

# **Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy 2025/26 Annual Progress Report**

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Our Phase 2 Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy (SCCS) 2024–27 sets out the Council's priorities and planned actions to drive progress towards achieving our organisational net zero and wider sustainability objectives. The strategy builds on earlier work and focuses on embedding sustainability across the Council's services and decision-making.
- 1.2 All Service Areas are expected to demonstrate leadership by delivering the actions assigned to them and ensuring that appropriate resources are in place. Progress is monitored through quarterly reporting by lead officers using the Sustainability Tracker, the Council's internal monitoring tool. The Tracker is reviewed twice annually by the Sustainability and Climate Advisory Group (SCAF). A publicly accessible summary of the Sustainability Tracker is made available on our website to allow residents and stakeholders to track progress towards SMART targets.
- 1.3 This Annual Progress Report provides a comprehensive update on delivery against the actions set out in the Strategy. It also includes an assessment of progress, a summary of the latest corporate and district-wide emissions and trajectory towards the Council's Net Zero 2030 target.

## **2.0 Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy (SCCS) Progress**

### **Theme: Governance and Leadership**

- 2.1 Effective governance and leadership underpin delivery of the Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy. This includes strong monitoring and accountability, sufficient organisational capacity, integration of sustainability into decision making, secure funding and effective engagement with staff, partners and communities.

#### **Monitoring, accountability and decision -making**

- 2.2 Officer-led working groups continue to meet quarterly, providing a forum for service areas to work collaboratively, share progress, align projects and support delivery of Strategy

actions. Progress is tracked through the Sustainability Tracker, which enables regular monitoring and reporting by lead officers across the organisation.

- 2.3 Sustainability and climate considerations are increasingly embedded within corporate governance processes. Climate risks are reviewed biannually and recorded within the [Council's Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers](#), with mitigating actions integrated into Strategic and Directorate Service Plans. At present, there are five climate-related risks on the Corporate Risk Register and two within each Directorate. Benchmarking work was completed in 2025 to compare the Council's assessments with those of other Hertfordshire authorities. We are currently reorganising and updating the risk registers to ensure we continually mitigate any identified risks.
- 2.4 The Capital Projects Protocol has been updated to ensure that carbon impacts are formally considered for all new capital developments, and the Investment Strategy now includes a requirement to assess the sustainability impacts of all future investments.

### **Resourcing and Organisational Capacity**

- 2.5 Staff resourcing remains critical to delivering the actions set out in the Strategy. During the reporting period, the Council strengthened its internal capacity through the creation of new roles focused on sustainability and decarbonisation. A new Built Environment and Sustainability Manager is now in post and will oversee the Sustainability Team from April 2026. The team also includes a new Decarbonisation and Energy Manager appointed in March 2026 to focus on decarbonisation of corporate portfolio and management of energy data. We are also now beginning the process of recruiting to an additional Sustainability Post.
- 2.6 Two further officers focusing on asset management and decarbonisation have been appointed to focus on decarbonisation of Housing Revenue account (HRA) properties.
- 2.7 The two fixed-term officers recruited in 2024 to deliver the St Albans Greener Together (SAGT) programme left the Council in June 2025 as the external funding ended. An application has been submitted for funding to support the extension and expansion of SAGT, through the National Lottery's Our Shared Future Fund. We await the outcome.

### **Embedding Sustainability into Policy and Processes**

- 2.8 Addressing climate change continues to be a priority within the Council Plan 2026–28. The SCCS is referenced across a number of key strategies, including the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Tree Strategy and Parking Strategy, and is a core driver within the emerging Local Plan. We are working closely with the local authorities in Hertfordshire to ensure that sustainability and climate considerations are effectively integrated into Local Government Reorganisation.
- 2.9 A SADC Sustainable Events and Markets Policy has been created and this has been translated this into online guides for traders as well as those hosting events on Council land.

- 2.10 Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIAs) play a central role in ensuring that environmental impacts are considered early in decision-making. SIAs are required for new projects or policies, significant policy changes, and all purchases over £25,000. This requirement has been embedded into procurement processes and contract renewal reminders, resulting in a substantial increase in completed assessments. Since the process was introduced, 113 SIAs have been signed off, with 28 completed in 2024 and 19 in 2025. New guidance has been produced to ensure that report authors include the Summary Statement written by the Sustainability Projects Officer on completed SIAs, to the Implications section of relevant committee reports.

### **Procurement, Contracts and Tenancies**

- 2.11 Sustainability requirements are now more thoroughly integrated across procurement and contract management. A sustainability section worth 5% of the evaluation score has been incorporated into the Council's Invitation to Tender (ITT) template, requiring suppliers to demonstrate how they will contribute to delivering the Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy.
- 2.12 Guidance, monitoring forms and sustainability clauses have been developed to support contract managers in embedding sustainability KPIs and maintaining regular sustainability discussions throughout the life of contracts. This approach has been promoted through Directorate Management Team meetings to ensure consistency across services.
- 2.13 In addition, green clauses have been incorporated into the terms of new corporate commercial leases, helping to reinforce sustainability expectations beyond core Council operations.

### **Staff and Member Capability and Engagement**

- 2.14 All staff are required to complete a Climate Change eLearning module during their employment, based on the nationally recognised Carbon Literacy framework. This provides standard training in climate science, risks and impacts, national policy, and approaches to mitigation and adaptation. Staff are also required to complete an annual sustainability e-learning module, which provides an overview of the strategy, Sustainability Impact Assessments, sustainable procurement policy and practical actions staff can take at work and at home.
- 2.15 All Lead Councillors have now completed a video-based climate change training and this is being rolled out to all councillors in May 2026. In addition, Councillors and senior officers were invited to participate in full Carbon Literacy training delivered in partnership with the Local Government Association in Spring 2025.
- 2.16 Staff engagement is supported through regular internal communications, including a monthly Sustainable News Bulletin, staff briefings, and the online staff portal. From January 2025, a new Staff Awards category, 'The Green Initiative Award', was introduced to recognise and encourage positive action.

- 2.17 Recruitment and induction processes now clearly communicate the Council's sustainability and climate ambitions, ensuring that new starters understand these priorities from the outset. Managers are also encouraged to identify opportunities for sustainability improvements through the objective-setting process; to date, 16 staff have specific sustainability-related objectives included within their performance frameworks.

### **Emissions Monitoring and Data Quality**

- 2.18 The Council's corporate greenhouse gas emissions continue to be analysed and published annually. Over the past two years, significant work has focused on improving the accuracy and completeness of emissions data, including cleaning energy account and meter records and capturing off-contract energy use, such as temporary accommodation. Estimated emissions from home-working are now included, and Scope 3 emissions reporting will be expanded in 2025/26 to include the Council's Housing Contractor.
- 2.19 Work undertaken at a Hertfordshire level has identified an estimated gross residual emissions gap of between 25 and 30 kTCO<sub>2</sub>e across the county. High-quality carbon offsets are estimated to cost approximately £120 per tonne on international markets, implying potential costs in excess of £3M at a county-wide scale. Given the scale of these costs and the limitations of offsetting, the Council continues to prioritise emissions reduction at source and will consider offsetting only as a last-resort measure for unavoidable emissions.
- 2.20 As referenced later in this document, we do also continue to plant trees at scale which represents a long-term carbon sink not currently measured in regional emissions calculations.

### **Financing the Transition**

- 2.21 A range of external grant funding has been secured to support decarbonisation projects and community education activities. Once we will have a clearer understanding of the scale of investment required to decarbonise Council buildings we can develop a longer term plan to attempt to access the needed finance.
- 2.22 The Council's Invest to Save budget continues to provide a mechanism proposals that can demonstrate a financial return within 5 years. As part of this approach, investment has been approved for four solar photovoltaic (PV) projects in 2026/27, which are expected to reduce energy costs while lowering emissions.

### **Facilitating Community Action**

- 2.23 St Albans Greener Together (SAGT) was launched in 2024 to support community action on sustainability and climate change. The programme was active until July 2025, when external funding for the two lead delivery roles concluded. During this period, SAGT delivered an extensive programme of engagement, communications and partnership

activity across the district. A structured communications plan was delivered, supported by social media activity, events, and partnerships with local organisations. The project established a strong community network, with over 100 organisations signed up, and continues to maintain engagement through a quarterly newsletter. The website, which is updated by the Sustainability Projects Officer, receives around 600 visits per month.

2.24 Key achievements included:

- Engagement with parish councils, community organisations and business networks
- Delivery of themed talks, panels and workshops on retrofit, sustainable transport, recycling, biodiversity and community energy
- Presence at major local events, including markets and community and business networking events
- Development of promotional materials, website content and a launch video
- Delivery of the Just One Thing campaign to encourage practical climate action

2.25 Recordings from many of the events below are [available online](#).

- Retrofit Lecture with University of Hertfordshire (July 2024)
- Sustainable Transport Panel (July 2024)
- Heating your Home: Heat Pump Experience Talk (Nov 2024)
- Sustainable Practices to Attract Customers (April 2025)
- Practical guide to Low Carbon Construction (2025)
- Recycling Panel (June 2025)
- Community Energy Discussion (June 2025)
- Wilding Panel (June 2025)
- Climate Outreach UK Workshop (July 2025)

2.26 Six local community projects were awarded Net Zero funding to deliver initiatives focused on climate action, energy and transport. Outcomes from these projects, including short videos produced by grant recipients, are [available online](#), helping to demonstrate local leadership and impact.

2.27 To support the continuation and expansion of this work, the Council has applied for £1.5M to the National Lottery Climate Action Fund – Our Shared Future, working in partnership with Communities 1st.

## Communications and Public Engagement

2.28 The Sustainability and Climate section of the Council's website has been significantly restructured to improve accessibility and transparency. New pages highlight progress, nature and wildlife, sustainable transport, climate targets and St Albans Greener Together.

2.29 Sustainability messaging continues to feature regularly across Council communications, including Community News and social media. Recent topics have included



recycling, air quality, tree initiatives, retrofit guidance and biodiversity. Recycling information was provided to all households in the Spring 2026 printed edition of Community News, including the introduction of TetraPak recycling.

### **Business, Parish and Partnership Working**

- 2.30 St Albans Greener Together has been widely promoted to local businesses through Council business communications. Sixty-three businesses have joined the network and received invitations to briefings delivered by the Carbon Trust.
- 2.31 Support has also been provided to parish councils to develop sustainability plans, with two parishes taking up this offer. A series of Carbon Trust business briefings were delivered in May 2025, and sustainability was a key theme of the Annual Business Summit in February 2025.
- 2.32 Sustainability is a standing agenda item at Strategic Partnership Meetings, with one meeting per year dedicated entirely to sustainability.
- 2.33 The Council continues to participate actively in the Abbey Line, St Albans–Bedford Community Rail Partnerships as well as wider structures such as Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP).

### **Influencing Policy and Systems Change**

- 2.34 Working with other Hertfordshire authorities, the Council has responded to a wide range of consultations relating to sustainability, climate change, planning and local government reform as shown below:
- RESP Methodology consultation (2026).
  - Statutory Reporting for sustainability (2025)
  - Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data (2025)
  - Local Government Outcomes Framework (2025)
  - Local Government Association Consultation on Local Government Reform and Climate Change Responsibilities (2025)
  - National Planning Policy Framework Consultation (2024 and 2026)
  - Climate Resilience Roadmap (2024)
- 2.35 The Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy has also directly informed the emerging Local Plan. For the first time, the call for sites process explicitly sought land for biodiversity enhancement, renewable and low-carbon energy, heat infrastructure and tree planting. Once adopted, the new Local Plan will introduce significantly stronger sustainability requirements for many new developments requiring planning permission. The Local Plan Draft policies were agreed and submitted to the Secretary of State on 29th November 2024. Local Plan Stage 2 Hearings took place in Oct-Dec 2025 and we expect to formally adopt the Local Plan in July 2026.

## Theme: Energy and Buildings

- 2.36 Reducing emissions from the Council's buildings and housing stock is central to achieving the Council's net zero ambitions. During the reporting period, work has focused on improving understanding of the current estate, strengthening energy management, planning for future investment through heating decarbonisation plans, and delivering funded programmes to improve the energy performance of council housing.
- 2.37 Per capita energy consumption in the District is higher<sup>1</sup> (24.9 MWh) than the UK average (20.4 MWh) likely reflecting the areas affluence. Fuel poverty is correspondingly lower (7.2% compared to 13.1% nationally), despite the prevalence of older buildings.

### Decarbonisation of Corporate Buildings

- 2.38 Internal funding has been allocated to procure Heating Decarbonisation Plans (HDPs) for the Council's corporate estate through a phased approach. These plans are intended to identify viable routes to decarbonising heat, reduce energy consumption and inform future capital investment decisions.
- 2.39 HDPs have been completed for the District Offices and Verulamium Museum. These plans have identified a range of decarbonisation actions, two of which are already being progressed to reduce energy consumption on site. The plans will directly inform future decisions on investment and delivery approaches.
- 2.40 We are now progressing procurement of HDPs for Sandridge Gate Business Centre and St Albans Museum and Gallery, with the Council intending to commence this work in April 2026. In the final phase we will seek HPDs for Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre, Batchwood Leisure Centre and Cotlandswick Leisure Centre.
- 2.41 To support strategic planning, a central tracker is being developed to consolidate outputs from all completed HDPs. This will map the Council's decarbonisation pathway to net zero, including indicative costs, and will be used to influence investment planning and future funding bids.
- 2.42 A new sustainable roof has been installed at Verulamium Museum, supported by Arts Council England funding. The roofing system was chosen for its environmental performance and its ability to improve the efficiency and viability of solar photovoltaic (PV) installations. Following completion of feasibility studies and procurement, a supplier has been identified to design and install a PV array on the roof of Verulamium Museum, with delivery planned in 2026.

### Energy Management and Data Quality

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<sup>1</sup> <https://regengis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/7bab1b86aac54e97a3ff1d074948d102>

- 2.43 Work continues to improve the accuracy and completeness of energy management data across the Council's estate. This includes verification of meter details and consumption data to ensure that reported figures reflect actual energy use and consolidation into parent utility contracts. This has given the Council better oversight of its supplies, a stronger purchasing position, more favourable standing charges and has helped provide cost savings.
- 2.44 All communal housing meters have now been verified and added to the Council's parent electricity and gas contracts. Work is ongoing to verify meters and supply arrangements for temporary accommodation, prior to adding these to the relevant contracts.
- 2.45 The Council is also reviewing the role of third-party providers within its energy management arrangements to ensure services are efficient, proportionate and aligned with future requirements, including anticipated Local Government Reorganisation, which will require a consistent approach across authorities.

### **Council Housing Energy and Decarbonisation**

- 2.46 Within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) work is ongoing to move any utility bills for which the Council is responsible (e.g. communal areas, temporary housing), to the central utility contract, as well as developing a more robust approach to utility billing management. A Compliance and Safety Housing Manager has been recruited and will have responsibility for managing HRA utility billing.
- 2.47 Significant progress has been made in delivering funded housing decarbonisation programmes:
- Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery 1B (2022): Works to 45 properties to achieve improved energy efficiency and EPC C ratings.
  - Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 1 (2022): £1.5m awarded supported by £850k from the Housing Investment Programme, to improve the energy performance of 136 properties. Works were completed in August 2023.
  - SHDF Wave 2.1 (2023): £4.2m secured, alongside £5.3m HRA contribution to improve 477 properties to EPC C. Completed March 2026
  - Warm Homes / SHF Wave 3 (2025): £2.45m awarded, supported by £9M HRA co-funding, to improve heating systems and energy efficiency across ~350 properties from April 2025 to September 2028. This programme includes flats for the first time and enables replacement of non-gas heating systems. Phase 1 includes retrofit works to 15 blocks in London Colney, comprising 93 properties, with procurement completed and mobilisation underway.
- 2.48 In addition, trials are underway under the Social Housing Fund to test low-energy hot water solutions, including Mixergy tanks and alternative systems that use excess solar generation, to inform future investment decisions.

## **New Developments and Design Standards**

- 2.49 All new Council-led developments are assessed for viability against the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge targets at an early stage and the Capital Projects Team continue to review whether this provides the most appropriate and up-to-date industry standard.
- 2.50 The Abbots Avenue West (HRA) development is designed to achieve an EPC A rating and incorporates air source heat pumps, solar PV and enhanced insulation.
- 2.51 Developments approved prior to 2025/26, such as The Hedges and King Offa, do not fully meet RIBA 2030 standards but have incorporated a range of sustainable design features. The Hedges development, completed in April 2025, included Air Source Heat Pumps, solar PV and passive infrastructure for EV Chargers. King Offa (completed in Nov 2025) included ASHP and EV infrastructure and was delivered using off-site timber frame manufacture for all units.
- 2.52 Projects currently at feasibility or concept design stage will consider the costs and benefits of meeting RIBA 2030 targets, including fabric-first approaches and low-carbon heating solutions. Smaller capital projects, such as toilet refurbishments and museum repairs, are also being used as opportunities to improve the sustainability of existing assets.
- 2.53 Effective communication is critical to ensuring residents understand and can use new technologies safely and effectively. For new-build developments, we now provide a Home User Guide providing clear, user friendly guidance on heating, cooling and ventilation systems. This is kept under review to ensure ease of understanding by residents. The Capital Projects Team and Housing Surveyor Teams are reviewing any contractor handover information to ensure maintenance requirements are clear and achievable and where necessary additional supporting information for householders is provided.

## **Renewable Energy Capacity**

- 2.54 Renewable energy capacity is being increased across the Council estate. PV installation at Harpenden Leisure Centre was completed in Spring 2025, with approximately 174 panels installed, generating an estimated 93 MWh of electricity per year and reducing operational emissions by around 18 tonnes annually. Planning permission has been granted for PV installation at Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre, with delivery dependent on completion of planned roof repairs. Roof works at Verulamium Museum are complete and procurement for PV installation is underway, with installation expected in early 2026. Four further PV projects have been identified as offering value for money, with internal funding allocated to progress them.
- 2.55 The emerging Local Plan allocates land for large-scale renewable energy, biodiversity enhancement and tree planting. While national policy limits the extent to which councils can mandate delivery in this area, these allocations support longer-term opportunities for low-carbon energy infrastructure. Post-hearing correspondence was received in January 2026, with adoption anticipated in July 2026.

## Supporting Domestic Retrofit

- 2.56 The Council continues to support residents to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, with a particular focus on fuel-poor households and properties that are harder to decarbonise.
- 2.57 In 2025 the Council was successfully awarded £1.5 million through the Warm Homes: Local Grant in 2025. This three-year programme delivered by the National Energy Foundation (NEF), targets low-income, households with poor energy efficiency. The scheme is now fully underway, and 10 households have received measures valued at £170,000.
- 2.58 In addition, 46 Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding applications have been approved over the past 12 months, helping households access further energy efficiency improvements. The ECO scheme closes at the end of 2026.
- 2.59 St Albans Home Energy Support Service, also provided by NEF, continues to provide a central advisory service on energy efficiency and to all District households. A total of 134 residents have benefited so far. In addition we continue to promote the Herts Home Retrofitting Guide and other sources of local and national advice, helping residents understand retrofit options and make informed decisions.
- 2.60 The Community Engagement Team is promoting energy efficiency grants and initiatives across community networks, including Age Friendly and Access User Groups. The Council's Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice Bureau includes provision of energy efficiency advice, providing further support to residents to access impartial guidance which provides another route for those requiring help to receive advice on energy bills and energy efficiency.



## Renewable Energy Capacity for Homes

- 2.61 Statistics show there are now 3,561 solar panels and 5 wind turbines in the District<sup>2</sup>, providing 14.8MW<sup>3</sup> of installed capacity.
- 2.62 Across Hertfordshire, the Solar Together bulk buying scheme has delivered 2,275 installations, equating to over 22,500 solar panel installed and more than £22.4M of private investment in renewable energy. Local installations are shown below:

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/regional-renewable-statistics#full-publication-update-history>

<sup>3</sup> <https://regengis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/7bab1b86aac54e97a3ff1d074948d102>

St Albans District	Installed Solar PV panels	Investment	Installed Batteries
2022	3,349	£3,869,268	277
2023	1,241	£1,107,257	110
2025	1,534	£1,078,926	130

- 2.63 The final installations are being completed for Solar Together 2025. To date 140 homes have installed solar PV, comprising 1,534 solar panels, and 130 battery systems have been installed.

### **Engagement with Businesses, Skills and the Supply Chain**

- 2.64 The Council actively promotes sustainability-related information, funding opportunities and support for businesses through the Council’s Business Newsletter, the website and partner networks. Work is also taking place with Hertfordshire Futures to support skills development in retrofit and low-carbon sectors. This includes engagement through the Employment and Skills Partnership, which the Council attends and supports.
- 2.65 Through St Albans Greener Together, a Continuing Professional Development seminar was delivered by the University of Hertfordshire for local professionals, focusing on new approaches to deep retrofit. The Carbon Trust has also delivered a series of sustainability webinars for businesses. Recordings are available via the SAGT YouTube channel.
- 2.66 Engagement with private landlords continues via the Landlord Forums, with presentations delivered by the Private Sector Housing Team, the National Residential Landlords Association and Hemel and St Albans Property Network. Topics included the Renters’ Rights Bill, homelessness, the Warm Homes Local Grant, eligibility of properties and landlord responsibilities and local sources of advice.

### **Theme: Transport and Air Quality**

- 2.67 Transport remains one of the most challenging areas for emissions reduction, reflecting the Council’s limited direct powers, reliance on external funding, and the role of Hertfordshire County Council as the local highways and transport authority. During the reporting period, progress has focused on reducing emissions from Council operations, supporting behaviour change, influencing development through planning policy, and working in partnership with the County Council, community groups and businesses.
- 2.68 This work is leading to positive improvements as HCC data shows that vehicle mileage on district roads has decreased by 6% between 2019 and 2024.

### **Low-Carbon Fleet and Workplace Travel**

- 2.69 The Council is working with Veolia to undertake a feasibility study to assess whether Sandridge Gate Depot could support the infrastructure and space requirements for a future electric fleet. Initial discussions have also taken place with the Council’s

Procurement team regarding inclusion of green fleet requirements within future procurement strategies, though further development is dependent on available resources.

- 2.70 The Council's Parking fleet are now all electric and we have committed to replacing the Museums and Housing Vans with electric vehicles once they reach the end of their life or before 2030.
- 2.71 Work is progressing on the development of a Workplace Travel Plan, aimed at reducing unnecessary travel and encouraging more sustainable modes of transport for staff and councillors. The Green Travel document is scheduled for launch imminently and options such as a salary sacrifice scheme for electric vehicles will be considered, subject to financial viability and risk assessment.
- 2.72 Practical measures have also been delivered, including installation of cycle storage at the District Offices and continued promotion of the electric Car Club and schemes such as the tax-free salary sacrifice for bicycle purchase. A staff cycling competition was held to promote and reward cycling for both work and leisure.

### **Walking, Cycling and Active Travel Infrastructure**

- 2.73 The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for St Albans was adopted by in 2023. As the Highways Authority, Hertfordshire County Council leads on delivery, whilst SADC support scheme coordination, evidence gathering and Transport Impact Assessments.
- 2.74 During 2024/25, the Council supported delivery of the Marlborough Road cycle lane, and continued to engage on development of the Victoria Street scheme. Community engagement for the Victoria Street project was completed in April 2026; following this, further consultation is planned before the scheme progresses to the design stage.
- 2.75 Through partnership working, four cycle maintenance stands provided by the County Council have been installed and are operational across the district. Support has also been provided for additional cycle parking at Harpenden Train Station, subject to approvals.

### **Electric Vehicle Infrastructure**

- 2.76 The Council is responsible for 18 electric vehicle charging points in our leisure centres and car parks, providing 36 spaces for EV's to be charged.
- 2.77 We continue to work with Hertfordshire County Council to support delivery of public EV charging infrastructure through the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) programme. Key milestones achieved include agreement of the LEVI Statement of Principles, completion of initial site identification work, and progress on partnership and data-sharing agreements.

- 2.78 In order to increase utilisation of our existing public EV charging network, Traffic Regulation Orders will be updated to allow longer usage.
- 2.79 The issues with the Car Club charging post during winter 2025 that affected vehicle availability, have now been resolved through replacement of the charging post. Promotion of the pool cars has been supported through St Albans Greener Together, Community News, Business Newsletter and social media campaigns, including an EV myth-busting guide. While utilisation fluctuated during this period, usage increased again in 2026 following the resolution of technical issues. In total the car club vehicles have travelled 27,866 miles saving approximately 8 tCO<sub>2</sub>e.

### **Policy Influence Through the Local Plan**

- 2.80 The emerging Local Plan includes policies supporting active and sustainable travel, low-emission development, new transport routes, cycle infrastructure and EV charging provision. Draft policies were agreed by Planning Policy & Climate Committee and Full Council and the Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State in November 2024. Adoption is currently anticipated in July 2026. Once adopted, the Plan will provide a stronger framework for securing sustainable transport measures through new development.

### **Community Engagement and Behaviour Change**

- 2.81 Community engagement to promote sustainable and active travel has been delivered primarily through St Albans Greener Together. This included an online Sustainable Transport Panel held in July 2024, featuring local stakeholders and published via the SAGT YouTube channel.
- 2.82 St Albans Greener Together and the Net Zero Fund have supported community-led initiatives, including projects focused on cycle proficiency in schools and a pilot use of e-cargo bikes at parish level. The One Action Together campaign also highlighted the collective impact of small changes in travel behaviour. Further engagement capacity, including transport-related activity, is dependent on the outcome of the Council's application to the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund.
- 2.83 The Council has also supported the Green House Climate Club Anti-Idling campaign, which engaged schools and the wider public through creative activities and market-based outreach.



### **Working with Businesses, Taxis and Rail Partners**

- 2.84 The Council works with businesses to promote low-carbon travel through advice, sharing good practice and promoting funding opportunities via the Business Newsletter and St

Albans Greener Together. The Carbon Trust has delivered workshops for businesses covering sustainable transport, alongside energy efficiency.

- 2.85 Engagement with the taxi trade has focused on strengthening emissions standards through licensing policy. New policies have been approved requiring higher emissions standards for vehicles (Euro 6). The Council remains cautious about actively promoting electric taxis until sufficient public charging infrastructure is in place.
- 2.86 The Council continues to actively support both local Community Rail Partnerships, providing funding and officer involvement through the Economic Development team. Engagement also includes regular attendance at Thameslink / Govia stakeholder meetings.

### Improving Air Quality

- 2.87 The Council published its Air Quality Annual Status Report in 2025, which was subsequently approved by DEFRA. Remaining Air Quality Management Areas are now demonstrating compliance, and preparatory work is underway to revoke them where appropriate. Preliminary results from monitoring on Victoria Street will be reported separately.

- 2.88 The streets around the Peahen Junction are now all 20mph to increase safety for cyclists. In 2026/27, Arriva are introducing new Euro VI buses to routes 321, 724 and 725, all of which serve St Albans Peahen Junction. Uno will receive 27 more electric buses later this year, that will serve St Albans.



- 2.89 We are delighted to secure a fully electric Ice Cream Vendor contract for Verulamium Park as of 1st April 2026. The firm use electricity both for travel as well as for freezing ice cream at point-of-sale. This is a step forward on previous years in which we were able to use battery or grid fed electricity for freezing ice cream at point-of-sale but not for vehicle propulsion.
- 2.90 The Council supports County-led initiatives to improve air quality, including promotion of Clean Air Day and Clean Air Night, joint engagement events, consultation on Hertfordshire's Air Quality Strategy and Local Transport Plan as well as community clean air initiatives by the Youth Climate Club.

### Theme: Nature and Biodiversity

- 2.91 Enhancing biodiversity, strengthening climate resilience and improving access to nature are central to the Council's Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy. Progress during the reporting period has focused on embedding biodiversity into development and asset

management, improving the ecological value of parks and green spaces, supporting tree planting and nature recovery, and working closely with partners, volunteers and local communities.

### **Biodiversity and Nature in Development and Council Assets**

- 2.92 Biodiversity considerations are incorporated into all new Council-led development projects at the feasibility and pre-planning stages. For example, the Abbots Avenue West (HRA) development was assessed for rewilding and wider biodiversity enhancement. While site constraints meant full rewilding was not appropriate, the scheme includes ecology and biodiversity improvements such as bird nesting provision, developed in consultation with specialist groups including the Hertfordshire Swift Group.
- 2.93 Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement are more limited within refurbishment and fit-out projects. However, biodiversity measures are considered where possible, including incorporation of swift boxes on relevant Housing schemes and external wall insulation projects, and installation of swift boxes at the District Offices.

### **Parks, Green Spaces and Habitat Creation**

- 2.94 The Council continues to manage parks, green spaces and recreational facilities to increase biodiversity value, create new habitats and support rewilding where appropriate. Officers are identifying opportunities to reduce mowing, including on suitable highway land, alongside meadow enhancement, tree planting and hedgerow creation.
- 2.95 The Hertfordshire and Middlesex Butterfly Conservation Trust has completed a second-year assessment of wilding sites and changes to highway verge management. Volunteers supported by the Countryside Management Service (CMS) continue to provide aftercare to recently planted areas.

During 2025/26:

- 12,000 trees were allocated through the Tree Giveaway scheme, including 4,550 trees planted as new woodland at Abbey View
- 5,800 square metres of meadow were reseeded with an enhanced meadow mix
- Four Green Flag Awards were achieved across local green spaces, with an application planned for Nomansland Common in 2026

### **Tree Planting, Street Trees and Climate Resilience**

- 2.96 The Council's Tree Strategy highlights the importance of selecting resilient, climate-tolerant species to address pests, disease and changing weather patterns. Planting schemes incorporate a mix of perennial and drought-resistant species, and all plants are sourced with plant passports to maintain biosecurity. The Tree Strategy was approved alongside new policies and an action plan, and officers are now embedding revised working practices. The Tree Warden Scheme was launched in November 2025 and piloted in Cunningham Ward, with plans to expand to additional wards.

- 2.97 The Council works closely with Hertfordshire County Council to retain and replace street trees that provide important cooling and air quality benefits. Tree surveys are now carried out using the County Council's EZtreev system, enabling direct access for County officers to information on trees requiring replacement.
- 2.98 A total of 12,000 trees were allocated through the Tree Giveaway Scheme, including 4,550 trees planted as new woodland at Abbey View. Officers have also worked with the Tithe Barn Residents' Association to deliver a tree-planting project within their local open space. This project has included habitat restoration works and the planting of over 40 additional trees, contributing to local biodiversity and long-term environmental improvements.

### **River Ver Project**

- 2.99 Good progress has been made on the Revitalise the River Ver project. Works delivered to date include wetland creation, de-shading works, footpath restoration, and completion of bunds to reconnect the new wetlands and enhance overall river function. Phase 2 river works have been completed by Environment Agency contractors, and a new Councillor Working Group has been established to support ongoing governance and project oversight. In addition, Reach 4 tree works have taken place to increase light levels to the river channel in preparation for in-channel works planned later this year. This element of the project is being funded by the Environment Agency through a collaborative agreement.

### **Public Engagement, Education and Volunteering**

- 2.100 Public engagement and education on biodiversity, conservation and habitat management continues across a range of activities. Officers work with the Joint Allotment Management Group to encourage reduced pesticide use among allotment holders, supported by regular discussions and enforcement of allotment rules.
- 2.101 The Council has supported local engagement on development of the Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which has now been formally adopted following a public consultation that received 751 responses - the highest number nationally for an LNRS consultation. Key SADC Officers and Councillors attended an LNRS consultation workshop led by HCC in January 2025 to help shape the strategy.
- 2.102 The Council works with Countryside Management Service (CMS) and other partners to deliver the environmental actions of the Green Space Action Plans. Over the reporting period CMS mid-week volunteer teams delivered conservation work across multiple sites, contributing 1,370 volunteer hours. Furthermore, Friends Groups across the district contributed a further 1,496 volunteer hours, including tree planting at the former Abbey View golf course.
- 2.103 Officers work closely with the Ver Valley Society on river corridor habitat management, including vegetation management, ecological surveying, and litter-picking activities. Over the past year, Volunteers have also welcomed more than 1,000 schoolchildren to

Verulamium Park, providing educational visits focused on the importance of rivers, particularly chalk streams. This learning has included practical, hands-on activities, helping pupils to better understand river ecology and the role of active conservation.

- 2.104 The Council's website has been expanded to include a dedicated Biodiversity page, signposting local initiatives, volunteer opportunities and partner organisations. Officers are also working with the newly formed Friends of Verulamium Park to identify appropriate practical conservation activities.

### **Planning Policy and the Local Plan**

- 2.105 The emerging Local Plan includes strengthened policies requiring developments to support biodiversity, tree planting, habitat creation, connected green infrastructure and climate resilience measures such as drought-resistant planting. Adoption is currently anticipated in July 2026. Once adopted, these policies will provide a stronger basis for securing biodiversity and nature recovery outcomes through development.

### **Community-led Greening and Food Growing**

- 2.106 The Council remains open to community-led greening initiatives and has launched a Community Right to Grow pilot, enabling groups to apply to cultivate land with permission from the Council. The scheme has been widely promoted, and a Licence to Cultivate has been granted adjacent to Sopwell Allotments to support community food growing.
- 2.107 We have a number of community growing sites in the District. Incredible Edibles manages sites at Civic Square and Russel Avenue. Volunteers are working with John O'Conner on Municipal Gardens in Charter Close and the Council has supporter Grow Sopwell and Sopwell Allotment Inclusive Garden project.

## **Theme: Circular Economy, Waste and Food**

- 2.108 Reducing waste, increasing recycling, supporting the circular economy and promoting sustainable food are key priorities within the Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy. Progress during the reporting period has focused on improving recycling at Council events and markets, embedding circular economy principles into Council operations and development, supporting residents to recycle more, and working with communities, schools and partners to reduce waste and litter.

### **Reducing Waste at Council Events and Markets**

- 2.109 Food waste recycling has been introduced at Council-run events and markets, in line with the requirements of the Simpler Recycling Legislation. A communications programme is planned to ensure traders fully utilise the facilities once all bins are in place.
- 2.110 Recycling facilities, including food waste bins, were provided at major events such as Spring Festival and Christmas Cracker, with bins emptied throughout the day by the

Council's waste contractor. Engagement activities were also delivered, including promotion of bokashi composting through the Soil Squad at Spring Festival.

### **Reducing Single-Use Plastics**

2.111 The Plastic Free Action Plan was reviewed in 2025 with actions now being delivered across services. Market operations are progressing work to introduce branded biodegradable bags for traders, offered at a discounted rate. Reusable bags were considered but found to be impractical and costly for most traders. We have also:

- adding a single-use plastics declaration to the Market Trader application process
- replaced the bottle refill fountains with more eye-catching equipment to improve usage
- introduced biodegradable/reusable zip ties in Green Spaces and Museums, with wider rollout encouraged
- ITT documentation has been updated to steer contractors towards sustainable waste management practices.

### **Reducing Waste from Council Operations**

2.112 While it is not currently possible to accurately measure waste and recycling outputs from Council buildings, steps have been taken to improve practice and reduce contamination:

- engagement with tenants and cleaners at District Offices to encourage better recycling
- introduction of monthly spot checks at the District Offices
- installation of food waste bins at Verulamium Museum
- promotion of food sharing through "help yourself" signage to reduce scheduled fridge-cleaning food waste
- use of the Too Good To Go app by the Museum café contractor
- Digital Services are monitoring paper use across the Council and have set a target for a 10% annual reduction.

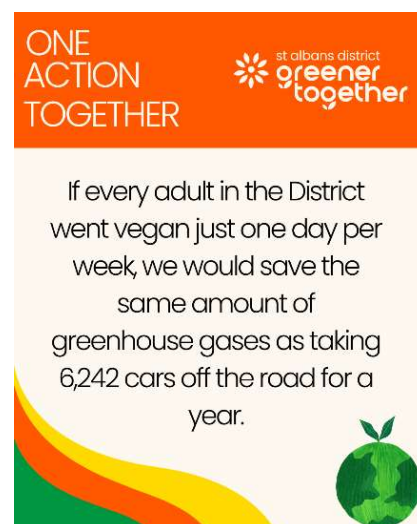
### **Circular Economy in Council-Led Development**

2.113 Circular economy and whole life-cycle principles are being embedded into Council-led developments. All schemes are required to produce Waste Management Plans, which are reviewed to assess opportunities to eliminate waste, retain material value, and incorporate circular economy approaches where practical. At the feasibility and design stages, existing buildings are assessed to determine whether elements can be retained or materials reused within new developments. Current Housing and temporary accommodation projects, including Abbots Avenue West, are being assessed for whole-life impacts, including waste.

## Sustainable Food Provision

Sustainable food choices are actively promoted across Council-operated sites, events and markets. Market trader applications prioritise local producers and those offering sustainable or plant-based food options, with particular consideration given to traders providing predominantly vegan food.

- 2.114 Event guidance requests vendors provide at least one complete vegan option where possible. Café operators at Council-run venues are continuing to develop more sustainable menus, with sourcing focused on local suppliers to reduce food miles. Sustainability criteria are encouraged through procurement processes for new food contracts. Surplus food reuse continues to be supported through platforms such as Too Good To Go.
- 2.115 Ice cream vendors are required to offer at least one pure fruit juice lolly option as an alternative to high fat and sugar content processed ice cream.



## Litter, Fly-Tipping and the Public Realm

- 2.116 The Council has supported over 150 community litter picks, providing equipment and logistical support and collecting data on the number of bags collected for annual reporting. The Litter Strategy and Litter Bin Strategy are publicly available on the Council website and guide decision-making on new bin provision and rationalisation.
- 2.117 Work continues to reduce fly-tipping through partnership working with neighbouring councils, landowners and the Police. Joint operations have been delivered with the Police Rural Crime Team to target illegal waste carriers, and further collaborative activity is planned.



- 2.118 Options to maximise recycling across the public realm are kept under review. While technologies such as solar compaction bins were explored, high capital costs mean they are not currently being pursued. The introduction of Simpler Recycling will expand materials accepted at kerbside, while the Deposit Return Scheme is expected to encourage recycling away from household collections.

## Flats Recycling and Resident Engagement

- 2.119 A Flats Recycling Strategy is being implemented to increase recycling participation within communal properties. Activities undertaken include:

- resident surveys to understand barriers to recycling
- audits of bin provision at communal sites
- engagement at housing estate events
- close working with management agents and housing associations
- promotion of correct recycling through leaflets, signage and direct engagement

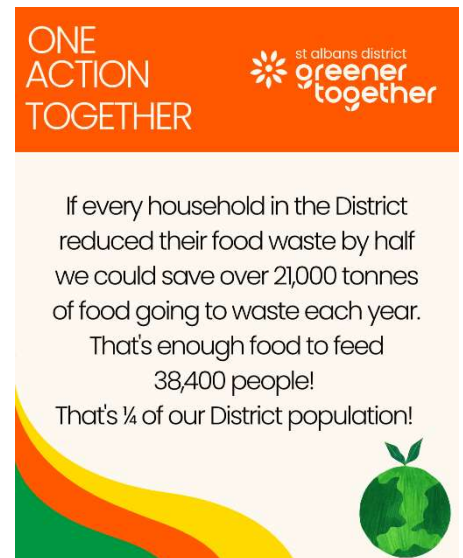
2.120 Crews no longer collect waste left on the floor of bin stores, prompting clearer responsibility and improved engagement from managing agents. The Council is also working with HCC WasteAware to share best practice and improve outcomes.

### Education, Communication and Behaviour Change

2.121 Waste reduction and recycling messages continue to be widely promoted through Council communications. Full recycling guidance is provided to all new residents, and a detailed recycling section featured in the March 2026 printed edition of Community News, including information on the introduction of TetraPak recycling.

2.122 The Council supports waste education in schools through close working with the County Council's Education Officer, helping to promote recycling, food waste reduction and positive behaviours within the curriculum.

2.123 Sustainable food choices are promoted through staff communications, website content and market and events policies, with regular articles and updates shared through internal and external channels.



## Theme: Water Resources and Flooding

2.124 Managing water resources efficiently and preparing for the impacts of extreme weather are important components of the Council's approach to climate resilience. Activity during the reporting period has focused on improving water efficiency across Council assets, embedding water considerations into planning policy, and maintaining robust emergency planning arrangements for flooding incidents.

### Water Efficiency and Management

2.125 A new supplier of water for the Council's commercial and operational buildings has been agreed and all supplies are now being migrated to the new contract for an October 2026 start. Some communal housing assets may be included within this arrangement, while single dwelling properties may require alternative approaches.

- 2.126 From an asset management perspective, water-saving measures are incorporated as standard across Council maintenance and retrofit works. These include low-flow showers and dual-flush toilet cisterns. Rainwater harvesting has been installed at the Civic Offices to support management of the adjacent park, and opportunities to incorporate greywater or rainwater harvesting into new housing developments are being explored. Retrofitting such systems into existing buildings is recognised as technically challenging and costly, but options are being considered where feasible.

### **Planning Policy and Water Consumption**

- 2.127 The emerging Local Plan includes draft policies that introduce an optional lower water consumption target of 110 litres per person per day for new developments. Once adopted, these policies will support improved water efficiency and resilience through new development.

### **Flood Risk, Parks and Natural Water Management**

- 2.128 Flood risk is managed at a national level by the Environment Agency, with the Council's role focused on preparedness and response. The Council has a statutory duty as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act and maintains an Emergency Plan to respond to flooding and other major incidents in coordination with emergency services and the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum. The Emergency Plan was approved by Senior Leadership Team in 2024 and will be formally reviewed in 2029, or sooner if circumstances change. It equips the Council to provide advice, assistance and coordinated response should flooding occur.
- 2.129 In parallel, work in parks and open spaces supports a more natural approach to flood management. Activity linked to the River Ver project has helped to identify areas within parks that are susceptible to flooding. Officers are working to reconnect and formalise these areas to safely accommodate floodwater while maintaining accessibility. A temporary raised path has been installed in key locations to ensure routes remain usable during flood events.

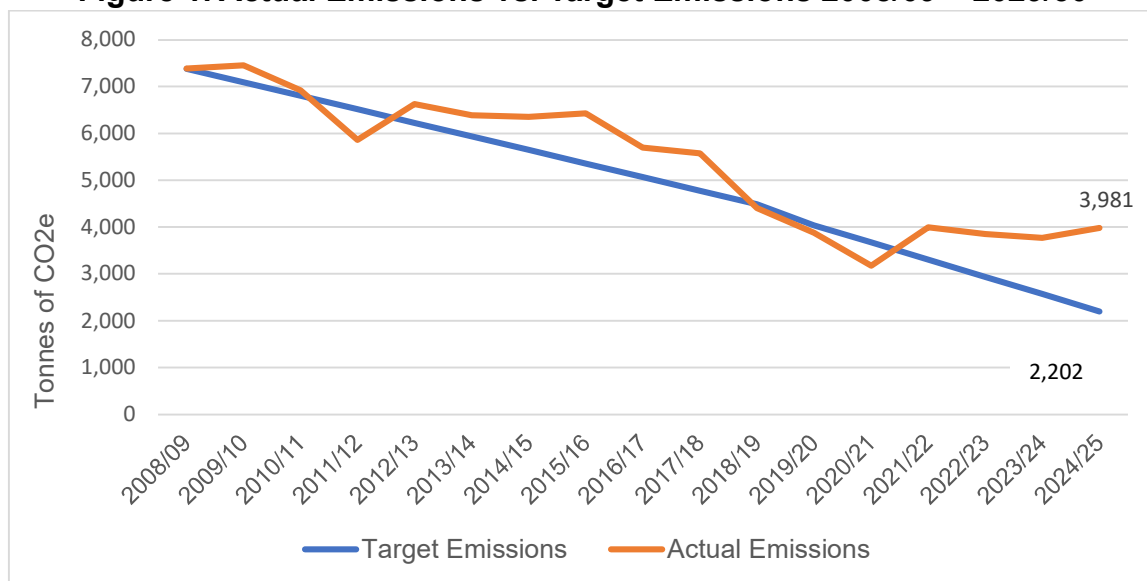
### **Community Resilience**

- 2.130 The Council continues to promote flood resilience and preparedness through communications and partnership working. Information on property flood resilience grants, including available funding of up to £6,000 for eligible properties, has been promoted through Council communications channels. Engagement has also taken place with local communities, including the Cottonmill Residents Association, to raise awareness of flood response arrangements and explore how communities can support one another during incidents. This will lead to a Community Emergency Plan - and this approach may be expanded to other areas in future.
- 2.131 Flood risk and adaptation issues have been shared through governance forums, including a presentation from the Flood Team to the Sustainability and Climate Advisory Forum

### 3.0 Corporate Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- 3.1 The Council has been measuring and reporting the greenhouse gas emissions associated with its buildings and services since 2008. This long-term monitoring provides a consistent evidence base for tracking progress and identifying where further action is required to achieve our Net Zero 2030 target. The Corporate Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report for 2024/25 is available [here](#).
- 3.2 Total corporate emissions for 2024/25 were measured at 3,981 tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e), which represents . This represents a 46% reduction compared with the baseline year, reflecting the cumulative impact of changes to the Council's estate, energy supply, and operational practices over time.
- 3.3 Despite this significant achievement, current emissions are not on track with the Net Zero 2030 trajectory set in 2020 which would require a 70% reduction by 2024/25. Corporate emissions increased by 6% compared with the previous reporting year. This is partly attributable to billing anomalies and changes in building use, highlighting how operational and accounting changes can affect the overall footprint.

**Figure 1. Actual Emissions vs. Target Emissions 2008/09 – 2029/30**

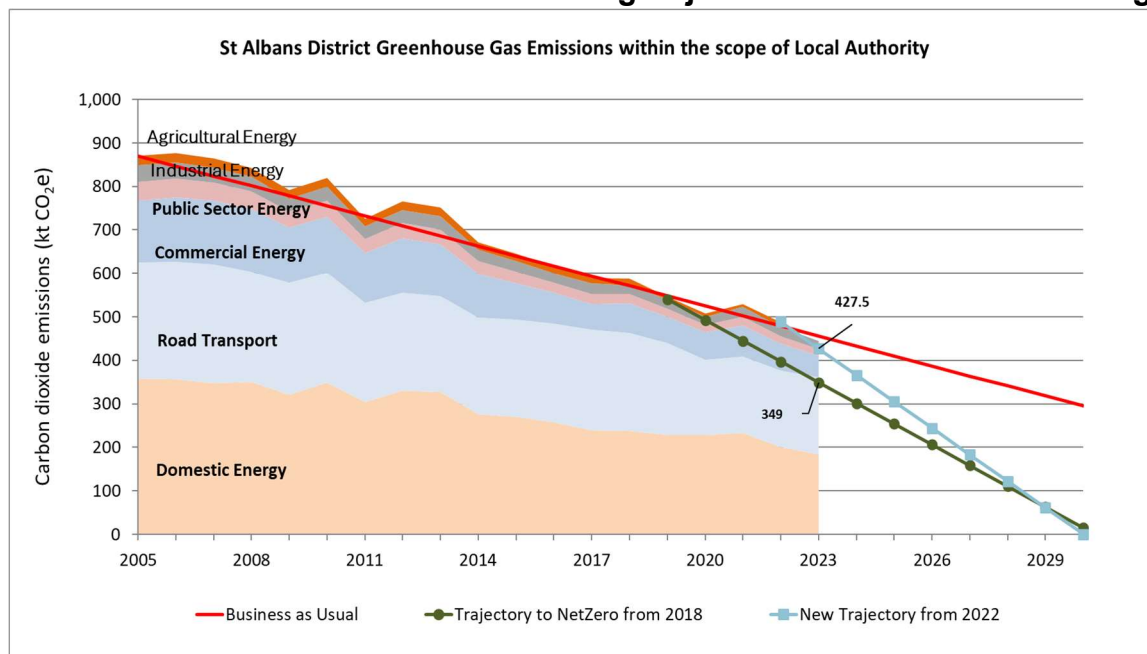


### 4.0 Community-Wide Emissions

- 4.1 The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) release annual area-wide emission statistics broken down by local authority area. The most recent Community-wide Emissions Summary for 2023, can be found [here](#).
- 4.2 Actual emissions were 458,400 tCO2e, which represents a 48% reduction from the baseline year. District emissions are not on track with our straight-line trajectory to Net Zero which required that we see a 72% reduction in emissions by 2023.

- 4.3 The observed annual rate of reduction is around 23,000 tCO<sub>2</sub>e, which is less than half the rate required to achieve the decarbonisation target. If reductions continue at this pace, the District is projected to reach net zero by 2042, 12 years behind our target.

**Figure 2. St Albans District Greenhouse Gas Emissions within the Scope of Local Authorities 2008/09-2029/30 showing trajectories to 2030 Net Zero Target.**



## 5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 Over the course of implementing this Strategy, the Council's teams have made steady progress in embedding sustainability and climate considerations into decision-making, policy and service delivery. This has included strengthening governance, improving data quality, building internal capability and working more collaboratively across services and with partners.
- 5.2 While this progress is not immediately visible through emissions figures alone, it has laid essential foundations for long-term action. The work carried out to date has significantly improved the Council's understanding of its assets, infrastructure and emissions. This clearer picture of asset condition, energy use, costs and constraints is critical for making realistic choices about where to invest, how to prioritise action and how to demonstrate value for money.
- 5.3 Experience in recent years have also highlighted the wider importance of resilience. Global events, including the wars in Ukraine and Iran, have exposed the risks associated with reliance on fossil fuels, contributing to sharp increases in energy prices and concerns around security of supply. These impacts have reinforced the case for reducing dependence on fossil fuels, improving energy efficiency and increasing local generation — not only to cut emissions, but to protect services, budgets and communities from future shocks.

- 5.4 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will fundamentally change the scale and scope of influence over sustainability and climate action. A single authority will hold responsibility for assets, transport, planning and infrastructure at a level not currently available to district councils.
- 5.5 Over the next two years, leading into LGR transition, the focus of sustainability work must be both practical and forward-looking. This is a period for consolidation and preparation, ensuring that sustainability is built into the foundations of new structure, data systems, policies, asset management, contracts, services and ways of working from the outset. This will ensure that progress can continue smoothly under future arrangements. It is a major opportunity for sustainable change.
- 5.6 This includes for instance:
- ensuring energy, water and asset data are accurate, complete and accessible, ready to be combined with other councils
  - clearly documenting what is known about the Council's assets, including costs, condition, risks and carbon impacts
  - embedding sustainability consistently across planning, procurement, governance, capital investment and service design
  - supporting joined-up thinking so climate, biodiversity, health, resilience and affordability are considered together
- 5.7 In 2026/27 the Council will review the actions within the Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy to ensure they remain focused, viable and effective. This review will help identify where priorities need to be updated, where delivery approaches need to change, and how the Strategy can best support action until reorganisation. This is about strengthening impact, not reducing ambition.
- 5.8 With global temperatures now exceeding the 1.5°C threshold at times, the impacts of climate change are increasingly evident, including locally, including greater flood risk, pressure on water resources and more frequent extreme weather. Addressing these challenges requires long-term planning, collaboration and resilience, as well as emissions reduction.
- 5.9 By focusing on strong foundations, clear evidence and embedded ways of working during the transition ahead, the Council is taking a responsible and forward-looking approach. This will help ensure that sustainability and climate action remain central through Local Government Reorganisation and are well positioned to accelerate in the years that follow.
- 5.10 By maintaining clear priorities, strong leadership and a focus on what can be controlled and influenced across all areas of Council activity, the Council is demonstrating responsible stewardship in addressing the climate and ecological emergency, while preparing for a smooth transition into Local Government Reorganisation and the next phase of delivery.