Watford Environmental Strategy: Addressing the Environmental and Ecological Emergency

Delivery Plan 2025-2027

Annual Report 2025-26



Foreword

The unprecedented heatwaves this summer clearly show how climate change impacts our everyday lives, and knowing human activity has intensified them is a sobering thought.

At Watford Borough Council, we are working hard to address the climate and ecological emergency internally and across our local community. While we are investing in green spaces, reducing our energy usage, and encouraging active travel, we all need to do more.

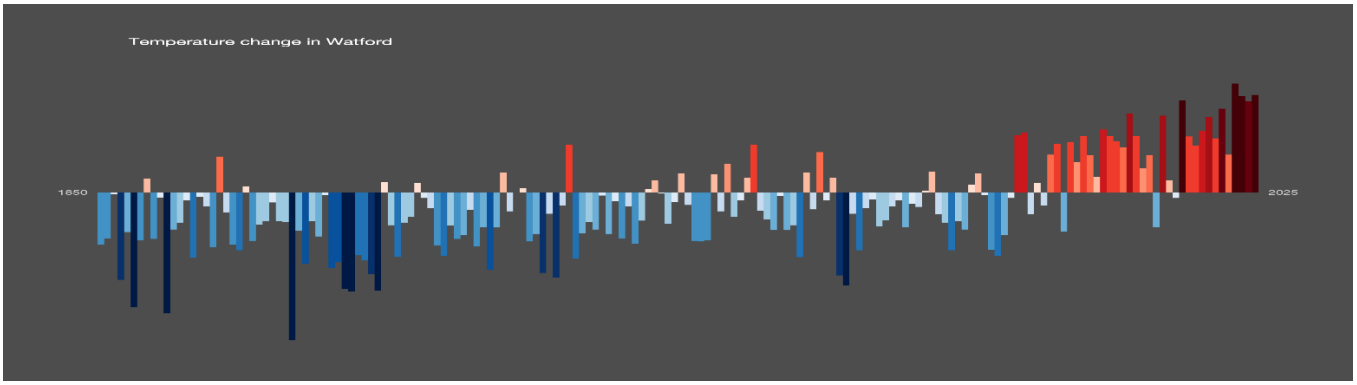
This report outlines our current progress and highlights the scale of the challenge ahead. As we continue to advocate for bolder national action and resourcing, driving real success will require everyone across the borough to act on this generation-defining issue.

Peter Taylor,
Elected Mayor of Watford

Councillor Ian Stotesbury
Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability

Introduction

The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and an ecological emergency in 2021. These issues remain as important and challenging as ever, as demonstrated by the temperature change in Watford over the past 175 years, and the impacts we are experiencing locally with heat waves, drought, flash floods and severe storms. This makes it more important than ever that we all take action to reduce our impact on the environment and move to creating greater resilience within our communities.



Reference: https://showyourstripes.info/

The Environmental Strategy: Addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency 2023-2030 was approved in March 2023, along with the first two year delivery plan. The second two year delivery plan for 2025-27 was approved in March 2025. The strategy sets out overarching targets as well as specific targets under two themes:

- Leading by Example
- People Power

And four topics:

- Achieving Net Zero
- Nature and Ecological Restoration
- Responsible Resource Use
- Adapting to Change

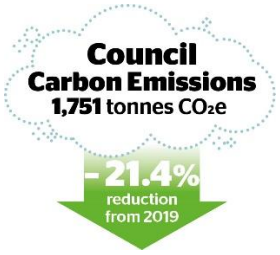
In the adopted strategy we committed to annual external reporting, covering the following:

- Carbon emissions – for both the Council and the borough, and showing how this is performing against target
- Water usage for the borough and the Council
- Biodiversity – initially this will relate to the amount of green space managed for nature and the canopy cover. Once the new green spaces strategy is developed with an appropriate metric, we will incorporate that into this strategy
- Waste
- Progress on delivery plan

The report is the second annual report under the strategy, covering 2024-25, unless stated otherwise and relates to the first delivery plan.

Progress by Area

Carbon Emissions:





The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, and set a net zero target for both its own operations by 2030 and to work with others towards the Borough achieving net zero by the same target date. This is now less than 5 years away.

The Council has calculated its carbon emissions using the Local Government Association (LGA) Greenhouse Accounting tool and DESNZ conversion factors. These include scope 1 (direct fossil fuel used in operations e.g. gas heating, fuel for vehicles etc.), scope 2 (indirect fossil fuels used in operation e.g. electricity) and some scope 3 (this is energy use outside the direct control of the council and includes leased assets and contracted out services).

A baseline study was completed for 2019, which is used in the Environmental Strategy. Data for some of the baseline emissions were reviewed and updated in 2024, and an updated baseline of emissions of 2228 tonnes CO_2e is now being used. As we improve the data we can collect we are introducing them to the scope 3 emissions. Therefore, there is a comparison to the 2019 baseline, which is what our target is based on, and additional carbon calculations and ultimate reductions based on the additional activities we can now include.

The council scope 1 and 2 emissions reduced by 26.2% in 2025/26 compared to the 2019 baseline, compared to our 16.1% reduction last year. While our electricity emissions have reduced significantly, our gas usage has increased compared to last year. This is likely due to the consolidation that took place when we moved to a bureau management system, and so we will have captured any long term estimates. This is reflected in the spike noted in October when change over happened. We have now exceeded our scope 1 and 2 target for 2025 of a 22% reduction, but are still a significant way from the 2027 target of 40% reduction.

Our scope 3 emissions have also significantly improved, mainly due to a 27% reduction in emissions at Woodside Leisure due in part to the installation of photovoltaics (PVs) on the roof, which became operational in May 2025. We hope to see further reductions due to the PVs in 26/27 when we have a full operational year. We are looking at opportunities for additional PVs, which we hope will be operational for 27/28 financial year.

To meet our 2027 target will still require significant resources and investment. Work has started on how to achieve this, with the investment at Woodside Leisure Centre along with reviewing buildings in our portfolio for suitability for solar, and improvement in energy use. We are moving forward with a community energy initiative to install PVs on 3 of our buildings. We will continue to look at appropriate ways to fund renewable and low carbon technologies, since the PSDS funding has now ceased. The intention is to ensure our buildings have lower running costs and are more resilient to climate change shocks, ensuring greater energy security. We have produced a standalone greenhouse gas emissions report for the Council, which is attached as Appendix C.

Borough emissions are calculated by DESNZ, 2 years in arrears, with the latest figures published in July 2026. The table below shows our performance, how it compares to the rest of Hertfordshire and to the UK. Note that all figures are updated each year, and the government figures include changes to the emissions for 2019-2022 as well as emissions for all years up to 2024.

Emissions by Area (tonnes)	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Borough emissions CO_2e (DESNZ)[1]	412.2 k	3.99.1 k	416.3 k	358.8 k	363.3k	315.3k
Borough emissions in LA influence - CO_2 (DESNZ)[2]	325.2 k	290.9 k	304.4 k	281.1 k	256.7k	257.6k
Herts emissions CO_2e	6440.1 k	5899.8 k	6074.0 k	5708.0 k	5562.5k	5388.1k
UK emissions	417.1 m	377.3 m	395.9 m	375.9 m	385.0m	373.4m
Emissions per capita	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
Borough (DESNZ)	4.0	3.9	4.1	3.5	3.5	2.9
Herts	5.4	4.9	5.1	4.7	4.6	4.4
England[3]	5.8	5.3	5.5	5.1	4.8	4.7

[1] Government emission figures for Local Authority Areas can be found here: https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/723c243d-2f1a-4d27-8b61-cdb93e5b10ff/local_authority_carbon_dioxide_emissions

[2] Carbon dioxide emissions within the scope of influence of local authorities, e.g. excluding transport emissions from motorways. For more information see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a3bacc6da47783d87723902/2024-local-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-statistics-statistical-release.pdf page 31-33.

Borough emissions have reduced by 23.5 % since 2019, and by 13.2% compared to 2023. The decrease in emissions is mainly due to a significant decrease in emissions from waste management (55% compared to the previous year). In 2025 we queried the waste management emissions, without receiving a satisfactory reply as to why they were high compared to both other Hertfordshire district and boroughs and the previous year. It is good to see this year that anomaly has been corrected. The other most significant reductions compared to 2019 are commercial (34% reduction) and public sector (21% reduction). However the most significant emissions generators are domestic and transport, both of which have increase slightly compared to the previous year, but still show reductions compared to 2019/20 (16% and 20% respectively).

The borough per capita emissions have reduced by 27% compared to 2019

There is more we all can do to improve our performance, and these generally have additional benefits, whether health, cost or other environmental benefits:

- Leave the car at home if you can – walk, cycle or get public transport. If you need to drive, can you share or combine journeys? Reducing our car use reduces congestion, and associated pollution. This also makes it easier for those who have to drive, such as those with disabilities. If you replace your car, consider replacing it with as fuel efficient as possible for the type of vehicle required, or can you move to an electric vehicle?
- Improve the efficiency of your home if you can – This can be both through using what you have more effectively (reducing avoidable waste) and improving the efficiency of your home. Turn things off when not you are not using them. Draught proof doors and windows (heavy curtains can be great both as draught proofing and insulation). Reduce how much heat you use (while keeping comfortable) – did you know reducing your thermostat by 1°C could reduce your bills by round £100 depending on your fuel and tariff. Lower the temperatures on the appliances you use or the amount of times you use them. Can you install renewables? All of these can reduce your energy costs, while improving the insulation and draught proofing can also improve comfort, both in summer and winter. If you are interested in where your home may be leaking heat, you can borrow a thermal imaging camera. These will be available from the council through the Hertfordshire library service from Autumn 2026.
- At work – large or small, can you create a 'green approach'? Sign up to the sustainability aspects of the Watford Business Pledge? Create your own 'green team' to look at energy and other resource use and encourage staff to think in a more sustainable manner. Monitor your energy use – particularly your scope 1 and 2 emissions and consider reporting on it. Create an energy reduction action plan and look for the easy wins first!

Actions you take to reduce your carbon emissions can have many positive benefits, from improving your health and fitness to reducing costs, to creating a more comfortable place to live.

Water



The Council has committed to reducing its own water use to 12 l/p/day (excluding water usage for parks etc.) and to support residents reduce water usage to 110 l/p/d, with an interim target of 145 l/p/d. Water usage has both an ecological impact and a carbon impact. The latter is due to the transporting and processing of water and sewage. We are in a low rainfall region and also much of our water is from ground sources, which can directly affect our chalk and chalk fed streams. This can also dampen the effects of both drought and rainfall in the impact on our water supply.

We are not currently on from target for either the Council or Borough water use, with council water usage decreasing slightly to 30 l/p/d compared with 31 in 2024/25 and 53 in 2023/24. Our calculation of water use per person per day uses the full-time equivalent staff number, and so does not take into account councillor usage or the impact of holding large meetings.

We have a joint water meter with the Colosseum, which covers their toilet and office use. We are seeking to rectify this or have an accurate recharge system, but for 2025/26 an estimate of 25% of the town hall water usage being associated with the Colosseum has been used for the operational period. In addition, for most of 2025/26 we have had to empty the water tanks daily to combat a potential health and safety issue, which was resolved by end March 2026. For both these reasons we would hope that water usage will reduce in 2026/27.

The Council has improved how it monitors water use for its buildings, with better metering being installed. This is a process which will continue into 2026/27, especially as we seek to resolve the issue with understanding the

Colosseum water usage. Based on industry data (South Staffs Water suggests 50 l/p/d is average, while CIRIA data puts this as much lower classing above 27 l/p/d as excessive) our current water usage would be considered excessive, but with mitigating circumstances.

Borough water usage is currently only available as part of Affinity Water's Colne Community area (see map) and therefore does not accurately represent water use in the borough or reflect if, within the Borough, we are making improvements. The Council has looked at how it can get more accurate data, however it is currently understood that more localise water usage will not be available until the roll out of smart metering.

Compared to 2024/25 water usage in the Colne Community area has increased by 14% from 147 litre per resident per day to 167 l/p/d, however it is very similar to the 2023/24 figure. This may be due to the 2024/25 being a particularly wet year, and so garden watering being reduced, while 2023/24 and 2025/26 were much drier summers. It is interesting to note that those on water meters use about 11% less water than the average and 25% less than unmetered households.



Even if we can't measure accurately Watford's average water usage, it benefits us all to reduce unnecessary water use. Benefits can include reduced costs, reduced impact on the local environment, reduced likelihood or water restriction measures being imposed.

There are many things which residents in Watford can do to reduce their water usage, such as:

- In the home: don't leave the tap running, use water efficient appliances/ cycles, only run the washing machine / dishwasher when full, when changing appliances, choose water efficient ones, along with low flow taps and aerated showers etc., fix leaks as soon as you can after you notice them. If you are on a water meter, this will also reduce costs.
- Outside: plant water resilient plants, which don't need lots of watering, use a water butt if you can, use a watering can rather than a hose, a handheld hose rather than a sprinkler. Similarly, if washing a car or other item, use a bucket rather than a hose. Create permeable landscaping, where practical have planted areas and good ground cover to reduce water evaporation.
- At work: Are you monitoring your water use? If not this is a good place to start if you can. Also look for easy wins, such as old, large toilet cisterns, taps left running, drips and leaks etc. Perhaps appoint a water champion. If water is used as part of your operation ensure it is used efficiently, and consider reviewing the process to see where changes or savings can be made so they can be built into future plans.

Biodiversity





The UK is one of the most biodiversity depleted countries in the world, consistently ranking in the bottom 10% in terms of biodiversity intactness, and the southeast particularly so. The southeast is also one of the most drought prone areas, which also affects our local flora and fauna.

Watford, especially as an urban borough, is fortunate in the amount and quality of green space residents have access to – 17 green flag parks again this year. In 2026/27 an additional park is planned to be managed to achieve green flag status. The Council continues to work on ensuring the spaces it manages includes spaces for nature. It is also increasing its tree planting, which improves biodiversity, provides shading, and absorbs carbon. It has significantly exceeded its space managed for nature target and has also exceeded its tree planting target. Our tree canopy cover is being maintained across the borough, reflecting our approach to street tree planting and management of trees in our control. The development of the Council's Green Spaces Strategy has now been approved and was published in 2025/26. This will ensure that biodiversity, and connectivity for species, is maintained and, where practicable, enhanced. We will also continue to work with the county council on the Trees for the Future initiative, and when appropriate, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy implementation.

How can you help?

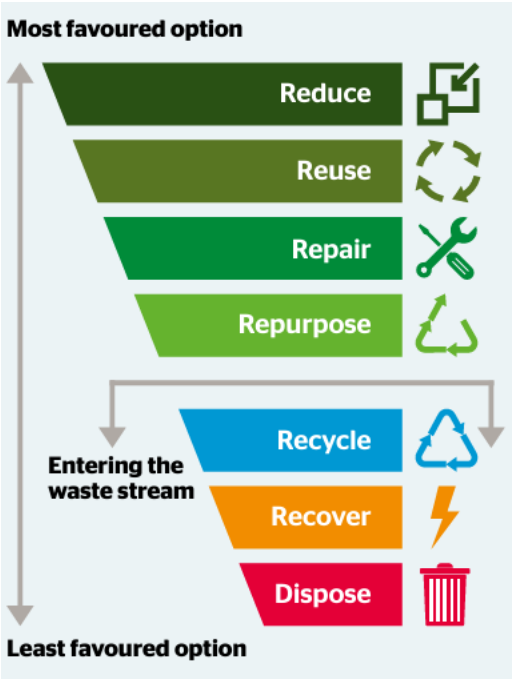
- Take litter home – litter can cause serious harm to wildlife as well as looking unsightly and requiring extra resources from the council which could be better used elsewhere.
- If you have a garden- at home or at work – allow holes in fences so animals such as hedgehogs can move between them, add bug hotels, leave spaces untended to encourage bugs and wildlife, plant native species, be careful not to disturb creatures, such as over wintering insects, hedgehogs, etc. Also consider creating a safe water feature for wildlife to drink from, even if it is only used in drier months.
- If you don't have a garden – can you have a window box? If so consider planting one with plants that pollinators like. Is there an area near where you live where you can help make it a better place for nature? This could be a regular litter pick (the council has litter pickers you can borrow if needed) or working with the landowner to create a mini wildflower meadow or buzz stop (see here for inspiration: https://wilderhoodwatch.org/projects/st-albans-buzz-stops/lancaster-road-buzz-stop/). You may also want to see if you can create an edible landscape area, whether that is for people or wildlife or both.
- Volunteer - on one of the local projects, such as the Rediscovering the River Colne project or the Cassiobury Wetlands project; or with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.
- Consider how you can make your neighbourhood a wilder community (https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-communities/watford).

Waste



*Note borough data is for 2024/25

Waste has a major environmental impact, in terms of processing the waste, but also in terms of creating the product which is now waste in the first place. It is good practice to reduce the materials going into the waste stream, as shown in the diagram. If the item is no longer usable in any form then ideally it would be recycled.



The Council has started monitoring its waste, and has improved the recycling labelling in its offices to encourage more recycling, along with working with partners to achieve the same thing. We now have a baseline for performance over future years. This includes the market waste. In 2025/26 our overall council waste decreased from 163 tonnes to 151 tonnes, however this is still an increase on the 2023/24 baseline of 143 tonnes. The market waste has reduced, however the Town Hall waste has increased. The latter may in part be due to better data collection, however it is still based on regular audits scaled to estimate yearly waste.

As a Borough, our total residual waste was 718kg per household for 2024/25, which is 5% less than the previous total in 2023/24. This also represents a 10% decrease since 2019/20. However, our recycling rate has remained below 50% at 48.4% decreasing from 49.6% in 2023/24, 50.2% in 2022/23 and 51.7% in 2022/23. While it is disappointing that our recycling rates have continued to decrease, they are still higher than the East of England (44.9%) and England (42.0%) averages.[1]

The Council changed its recycling collection frequency in October 2024 and this is reflected in the recycling rates. With the increase in recycling options across all residential types, the introduction of the Simpler Recycling approach and waste aware initiatives, it is hoped that recycling rates will start to improve.

What can you do to help?

- Think about how you can reduce the amount of waste you create – do you need it, or are you ok for now? If replacing something, can it be reused by someone else? Can you repair rather than replace? Can you (or someone else) upcycle it? Can you decline or reuse packaging?
- Packaging – can you take your own bags, containers etc and buy loose to reduce the packaging you collect? Can you reuse the packaging you get (e.g. bread bags for collecting food waste or dog poo), or decline it where possible and practicable?
- Where you can't reduce or reuse, recycle wherever possible – make the most of the kerb side recycling, check what you can recycle when you buy things (particularly with packaging). Major supermarkets

[1] Hertfordshire Waste Partnership annual report – 2024/25: https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/doc/waste/wasteaware/hwp-annual-report-2024-25.pdf

often have soft plastic recycling points, which are not currently included in Watford's kerbside collection, this is due to change as new requirements come into force.

- There are a number of initiatives in Watford to help you reduce what you might need to buy, repair things you already have and rehome things you no longer want. These include:
    - The Watford repair café, which is held monthly on the second Saturday at St Mary's Church. You can get many things repaired or suggestions made on options. You could also help with the fixing if you have the skills, knowledge and time. For more information: https://www.facebook.com/WatfordRepairCafe/
    - The Library of Requirements, at Croxley Business Park. Here you can borrow things for a small fee, so if you need a ladder or a tent for a one off occasion, rather than buying one, you can borrow it. For more information: https://thelibraryofrequirements.lend-engine-app.com/
    - Clothes swaps – Veolia host a number of these in the year, and there are others in local areas. Here you can bring a number of clothing items, collect tokens for the number of suitable items you brought and choose something that someone else has brought.
    - Gift swaps – usually held in January, an opportunity to swap unwanted gifts for something else.

Progress to Target

The Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency sets out the Council's approach to addressing the climate and ecological emergency from 2023-2030. This section sets out how we are performing in each of the two themes and 4 topics, against the targets and actions in the Delivery Plan 2025-27. Progress has been assessed on whether the action:

- Actions completed,
- Actions on target,
- Actions delayed but due to be completed by the end of the delivery plan period,
- Actions not on target, or
- Actions removed, not completed as no longer relevant or appropriate.

In addition, we set out 5 overarching targets, the progress to date can be seen in the table below:

Overarching target – 2030	Actual 2025 - 2026	2025 target	2027 target	2030 target
Council's own carbon emissions to be net zero	21.4% reduction from 2019 baseline	22% reduction from 2019 baseline	40% reduction	75% reduction
	0% offset	6% offset	11%	25%
Council's own waste reduced to near zero	151 tonnes office waste 54% being recycled	60% of waste recycled	70% recycled	Waste reduced to near zero
30% by area of our green spaces to be managed to support nature	42.4%	20% by 2025* (target exceeded)		30%* (Target exceeded)
Do everything in our power to achieve net zero borough carbon emissions	315.3k tonnes CO_2e (2024) – 23.5% decrease on baseline	50% reduction**	65% reduction**	Net zero
Do everything in our power to reduce waste by 50%, and recycle at least 60% of said waste	48.4% (2024/25)		54% of waste recycled by 2027	60% recycled
	10% reduction in total waste	TBC***	TBC***	50% reduction

* Target reviewed and updated in Delivery Plan 2025 - 2027
** Target based on the Tyndall Centre's proposed reductions to achieve a just transition.
*** Target to be developed as the National Resources and Waste Strategy is rolled out.

Key Exceeded target | On target | At risk of missing target | Target not on track to be achieved

Highlights on progress for the overarching targets are:

- 18% reduction in emissions by the Leisure Centres, in part due to the 27% reduction at Woodside Leisure Centre mainly resulting from the installation of solar PV
- New bureau service for managing our energy
- Publication of the new Green Spaces Strategy
- Ongoing success of the tree planting programme
- Implementation of the Simpler Recycling Scheme.

Challenges faced:

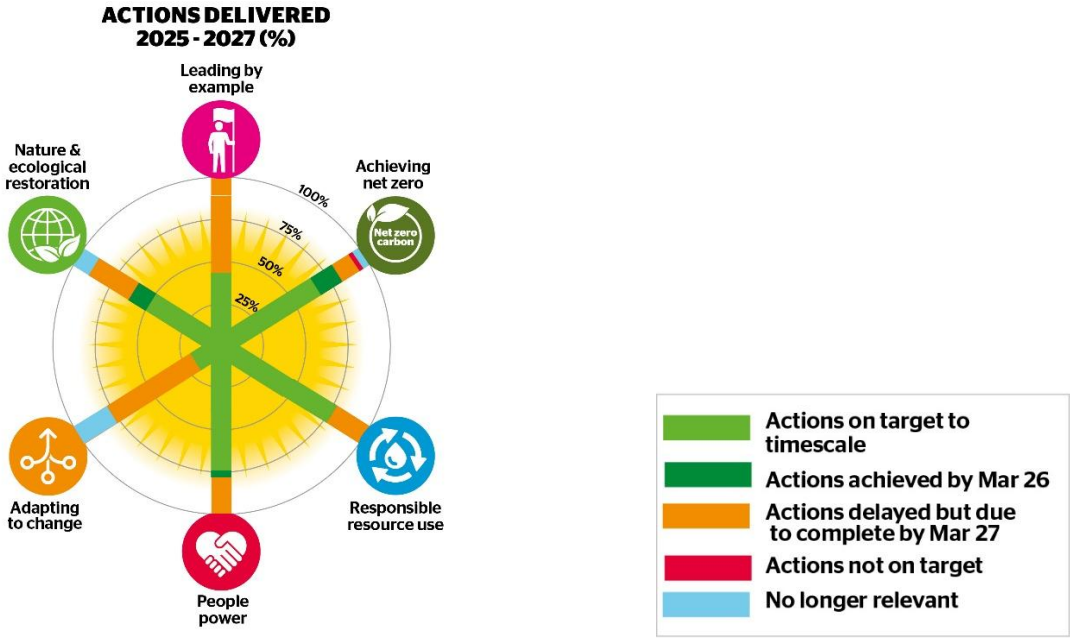
- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has impacted on planned progress and long term climate emergency planning.
- Reduced staff resources due to staff absence, additional LGR responsibilities and ongoing reduced sustainability team resource.

Focus for 2026/27

- Reduction in council carbon emissions
- Managing water use and reduction in council water usage
- Implementing the Green Spaces Strategy
- Ensuring activities put Watford Borough Council in a good position from a climate and ecological emergency perspective.

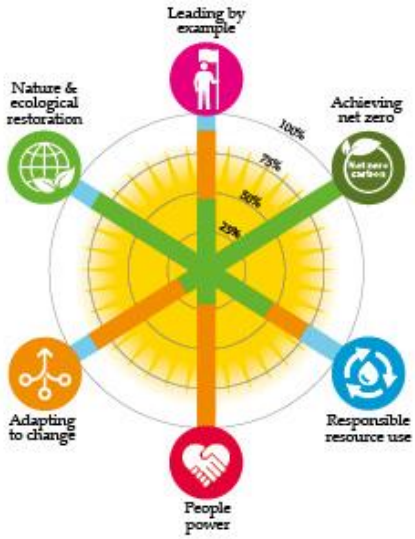
Appendix B shows all targets, actions and progress. Below sets out the summary and highlights of this.

A summary of progress is shown in the graphic below:



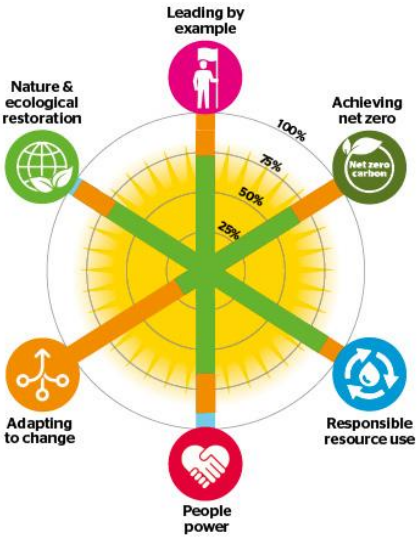
This compares to progress across the two years of the previous delivery plan as illustrated below:

2023-24



Green = Actions achieved Mar 24
Orange = Actions on target to be achieved by Mar 25
Blue = to be reviewed

2024-25



Green = Actions achieved
Orange = Actions carried over to new delivery plan
Blue = Not completed / no longer relevant

Leading by Example

To achieve the Council's aims requires working across the council and beyond. The Council seeks to lead by example, both in its approach to addressing the climate and ecological emergency, and in its approach to working with others: to enable, facilitate and inspire others in these areas. The Council Plan 2026-2028 includes as its fourth theme: A greener town; setting out its commitment to addressing these issues.

This section contains 10 targets, with 20 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 9 are on target and 11 are delayed but scheduled to be complete by the end of the delivery plan period. There are no actions which are deemed no longer relevant.



Highlights on progress include:

- Ongoing work to embed sustainability into the council operations, including use of the Watford Wheel and a training course was run in September 2025 on the Wheel.
- Watford CEO as the lead CEO for Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability as the Chair.

Challenges faced:

- Reduction in staff resources due to long term staff absence and the Sustainability Projects Officer moving to a new job in the final quarter of the year.
- Competing priorities, especially with Local Government Reorganisation.

Areas of Focus for 2025/26:

- Training: including Carbon Literacy to move towards becoming a silver carbon literate organisation, for Council members on climate change, and on initiatives such as the Watford Wheel to ensure it can be used effectively within the council.
- Integrating the use of the Watford Wheel more effectively into the management and portfolio holders reports.
- Working with HCCSP to maximise our impact.

Spotlight: Watford Wheel

The Watford Wheel was developed in 2024/25 to allow us to better understand the sustainability impacts projects and policies may have. It builds on work done by other councils, based on the Doughnut Economics (Kate Raworth et al) approach (for more information see: https://doughnuteconomics.org/).

The Wheel is used in the project management process, with a Wheel assessment being required at key parts of the project, and within the Council's approvals process. It is a standard requirement for all corporate management board reports and is being introduced into Portfolio Holder reports.

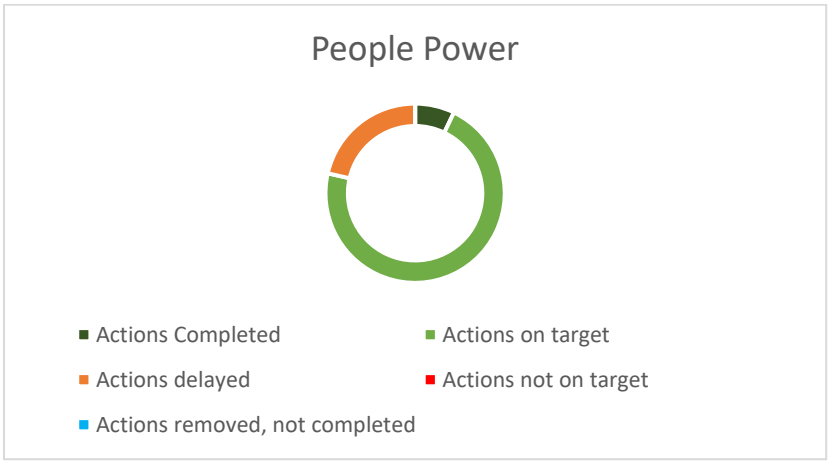
The Wheel looks at both environmental and social impacts as an 'environmental ceiling' and 'social floor'. An illustration of the wheel is below:



People Power

While Leading by Example sets out what the Council will do, People Power is about how we encourage the whole community to get involved. In the subsequent sustainability topics targets are divided into Leading By Example and People Power, but here are the more general targets we have set to get the whole borough engaged.

This section contains 7 targets, with 14 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 1 has been completed, 10 are on target and 3 are delayed but on schedule to be delivered by the end of the delivery plan period.



Highlights on progress include:

- Successful participation in Great Big Green Week in June 2025, with a fully booked family film event, participating in the Green Festival, holding a film and panel session, running a clothes swap and running an internal staff event on the Environmental Strategy.
- Our ongoing work with residents in Watford to support them in improving the energy efficiency of their homes, along with being awarded Warmer Homes grant, which will support this further.
- Instigating a regular staff newsletter, with a monthly theme.
- The continued success of the Environmental Managers' Network, held bi-monthly in locations around Watford.

Challenges faced:

- Reduced staff resources due to absence, LGR commitments and staff leaving reduced the ability to take forward some of the communication and engagement actions.

Areas of focus for 2025/6:

- Reignite the Environmental Managers Network and where possible use it to amplify the impact of our message.
- Engage with other initiatives to disseminate the importance of addressing the climate emergency issues, the benefits in doing so, and how everyone can take action. This includes Great Big Green Week and may include work done by the National Emergency Briefing.
- Engaging with staff through newsletters, activities and regular communications to encourage them to reduce their impact both at home and at work.

Spotlight: Community Reduce, Reuse, Repair Initiatives

In 2025/26 two positive initiatives have emerged from the community supported by the Council.

In October 2025 the first Watford Repair Cafe was held at St Mary's Church. Initially part of the local Friends of the Earth group, it is now its own entity. It is held monthly on the second Saturday of the month, and you can bring electronics & gadgets, clothing & textiles, bikes, household items, and tools for basic repair. It is free, although donations are welcome and you can purchase tea and cake. More information can be found here: https://www.facebook.com/WatfordRepairCafe/

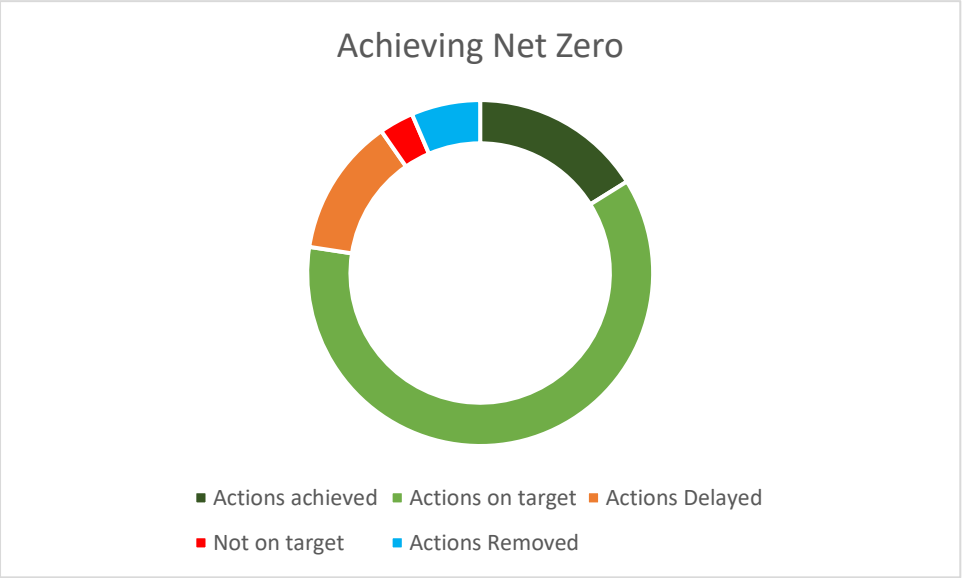
The second initiative is the Library of Requirements, officially launched in June 2026, with work to create it happening throughout the previous year. The Council was again able to support this, both through grant funding, and in helping secure a space for the library to occupy.

The Library of Requirements allows members to borrow items they might only use occasionally so don't want to buy, don't have space to store or can't justify buying. The items available range from garden strimmers to tents to hammers to drinking glasses and much in between! It is very affordable, with prices starting at £1/ week up to £12 / week. For more information see: https://thelibraryofrequirements.lend-engine-app.com/--1

Achieving Net Zero

This section has targets for both the Council and Borough, the latter we seek to influence where we can as we have minimal control. For the Council targets, issues include looking at our transport, both commuting and business travel, as well as our building energy.

This section contains 12 targets, with 31 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 5 have been achieved, 19 are on target, 1 is not on target and 2 no longer appropriate.



Highlights on progress include:

- We have reduced our emissions by 21.4% compared to 2019/20, and our scope 1 and 2 emissions by 26%.
- We continue to improve how we manage and monitor our emissions, and how we calculate our scope 3 emissions.
- The Leisure Centres reduced their carbon emissions 18%, with Woodside Leisure reducing by 27% which was mainly due to an almost full year of the solar PV on the roof. Improvement in how other systems operate in conjunction with each other has also helped.
- Watford Colosseum reopened with a range of decarbonisation measures in place covering cavity wall installation and solar panels.
- Continued support and use of the Beryl bike scheme, and working with neighbouring boroughs.
- Expansion of the e-car club to 9 bays.
- The Council continues to support residents with grants and loans for insulating and heating improvements. See Spotlight.
- Social housing schemes continue to decarbonise homes at pace in the borough following Watford's successful part in a £40m scheme (split across 3 Housing Associations). Works are underway to upgrade insulation to 463 homes in Watford. This includes works to the Meriden flats with an insulation and ground source heating scheme. The council is supporting the project by funding private lease holders so that they can benefit and be included in the scheme.
- The implementation of a managed utilities function which allows better oversight of utility usage and opportunities for additional value for money.

Challenges faced:

- Lack of funding available to implement sustainability features when buildings are being upgraded.
- Accessing reliable energy data and being able to understand why changes have occurred.

Areas of focus for 2026/7:

- Ongoing improvement in the monitoring and managing council utilities.
- Legacy building sustainability initiatives, particularly through a community energy scheme to install PVs on council building roofs.
- Staff and business travel initiatives, moving towards a Very Good rating with the ModeShift Stars staff travel plan scheme.

- Warm Homes implementation after successfully bidding for funding, supporting local residents to improve the comfort of their home and reduce their energy use.

Spotlight: Warmer Homes Grant

Following the successful award of £3.75 million for a three-year private home retrofit project funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), work is well underway to upgrade homes across the Watford and Three Rivers boroughs.

The project is delivering energy efficiency improvements ,including air source heat pumps, solar PV and external wall insulation, with the aim of bringing properties up to at least an Energy Performance Certificate rating of EPC C. With more than half of UK adults worried about their energy bills, the project is helping to lower utility costs and make homes warmer, free from damp and easier to heat, while saving residents hundreds of pounds each year. The housing stock is also being improved to support the government's requirement for landlords' properties to reach EPC C by 2030, as well as Watford Borough Council's objective to improve all homes to EPC C and help make the town net zero carbon.

Nature and Ecological Restoration

As mentioned previously, the UK is depleted of biodiversity. The UK is home to 85% of the world's chalk rivers, unique habitats of which two run through Watford: the Rivers Colne and Gade, both of which are in 'moderate' condition as assessed under the water framework directive. To halt biodiversity loss requires effective policy and strategy to deliver spatial planning, protection, land management and education. This is becoming more important as we experience more extreme weather events, including periods of both drought conditions and high rainfall.

This section contains 16 targets, with 36 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 5 have been achieved, 18 are on target, 8 have been delayed but are on schedule to be delivered in this delivery plan period. A further 5 have been deemed no longer appropriate and will be removed.



Highlights on progress include:

- Successful Tales of the River project completed.
- Exceeding our target of tree planting by having 26,000 trees given away and planted by end March 2025. Our tree canopy across Watford has also increased to 26%, meeting our interim target of 20% by 2027.
- The publishing of the Green Spaces Strategy.

- Completion of the Cassiobury Wetlands project and liaising with the Friends of Cassiobury park in the ongoing management of it.

Challenges faced:

- The ongoing impacts of the high rainfall in the earlier part of the year.

Areas of focus for 2026/7:

- Publication of the Green Spaces Strategy summary document and implementation of the strategy.
- Further tree planting, working with Hertfordshire County Council, Watford Football Club and the local community.
- Ongoing ensuring effective water monitoring and management.

***Spotlight: Green Spaces Strategy:* Our vision for greenspaces**

'Welcoming places where people and nature can thrive, making Watford a vibrant, happy and healthy place.'

Watford is a growing town with a lot packed into a small area. More people are living in flats without private gardens, so public greenspaces play an even bigger part in daily life. Watford has 387 hectares of publicly accessible greenspace, covering 18% of the borough, including 17 Green Flag Award parks (the most in Hertfordshire).

We have set six priorities to guide the next 10 years of work on Watford's greenspaces.

1- Greenspaces that welcome everyone
2- Bringing our community together
3- Healthy, connected communities
4- Protecting nature and climate adaptation
5- Caring for what we have
6- Working together

By 2035, we want Watford's greenspaces to be easier to reach, better for wildlife and more welcoming for everyone. They should support healthier lives, stronger communities and a greener, more resilient town.

See the summary green spaces strategy here: https://www.watford.gov.uk/downloads/file/162/green-spaces-strategy

Responsible Resource Use

A key part of our environmental impact comes from the things and amount we consume. The targets set out here are about how we can reduce the amount of waste we produce, and then improve how we recycle it. Indirectly we are considering the circular economy, and directly the waste hierarchy.

The Government has introduced the Simpler Recycling requirements, which sets out what recycling is required to be collected by local authorities, alongside business recycling requirements. The Government has also tightened up on use of single use plastic.

This section contains 5 targets, with 9 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 7 are on target and 2 are delayed but scheduled to be completed by the end of the delivery plan period.



Highlights on progress include:

- Working with partners to inform businesses on the Simpler Recycling requirements
- Roll out of separate food waste collections to flats.
- Successful clothes swaps and raising awareness with staff on reducing and recycling.
- Improved monitoring and managing of council waste and raising awareness with officers on how to recycle in the office.

Challenges faced:

- Getting officers to understand what can and can't be recycled, especially as it may be different from their home recycling.
- Improving recycling in flats and so improving our recycling rate.
- Improving rates of food waste recycling and addressing the avoidable food waste challenge.

Areas of focus for 2025/6:

- Reducing avoidable food waste and recycling non-avoidable food waste.
- Improving recycling with increased communications.

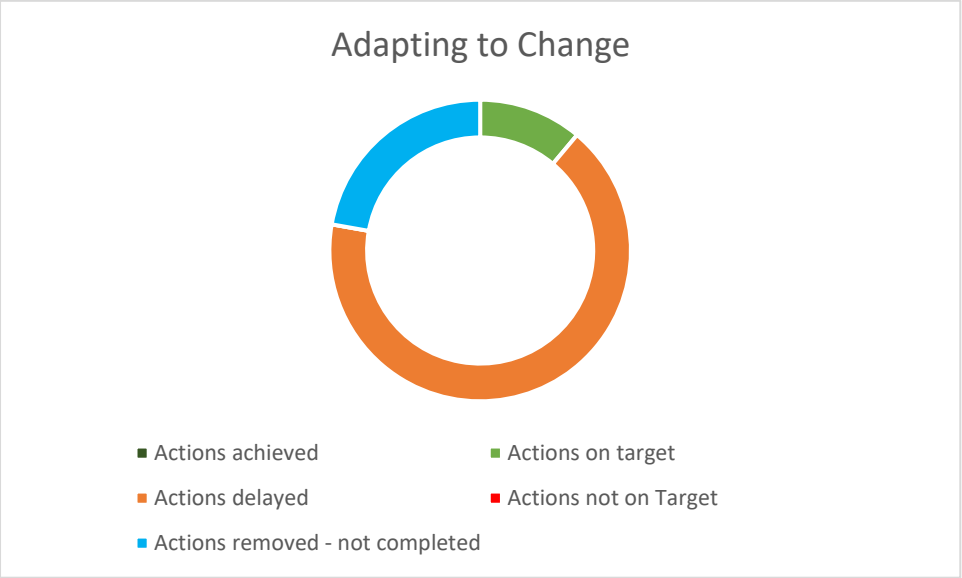
Adapting to Change

Even if the Council meets it environmental commitments, the UK meets its 2050 net zero target, and the world remains within a 1.5 °C temperature change, we will still need to adapt to those changes, as we are already adapting as the global average temperature rises, with 2025 being one of the warmest on record, with a global average surface temperature of 1.44°C +/- 0.13°C above the 1850-1900 average. This compares to 2024 which is the hottest year on record with a global average temperature of 1.53°C +/- 0.08°C above the preindustrial period, and only slightly lower that the high of 2023 of 1.46 °C. The last 3 years are the warmest 3 years according to all the datasets used by the World Meteorological Organisation in their consolidated analysis. The background trend of approximately 1.3°C above pre-industrial temperatures in 2024.[2]

Therefore, we need to consider how we adapt to those changes alongside mitigation measures we take. This includes understanding the risks and knowing how we are going to mitigate and manage them, as well as supporting those in the borough, particularly more vulnerable in society, to adjust to the climate changes, extreme weather, and the impacts of those, such as food production issues.

[2] https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2025/2024-record-breaking-watershed-year-for-global-climate

This section contains 6 targets, with 9 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 1 of these is on target, 6 are delayed and 2 are to be removed as they are not longer appropriate.



Highlights on progress include:

- Climate change is a risk included in the corporate risk register, and therefore is regularly reviewed.

Challenges faced:

- Reduced and competing resources to deliver these and other actions.

Areas of focus for 2025/6:

- Develop climate risk register as appropriate, and related guidance for it to be incorporated into / recognised as a determining factor in service risk registers.
- Ensure adaptation is considered across our activities.
- Develop guidance on adapting to change or link to existing guidance and make that more accessible to potential users.

Going Forward:

Carbon emissions: The Council is moving towards achieving Net Zero emissions for the Council, and continues to review how it can improve its buildings. The Town Hall and Colosseum decarbonisation work is now complete with the Colosseum opening in August 2025. Carbon emissions for the Colosseum are included in our updated emissions under scope 3 downstream leased assets. Three more buildings were decarbonised with PSDS funding before that funding stream closed. We are moving forward with a community energy approach to install rooftop solar photovoltaics on a number of our buildings. We will also continue to improve the operation and management of our buildings. The Borough emissions have reduced but there is more work to be done. The Council is working on transport initiatives within the Transforming Travel In Watford strategy, however it needs action from residents, businesses and communities.

To achieve net zero for both the Council and the Borough is likely to require significant investment and progress will also be influenced by national policy and funding.

Water Usage: Hertfordshire is one of the highest water users in the UK, in one of the drier regions and we will continue to support borough wide initiatives to reduce water usage. The Council is improving its own monitoring and management of water and will continue to engage with staff to reduce water usage.

Biodiversity: The Council has published its Green Spaces Strategy to help ensure the quality of our green spaces both for residents and nature. We will also continue our work on the Rediscovering the River Colne Project, will implement our green spaces strategy and continue to manage all our green spaces effectively.

Waste: The Council is working to reduce its waste, improve its recycling and also to help residents and businesses to do likewise. The Government is bringing in new requirements for recycling which will be implemented by 2027, and by 2025 for some businesses. This will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to recycle more, whether at home or at work.

What can You do to help?

Individuals:

- Leave the car at home if you can – walk, cycle or get public transport. (see www.watford.gov.uk/green-transport). This also makes it easier for those who have to drive, such as those with disabilities.
- Reduce your emissions at home – can you improve the efficiency of your home? Turn things off when not using them? Reduce how much you heat your home (while staying comfortable) or the appliances you use? Install renewables? (For energy advice go to www.bhbh.org.uk).
- Don't leave the tap running, use water efficient cycles, run the washing machine / dishwasher only when full, when changing appliances, choose water and energy efficient ones, along with low flow taps and aerated showers.
- Create a resilient garden, which doesn't need lots of watering, use a water butt if you can, use a watering can instead of a hose, a handheld hose rather than a sprinkler.
- Create a wildlife friendly garden – allow holes in fences for hedgehogs, add bug hotels, leave spaces untended to encourage bugs and wildlife, plant native species, be careful not to disturb creatures, such as over wintering insects, hedgehogs, etc., include safe water features for wildlife.
- Take litter home – litter can cause serious harm to wildlife as well as looking unsightly.
- Think about how you can reduce the amount of waste you create – do you need a new one now? Can it be reused by someone else? Can you repair rather than replace? Can you (or someone else) upcycle it? Can you decline or reuse packaging?
- Reduce food waste where you can, and use the food waste collection or home composting where you can't.

Businesses:

- Sign up to the Sustainability Commitments of the Watford Business Pledge.
- Create your own 'green team' so it doesn't all fall on one person.
- Monitor your energy and water use.
- Look for the quick wins and get everyone on board. When doing maintenance move to more sustainable options.
- Manage any green spaces for nature, allowing access for small mammals, thinking about the planting, leaving parts 'untidy' for the bugs and thinking about what chemicals (if any) you use on the area.
- Encourage staff to travel in a more sustainable way, i.e. walking, cycling, public transport, car sharing.
- Implement the new 'simple recycling' requirements and encourage staff to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Community Groups:

- Look at those business actions you can do.
- Work with your members and local community to see what actions you can all take.

Around the Borough:

- Can you volunteer? There are volunteer opportunities with the Rediscovering the River Colne Project (https://www.rivercolnewatford.co.uk/) and at Cassiobury Wetlands (https://friendsofcassioburypark.org.uk/)
- Can you improve your local environment? Can you make your neighbourhood a wilder community? (https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-communities/watford).
- You can find a list of environmental groups in Watford with everything from waste and recycling to nature and volunteering to travel & transport to energy and campaigning (https://greenwatford.uk/connections/)

For more information

www.Watford.gov.uk/sustainablewatford

sustainability@watford.gov.uk

Appendices

- A: Headline figures explained
- B: Progress to date
- C: Full Greenhouse Gas report
- D: Summary of References