



A Climate Emergency Centre for Durham: Project Brief

Climate Action Durham (CAD) exists to promote practical responses to the climate and ecological emergencies in Durham and the Northeast of England. CAD has organised community events since 2019 as a volunteer-led non-profit group affiliated to Friends of the Earth and is part of a wider regional network of climate justice and campaign groups. Members of CAD have been inspired by the Climate Emergency Centres that are springing up around the country seeing them as a way to increase the speed and scale of climate action in Durham in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement, UK Nationally Determined Contribution and Durham County Council Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP2).

CECs are a response to global inaction on the climate crisis and an acknowledgement that to avoid the worst of the climate crisis it is now urgent that we take action ourselves, whilst constantly pushing governments to create ambitious policy, appropriate to the scale of the threat. CECs have grown in number, over 40 currently exist in the UK. The CEC concept recognises that the climate and ecological emergencies are inextricably linked to the many social crises we face and so responses need to be found that build community support, adaptation and resilience. Primary aims of the CEC are, therefore, to inform and engage as much of the community as possible and to be a catalyst for community organising and key aspects of behaviour change.

CAD is applying for Area Action Partnership funding from Durham County Council to cover costs associated with setting up the centre. We would like to work collaboratively with the council, initially to support their Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP2) then ongoing, particularly with public engagement.

A CEC's function is shaped by the local community, initially by a core group tasked to work through the process of setting it up. The centre's activities can help build the frameworks that remodel how we live and work in the face of a heating planet, threatened biological life support systems and increased levels of deprivation and economic insecurity. Examples of this all-encompassing change agenda include developing a circular economy in which waste is minimised by keeping resources in use for as long as possible, gaining maximum benefit from them before efficient recovery and regeneration of materials, which reduces negative environmental impact; developing sustainable food systems based increasingly on local, seasonal plant-based diets, developing transport and mobility patterns that minimise pollution whilst maximising health benefits through active travel and public transport, reducing emissions and costs from heating buildings, etc.

Regular, democratic meetings with as diverse a range of people as possible, are essential to maintaining broad participation and seeding new ideas.

CAD held an online talk in July, hosted by an experienced speaker from the CEC national network, which was attended by over 30 people. The talk was very inspiring and practically useful. Many attendees left their emails wishing to be involved in the project. Notable support

came from Durham Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Climate Change, Mark Wilkes and Durham University Greenspace representatives.

The activities we hold in the Durham Climate Centre will depend on the type of premises we secure and the number of people who commit to contributing their time, skills and ideas. Likewise, the hours that it is open. The aim is to encourage community involvement and education in understanding and responding to the urgency and scope of global heating and environmental degradation - a place where residents and groups can discuss concerns and share knowledge and positive ideas. It might also be possible to make provision for currently hard-to-recycle materials such as oral care products and medicine blister packs. The following are ideas for activities from CECs already up and running; talks, workshops, meetings, eco community events, arts and crafts, cinema, library/library of things, climate cafe, zero waste shop, repair cafe, fundraising projects and 'Take the Jump' - a very successful activity run by Guildford CEC which is an interactive wall where you can learn about what you can do and what local resources there are to help you.

Our vision for a centre in Durham is to provide a physical place, complementary to online organising spaces, which encourages passers-by to drop in and which hosts organised events aimed at increasing awareness of the climate change, ecological and biodiversity emergencies and how we can combat them. It is intended to be an inclusive, friendly and vibrant space for flexible use by individuals, groups and organisations including residents, visitors, businesses, local authorities, the university, churches and schools. There are many environmental, educational, community arts and social need groups already doing good work in County Durham who might benefit from connecting with others on a face-to-face basis, with more joined up working and greater visibility. We hope that this centre will develop and promote new projects, giving local people more agency over their futures and accelerate momentum for system change.