need for new funding, some of which is outlined in our five priorities below.

Of course, local authorities are by no means the only local actor delivering carbon emissions reductions. They want to work with local people, community groups and non-governmental organisations, and the wider public sector, including expert statutory agencies like the Environment Agency and Natural England, whose work is essential and needs adequate resourcing.

## Five Priorities

Below are five immediate priorities for how the government can accelerate a green recovery from coronavirus whilst helping to set the foundations for longer term solutions to the climate and ecological crises we face:

### 1. Invest in low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure

Make low carbon and climate resilient infrastructure a core priority of the revised National Industrial Strategy and Local Industrial Strategies to deliver on statutory national carbon budgets and drive local low carbon economic growth. For example, for transport, this means bringing forward investment in rail, electric buses, bus networks, segregated cycle lanes, electric vehicle charging, and digital connectivity.

### 2. Support reskilling, retraining and research for a net-zero well-adapted economy

Enable councils to use existing funding to accelerate low carbon skills development by joining up the National Skills Fund, the National Retraining Scheme and the Apprenticeship Levy at local level and align this with place-based employment and business support systems.

### 3. Upgrade our homes and buildings to ensure they are fit for the future

Establish retrofitting the UK's building stock as one of our national infrastructure investment priorities, with a target to bring homes up to a good standard by 2030 (at least EPC 'C') and investment for all schools to reach zero carbon by the same date. Ensure that local authorities have the powers they need via planning and building regulations to require all new homes to be zero carbon by 2025.

### 4. Make it easy for people to walk, cycle or use public transport and to work remotely / flexibly

Enable local authorities to facilitate the ongoing shift to remote and flexible working, active travel and public transport provision, recognising that these modes have a role to play in both the recovery from coronavirus and that they are likely to remain (even if in part) post-pandemic. Build on funds for active travel by supporting local authorities' ability to permanently re-allocate road space to pedestrians and cyclists; and improve access to digital connectivity to facilitate and encourage more permanent flexible work practices.

### 5. Accelerate tree planting, peatland restoration, green spaces, and other green infrastructure

Allocate additional funding to councils to protect and maintain parks and green spaces. Accelerate provision of new green infrastructure including tree planting and address current inequalities in access to local green space.

**To take these proposals forward and to work effectively in partnership, our number one priority is the setting up of a joint local and central government taskforce on climate change, with other stakeholders, as previously recommended by the Local Government Association.**

# Theme 1 - Growing the zero and low carbon economy

## What local authorities want to do and why

Local authorities want to create thriving, resilient economies that support a fair transition to zero carbon.

Examples of local authority action include:

- Training and skills development, in areas such as housing retrofits and heat pump installation, to support low carbon investment and local low carbon businesses;
- Targeted support for businesses, industries and workers that need to change and adapt to the zero and low carbon economy, to secure a fair transition;
- Shared local economic strategies developed with businesses and other stakeholders, which build resilience and thriving zero carbon economies; and
- Procurement approaches that aim to influence the emissions of supply chains and products, and the technological solutions needed to decarbonize our economies.

The co-benefits of this include growth in the low carbon jobs market, reduction in poverty and inequality, and resilience to external shocks.

## How government can support local authorities to scale up action

The Government's economic recovery and renewal package must recognise the crucial role of local authorities in rebuilding resilient, low carbon local economies. It will be essential for councils to have sufficient resources devolved to the local level to move from current emergency support measures to rebuilding healthy, thriving places. There needs to be a focus on reskilling the workforce for the zero and low carbon economy, but tackling the gap in basic literacy and numeracy skills could be part of a wider picture on recovery and access to green jobs. Local authorities will also need powers to use tools like business rates to support zero and low carbon businesses, including those with local supply chains.

To enable this, we believe the Government should:

### *Align strategy with the net zero climate goal*

1. Map areas across the UK at particular risk of business closures and jobs losses in the transition to net zero and develop targeted support to enable a fair transition for these areas to avoid the risk of left-behind communities.

### *Provide resources to grow the zero and low carbon economy*

2. Ensure that the Shared Prosperity Fund is designed to support zero and low carbon economic development, and that it includes provision for place-based funding, linked to Local Industrial Strategies, that enables local authorities to create a joined-up response to the climate and ecological emergencies.
3. Enable flexibility in the business rates system, so that councils can support local decarbonisation and the installation of renewable energy generation measures on business premises.

4. Support the rapid development of digital infrastructure, including funding for local authorities to roll out digital solutions that can support local business resilience, for example by reducing unnecessary commuting or business travel and enabling the adoption of effective digital communications, particularly in rural areas and amongst more deprived communities.

*Catalyse low carbon skills development*

5. Ensure local authorities have adequate skilled staff and access to training for elected members to catalyse local zero and low carbon economic development, including connected functions such as planning and development, transport, housing retrofits, sustainable consumption, public realm and green infrastructure.
6. Enable councils to use existing funding to accelerate low carbon skills development by joining up the National Skills Fund, the National Retraining Scheme and the Apprenticeship Levy at local level and align this with place-based employment and business support systems.



## Theme 2 - Retrofitting homes and buildings

### What local authorities want to do and why

Local authorities want to ensure the improvement of housing stock and the wider built environment, to reduce carbon emissions and build resilience to future climate change.

Examples of local authority action include:

- Retrofitting of social homes to high energy efficiency standards - EPC 'C', or higher where practicable (for example, Energiesprong/ Passivhaus retrofit);
- Facilitating retrofitting of private housing and commercial buildings to EPC 'C', or higher where practicable;
- Prioritising retrofit over demolishing and rebuilding in planning decisions where this is the best life-cycle solution, including sympathetic retrofit of listed buildings;
- Securing high energy efficiency standards in the public estate, including schools;
- Leveraging retrofit skills training opportunities through existing programmes; and
- Publishing open data, where ethical and anonymised, to inform retrofit design and delivery.

The co-benefits of this include alleviating or eliminating fuel poverty, supporting jobs and skills in the green economy, enabling older people to stay in their homes longer, improving educational outcomes for children and reducing physical and mental health issues.

### How government can support local authorities to scale up action

Local authorities need the resources and convening powers to scale up retrofitting programmes to cut emissions and end fuel poverty; these programmes need to be joined up with vital fire safety work already underway. They also need policy backing and relevant powers, and the development of a skilled local workforce. To enable this, we believe the Government should:

#### *Align strategy and financing with the net zero climate goal*

1. Put in place a long-term area-based delivery approach to retrofitting, with local authorities playing a core role in cutting emissions, tackling fuel poverty, creating demand, and growing local supply chains.
2. Provide local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships with the resources and support to produce and deliver local area energy plans, which can underpin an area-based low carbon home heating transformation programme in line with statutory national carbon budgets. This should be aligned with local plans and support councils to invest in low carbon infrastructure.
3. Ensure skills funding is directed towards creating a workforce that can deliver the necessary building retrofits (energy efficiency and low carbon heating) and give the public confidence about the quality of retrofitting work.
4. Confirm the funding for retrofit and low carbon heat already pledged in the 2019 Conservative manifesto. Outline how and when the government will bring forward further funding to deliver retrofitting as a national infrastructure priority, recognising that many experts have called for significantly greater levels of support and for greater certainty around funding streams that would allow the development of stable supply chains.
5. Support access to funding, including simplifying the application process for schools and other public sector organisations. Engage with stakeholders including local authorities to make sure the process works. Provide flexibility to blend different funding streams.
6. Reduce VAT rates on domestic energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating, provided the whole property is brought above certain EPC thresholds to support the retrofitting industry to develop.

### *Enable public sector retrofitting*

7. Put in place a holistic package of resourcing that enables local authorities and other registered providers to bring all public sector buildings, including as a priority social housing, up to a minimum of EPC 'C' by 2030. This should be done through whole-house retrofits, with immediate short-term focus on reducing fuel poverty rates.
8. Confirm the £2.9 billion over the next five years pledged in the 2019 Conservative manifesto for improving energy efficiency in schools and hospitals, together with the investment and support for all schools to reach zero carbon by 2030, acknowledging the unique role played by schools in inspiring behaviour change in local communities.

### *Support private rented sector retrofitting*

9. Introduce the proposed regulations on the energy performance of private rented homes so that these homes are EPC 'C' by 2028, with a cost cap on landlords of £15,000 to drive greater carbon emissions reductions across a larger number of homes and deeper energy bill reductions for tenants than the currently proposed £10,000 cap.
10. Ensure councils have sufficient resources for ensuring compliance with the regulations on private rented homes.

### *Support private owned sector retrofitting*

11. Establish financial support and incentives for councils to encourage private retrofitting, including green mortgages, a fiscally neutral, variable Stamp Duty Land Tax for more efficient homes, a revolving loan fund and/or low-cost finance for home energy retrofitting.
12. Reform the planning system and building regulations to enable local authorities to require the installation of energy efficiency measures when owners are making changes to a property that requires permission from their council, and ensure there is adequate funding for building control officers to enforce this.
13. Revise the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to encourage the installation of energy efficiency measures in non-listed buildings in conservation areas. Provide funding, professional advice and technical support to enable sympathetic retrofitting to listed buildings.
14. Reform the planning system so that external wall insulation with non-combustible materials is permitted development in all cases, except for conservation areas and listed buildings.
15. Support local information hubs to link available retrofit solutions, installers, finance solutions and access to data on impacts of previous retrofits, reviewed and updated regularly to serve local need.

# Theme 3 - Decarbonising transport

## What local authorities want to do and why

Local authorities want to avoid and shift traffic to more sustainable modes through encouraging more active travel, especially for short journeys and the first/last mile, and by greater use of publicly accessible transport.<sup>1</sup> Doing so will deliver improvements in carbon emissions, air quality, noise, safety, and congestion. The recovery from coronavirus presents significant opportunities to help achieve these aims and improve public health. In the short term however, there is the risk that private car use is increasing as people feel safer travelling this way.

Examples of local authority action include:

- Seamless physical interchanges between different modes of transport, and ticketing systems integrated effectively with local amenities and facilities to reduce trip making;
- Safe cycling and walking routes - including reallocating road space to support social distancing and active travel during the coronavirus lockdowns;
- Interventions that seek to reduce the need and desire to travel by car and support the transition to electric vehicles for remaining car use, including provision of charging points;
- Rapid transition to low and ultra-low carbon vehicles for council fleets, taxis, shared mobility and buses; and
- New developments that are designed to encourage and facilitate more sustainable travel.

The co-benefits include considerable reductions in local air pollution, noise, and congestion, that can improve people's physical and mental health and reduce the strain on the NHS, and improvements to local places that support local businesses and improve the overall quality of place.

## How government can support local authorities to scale up action

Local authorities are essential to ensuring that 'public transport and active travel will be the natural first choice for our daily activities', and that as the coronavirus restrictions are lifted, we don't return to previous levels of air pollution and congestion. Local authorities will also be crucial in promoting the evolution of local transport; this in turn will mean better quality and accessible low carbon travel that gives people more choice. They will be essential to encouraging longer term behaviour change such as significant levels of flexible and remote working and local shopping, providing better quality, accessible public transport and safer provision for walking and cycling.

To do so, local authorities require stronger powers and adequate resources to deliver change in partnership with local communities, businesses and transport providers. This is even more pressing since public transport revenue has been hard hit by coronavirus travel restrictions, and predictions are that people's wariness of returning to travelling on public transport may last for some time post-pandemic. To ensure that everyone benefits, it will be vital to address disparities in the funding, provisioning and quality of public transport across the country. To enable this, we believe the Government should:

### *Improve public transport, cycling and walking*

1. Introduce higher subsidy levels for public transport, recognising the significant and ongoing strain these systems are facing due to Covid-19, and simplify and reduce public transport fares, with increased national and local control. This will also benefit poorer households, who are disproportionately reliant on the bus network for their travel needs.
2. Update Local Transport Plan guidance to prioritise low carbon transport modes, including public transport, active travel and emerging new modes of transport.

<sup>1</sup> Publicly accessible transport: a blend of mass transit, demand responsive and shared modes which doesn't come under the traditional umbrella of 'public transport' (e.g. bus, train etc.)

3. Introduce a salary sacrifice scheme for employees to claim up to a maximum amount each month, tax free, to spend on their mobility needs via public transport, bike and other micro-mobility options (eg e-scooters), and car-sharing where these modes are not available. Encourage employers to contribute to the costs where their employees commute by public transport as part of the scheme.
4. Fund local authorities to significantly increase cycling, walking and micro-mobility provision by establishing a dedicated funding stream at levels seen in countries like the Netherlands and extending the ease of reallocating road space to pedestrians and cyclists as is happening in Milan and London. Give local authorities the powers to licence dockless micro-mobility operators, set safety standards, and cap the number of vehicles deployed in local areas.
5. Invest in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and digital connectivity to facilitate and encourage more permanent flexible work practices.
6. Devolve powers to enable local authorities to transform the standard of public transport provision in their area, including TfL-style coordinated public transport management, oyster-type ticketing arrangements and control of local railway lines where appropriate.
7. Enable local authorities to implement bus service regulation, including devolution of bus service operators grant to local authorities so it can be targeted at low carbon vehicles.
8. Provide funding, resources and new regulatory powers to local authorities for Mobility as a Service (MaaS) schemes, particularly for rural local authorities.
9. Work with local authorities on influencing behaviours to both reduce and shift travel to more sustainable modes.

#### *Manage traffic and reduce air pollution*

10. Give local authorities more control of roads in their areas, including road traffic offences, for purposes of traffic management and reduction of carbon emissions (not including motorways).
11. Building on the improvements in air quality arising from coronavirus, fund an air quality support scheme for local authorities in the context of the national commitment to compliance with WHO standards on PM2.5 from 2022. Ensure any new modelling for dealing with air quality is adequately resourced and allow local authorities the power to take local action on meeting emissions targets.

#### *Manage aviation*

12. Ensure local government has the necessary powers and influence to manage and mitigate impacts from surface access to airports - such as air quality and congestion - as part of a wider UK aviation strategy that should prioritise surface transport and reduce aviation emissions in line with statutory national carbon budgets.

# Theme 4 - Planning to deliver zero carbon development that protects and enhances nature

## What local authorities want to do and why

Local authorities want to ensure all new development is zero carbon, facilitate increased renewables generation and zero or low carbon heating schemes, make more space for nature, and link developments with public transport and walking and cycling routes.

Examples of local authority action include:

- Requiring the integration of renewable energy generation and zero or low carbon heating schemes into new development through local plan development management policies;
- Requiring new low and zero carbon development through adopted local plan development management policies and/or locally adopted supplementary planning guidance;
- Requiring new development to be highly energy and water efficient through the adoption of local plan development management policies and/or local adopted Supplementary Planning Documents;
- Requiring new high quality, accessible green spaces in areas that are lacking through adopting area specific policies in local plans and compulsory purchase of sites; and
- Requiring and enforcing safe walking for children within and to connect new developments to existing services such as schools, shops and health services.

The co-benefits of this include more liveable and beautiful places, with healthier, more accessible transport choices, which will reduce place-based inequalities, and attract investment. More green space can help reduce exposure to extreme temperatures, reduce flood risk, improve wellbeing and connect people with nature. These developments can also increase renewable energy generation to support emissions reduction targets and support the creation of new skilled jobs.

## How government can support local authorities to scale up action

There is a clear legal requirement for local plans to ensure that they include policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, taking into account the UK's net zero commitment under the Climate Change Act. But the National Planning Policy Framework contains conflicting policies that undermine this legal duty in practice. The planning system needs to be strengthened so that delivering on the climate target is applied to all planning decisions and embedded in building regulations.

The recent proposals in the Planning White Paper threaten instead to undermine local authorities' ability to deliver high quality zero carbon development and would limit the ability of local communities to influence development proposals in their local areas. Rather than a fundamental overhaul of our planning system which risks causing major disruption for local planning authorities, communities, and developers alike, a better approach would be to build on and strengthen the system we have now. The White Paper proposals for greater centralisation with more nationally set policies would restrict councils' ability to set local policies and targets which best meet the needs and priorities of their areas, including in response to climate change.

While higher minimum standards should be set nationally, with regards to matters such as energy efficiency, climate change, nature, and green space, in building regulations, it is also important that local planning authorities are free to set their own higher standards where they deem these necessary and justified.

Councils will also need much clearer practical advice, and better resourcing to ensure they have enough expert planning staff, including in enforcement.

To enable this, we believe the Government should:

### *Align strategy with its' net zero climate goal*

1. Revise proposals in the Planning White Paper and update the NPPF to empower local authorities to adopt planning policies commensurate with the climate and ecological emergency, informed by evidence, opportunities and needs that exist in their areas and in consultation with their communities.

### *Deliver low and zero carbon development*

2. Reform the planning system to ensure that it, in conjunction with necessary changes to building regulations, will:
  - Require all new homes and other buildings to be zero carbon as soon as possible and at latest by 2025, including a requirement for onsite renewable energy generation
  - Work to a policy hierarchy which incorporates circular economy principles for construction, including in relation to reuse and refurbishment in preference to demolition and new construction
  - Ensure that local authorities continue to be able to set higher requirements for energy efficiency than national standards where practical and demonstrably viable
  - Restrict permitted development rights to minor development so that local authorities can ensure new housing meets energy efficiency and healthy living standards.
  - Require any new homes that are delivered using permitted development rights to change existing use to residential use to meet high energy efficiency standards
  - Enable local authorities to require water reuse and recycling in areas of severe water stress and to set tighter limits than the current 110l/person/day limit
  - Give stronger encouragement for retaining and expanding local food growing, processing and retailing
3. Provide stronger guidance on:
  - Achieving zero carbon at every stage of the design of a development, from building siting to construction materials
  - Retrofitting heritage assets and buildings in conservation areas to support climate goals
4. Reform the methodology for calculating housing supply and delivering new homes so this focuses on genuine need, identified locally, particularly the need for affordable homes, and enables local authorities to prioritise sustainable locations with an emphasis on the proximity to employment, food shops, and walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure.
5. Take action to tackle the 'viability' issue when drawing up local plans to ensure outcomes are in line with the public interest, including tackling the climate and ecological emergency, and do not just benefit developers.

### *Develop renewable energy*

6. Introduce stronger support in the NPPF for local plans to:
  - Increase the provision of onshore wind power and other renewables, and infrastructure for power storage - including identifying new sites and requiring the installation of renewables within new developments - with specific encouragement for community ownership, and;
  - Plan for renewable energy and storage with distribution network operators at a regional level, to meet anticipated demand from electric vehicles and heat pumps.
7. Support appropriate development of renewable energy schemes within the green belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to facilitate renewables that do not conflict with the purposes of these areas.

*Enhance nature and green infrastructure*

8. Revise the NPPF to provide greater priority to protecting and enhancing the green spaces and infrastructure we need to support community resilience and climate adaptation, by:
  - Empowering local authorities to set green infrastructure standards through local plans to deliver on both the climate and ecological emergency and to refuse development where these requirements are not met
  - Providing stronger protection for all spaces that are important for nature, including priority habitats and non-statutory local wildlife sites
  - Setting a requirement for local plans to consider how to provide better access to good quality nature rich green space for everyone within five minutes' walk of their home, in line with the Natural England standard ANGSt (Access to Natural Green Space Standard), and;
  - Providing a stronger reminder of the duty to preserve trees on development sites, to enable local enforcement.
9. Ensure that plans to improve green infrastructure are adequately funded.

# Theme 5 - Reducing waste and encouraging sustainable consumption

## What local authorities want to do and why

Local authorities want to reduce waste and develop a circular economy, discouraging wasteful lifestyles that create environmental problems overseas as well as at home.

Examples of local authority action include:

- Interventions to minimise waste, including increasing reuse and repair;
- Increasing the quality and amount of recyclate streams;
- Reducing the amount and impact of residual waste; and
- Supporting sustainable consumption and production.

The co-benefits of this include reducing plastic pollution in our oceans, reducing the dumping of waste overseas, and generating economic gain within local areas. Encouraging people to adopt less wasteful and carbon intensive lifestyles - for example, eating less meat and dairy products, and reducing the amount of food and clothing thrown away - can also help individual incomes, cut emissions and reduce incineration and landfill.

This is the right moment for local authorities not only to address waste reduction but also link and align waste management policies with circular economy, natural capital and carbon emissions reduction policy agendas. Together with sustainable production and consumption of resources, they will play a crucial role in helping England meet its 2050 net zero carbon target.

## How government can support local authorities to scale up action

Local authorities play a central role in ensuring that we manage resources efficiently and safely, and during the Covid-19 pandemic waste management operatives have been recognised for the vital work they do. To reduce consumption and increase reuse, repair, and recycling, councils need the government to provide strategic support for UK-based reprocessing and secondary material markets to improve the economics of recycling and composting. One source of additional finance can be provided via Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes so that local authorities receive adequate funds for the introduction of separate food waste collections and have greater ability to innovate.

To enable this, we believe the Government should:

### *Reduce consumption of materials and resources*

1. Reduce the pressure on local authority systems by introducing legislation that restricts the availability of non-essential single-use plastic items and all oxo-degradable products.

### *Support more efficient and better-quality waste collections*

2. Put greater emphasis on reducing non-recyclable packaging, reducing the use of more difficult to recycle packaging and reducing the range of types of approved packaging materials, potentially through a granular modulated producer fees system.
3. Implement Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation as an instrumental approach to managing product value chains across the board, to drive better design and longer life products, incorporating the full lifecycle impacts of products. This should be fully-funded by producers and ensure that local councils achieve full net cost recovery.



4. Fund the costs of high-quality recycling collections that are source separated where practicable.
5. Fund the introduction of separate food waste collections from households and businesses.
6. Enable local authorities to restrict the frequency of residual waste collection as appropriate to local circumstances to achieve waste reduction and allow willing local authorities to trial the implementation of 'pay as you throw' schemes without penalising lower income households.
7. Provide local authorities with enforcement powers to improve the quality of materials and ensure they are effectively captured and prepared for processing
8. Create a single, consistent, comprehensive, and clear message on material that can/cannot be recycled with on-pack labelling. Accompany this with an extensive complementary communications campaign, underpinned by prior establishment of reliable, transparent and viable end markets for all materials.

*Support sustainable consumption*

9. Issue practical guidance on the implementation of lower meat and dairy diets - in line with the Eatwell Guide - in school, hospital, prison, and care home food standards.

## Theme 6 - Restoring nature for all

### What local authorities want to do and why

Local authorities want to ensure that local communities have easy access to high-quality green spaces given their vital importance for the wellbeing of individuals and communities, and recognising the current inequalities in access. In the longer-term, they want to ensure multipurpose green spaces and healthy ecosystems, which provide natural services such as flood water storage, areas for wildlife and carbon capture in addition to the human-focused leisure and cultural services.

Examples of local authority action include:

- Protection and restoration of nature, including through local nature recovery strategies;
- Carbon sequestration through nature-based solutions such as restoring peat, more considered land management and planting trees in suitable places;
- Green infrastructure growth, habitat restoration and improved connectivity between these units to increase resilience to climate change; and
- Changes to the management of council-owned land and road verges, including reduced pesticide use, alteration of mowing patterns and increased planting of wildflowers.

The co-benefits of protecting nature sites and creating new nature rich green space include better mental and physical health for local people, especially where inequalities in access are addressed, greater resilience to future climate change extremes, and more resilient food production.

### How government can support local authorities to scale up action

Resourcing is a major barrier to local authorities achieving their aims, with gaps in expertise due to staff cuts, reduced staff training and continuing professional development (CPD), and many councils being forced to cut parks, natural environment and countryside service budgets. Access to good quality data must also be improved to enable local authorities to map important nature sites and protect them, as well as identifying gaps in green space provision, including for BAME communities. Strengthening of planning policy is also needed as set out in Theme 4.

To enable this, we believe the Government should:

#### *Enable a strategic response to the climate and ecological crisis*

1. Support local authorities to coordinate the development and delivery of integrated and strategic Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Local Natural Capital Plans.
2. Ensure that the Environment Act will enable local action to deliver genuine gains for nature including a stronger biodiversity duty on local authorities.
3. Ensure that local authorities have access to habitat baseline data, species data and land use data that will enable them to map existing local places of importance for nature.

*Enable delivery of natural climate solutions*

4. The National Tree Strategy should commit to increase funding for local authority tree planting and maintenance, including large scale woodland and re-wilding programmes in appropriate locations and in close collaboration with local wildlife and community groups. Support is also needed to tackle ash dieback.
5. Properly fund local authorities to manage parks, open spaces, and public rights of way, and create new nature-rich green spaces (including pocket parks) accessible to all.
6. Increase the importance of protecting green and blue infrastructure within the grant-in-aid formula for flood defence funding.
7. Ensure that Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) receive adequate funding, with long term certainty, to plan and deliver effective flood defences, and to plan for adaptation to a changing climate.

# Theme 7 - Developing local authority funding, governance and accounting systems that are fit for purpose

## What local authorities want to do and why

Local authorities want to develop a strategic approach to addressing the climate and nature emergencies that underpins their actions, including purchasing and influencing in line with UK and international obligations. They want to provide citizens with appropriate engagement opportunities based on transparency on proposals, processes and performance.

Examples of local authority action include:

- Innovative funding and financing mechanisms, such as Community Municipal Bonds;
- Climate partnerships with local communities and businesses.

The co-benefits of this include longer-term resilience in local authority systems and processes, greater transparency and credibility, and - through strong partnerships - authorities that are able to develop and deliver better, more innovative solutions together with their communities.

## How government can support local authorities to scale up action

Local government needs clear advice and guidance on how it can deliver reporting, procurement, and collaboration that can support its climate action in other areas. It also, fundamentally, needs long-term funding and financing that can enable local authorities to act confidently in the long-term best interests of their communities as they tackle the climate and ecological crises.


To enable this, we believe the Government should:

### *Support adequate long-term funding and financing for local authorities*

1. Support new fundraising powers that can help to drive decarbonisation, such as the payroll public transport levy widely used in France.
2. Use the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to fund the transition to the low carbon economy, particularly in areas where the transition is most challenging, including spending on skills, infrastructure, and supply chains.

### *Support standards, data and guidance for the local low carbon transition*

1. Government strategies - for example, National Infrastructure, Decarbonising Transport, Heat and Buildings, Green Finance, and Energy White Paper - should provide more detailed targets and clear trajectories for decarbonising key sectors and activities (energy, buildings, transport, industry, agriculture, and land use).
2. Provide local authorities, combined authorities, sub-national transport bodies and Local Enterprise Partnerships with the evidence that helps them apply policies and target resources to deliver necessary cuts in carbon emissions.
3. Reform national infrastructure investment and the Green Book so that the appraisal of public sector policies, programmes and investments includes the economic costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

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4. Require public bodies such as Highways England, Network Rail and Homes England, to take local and national environmental strategies and plans into account when planning and delivering new schemes.
  5. Require new infrastructure schemes to deliver multiple benefits. For example, new rail routes should be built with parallel cycling and/or walking routes and digital fibre to significantly reduce costs at the point of construction and negate the need for retrofitting.
  6. Require all local government procurement to evaluate social value including environmental value, and to contribute to achieving national environmental goals.
  7. Support the development of common standards for carbon emissions reporting.