Watford Environmental Strategy: Addressing the Environmental and Ecological Emergency

Delivery Plan 2023-2025

Annual Report 2024-25



Foreword

"The climate and ecological emergency remains challenging and important, especially in the current global political environment. At Watford Borough Council we're working hard to address it by bringing our residents and businesses together to take collective action.

"We continue to invest in green spaces and encourage active travel. We have also reduced our total waste, however, we all need to do more to tackle the scale of borough wide emissions.

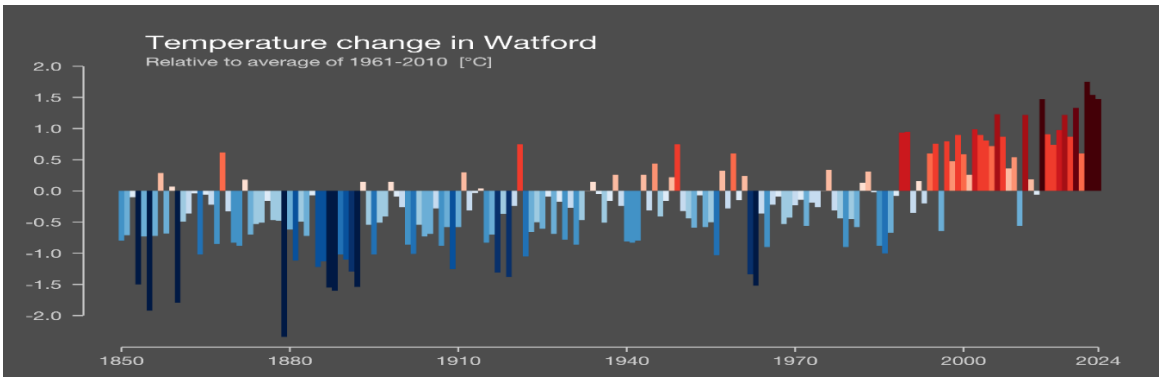
"This report sets out our progress to date, actions going forward and helps to highlight the scale of the challenge ahead. We continue to call for bolder national action and resourcing. To succeed we need everyone within the borough to take action to help address this generation defining issue."

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, making it more important than ever that we all take action to reduce our impact on the environment.



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

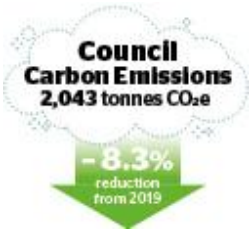
In the adopted strategy we committed to annual external reporting, covering the following:

- 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 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 are able to include.

The council scope 1 and 2 emissions reduced by 16.1% in 2024/25 compared to the 2019 baseline, which is slightly more that our reductions last year. Reductions were reduced due to an increase in scope 2 electricity consumption which we are reviewing, and is likely to relate, at least in part, to ongoing construction work. When our baseline scope 3 emissions are included, we have a total reduction of 8.3%, which is an improvement on 2023/24, but is significantly below our target of 22% by 2025 and our 40% target for 2027. The reduction was achieved through better energy performance of our leased assets, which we expect to continue to improve as changes in how energy is provided feed into the data, such as the installation of photo voltaics at Woodside Leisure, which became operational post March 2025.

To meet our 2027 target will 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 have been successful in PSDS funding to improve three of our buildings, and we will continue to look at external means of funding to improve other buildings. The intention is to ensure our buildings have lower running costs and are more resilient to climate change shocks.

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 2025. 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 2023.

Emissions by Area (tonnes)[1]	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Borough emissions CO_2e (DESNZ)	419.7 k	410.2 k	428.8 k	365.6 k	372.9k
Borough emissions in LA influence - CO_2 (DESNZ)[2]	325.2 k	290.9 k	304.4 k	281.1 k	256.7k
Herts emissions CO_2e	6362.1 k	5815.1 k	5975.1 k	5634.9 k	5463.0k
UK emissions	415.5 m	379.9 m	396.3 m	372.4 m	356.1m
Emissions per capita[1]	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Borough (DESNZ)	4.1	4.0	4.2	3.5	3.6
Herts	5.3	4.9	5.0	4.7	4.5
England	5.8	5.3	5.5	5.1	4.8

[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/686538ace6c3cc924228943a/2023-local-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-statistics-statistical-release.pdf page 30-31.

Borough emissions have reduced by 11.15% since 2019, however, they have increased by 2% since 2023-24. The increase in emissions is due to a significant increase in emissions from waste management. Waste emissions are calculated from where the waste is generated rather than where the emissions are released. Watford waste management emissions are significantly higher than other districts and boroughs in Hertfordshire, and it is unclear why this is the case. The Council is actively investigating this and is in correspondence with DESNZ. The most significant reductions compared to 2019 are commercial (29% reduction) and public sector (27% reduction). However the most significant emissions generators are domestic which has a 18.5% reduction compared to 2019, waste management which increased by 38% and transport which decreased by 20%. Waste management was the only sector which increased compared to 2022.

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.
- Reduce your emissions – can you improve the efficiency of your home / building? Turn things off when not using? 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) or the appliances you use? 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.
- 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!

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, although there has been a significant reduction in water usage over the last 12 months.

The Council is improving how it monitors water use for its buildings and better metering is being implemented in 25/26. This will improve how we track water usage, understand where major water usage is, identify anomalies and so take action to reduce our water usage. While South Staffs Water suggests 50 l/p/d is average, CIRIA data puts this as much lower classing above 27 l/p/d as excessive. We are now 30.86 l/p/d, much closer to the CIRIA maximum suggested usage, and the data includes a period where we identified a water leak. It may also be affected by the ongoing construction work. For 25/26 we will continue to improve our understanding of our water usage and identify where we may take action.

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 is looking 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 2023/24 water usage in the Colne Community area has reduced by 10% from 163 litre per resident per day, to close to our 2025 target. This may be due to the 2024/25 being a particularly wet year, and so garden watering being reduced.



There are still 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, 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 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 hand held hose rather than a sprinkler. Similarly, if washing a car or other item, use a bucket rather than a hose.
- 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.

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.

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. 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 continues to improve 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 is nearing completion, and will be 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.

How can you help?

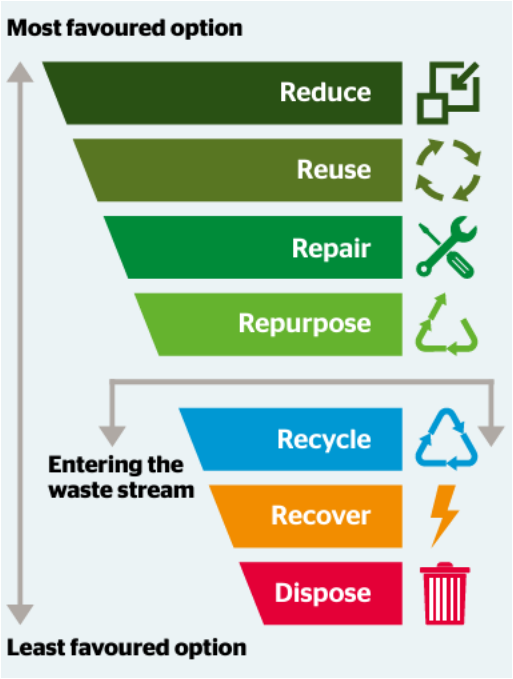
- Take litter home – litter can cause serious harm to wildlife as well as looking unsightly and requiring extra resources from the council which could be used better elsewhere.
- If you have a garden- at home or at work – allow holes in fences so animals such as hedgehogs can move between them, add bug 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.
- 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 land owner 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/).
- 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 2023/24.

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 2024/25 our overall council waste increased from 143 tonnes to 163 tonnes, however the office waste reduced by approximately 60% from 17.76 tonnes annually or 79kg/employee/year to 7.07 tonnes or 29 kg/employee/year.

As a Borough, our total residual waste was 752kg per household for 2023/24, which is the lowest in Hertfordshire and a 2% reduction compared to the previous year. This also represents a 6% decrease since 2019/20. However, our recycling rate has now fallen just below 50% at 49.6% decreasing from 50.2% in 2022/23 and 51.7% in 2022/23. Rates for 2024/25 will be available in the Winter 2025. The Council changed its recycling collection frequency in October 2024 and we will see any impact of that in the 2024/25 figures.

The Government has now brought in actions to reduce the use of single use plastic and improve recycling. By end of March 2026 all councils will need to be collecting paper and card, plastic, glass, metal, food waste and garden waste as curb side collection. In addition, businesses, schools and hospitals will need to be doing the same with the exception of garden waste, on a staggered timeframe, giving smaller organisations time to put this in place.

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 often have soft plastic recycling points, which may not be included in kerb side recycling.

- Can you share tools and equipment with neighbours, so you don't all need to own them, or work with others to set up a local 'library of things'? A group is setting one up in West Watford called a Library of Requirements.
- Are you able to fix things? Can you help others either to fix their things or showing them how to do it themselves? A regular, monthly, repair café is starting in October 2025 at St Mary's Church, run by the local Friends of the Earth group – are you able to help them? Or go along and get things you need fixed?

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 2023-25. Progress has been assessed on whether the action:

- has been achieved,
- will be carried over to the next delivery plan (approved in March 2025) or
- if it has not been completed and is no longer relevant.

Some actions have been delayed until the next delivery plan period to tie in with other planned activities, while others have been superseded, e.g. by new government legislation.

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

Overarching target - 2030	Actual 2024 - 2025	2025 target	2027 target	2030 target
Council's own carbon emissions to be net zero	8.3% 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	163 tonnes office waste 45% 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	372.9k tonnes CO_2e (2022) - 12.7% 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	49.6% (2023/24)		54% of waste recycled by 2027	60% recycled
	6% reduction in total waste	TBC***	TBC***	50% reduction

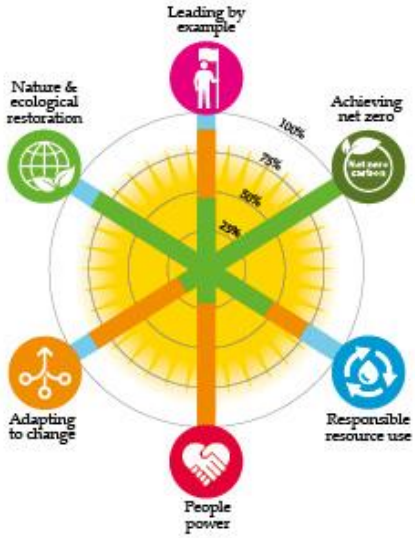
* Target reviewed and updated in Delivery Plan 2025 - 2027
** Target based on the Tyndall Centre's proposed reductions to achieve a just transition.
*** Target to be developed as the National Resources and Waste Strategy is rolled out.

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

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

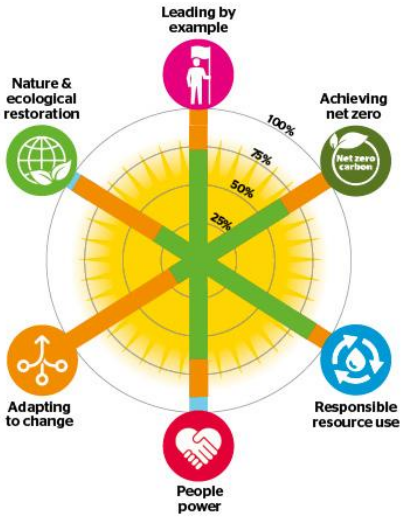
A summary of progress is shown in the graphic below:

2023-24



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

2024-5

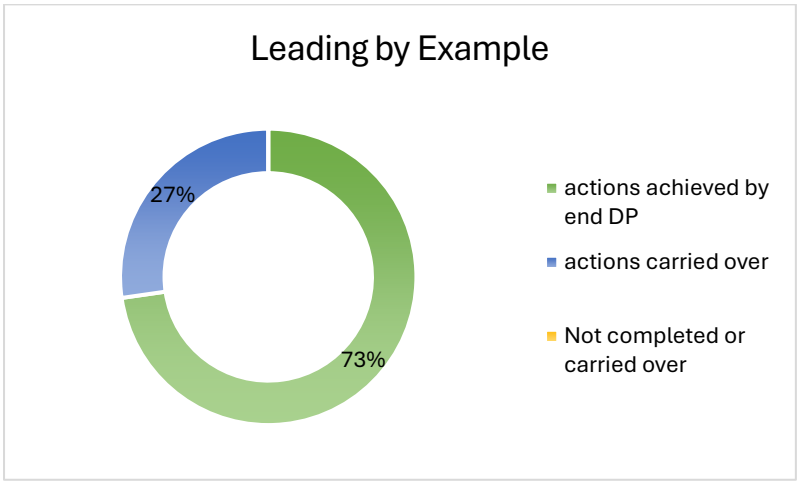


Green = Actions achieved
Orange = Actions carried over to new delivery plan
Blue = Not completed / no longer relevant

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 also in its approach to working with others: to enable, facilitate and inspire others in these areas. The Council Plan 2022-2026 includes as its second theme: A greener, brighter future; setting out its commitment to addressing these issues.

This section contains 10 targets, with 11 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 8 have been achieved (including ongoing activities) and 3 have been carried over into the new delivery plan (Environmental Strategy Delivery Plan 2025-27). There are no actions which we have not delivered on or are not addressing the new delivery plan.



Highlights on progress include:

- Watford Wheel included in the reports template, and being used for CMB reports.
- Watford CEO becoming the lead CEO for Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), with the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Sustainability becoming the Chair.

- Watford Borough Council is one of the leading district in Herts in the UK Climate Scorecards published in 2025, second behind St Albans City and District Council.

Challenges faced:

- Competing resources to deliver the actions and write the new delivery plan.
- Reduced resources during recruitment period for the Sustainability Projects Officer.
- 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.
- Developing a simple environmental checklist for use with our property management approach.
- Working with HCCSP to maximise our impact.

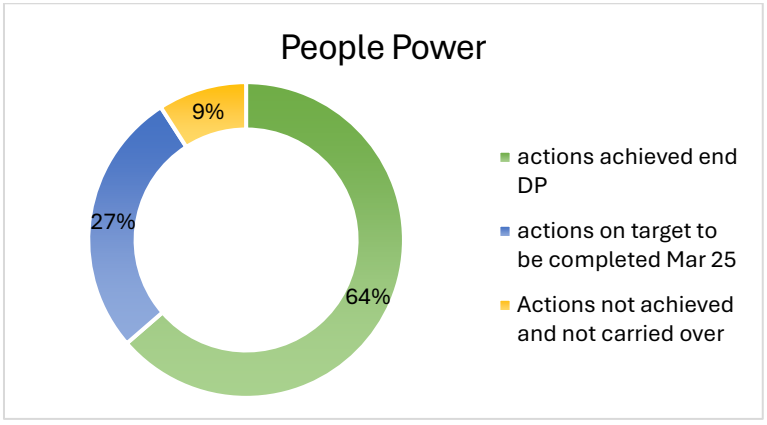
Spotlight: Sustainability Business Symposium

The first Watford Sustainability Symposium was held in October 2024 at Watford Football Club. Over 60 people signed up to attend the event which was host by Mayor Peter Taylor. The delegates heard about the Council's first Environmental Strategy Annual report, followed by a panel of local businesses on how they have addressed sustainability and used that in meeting the sustainability aspects of the Watford Business Pledge. Watford Football Club took delegates through the inspiring things they are doing to address sustainability, including working with fans. The event culminated with a series of roundtables to understand what businesses are doing and what commitment they have made with the themes and topics of the Environmental Strategy.

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 11 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 7 have been achieved (including ongoing activities) and 3 have been carried over to the 2025-27 delivery plan, and 1 has not been completed and is no longer appropriate.



Highlights on progress include:

- Successful participation in Great Big Green Week in June 2024, 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:

- Funding not achieved for either of the funding applications submitted.

Areas of focus for 2025/6:

- Engaging with the community through the Environmental Managers' Network, the Public Sustainability Forum and community groups, with the underlying theme of 5 years to 2030.
- Engaging with staff through newsletters, activities and regular communications to encourage them to reduce their impact both at home and at work.

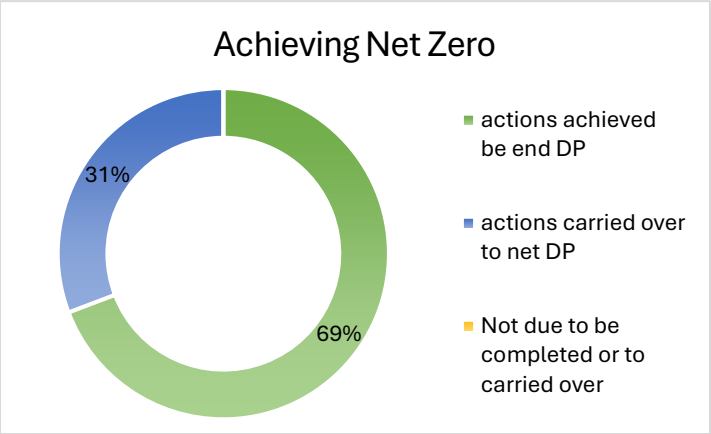
Spotlight on the Environmental Managers Network

The Environmental Managers' Network was launched at Great Big Green Week in 2022, with the first event held at the Hilton Offices. Since then, the network has met every two months, with it hosted by a different organisation each time. The host organisation presents on what they are doing and any challenges they may be having, and a discussion follows. The second half of the session is a presentation on a relevant topic to the businesses, varying from simpler recycling to carbon reporting to water literacy with much in between. With some events a key part is a site tour, whether that was showing the innovative printing approach taken by Stylographics or how tenants are helped to reduce their emissions at Croxley Business Park. There are about 15-20 regular attendees, with anyone who has an environmental remit in their job welcome. It is not aimed at places where people are part of a large local team (although they are welcome) but more for those who do not have a local support network to bounce ideas off, and be inspired by what others are doing.

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 13 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 9 have been achieved (including ongoing activities) and 4 have been carried over to the 2025-27 delivery plan. There are no actions which have not been achieved or are not being addressed in the new delivery plan.



Highlights on progress include:

- We have reduced our emissions by 8.3% compared to 2019/20 and we continue to improve our managing and monitoring of emissions.
- The Leisure Centres reduced their carbon emissions, which will reduce further as the initiatives implemented to improve the performance come online, particularly at Woodside Leisure with the installation of rooftop solar photovoltaics.
- Watford Colosseum is shortly due to reopen 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.
- The Council continues to support residents in decarbonising their homes in the borough. A Watford led partnered project with Three Rivers successfully bid £3.75m for a home retrofit project which we are now delivering over the next three years. The government award was the highest in Herts and Buckinghamshire (who are both using our project management framework to deliver their projects; resulting in the council receiving fee income).
- The council continues to support residents with grants and loans and monies from Energy Company Obligations (ECO) for insulating and heating improvements.
- 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 set 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.
- Installation of solar panels on Woodside Leisure Centre, funded by the Swimming Pool Support fund.
- The implementation of a managed utilities function which will allow better oversight of utility usage and opportunities for additional value for money.
- Following a successful previous scheme another 50 homes have so far signed up to have solar panels/batteries fitted in this years' Solar Together scheme

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 2025/6:

- Monitoring and managing council energy and water usage.
- Legacy building sustainability initiatives.
- Staff and business travel initiatives.
- Borough wide energy, considering a Local Area Energy Plan and the potential for community energy.

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

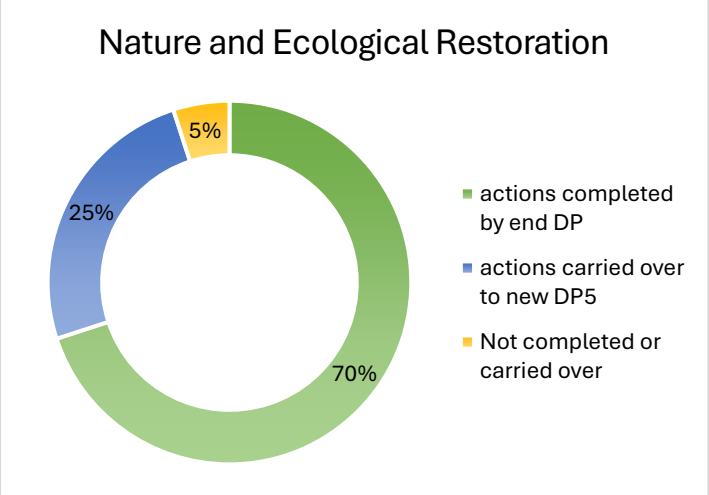
Spotlight: Green Loop

The Green Loop, a 6.6 mile continuous cycling and walking route was officially launched in Autumn 2024, connecting the town's vibrant urban landscape with its serene open spaces and heritage sites. The Council has developed a flyer and map, directional cue sheet and GPS route planner which can be viewed here: www.watford.gov.uk/greenloop. These highlight landmarks such as the River Colne, Oxhey Activity Park, Ebury Way, the Grand Union Canal and Whippendell Wood. Promotion of the route has encouraged people to cycle around Watford for leisure as well as commuting, with responses from a recent survey showing that route users had explored new parts of Watford and 92% of people are now aware of Watford's Green Loop.

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 section contains 16 targets, with 20 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 14 have been achieved (including ongoing activities) and 5 have been carried over to the 2025-27 delivery plan. There is one action that is no longer deemed to be appropriate, with a more appropriate action being included in the 2025-27 delivery plan.



Highlights on progress include:

- Successful Tales of the River project.
- 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.
- Developing the Green Spaces Strategy.
- Collaborating with Hertfordshire County Council to produce the statutory county wide Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Completion of the Cassiobury Wetlands project.

Challenges faced:

- High rainfall, leading to challenges in monitoring water quality in the River Colne, and carrying out work both at in the River Colne and Cassiobury Wetlands.

Areas of focus for 2025/6:

- Completion and publication of the Greenspaces Strategy and implementing the action plan.
- Further tree planting, working with Hertfordshire County Council, Watford Football Club and the local community.
- Developing our approach to ensure our corporate green spaces are managed as effectively as our parks and green spaces.
- Ensuring effective water monitoring and management.

Spotlight: Cassiobury wetlands

A wildlife wetland sanctuary in Watford is taking shape at Cassiobury Park Nature Reserve in the town's old watercress beds, to help boost biodiversity and protect local habitats.

The watercress beds, which declined after not being actively managed since 1991, have been restored by Watford Borough Council through digging out the silt from the dried-up cress beds, whilst preserving the historic bed structures and opening feeder channels. In addition, a wildlife pond has been increased in size tenfold and a linear wetland fed by the River Gade has been restored, so it can again provide a refuge for fish and invertebrates to hide from predators. To improve access, an old wooden footbridge has been replaced with a new wider recycled plastic bridge, and a narrow footbridge has been replaced with a grassed walkway.

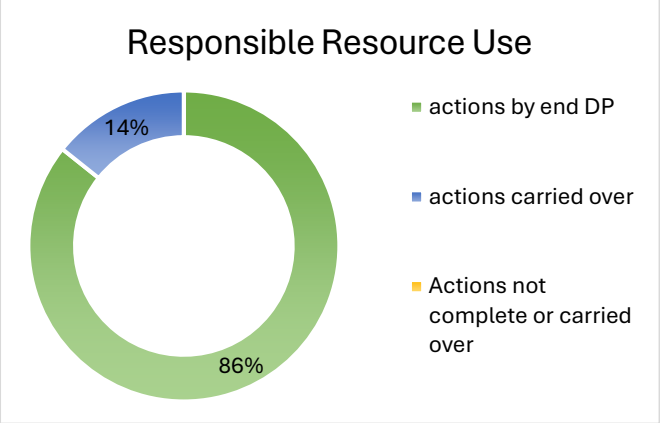
Once the wetlands have fully matured, the area will become a valuable habitat complete with reeds, ponds and scrapes, and it will also preserve the flood plain functionality of the watercress bed area. Tree planting and a wildflower meadow will complement the wetland features and together create a range of habitats that boosts local biodiversity.

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 7 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 6 have been achieved (including ongoing activities) and 1 has been carried over to the 2025-27 delivery plan. There are no actions which have neither been delivered or carried over.



Highlights on progress include:

- Working with partners to inform businesses on the Simpler Recycling requirements
- Roll out of separate food waste collections to over 2,000 flats. The scheme will continue to be rolled out during 25-26.
- Helping residents to save money by reducing the amount of edible food wasted through the #Worth Saving campaign.
- 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.

Areas of focus for 2025/6:

- Implementing simpler recycling for the borough and supporting businesses and organisations to implement it.
- Rolling out separate collections of food waste to all remaining flats.
- Reducing avoidable food waste and recycling non-avoidable food waste.
- Improving recycling with increased communications.

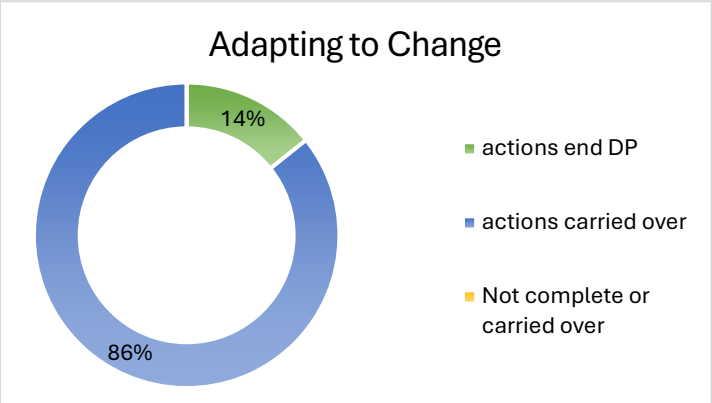
Adapting to Change

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 2024 being the hottest year on record with a global average temperature of 1.53°C +/- 0.08°C above the preindustrial period, higher than the previous high in 2023 of 1.46 °C. and the background trend of approximately 1.3°C above pre-industrial temperatures in 2024.[1]

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.

This section contains 6 targets, with 7 actions set out in the delivery plan, of these 1 have been achieved and 6 have been carried over to the 2025-2027 delivery plan.

[1] 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



Highlights on progress include:

- Working with the HCCSP Adaptation sub-group to understand how approaches to adaptation can be included in our practices.

Challenges faced:

- Competing resources to deliver these and other actions.
- New template being developed as we were part way through developing our risk register.

Areas of focus for 2025/6:

- Develop climate risk register to integrate into the Council risk register.
- Ensure adaptation is considered across our activities.

Going Forward:

Carbon emissions: The Council is moving towards its 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 and the Colosseum opened in August 2025. Carbon emissions will be included in our updated emissions and we will continue to seek to improve the operation and management of our buildings. Three more buildings are being decarbonised with PSDS funding and additionally rooftop solar photovoltaics will be investigated for installation on a number of buildings. Further work in this financial year will be on staff and business travel and on water use. 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: In Hertfordshire we are one of the highest water users in the UK, in one of the drier regions. The Council is working to understand and improve its water usage, and will continue to engage with water companies to help residents reduce their water use.

Biodiversity: The Council is developing its Green Spaces Strategy to help ensure the quality of our green spaces both for residents and nature. We are also working with Hertfordshire County Council on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which, along with biodiversity net gain requirements, will help to improve biodiversity in the borough and surrounding area. We will also continue our work on the Rediscovering the River Colne Project, implementing the Cassiobury Wetlands management plan and managing all our green spaces effectively.

Waste: The Council is working both to reduce its waste and also to help residents and businesses to do their bit. 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 when full, when changing appliances, choose water 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.
- 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.
- 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/)
- 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