ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL COUNCILS
A working document - revised 16 April 2024

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	2
1. Basic Principles	2
2. Principal Activities	3
a. Emergency plans	3
b. Climate action plans	3
c. Neighbourhood development plans (England)	4
d. Wellbeing, biodiversity and place plans (Wales)	5
e. Managing or developing the built environment	5
f. Managing or creating sources of renewable energy	6
g. Managing sites for biodiversity	6
h. Managing council operations including transport	7
3. Common Techniques	7
i. Community engagement	7
ii. Project appraisal	8
iii. Carbon audit	8
iv. Energy performance assessment	8
v. Mapping	9
vi. Environmental impact assessment	10
vii. Life cycle assessment	10
viii. Groundwater risk assessment	11
4. Choosing Materials and Products	11
5. Choosing Contractors	11
6. Legal Responsibilities and Powers	12
7. Further guidance and good practice	15
References	16
Appendices:	
A. Template for a climate action plan	18
B. Emerging response to biodiversity net gain	22
C. Template for project appraisal	24
D. Sustainable Procurement Checklist	26
E. Local councils' powers and opportunities around climate change	28

INTRODUCTION

Environmental Planning has been described as an area of planning that focuses on environmental issues, environmental assessment, and environmental policy[1].

In practical terms, this means considering current activities and future development in their relation to:

- Air quality
- Water quality
- Soil quality
- Climatic conditions, including climate change.
- Flora and fauna, including ecosystems.
- Agriculture, including food production.

At this time of climate emergency, a major focus is the minimising of carbon emissions that contribute to global warming, which in turn means a move away from fossil fuels. Much of environmental planning will be around the interplay between the built and natural environments, and the interplay with people and the economy.

For local councils, environmental planning can mean:

- A change in priorities when making council decisions.
- A greater awareness of the impact of other people's decisions.
- Closer links with the local community, including the business community.

This guidance aims to support local councils by providing advice that helps to integrate environmental awareness within current and future council activities.

1. BASIC PRINCIPLES

There are some principles which apply at all levels of environmental planning:

- The conservation of the natural environment is paramount.
- Any changes must have a positive impact on the environment not a negative.
- Any plans must be underpinned by proper local assessment.
- Any plans must be approved by the appropriate authority.
- Any implementation of plans must be effectively managed.

Some of this may seem obvious, and some may look like extra work for council staff! Working more closely with neighbouring councils and involving local people in working groups can help to reduce the burden as well as underpin the results.

2. PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES

Local councils will require an environmental planning approach for several activities:

a) Emergency plans
b) Climate action plans
c) Neighbourhood development plans (England)
d) Wellbeing and biodiversity plans (Wales)
e) Managing or developing the built environment
f) Managing or creating sources of renewable energy
g) Managing sites for biodiversity
h) Managing council operations including transport

The knowledge and policies developed through these activities will also assist local councils in commenting effectively on developers' planning applications.

EMERGENCY PLANS

Following the Civil Contingencies Act 2004[2], local councils should all have received an emergency plan template from their District Emergency Planning Officer in England or Local Resilience Forum in Wales. Some key items to consider include:

- Contingencies in case of flood, as wetter weather is expected in future.
- Contingencies for helping housebound people with shopping, as was necessary during the Covid lockdown and may be needed for floods also.
- Contingencies in the event of drought and water shortages
- A cool hub to shelter people in the event of a heatwave, particularly elderly people and babies, and including toilet and kitchen facilities.
- Transport plans to support all the above, potentially with volunteer drivers and preferably hybrid or electric vehicles.

Warm hubs are not in the same emergency category as they may be needed all winter as a respite from increased energy bills, but they are worthy of consideration.

CLIMATE ACTION PLANS

The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) has published a toolkit[3] for preparing climate action plans, and other toolkits are under development elsewhere. The principal elements of any plan will be:

- An assessment of the local carbon emissions that create a "carbon footprint", both for council activities and for the area as a whole

- An appraisal of which projects or changes will contribute to carbon reduction, thus mitigating the effects of global warming caused by high levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.
- An appraisal of which projects or changes will help the area to adapt to the effects of global warming, as some warmer and wetter weather is inevitable.
- An appraisal of which projects or changes will support local biodiversity, which is being reduced by human activity as well as by climate change, and which is very necessary to support life on the planet.
- Engaging local people in the planning process and agreeing priorities
- Setting targets and establishing an approach to monitoring and evaluation

The template at Appendix A gives an overview of what an action plan might cover.

NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLANS (ENGLAND)

Neighbourhood development plans (NDPs) became an option for English local councils under the Localism Act 2011[4]. There is not a statutory requirement for local councils to prepare them, but councils are at the forefront of their development.

NDPs provide a vehicle for integrating with other local issues a response to environmental concerns such as conserving biodiversity under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (see Legal Responsibilities below), and in 2020 CSE produced a guide to neighbourhood planning in a climate emergency[5]. There is not yet uniformity in what planning authority officers and external examiners may approve as part of a new neighbourhood plan – which needs to conform to the planning authority's own Local Plan – but the CSE guide has many examples of useful wording that has been adopted elsewhere.

One particular bone of contention is the building of new homes without full insulation or renewable energy production as part of the design. The Government is bringing in a new Future Homes Standard[6] for building regulations in 2025, but until that time the degree of energy efficiency in new homes remains a matter for local negotiation.

Local councils should fully participate in any review of their planning authority's Local Plan, which is where definitive climate action policies also need to be included, and to which NDPs need to refer. Government guidance around "Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change" is at Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework[7]. The Framework has been under review as part of the consultation on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill[8], but key topics where high local standards would be beneficial include:

- Energy efficiency in building design, such as the existing Passivhaus standard[9], and noting solar panels and other sources of renewable energy.

- Traffic and transport, such as reducing vehicle use in town centres and providing cycle lanes (this topic relevant to Local Transport Plans)
- Preventing pollution, such as care of water courses and groundwater (relevant to local Minerals Plans)

The Localism Act also created the potential for neighbourhood development orders and community right to build orders[10], which are tools that enable communities, including local councils, to enable planning permission for specific types of development in a particular area. This could include specified uses such as renewable energy.

WELLBEING, BIODIVERSITY AND PLACE PLANS (WALES)

While neighbourhood planning is optional In England, larger local councils in Wales are obliged to work with their local public services board on an action plan[11] against the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 (see Legal Responsibilities below).

All community and town councils in Wales share a duty[12] under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to report every three years on what they have done to maintain and enhance biodiversity, and these actions may be included in wellbeing plans.

Welsh town and community councils may also develop community-based Place Plans[13] that have the potential to become supplementary planning guidance for their planning authority area.

MANAGING OR DEVELOPING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

CSE have produced a guide to energy efficiency for community buildings, which is currently being updated[14], and SLCC with Future Leap have produced guidance on carbon saving building improvements[15]. Using general powers under the Local Government Act 1972 (including working in partnership with higher level authorities), local councils may install charge points for electric vehicles, which will need to be planned with reference to location and accessibility, and with reference to the likely local demand.

Future proofing is required for proposed new developments – are they the only way to achieve a desired result, would they prevent land being used for anything else? These questions should be answered during a full project appraisal (see below).

Much of a local council's activity in this area will be around making comments on any planning applications by developers, such as ensuring the biodiversity net gain target is being met (see Appendix B). Councils should also register with their local planning authority exactly what benefits their community requires from Section 106 agreements[16] with developers or the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)[17].

MANAGING OR CREATING SOURCES OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

CSE have produced an overview of the main sources of renewable energy[18]:

- Hydroelectricity – requires a suitable waterway.
- Biomass heating – burning local wood fuel supply.
- Wind power – also requires a suitable location.
- Solar energy – can either produce electricity or heat water directly.
- Anaerobic digestion – generating electricity from organic waste.
- Marine energy – generating energy from tidal flows.

Local geography will be a determining factor in the creation of a renewable energy source, whether developed by public, private or voluntary sector bodies or – more probably – by a wider partnership with greater resources. CSE are developing an approach[19] to engaging the local community in planning local energy sources.

MANAGING SITES FOR BIODIVERSITY

There are some broad guidelines for managing council-owned land such as public parks, playing fields, allotments, cemeteries and highway verges, such as:

- No mowing in May, or late April as the seasons are coming forwards (apart from actual playing areas), to allow wildflowers to support pollinating insects.
- Only one mowing a year where possible and consider rotational mowing in sections to avoid mowing an entire site at once (good for hibernating insects and ground nesting birds) - aim to mow in August / September after seeding.
- No artificial fertilisers that reduce the quality of grasslands[20]
- Planting more trees and hedges
- Ending the use of pesticides, trialling alternative approaches.

Reduced mowing regimes to benefit wildlife will need to be explained to local residents, some of whom will inevitably prefer every green space to be neatly manicured at all times. Involving residents as volunteers in a "Friends Of" group is one way to create ownership and share understanding. Councils can also support locally led wildlife/gardening/tree planting/rewilding projects as nature-based solutions to the climate crisis.

South Gloucestershire Council have published a guide to producing nature action plans[21] which is a source of wide-ranging advice on protecting local ecosystems, as well as a field guide[22] to help those with little or no ecological background assess a site for wildlife. The City of Edinburgh Council has published guidance[23] on biodiversity in parks, and the Woodland Trust publishes advice[24] on managing woodland.

MANAGING COUNCIL OPERATIONS INCLUDING TRANSPORT

A carbon audit (see below) of local emissions will reveal a number of council activities that emit carbon, and for example may lead to plans to replace fossil fuel vehicles with electric vehicles. This is particularly important as transport is now the biggest source of carbon emissions in the UK, and local councils can also help to support active travel such as walking and cycling by mapping, publicising and improving public rights of way.

While responsibility for areas of operation such as highways and public transport rests with higher-level authorities, Section 101[25] of the Local Government Act 1972 allows local councils to work with, support and encourage higher-level authorities on those other authorities' responsibilities and activities.

Council purchasing is a key area where councils at all levels can support the move towards net zero in carbon emissions, and purchasing is further discussed in chapters 4 and 5 below.

3. COMMON TECHNIQUES

Several techniques are available for use at all levels of environmental planning:

i. Community engagement
ii. Project appraisal
iii. Carbon audit
iv. Energy performance assessment
v. Mapping
vi. Environmental impact assessment
vii. Life cycle assessment
viii. Groundwater risk assessment

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Behind every climate action plan is the need to engage the community. Involving the local community can be time consuming but is vital to secure support for new initiatives as well as providing a source of ideas, volunteers and resources. There are several techniques that may be employed, including:

- A household survey, that can generate a local mailing list of interested people.
- Inviting local conservation groups to the annual parish meeting (England only)
- Community workshops on particular topics
- "Walking workshops" with a tour of the local area.

- Talks by specialist professionals.
- Online maps for people to locate and post ideas and suggestions.
- Neighbourhood and wellbeing planning events
- Open house events from residents who have made low carbon changes.
- Supporting all the above through newsletters, social media and websites.

Engaging, supporting and facilitating existing local community groups to deliver local engagement and community-led climate action initiatives is also important, not least as those groups have already engaged with local people. Supporting bottom-up action and change and encouraging collective action rather than placing emphasis on individual/household change can be more productive than putting too much emphasis on individuals.

Some tips for success:

- Engage people across different platforms and channels to ensure everyone has the opportunity to get involved.
- Have regular and ongoing involvement.
- Facilitate effective two-way dialogue.
- Make your messages appealing to different audiences.

Climate action is a long-term exercise, and so it will be helpful to use community engagement to populate a working group to take new initiatives forwards. As a variation on this theme, Kendal Town Council have developed a "Citizens Jury"[26] which has representation from all sections of the community.

Working with local businesses is also important, but business owners are much less likely to respond to surveys or to attend meetings. Time spent on approaching local firms individually will be more time-consuming but a more effective tactic.

PROJECT APPRAISAL

As with any successful new initiative, there will be a danger of "mission creep" – new projects being proposed which take up time and resources out of all proportion to their contribution towards the main objectives. Every project proposal should be fully appraised to ensure that the project has real potential rather than being one group or individual's pet idea. A template for appraising project proposals is at Appendix C.

CARBON AUDIT

CSE have produced a community carbon footprint tool[27] which aims to give small communities (parishes and towns) "*usable data on their carbon emissions that is easy to understand, easy to share, and which gives them a clear idea of their main*

'impact areas' – those places where focused community-based action can make the biggest contribution to cutting local emissions".

The data from a carbon audit can identify important targets for a climate action plan and form the basis for energy strategies within a neighbourhood or wellbeing plan.

ENERGY PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Leasing or selling a wide range of residential or business premises in the UK requires an energy performance assessment of the building carried out by an accredited assessor[28]. The resulting certificate will grade the property from A to G, of which the most energy efficient grade is grade A. As well as providing basic information about any council properties, information on the assessed buildings in a council area may give an indication of the scale of retrofitting needed to help achieve local net zero carbon emissions and may possibly help to identify any particular housing areas that might be best suited to grant aid or other support.

MAPPING

When developing any kind of local plan, showing projects and proposed developments on a map can be most helpful when identifying potential issues or opportunities. A map can also be a most useful visual aid in any community engagement.

Parish Online[29] is a well-known tool (***licence needed for use***) that is already being used by many local councils both for viewing maps and for storing and displaying local data. As well as data layers such as Natural England habitats and designations that may be useful in environmental planning, there are three relatively new layers:

- Energy Performance Certificates – Current Rating
- Energy Performance Certificates – Potential Score Increase
- Energy Performance Certificates – Potential to C

These layers show what the last Energy Performance Certificate grade a building received, what score it could achieve if guidance is followed, and which houses have the quickest potential to be upgraded to Grade C. This can be valuable for public use because residents can view what their current and potential energy efficiency is and see what the average is in their area. This might engage the community more to improve their own rating, or even their whole road's rating and take a more active approach to improving their energy efficiency.

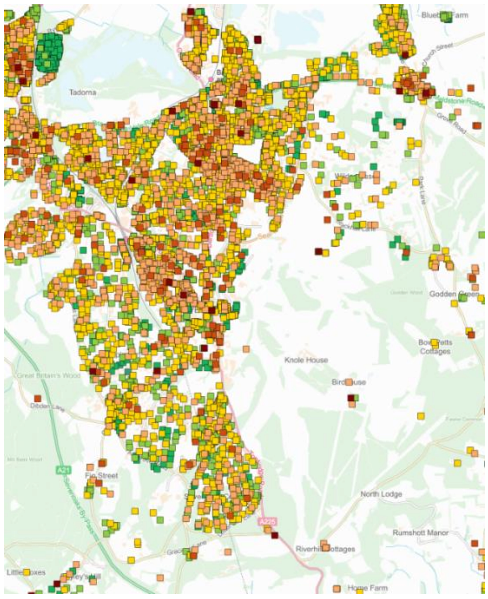
Mapping can also be a useful engagement technique on sustainable travel, highlighting different routes and approaches to journeys than using a car.

This example image shows energy performance certificate ratings on a local map.

Properties are colour-marked for their current rating, ranging from green for A to dark brown for G.

For more details please contact Parish Online direct.

Your local planning authority may also have a geographic information service that can help with online mapping.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Environment Agency defines environmental impact assessment as "*a process carried out to ensure that the likely significant environmental effects of certain projects are identified and assessed before a decision is taken on whether a proposal should be allowed to proceed. This means that the most environmentally favourable option, or at least the environmentally acceptable option, can be identified at an early stage and projects can then be designed to avoid or to minimise environmental effects*".

As well as the scoping handbook[30] and more specific advice published by the Environment Agency, there is a step-by-step guide[31] published in 2010 by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) which links to a useful checklist of questions to ask of policy and indeed project options:

- Will the policy option be vulnerable to the predicted effects of climate change?
- Will the policy option lead to a change in the financial costs or the environmental and health impacts of waste management?
- Will the policy option impact significantly on air quality?
- Will the policy option involve any material change to the appearance of the landscape or townscape?
- Will the proposal change 1) the degree of water pollution, 2) levels of abstraction of water or 3) exposure to flood risk?
- Will the policy option change 1) the amount or variety of living species, 2) the amount, variety or quality of ecosystems?

- Will the policy option affect the number of people exposed to noise or the levels to which they're exposed?

LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT

A life cycle assessment (LCA) is a way of measuring a product's environmental impacts across its whole life. There are systems that can be used in carrying out such assessments, but in simple terms a product goes through five phases:

1. **Raw Material Extraction** – to make the product.
2. **Manufacturing & Processing** – creating the product.
3. **Transportation** – delivering the product to retailers or customers.
4. **Usage & Retail** - both using and disposing of the product.
5. **Waste Disposal** - disposing of any waste the product itself produces.

Local councils can have these five phases in mind when considering options for a new purchase, project, or service.

GROUNDWATER RISK ASSESSMENT

You will need professional help to carry out a groundwater risk assessment when planning to carry out activities that could directly or indirectly pollute groundwater, such as a new or extended burial site. Groundwater is all water underground in the saturation zone (below the water table) and in direct contact with the ground or subsoil. Details of the process are posted on the Government website[32].

4. CHOOSING MATERIALS AND PRODUCTS

In terms of carbon emissions, almost any purchase up to and including new buildings may be assessed under two main headings:

- **Embodied carbon** – emissions relating to creation and disposal (see life cycle assessment above), such as the materials used in building new offices or making a new car
- **Operational carbon** – emissions caused by using a new purchase, such as the heating cost of a new building or a car's use of fossil fuel

One of the current ironies is that it has been reported that the process of making an electric vehicle emits more carbon that making one that runs on fossil fuels. Balancing embodied and operational carbon is not necessarily straightforward when making a purchase and is not always easy if the relevant data is not presented by

the supplier through an environmental product declaration[33] (EPD). As well as asking for an item's EPD, councils may consider:

- Whether a proposed purchase is made from manufactured or recycled materials (though some recycling methods also have an environmental impact) – using natural materials such as wood deserves consideration.
- The lifetime expectancy of a new purchase (the longer the better), which in turn relates to how robust it is and how much it is at risk from climate change, vandalism or other threats.
- Whether it has elements that may be replaced, giving it a longer life (although the less components the better)
- Whether its operation has a carbon impact
- How it may be recycled or re-used in due course

"Green public procurement" as a policy is beginning to generate some useful toolkits[34], from which we have developed the checklist at Appendix D.

5. CHOOSING CONTRACTORS

Following on from the above, a contractors' choice of materials is also a factor in deciding which firm to appoint to a task.

Potential contractors could also be asked to fill out an environmental questionnaire e.g. including their understanding of their firm's own environmental impact, their environmental policies and environmental qualifications if applicable.

A recent health and safety article[35] lists a number of further factors that may be considered when choosing a contractor:

- Trade association memberships.
- Maintenance of equipment.
- Experience with similar works.
- Training of staff.
- Method statement suitability.
- Risk assessment quality.
- Accident history.
- Enforcement actions.
- Health and safety policy.
- Equipment to be used.
- Maintenance of equipment.
- Control of sub-contractors

As well as naturally checking for insurance, relevant licences and qualifications, and financial stability, it may be worth asking for references to check a contractor's reputation for good communication and finishing tasks on schedule.

6. LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS

ENGLAND

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006[36] there is a duty on public authorities in England to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making. Conserving biodiversity can include restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.

English public authorities including town and parish councils should be able to show their duty to have regard for conserving biodiversity if they have identified ways to integrate biodiversity when they:

- Develop policies and strategies and put them into practice.
- Manage the planning system.
- Manage:
    - their land and buildings
    - woodlands and nature reserves
    - gardens, parks and public open space
    - community amenities e.g. sports grounds and cemeteries
    - waste and pollution
    - energy and water
    - wood and plant products
- Develop infrastructure, such as roads, buildings or flood defences.
- Make decisions about procurement.
- Implement economic, environmental and social programmes.

This duty has been reinforced under the Environment Act 2021, and Government guidance[37] asking for councils to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024 and agree policies and objectives as soon as possible afterwards was published on 17 May 2023.

For those councils planning to expand an existing cemetery or create a new one, planning permission may be required under section 57 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Expanding an existing cemetery means extending the geographical area of a site to an extent that you need new planning permission, with the decision being made by the Environment Agency. The Government has published guidance[38] on this requirement which came into force on 1 April 2022.

WALES

In Wales, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015[39] put in place seven well-being goals, of which three have a strong environmental element:

- A prosperous Wales - defined as an innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.

- A resilient Wales – defined as a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example, climate change).

- A globally responsible Wales – defined as a nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

The Act establishes public services boards to be responsible for setting local wellbeing plans in consultation with local councils. Larger local councils in Wales with an annual turnover greater than £200,000 have a duty to take all reasonable steps towards meeting the local objectives included in the local wellbeing plan that has effect in their area (smaller local councils may do this voluntarily).

All public bodies involved in wellbeing plans must also make sure that they involve people interested in achieving the goals and that those people reflect the diversity of their area. Each year they must publish an annual report showing the progress they have made in meeting their objectives.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the section 6 or s6 duty) for all public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales. The s6 duty requires that public authorities "*must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems*".

To comply with the s6 duty public authorities including community and town councils should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early

thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day-to-day activities. All community and town councils in Wales must report every three years on what they have done to maintain and enhance biodiversity.

POWERS

The Local Government Act 1972[40] provides several broad powers:

- Section 101 – the power to help higher authorities with their responsibilities
- Section 111 – the power to facilitate the discharge of council's own functions
- Section 136 – the power to support other authorities' activity financially
- Section 137 – the power to fund activities of community benefit

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 effectively gave broad powers for environmental action to Welsh community and town councils, while the Localism Act 2011 brought local councils in England the potential to create neighbourhood development plans as well as the "general power of competence" to be able to deliver any activity that could be delivered by a private individual. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 has extended the general power of competence to community and town councils in Wales, subject to similar conditions.

Apart from these well-known powers, there is a host of environmental activities that may be delivered under the aegis of lesser-known statutes – see Appendix E. The DEFRA guide[41] on ways town and parish councils can tackle climate change under the Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Act 2006 also provides a useful overview of the whole process of climate action.

7. FURTHER GUIDANCE AND GOOD PRACTICE

Links to further guidance may be found at www.slcc.co.uk/climate-action and to emerging good practice at www.thecommunityworks.co.uk/local-projects . These include links to the websites of the Centre for Sustainable Energy, the Planning Advisory Service and the Local Government Association, including an October 2021 report[42] on delivering local net zero and a November 2022 report on a neighbourhood approach to decarbonisation[43].

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41. Ways to tackle climate change, assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218799/tackling-climate-change.pdf
42. Delivering local net zero, www.local.gov.uk/publications/delivering-local-net-zero
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APPENDIX A – TEMPLATE FOR A LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

This template is not intended to be a definitive guide, as every place is different, but rather an overview of the range of possible approaches. It may well be appropriate to start climate action with something of the highest local priority and then develop an action plan from there. More detailed guidance on individual sections is either already available or under development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Main aims / objectives
- Main actions
- What success looks like

AIMS / OBJECTIVES

- Reduce carbon emissions
- Improve biodiversity
- Adapt to new conditions

DATA & METRICS

- Current carbon emissions
- Target reductions
- Target date and reporting

PARTNERS

- Local authorities
- Local community
- Local businesses
- Working group

COMMUNICATION

- Community engagement
- Networking
- Publicity

FUNDING

- Local grants
- Project expenditure & income
- Fundraising

ENERGY

- Main sources
- Main uses
- Renewables and energy-sharing

BUILDINGS

- Insulation – domestic / commercial / public
- Renewable energy
- Other improvements

TRAVEL

- Current patterns
- New opportunities
- Supporting actions

FOOD & DRINK

- Current supplies
- Local opportunities
- Supporting actions

WASTE

- Current systems
- Recycling, including repair cafes
- Plastics reduction

PURCHASING

- Carbon emissions by suppliers / products
- Criteria for selection
- Purchasing policy / procurement including social value procurement

BIODIVERSITY

- Local flora and fauna
- Missing pathways
- Targeted actions and support

EMERGENCY PLANS

- Heatwave & drought
- Flooding
- Warm and cool hubs

EMPLOYMENT

- Local jobs / commuting
- Future opportunities

LAND USE PLANNING

- Neighbourhood development plan
- Comments on other plans / lobbying
- Responses to planning applications

RISKS ANALYSIS

- Identification
- Prevention
- Mitigation

SUMMARY TABLE

AIM / OBJECTIVE	ACTION	LEADER(S)	CONTACT	RESOURCES & PARTNERS	STAGES / TIMING	SUSTAINABILITY

APPENDIX B – EMERGING RESPONSE TO BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

The Environment Act 2021 incorporated a broad principle of enhancing biodiversity. Proposals for biodiversity net gain of at least 10% on existing site levels in England are now required as part of the following:

- Generally, any planning applications for a single dwelling or more (but not housing extensions), submitted since 12th February 2024
- Commercial development of more than 1,000 square metres or 1 hectare
- Minerals or waste related development
- Nationally significant infrastructure projects (*thresholds are defined under Sections 15-30A of the Planning Act 2008)* – but not yet, date to be confirmed.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has published a statutory biodiversity metric (see www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-metric-calculate-the-biodiversity-net-gain-of-a-project-or-development) for calculating biodiversity value, as a baseline for a 10% increase.

(This requirement for biodiversity net gain applies to England only, there is a separate approach to biodiversity within the planning process in Wales.)

POINTS TO CHECK IN PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Further to Government guidance for planning authorities (which can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-what-local-planning-authorities-should-do) the following points in a developer's application may be looked for:

Planning application detail	Potential response
Confirmation that biodiversity net gain is applicable.	*If not, why not? See definitions above*
Calculation of the biodiversity value of the site	*Have they missed anything - including saying there is none? NB If unauthorised degradation has taken place, calculations can be based on a previous value as far back as January 30th 2020.*
Description of any irreplaceable habitat	*Is there really no alternative to destroying a habitat?*
A habitat plan of the whole site	*Is it accurate? See considerations below.*
To what extent the net gains are to be provided on-site and off-site	*It will be important for local councils to take a view on these points, as developers may be asking to buy "statutory biodiversity credits" rather than enhance local biodiversity.*
A draft habitat management plan for on-site biodiversity	
Plan for any off-site biodiversity gain	

There will also be a biodiversity net gain plan (the Government template for which is not mandatory), but this is usually only agreed AFTER planning permission has been given, and local councils are not asked to be involved in those discussions. It will be appropriate therefore to make any comments on that plan as soon as the planning application comes in.

The agreed and signed plan is intended to be enforceable by the planning authority for 30 years, so some points to review:

- If the plan includes a biodiversity credit for an area outside the planning authority's jurisdiction, that may make future monitoring difficult.
- If the plan includes biodiversity net gain within the gardens of new houses, that may prove difficult to enforce on future householders.
- The potential for using the same off-site location for biodiversity net gain for more than one development should be prevented by a planned national database of such locations.

CONSIDERATIONS

Local councils may like to consider:

- contacting local wildlife or conservation groups for their advice
- identifying local experts in either habitats or locations
- noting areas outside development sites that might benefit from enhancement, to potentially add to the local planning authority's credit list.
- building up over time a biodiversity map of the council area, adding in the details discovered for each development proposal.
- including such site information in a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

See also guidance on responding to planning applications and a model biodiversity policy at www.slcc.co.uk/climate-action/ .

APPENDIX C – TEMPLATE FOR PROJECT APPRAISAL

PROJECT APPRAISAL FORM

Project title	
Project lead	
Partners (confirmed / not)	
Project description, including any options, and proposed approach	
Project history, including research & consultation to date	
Need for the project	
Scope / size of project	
Location	
Fit to regeneration & recovery objectives	
Measurable outcomes / other benefits	
Support for other strategies / objectives	
Cost estimates (capital / revenue)	
Income sources (confirmed / not)	
Sustainability	
Risks	
Assessment	
Next steps	
Appraiser & date	

PROJECT APPRAISAL GUIDANCE

Project title	Should be clear and short
Project lead	Project champion / origin if no named lead
Partners (confirmed / not)	Individuals and organisations to be involved in the project
Project description, including any options, and proposed approach	Enough detail to inform a decision for the project to go forward. Test if proposers have considered the zero option (doing nothing), and whether any other options have been identified and fully explored
Project history, including research & consultation to date	Include how the impact of climate change and the pandemic have been reviewed, as well as past local studies and discussions
Need for the project	Include evidence base e.g. indicators of deprivation, economic statistics, other research
Scope / size of project	Range of activity, partners and beneficiaries. Physical size if capital project, area of operation / benefit if revenue project
Location	Note any options
Fit to regeneration & recovery objectives	Match to locally agreed strategic objectives
Measurable outcomes / other benefits	Benefits for whom? Carbon reduction? Early ideas on how to measure social outcomes e.g. job creation, more health-giving activities
Support for other strategies / objectives	Check against relevant local / district / county and national strategies
Cost estimates (capital / revenue)	Include origin of the figures e.g. whether or not formal estimate from contractors
Income sources (confirmed / not)	Could include support in kind through staff time, free use of equipment etc.
Sustainability	Long term prospects in environmental / economic / social terms, including climate change
Risks	Risks that would prevent the project happening, and risks if the project doesn't happen (zero option)
Assessment	1. Project should go forward, seek resources 2. Project needs more research 3. Project should not go forward because… 4. Other comment
Next steps	Recommendations from the appraisal meeting, not necessarily for the project itself

APPENDIX D – SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT CHECKLIST

(Worked example – given answers are in **bold)**

Pre-Procurement Checklist	Choice of answers	Weight	Weighted score
Before purchasing new goods, we ask these questions: * Is the product *function* still required? * Is the *current product* repairable / upgradable? * Could *other in-house assets* satisfy the desired function? * Are other "access over ownership" options viable? (e.g., borrowing, sharing, pay-for-use)	Never **Sometimes** Often Always	10%	3%
Does the supplier offer Product-as-a-Service (PaaS), managed services, leasing, or renting options?	**No** / Yes	5%	0%
Does the supplier offer used / pre-owned products?	No / **Yes**	5%	5%
TOTALS CARRIED FORWARDS		20%	8%

Sample Specifications for Products	Choice of answers	Weight	Weighted score
Has the supplier provided a Product Carbon Footprint (PCF) Information Sheet, or equivalent, for the product?	No / **Yes**	10%	10%
Are any greenhouse gases emitted when the product is operated / used as directed?	**No** / Yes	10%	10%
Does the product have an energy efficiency ecolabel?	No / **Yes**	2%	2%
What % of the products' materials are recycled, remanufactured, renewable, and/or biodegradable?	0-5% **5-20%** 20-50% >50%	10%	3%
Is the product designed for repair and/or upgrades?	No / **Yes**	5%	5%
Is the product designed for take-back and disassembly?	**No** / Yes	5%	0%
What % of the products' packaging is made from recycled, renewable, and/or biodegradable materials?	0-5% **5-20%** 20-50% >50%	5%	2%
Is the product packaging reusable and/or taken back by the supplier?	**No** / Yes	4%	0%
Has the supplier estimated the greenhouse gases emitted by the delivery / shipping / transportation of the product to the buyer?	No / **Yes**	5%	5%
Has the supplier disclosed any harmful materials (i.e., toxic materials, harmful chemicals, plastics) in the product?	No / **Yes**	5%	5%
Has the supplier disclosed traceability / chain of custody certifications for materials used in the product?	No / **Yes**	5%	5%
Does the product have a water efficiency ecolabel?	**No** / Yes	2%	0%
Has the supplier estimated the waste / non-greenhouse gas emissions from the product operations?	No / **Yes**	2%	2%
Is the product designed for accessibility while ensuring data security / privacy?	No / **Yes**	5%	5%
Has the supplier estimated the impact on user / worker / community health and safety of product operations?	No / **Yes**	5%	5%
TOTALS BROUGHT FORWARDS		20%	8%
GRAND TOTALS		100%	67%
		Above total should equal 100%	Product score for comparison

APPENDIX E - LOCAL COUNCILS' POWERS AND OPPORTUNITIES AROUND CLIMATE CHANGE

There are two main approaches to climate change:

- MITIGATION – working towards community life having a minimal effect on the environment in general and carbon levels in particular ("carbon neutral"), including low energy use and taking up fewer resources.

- ADAPTATION – preparing for expected changes in the climate in future, such as rising flood levels and warmer temperatures (already happening)

Supporting nature recovery has links to both these approaches. There is a certain amount local councils can do themselves, but beyond that they can still support action by other people at other levels of society and government by encouraging or campaign ing.

STATUTE	GENERAL	MITIGATION	ADAPTATION	NATURE RECOVERY
Allotments and markets: (Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, ss 23, 26 and 42; Food Act 1984, s. 50)	This allows the promotion of local produce and healthy eating	This can help to reduce food-miles	Allotments powers also enable the provision of communal food-growing sites and initiatives, run by associations and cooperatives.	
Burials etc: (Open Spaces Act 1906, ss 9 &10; Local Government Act 1972, s.214; Parish Councils & Burial Authorities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1970 s.1)	This can allow practices such as green burials, eco-friendly management etc			

Commons, ponds, open spaces, recreation etc (Open Spaces Act 1906, s.15; Highways Act 1980, ss 47)	Scope to practise good environmental management, accommodate recycling facilities etc on the council's land	Scope to plant trees on, and maintain, highway verges (and ask for tree preservation orders on all existing mature trees)		Scope to plant trees on, and maintain, highway verges (and ask for tree preservation orders on all existing mature trees)
Community centres and other public buildings (Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1970, s.19. (Local Government Act 1972, s. 133)	Work towards being carbon-neutral by reducing the council's carbon emissions and using renewable energy sources	Scope to embrace/ include on-site green energy, energy-conservation, electric car charging-points, recycling points etc		
Community energy (s20 of the Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006)	*The 's 137 expenditure limit' is a severe constraint on making capital investments in energy schemes*	Councils can encourage or promote the local production and use of renewable energy, and also energy conservation, subject to the section 137 of the LG Act 1972 annual spending limit	*Restrictions currently on the ability to 'sell' the energy directly to local consumers.*	
Highways and sustainable transport (Highways Act, ss 43, 50, Parish Councils Act 1957, s.1; Local Government Rating Act,	Scope to promote rights of way routes, walking and cycling	Scope to use 'car park' powers, to provide useful facilities such as on-site electric vehicle-charging points and cycle racks	Scope to make more use of powers to support community bus services, and to run or support car- sharing	

1997, s.25, 28 & 29; Transport Act, 1985, s.106A)				
Litter and environmental crime (Litter Act 1983, ss 5.6, Cleaner Neighbourhoods and Environment Act, 2005)	Scope to provide refuse and waste receptacles and publicity, including recycling	Scope to discourage and prosecute littering and dumping	*Currently there is no specific power to promote or run waste-recycling or resource re-use activities*	
Neighbourhood planning (Localism Act, 2011; Neighbourhood Planning Act, 2017 and National Planning Policy Framework,)	There is a continuing need to ensure that Neighbourhood Plans have 'teeth', and that they can be more than just land-use allocation policies	Scope to include environmentally-friendly planning policies re design, routes, landscaping etc	Encourage climate-friendly activities such as repair cafes, food banks, and recycling	
Newsletters and websites: (Local Government Act 1972, s.142)	Scope to use to promote good environmental practices, resource-sharing etc			
Community support and engagement (Local Government Act 1972 ss. 111, 140 etc)	Scope to encourage and support volunteers and the wider community with grants, loans, insurance protection, publicity, surveys,	Run a yearly schools' competition for ideas to make the town carbon neutral, establish a forum including businesses, local organisations and	Adopt a "Refill" scheme, making it easier to reuse and refill plastic bottles with free tap water in the town.	Hold open meetings for residents on how to increase biodiversity in their garden, encourage pollination corridors

	good-practice advice etc	residents to develop such ideas		by use of “bee squares”
Tourism (Local Government Act, 1972, s.144)	Scope to encourage and promote eco-tourism			
General powers (Local Government Act 1972, s 137; Localism Act 2011, ss 1–8, Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Chapter 2)	*S 137 annual spending level is limited, and the General Power of Competence is exercisable by relatively few councils*	Scope to spend money and/or undertake work on a wide range of beneficial activities which are not prescribed in other legislation	Scope to spend money and/or undertake work on a wide range of beneficial activities which are not prescribed in other legislation	Scope to spend money and/or undertake work on a wide range of beneficial activities which are not prescribed in other legislation
Subsidiary powers (Local Government Act 1972, s111):	A very useful enabling power, for a council to do anything (that are not constrained by other legislation) which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of its functions			
Permitted development rights (Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, part 12)	Councils may erect and operate, without the need to seek planning permission, a wide variety of small buildings, equipment and other structures			This can include a range of small ‘green’ developments

	on their land, for the purposes of any of their functions or public services.			
Power to comment on planning applications as statutory consultee (Town & Country Planning Act 1990)	Most planning applications in the parish or town will be sent by the planning authority for comment	Ask that any new building is well insulated and produces as much of its own energy as possible	Caution around any development on low-lying land due to flood risk, and encourage tree and food planting on site	Object to any proposal for development on green field land on the basis of no community benefit – such land is required for food production
Power to work with higher level councils (Local Government Act 1972, ss. 101 & 136)	Section 136 could help with expenditure on a wider range of activities but perhaps more important is to explore Section 101 in detail with districts/ boroughs/ county councils to look at delegated or shared services.			
Power to acquire land (Local Government Act 1972, ss 124, 126 & 127)	Gives Parish Councils the power to acquire by agreement, to appropriate (to dispose of) **land** – there is no restriction on the use of that land.			

Car sharing schemes (Local Government and Rating Act 1997 s.26)	Gives Parishes the power to establish and maintain a **car sharing scheme** that benefits the council's area or to assist others in doing so. Now that could be limited to electric cars!			
Improve local biodiversity (Public Health Act 1936 s.260)				Gives the power to **maintain or improve ditches and ponds** – or pay others to do so. Ponds can be important for local biodiversity.
Maintain and enhance biodiversity (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 s.40, confirmed by the Environment Act 2021; Environment (Wales) Act 2016 s.6)				Gives a duty to have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of a council's functions, to the purpose of **conserving biodiversity**