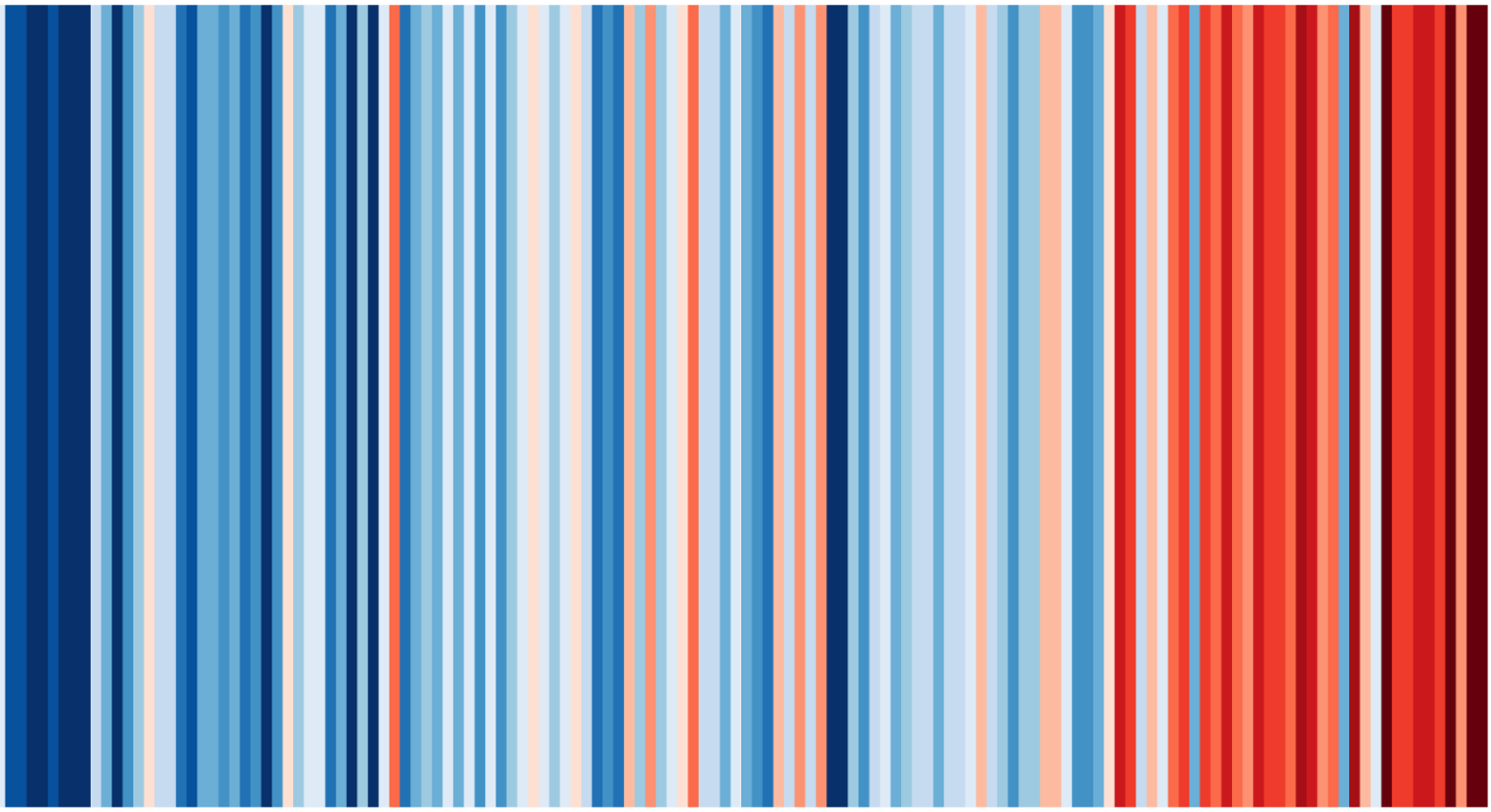

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Borough Climate Change Strategy Summary: Accessible Version

06 August 2025

TWBC CLIMATE ACTION

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

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1. Introduction

1.1. What is Climate Change

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns[1]. These changes can be in the mean and/or variability of its properties that persist for an extended period, typically decades or longer[2]. Whilst there have been natural periods of climate change in the earth's history, the scientific consensus observes that since the industrial revolution, this process has accelerated exponentially because of human activities[3].

As highlighted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) observed increases in global temperature and atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations (GHG) are unequivocally caused by GHG emissions resulting from human activity since 1750[4]. Human-induced warming is often referred to as anthropogenic climate change. Water vapour (H_2O), carbon dioxide (CO_2), nitrous oxide (N_2O), methane (CH_4) and ozone (O_3) are the primary GHGs in the Earth's atmosphere.

Since the industrial revolution, humans have increased the amount of GHGs in the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels for energy (figure 1). Increased GHG concentrations in the atmosphere traps infrared radiation, stopping it from being re-emitted back into space. As more energy is trapped in the earth's atmosphere, the earth's temperature increases (global warming). This is the enhanced greenhouse effect.

This rise in CO_2 concentrations is at the limit of compatibility with the 1.5°C global temperature limit, set by the 2015 Paris Agreement[5]. Average global temperature increase is now 1.46°C above pre-industrial levels, with global average temperature approximating 1.55°C in 2024, making 2024 the first year to breach the 1.5°C global warming limit[6].

[1] Met Office, 2025.
[2] IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report Annexes, 2023
[3] IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report, 2023
[4] IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report, 2023
[5] Met Office Forecast
[6] World Meteorological Organisation, 2025

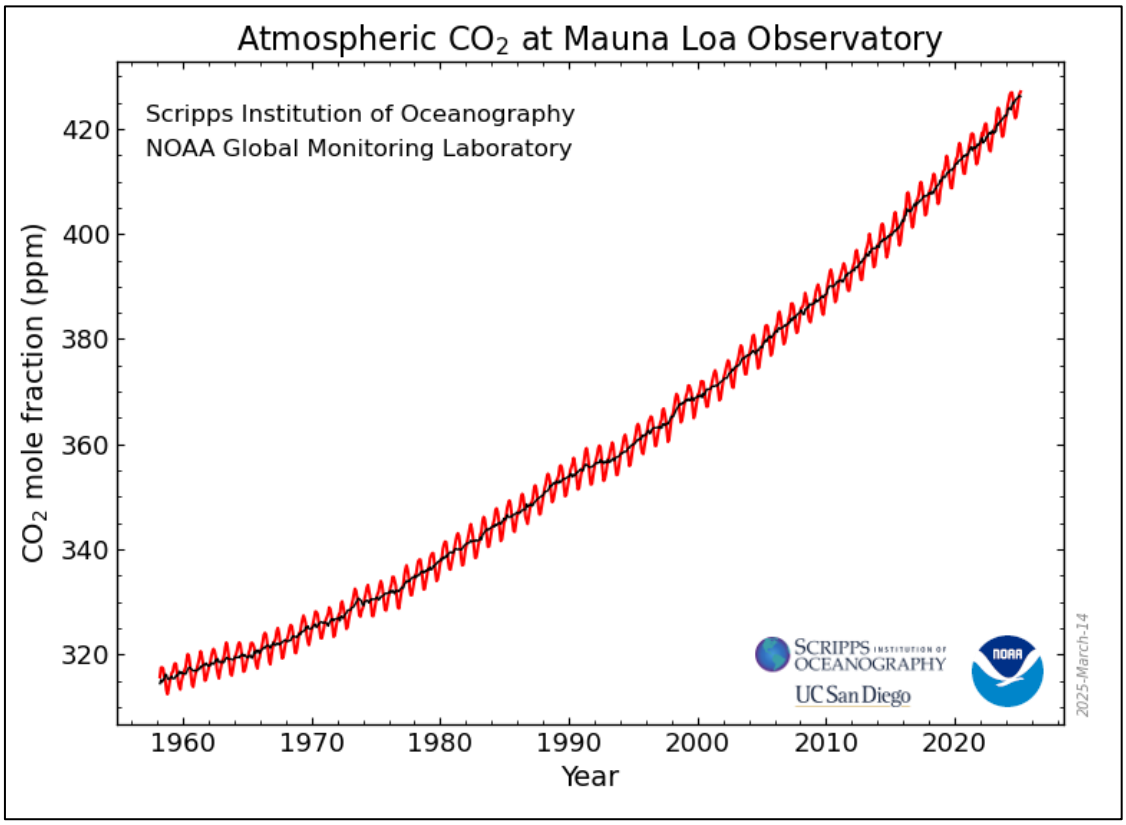

Figure 1: Atmospheric CO_2 concentration 1958-2024, NOAA, 2025

1.2. The 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 (IPCC, 2021)

Tackling climate change is a global issue to be solved by national and international governments, but governments cannot do it alone. Over 50% of emissions reductions required in the UK depend on local residents, communities and businesses taking action.

The IPCC's sixth assessment report was 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.

Climate change poses the most substantial challenge and threat to our way of life. If left un-checked, Climate Change will result in extreme changes to our weather systems, biodiversity loss and habitat degradation. It will threaten our public health, economy, infrastructure, and resources. Action must be taken to mitigate against these threats and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Tackling climate change is intrinsically linked with public health improvements, economic growth, sustainability, and poverty alleviation. This is our opportunity to tackle the biggest issue facing our society and improve the quality of life of our residents for generations to come. By acting now, we are safeguarding a better future.

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

This strategy shows how we can create a sustainable, low carbon borough. We have used key information, data, and policy to create achievable ambitions and actions. We have combined an evidence-based approach with public consultation and engagement to give all residents a voice on this topic.

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 cannot be done alone: it requires collective action from the whole community. This is reflected in the Strategy, whose adoption will steer climate action across our borough.

1.3. Purpose of the Strategy

By declaring a climate and biodiversity emergency, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) acknowledges the work required to drive local climate action. This declaration sets out our commitment to tackling climate change.

The council will not deliver this strategy alone. This strategy provides a framework for delivering climate action by the council, residents, and wider stakeholders, but is not a fixed course to net zero. Further developments in policy, understanding and technology may impact the scope and delivery of this strategy in the future.

We have developed this strategy to achieve the ambition of net zero in the borough by 2050, in line with the Climate Change Act 2008.

Greenhouse gas emissions are not constrained by borough boundaries; achieving net zero in isolation is beyond the control of the Borough Council and its residents. There are sectors that cannot be influenced without changes to national policy and regulation.

Aligning with the Climate Change Act 2008 provides a realistic timeframe to achieving net zero. As highlighted by the seventh carbon budget released by the Climate Change Committee in 2025, net zero is possible in 2050, but significant and sustained action is required.

To meet this ambition, our strategy proposes 21 ambitions across seven priorities:

1. Buildings
2. Transport
3. Biodiversity and Environment
4. Renewable Energy
5. Waste and Resources
6. Business and Community Engagement
7. Adaptation

These ambitions depend on action from all residents, local institutions, businesses, community organisations and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

1.4. Climate Change in the Borough

1.4.1. Borough Territorial Emissions

Tunbridge Wells Borough emitted 422.8 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent ($ktCO_2e$) in 2023[7]. Of this carbon footprint, 32% came from domestic properties, 31% from transport and 11% from agriculture. These three sectors contribute 74% of emissions in the Borough. Tunbridge Wells Borough also naturally sequesters emissions, absorbing 60.4 $ktCO_2e$ in 2023 from its forest and grassland.

Tunbridge Wells Borough emissions have fallen significantly since 2005, by 47.3% (figure 2). Much of this reduction can be attributed to the decarbonisation of the national grid as the UK has reduced its reliance on coal and oil. Building and car efficiencies have also contributed to this reduction to a smaller extent.

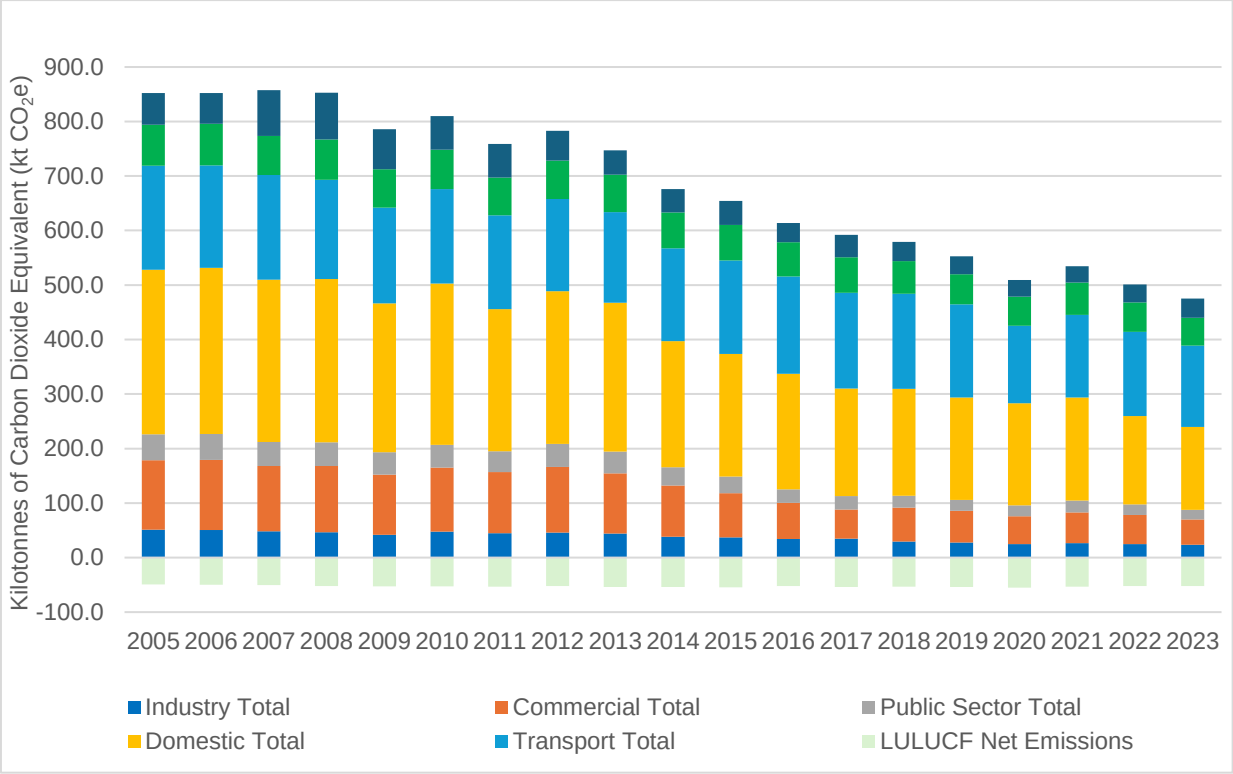

Figure 2: Tunbridge Wells Borough Emissions 2005-2023, DESNZ, 2025.

1.4.2. Borough Consumption Emissions:

Consumption emissions are the greenhouse gases produced throughout the lifecycle of goods and services consumed within a specific area. This includes emissions from production, transportation, use, and disposal, regardless of where those emissions physically occur.

[7] UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics, DESNZ, 2025

TWBC monitor these emissions to understand our community's carbon footprint beyond direct emissions. Tracking consumption emissions helps identify high-impact areas like imported food, construction materials, or energy use, so that we can make targeted policies and public engagement to drive meaningful emissions reductions.

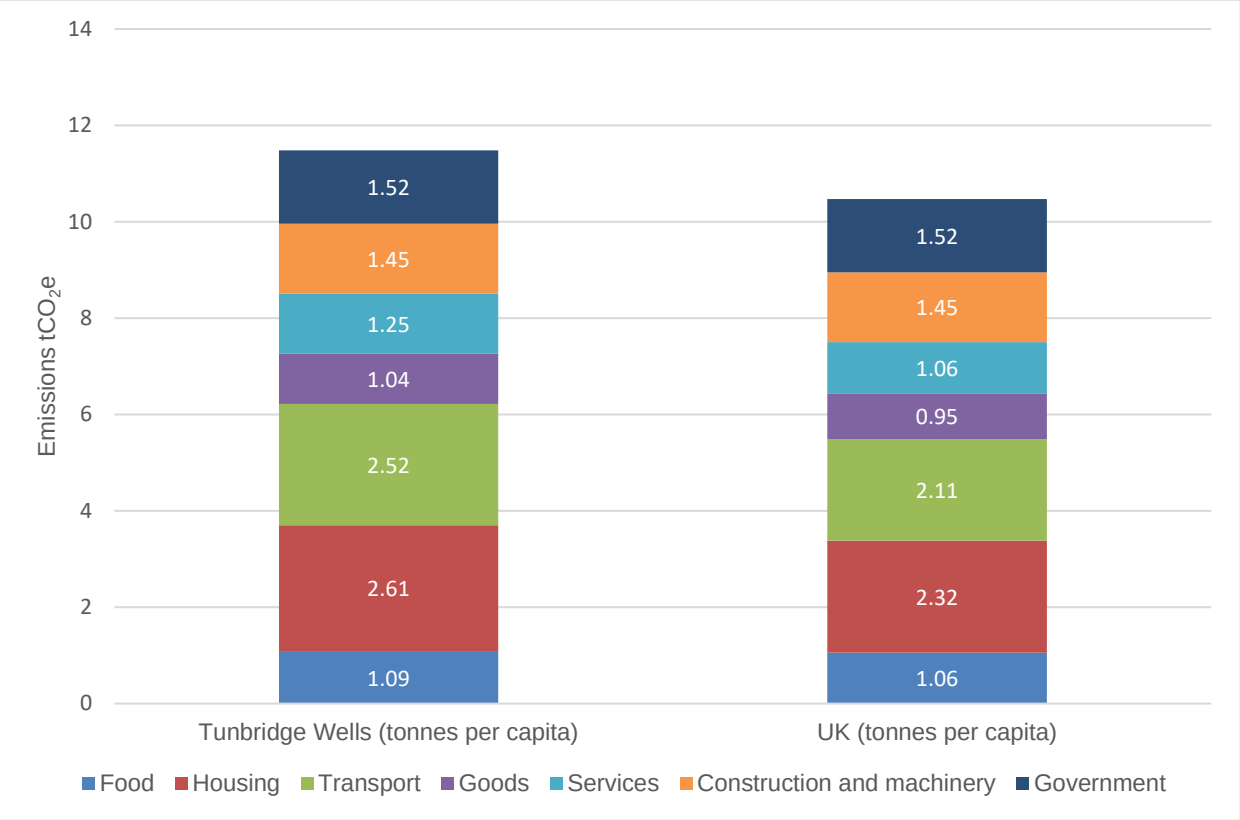

Figure 3: 2021 Tunbridge Wells per capita consumption emissions, Local Footprint, 2025

As shown in figure 3, the per capita consumption emissions in our borough (11.5 tonnes) exceed the UK average (10.5 tonnes). This is true for most sectors, except for construction, machinery, and government, which are consistent with the UK average.

This pattern of consumption-based emissions is caused by several factors.

- The average disposable income in our borough is £8,662 higher than the UK average[8].
- Car ownership per household in Tunbridge Wells borough is higher than the national average in[9].
- Housing in Tunbridge Wells is generally larger and older. In homes that have not been retrofitted for energy efficiency, this means higher energy demands for heating[10].

[8] Regional gross household income, UK: 1997 to 2022, ONS, 2025
[9] Local indicators for Tunbridge Wells, ONS, 2025
[10] Local indicators for Tunbridge Wells, ONS, 2025

1.4.3. Local Climate Risks

The Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessment for Kent and Medway (CCRIA) informs on climate risks to society, economy, and environment.

Risks to the borough and county are:

- **River and surface water flooding:** Both Tunbridge Wells and Kent are susceptible to river and surface water flooding during periods of heavy rainfall. The river Medway and its tributaries pose flood risks in Kent, while Tunbridge Wells has localized surface water flooding issues due to its topography.
    - Tunbridge Wells Borough has experienced many pluvial flooding events. In the last 5 years, manholes near the River Grom have burst more than 30 times[11].
- **Heatwaves:** More frequent, more intense heatwaves pose risks to public health, particularly elderly and younger demographics. Urban areas like Tunbridge Wells may experience higher temperatures due to the urban heat island effect.
    - If temperatures rise by 2°C, our hottest summer day will reach 37.2°C. If earth's temperature increases by 4°C, summer temperatures in the Borough will reach 41.8°C[12].
- **Storms and high winds**: The whole of Kent is affected by strong storms and high winds which cause property damage, disrupted services, and pressure on emergency services.
    - The latest Severe Weather Impacts Monitoring System (SWIMS) report released by KCC in 2020 showed a total of 11 severe weather events logged[13].
- **Droughts:** Low rainfall leads to droughts which affect water supply, agriculture, and ecosystems. Kent, known as the "Garden of England," will see impact on its horticulture and agriculture sectors.
    - In August 2022 official drought status was announced across Kent. Residents in the Borough (as well as most of Kent) were subject hosepipe bans.
    - A 2024 KCC report stated that the projected wetter winters and warmer summers, could bring vector-borne diseases to Kents shores[14].
- **Sea level rise**: Coastal areas in Kent are at risk from rising sea levels, which lead to increased coastal erosion, loss of habitats, and coastal flooding. Kent faces risks from coastal flooding in low-lying areas like Romney Marsh and areas around the Thames Estuary.

You can read the full Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessment for Kent and Medway here.

[11] Call for urgent improvements following flooding, BBC, 2024
[12] What will climate change look like near me, BBC, 2022
[13] Monitoring Impacts of Severe Weather, KCC, 2020
[14] Implications of Climate Change for Public Health, KCC, 2024

2. Achieving Net Zero

Net zero refers to the balancing of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere with those removed from the atmosphere. Such removals could come from activities such as tree planting, peatland restoration, and carbon capture and storage.

For Tunbridge Wells Borough, reaching net zero is critical to addressing the impacts of climate change. Reducing emissions from transport, buildings, waste, and other sectors, and enhancing natural carbon sinks, contributes to national climate goals and improves air quality, energy efficiency, and resilience to extreme weather.

Reaching net zero is an environmental and social responsibility, which supports healthier communities, green job creation, and long-term economic stability.

2.1. Policy Frameworks

Policy has been instrumental in driving the climate action we have seen to date. International treaties, agreements and carbon budgets are designed to tackle climate change and minimise its impacts, while policy ensures climate action is taken locally.

2.1.1. The Paris Agreement 2015

The Paris Agreement (PA) is an agreement from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), imposed to legally bind obligations on signatory countries to reduce and limit greenhouse gas emissions. This Agreement committed all parties to keeping the rise in global surface temperature to well below 2°C above preindustrial levels. The agreement also stated it preferable to limit warming to 1.5°C[15]. At the time of writing, signatories account for over 98% of all global greenhouse gas emissions.

2.1.2. Climate Change Act 2008:

In 2008, the UK became the first country to establish a legally binding national climate commitment with the Climate Change Act. This act set an emissions reduction target of 80%, which was later revised to achieve net zero emissions by 2050[16]. The Climate Change Act requires the UK government to set emissions targets or “carbon budgets,” every five years. Carbon budgets set legally binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions over five-year periods.

2.1.3. Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy:

In 2020, Kent County Council (KCC) agreed The Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy, which sets out how KCC, Medway Council and the 12 district and borough councils

[15] The Paris Agreement, UNFCC, 2016
[16] Climate Change Act 2008, UK Government, 2025

of Kent will respond to the climate emergency. This strategy commits Kent to achieving net zero 2050, and a 50% to 60% reduction in emissions by 2030[17].

2.1.4. TWBC Climate & Biodiversity Emergency Declaration:

TWBC declared a climate and biodiversity emergency in 2019, and initially established a 2030 net zero ambition for the borough and the Council (FC29/19). Since the declaration, TWBC has developed a Corporate Carbon Descent Plan (CCDP), to achieve net zero across the Council's operations[18].

A detailed overview of national and international legislation, national and local policy and strategy can be found in our supporting evidence document.

2.2. Developing Our Strategy

2.2.1. Resident Consultation

As part of the development of our strategy we conducted the following consultation:

Phase One: Informal drop-in sessions and online engagement

The sustainability and communications teams held borough-wide drop-in sessions throughout summer and autumn 2024. During phase one, we engaged in informal discussions about climate change, addressing residents' questions and clarifying topics where further education was needed. We spoke to over 400 residents in person throughout phase one, attending 17 drop-in events. Almost every resident we spoke to communicated their support for climate action and the council taking an active approach.

Phase Two: Focus groups

We delivered 12 90-minute focus groups from August to October 2024, engaging with 71 residents. Most sessions covered all priorities, allowing residents to guide the discussion to gain deeper insights or ask further questions. We took notes on each session so that residents' views could be included in the strategy.

Phase Three: Statutory online consultation

Our online consultation ran until 18 October. We received 72 responses to the formal consultation and 215 responses to our short survey. More than 1,000 residents visited our consultation page, and almost 700 downloaded the strategy. The formal online consultation focused on the draft strategy, with the short survey asking residents about actions they take or plan to take to become more sustainable.

[17] Kent and Medway Low Emissions Strategy, KCC, 2020
[18] Corporate Carbon Descent Plan, TWBC, 2021

Response

Response to the strategy was positive, most in-person respondents were pleased to see TWBC taking clear action and leadership on the issue of climate change. In focus groups, only one resident out of the 71 engaged with did not support the council developing this strategy (1%).

From the formal consultation 72% of respondents supported the council in tacking climate action, 23% were not in support and 5% were unsure.

Following analysis of the consultation and engagement data, four feedback headlines were incorporated into the strategy:

- Ambitions with SMART, measurable targets are required.
- The strategy's ambitions should be more ambitious.
- Commitment to a specific Net Zero target was preferred.
- Improved resources, funding and delivery was essential to the successful delivery of the strategy.

2.2.2. SCATTER Pathways

To develop this strategy, we used the SCATTER[19] (Setting City Area Targets and Trajectories for Emissions Reduction) tool, developed by Anthesis and funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ). This tool provided emissions reduction pathways for the borough, forecasting emissions across varying scenarios.

SCATTER's high ambition pathway is the primary data source used to map our road to net zero. As shown in figure 4, the high ambition pathway scenario does not show the borough achieving net zero until 2046. This pathway relies on national levers to drive a large amount of the emissions reductions forecast. Of the 30 interventions identified, 21 rely on national levers or societal change (consumption, diet, travel, and energy use).

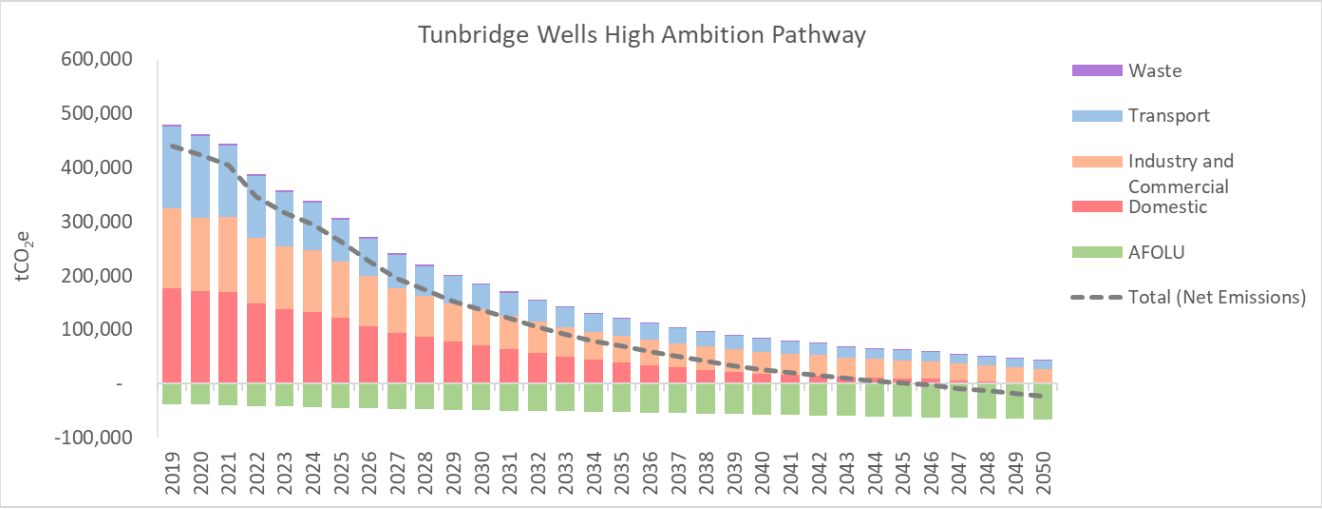

Figure 4:Tunbridge Wells Borough high ambition pathway, SCATTER, 2025.

[19] SCATTER, 2025

2.3. Setting The Net Zero Target

Before the 2019 declaration, work had not been undertaken to identify whether 2030 was a realistic or possible net zero target for a borough in isolation and what scope of influence the council had to deliver. SCATTER's high ambition pathway shows how much work is required to achieve net zero. It also tells us that achieving net zero earlier than 2046 is unlikely, with most of the interventions required being led by national government (who are bound by a 2050 target).

We are taking a pragmatic approach to net zero that focusses on changing those areas within our control, so that once national interventions are delivered, the borough will achieve net zero.

This does not negate the climate and biodiversity emergency declaration, declared by TWBC in 2019. Adopting a different target to that initially agreed, simply presents a more pragmatic, realistic, and achievable option, one that can only have been identified following the development of this strategy, as directed by the declaration. A 2050 target aligns with the available data, the UKs legal requirement and the UKs independent climate advisory committees, consensus on what is achievable for the UK.

Consequently, a 2050 net zero is the most sensible option for Borough of Tunbridge Wells.

2.4. Tunbridge Wells Borough Net Zero Target

We have an ambition to achieve net zero in the borough by 2050, in accordance with the Climate Change Act 2008.

2.5. The Council's Role

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council:

The Council's operations make up a small percentage of the total emissions produced by the borough, but the Council must advocate for local climate action by collaborating with residents and partner organisations. As stated by the Climate Change Committee (CCC), local authorities have powers or influence over approximately a third of local area emissions[20].

However, There is currently no agreed framework for delivering against local government net zero objectives. Targets vary between authorities, with no national reporting requirements making joined up working difficult due competing priorities and timescales.

Local authorities face financial difficulties: often having to deliver more services, with less funding. Without dedicated funding for climate action, local authorities are dependent on inadequate and unstainable grant schemes, as a source of funding to achieve net zero.

[20] Sixth Carbon Budget, Climate Change Committee, 2020

Local Government Reorganisation:

In December 2024, the Government published the English Devolution White Paper. Alongside devolution the Government plans to replace the current system of county councils and borough/district councils with unitary councils. As part of these plans, Kent Councils are currently developing proposals for reorganisation. These proposal would see Kent County Council, the borough and district councils in Kent, and Medway Council, replaced with larger unitary councils.

With organisational changes on the horizon, any changes to TWBC due to reorganisation will trigger a review of this strategy, ahead of our targets. It will be for any new unitary authority to determine its position on climate change.

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

3. Our Borough Ambitions

We have developed 21 ambitions as a vision for what the borough must achieve by 2050. Our ambitions are split into seven priorities, each with three ambitions and an action plan.

A net zero borough will not be achieved and delivered by the council alone. Achieving net zero will be reliant on all of us taking action to deliver real change. These ambitions are only achievable with the whole borough working together.

In the below ambitions, where 'we' is referenced, the ambition is referring to the borough as a whole. Where Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) is explicitly referenced, the ambition is referring to the Council only.

Ambitions for our Net Zero Borough:

Buildings:

1. We have increased the percentage of existing homes using air source heat pumps to 52% by 2040.
2. All suitable domestic properties in the borough have achieved an EPC level C (or equivalent) by 2035, where practical and cost effective.
3. All suitable commercial properties in the borough have achieved an EPC level C (or equivalent) by 2027 and EPC level B (or equivalent) by 2030.

Transport:

4. We have increased the percentage of journeys travelled through active travel methods to 55% by 2035.
5. We have grown EV chargepoint provision to at least 685 public sockets by 2030, 1,448 by 2040 and 1,631 by 2050.
6. We have electric buses in operation in the borough by 2035.

Biodiversity and Environment:

7. We have continued to increase annual tree planting and biodiversity improvements throughout the borough by the end of the 2034/35 planting season.
8. We have exceeded 10% annual biodiversity net gain by 2027.
9. We have exceeded 25% total woodland cover in the borough by 2050.

Renewable Energy:

10. We have trialled community energy projects in the borough by 2030.

11. We have increased total local solar generation by at least 1,000% by 2050, from a 2019 baseline.
12. TWBC has allocated local sites to new renewable projects in the borough by 2030 (subject to the Local Plan Review).

Waste and Resources:

13. We have increased kerbside recycling rates in the borough to 65% by 2035 and 85% by 2050, from a 2019 baseline.
14. We have reduced per capita food waste 50% by 2030, from a 2021 baseline.
15. TWBC waste collection vehicles will be fossil fuel free by 2031.

Business and Community Engagement:

16. All Schools, Parish and Town Councils will have set a net zero target and developed plans by 2030.
17. The industry and commercial sectors average at least a 4% annual reduction in CO_2e emissions, from a 2022 baseline.
18. Over 90% of residents and businesses are aware of climate change and how they can take meaningful action by 2030.

Adaptation:

19. All vulnerable residents in the borough have signed up for local flood alerts by 2030.
20. Over 90% of residents and businesses are aware of local climate risk and how they can meaningfully adapt by 2030.
21. TWBC has delivered a local climate adaptation strategy by 2030.

4. Action Plans

To deliver against our ambitions, we have developed dedicated action plans detailing the work that TWBC will deliver over the coming years. These action plans are a starting point but not an exhaustive list.

These action plans cover a five-year period and will be reviewed and updated in 2030. Whilst these action plans are for the 2025 – 2030 period, our commitment to the climate emergency extends beyond this period.

Action plans for our seven priority areas can be found in the full document or in our separate action plan document. All documents can be accessed *through the TWBC Climate Action Website*.

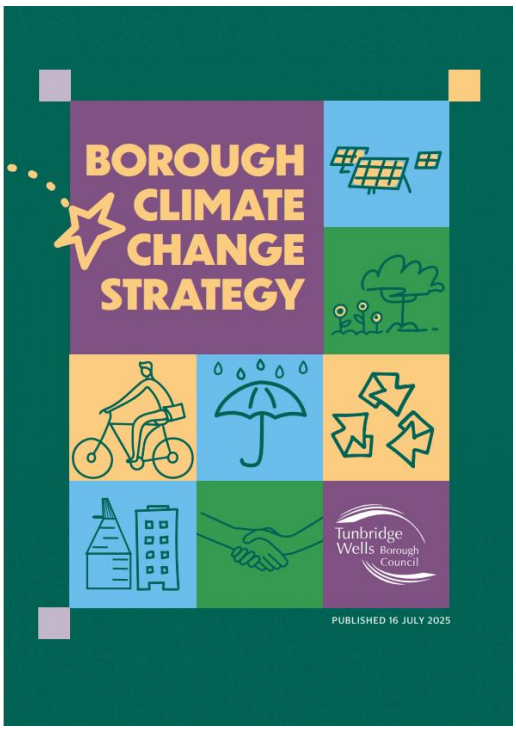

Figure 5: Tunbridge Wells Borough Climate Change Strategy, TWBC, 2025

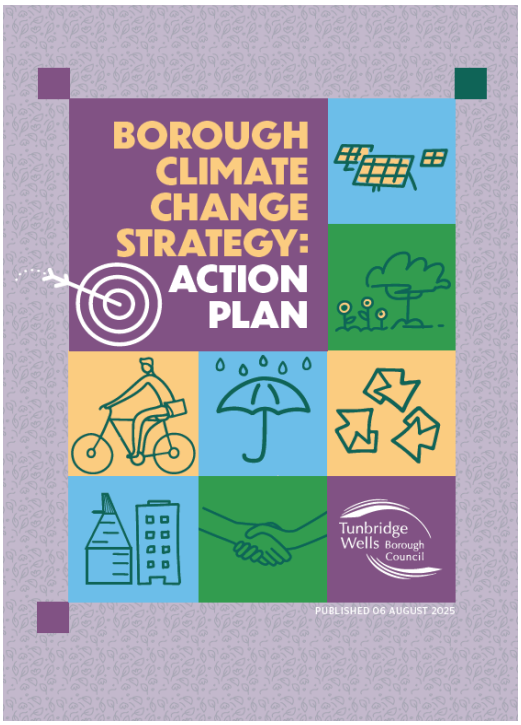

Figure 6: Tunbridge Wells Borough Climate Change Strategy: Action Plan, TWBC, 2025

5. Version Control

Document Name	Borough Climate Change Strategy
Responsible Officer	Henry Saunders, Sustainability Manager

Version Number	Reason for Review	Author	Date
1.0	Summary Document	H. Saunders, Sustainability Manager J. Berry, Graduate Climate Change Officer	06.08.2025

All figures in this document are correct as of 21/07/2025.