



Net Zero Toolkit

**CONSERVATIVE
ENVIRONMENT
NETWORK**

CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENT NETWORK



The Conservative Environment Network (CEN) is an independent forum, Parliamentary caucus, and grassroots organisation for conservatives who support conservation and decarbonisation.



CREDITS

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FOREWORD

Andy Street

Mayor of the West Midlands

Local and regional authorities have an essential role to play in meeting our national net zero ambitions. Mayors and councillors, working alongside our Members of Parliament, are best placed to understand the needs of their areas and know how best to implement net zero policies. We are the bridge between national government and local communities, coordinating our decarbonisation efforts and empowering people to reduce their carbon footprint.

The government published a raft of strategies last year that set the direction, created the market frameworks, and established the sources of funding for net zero. The £500 million Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme, the £800 million Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund,

and the £950 million Home Upgrade Grant have all given local authorities an opportunity to prove their capability to deliver a greener Britain. This is a great start, and mayors and council leaders now have a real appetite to work more closely with Westminster to clean up our housing stock.

Local leaders also play a vital role in cutting transport emissions: new hydrogen and electric bus fleets are springing up across the country, and councils are leading the way in reducing air pollution with improved cycling infrastructure and more walkable streets. Local authorities will inevitably be the ones that end up delivering the government's objective to make public transport and active travel the natural first choice for getting about.

Reaching the government's 2050 net zero target and halting Britain's contribution to climate change also necessitates a total restoration of our natural environment. Our trees, peatlands, hedgerows, wildflower meadows, and coastal and marine habitats hold the potential to sequester one third of Britain's emissions. Nature can be a defence from flooding and a provider of skilled jobs, and local authorities are well placed to deliver these nature-friendly projects. Here in the West Midlands, we've worked with our councillors to do just this, working with local authorities like Solihull to deliver nature corridors across the borough.

Whether it's retrofitting our housing stock, building a clean public transport network or driving investment in green infrastructure, local leaders can be visible and accountable drivers of change across the country, making the case for the right powers and resources to deliver on behalf of their constituents.

We've pulled through this pandemic together, but people don't want things to simply go back to the way they were. Voters want to see change and improvement: they want to build back better and greener, they want to see investment in their communities and a rejuvenated natural environment, and they want their local leaders to support them in playing their part to fight climate change.

This Net Zero Toolkit from the Conservative Environment Network isn't simply an instruction manual on how to start delivering that change, but an invitation to join a rapidly growing network of conservatives – the biggest of its kind in the world – that is leading the way in decarbonisation and conservation.



Andy Street was elected as Mayor of the West Midlands in May 2017 and again in May 2021. Prior to being elected, Andy was Managing Director at John Lewis and chair of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership.



CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS NET ZERO?

The consequences of climate change are becoming more tangible every year. A warmer world, caused by greater concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, is making extreme weather events more frequent across the world, with all the socio-economic and security consequences becoming clear to see. Here in the UK, we are seeing more unpredictable weather, with floods devastating property, farms, and transport networks. If we fail to mitigate global temperature rises, the damage to the economy will reach into tens of billions of pounds every year in damage.

'Net zero' means net zero greenhouse gas emissions. This does not mean zero emissions, which would be impossible. It means reducing emissions as much as possible and then offsetting (removing emissions from the atmosphere by natural or technological means) the remainder so that, overall, we are not contributing to climate change anymore, and could then begin to reverse global temperature rises. The idea of net zero was established in international law by the Paris Agreement in 2015.

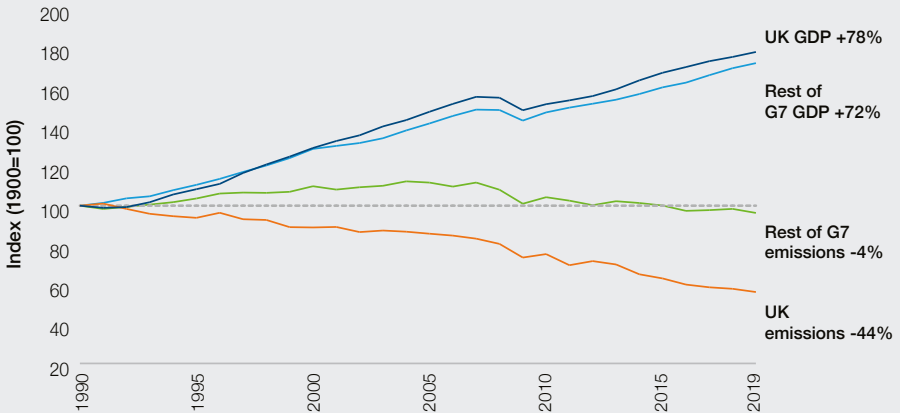
The UK is a climate leader on the world stage. In 2019, it was the first major economy to commit to a net zero emissions target and has submitted highly ambitious climate targets for 2030 and 2035.

The UK has achieved rapid emissions reductions at the same time as growing its economy, showing that clean growth is possible.

The government's Net Zero Strategy, published in October 2021, just before the UK hosted COP26 in Glasgow, combines a series of government strategies and plans for how we will decarbonise in the most cost-effective and fair way. We were the first country to industrialise, and we can lead the world again in the green industrial revolution. While the UK made this step just three years ago, over four fifths of the global economy has since come under net zero targets.

GRAPH 1

UK and G7 economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions reductions since 1990



Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, *Net Zero Strategy*, 2021 p.41

Net zero is not just about cutting carbon. It is about creating new, skilled jobs in the industries of the future, such as manufacturing wind turbines and assembling electric vehicles.

The air we breathe can be made cleaner and high streets rejuvenated by shifting from an over-dependence on cars to more walking, cycling, and public transport where feasible. Our communities will become nicer places to live, if local authorities keep net zero in mind when they plan for the coming years - with better quality housing and nature being brought into towns and cities, and restored in the countryside.

Though the government does have a role to play in creating policy frameworks and funding early-stage technology development, net zero will ultimately be delivered and financed by the market. Since November 2020, when the Prime Minister's 10 Point Plan was released, over £26 billion in private finance has been mobilised to support net zero, and it is projected that as much as £90 billion will be by 2030. With such broad coverage of net zero targets, the global race to compete in net zero industries and technology is now on. By keeping the UK at the forefront, the government forecasts that we will deliver 190,000 jobs by 2025 and 440,000 five years later.

However, the net zero needs of two communities are rarely the same. A range of technologies will be required, some proving more cost-effective to implement in some places than others. Elected representatives of devolved, regional, and local governments play an essential role in meeting national net zero ambitions by helping their constituents to make the most out of the net zero transition. Local leaders are uniquely placed to engage with all parts of their communities and to understand the local policy, political, social, and economic nuances relevant to climate policy.

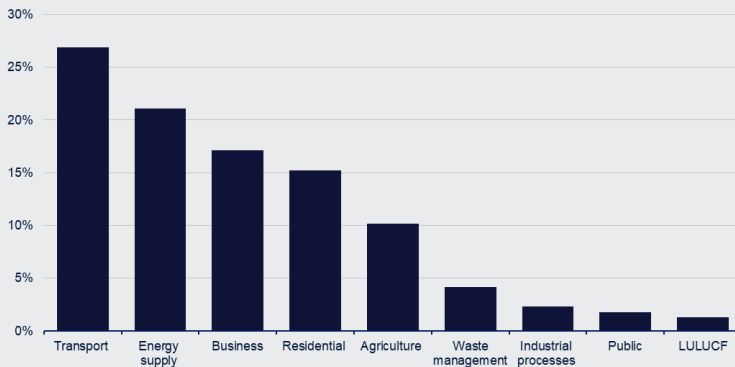
Climate has steadily risen up the agenda over the past decade to become a priority issue in elections, and it will likely remain so for years to come.

As conservatives, we can only maintain support among the public by putting forward cost-efficient policies that do not make those who can least afford it bear the heaviest burdens and balancing decarbonisation with other local priorities. Although there will always be a minority in the conservative movement who do not think we should lead the way in this area, it is perfectly possible to develop climate policy that is fair and affordable.

This Net Zero Toolkit provides ideas and case studies for CEN Councillors for common-sense, cost-effective net zero solutions across energy, transport, and nature. As our councillor network grows, we hope CEN Councillors can share their ideas and methods for implementing effective climate and clean growth policies in their local communities. This is how we can show that conservatives can be trusted on the environment, which, in keeping with Edmund Burke’s intergenerational social contract, we have a duty to conserve for generations to come.

GRAPH 2

UK greenhouse gas emissions by sector



Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, *2019 Final UK greenhouse gas emissions*, 2021, p. 13
Note: LULUCF is land use, land use change and forestry



CHAPTER 2

LOCAL NET ZERO PLANS

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local leaders know their communities best. Their understanding of their local area is necessary for managing the complexities of the transition to net zero. It is vital that they set out a transparent plan for how their area will cut emissions, as many of the changes will impact the everyday lives of residents. Local government operations are directly responsible for on average 2-5% of an area's emissions. However, according to the Climate Change Committee, around one third of the UK's emissions are directly shaped or influenced by local authority practice, policy and partnerships.

HOW TO MAKE A LOCAL NET ZERO PLAN:

- 1.** Scope out what there is to be done – where are the most significant emission reduction contributions coming from?
- 2.** Think about where you can have the most impact:
 - a.** What levers does an authority have to effectively tackle emissions?
 - b.** What direct emissions can the authorities curb to make the most significant impact?
 - c.** Which areas can you take action on immediately, and which others might be further in the future?
- 3.** Begin the process of creating a net zero plan:
 - a.** Some emissions in council operations might be easy and cheap to cut right away. Solar panels offer the cheapest form of electricity and could be installed soon, while energy efficiency programmes are easy to set up with the right financing mechanisms.

- b.** Others may have to wait for a while, for example your rubbish truck fleet might still have some years left in it. There'd be no point in retiring them early, as that would be wasting council money for relatively little long-term environmental gain.
- c.** Some emissions can be offset through investment in nature-based solutions (see chapter five).

MEASURING YOUR EMISSIONS:

- **Work out the authority's current carbon profile:** Choose a baseline year to measure progress against. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) first reported emissions by local authority area in 2005.¹ Having a baseline year will give authorities an indication of a reasonable target. The Treasury and Local Government Association have funded "Local Partnerships" to support local authorities measuring mapping out their carbon baseline.²
- **Measure your emissions:** Work out what emissions fall into each 'scope'.
 - **Scope 1:** Direct emissions, for example while running the authority's boilers and petrol vehicles.
 - **Scope 2:** Indirect emissions produced on behalf of but not directly by the council, like through buying power for buildings (i.e. where emissions are produced by a power station owned by an energy company).

1. UK local authority and regional carbon dioxide emissions, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020

2. For more information please visit: localpartnerships.org.uk/our-resources

- **Scope 3:** Supply chain emissions, either from buying products from suppliers or from consumers using council products. This scope is the most challenging, but products and tools are being developed to make it easier.


A net zero plan for the council's own operations should consider all three scopes.


- **Set targets and monitor the entire authority's emissions:** Consider climate change and net zero across all council decisions even those which are seemingly unrelated, such as procurement and outsourcing decisions. This will align stakeholders and partners with your climate ambitions in your council decision making. Many authorities have found hiring a Climate Change Officer beneficial to their operations and for making progress in reducing scope 3 emissions.
- **Transparency:** After creating the net zero plan, publish regular update reports to keep residents in the loop. Mapping out the decisions that need to be made step by step can bring residents with the council on decisions.


WEST MIDLANDS FIVE YEAR PLAN (FYP):

- The West Midlands Combined Authority (WCMA) published its "Five Year Plan" to provide residents with a transparent plan on how the region will reach net zero by 2041. The plan sets out the region's current emissions profile and the necessary steps in each sector. It maps out the measures that the authority will take and targets for its delivery partners over the next five years to be on course to reach its target.

- The plan currently runs from 2021-2026 and has set a target of a 33% reduction from the 2016 emissions baseline by 2026. By setting out its decarbonisation plans, the WMCA has opened itself up to funding, financing and investment opportunities from companies interested in supporting project delivery - for instance, the region's retrofit programme.

 ***Climate Emergency UK has rated all councils' climate plans. Conservative controlled Solihull Borough Council came second for single tier councils and the Conservative led West Midlands Combined Authority scored first. Look at the Council Climate's scorecards for more information.***³

 ***Tyndall Manchester provides free, accessible help for developing climate targets for specific local authorities.***⁴

 ***Enerlytic software provides key insights into energy data, allowing energy users to measure, analyse and reduce consumption, cost and carbon footprint. The tool looks at energy consumption analysis, forecasting reports and carbon emission reporting.***⁵

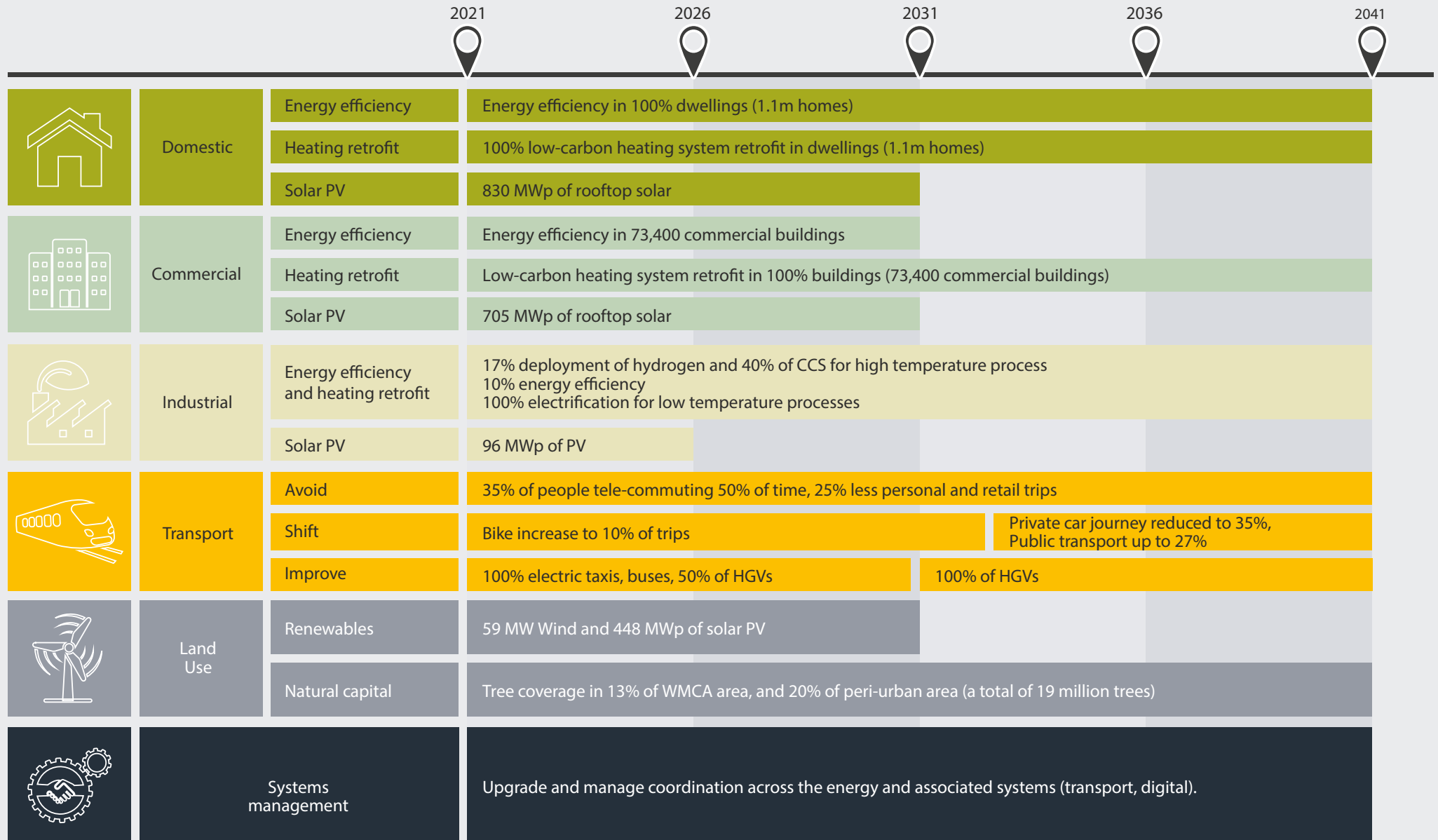
3. For more information please visit: councilclimatescorecards.uk

4. For more information please visit: carbonbudget.manchester.ac.uk/reports

5. For more information please visit: enerlytic.co.uk

GRAPH 3

The West Midlands Combined Authority’s timeline of actions under the ‘accelerated’ scenario by 2041



Source: West Midlands Combined Authority, Five Year Plan 2021-26, 2021, p. 4



CHAPTER 3

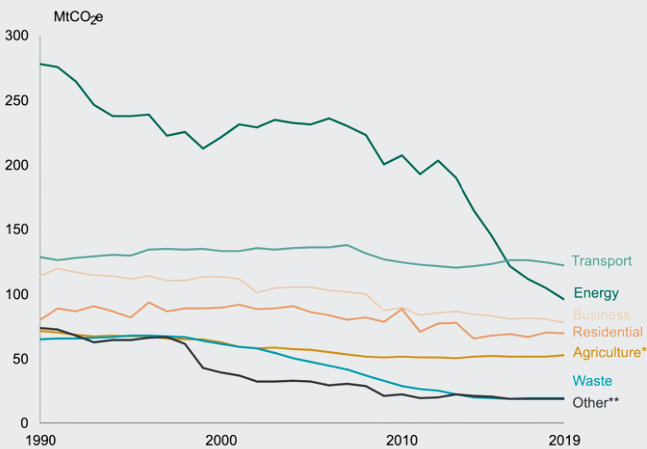
ENERGY

Fossil fuels like coal and gas have enabled the stunning social and economic progress made in the UK and the rest of the world since the industrial revolution, but they are also the primary source of greenhouse gases, which are driving climate change. The UK is leading the world in the transition to newer, better energy sources like solar and wind, which as the International Energy Agency has reported are now the cheapest energy available, with new projects supplying energy at half the cost of a new gas power plant.

The cost of solar power and onshore wind has fallen by 89% and 70% respectively over the past decade. Solar panels and wind turbines can be plugged directly into buildings and provide local communities with clean, affordable power. A more efficient use of energy through insulation and the rollout of energy-saving appliances will deliver lower bills and cosier buildings, all while cutting carbon emissions.

GRAPH 4

UK greenhouse gas emissions since 1990



* LULUCF – Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry
 ** Includes emissions from Public and Industrial Processes

Source: House of Commons Library, UK and global emissions and temperature trends, 2021. This is available at commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Community energy

These are schemes that reduce, purchase, manage, or generate electricity, and in the past have included solar on rooftops, wind farms, or geothermal plants. Community energy projects generate renewable power that can be used locally or even directly for a building. For instance, unused flat roofs can be used for community solar projects, helping to cut council emissions and energy bills.

Councils can work with the rapidly growing renewable energy industry to bring the renewable revolution into local communities. This will transform the energy system in the coming years from one based on meeting demand from big, inflexible sources of power like coal plants to one which is more dispersed and flexible in nature, with individuals and councils even being able to sell their power back to the grid.

CASE STUDIES

Kent County Council and Canterbury City Council

Canterbury City Council successfully negotiated with a developer, who was proposing to build a solar farm, and agreed to co-finance it as a community energy project. Kent County Council matched the no-obligation grant given by the project's developer to Canterbury City Council, so solar panels could be installed onto the roofs of two schools and a senior citizens' club.

West Sussex County Council

The council built a subsidy-free solar farm on a closed landfill site in 2018, building on its previous park opened in 2015 on an old RAF airfield with a partnership between 12 councils of different tiers. The council estimates that the scheme will pay back in 15 years and generate £7.9 million in net income. It now plans to supply its residents with energy generated locally as well.

FURTHER GUIDANCE:

- Find opportunities for local renewable energy projects, which for most areas will be in solar power and onshore wind, and identify suitable sites in your Local Plan.
- Consult on proposed projects to demonstrate that local communities have been fully involved and that the proposal has local backing.
- Champion community energy projects as a cost-effective solution to local residents' energy concerns, and the economic opportunities they represent.
- Engage with industry organisations such as 'Community Energy England (CEE), to see how local authorities can constructively support community energy projects.
- Where local authorities are a stakeholder in a project, work with organisations like Energy4All, an energy cooperative. This will widen industry knowledge, increase capacity and potentially offer financial benefits.
- Formulate a community engagement plan that sets out the requirements for projects to follow.

Clean heat

Heating accounts for around 17% of UK emissions. Clean heat options like heat pumps will therefore be a necessary part of reaching net zero. They are three times more efficient than gas boilers and work in temperatures as low as -15°C. Norway, a much colder country than the UK, has the largest heat pump market in the world. A government-commissioned study recently found that heat pumps can work effectively in all types and eras of buildings.

Clean heat technologies are on the way but may take a few years to become as cheap as a boiler due to the lack of scale in the market. Local authorities can lead the way by working with the government to procure clean heat options while the market is still maturing, helping to bring down the costs for individuals to begin replacing their boilers in the years to come, and support homeowners to make green improvements by issuing guidance on the most effective clean heat options for their homes.

CASE STUDIES

Wiltshire Council

The Conservative Council was given £4.6 million following its bid into the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to reduce the energy consumption of the 17 least efficient buildings owned by the council. In addition it has helped the council gain expertise in green technologies ready for future decarbonisation projects to be rolled out across Wiltshire's homes and buildings.

→ **HEAT PUMPS**

Gas boilers have been replaced with heat pumps, saving 1,200 tonnes of carbon.

→ **SOLAR PANELS**

The council has installed solar panels on many of its buildings to generate electricity and reduce costs

Cambridgeshire County Council

In 2020 the Conservative administration launched the Swaffham Prior Heat Network. Over half of the almost 300 homes were burning oil for heat, an incredibly polluting heat source. The council installed a ground source and air source heat pump to supply all the homes with clean heating through a heat distribution network.

FURTHER GUIDANCE:

- Look to industry specialists such as [Daiken](#), [E.ON](#) and [Octopus Energy](#) that can provide expertise on how to use existing levers to deliver clean heat projects in your area.
- Provide local residents with guidance on clean heat sources that would be most effective in their type of property.

Energy efficiency

Local authorities are a key delivery partner for improving the energy efficiency of the UK's building stock. With more intimate knowledge than central government of an area's current emissions, the types and ages of properties, and fuel poverty levels, local and combined authorities across the country have a huge role to play, and indeed have been responsible for many energy efficiency improvements in the past few years.

The government has a target for as many homes as possible to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C by 2035. Less energy consumption means lower bills. A better insulated building wastes less energy, meaning less money spent. It also means the value of the building goes up and enables the more effective use of heat pumps.

CASE STUDY

 **Cornwall Council**

The council bid into the BEIS “Sustainable Warmth Competition” and was awarded £7.8 million to make 400 low-income households more energy efficient. Three hundred and seventy of the homes in the scheme are off the gas grid and so the project will install clean heat in addition to the improvements to energy efficiency. The project will reduce Cornwall’s greenhouse gas emissions (energy use in homes contributes currently one quarter of emissions in the region) and will help to make homes more comfortable, while reducing fuel poverty.

FURTHER GUIDANCE:

- Keep up to date with national government projects with local delivery mechanisms for energy efficiency and apply for funding where possible. There are currently three main funding pots:

 [The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund](#)

 [The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme](#)

 [The Green Homes Grant Local Delivery Scheme](#)

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS TO CONSULT ON ENERGY:

[UK100](#)

[Energy Systems Catapult](#)

[Daiken](#)

[Octopus Energy](#)

[Energy4All](#)

[Power for People](#)

[RenewableUK](#)

[Community Energy England](#)

[Carbon Trust](#)

[Energy Savings Trust](#)

[Local Climate Impacts Profile](#)

[Centre for Sustainable Energy](#)

[Solar Energy UK](#)



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CHAPTER 4
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TRANSPORT

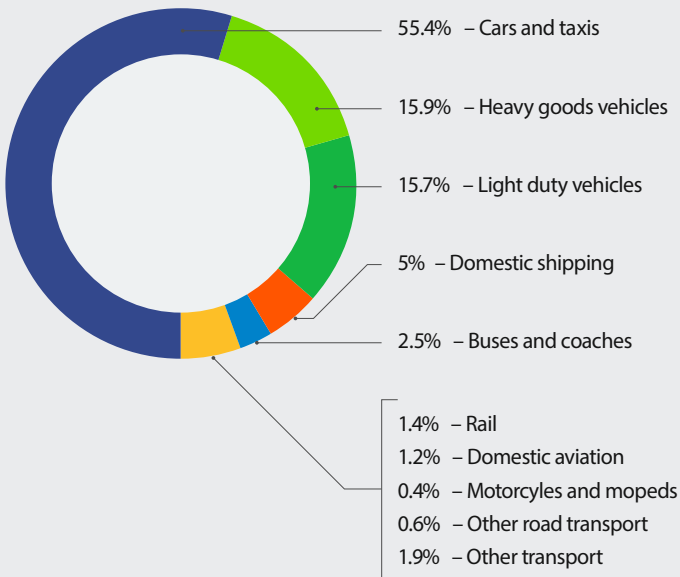
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Transport is currently the UK's largest emitting sector, producing 27% of our greenhouse gas emissions. Most of these emissions arise from private car and taxi usage (61%), but HGVs (18%) and vans (17%) are also significant contributors.⁶ To reach net zero by 2050, the UK will need to shift to an electric fleet and more journeys taken by public transport and by bike or foot where appropriate need to be encouraged.

GRAPH 5

UK greenhouse gas emissions by transport mode in 2019



Source: Department for Transport, *Transport Decarbonisation Plan*, 2021, p. 15

6. Department for Transport, *Transport and environment statistics*, Autumn 2021

Active travel

Cycling and walking (active travel) can reduce pressure on your local NHS services by getting people moving more and reducing toxic air pollution, which is particularly harmful to children and those with asthma. It also has big economic benefits, including reducing traffic jams and raising footfall for local businesses by improving access to the high street.

Councils can play a role by consulting with their local communities to install active travel infrastructure like bike racks in high-demand areas such as high streets. They can also implement schemes to encourage active travel to school or reduce 'rat-running' in what should be quiet, safe neighbourhood streets where children can play.

CASE STUDIES

Suffolk County Council

The Conservative council used the government's Active Travel Fund to install new cycling parking stands and plan to produce a map of the cycle routes around the town and the surrounding countryside. The council is delivering a raft of measures to encourage active travel like installing cycle lanes, pedestrianisation and safe road crossing points.

West Midlands Combined Authority

The region has created the 'Starley Network', a 500-mile connected network of cycle routes across the West Midlands. Funded through the Active Travel Fund, local authorities worked together to map out a strategic route across the region. A segregated cycle route that runs alongside a new bike hire scheme to serve the region and a series of active travel routes that are complemented by a tram and bus network alongside.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

- Ensure that cycle paths are segregated from both traffic and pedestrians.
- Consider setting up bicycle hire schemes to help constituents access active travel.
- Work to ensure active travel infrastructure compliments the public transport network.
- Ensure that cycle paths are easy to use (direct, logical, free of obstacles and weatherproof).
- Look into introducing traffic calming measures, whether that is flexible schemes like 'school streets' or more permanent infrastructure like bollards or plant boxes, where appropriate.
- Make the wider environmental, health, and economic case for the public to get cycling and walking, not just 'men in lycra'.
- Regularly communicate and consult with residents about upcoming plans and changes, to avoid pushback against active travel schemes and ensure changes work for everyone..

Public transport

A better public transport network means fewer journeys need to be completed by car, reducing congestion (which costs the UK economy around £30.8 billion per year).⁷

7. Local Government Association, *A country in a jam: tackling congestion in our towns and cities*, August 2017

It can be a lifeline for those without a car to get to work, attend non-emergency health appointments, and get out and about in general. Good public transport links are beneficial to property prices and have a positive effect on employment opportunities for a local area.

Local, accessible transport is a priority for any council. Seeking partnerships with companies to provide good services with low-polluting bus fleets can deliver immediate and visible benefits for your constituents, including cleaner air and lower emissions.

CASE STUDIES

 **Tees Valley Combined Authority**

The Tees Valley's Tees Flex service is operated by Stagecoach on a three year trial to serve the rural parts of the Tees Valley area, costing £3 million. The scheme aims to serve residents living in rural areas who need an affordable and reliable alternative to car travel who are not currently served well by conventional bus routes.

 **West Midlands Combined Authority**

In March 2021, the West Midlands Combined Authority was awarded £50 million by the Department for Transport to make Coventry the first all electric bus city by 2025 with electric charging infrastructure available to all operators.

FURTHER GUIDANCE:

- Ensure that local planning policies facilitate and encourage public transport usage.
- Encourage bus operators to work more collaboratively with one another by:
 - Showing the details of all stopping services;
 - Offering greater consistency with all operator tickets and the same route numbers;
 - Building partnerships with the neighbouring councils and other tiers of government and transport operators to give riders a more consistent experience.
- Look for opportunities to push positive messaging around public transport usage.
- Seek government funding for low-carbon public transport projects.

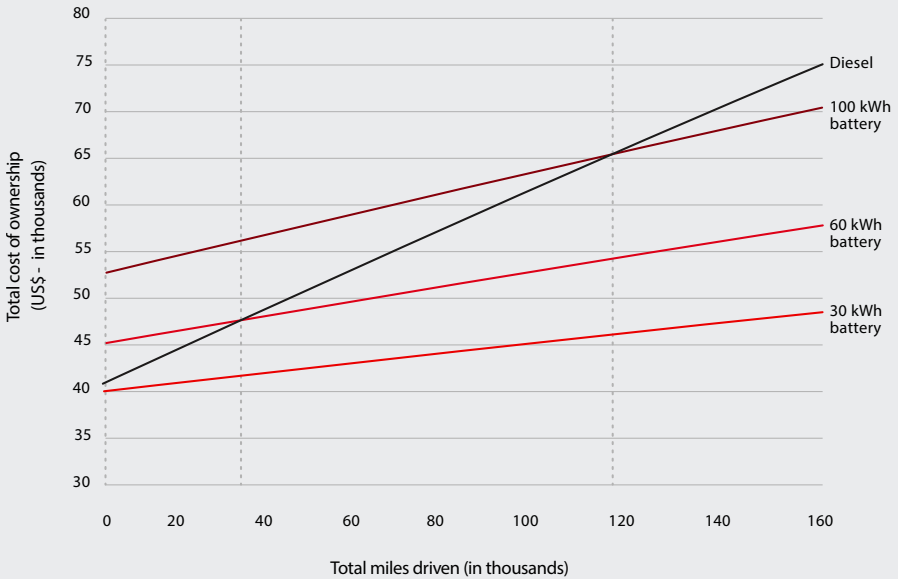
Electric vehicles (EVs)

Not all journeys can be replaced with a bus or a bike. Personal cars will always be more convenient for the majority of the population, particularly in rural areas. EVs, however, will prove cheaper to run (and soon to buy) and more convenient than today's petrol and diesel cars. We will be able to charge them overnight at home like our phones or on the go at the shops or work.

It is a myth that they release more carbon into the atmosphere overall because they are harder to make: the average “lifetime” emissions from an electric vehicle are up to 70% lower than from a petrol counterpart. Though they do still release some air pollution due to brake wear and tires, they have no tailpipe spewing out noxious fumes and are much, much quieter.

GRAPH 6

In the long run, the total cost for an EV is already lower than for a conventional, diesel-powered car



Source: Accenture Strategy eMobility Value research, 2019. Countries included as part of the analysis: Belgium, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, UK, US (California + New York)

The EV market is on the way up, with upfront costs coming down fast. Councils have a role to play in making sure the charging infrastructure is there for the 'EV revolution', which is already well underway but could be held up if people feel they cannot access charge points.

CASE STUDIES:

 **Westminster City Council**

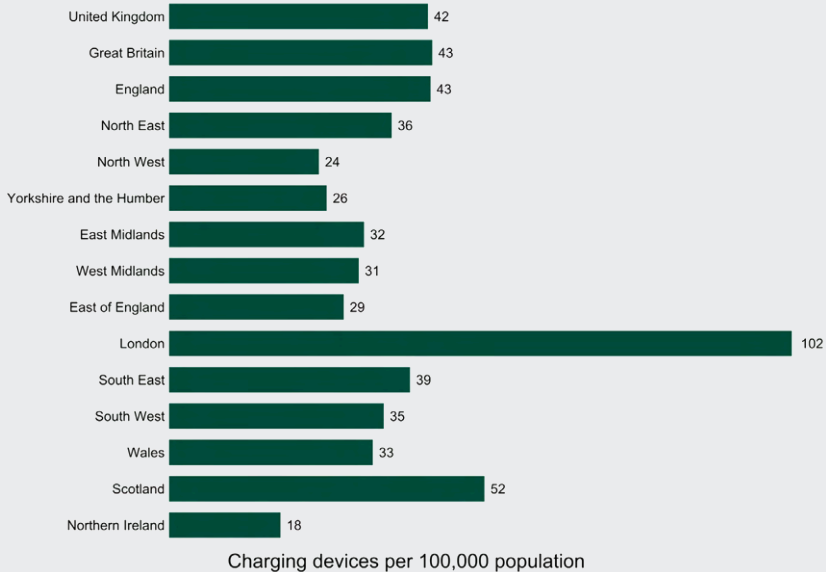
To facilitate the switch to EVs, Westminster City Council collaborated with Siemens to deliver 1,000 lamppost charge points as most residents do not have access to off-street parking. One street has been dubbed 'Electric Avenue' after its 24 lampposts have been converted into charging points.

 **Essex County Council**

To increase EV uptake, the council installed rapid chargers into two of its park and ride sites in Chelmsford and is offering SMEs up to £10,000 to install charging infrastructure for employees to use. The council was awarded £5.3 million by Innovate UK to deliver the UK's first electric forecourt with 24 charging bays.

GRAPH 7

Public chargepoints per 100,000 people in 2022



Source: Department for Transport, *Electric vehicle charging device statistics: January 2022*. This is available on the gov.uk website.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

- Include public electric charge point provision in local plans.
- Survey residents on their requirements for transitioning to an EV, and consider what areas will be dependent on off street infrastructure and what type of charger will be needed where.

- Track central government funding opportunities to roll out charge points, like On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme or the Workplace Charging Scheme.
- Highlight other grants to residents and businesses for installing charging infrastructure from the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV), which allocate funding in addition to providing guidance.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS TO CONSULT FOR TRANSPORT

🔗 Department for Transport (DfT)

🔗 Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV)

🔗 Living Streets

🔗 CyclingUK

🔗 Transport & Environment

🔗 Sustrans

🔗 Confederation of Passenger Transport

🔗 Zap Map

🔗 Urban Transport Group

🔗 ChargePoint UK



CHAPTER 5

NATURE

Natural habitats such as forests, wetlands, and saltmarshes capture carbon and bury it, while also delivering other benefits like flood protection and cleaner air. They are vital to mitigating and adapting to climate change and restoring nature. Using nature in the fight against climate change is politically popular and a key part of the Conservative Party's promise to leave our environment in a better state than we found it in. Nature-based solutions will help to provide the 'net' in net zero by offsetting emissions.

Trees

Britain only has 13% tree coverage, compared to 38% across mainland Europe, a legacy of the industrial revolution and chopping down trees to make Royal Navy ships. Local authorities can work with their communities, government agencies, and charities to increase tree coverage in their local area. Land Registry data suggests that councils collectively own 1.5 million acres of land in England and Wales, making them even larger landowners than the Forestry Commission. A tree planting programme can boost local forestry businesses, improve biodiversity, make an area more pleasant to live in by cleaning up its air, and protect communities from heat waves and floods.

GRAPHIC 8

Carbon Storage in Earth's Ecosystems

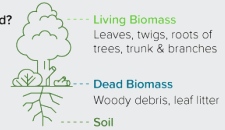
Carbon Storage in Earth's Ecosystems

Achieving net-zero by 2050 depends on the Earth's natural carbon sinks.

Forests play a critical role in regulating the global climate. They absorb carbon from the atmosphere and then store it, acting as natural carbon sinks.

Where is Carbon Stored?

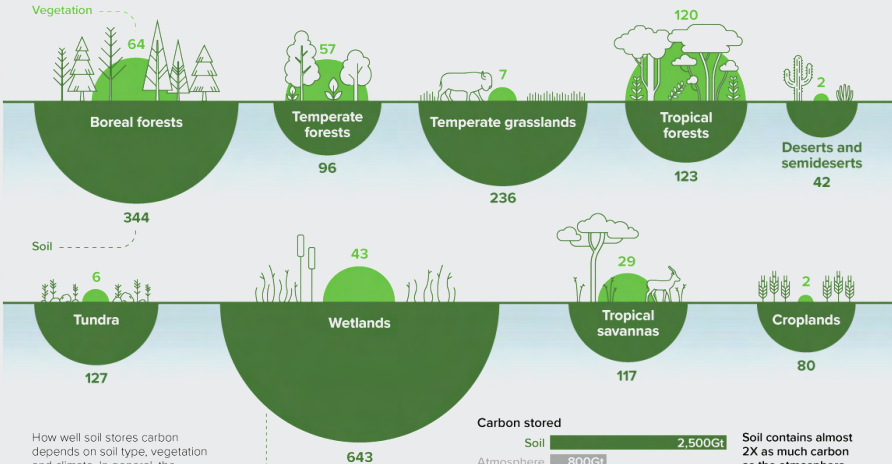
There are various carbon pools in a forest ecosystem.



Carbon Storage Tonnes of Carbon per Hectare*

The world's forests absorb around **15.6 gigatonnes** of CO₂ each year. That's around 3X the annual CO₂ emissions of the United States.

However, around **8.1 gigatonnes of CO₂** leaks back into the atmosphere due to deforestation, fires and other disturbances.



How well soil stores carbon depends on soil type, vegetation and climate. In general, the **wetter and colder**, the better.

Carbon stored



Soil contains almost **2X** as much carbon as the atmosphere and living flora and animals combined.

*At a ground depth of one meter
Sources: IPCC, NASA

Carbon Streaming is protecting the Earth's natural carbon sinks with carbon credit streams across the following REDD+ projects:



Rimba Raya
Borneo, Indonesia
~64,000 hectares



Cerrado Biome
Brazil
~11,000 hectares



MarVivo Blue Carbon
Baja California Sur, Mexico
~22,000 hectares

Source: Visual Capitalist

GRAPHIC 9

Carbon Storage in Earth's Ecosystems

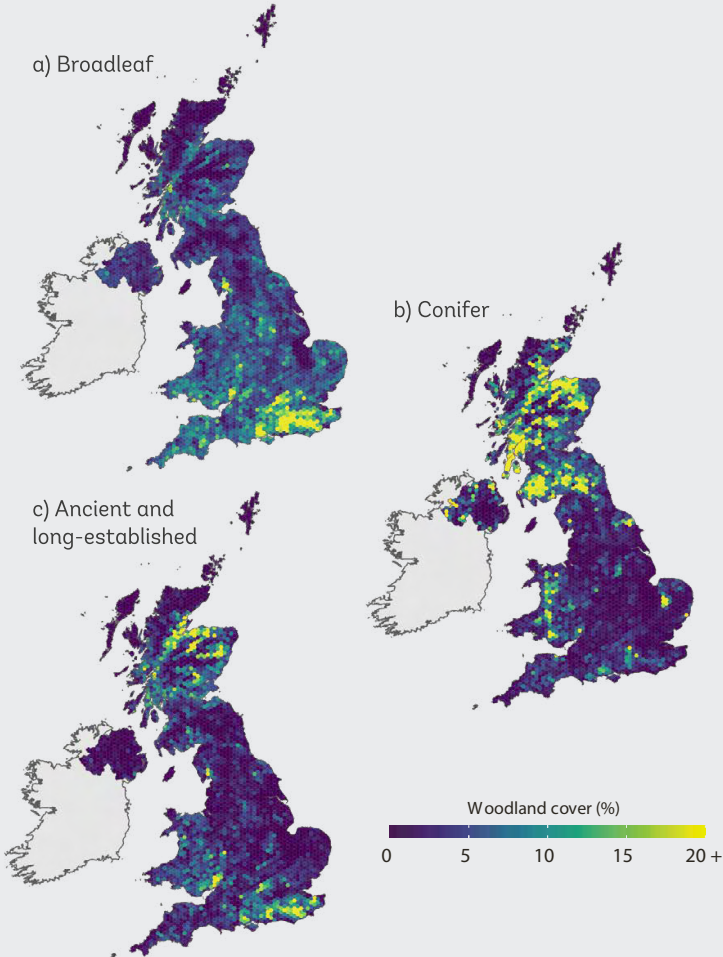


Figure 1.1.1. Percentage of woodland cover per 10km high hexagon across the UK a) Broadleaf b) Conifer c) Ancient and long-established

Source: National Forest Inventory 2019 (NFI) and the Northern Ireland Woodland Register (NIWR) for conifer and broadleaf, and the Ancient Woodland Inventories

CASE STUDIES

Leicestershire County Council

The county council mapped out its stock of trees using the tool i-Tree to identify their benefits and economic value. In order to reverse the recent decline in tree coverage in the Leicester area, the council also set out plans on planting on both public and private land.

Northumberland County Council

The council's Growing Together strategy aims to improve tree cover to enhance the county's reputation for its breathtaking scenery and environmental quality.

Peatland and saltmarshes

Peatland covers 12% of the UK's land area and contains more carbon than the forests of the UK, France and Germany combined, but four-fifths of it is damaged and deteriorating.⁸ Healthy peatlands capture carbon from the atmosphere, and are sometimes referred to as the 'rainforests' of the UK. However, due to poor management, they are now a net source of greenhouse gas emissions. The Net Zero Strategy set a target to restore 250,000 hectares of peat by 2050.

Saltmarshes can suck up carbon three times faster than tropical rainforests, but we have lost 15% of them over the past 80 years. Restoring saltmarshes by allowing the flooding of certain coastal areas can deliver significant carbon sequestration, biodiversity gain, and protection from rising sea levels.

8. Office for National Statistics, *UK natural capital: peatlands*, July 2019

Not every local authority will have these unique habitats within its boundaries, but those which do have an opportunity to protect and restore them and reap the benefits of greater biodiversity and greater protection against flooding.

CASE STUDIES

 **Staffordshire Moorlands District Council**

The Conservative-controlled council introduced a policy that specified that all planting projects in its local parks and open spaces just must use reduced-peat or peat-free compost. This is ahead of the government's plans to end the sale of peat in the amateur horticulture sector by 2024.

 **Adur and Worthing District Council**

The council has purchased 45 acres of farmland as a part of its plans to tackle climate change and biodiversity. The farmland, which will become a wetland once restored, will store carbon, support biodiversity and protect the surrounding areas from flooding.

FURTHER GUIDANCE

- Forge a relationship with local conservation NGOs like the Woodland Trust to widen your expertise and capacity on protecting, enhancing and optimising nature in your local area, and for advice on funding opportunities.
- Embed opportunities for protecting and enhancing nature into your Local Plan.
- Hire a climate change and biodiversity officer and provide climate literacy training to staff.
- Include protecting and enhancing nature in your council's corporate strategy.

- Read the Government's recent English Tree and Peat Action Plans for steers on national policy and targets.
- Seek guidance and funding from non-governmental organisations like the Royal Horticultural Society.
- Seek funding opportunities from the government, like the new Environmental Land Management schemes.
- Produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifying suitable land for tree planting and peat restoration.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS TO CONSULT FOR NATURE

🔗 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

🔗 Natural England

🔗 Woodland Trust

🔗 Wildlife Trusts

🔗 Royal Horticultural Society (RHS)

🔗 RSPB

🔗 National Trust

🔗 The Tree Council

🔗 Forestry Commission



CHAPTER 6

INDEX OF USEFUL DOCUMENTS

CEN BRIEFINGS

[🔗 Active travel briefing](#)

[🔗 Bus briefing](#)

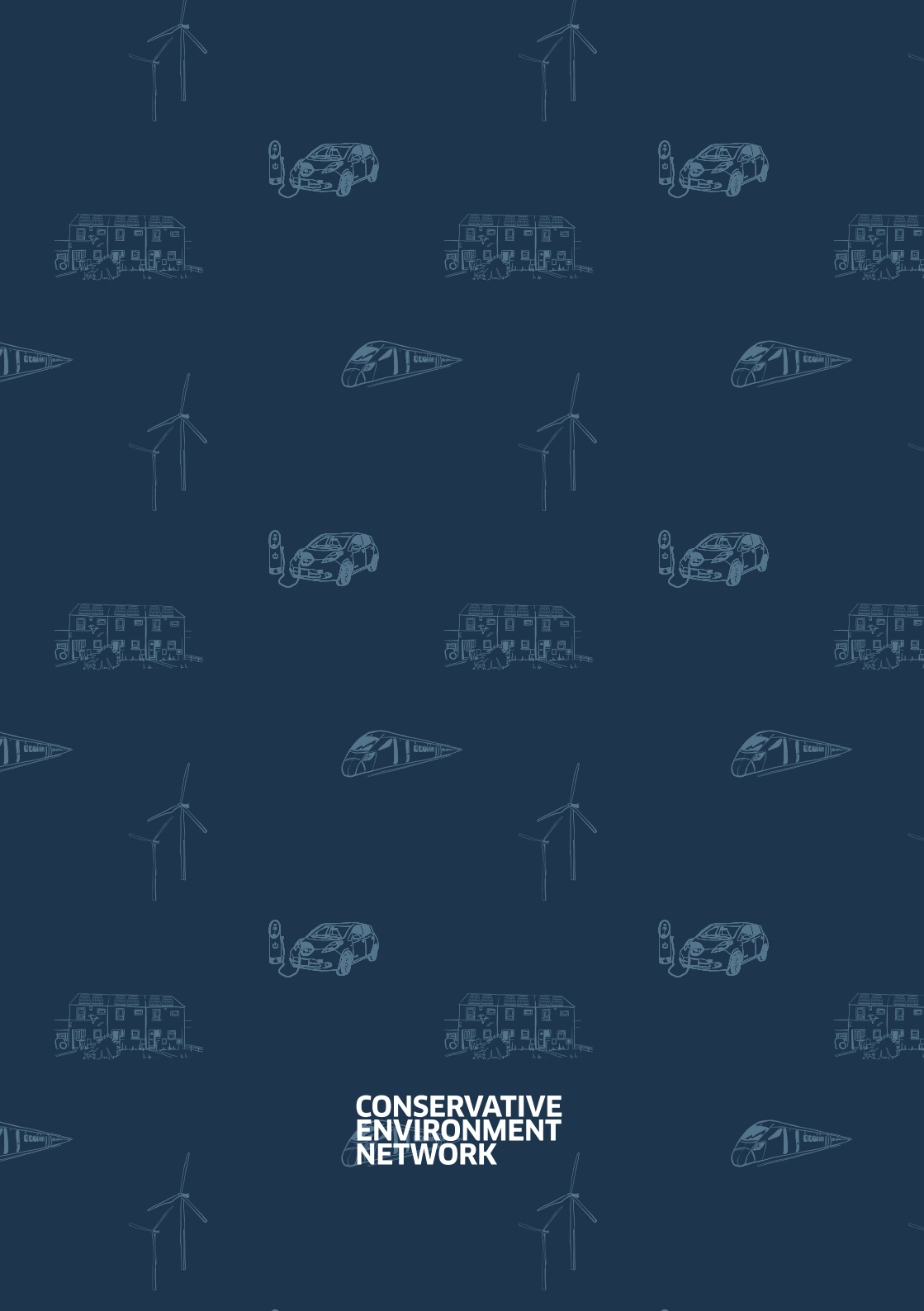
[🔗 Green recovery briefing](#)

[🔗 Green infrastructure briefing](#)

GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

- 🔗 **Net Zero Strategy:** This strategy sets out policies and proposals for decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy to meet our net zero target by 2050.
- 🔗 **Heat and Buildings Strategy:** This strategy sets out how the UK will decarbonise our homes, and our commercial, industrial and public sector buildings, as part of setting a path to net zero.
- 🔗 **Gear Change:** This document sets out a vision for a travel revolution in England's streets, towns and communities.
- 🔗 **Bus Back Better:** This is a long-term strategy for buses in England, outside London.
- 🔗 **Transport Decarbonisation Plan:** This is a plan to decarbonise the entire transport system in the UK.
- 🔗 **Transitioning to zero emission cars and vans: 2035 delivery plan:** This plan sets out investment and policy initiatives to help meet our phase out dates, including significant milestones and how the government will monitor progress.

- 🔗 **England Trees Action Plan:** This plan sets out the government's long-term vision for trees, woodlands and forests in England and the actions it will take during this Parliament to achieve our ambition.
- 🔗 **England Peat Action Plan:** This is an integrated plan for the management, protection and restoration of our upland and lowland peatlands, so that they deliver benefits for nature and the climate.



**CONSERVATIVE
ENVIRONMENT
NETWORK**