# Climate Change

## Background

Dealing with the worldwide effects of climate change will be one of the biggest challenge we will ever face. Rapidly warming temperatures resulting from human activities are changing global weather patterns, bringing: flooding; rising sea levels; droughts; wildfires; melting polar ice; catastrophic storms; and declining biodiversity.

The Climate Change Act sets a legally binding target for the UK to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It is now the role of Local Authorities to ensure that all planning polices embed the principles of net zero carbon and fully demonstrate that they will be a part of a net zero carbon future.

In 2019, Herefordshire Council unanimously declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency, setting a target of carbon neutral by 2030. Herefordshire Council agreed to:

- Accelerate a reduction of emissions and aspire to become carbon neutral by 2030/31;
- Deliver an updated Carbon Management Plan and Carbon Management Action Plan for council emissions by April 2020;
- Work with strategic partners, residents and local organisations to develop a revised countywide carbon dioxide reduction strategy aspiring for carbon neutrality by 2030; and
- Use 100% renewably sourced energy where this provides the best carbon reduction return on investment.

In January 2022, the Herefordshire Citizens' Climate Assembly was held to discuss: *'How should Herefordshire meet the challenges of climate change?'*

In total, 35 recommendations were developed within the themes of buildings, transport, food, farming, and land-use. Individual assembly members then voted on the recommendations to form a priority ranking, which included, amongst others, introducing and changing building and planning regulation, planning powers to address biodiversity and planning mandate to avoid car dependency. These recommendations will be used to influence council policy and spending priorities, as well as being addressed in the Local Plan, to help Herefordshire become a carbon neutral and nature-rich county by 2030.

The aim of planning is to create places where people can enjoy happy and healthy lifestyles, however, this will become difficult to achieve without policies which comprehensively address climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The following sets out how climate change is addressed through the Local Plan's new vision and objectives as well as a look at how the County Plan also addresses climate change.

### Herefordshire County Plan

Throughout the County Plan (2020-2024), the significant effects of climate change have been considered, particularly the frequent, but unpredictable, periods of flood and drought.

The council aspires to *'consider the impact of climate change and the opportunity for carbon reduction in every aspect of our operation*'.

Ensuring that the Local Plan seeks to address climate change through its policies will therefore be important.

### Local Plan Draft Vision

The Local Plan 2021-2041 has an environmentally themed countywide vision which states:

'*By 2041, Herefordshire will be a place where planning has helped to create an environment where all of its residents have an exceptional quality of life and are able to live and travel in a more sustainable way. In addressing the climate and ecological emergency, the county will be carbon neutral, and biodiversity here will be thriving*.'

The climate and ecological emergency is therefore a central part of the vision, and by having effective climate change policy within the Local Plan will play a crucial role in addressing this.

### Local Plan Draft Objectives

Climate change is addressed in the environmental objectives, in particular objectives 9 and 10:

- *To ensure that development is located and designed in a way which requires less energy use and to increase the amount of energy generated from renewable sources, with a requirement for all new development to be net zero carbon by 2030.*
- *To enable net zero carbon goals to be at the heart of transport planning decisions, for environmental gains but also to allow people to make healthier more active travel choices.*

All of the environment objectives highlight the importance of the natural environment. These are all working towards achieving the county's carbon neutral goals. They also contribute to mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

## National Guidance

Addressing climate change is one of the core land use planning principles, which the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) expects to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. It emphasises the importance of responding to climate change, as it is central to all economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.

The NPPF states that plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account of issues including the long-term implications of flood risk, water supply, biodiversity, resource usage and landscapes, as well as the risk of overheating from rising temperatures, for example.

## Local Considerations

Herefordshire is considered to be the West Midlands' most rural county.

The average household consumption emissions in Herefordshire is 17.8t $CO_2e$ per year, which compares to the national average of 13.1t. This is primarily due to the rural nature of the county, with more oil-fired heating systems and generally poorer access to public transport.

Herefordshire's biological and geological diversity is vulnerable to the effects of climate change and there are significant areas that are liable to flooding, the severity of which is exacerbated by climate change.

Responses to the Parish and Town Council questionnaire (Feb 2022) suggest that more emphasis is needed on our resilience to the effects of climate change, with modifications suggested to current Policy SS7 (addressing climate change). These are summarised below:

- The policy has limited effect in practice, with no evidence that it is understood or followed;
- Reliance of private car: need more emphasis on sustainable transport;
- Very few eco-friendly developments have come forward;
- Need to link biodiversity with climate change; consider the impacts of climate change on wildlife habitats;
- Implementation weak and needs strengthening;
- Climate change should be embedded, not be a separate policy;
- Need to address Herefordshire's climate and ecological emergency;
- Climate change seen as an afterthought, needs higher priority.

The Town & Country Planning Association (TCPA) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) have recently jointly published guidance on how the planning system can help communities face the climate crisis. Both organisations believe that climate change should be the top priority for planning;

*'This is simply because the impacts of flooding, overheating and other consequences of climate change stand in the way of everything else we want to achieve in terms of the creation of vibrant communities and a sustainable and just society'.*

It is suggested that the best way to introduce new, effective policies on climate change is to embed them throughout Local Plans. Successful solutions to the climate crisis require local planning policies to be based on a powerful, overarching objective of mitigation and adaptation. This should be set within the wider objective of planning to secure the delivery of sustainable development.

## Evidence Base

Several evidence base reports provide advice and support in relation to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change:

- Climate Change Study: this will identify the potential impacts of climate change and options for addressing these within Herefordshire.
- Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA): This follows on from the completed SFRA Level 1 and will include a detailed assessment of all sources of flood risk for specific sites.
- Sustainability Appraisal (SA): involving ongoing iterations to identify and report on the potential social, economic and environmental effects of development plans and the extent to which sustainable development is expected to be achieved.
- Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA): this is the process to consider whether a development plan is likely to have significant effects on a national network site designated for its nature conservation interest.
- New Green Infrastructure Strategy: This is to be commissioned shortly. This will include an establishment of policies and principles for the protection and enhancement of natural and culturally important features and functions that contribute to a sustainable future for development in Herefordshire.
- Built Environment and Design: The Environmental Building Standards SPD set out ways to improve standards of building design and construction, providing minimum standards for building performance, energy use, accessibility and construction.
- A Transport Scoping Report: This will determine the overall approach to transport across the county.

## Existing policy

The current Core Strategy includes policies such as SS7, SD1-SD3 that are relevant to mitigating and adapting to climate change, but there is recognition that these need to be strengthened to ensure delivery of the council's target to be carbon neutral by 2030.

## Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs)

There is no explicit requirement from government for NDPs to address climate change mitigation and adaptation, with the exception of renewable energy. However, different communities may face different challenges relating to climate change. Therefore addressing these in an NDP can ensure that the local challenges faced can be effectively tackled. This can be done through: developing policies that can encourage energy efficient and small carbon footprint developments; making local decisions on the location of new developments; or enabling sustainable communities, for example.

## Climate change policy options

### Option CC1 – Retain an overarching strategic climate change policy

This option would revise and update policy SS7 ‘addressing climate change’ and would include a more focused approach to mitigation and adaptation, taking forward amendments to meet the new Local Plan’s vision and objectives and recent Government guidance.

- Ensure the policy conforms to the new changes in the Climate Change Act 2008 and refer to the council’s Climate and Ecological Emergency;
- New aim for carbon neutral;
- Sharper focus on the requirements of the NPPF;
- Climate change mitigation: measures that contribute to slowing and reversing the emission of greenhouse gases, such as: reducing the need to travel; encouraging walking, cycling and public transport rather than private car; decentralised energy and heating; and promoting renewable and low carbon energy;
- Climate change adaptation: understanding the present and future impacts of climate change such as flood risk and heat, and planning the measures that need to be put in place to adapt to, and mitigate those impacts, such as: conserving water supplies and minimising the risk and impact of flooding; the use of green infrastructure to reduce heat; and ensuring design and construction of developments provides resilience to climate change.

### Option CC2 - New cross-policy approach

This option would reflect the guidance from the TCPA and the RTPI and would ensure that individual Local Plan policies require development proposals to address climate change and ecological emergencies; putting climate change at the forefront of the Local Plan. It would ensure that specific development types would have tailored policy guidance, including the location based allocation policies within the Plan.

Change to the policy direction could refer to:

- Housing design: requiring all developments to be carbon neutral by 2030 and net zero carbon by 2050. Ensuring that development is located and designed in a way that requires less energy use and increases the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources;
- Green infrastructure: provision of multi-functional green infrastructure, which can reduce urban heat islands, manage flooding and help species adapt to climate change, as well as encouraging people to walk and cycle within these areas;
- Transport: reduce the need for people to travel by promoting sustainable transport and ensuring there is an improved public transport network available for all residents;
- Water: consider the impact of and promoting design responses to flood risk;
- Considering availability of water, water infrastructure and design responses to promote water efficiency and protect water quality.

**Option CC3 – A combination of options 1 and 2**

This option would see a combination of a new strategic level climate change policy, plus a cross-policy approach in the Local Plan. This option will put climate change as a top priority throughout both the strategic and more detailed policies and proposals, so that its importance is emphasised.

This option will ensure that prospective developers understand that addressing climate change is an essential element in all forms of development, of whatever kind and at whatever scale. If climate change is not addressed in proposals, then this would be contrary to the Local Plan.