

Annual Climate Change Update Report 2024/25

Prepared by the Climate Change Officer

Email: climatechange@welhat.gov.uk

1. Introduction

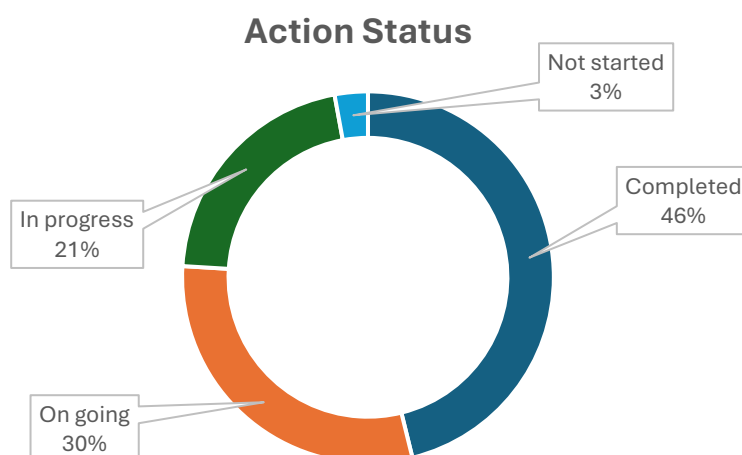
- 1.1 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, reflecting the urgency of addressing climate change and its impacts on our communities, environment and local economy. Since then, the Council has embedded climate action as a core consideration in decision-making and service delivery.
- 1.2 The Council has committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions across its own operations by 2030 and supporting the wider borough to reach net zero by 2050. These ambitious targets align with national climate commitments and demonstrate the Council's leadership role in driving local action.
- 1.3 Action on climate change is a key corporate priority for the Council. This priority is underpinned by a set of clear objectives focused on reducing carbon emissions, enhancing climate resilience, protecting biodiversity, and supporting residents, businesses and partners to transition to a more sustainable future.
- 1.4 In 2025, the Council published its new Transition to Net Zero Strategy, which sets out a long-term vision for a sustainable, resilient and low-carbon borough. The Strategy outlines the scale of change required and the strategic approach needed to deliver meaningful emissions reductions while maximising wider social, environmental and economic benefits.
- 1.5 The Strategy is supported by a detailed Climate Action Plan, which identifies the specific actions, projects and initiatives required to achieve its objectives. The Action Plan includes delivery lead responsibilities, indicative timescales, co benefits, carbon reduction impact and performance indicators to enable effective monitoring and governance
- 1.6 A bi-monthly Climate Change Update Report is presented to the Climate and Biodiversity Cabinet Panel, providing transparency and oversight of projects being delivered in support of the Strategy and the Council's wider corporate priorities.

2. Annual review

- 2.1 This Annual Report has been written to provide a summary of progress made across the Council's climate change and sustainability agenda during the 2025/26 financial year, highlighting key achievements, ongoing challenges and areas of focus for the year ahead.
- 2.2 Of the 104 actions set out in the Climate Action Plan, 48 have been completed. A further 31 actions are classified as ongoing, 22 are currently in progress, and 3 have not yet commenced.

Actions categorised as *in progress* are typically time-limited and have defined end dates, while *ongoing* actions represent continuing activities that have been embedded within business-as-usual operations. These *ongoing* actions are

subject to continuous delivery, monitoring, review and, where appropriate, further development over time.



3. Key deliverables 2025/26

- 3.1 In line with the thematic headings of the Transition to Net Zero Strategy, this chapter sets out key projects delivered under each theme.

3.2 Community

- 3.2.1 A total of £5,000 was awarded through the Climate Action Small Grants programme to support 10 small-scale community-led climate action projects across the borough. The funding was made available to not-for-profit community organisations, schools and parish councils. The programme generated strong interest, with 21 applications received, demonstrating a high level of engagement and appetite for local climate action initiatives.

The funded projects supporting practical carbon reduction activities, such as energy efficiency, active travel, improvements to nature and the circular economy. They all demonstrate increased environmental awareness and behaviour change at a local level by empowering communities to test and deliver tailored, place-based solutions

- 3.2.2 £20,000 of National Lottery funding was secured to support the installation of state-of-the-art, energy-generating outdoor gym equipment at the King George V (KGV) Playing Fields. This innovative infrastructure promotes physical wellbeing while raising awareness of renewable energy and sustainability

through active, visible technology in a public space. The equipment also acts as an engagement and education tool, helping to normalise low-carbon technologies and encourage positive behaviour change through everyday activity.

3.2.3 The Climate Hub continues to be developed as a central, digital “one-stop shop” for climate action across the borough. The hub supports behaviour change by improving access to information, showcasing progress, signposting residents and organisations to funding opportunities and training, and promoting local events and positive climate-related initiatives. By increasing awareness and reducing barriers to participation, the hub plays a key role in enabling informed, sustainable choices.

3.2.4 The Council participated in Great Big Green Week for the second consecutive year, delivering a programme of free events across the borough to engage residents in sustainable practices and environmental awareness. Activities included a cycling event featuring police-led bike security marking and a pop-up repair workshop, a guided tour of Tewin Green Market Garden, an educational session on “Creating a Space for Nature,” stream dipping in partnership with Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, a design a hedgehog home competition for children, and a community clothes swap.

In addition to this programme, the Council delivered a range of community engagement activities throughout the year to promote waste reduction and sustainable behaviours. This included hosting an interactive stall and game during Recycling Week, as well as distributing 150 aluminium water bottles during Plastic Free July across four pop-up events, encouraging residents to reduce reliance on single-use plastics.

3.3 Energy

3.3.1 Building on the success of Wave 2.1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), through which the Council received a prestigious INCA Award in the *Refurbishment: Low Rise – Render / Traditional Finish* category, the Council has successfully secured a further £6.8 million through the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund.

This external funding has been supplemented by £6.2 million of Council match funding, reflecting a significant corporate investment in improving the quality, energy efficiency and long-term sustainability of the Council’s housing stock.

The programme will support the delivery of energy efficiency retrofit improvements to 653 social housing properties between April 2025 and March

2028, with the aim of achieving a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C across all homes included in the scheme. The project will deliver substantial carbon emissions reductions, improve thermal comfort, reduce fuel poverty, and enhance health and wellbeing outcomes for residents, while also contributing directly to the Council's net zero objectives and wider place-based decarbonisation ambitions.

- 3.3.2 During the reporting period, the Council established a partnership with the National Energy Foundation (NEF) to deliver the Warm Homes: Local Grant programme, targeting privately owned homes across the borough. The Council has secured up to £1.5 million in external funding to support the delivery of energy efficiency measures and low-carbon technologies for eligible homeowners over a three-year period.

The programme is focused on improving the energy performance of lower-income and fuel-poor households, helping to reduce carbon emissions, lower energy costs, and improve thermal comfort and living conditions. By extending retrofit support beyond the social housing sector, the scheme plays an important role in influencing behaviour change within the private housing market and supporting a borough-wide transition to low-carbon, energy-efficient homes.

- 3.3.3 Approximately £100,000 has been invested in upgrading the lighting and heating in six of our commercial buildings, namely, Campus West, The Hive, Mill Green Museum, Vineyard Barn, Hat tech and White Lion House. These improvements are designed to enhance the energy efficiency of the Council's estate by reducing overall energy consumption and reliance on fossil fuels.

By installing more efficient systems, the Council is not only lowering operational energy demand but also contributing to a reduction in carbon emissions associated with the day-to-day running of these facilities. In the longer term, these upgrades are expected to deliver financial benefits through reduced energy costs, while supporting the Council's wider commitment to achieving net zero and improving the environmental performance of its assets.

3.4 Nature

- 3.4.1 In May, the Council successfully delivered its annual compost giveaway event, distributing approximately 10 tonnes of compost to residents to support sustainable gardening practices. This initiative plays a key role in encouraging residents to enhance soil health, reduce reliance on chemical fertilisers, and adopt more environmentally conscious behaviours within their own outdoor spaces. By increasing the availability of nutrient-rich compost, the scheme contributes to the creation and improvement of habitats across the borough, particularly benefiting pollinators by enhancing local food sources and biodiversity. The event was extremely well received, with all available compost

claimed within just one hour, demonstrating strong community engagement and appetite for practical climate and nature-based initiatives.

- 3.4.2 As part of the *Your Tree, Our Future* programme, the Council distributed an impressive 13,000 trees and hedgerow packs to residents, alongside achieving its corporate planting target of 300 street and orchard trees. This large-scale tree and hedgerow planting initiative is expected to deliver a range of long-term environmental benefits, including increased biodiversity, strengthened ecological networks, and enhanced habitat connectivity across the borough. In addition, these natural assets will support climate resilience by contributing to carbon sequestration, improving air quality, and providing shading and cooling benefits during periods of extreme heat. The programme continues to empower residents to take an active role in climate action, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the local environment.
- 3.4.5 The Council has continued to actively manage and maintain its network of naturalised wildflower areas, supporting seasonal biodiversity and enhancing the visual quality of green spaces across the borough. These efforts have not only contributed to ecological improvements but have also been recognised through continued success in the Anglia in Bloom awards. Danesbury Park was awarded Gold in the Historic Parks and Gardens category, reflecting the high standard of its management and conservation. In addition, Welwyn Garden City BID was named overall category winner and achieved a Silver Gilt award in the Business Improvement District category. These achievements highlight the Council's ongoing commitment to high-quality green space management, community pride, and biodiversity enhancement.
- 3.4.6 A total of XX Landscape Management Plans were reviewed and updated in line with their standard 10-year cycle. These plans included Sherrardspark Wood, Danesbury Park, Mardley Heath, and Northaw Great Wood. The updates ensure that each site continues to be managed in accordance with current best practice, incorporating the latest ecological evidence, legislative requirements, and local priorities for biodiversity conservation and enhancement.

The refreshed management plans provide a strategic framework for the long-term stewardship of these important green assets, setting out clear objectives and actions to protect and enhance habitats, support priority species, and improve resilience to environmental pressures such as climate change. They also support the delivery of wider corporate objectives, including commitments under the Council's Climate Action Plan and alignment with the Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

- 3.4.7 The Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was published following an extensive programme of collaboration and engagement over a period of more than 12 months, involving local authorities, environmental organisations, landowners, businesses, and community stakeholders across the county. The strategy provides a comprehensive, evidence-based framework for restoring and enhancing biodiversity at a landscape scale, identifying priority habitats and species, as well as opportunities for targeted nature recovery and habitat connectivity.

Aligned with national policy under the Environment Act, the LNRS sets a clear strategic direction for coordinated action, ensuring that nature recovery is integrated into spatial planning, land management, and wider place-based initiatives. It also plays a key role in supporting the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain, green infrastructure planning, and climate adaptation objectives, recognising the interdependence between the climate and ecological crises.

The Council will continue to work proactively with partners and stakeholders within the borough to support the effective implementation of the strategy, ensuring that local priorities are reflected and that delivery is embedded across relevant services and projects. This includes exploring opportunities to align council-owned land management, planning policy, and community engagement activities with the LNRS priorities to maximise environmental outcomes.

Further detail on the strategy, including its implications for the borough and proposed delivery approach, will be presented to the Panel under a separate agenda item.

- 3.4.8 Comprehensive cyclical management plans have been completed for key natural assets across the borough, ensuring a structured and long-term approach to the stewardship of these important sites. This includes the 10-year Landscape Management Plans for The Commons, alongside 10-year Woodland Management Plans for Sherrardspark Wood, Mardley Heath, and Northaw Great Wood.

These plans provide a strategic framework for the conservation, enhancement, and sustainable management of these areas, supporting the protection of biodiversity and the delivery of wider environmental benefits. They set out clear actions to maintain and improve habitat quality, promote species diversity, and strengthen the resilience of these ecosystems to the impacts of climate change, including increased temperatures, extreme weather events, and pest and disease pressures.

In addition, the plans contribute to the provision of high-quality, accessible green spaces for residents, supporting health and wellbeing, encouraging responsible access, and fostering a stronger connection between communities and the natural environment.

3.5 Transport

- 3.5.1 The Council completed the final installations associated with the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS). With £695,350 central government funding, this programme delivered approximately 192 charge point sockets across the borough and significantly strengthened local charging provision for residents. As a result of this investment, Welwyn Hatfield was ranked 20th nationally for the number of public EV charge points per 100,000 residents, demonstrating strong relative performance in supporting the uptake of ultra-low-emission vehicles.
- 3.5.2 Building on this progress, the Council is now prioritising the expansion of on-street EV charging infrastructure to support residents without private driveways or access to convenient off-street charge points, addressing a key equity and accessibility barrier to EV adoption. This work is being delivered through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Fund, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council and all district and borough councils across Hertfordshire. The countywide programme has secured in excess of £6 million in government funding and will enable coordinated planning and delivery of on-street charging infrastructure, supporting behaviour change, accelerating the transition away from internal combustion engine vehicles, and contributing to borough-wide carbon reduction and air quality objectives.

3.6 Resources; Waste

- 3.6.1 The Council funded and supported the launch of BorrowIt at the Howard Centre, introducing a practical circular economy initiative that enables residents to borrow items rather than purchase them. This approach directly supports waste reduction, resource efficiency and the cost of living crisis, while encouraging long-term behaviour change around consumption habits. Early performance data indicates strong uptake, with the Welwyn Hatfield location recording higher sign-up levels than two established London sites, demonstrating significant demand for sharing-based, low-waste solutions locally.
- 3.6.2 Simpler Recycling legislation, effective 31 March 2025, standardises recycling across England, requiring households and businesses to separate key recyclable materials to improve recycling rates and reduce contamination.

A dedicated Simpler Recycling Officer was appointed in May 2025, with responsibility for introducing food waste and full recycling services to communal residential blocks across Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

During June and July 2025, site visits were completed at approximately 900 communal sites to assess existing waste and recycling provisions to; identify requirements for new or expanded services; and determine any remedial works needed to accommodate additional or replacement bins

The findings from these visits informed service design, infrastructure planning, and delivery schedules.

The simpler recycling officer will be attending a future Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel with a presentation on her role and details about the programme.

3.7 Partnerships

- 3.7.1 The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership continues to operate as a highly effective multi-stakeholder collaboration, demonstrating the value of coordinated, place-based action. By leveraging shared expertise, economies of scale, and a unified regional vision, the partnership consistently delivers outcomes that exceed what individual organisations could achieve independently.

During the 2025/26 financial year, the partnership achieved a number of significant milestones. These included becoming the first UK pilot for the Local Area Retrofit Accelerator, as well as publishing both a countywide Retrofit Strategy and an Offsetting Strategy. The partnership's leadership and impact were further recognised through the award of a national GOLD accolade at the iESE Awards 2025, highlighting excellence in public service delivery and climate leadership.

In addition, the partnership successfully delivered the third year of the Solar Together scheme, resulting in 601 solar photovoltaic and battery storage installations across Hertfordshire. This initiative is estimated to deliver carbon savings of over 472 tonnes per annum, contributing meaningfully to boroughwide net zero ambitions while supporting residents to transition to low-carbon energy solutions.

- 3.7.3 Let's Go Zero - The government has said that by 2025, every education setting will have nominated a "sustainability lead", who will be responsible for putting in place climate action plans, also by 2025.

In response to this and to help schools meet this requirement, the council have worked closely with the charity, Let's Go Zero to deliver four series of workshops (2 parts in each) outlining the requirements and details on how to create a realistic, implementable climate action plan.

We worked with County Council to promote the opportunity to all educational settings across Hertfordshire. Approximately 60 Market schools have benefitted from these workshops to date.

3.8 Adaptation

- 3.8.1 Redevelopment of Market place, Hatfield – Sustainability considerations were embedded throughout the project. Ninety-four per cent of the existing block paving was

retained and reused on site, significantly reducing material waste and embodied carbon associated with disposal and replacement. Timber arising from the scheme was repurposed to create on-site wildlife habitats, supporting local species and contributing to ecological resilience. In addition, the landscaping works were designed to deliver a 10% biodiversity net gain, in accordance with national policy expectations, resulting in reduced environmental impact, lower carbon emissions, and a measurable enhancement of the natural environment.

- 3.8.2 Under Regulation 18 of the Local Plan process, a clear vision and set of strategic objectives have been established, including a strong emphasis on *Climate Resilience and Environmental Stewardship* and *Sustainable and Well-Designed Growth*. These priorities reflect the Council's commitment to embedding environmental considerations, high standards of design, and long-term sustainability into future development across the borough.

Engagement undertaken as part of this stage highlighted strong local support for these themes. Addressing climate change was identified as a key priority, with respondents emphasising the importance of delivering sustainable homes that are resilient to future climate impacts. This includes measures such as adapting to overheating, integrating renewable energy technologies, and enhancing flood resilience. There was also clear support for strengthening the natural environment through protection and enhancement of green and blue infrastructure, and for maximising the use of nature-based solutions. These approaches not only support biodiversity recovery but also provide multiple co-benefits, including improved climate adaptation and resilience, better water management, and enhanced health and wellbeing outcomes for residents. Collectively, these local views reinforce the borough's commitment to sustainability and resilience, and help to shape the direction of emerging planning policies.

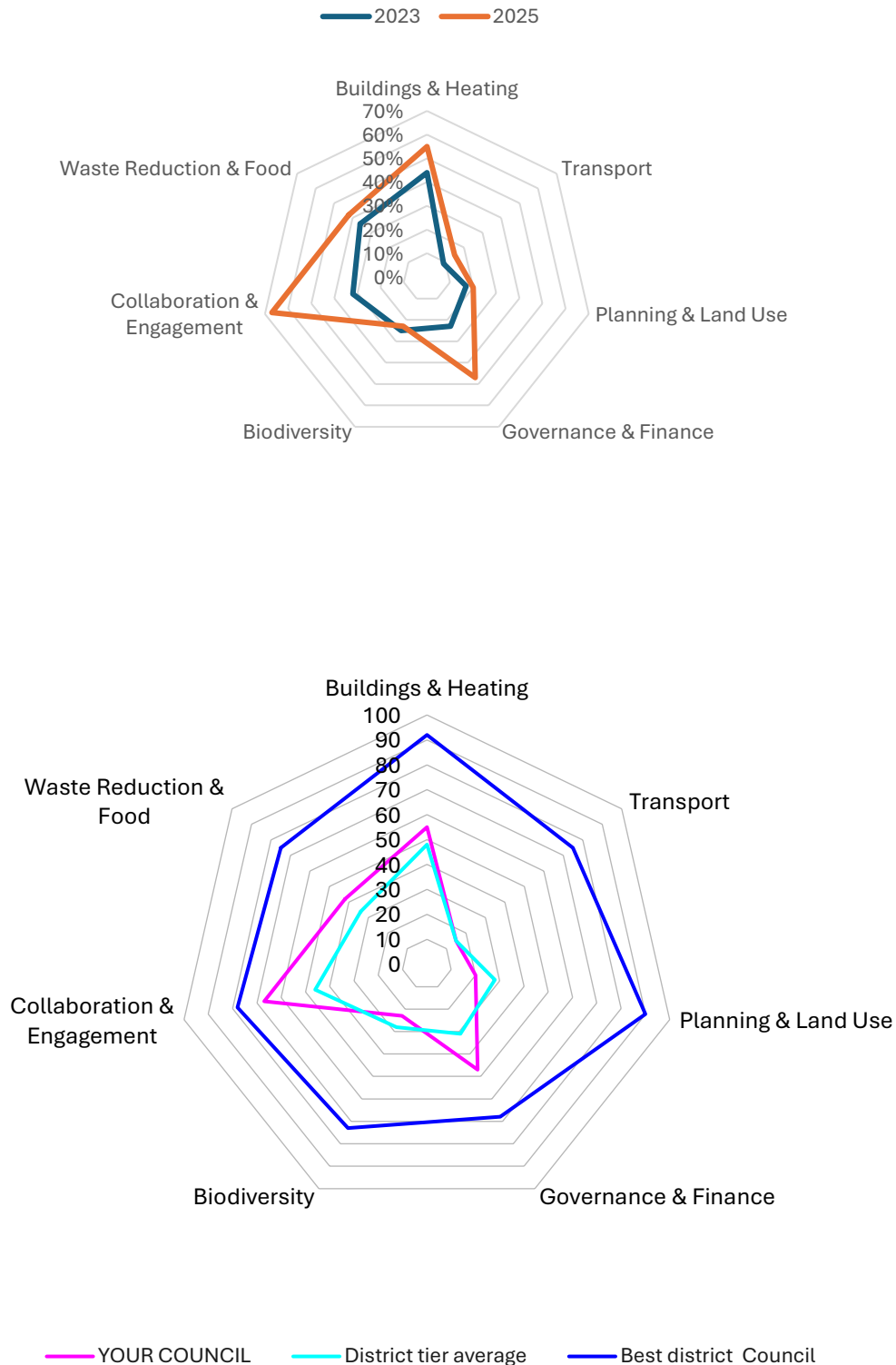
The Planning Team is currently progressing work on the draft Local Plan, translating these strategic objectives and community priorities into detailed policies and site allocations that will guide future development. Subject to progress, the Council is aiming to advance to the Regulation 19 stage in autumn this year, at which point the Draft Plan will be published for consultation prior to final submission.

3.9.1 General

- 3.9.1 Climate Emergency UK is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company that publishes biannual scorecards assessing local authorities' progress on climate action.

In the 2025 assessment, the Council achieved a significant improvement in its overall score from the previous assessment in 2023, with an increase of 12%. The most notable progress was in the area of collaboration and engagement. The Council remains committed to building on this progress, with a continued focus on strengthening performance across all areas as it works to reduce emissions and support the development of more sustainable and climate-resilient communities.

Climate emergency UK score cards



5. Emissions

5.1 Corporate GHG assessment

Key findings from the 2025/26 corporate greenhouse gas assessment will be presented in the September panel meeting as the calculations have not yet been completed. (Emission factors are not released until June/July and this report had to go through relevant approval processes prior to their release).

5.2 Boroughwide GHG assessment

Data for 2024 has not yet been published by central government (which usually occurs around June/July), as such, no updated findings are included in this report. It should be noted that borough-wide emissions data is published on a two-year retrospective basis and therefore would not align with the reporting period covered by the 2025/26 Annual Report.