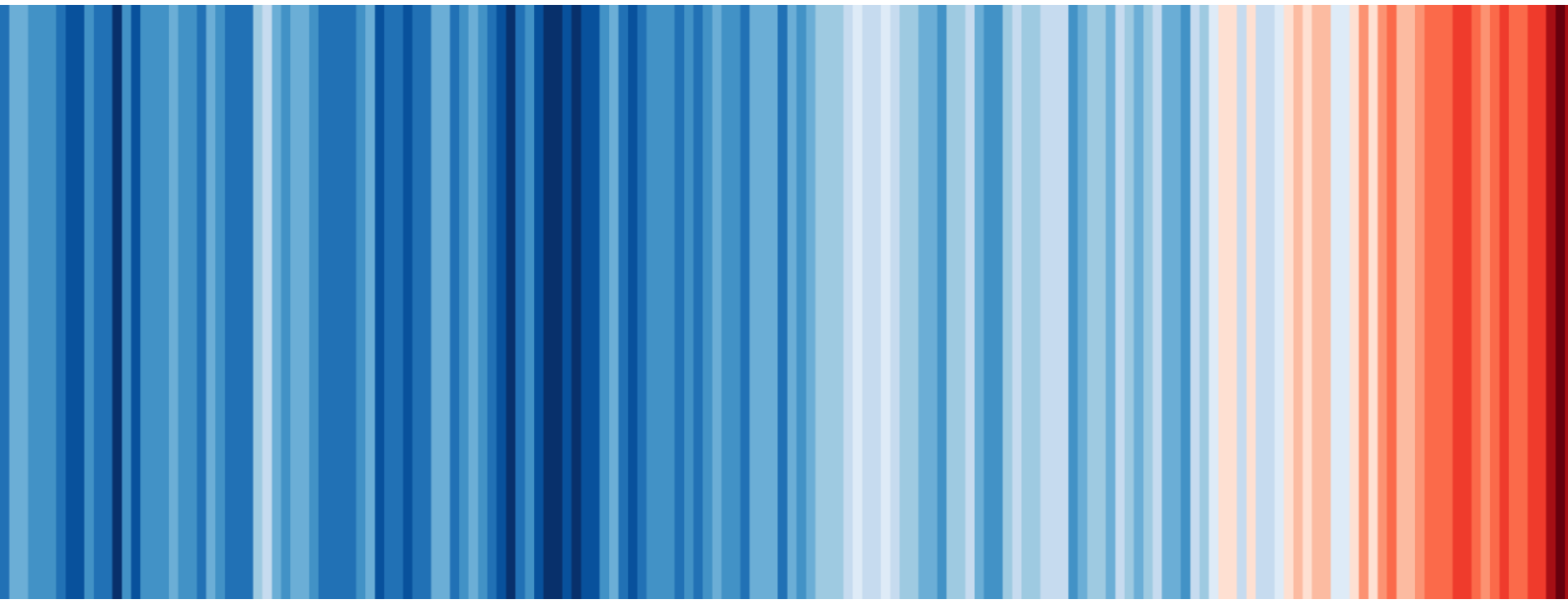

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Draft Borough Climate Change Strategy – Summary Document

Consultation Draft, 25 July 2024

1. Our Climate Emergency

"Unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach."

- *Ko Barrett, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change[1] (IPCC, 2021)*

Tackling climate change is often seen as a global issue to be solved by national and international governments, however, this is not the case. Every single individual has a responsibility to take action to minimise their impacts on the climate and ensure that future generations can prosper.

The IPCC's sixth assessment report has been a 'reality check' for global, national, and local climate policy. If urgent action is not taken, the consequences of exceeding the 1.5°C threshold will be huge.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) has acknowledged the urgency of the climate and biodiversity emergency, with its declaration in 2019. In delivering against this declaration, TWBC has developed this Borough Climate Change Strategy.

This strategy provides an overarching vision to create a sustainable, low carbon borough, pulling together key information, data, and policies to create ambitious, yet achievable actions. The strategy has used an evidence-based approach along with a significant public consultation and engagement to ensure all voices in our borough are heard.

The council recognises the key role it plays as a community leader in shaping the borough through its policies, partnerships, and services. Achieving net-zero, however, connot be done alone, it requires collective action from all members of our community. It has been estimated that more than half of all emissions cuts required in the UK rely on local resdients and businesses taking action. This strategy echoes this necessity, and its adoption will be a critical step to directing a path towards climate action across our borough.

[1] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

2. Our Strategy

By declaring a climate and biodiversity emergency, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) acknowledges the key work required to drive climate action across the borough. This declaration sets out an ambition for the borough and commitment to tackling climate change.

This strategy will provide a vision and framework for delivering climate action by the council, residents, and wider stakeholders.

This strategy will not be delivered by the council alone and will not be a fixed course to net zero. We appreciate that there will be further developments in policy, understanding and technology that may impact the scope and delivery of this strategy in the future.

In responding to our declaration, we have developed this strategy to achieve the **ambition** of making **Tunbridge Wells a 2030 Net Zero Compatible Borough**.

Greenhouse gas emissions are not constrained by borough boundaries and therefore, achieving net zero for a borough in isolation is beyond our control. There are sectors that we cannot influence without either a significant funding increase or a step change in national policy and regulation.

However, by becoming a net zero compatible borough, we are commiting to doing everything possible to eliminate our direct emissions by 2030, putting the borough in the best position to decarbonise fully, as, and when national policy levers catch up and come into force.

By retaining the **2030 ambition** from our declaration it will drive us to make immediate change, whilst highlighting the urgency of taking action to tackle climate change.

To meet this ambition, our strategy proposes 24 ambitions across the following eight themes:

1. **Transport**
2. **Buildings and Energy Efficiency**
3. **Low Carbon Business and Industry**
4. **Natural Environment**
5. **Waste and Resource Consumption**
6. **Renewable Energy Generation**
7. **Communities, Engagement and Green Skills**
8. **Adaptation**

These ambitions will be beholden upon Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, residents, anchor institutions, businesses, and key community actors to achieve.

Each thematic area has a detailed plan, highlighting actions Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will take to achieve these ambitions and how it will also support the borough to do so. These action plans can be read in the full consultation draft.

3. The Local Context

Tunbridge Wells Borough emitted 462.0 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent ($ktCO_2e$) in 2022. Of this carbon footprint, 32% came from domestic properties, 30% from transport and 14% from agriculture. These three sectors alone contribute 76% of all emissions in the Borough. Tunbridge Wells Borough also naturally sequesters emissions, absorbing 60.9 $ktCO_2e$ in 2021 from its forest and grassland.

The below pie chart breaks down the Borough's emissions profile into the seven emitting sectors:

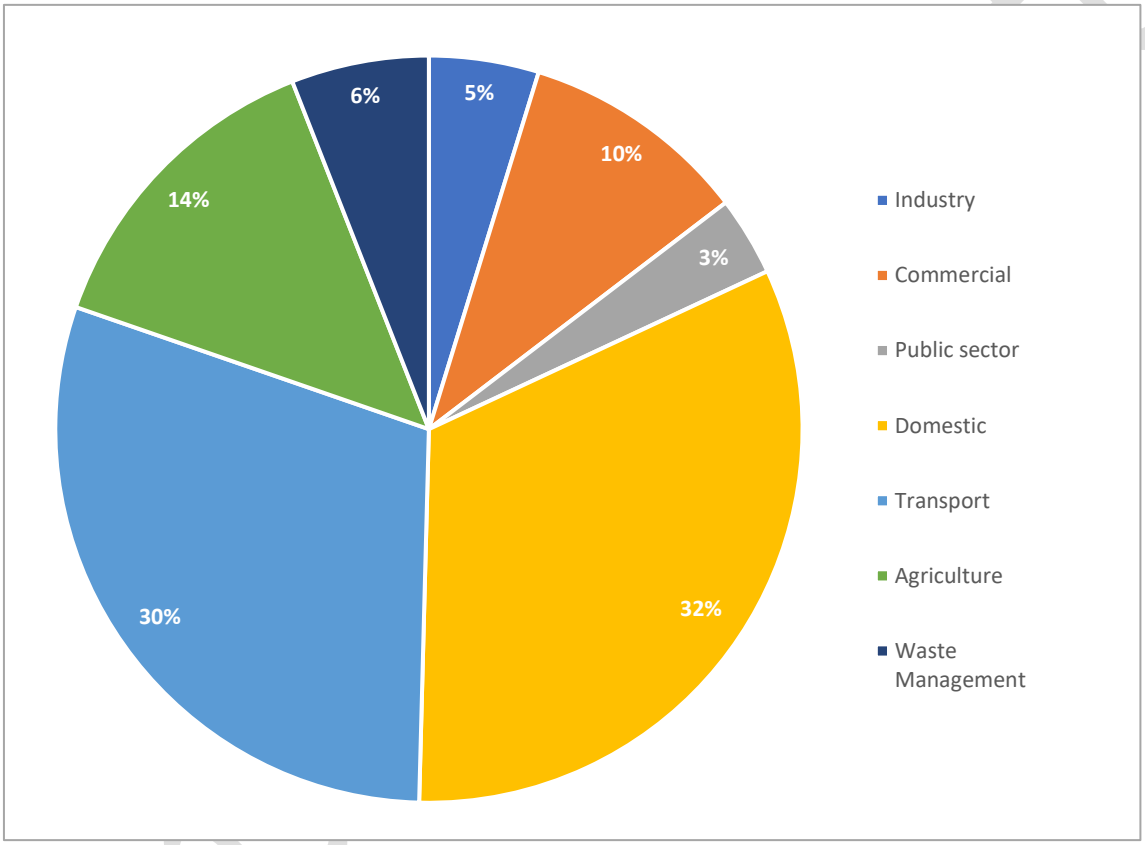

Figure 1: Tunbridge Wells Borough emissions sector breakdown 2022. DESNZ, 2024.

Tunbridge Wells Borough emissions have fallen significantly since 2005, by 42.3%. Much of this reduction can be attributed to large scale decarbonisation of the national grid as the UK has reduced its reliance on coal and oil. General building and car efficiencies have also contributed to this reduction, albeit to a smaller extent. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a signifant annual reduction of 9.4%, the largest all time annual reduction observed in the borough. Emissions rebounded by 6.4% in 2021 before falling by 5.3% in 2022, the second lowest levels on record (after 2020).

The below graph highlights the observed decreasing trend since 2005, whilst also showing how emissions from each sector have changed over time:

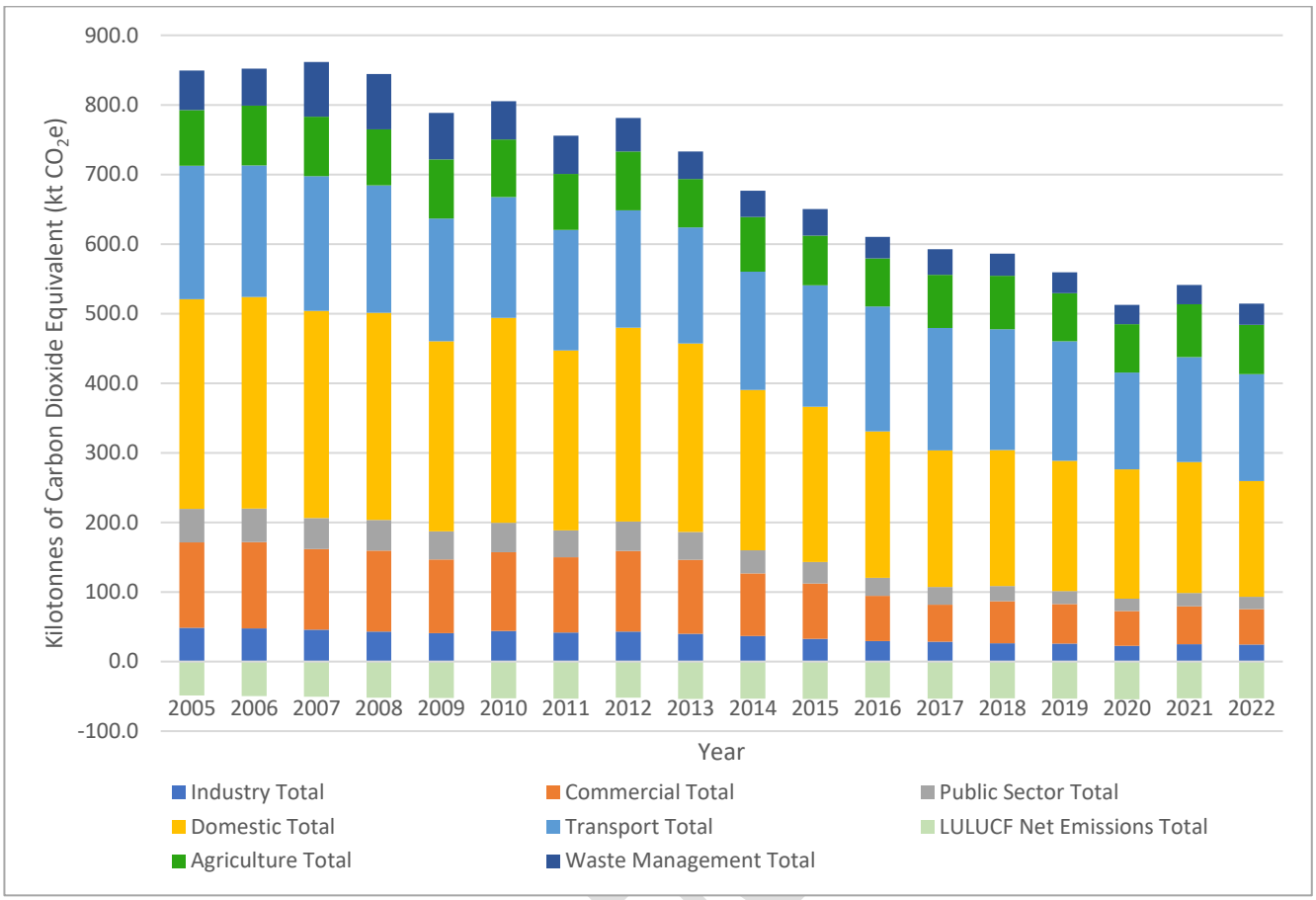

Figure 2: Tunbridge Wells Borough sector emissions 2005 – 2022. DESNZ, 2024.

Whilst our emissions trend is going in the right direction, this data does not provide the full picture. The methodology used to calculate these emissions focuses on energy and fuel consumption, hiding the fact that there are significant emissions sources for which we are responsible, but not accounting for. Such sources include aviation, the food we eat and the goods we purchase. Consequently, total emissions associated with our Borough are likely to be higher than officially reported. This limitation we must be conscous of when determining our course of action to reduce our emissions.

Land use, land use change, and forestry only absorbs 52.6 ktCO_2e (net), a fraction of what is needed to offset our borough's total emissions. While land-based sequestration (absorption) should not be neglected, this highlights the significant imbalance between our greenhouse gas emissions and removals.

4. Achieving Net Zero

4.1. Explaining Net Zero Compatibility

Net zero compatibility refers to reducing direct emissions from the council and wider borough (residents, businesses, anchor institutions, key community actors) to the point where national intervention must take over to help achieve full net zero.

Net zero compatibility requires immediate action to be delivered but recognises the limited scope of influence over a number of key emitting sources and the requirement for national interventions to accelerate further action.

4.2. The Council's Role

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

The Council set an ambition to achieve net zero across its operations in 2030. The Corporate Carbon Descent plan (CCDP), created by the cross-party Climate Emergency Advisory Panel (CEAP) in 2021, outlines actions and measures the Council needs to take to achieve this ambition.

Local authorities' levers to deliver net zero:

The Council's own operations make up a small percentage of the total emissions produced across the borough (figure 5), but the Council plays a significant role in encouraging and pushing for local climate action. For the borough to achieve its ambition, the Council must work in collaboration with a wide range of partners and residents of the borough.

As stated by the Climate Change Committee (CCC), local authorities have powers or influence over approximately a third of local area emissions[2]. The following four pillars, as set out by the CCC required to achieve collaborative climate action and delivery:

- *"Framework: An agreed framework for delivery for Net Zero incorporating local and national climate action."*
- *"Financing: Appropriate long-term financing to support local authorities in delivering Net Zero."*
- *"Flexibility: Local operational flexibility around how local areas address climate change."*
- *"Facilitation: coherent policy and powers for the facilitation of delivery."* [3]

Unfortunately, within local government, there is no clear, agreed framework for delivering against net zero objectives, with targets ranging from borough to borough and no national reporting requirements. As such, joined up working is more challenging due to competing

[2] https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget/
[3] https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Local-Authorities-and-the-Sixth-Carbon-Budget.pdf

priorities and timescales for action. Kent County Council are playing a key role in helping drive joint climate action across Kent, with the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy forming a key framework for the County.

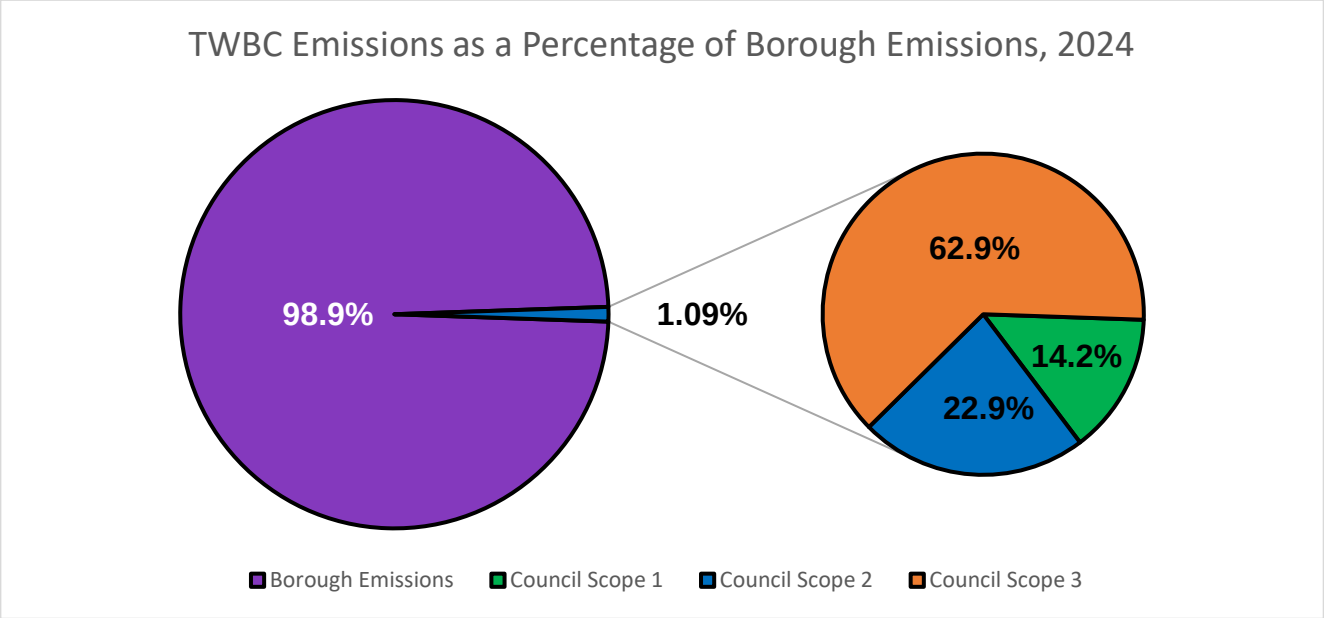

Figure 3: TWBC emissions as a percentage of total borough emissions. DESNZ, 2024.

Local authorities are also facing significant financial difficulties, often having to deliver more services, with less funding (in real terms). As such, without consistent government funding for climate action, local authorities are beholden to time intensive, oversubscribed grant schemes, which do not align or provide enough support for local net zero targets.

It is, therefore, essential that we work collaboratively as a Borough, to tackle climate change and achieve 2030 net zero compatablity.

For more information regarding the councils' own operations and its corporate carbon descent plan, please refer to the TWBC Climate Action Website.

5. Our Borough Ambitions

We have developed the following 24 ambitions as a vision for where we want the Borough to be in 2030. Our ambitions are split into eight themes, each with three ambitions for 2030.

Throughout this strategy we have highlighted how achieving net zero compatibility will be reliant on all of us taking action to deliver real change. Thus, these ambitions are only achievable with the full force of the Borough behind them.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, our resdients, anchor institutions, business and wide key actors in the community are therefore, all responsible for Tunbridge Wells Borough progressing towards net zero compatibility.

Our Borough, in 2030 ...

Transport

- A reduction in annual road transport emissions has been observed.
- Total mileage of improved cycling and pedestrian infrastructure has increased.
- Off-street public EV charging provision has grown alongside demand.

Buildings and Energy Efficiency

- All Tunbridge Wells Borough domestic properties have an EPC rating by 2030.
- All suitable existing Tunbridge Wells Borough domestic properties have an average EPC level D by 2030, pushing for an EPC C or above where suitable.
- Tunbridge Wells Borough has a local area energy plan to provide direction for key infrastructure improvements.

Low Carbon Business and Industry

- All suitable existing Tunbridge Wells Borough commercial units have an average EPC level D by 2030, pushing for an EPC C or above where suitable.
- All local businesses have taken initial action to tackle climate change and decarbonise by 2030.
- A 50% reduction in commercial and industry emissions is achieved by 2030, from a 2019 baseline.

Natural Environment

- All new development contributes to an overall improvement to biodiversity across the borough.
- The overall sustainability of green spaces (including council owned) continues to improve, with clear objectives to improve access and biodiversity.
- Community engagement is further embedded into habitat management and horticultural projects.

Waste Production and Resource Consumption

- Recycling rates hit 55% in 2027 and 60% in 2030.
- Our waste collection service is net zero compatible.

- Circular economy practices and buying local, supports sustainable consumption across the borough.

Renewable Energy Generation

- New energy generation projects are approved in the borough, increasing locally generated renewable energy.
- Residents and businesses feel supported and empowered to adopt renewable energy technologies.
- The feasibility of community energy schemes is understood with such schemes supported across the borough.

Communities, Engagement and Green Skills

- All Schools, Parish Councils and Town Councils in the Borough are monitoring their emissions and implementing decarbonisation plans.
- 80% - 90% of residents feel informed about climate change and empowered to take action.
- There are more opportunities in the Borough for our younger generations to develop green skills.

Adaptation

- Tunbridge Wells Borough is delivering against a climate change adaption strategy and action plan.
- The Borough is more aware of climate risks and what can be done to adapt to them.
- The Borough is actively monitoring climate risk.