

# What is Cambridge City Council doing for Climate and the Environment?

*A summary, by Anne Miller, Chair of Carbon Neutral Cambridge and Climate and Environment Lead for Newnham Labour. November 2023*

## Introduction:

In my view, over the last few years, Cambridge City Council has been making good progress towards decarbonisation, with some very serious investments underway. This is thanks to the leadership from the Labour controlled City Council and hard work by some excellent officers. Nevertheless, we need to move faster still, if we're to avoid climate breakdown.

The City's progress was recognised nationally when, In October 2023, Climate Emergency UK's [Council Climate Action Scorecards](#) ranked Cambridge City joint 3<sup>rd</sup> out of the 186 District Councils assessed, alongside Oxford (and below Lancaster).

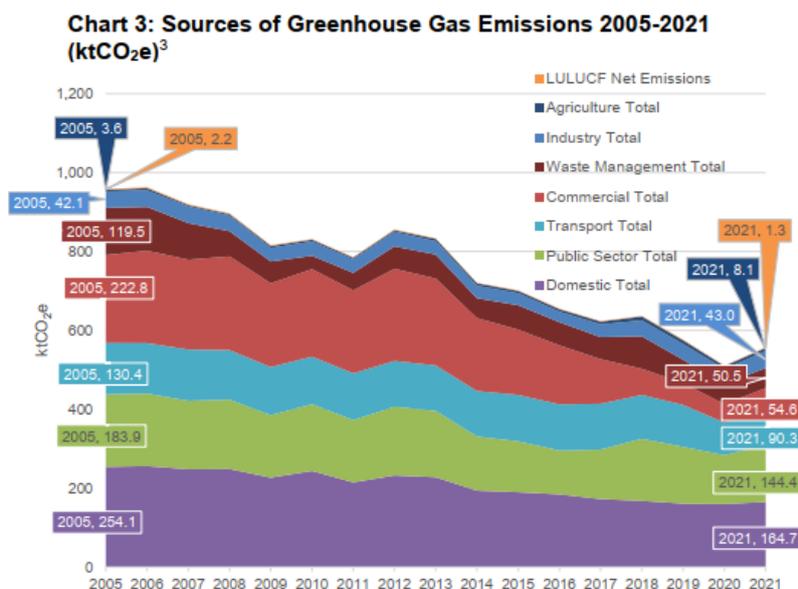
See below for an overview, then a brief summary listing of the key projects underway. Some projects are run by Cambridge City Council (Labour). Others are in partnership with South Cambs (Lib Dem), Cambridgeshire County Council (joint Labour-Libdem control), The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) (Labour) Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP), Cambridge University and other bodies such as UK Power Networks.

Anne Miller [Anne@annemiller.uk](mailto:Anne@annemiller.uk) 1 December 2023

## Overview

City Council's Oct 23 progress report on the Climate Strategy, gives a good overview of activities and achievements <https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=30919&Opt=0>

This chart shows the reduction in the City Council's own Greenhouse emissions since 2005



For more detail, the City Council's 2021-26 Carbon Management plan is here:

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/carbon-management-plan>

## Key Projects relating to Climate and the Environment

### Housing and energy

Cambridge City council is the local authority responsible for housing matters, so this is a major area of activity.

Major programme of building 500 Low carbon homes “Affordable” homes and council homes, some of which will be PassivHaus. <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/news/2022/10/10/planning-approval-granted-for-over-80-low-carbon-affordable-homes> <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/affordable-housing-programme>

Programme of upgrading all council house stock to at least EPC C. 264 have been upgraded with external wall insulation and PV in the last 3 years <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/making-our-housing-stock-more-energy-efficient> (I think about 70% are now EPC C or above, which is substantially better than private housing stock in Cambridge).

Targeted enforcement of national Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards in private rented housing stock <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/minimum-energy-efficiency-standards-in-private-rented-accommodation>

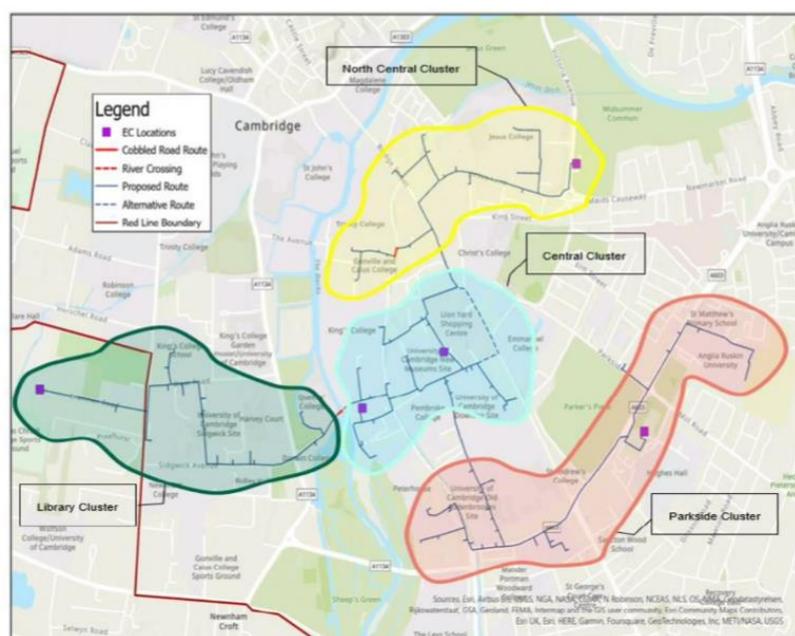
Parkside and Abbey Swimming pools (which were some of the councils highest users of energy) are now heated by Air Source Heat pumps (a £1.7M project)

In partnership with Cambridge University, the City Council is undertaking an important feasibility study on a low carbon district heat network for city centre. This aims to link 70 major heat users and could reduce their carbon emissions by 90%

<https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/documents/s62222/s%20and%20r%20mar%202023%20asset%20management%20plan%20review%20FINAL%20report.pdf>

<https://carbonneutralcambridge.org/decarbonising-the-city-centre/>

The City Council hopes to apply for grant to do the next stage of detailed exploration, early in 2024,



## Food

The City council is working with Cambridge Sustainable Food Partnership, aiming to get a gold award as a Sustainable Food City in 2024 <https://cambridgesustainablefood.org/goldfoodcambridge/about>

### Advice, grants and financial support for decarbonisation

The City Council published the Cambridge Retrofit guide.

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/11677/retrofitting-your-home-report-non-accessible-version.pdf>

Action on Energy Website <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/how-you-can-take-action/home-energy/action-on-energy>

Successful application for funding for a Grant programme to support low income households in improving energy efficiency (although this is subject to restrictions by central government)

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/home-energy-efficiency-grants-and-incentives>

‘Solar Together’ scheme using bulk purchasing to reduce the cost of PV for home owners

<https://solartogether.co.uk/cambridge/home>

~£1M awarded in community grants each year. This includes grants to groups like Citizens advice and the Food banks, but also Cambridge Carbon Footprint, Cambridge Sustainable Food and others

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/grants-and-funding>

### Nature and water

The City Council’s recently started the Chalk streams project <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/chalk-streams> with a fulltime staff member appointed for 3 years.

The City Council supported Cam Valley Forum’s application for Bathing Water Designation for the Cam, to help reduce upstream sewage pollution. <https://camvalleyforum.uk/council-formally-supports-bathing-water-designation/>

Expanding the herbicide free trial. <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/reduced-use-of-herbicides>

Expanding the Tree Canopy project. <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/cambridge-canopy-project>

### Planning and Waste (shared services with South Cambs)

The Emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan, being developed by the Shared Planning Service includes a superb “Net zero carbon homes policy”. Once adopted, it will be one of the best in the country requiring all new homes to be so well insulated they will be virtually free to heat, and with required maximum water use of 80lppd. This is ~ 30% less than in the current Local Plan.

<https://consultations.greatercambridgeplanning.org/greater-cambridge-local-plan-first-proposals/explore-theme/climate-change> <https://carbonneutralcambridge.org/net-zero-local-plan/>

Council Leaders and officers are engaging with government, water companies and others, attempting to get clarity about how to address the conflicting problems of a shortage of water, the shortage of affordable housing, and Cambridge’s important place in the UK economy.

The Shared Waste Service now has 3 Electric Refuse Collection vehicles (and a 4th in the pipeline), with solar charging facilities planned for Waterbeach depot.

<https://democracy.cambridge.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=29318&Opt=0>

## **Transport**

*Because of our ridiculously complicated local government structure the city has influence but limited power in the transport sector. The County Council is the Highways Authority. GCP was given the funding and responsibility for developing the Sustainable Travel Zone proposals, greenways and busways, while the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) is the Transport Authority, which has powers over buses.*

However the City Council does control licensing of taxis (and has been encouraging eV taxis for some years), and has recently signed an important and interesting agreement with “Connected Kerb” to provide 600 public eV charging points on City Council owned land, at no cost to council funds.

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/electric-vehicle-charging-points>

The CPCA is exploring Bus Franchising. I think this is a “good thing” because it will provide more public control of public transport, allowing the council to use funding from profitable routes to cross subsidise the socially beneficial but less profitable ones. There will probably be a public consultation on this in early 2024

<https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/what-we-deliver/transport/buses/bus-reform/>

“Making Connections” a.k.a “Sustainable Travel Zone” or “Congestion Charge”. This GCP led project would have had a major beneficial environmental impact and was supported by both Labour and Libdems. Personally I found it disappointing and surprising that the Green Party opposed it.

Following a collapse of political support it has been withdrawn, but of course the need for a solution to Cambridge’s congestion remains.....

## **Air Quality**

City Council agreed at the Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting on 5 Oct 2023 to aim for WHO air quality standards as part of the Air Quality Strategy. I think this was an important decision, as the WHO standards are significantly tighter than UK ones.

## **Postscript**

This is a personal view of some of the most exciting projects going on. But there is so much going on, I’m sure I will have omitted some great projects. I also apologise for any errors.

Anne Miller