



## Notes from the Citizens' Forum on the Durham County Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan (2022-2024)

### Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Transport and connectivity: Small group summary.....	1
3. Engagement, Education, and Behavioural Change: Small group summary .....	3
4. Decarbonising heating and electricity: Small group summary.....	5
5. Waste, Procurement, Food Production, Natural Environment: Small group summary .....	8
6. Overarching comments and thoughts on the plan .....	10
7. Points for improvement of any future events similar to this citizens' forum .....	11
8. Appendix: Event details as advertised .....	11

### 1. Introduction

- The citizens' forum was organised by Climate Action Durham (CAD) and took place on Tuesday 5 July, 2022 at Durham Town Hall
- Around 60 people attended the event
- Durham County Council's (DCC) Alan Patrickson introduced the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan (2022-2024)
- Four topic-based small groups were co-facilitated by CAD's citizen experts and Durham County Council officers, discuss ongoing and planned climate action by the council and what else they felt was needed

This document presents notes taken in the small group discussions and additional thoughts contributed by numerous CAD members and activists. It is intended to summarise key points of our discussions and thoughts in summer 2022. It is not a comprehensive documentation of the event and it is not intended as a final word in any way; because CAD-internal discussions are ongoing at the time of writing (13/8/22), this document does not contain an executive summary.

### 2. Transport and connectivity: Small group summary

Theme summed up by Measurable target. Reduce ICE (Internal combustion engine) cars on road by 35,000 by end 2023, 25% reduction in car use, or a combination.

Transport is 33% of carbon footprint. EV (Electric Vehicles) chargers have been the focus, but just replacing EV for ICE is not sufficient.



Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

DCC: Focussing on increasing the number of EV charge points, both on street and in car parks; car sharing/clubs; cycling and walking plans (LCWIPs); recognising the need to increase use of public transport, particularly to rural areas.

DCC: Mentions that the increased use of home working reduces carbon emissions, and is working with the University to compare emission between home working and travel.

DCC: Bus companies are private companies and can't be told what to do.

### **Suggestions**

**Key point:** The DCC has control over the road network, and can therefore put in place restrictions, orders, speed limits and road infrastructure changes without a great deal of cost. This could have an effect on local people, and therefore a publicity campaign to get people on side would be necessary. Durham is very car centric.

1. Leads on to "Reduction is more important than electrification".
2. School runs: Focus on these. Get parents involved. Volunteers to shepherd
3. Put pressure on university to stop students bringing cars into the city
4. Encourage/incentivise e-cargo bikes to do last mile deliveries. (Z-move)
5. Modernising public transport, particularly in rural areas. Liftango | What is a Demand-Responsive Bus Service? These can significantly reduce car use.
6. Use clean air/air pollution/ children's and adult health issues as motivator to reduce ICE car use. NB Car tyre toxic nanoparticles are as much a problem from EV as ICE vehicles, and can cause more health problems than exhaust emissions. PUBLICITY
7. DCC should consider turning (parts of) Durham City into a Low Emissions Zone or Clean Air Zone.
8. Consider monitoring car journeys by standard technology. Can help to demonstrate to people how car journeys are very local and polluting.
9. Speed limits: 60mph (or less) imposed generally. 20mph more widely through the city.
10. Change priorities in the city for cars. Prioritise cycles/ebikes/e cargo bikes/ small low powered EVs (eg citroen ami).
11. Highly visible publicity and awareness campaign via DCC's large poster and rolling billboards to alert public of transport and climate change policies
12. As the 2045 vision includes "individual car ownership is less common" and in the shorter term reduction in car use is necessary, will DCC commit to building no new roads and no additional motor traffic capacity, allowing staff and financial resources to prioritise sustainable transport?
13. Importance of high speed broadband connectivity to rural areas to reduce need for car journeys for service visits (eg medical appointments) and other arrangements.
14. Push for car clubs and sharing (failed previously due to lack of willingness to give up personal autonomy). Awareness needed of need to relinquish some personal 'rights and freedoms'.
15. DCC should commit to buying no more fossil fuel vehicles, if not immediately then at a set date in the near future.



16. DCC should focus more on using the planning system to boost public transport, car clubs, active travel etc.
17. DCC should add detail on how existing highways maintenance budgets can be steered towards active travel improvements. Cease building in additional road capacity.
18. DCC should update the framework for workplace and residential Travel Plans to assess emissions, distance travelled, and frequency of travel.
19. DCC should work towards sustainable urban densities which support the use and adoption of sustainable transport (walking, cycling, buses etc.); see [Sustainable Residential Quality Exploring the Housing](#) and [Urban Design Compendium](#). Appropriate densities will deliver positive social, transport and environmental impacts.
20. DCC should switch focus from cycling links directed towards leisure cycling to cycling for travel; through routes in the towns need to be much more easily usable and safer and more accessible than vehicular routes and e-bikes need to be given much more publicity, not just as a leisure pursuit, but as an alternative to cars.
21. DCC should mandate emissions awareness training for bus and taxi drivers, and DCC staff

### 3. Engagement, Education, and Behavioural Change: Small group summary

#### Main areas of discussion

1. The role of educational work in and relating to schools and Durham University
2. How do we achieve behavioural change? Through education as in classroom teaching, or through enabling more climate-friendly behaviours? A participant who works with deprived people cautioned that behaviour change is **not** about finding the cheapest option, it's about finding the least stressful option!
3. Existing volunteer opportunities: Wear Rivers Trust, e.g. Balsam bash: you don't have to talk, you can just come along and volunteer without being forced to socialise.
4. The psychology of global heating and climate action: How should we deal with climate anxiety, not least among children? Some argued that we should counteract it by stressing the good action that is there - don't make it all doom and gloom; others felt that kids are right to be anxious and that their anxiety may be positive as it can lead to more determined action
5. The frequent use of the phrase "you have to start from somewhere" gives the impression of DCC's work being still very much in progress. The different views among the public showed that participants too had at times quite different approaches and opinions

#### DCC action mentioned:

- We work in/with 240 schools. Active travel is a key component of the work being done with schools, explaining aspects of active travel to kids.
- We are looking at procurement processes; e.g. pilot project to build partnership with SMEs and charities, networking and educating, including the issue of excessive use of plastics. Separate initiative "plastic pledge"



## Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

### Challenges to DCC

- We teach kids all about the climate crisis, but parents are still driving to schools! This teaches kids that driving is normal and will make kids less likely to engage in more environmentally friendly transport behaviour when older. Given all the benefits of walking to school and how that should be focused on (cost, health, spend more quality time with kids, etc) and the principle that “you learn what you do”, there was a sense that we are not doing enough as a county.
- Uni is mentioned as part of research but there is a lack of young people in community conversation.
- Parish Councils are not mentioned in CERP2
- DCC should produce and circulate a public leaflet on nature-based management of gardens and green spaces, especially on eliminating use of chemicals and peat composts, and tips on basic garden tree/hedge maintenance (to reduce the unwarranted chopping down of overgrown trees for ‘safety reasons’ and encourage the use of hedges for emissions protection, etc).

### Challenge to Durham University

- Has great opportunity to educate on climate change and should be involved in more educational efforts generally! Also there should be a better link between climate groups within the Uni and the community movements and initiatives.
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### **Suggestions**

1. Areas around schools should be blocked off only allowing walking and cycling
2. The county needs to focus on making routes for cycling available.
3. Make roads less dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians
4. Support the [Climate Fresk](#) COP26 game and help deliver it extensively.
5. Use and publicise existing faith-based resources (designed for all faiths and none) such as Films, table talks, etc. Tried at Bishop Auckland “Global Healing”. Says they have resources that can be shared and could be used to engage parents in many different (social) ways – through schools!
6. Challenge “bill free homes” which mean students don’t think about environmental cost of heating. Landlords should be able to control students heating to combat this.
7. CAD want to work with DCC on getting the message out more widely, using all their visual displays; and tap into the expertise of the university. E.g. PEAS group to use nudge theory to change people’s behaviour, ensuring maximising residents’ buy-in

### **Follow up required**

Is DCC following up as promised

1. Supporting the [Climate Fresk](#) COP26 game and help deliver it extensively
2. Putting Bishop Auckland “Global Healing” on DCC website as a case study
3. Involving Parish Councils as part of community work



Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

How can Durham University be better integrated into community and DCC environmental initiatives?

CAD should consider to

1. Publicise DCC climate website, Green Durham, Wear Rivers Trust for volunteering opportunities
2. Consider how we engage with people who don't have time and energy for environmental initiatives
3. Consider if we want to engage with/challenge student landlords
4. Consider promoting Surfers against sewage initiative that provides a certificate for non-plastics, that companies, businesses, etc can put in their windows.

#### 4. Decarbonising heating and electricity: Small group summary

CAD's key action points arising from the small group:

1. CAD will carry out a survey, in a selected residential area, to locate houses with solar panels installed. (This will give encouragement to neighbours to install panels, if given helpful info.)
2. In collaboration with DCC, CAD wants to support requests from government for increased funding for energy-saving projects.
3. In collaboration with DCC, CAD wants to lobby central government to impose planning regulations on development companies to comply with the highest standards of insulation on new-build schemes - both residential and office development.
4. DCC should implement the CERP communication campaign: to give trusted advice on low carbon technology both on line and in leaflets: insulation, heat pumps, solar PV: where to start? what is suitable? which installers to trust?

**From the CERP2:** In 2019 47% of the County's carbon footprint came from heat. Related targets are:

- 2030 net zero carbon emissions for all DCC operations
- 2045 County Durham carbon neutral

DCC is responsible for reducing its own carbon footprint and has a role in facilitating reduction of carbon emissions county-wide. The decarbonization of the National Grid is the responsibility of national government through subsidy schemes like contracts for difference, County Durham can benefit from low carbon generation elsewhere.

#### Context

##### Government Funding

Domestic – boiler upgrade scheme is the only funding available to assist domestic properties reduce emissions, this is a £5000 grant towards the cost of a heat pump



Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

Public sector – public sector decarbonisation scheme provides grants for local authorities to reduce emissions in public sector estates, LAD scheme exists to improve energy efficiency of low income households

### Transition to clean heat

DCC's CERP 2 suggests that there needs to be 55,000 fewer gas boilers (or equivalent amount of gas use) by 2024 (with a baseline of 2019) in order for County Durham to be on the right trajectory to meet a net zero by 2045.

### Sources of Renewable Energy

- Micro wind – small turbines based at strategic locations around the county
- Mine energy eg Seaham Garden Village, using heat in flooded mines to provide low carbon heat, in the form of a district heat network
- Hydro turbines located around county, feasibility studies for small hydro-electric turbines in areas around the County
- Solar farms – DCC is building a 3 MW solar farm at the Morrison Busty depot, there are plans for several private solar farms around the county currently in the planning process
- Private solar PV generation
- Air source heat pumps
- Geothermal from rocks in parts of County Durham

### Home Insulation

- Retrofit: energy assessment of existing buildings for improvement: window insulation, loft, floor and external wall insulation.
- Government 'Future Homes Standards' does not demand a high enough standard but is a step forward.
- New Build: all new building should be zero-carbon ready.
- Sniperley Master Place sets high standards for energy-efficient design. (To be taken into account: developers will not build new houses, if the energy efficient standards are set too high.)

### **Queries and Recommendations of the Group**

- Vital importance of **public engagement agenda**: accessible and clear information about energy efficiency strategies in the home, provided on line, and in leaflets. This will encourage behavioural change, in helping householders to develop energy-efficiency initiatives.
- Advice on competent local electricians and experts, who can install energy saving air source heat pumps and undertake other energy-saving initiatives in the home.
- A dedicated fulltime DCC employee able to offer advice and information, with a phone line.



## Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

- Conservation Areas: planning regulations for the historic environment can hinder the installation of solar panels and complicate other heat-saving initiatives.

### Summary from the facilitator

- Planning – what more do we need to do with our planning colleagues? How do we shape local planning policy to facilitate reduction in emissions or fast track reduction in emissions?
- Conservation areas – what are we conserving? How will residents reduce emissions in conservation areas if improving glazing / installing solar PV is a challenge?
- There is opinion that planners focussing on aesthetics over energy efficiency
- Information – a desire for more information on what can be done by individuals, families so average residents can understand, point was made about a good recycling leaflet that is given out to students each year
- Can we produce public leaflets that give trusted advice on low carbon technology? Is this part of the CERP communication campaign?
- Insulation
- Heat pumps – where to start? What is suitable? Who to trust?
- Solar PV – where to start? what is suitable? who to trust?
- Full time technical advisory role within LCE team for residents (BEEP for residents?!) – does this already exist in housing solutions?
- More collaboration with housing solutions and LCE team / CERP authors
- There seems to be a big need to help residents plot out decarbonisation strategy
- Request for more public asks of government, if we have asks of government within the CERP can we write public letters to ministers or departments that residents can support?

### Expert suggestions for improving the CERP2

- ALL BUILDINGS
  - Fails to recognise that EPCs are not a useful means of assessing energy use and carbon emissions ([report](#)). We need affordable wide scale adoption of Zero-Carbon-ready, not misallocation of £. EPC-B can be zero carbon ready IF Passivhaus and HP. (For instance EPC-A is a red herring, but appeals to those at a policy level.)
  - No recognition of, support for, or encouragement to address domestic hot water demand (the single greatest cause of carbon emissions after heating)
  - No recognition of, support for, or encouragement to adopt water efficiency [AECB Water Standards](#)
  - The energy performance gap i.e. due to failures in the design and construction process buildings do not consistent deliver the energy savings or carbon reduction predicted - unless they are Passivhaus buildings ([Johnston, Siddall, Feist, Ottinger, Peper, 2021](#))



## Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

- No recognition of, support for, or encouragement to address the upfront carbon emission which from the construction process - planning applications are being refused and called in by government departments for this reason<sup>1</sup>
- ([AECB Lifetime Carbon standard](#), [RIBA 2030 Challenge](#), [LETI](#) )
- No recognition of, support for, or encouragement to consider overheating risks arising from climate change (predicted to cause a growing number of deaths) - as addressed by the Passivhaus Standard, AECB Building Standard, AECB Retrofit Standard
- RETROFIT
  - Health and wellbeing (Indoor air quality) - poorly considered retrofit can make living conditions worse
  - No recognition, support for, or encouragement of low energy retrofit standards ([AECB Retrofit Standard](#) / [Passivhaus EnerPHit standard](#))
  - No criteria for connecting to heat networks. This is necessary because (a) Distribution losses are too great IF you've designed the houses correctly i.e. space heating demand 15 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>.yr (b) Heat pump heated homes are better than combined heat and power-led heat networks. (Connections to district heating should only be permitted if emissions are less than the COP of a good Heat Pump using today's electricity i.e. <0.045kgCO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh)
- NEW BUILD
  - No recognition of, support for, or encouragement of daylight standards ([AECB Daylight standard](#))
  - No recognition of, support for, or encouragement of low energy building standards [Passivhaus standard for new build homes and non-domestic buildings](#), [AECB Building Standard](#)
- CERP2 fails to recognise
  - EPCs are not a useful method for assessing energy performance or carbon emissions

## 5. Waste, Procurement, Food Production, Natural Environment: Small group summary

Questions about the report

Farming

- Has thought been given to involving farmers and farming organisations such as NFU, and farms in the AONB, and the Soil Association, woodland trust, RSPB, national trust etc. clear that consultation with farmers is needed, a working group should be formed, council makers need to visit farms to understand our local situation better before making policy or funding decisions
- Keen to avoid greenwashing when it comes to land use policies

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/tulip-rejected-over-embodied-carbon-and-heritage-concerns>  
<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/ms-oxford-st-demolition-scheme-halted-by-gove>





## Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

- mention of using waste sheep's wool for insulation - can we encourage it to be used as household insulation as per the Welsh Government's scheme?
- Are the council taking steps to ensure that companies are not able to buy farming land for trees to offset carbon emissions ('greenwashing') as Brewdog have recently done in Scotland?
- Increasing hedging at field margins could be a way of helping to increase biodiversity, and carbon capture whilst maintaining land in production.
- Peat as carbon capture: it is good that the DCC in conjunction with charities such as the RSPB are restoring upland peat bogs, but are steps being taken to stop the burning and degradation of peat uplands for Grouse shooting? All burning of peat is detrimental. How can individuals and the DCC put pressure on landowners and national government to stop this practice?
- Production of food needs to be diversified from cereal and animals, at the same time as feeding our population using reduced dependency on fertilisers produced from fossil fuels. Need to encourage a lower density of livestock - actually more profitable for farmers, at the same time encouraging people to consume less meat. (30% target)

### Procurement and Waste:

- Focus on reduction of waste needed – current bias is towards recycling, which is not primarily a climate change issue. Buying less stuff in the first place when it comes to procurement should be focus!
- “We will encourage” is language used in procurement section – no firm commitments – want to read “we will always specify”. More examples are needed; costs and finance commitment needed in action plan P98-99
- No mention of construction waste – biggest contributor to landfill
- No mention of Anaerobic Digestion – question
- Food waste from households collection likely to happen between 2025-2028. No mention in the strategy of what they will do with food waste? And increase in emissions from collection vehicles?
- DCC mentions the “Tees Valley Waste to energy Plant with CCS”; some CAD members find this a highly problematic project for various reasons and it applies the common euphemism for waste incineration to make it appear a “carbon solution”. The main reason it is problematic is that it creates a long-term demand for waste through investment and long-term contracts. It also relies on CCS technology which, I believe, is not certain to be feasible in that context and at scale. Moreover, it produces toxic exhaust. It is no surprise that costs and CO<sub>2</sub> savings are TBC. Is the CO<sub>2</sub> output from such incinerators measured? Even if only waste that cannot be disposed of in any other way is burnt, it will still produce harmful emissions.
- DCC should explore the use of a variety of fungi that have been used elsewhere to consume waste plastic, reducing it to harmless compost.
- DCC should aim to contribute to phasing out single use plastics wherever possible.
- DCC should publicise availability of peat free compost for individuals much more
- DCC should ensure that compost produced from green waste benefits local growers.
- DCC should consider collecting cooked food waste

### Additional ideas



## Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

- How can the Council involve the community groups in this action plan? Need more emphasis on support of community organisations from the Council. Strengthen actions and encourage partnerships further. Ceasing the use of weedkillers at fence edges - harmful to wildlife, people, and unsightly. (many councils have already taken this step)
- Wildflowers on verges and other areas using a different mowing regime. Money saving, and better for the environment.
- Allotments, allotment associations – more support, more land available, more promotion of growing. How can Allotments be used as a community source of food
- Schools growing projects
- Community orchards e.g. Flass Vale community orchard
- Community compost schemes, large-ish scale regional composting that is efficient in terms of compost production and waste reduction but doesn't need fuel-hungry collection vehicles. Using funds that would otherwise be paying for household collection
- Food Durham mentioned a lot in Action Plan. Is Food Durham under Oases now? What happened to Food Hub, Community Good Food Network? Does the council need a food coordinator role to bring all these actions together, encourage community-based work, and make sure there is joined up working between food poverty, waste, education, farming, procurement, etc. etc.

### Other comments

- Cross-themed working: how does this tie in with health e.g. NHS social prescribers, food poverty, cost of living crisis, education, education on nutrition and cooking
- Durham Uni hasn't declared a climate emergency, doesn't have a Climate Emergency Action
- DCC should link CERP2 with bigger picture e.g. food strategy
- DCC should inform CAD and other stakeholders about the "detailed assessment of carbon emissions associated with Waste Services" scheduled for 2022

## 6. Overarching comments and thoughts on the plan

### Praise where it's due:

- Good to see Councillor Mark Wilkes visibly taking the political lead on climate action
- Good to see ambitions rising
- Questions around the "County Durham Partnership": Who is in it? What's its role? How effective is it? Are key stakeholders included, such as housebuilders, property developers, transport providers, independent experts?
- Good to see the **carbon budget** and carbon descent path presented in this way; this is the bottom line to which DCC (and society as a whole) will ultimately be held to account for
- Good to see the vision for "[a]ll of County Durham's transport to be ultra-low carbon and everyone will have access to safe and reliable public transport, while cycling and walking by choice whenever possible." But recent DCC transport plans and officer comments suggest this vision is not shared (at least by some) in the Highways department



## Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

- Good to see DCC's commitment to working collaboratively. CAD suggests that knowledgeable bodies/individuals outside the council be looped in to plans at an earlier stage. For example, advance notice of any highways works planned, so that active and sustainable transport opportunities can be built into the design brief

### **Doubts remain about:**

- "the Pension Fund and BCPP believe in Engagement rather than divestment" feels hesitant and vague and probably less good than divestment. How will DCC reassure CAD that DCC's position on pension investments is ambitious enough?
- CAD recognise that the project of decarbonising requires all sectors and actors to do their bit and a lot of collaboration. However, it also creates challenges around accountability and some in CAD feel that there is a danger for DCC to give the impression that they do a lot when they contribute very little in reality. For example, on page 60 the business rate relief for Refuse is great and welcome but also a very cheap and easy way for DCC to bask in the glow of Refuse's work and ethic.
- There is no reference made to air travel; DCC should develop a clear position on reducing CO2 emissions from Teeside International Airport?
- DCC should develop a strategy and show stronger commitment to working with Parish Councils
- DCC should strengthen adaptation in relation to rivers: Droughts, combined with already very high pollution loads and too-high nitrogen levels are likely to have dramatic effects

### **7. Points for improvement of any future events similar to this citizens' forum**

- Breakout groups would have benefited, if each groups was tasked to provide 2-3 action-points/suggestions and ideas, even if radical ideas seemed difficult to implement.
- CAD should make efforts to get more diversity in the room at events like this
- Alan Patrickson's presentation could have been more of a resume rather than a dash through the Plan
- The link to the plan should have been sent round to attendees the day before - it was clear that very few had read it

### **8. Appendix: Event details as advertised**

**What:** Climate Action Durham is preparing to host the first ever Citizens Forum to discuss the Durham County Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan 2.

**Why:** We believe that it is crucial for residents to learn about the County Council's plans, be able to ask questions, and to comment and discuss.

**When:** The event will take place on Tuesday 5th July at 7:30pm in the Town Hall Durham City; after the plan will have (hopefully) approved by the Council's cabinet on 15th June.

Format of the evening's discussions

7.00 Welcome - Richard Lilly Climate Action Durham



Notes on the Durham Climate Action citizens' forum, 5 July 2022

7.05 Presentation - Cllr. Mark Wilkes followed by Alan Patrickson highlighting themes and actions in Plan

7.45 Breakout groups

1. Decarbonisation of heat and electricity
2. Transport/connectivity
3. Waste, Procurement, Food Production, Natural Environment
4. Engagement, Education, Behavioural Change.

8.30 Plenary:

- Brief feedback from each group
- Any outstanding questions.
- Next Steps: Richard Lilly & Cllr. Mark Wilkes:

8.45 Close - Richard Lilly

This forum is aimed at anyone who feels strongly about the climate emergency that we are all facing, and would like to be involved in the local response to it. It is designed to be approached in a spirit of cooperation so that we both help and advise the council in their implementation, and also hold them to account on delivery.

The document will be available to read on the council's website - cabinet papers a week before the 15th June, so please read if you can and come to the workshop that most interests you with ideas to help achieve their stated aims.