

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

24 July 2025

Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology: Progress Report – Summer 2025

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr N Ireland, Leader of the Council, Climate, Performance and Safeguarding

Local Councillor(s):

County Wide

Executive Director:

A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

Report author and job title: Antony Littlechild, Sustainability Team Manager;
Connor Pearson, Carbon Management Officer

Email: antony.littlechild@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk;
onnor.pearson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. The council has continued to demonstrate its commitment to a climate friendly, nature positive and resilient Dorset. The imperative for action has never been stronger, with the spring of 2025 being the warmest and sunniest on UK record¹, underscoring the immediate impact of climate change on Dorset and the UK. The Councils Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy, sets out the agenda for change and action required.
- 1.2. This report is the first biannual report for 2025. It provides a qualitative narrative of the Councils deliver against our strategic aims. This report provides a snapshot of key areas of progress over the year 2024/25 highlighting the council's critical role in not only address climate and nature through its own operations but the critical role the Council has in working with partners to set and influence strategic policy frameworks to delivering climate and nature goals across the County and beyond. It is important to

¹ [Double record breaker: Spring 2025 is warmest and sunniest on UK record - Met Office](#)

note this report does not cover all the activity underway across council services but focuses on those strategic areas of action. Further details of progress and programmes can be found on our website - [Progress so far - Dorset Council](#).

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. To review progress made in delivering the natural environment, climate and ecology strategy during 2024/25.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1. In line with the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on 12 May 2021 that the Committee would provide oversight against progress and delivery of the strategy and action plan via six monthly progress reports, the Committee's views will be used to inform the shape of the next phase of the delivery programme.

4. Background and context

- 4.1. The Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy, was refreshed in 2023, setting out the key areas of action required both by the council to deliver its operational objectives and the work required to facilitate wider delivery across the County in partnership with other organisation. As noted in previous reports we have made significant progress since 2021, and programs of work continue to build on these strong foundations.
- 4.2. Over the past year the council has accelerated its delivery and strengthened its ambition through commitments made within the council plan (2024-2029), which sets tackling the climate and nature emergencies as one of four strategic priorities.
- 4.3. The council reports progress against its Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy biannually.
 - Spring/Summer reporting: qualitative narrative on delivery within our operational and facilitation programmes – i.e. our interventions.
 - Autumn/Winter reporting: quantitative reporting on the consequent changes to our council and county emissions trajectory – i.e. on the outcomes.

This report is the first of our biannual reports for 2025, representing a qualitative update of our own delivery.

4.4. Our last (Autumn/Winter 2024) quantitative report² noted that good progress had been made but there was a need to accelerate activity to bring emissions reduction back on track. It highlighted:

- Dorset county-wide emissions had reduced by around 13.2% by 2022 and that the three most significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Dorset are agriculture (33%), transport (28%), and domestic sources (20%). It also noted that last year Dorset emission reductions had been better than the national and southwest averages.
- Dorset Council scope 1 and 2 operational emissions had reduced by approximately 31% by end March 2024. Emissions from our buildings saw a steep decrease, but overall, in-year progress had been small, and more work was required to ensure emission reduction was on target by March 2025.
- It also highlighted that around 22% of Dorset's land falls within our ecological network, but only around a third of the network is known to be in good condition or fair – with a fifth known to be in poor condition. The development of the Local Nature Recovery strategy was essential to improving this.

5. Progress in 2024 / 25

- 5.1. The Natural Environment Climate and Ecology, progress report -summer 2025 (attached at Appendix A), provides a snapshot of progress, and is focused on the key strategic areas of work that have been prioritised over the past year. These have helped to accelerate our own progress to show the requisite leadership, develop the effective alignment of strategic policy frameworks to deliver climate a nature goals and work with partners at a county, regional and national level.
- 5.2. In addition to this, work continues across the council to deliver each mission of the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy, as noted in the spring 2023/24 report [Progress so far - Dorset Council](#).
- 5.3. 2024/25 saw a continuation of considerable delivery across a vast programme of work, as highlighted in Appendix A. Key highlights include:
- Continued decarbonisation of our estate through retrofit and installing renewable energy generation, as well as producing decarbonisation plans for 120 properties, and identifying 2.2MW of potential renewable energy generation across 50 sites.
 - The roll-out of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) across all council fuel bunker sites and transitioning our small fleet to EV

² [Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Progress Report - Autumn/Winter 2024](#)

- Developing the strategic policy framework to deliver climate and nature goals and strengthen partnership working at a county, regional and national level - including the launch of the Economic Growth Strategy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Local Transport Plan (LPT4), and Workplace Travel Plan.
 - Developing our strategic approach to climate adaptation and ensuring our services and communities are resilient for the future. Including both an internal Council Operational Climate Risk Assessment and developing plans to develop a county-wide Climate Adaptation Strategy.
 - Delivering key strategic programmes across the county supporting Dorset businesses and communities such as: -
 - Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, - offering the farming sector support, grants and networking to achieve multi benefit including sustainable farm practice, cost reduction, flood risk, carbon storage, and biodiversity.
 - Low Carbon Dorset programme – providing technical support and grants to organisations, helping them utilise low carbon technologies to reduce energy bills, support business growth and innovation, improve organisation viability and reduce the counties carbon emissions.
 - Deliver and develop strategic programmes helping residents reduce bills, access grants and improve their homes through Healthy Homes Dorset, and a new Dorset Solar Together programme.
 - Pioneering a Climate Ambassadors Network with the Met Office and our Children's Services – to support schools and local communities participate in tackling climate change and nature loss.
 - Significant progress on our sustainable procurement project, offering training and guidance on effective sustainable procurement for our services, and developing our understanding of our scope 3 emissions.
 - Remaining the #1 unitary for recycling, improving our recycling rate to 60.5% compared to a 43.4% national average.
 - Collaborating with regional partners, such as through our Public Sector Decarbonisation Group and The Great Southwest, to develop a joined-up approach to tackling climate change and exploit opportunities for our county and our region.
- 5.4. We expect continued reduction in council emissions in 2024/25 related to ongoing programmes of work, details will be reported in autumn/ winter 2025. This will include a reduction of 350 tonne CO₂e in fleet fuel emission (equivalent to 3% of scope 1 and 2 emissions), achieved through the HVO pilot, at one of the council's depots from November to March 25.
- 5.5. The full impact of the programmes such as building retrofit, solar PV and full switch to HVO fuel will be seen in the autumn/winter 2026 reporting. As a

result of this work, we anticipate council emissions dropping by over 4000 tonnes CO₂e a year, equivalent to a 31% of scope 1 and 2 emissions. This will ensure the council remains ahead of its 47% target for 2026.

- 5.6. In addition to this, wider work continues across the council to deliver each mission of the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy, as noted in the spring 2023/24 report [Progress so far - Dorset Council](#).

6. Alternative options considered

- 6.1. Not applicable

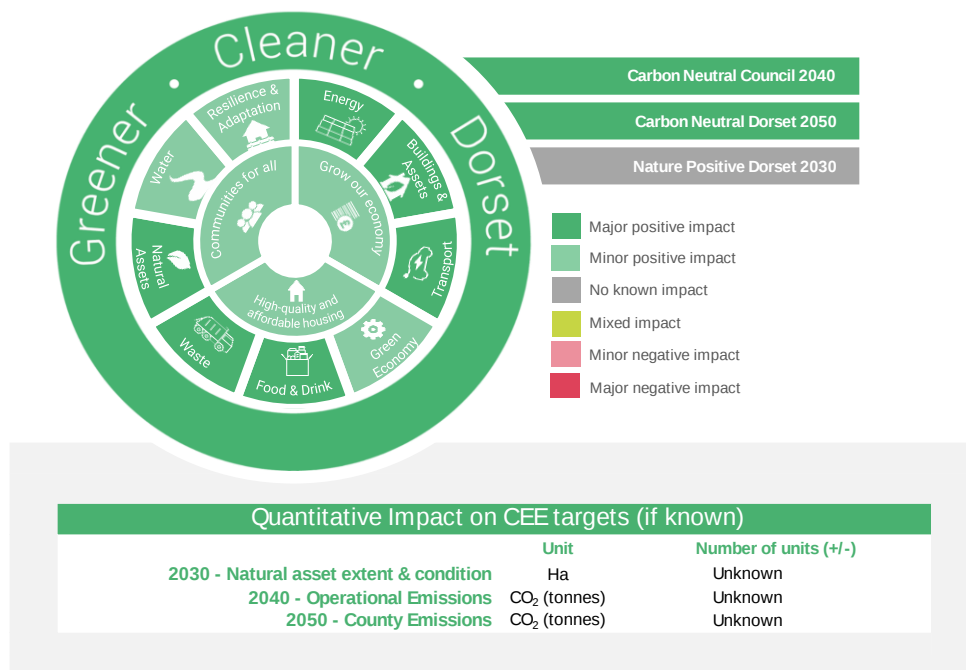
7. Legal considerations

- 7.1. Not applicable

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. This report itself has no financial implications but does reflect the impact and delivery that has been achieved through previous capital and revenue investments that have been agreed as part of the programme.
- 8.2. In 2022 Dorset Council committed £10 million capital funding and additional revenue to deliver its climate ambitions. By the end of financial year 2024/25 £5.3 million of capital has been spent on carbon reduction programmes. The remaining 4.7 million has been allocated over the next two years to deliver programmes such as building decarbonisation, Solar PV on DC buildings, EV infrastructure for DC fleet vehicles, Street lighting LED upgrades and the Low Carbon Dorset programme. An additional £6.025 million was allocated in March 2025 ([Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 25th March, 2025, 6.30 pm - Dorset Council](#)) to accelerate these programmes of work.
- 8.3. The cabinet report highlighted the need to continue our success in accessing additional resources from a variety of external sources through competitive grant funding and partnership working. To achieve this, it is critical that we continue to develop schemes and programme to ensure we are opportunity ready with the right evidence and resources to win funding competitions. To date the programme has been supplemented by over £25m of external funding from schemes such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) and Low Emission Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI).

9. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	Major positive impact
Buildings & Assets	Major positive impact
Transport	Major positive impact
Green Economy	Minor positive impact
Food & Drink	Major positive impact
Waste	Major positive impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	Major positive impact
Water	Minor positive impact
Resilience and Adaptation	Minor positive impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	Minor positive impact
High-quality and affordable housing	Minor positive impact
Communities for all	Minor positive impact

10. Well-being and health implications

- 10.1. There are no specific health and wellbeing implications of this report. However, from a strategic perspective, implementation of the strategy and action plan has significant co-benefits for health and wellbeing, and climate change impacts include significant socio-economic and health and wellbeing risks. Our emerging work on adaptation is considering how to mitigate the impacts of now unavoidable warming and is going to initially focus on

engagement with residents to understand what they consider important in the development of Dorset Strategy.

11. Other implications

- 11.1. There are no other specific implications contained in this report. As previously noted, the strategy and action plan itself has wide ranging implications, opportunities, and benefits for the way the council delivers services and works with others across the county.

12. Risk Implications

- 12.1. HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

- 12.2. Due to the known high level of public interest in the climate change agenda and the previous commitment to provide the public with a biannual progress report, to not do should be considered a high reputational risk to Dorset Council.
- 12.3. The publication of this report is in line with commitments made and shows a significant level of progress; but notes that there remains a need for increased urgency and further progress.
- 12.4. In addition, the impacts of climate change pose a significant risk to council services and budgets and the wider Dorset area in the medium and long term. Failure to effectively address the climate and ecological emergency and resilience will increase the risks associated with climate change.

13. Equalities

- 13.1. Any specific impacts are considered through the delivery of the strategy and associated programmes.

14. Appendices

- 14.1. Appendix A - Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology: Progress Report – Summer 2025.

15. Background papers

- 15.1. Revised greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction trajectories and key milestones – Cabinet March 25th 2025.

16. Report Signoff

- 16.1. This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s).