

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee

20 November 2025

Climate and Nature Progress Report – Autumn/Winter 2025

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s): County Wide

Senior Leadership Team:

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1. Since refreshing the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology strategy in 2023, the council has continued to demonstrate its commitment to a climate friendly, nature positive and resilient Dorset. The Dorset Council Plan 2024-29 has brought forward the council's net zero targets and reiterated its goals for nature-positive management across the county.
- 1.2. This report is the second biannual report for 2025. It provides a quantitative overview on our council's and county's emissions and nature management, and performance against our key strategic aims.

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. This report outlines Dorset Council's progress against its environmental goals as set out in the Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023–25 and the Dorset Council Plan 2024–29. The strategy is built around three pillars: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, supporting nature recovery, and adapting to environmental change.
- 4.2. **Carbon emissions reduction** – Appendix A to this report provides further detail on the progress of our emissions trajectories, both as a council and for the wider county.
- 4.3. **Nature recovery** – Further detail has been added to this year's report on nature as requested by Scrutiny Committee in July 2025. This provides a range of quantitative data as well as highlighting the work to develop a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Dorset LNRS. Nature Based Solutions also have a critical role to play in both sequestering carbon emissions and managing the impacts of climate change.
- 4.4. **Adapting to climate change** – Previous reports have focused on climate mitigation, but work has begun on considering our strategic response to climate change and this will play an increasingly important role in our future programme. A citizens panel on climate adaptation was established in October 2025 which is a first step in the development of a wider stake holder engagement process to develop a county wider strategy. This in turn will allow for great quantitative report on changes to the climate.
- 4.5. Following the Dorset Council Plan 2024-29, the council has committed to achieving net zero emissions for its direct operations by 2035, indirect operations by 2040, and the wider Dorset area by 2045.

5. **2024/25 carbon emissions reduction progress (Council Operational)**

- 5.1. In 2024/25, Dorset Council's total operational emissions (Scopes 1, 2, and 3) were 23,593 tonnes of CO₂e, this is a 31.3% reduction from the 2019/20 baseline. However, scope 1 and 2 emissions alone saw a higher decrease of 35% since the baseline year. These are the emissions under which Dorset Council has more direct control. Overall this indicates that emission reduction fell short of the 2025 interim target of a 40% reduction.

5.2. These figures do not however take full account of the switch from diesel to HVO fuel for council fleet vehicles, which only began in winter 2024 and was not fully implemented until April 2025. The benefit for this significant carbon reduction measure will be seen in 2025/26 data. In total we expect this to save around 4,000 tonnes of CO₂e, equivalent to 70% of our fleet emission. We therefore anticipate our scope 1 and 2 emissions to have reduced by 50-55% (compared to our baseline) by 2025/26, going beyond our 25/26 interim target of 48% and bringing us back on track.

5.3. Key highlights from the Autumn 2025 report include:

- Buildings and Assets: Emissions reduced by 45% compared to the baseline, driven by energy efficiency upgrades and 6MW of installed solar PV capacity.
- Highways Materials: Emissions have dropped to 36% compared to the baseline, aided by increased use of warm mix asphalt.
- Street Lighting: Emissions decreased by 41% compared to the baseline, meeting the 2025 target.
- Fleet: Emissions have fallen to 19% compared to the baseline, supported by the introduction of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) and expanded EV use.
- Business Mileage: Emissions saw a 7% year-on-year decrease and now sits at a 34% reduction on the baseline.
- Waste from Dorset Council sites: Emissions increase year-on-year due a higher-than-normal use of landfill but have still fallen by 65% against the baseline.
- Commuting: Emissions saw a slight increase but at a reduced rate of growth compared to previous years, now sitting at a 17% reduction on the baseline.
- Dorset Travel: Emissions saw a 1% increase year-on-year due to increased demand, especially in SEND transport, with the workstream now sitting at a 23% reduction on the baseline.

6. 2023 carbon emissions reduction progress (County-wide/Facilitation)

6.1. Nationally, emissions have decreased by 5.95% between 2022 and 2023. This has largely been driven by a reduction in electricity emissions due to both a decrease in electricity demand and an increase in the share of renewable energy in national electricity supply and imports.

- 6.2. Emissions have continued to fall in all regions, regardless of geographic, demographic and industrial differences, and fell in 94% (340 out of 361) of local authority areas.
- 6.3. In the year to 2023, Dorset's area-wide emissions reduced by 5.16% (from 2,209 to 2,095 ktCO₂e). Compared to our 2017 baseline, Dorset's area-wide emissions reduced by 18.76% by 2023 (from 2,580 to 2,095 ktCO₂e). Dorset's area-wide emissions reduced by 41.37% from 2005 to 2022 (from 3,574 to 2,095 ktCO₂e).
- 6.4. The sources of Dorset's area-wide emissions in 2023 were – from largest to smallest – agriculture (33%), transport (29%), domestic (20%), industry (6%), commercial (5%), Waste (3%), and the public sector (2%).
- 6.5. Area emissions were above the target trajectory in 2021 and 2022, but have come back within target in 2023, reducing by 18.8% compared to the baseline of 2017.

7. Nature Recovery

- 7.1. This report provides an overview Dorset Council teams that are involved in delivering newly created or enhanced nature (nature recovery) as part of their work including projects or schemes that Dorset Council are responsible for. As we have not provided quantitative data of nature recovery to this detail before, this report has covered both 2023/24 and 2024/24 data where possible, in order to offer points of comparison.
- 7.2. Countryside management: Dorset Council's nature recovery efforts are guided by the upcoming Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy (DLNRS), which will establish a monitoring framework using both local and national data.
 - The council manages 171 designated sites, including SSSIs, Ramsar sites, and nature reserves, with 770 hectares under countryside stewardship agreements.
 - In 2024–25, the council received over £1.6 million in Defra grant funding.
 - Some of the key outcomes from the Greenspace team through 2023-25 were a 12% increase in verges managed for nature, an increase in wildflower seed planting and a greater effort to remove invasive or non-native species.
- 7.3. Project delivery and operations: Nature recovery is integrated across council operations.

- The landscape and grounds team increased tree and wildflower planting, though hedgerow and shrub planting declined slightly due to fewer schemes.
- The arboriculture team maintained over 560,000 trees and responded to an increased number of storm-related emergencies. The team have met their 100% target on checking on trees adjacent to fallen trees within 2 weeks
- Capital projects saw reduced biodiversity enhancements in 2024–25, likely due to fewer school and community schemes
- Highways projects doubled wildflower planting and increased tree planting.

7.4. Development and planning: Dorset's Biodiversity Appraisal Protocol (DBAP) continues to secure wildlife enhancements and habitat compensation.

- Between 2009-2023, developers and homeowners in Dorset have taken over 3,300 actions to protect bats, and £1,235,333 of compensation money has been collected for habitat enhancement and creation in Dorset.
- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): since 2024, a new national approach made it mandatory for developers to deliver a biodiversity net gain of at least 10% and this habitat must be secured for 30 years. The number of approved DBAP biodiversity plans has decreased in the number from 2023-24 to 24-25, likely due to applicants adjusting to mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain and delaying planning applications.
- We are currently unable to report on BNG delivered through the planning system due to the BNG module not currently being available on the Mgov. The BNG module, when released, will allow us to measure the amount of nature recovery and will be available in the next reporting period.
- There has been an increase in the amount of nutrient mitigation through several land purchase agreements and temporary mitigation agreements.

7.5. Sustainable Farming: Dorset Council owns 40 farms and 17 farmland-only assets. Currently, 25% of these are managed under environmental schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and the Sustainable Farming Incentive; the target is 70% by 2030.

7.6. Hosted Partnerships: partnerships are central to Dorset's nature recovery.

- Litter Free Dorset delivered the "Reconnecting with Nature Spaces" project, targeting urban areas and vulnerable groups.

- Dorset National Landscape Partnership had a total of £2,382,317 of investment over the last two years, with number of projects supported rising from 68 in 2023-24 to 83 in 2024-25.
- Cranborne Chase also contributed £121,968 to nature recovery in northeast Dorset, focusing on woodland, wetland, and species surveys.

- 7.7. Overall figures: Between 2023-24 and 2024-25, the services/teams for Dorset Council saw an increase in the number of trees and hedgerows planted, sq m of wetland created, and number of natural flood management project. There was a decrease in the number of shrubs and wildflower seed planted and removal of invasive and non-native species.
- 7.8. Nature Recovery Dorset: Launched in August 2024, the Nature Recovery Dorset network has grown to 231 members, including individuals, farmers, charities, and businesses across Dorset Council and BCP Council areas. Collectively, they have created or enhanced approximately 22,687 hectares for nature. The network is mapped online to showcase contributions across the county: dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/nrd-network.

8. Resilience

- 8.1. Dorset Council – we are midway through a whole organisation climate risk assessment that should serve to give better visibility of climate risks and help inform future discussion of their resource impacts. We are aiming to produce to 44 council-wide risk statements across these areas; and give them service-specific risk scores.
- 8.2. Countywide – we have started to take the first steps in developing a county strategy. We've partnered up with Involve, a charity that supports public participation, to create a Dorset Citizens' Climate Panel. It comprises 22 residents, selected by lottery, who reflect the diversity of Dorset's population. Together they will help shape our county's response to climate change impacts – learning about climate adaptation and giving us a community perspective to help inform our eventual strategy.
- 8.3. The panel will meet four times between October and November and hear from a range of experts and undertaking facilitated discussion. To explore what an adapted Dorset may look like to our communities by 2050, issues they are most concerned about related to climate change impacts and
- 8.4. A stakeholder advisory group has also been established comprising the Met Office, the Environment Agency, the LSE Grantham Institute, Dorset Youth, and many others. This group will help to shape the Citizen Panel process.

- 8.5. The panel process will conclude in December, and the outcomes of this process will help to inform a Dorset Adaptation Strategy process facilitated by Dorset Council and stakeholder organisations. It is anticipated that this process will begin in early 2026.

9. Next Steps

- 9.1. The council's operational programme aims to achieve net zero emissions in its scopes 1 and 2 operations by 2035, and all operations including scope 3 by 2040. In 2030, we hold interim targets of 80% reductions compared to the baseline for scopes 1 and 2, and 70% reductions for all operations. Whilst much has been achieved so far, further urgency is required for the council to achieve its interim and net zero targets.
- 9.2. Section 5 of the Autumn 2025 progress report (attached), sets out key steps for the next 12 months, these include –
- Accelerating the councils own carbon reduction programme, through new building retrofit programmes and large-scale solar programme, revised streetlight LED programme and increasing use of HVO fuel for our fleet
 - Delivering a range of programmes to support residents to take action, such as focus on on-street charging infrastructure, Dorset Solar Together, and great partnerships working on home retrofit
 - Working to engage and support young people, public sector partners, and town and parish councils
 - Creating a stronger strategic framework for climate and nature in Dorset through development of key strategies and plans such as the Dorset Local Transport Plan, Dorset Local Plan, A Dorset Local Area Energy Plan and the Dorset Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)
 - Exploration of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) as a funding mechanism
 - Robustly building climate and nature consideration into our decision making and procurement processes
 - Developing our approach to adaptation to climate change both for our council services and wider Dorset working with our Dorset Climate resilience panel and our key partners and stakeholders
 - Carrying out a Climate Change Operational Risks and Opportunities Assessment for the council's operations, and developing a Dorset-wide Climate Adaptation Strategy

10. Alternative options considered

10.1. Not applicable

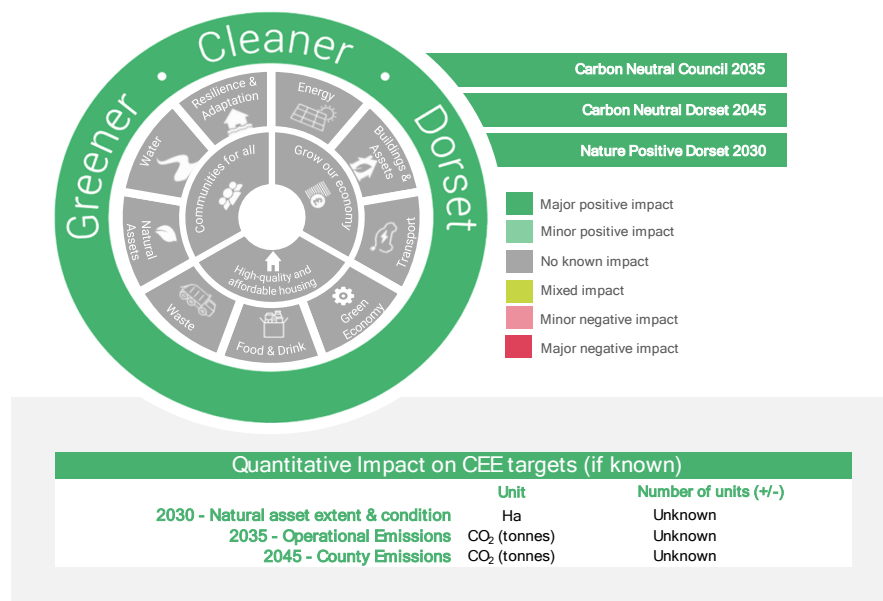
11. Legal considerations

11.1. Not applicable

12. Financial implications

- 12.1. In the region of £93 million has supported the councils' climate and nature programmes to date. Approximately 85% of this comes from government grants of various sources, such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation fund and match funding from private sector and other organisations. Roughly 15% comes from Dorset Council. Figure 41 (pg42) in the main progress report gives a graphical representation of these different funding sources. This is not an exhaustive list but gives a feel for the scale and success in securing external funds.
- 12.2. As we move forward, we continue to explore a wide range of external funding opportunities to include government grants, potential income streams and community funding, as well as develop the evidence and project pipelines to allow Dorset to maximise future funding opportunities as they arise.
- 12.3. Dorset Council has allocated a total of £16 million capital funding between 2022 to 2027 to facilitate reduction of the council's carbon footprint.
- 12.4. An initial £10m was allocated in March 2022 to support key workstreams such as – energy efficiency and renewable energy projects on council buildings, developing an electric vehicle charging infrastructure across our estate, purchase electric vehicles, installing LED lamps in Dorset streetlights and supporting external support programmes such as Low Carbon Dorset and Healthy Homes Dorset.
- 12.5. In March 2025, cabinet agreed the allocation of an additional £6.025 from 2025-2027. This was to support the acceleration of the council's carbon reduction programmes to ensure that carbon targets could be achieved 5 years faster.
- 12.6. It is anticipated that £8.4 million of capital would have been committed to these climate programmes between 2022 and April 2025. Collectively these schemes aim to reduce energy demand, switch the council away from fossil fuel use to electric, increase self-supply of electricity and reduce energy and fuel bills. For measures installed to date it is anticipated that energy bills have been reduced by more than £1 million per year.

13. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications



14. Well-being and health implications

- 14.1. There are no specific health and wellbeing implications of this report. However, the implementation of the strategy and action plan has significant co-benefits for health and wellbeing. The three pillars of the strategy aim to mitigate climate change, adapt to the impacts of climate change, and support nature recovery. Actions carried out in their pursuit aim to provide a cleaner, safer and more nature-positive environment.

15. Other implications

- 15.1. 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.

16. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: High

Residual Risk: Medium

- 16.2. Due to the known high level of public interest in the climate change agenda and the previous commitment to provide the public with a bi-annual progress report, to not do should be considered a high reputational risk to Dorset Council.

16.3. 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 continued urgency and further progress.

16.4. 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.

17. **Equalities**

17.1. There are no specific equalities implications for this report itself, but climate change is recognised to have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable people, which the strategy being reported upon aims to adapt the local area for climate change and mitigate further climate change.

18. **Other implications**

18.1. Appendix A: Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Progress Report – Autumn/Winter 2025

19. **Background papers**

19.1. [Natural Environment, Climate and Ecology Strategy 2023 to 25 Refresh - Dorset Council](#)

19.2. Cabinet 25 March 2025, Revised greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction trajectories and key milestones - [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 25/03/2025 18:30](#)

20. **Report sign-off**

20.1. 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)