



Collaborative Climate Change Event: Report



Context

We hosted a series of four in-person collaborative climate change events across the county. These events were opened by Councillor Glen Sanderson, Northumberland County Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate change. They all mirrored a similar event run for Members around three key topics that link to the climate change challenge and solutions facing Northumberland and overlap with other key Council priorities.

The following events were held:

November 2022: Blyth (Southeast)

January 2023: Hexham (West)

March 2023: Alnwick (Central)

May 2023: Berwick (North)

The main objective of these in-person collaborative events was to gather the perspectives of residents/business owners/communities within Northumberland regarding how to reach our net zero targets as a county and the complexities and priorities encountered by our residents.



Collaborative Climate Change Event: Feedback

Introduction

The tables included in this document outline the issues and suggestions raised by those who attended one of our in-person climate change events which were held:

- December in Blyth
- January in Hexham
- March in Alnwick
- June in Berwick

The Climate Change Team will take this feedback into consideration when creating the 2023 update of the Climate Change Action Plan. However, this does not mean that all these suggestions are within the team's capacity to carry out, feasible or a top priority for immediate action.

Any feedback which is unable to be actioned will be explored in the 2026 Climate Change Action Plan update once there has been further investigation into these areas.

Breakout session: Heat, Buildings and Energy Efficiency

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Planning	Retrofit	Challenge of retrofitting listed buildings.	Easier planning permissions for listed building energy conservation measures.
	New builds	New builds to meet high standards for energy efficiency, to prevent retrofitting in the future. For new builds to be net zero design.	Is there scope for the Council to enforce energy efficiency and renewables on new builds by private companies?
	Planning Policy	Restrictions at national level for planning that are not supporting climate goals at a local level.	Use the Council political voice to pressure central Government for national level change that aligns planning with climate change targets.
	The planning process	<p>Navigating planning processes as a private homeowner.</p> <p><i>'As a private homeowner wanting to install ground solar panels the planning hoops to go through are little incentive to try and do your bit to decarbonise - the whole planning process has been awful and non-sensible.'</i></p> <p>Understanding which planning regulations are relevant when considering retrofitting or renewables installation, especially for listed buildings.</p>	Clear guidelines for homeowners, specifically relating to retrofitting and renewable installation.



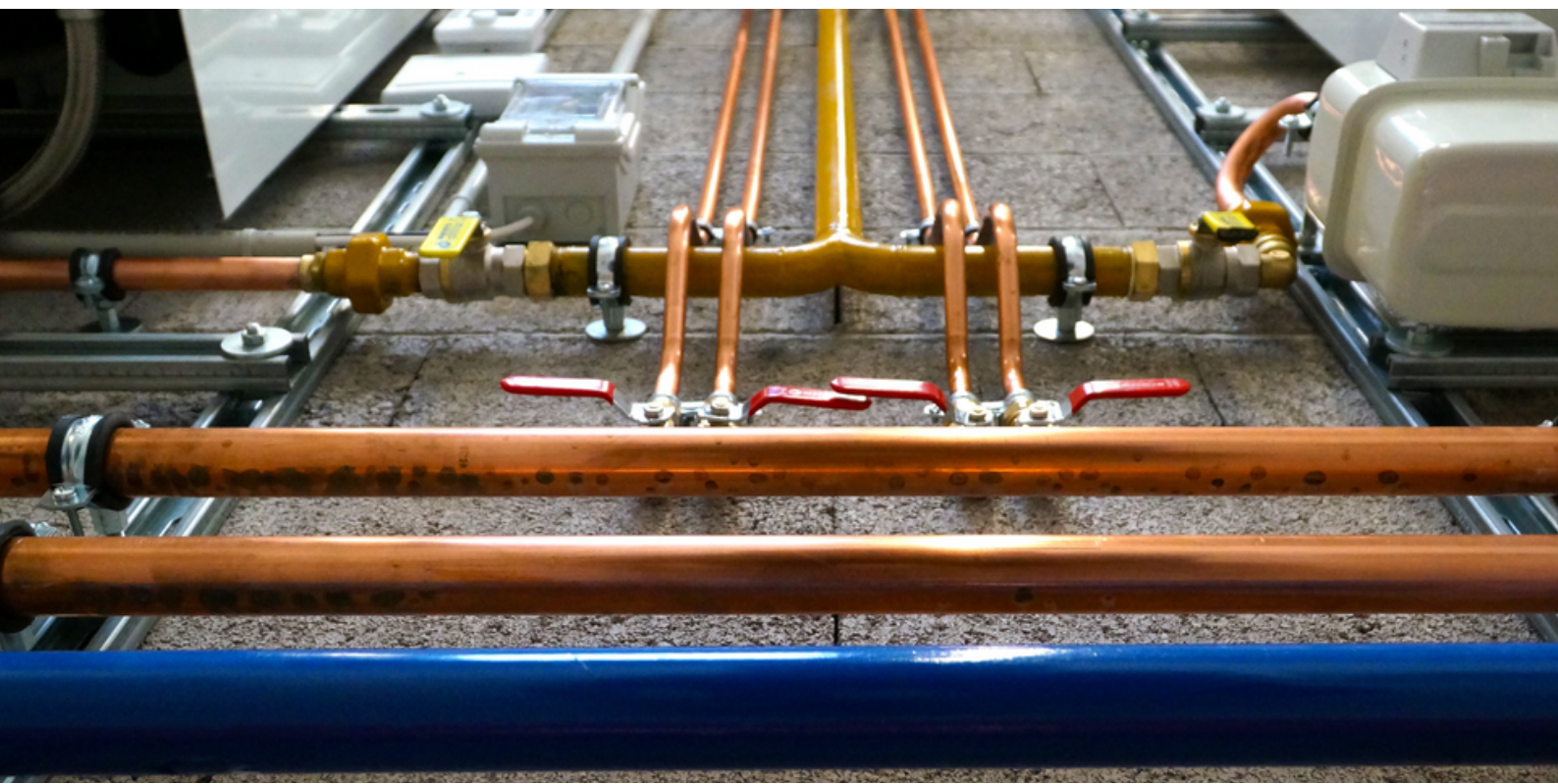
Breakout session: Heat, Buildings and Energy Efficiency

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Advice	Understanding what measures are available for homes.	Challenge of retrofitting listed buildings.	<p>A central place where homeowners can find information about renewable energy options and retrofitting. This would need to be kept up to date.</p> <p>In-person support or one-to-one support for people to discuss their retrofit or renewable installation journeys.</p>
	Awareness	<p>Clarity around what retrofitting means. Make retrofitting understandable and accessible.</p> <p>Promote Warmer Homes to increase awareness, improve take-up and reduce fuel poverty.</p>	<p>Make carbon literacy training available to wider audiences.</p> <p>CAN (Community Action Northumberland) suggested it has capacity to help households lower their energy use with one-to-one consultations and support. Potential to support climate goals at a community level.</p>



Breakout session: Heat, Buildings and Energy Efficiency

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Local energy generation	Network	<p>The challenge of grid capacity limiting or stopping community energy projects.</p> <p>The installation of heat pumps for individual homes is limited by grid capacity, which is a key barrier to decarbonisation.</p>	<p>Discussion with key energy grid stakeholders to support local energy generation and renewable installation for individuals, looking at novel ideas or where the grid is being updated.</p>
	Funding and support	<p>Funding to support local and novel community energy projects. Specifically what funding might replace the Rural Community Energy fund and whether there is funding available for initial feasibility studies.</p> <p>Is there funding available for electric storage systems?</p>	<p>Providing clear signposting to funding opportunities as they emerge.</p> <p>How much funding is available from Northumberland County Council for communities to reach net zero?</p>



Breakout session: Heat, Buildings and Energy Efficiency

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Opportunities	Heat networks	<p>Consider how to engage all stakeholders in discussions when it comes to the implementation of heat networks.</p> <p>Accessing private investment for DHN (District Heat Network) infrastructure development.</p> <p>Proportion of buildings in Northumberland which will be and need to be connected to DHNs.</p> <p>Timelines for the DHNs.</p> <p>Helping rural areas, not connected to the grid, understand the options available and whether DHNs could be a possibility.</p>	<p>More publicly available information about DHNs and the feasibility studies that have been undertaken.</p>
	Other opportunities	<p>Incentives for businesses to install renewables and how this is being communicated.</p>	<p>Opportunities to spearhead best practices within Northumberland. For example, Passivhaus standard, DHNs or ground source heating.</p> <p>Northumberland County Council estate to lead by example.</p>
Resilience	Adaptation and resilience	<p>Implications of warming and hot summers. Consider building regulations, retrofitting and energy consumption to cool buildings in hot weather.</p> <p>Increase in the number of storms. Resilience of new electric systems. Consider back up and energy storage, particularly with heat networks.</p>	

Breakout session: Reducing Transport Emissions

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Private cars	Car usage	<p>Reducing dependence on cars, particularly the reliance on cars for short-journeys.</p> <p>Reduce multi-car ownership.</p>	<p>Provide alternatives, such as community car clubs.</p> <p>Traffic reduction measures, which would promote other transport options.</p>
	Electric Vehicles	<p>Network of on-street EV (electric vehicle) chargers to fit the local need.</p> <p>EV installation barriers due to Northern PowerGrid capacity.</p> <p>Concerns about barriers due to cost and houses without off-street parking.</p> <p>Alternative transport options that are equally as good but less expensive.</p>	<p>Chargepoints using lampposts. This is being considered by other Councils. For example, Derbyshire County Council.</p>



Breakout session: Reducing Transport Emissions

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Public transport	Behaviour change	Pricing issues for mobility. People are unlikely to want to pay the same prices for short distances. This impacts people with mobility issues, disabilities or certain societal groups (parents with young children) in choosing to take public transport.	Promotion and publicity of routes will make it an easier choice for people.
	Connectivity	Fragmented transport network which costs multiple bus journeys for a simple car journey is a huge factor in reducing likelihood of public transport take up. Taking bikes on public transport.	Intermodal transport routes when planning public transport and active transport routes.



Breakout session: Reducing Transport Emissions

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Active travel	Behaviour change	<p>Improve take up of active transport options and reduce the reliance on cars.</p> <p>Dangerous roads deter people from cycling.</p>	<p>Behaviour change campaigns such as the Big Northumberland Gear Change.</p> <p>Improve access to electric bikes as an option of transport between towns.</p>
	Infrastructure	<p>Cycling can improve with dedicated cycle lanes and improved cycling infrastructure.</p> <p>More robust analysis from the County Council when deciding cycling and walking routes, including discussion of busy and/or dangerous roads and connections to public transport routes.</p> <p>Consider walking and cycling as key forms of transport, as well as motor vehicles, when planning permissions are granted.</p> <p>Revenue funding to support long-term behaviour change campaigns and long-term maintenance and improvement of new infrastructure.</p>	<p>Consider micromobility (small, lightweight vehicles operating at speeds typically below 15 mph and driven personally by users) when planning.</p> <p>Focus last mile connection on local transport, not only larger transport routes.</p> <p>Consider 15-minute towns when planning transportation and town planning/regeneration. For example, in Berwick, the grocery shops have now moved to the outer edges of town making public/active travel challenging.</p>



Breakout session: Natural resources and land management

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Agriculture	Demands on land use	<p>Concerns about balancing demands on farmland. For example, food production, energy generation, biodiversity, reducing emissions, housing and sequestration.</p> <p>Keep the discussion nuanced. Land use debates tend to lend themselves to strong opinions. The Council must take a place-based approach to landscape which is not based on assumptions.</p> <p>Concerns that farming land for food is being taken over for solar farms.</p> <p>Less productive land could be more appropriate for renewables or tree planting, keeping the best land for agricultural purposes.</p> <p>How to seriously consider the methane and nitrous oxide emissions, which are largely agricultural (particularly related to animal husbandry), in a way that's engaging and effective but doesn't villainise farmers.</p>	<p>Bespoke landscape strategy in partnership with key stakeholders, balancing demand and optimising land-use.</p>
	Opportunities and Potential issues	<p>Subsidies for farmers, to help them diversify their business to include biodiversity and sequestration. But concerns about tenant farmers vs landowners and who gets this funding.</p> <p>Discussion about how improving or focusing on biodiversity or carbon sequestration could provide a tourism revenue, both for farmers themselves, but also potential for larger Northumberland tourism pull in terms of green tourism to the area.</p>	<p>Opportunities to learn from each other – especially councils with similar geographical context.</p>

Breakout session: Natural resources and land management

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Biodiversity and environment	Pollution	Worries around water pollution (both due to agricultural runoff and wastewater pollution)	
	Northumberland County Council management	<p>Verge maintenance that is biodiversity friendly.</p> <p>Clear succession plans for planting carried out by the County Council or Town and Parish Councils in terms of maintenance, watering, and thinning to allow new growth.</p> <p>Concern that biodiversity is often overlooked especially when it conflicts with savings/costs.</p> <p>Supporting of more diversity in woodlands (owned by the County Council but also through the Great Northumberland Forest).</p>	<p>Clear policies around the Council's use of pesticides and where these can be reduced.</p> <p>Clear policies around mowing and strimming on verges.</p> <p>Regret that Northumberland County Council sold off land in the past. Suggestion of maintaining and improving Council-owned land for sequestration and biodiversity.</p> <p>Purchasing land if feasible and available to support these aims.</p> <p>Council should declare a biodiversity emergency and create capacity in the Council to address this.</p> <p>The creation of a holistic environmental plan, not just a climate change plan.</p>
	Engagement	<p>Schools are a key place to engage the next generation in protecting nature, the environment and biodiversity.</p> <p>Calls for education around the importance of soils and peatlands for carbon sequestration, biodiversity and food production.</p> <p>Opportunities for personal experiences and connections with nature.</p> <p>Education is key – about the nature crisis, why we need to act, and what we need to do.</p>	<p>Countryside code to be taught in schools.</p> <p>Map verges and engage communities in the planting and biodiversity work the County Council is doing to protect these.</p> <p>Use inspiring stories to engage people.</p> <p>Share climate change resources such as the book, <i>Wilding – inspirational stories (tackling climate anxiety)</i> – by Isabella Tree.</p>

Breakout session: Natural resources and land management

	Theme	Key priorities	Suggestions
Community action	Town and Parish Council	<p>How Town and Parish Councils could work out sequestration value in local areas.</p> <p>Support to help Town and Parish Councils connect with landowners for climate change initiatives such as tree planting.</p> <p>Funding opportunities for tree surveys at a parish-level so action plans can be created on where to plant, maintenance and state of condition.</p>	<p>Opportunities for learning about land management across Town and Parish Council's.</p> <p>Best practice sharing between Town and Parish Councils around biodiversity, tree planting and making space for nature.</p>
	Community projects	<p>Land ownership biggest barrier. Difficult to find spaces for community projects like local community farms, orchards, or plant nurseries.</p> <p>Scope and enthusiasm for community planting projects.</p> <p>Benefits of community horticulture/allotments and farming scheme for social benefits and to tackle food waste issues.</p> <p>Using deserted or spare areas of land within towns/villages for community orchards or veg patches.</p>	
	Greenspaces	<p>Inequalities surrounding access to greenspaces.</p> <p>Maintenance and safety of greenspaces.</p>	<p>Integrate greenspaces within towns and communities instead of being isolated (with County Council support).</p>



Next steps for Northumberland County Council's Climate Change Team

Breakout session: Heat, buildings and energy efficiency

- Go through the suggestions and discuss feasibility with relevant stakeholders.
- Regular meetings with planning to discuss concerns raised.
- Closely involve planning in the drafting of the next Climate Change Action Plan, specifically in reference to housing and developments.

Breakout session: Reducing transport emissions

- Go through the suggestions and discuss feasibility with relevant stakeholders.
- Create a clear plan for transport within the next Climate Change Action Plan which outlines the levers of the Council, key stakeholders and partners and funding opportunities which are essential to these projects.

Breakout session: Natural resources and land management

- Incorporate an agricultural plan into the next Climate Change Action Plan.
- Outline the scope and challenge of the agricultural plan with consideration that private landowners and national subsidies for agriculture are determinants of land use and land use change.
- Identify the Council's levers for change in this area and key stakeholders.
- Consider which areas sit within the Climate Change Team's expertise and capacity and suggest the inclusion of Council teams outside of this where there are skills, knowledge or capacity gaps.



General feedback and queries

Area	Key priorities, concerns and suggestions
Values	If there are a set of key values that the County Council and Climate Change Team use to steer their work, and if these can be embedded within the next Climate Change Action Plan.
Tourism	Potential tensions between action on climate change and tourism-led regeneration. This should be covered in the next Climate Change Action Plan.
Engagement	<p>How schools are being reached.</p> <p>Engaging more diverse groups. The events are reaching similar people. The County Council must look at ways to engage with younger people, people of different demographics and backgrounds.</p> <p>Carbon literacy training for public audiences.</p> <p>Engage with Town and Parish Councils to support local climate action.</p> <p>Role of individuals within communities in raising awareness with their Town and Parish Councils in order push climate change up the agenda.</p>
Politics	The role of party politics in the Council's county level Climate Change Action plan. Concerns around the influence of national party politics on local politics and what the implications of this are for climate action.
Resilience	Resilience must run through all of the work being done on climate change and embedded within the Climate Change Action Plan.
Risk	Both the risk of not acting and the risk of climate change solutions, should be outlined within the next action plan. Broader information available about how risk is assessed by the Climate Change Team.