

From Aspiration to Action

An updated Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan for Camden Council

In 2019 Climate Emergency Camden published an action plan, with ideas to encourage Camden Council to take meaningful action on the climate and ecological crises.

Because Camden's Climate Action Plan 2020-25 will be coming to an end, we are issuing an updated plan with our recommended priorities for the Council.

We are concerned about the ineffectiveness of Camden Council's current plan. The Council has a duty to plan and take much more effective actions.

Four years on, our revised plan has been expanded to focus on adapting to the unavoidable effects of climate change.

1 The context

1.1 Humans have caused irreversible climate change, the impacts of which are being felt around the world. The IPCC's Synthesis Report of March 2023 warned that actions by governments across the world fall far short of meeting the Paris Agreement goal of keeping warming well below 2°C, and that the window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all is closing rapidly.

1.2 Despite this dire warning, global and UK greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. There is no sign of effective action to transition to 'net zero', mainly due to economic and monetary systems that are based on increasing consumption. Indeed, energy use is forecast to rise by 50% in the period from 2020 to 2050 compared to 2020 and there is no realistic prospect that the global energy system will be 'decarbonised' during that time. Governments are clearly carrying on with business as usual and efforts to maximise growth without considering the consequences; nation states therefore continue to grant new licences for fossil fuel extraction. As greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions continue to rise, geoengineering options will be increasingly considered to reduce global temperatures, with high risks for humanity.

1.3 Nevertheless, we should continue efforts towards a more sustainable future. The destruction of natural systems on which all life depends, needs to be halted, to ensure our survival.

Individuals, businesses and governments should aim to reduce consumption as a means of both slowing the breakdown of the biosphere and reducing GHGs. Yet in Camden, a commitment to economic growth remains enshrined within the Local Plan, driving high- carbon development within the Borough without any acknowledgement of the harm caused both within and beyond Camden's boundaries.

1.4 In view of the ongoing global failure to mitigate climate and ecological systems collapse, we need an immediate focus on adaptation. Climate change will only continue to impact our lives more directly, whether in the form of extreme heat, flooding, or the collapse of food or other global systems on which we rely.

2 Camden Council's role

2.1 The UK Government has not set out an effective framework for reaching the objectives of the Paris Agreement; there is no single source of advice for local authorities. In the absence of a co-ordinated approach, local authorities are left to their own devices, each having to expend

scant resources on research and policy development. This leads to a disparate and diverse set of responses, which vary in effectiveness. Yet action by local authorities is critical to the UK's ability to mitigate climate change.

2.2 In 2020 Camden Council ran a citizens' engagement process over a period of 3 days, which resulted in the publication of Camden's Climate Action Plan 2020-25. Climate Emergency

Camden pointed out the shortcomings of the process at the time:

- It was not a true 'citizens' assembly' and did not cover all the issues fully,
- The actions chosen were limited and non-strategic.

Council officers have since admitted that the Climate Action Plan serves as a community engagement tool rather than an actual net-zero or decarbonisation plan.

2.3 The Climate Action Plan has been unhelpful for guiding the Council's actions. Like many other governmental bodies, it shies away from the key issues and hides behind a facade of achievement based on a limited definition of its responsibilities. It does this by limiting consideration to emissions within Camden and overstating the Council's role in reducing these. In fact, the reduction in these emissions is due to the progressive decarbonisation of the national grid, rather than anything the Council has done. The Climate Action Plan commits the Council to assessing Scope 3 emissions- emissions caused outside the territorial boundaries of Camden for which the Borough is responsible - but there has been no corresponding action.

2.4 GHG emission reductions resulting from the actions listed in the Council's Climate Action Plan are generally not recorded, and there is no attempt to provide a method of quantifying their effectiveness in climate mitigation.

2.5 The carbon effectiveness of the Camden Climate Fund appears negligible: payments made from the fund resulted in 213 tonnes CO₂e saved in 2020–21, 157 tonnes CO₂e saved in 2021–22. The fund results from failure of developers to meet their operational carbon targets, allowing them to pay a fee instead as permitted under the London Plan. It has been running for several years and has to date appears to have enabled developers to 'offset' around 35,000 tonnes of CO₂e. There is a lack of transparency in the operation and effectiveness of the fund. Payments made from the fund should be focused on reducing CO₂e, and not used to pay for things without quantifiable emission reductions, e.g. temporary street furniture with limited life expectancy.

2.6 The public information campaign performs poorly, with only 0.3% of the Borough's residents accessing the information provided on Camden's website over a year. The public information campaign remains underdeveloped and should encompass much more than just a website.

2.7 The proposed retrofit of only 150 out of 33,000 council homes is insignificant in the face of the Climate and Ecological Emergency. No plan has been published to deal with the other 32,850 homes.

2.8 In September 2020 Camden became the first council to amend its constitution to embed legal duties relating to climate change. The failure to take meaningful action since then, or to engage its various departments in discussions about potential activities across the whole spectrum of carbon emissions, is linked to the absence of a coordinating body within the Council. The establishment of such a 'task force' was among the key asks in Climate Emergency Camden's 2019 Action Plan.

2.9 Scrutiny is asking the right questions of all stakeholders, calling for relevant information to be provided and making informed suggestions. In January 2022, Climate Emergency Camden

asked three council scrutiny committees (Housing, Culture and Environment, and Resources and Corporate Performance) to work together to provide effective scrutiny of action on the climate and ecological crises. On 17th February 2022 the RCP Scrutiny Committee agreed with the principle of further scrutiny of issues that impacted the environment, agreed to write a report on this suggestion and to bring it to the next meeting. No further action has been taken.

2.10 Camden Council is not thinking and planning in a strategic way when it comes to mitigating climate change. For example, there is no reporting on Scope 3 emissions that result from the Council's operations, such as construction work on public highways or housing maintenance works. The Council's planning department continues to permit demolition of existing buildings without fully considering up-front emissions and to promote growth that is linked to fossil fuel consumption. The proposed Biodiversity Strategy and Tree Planting Strategy are weak and not sufficiently ambitious.

2.11 Camden residents need the Council to spearhead serious discussion and strategic planning, including the input of independent experts with knowledge of transport, housing, energy, retrofit, finance, land use and progress at other local authorities.

2.12 Camden Council is currently revising its Local Plan, which provides a golden opportunity to embed stronger measures to tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency. In addition, the Council will need to comply with new and proposed legislation that increases local authorities' responsibilities in urban greening and environmental protection. The Council also needs to live up to its obligations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to assess and prepare for risks that are likely to impede its functions. The Climate and Ecological Emergency is precisely this kind of risk.

3 Updated Action Plan

3.1 OBJECTIVES

Camden Council's policy must be based on the following three objectives:

3.1.1 Mitigation of climate change through the minimisation of greenhouse gas emissions. The objective should include consumption emissions (typically located outside the Borough of Camden) and explicitly recognise the harmful impact of the 'continuous growth' model, which is incompatible with a liveable planet.

3.1.2 Regeneration of ecological systems, both in Camden and globally.

3.1.3 Adaptation to a more precarious present and future, in collaboration with everyone in Camden.

3.2 APPROACH

To achieve these objectives Camden Council may wish to pursue the following:

3.2.1 Cross-party action: Foster positive collaboration among political parties within Camden for action on the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

3.2.2 Forward Planning: Set up a Climate and Nature Task Force to develop policy and actions to reduce CO₂e emissions, mitigate damage to global biodiversity and prepare for future climate instability. Review actions being undertaken by other councils and emulate good models. Action plans should have a longer time frame than 5 years.

3.2.3 Scrutiny: Set up effective scrutiny of the Council's operations and contracts. Be honest on progress against Camden's Climate Action Plan and any other climate or environmental targets or commitments, so that the Council can be held publicly accountable.

3.2.4 Transparency: Ensure transparency in all reporting

3.3 ACTIONS

3.3.1 Residents' involvement in decision-making

The initial 'citizens' assembly' process has ended, and the citizens' panel is not functioning. Camden should continue actively to engage its citizens. In partnership with existing community groups, Camden Council should create a genuine deliberative assembly for action in Camden to address the global crisis. In turn, the assembly would develop plans for immediate action on climate change mitigation, ecological regeneration and adaptation.

3.3.2 Combined action on the climate and ecological crises

Many of our suggested actions address both the climate and ecological crises, as they are inherently linked. Specifically, Climate Emergency Camden calls on Camden Council to do the following:

COMMUNICATION

- Implement a public information programme on the climate and ecological crises through the Camden Magazine, schools and community centres.
- Be honest about the seriousness of the current situation and the need to reduce CO₂e emissions in all areas. Many people still do not understand that climate and ecological crises are a threat to them, nor that their individual actions are as vital as those of government and business.
- Ensure all communications connect with issues of climate justice.

BOROUGH-WIDE ACTION

- Work in partnership with community groups across the Borough to take forward priorities, such as retrofit.
- Create a Camden Climate Centre, which should include:
 - o demonstration of materials and technologies used in retrofit
 - o a demonstration garden, showing how to plant for the future, including fruit and vegetables.
- Proactively engage with the public to inform them about opportunities for reuse and repair, as well as recycling.
- Expand repair workshops, integrated with re-use centres.
- Provide facilities for storing materials to be re-used locally, such as in the high street or on meanwhile sites, such as those affiliated with HS2.
- Provide full, easy to use recycling facilities on all housing estates.

COUNCIL PROCUREMENT

- Prioritise contractors who have true sustainability qualifications, including:
 - o contractors who use EVs and active transport wherever possible
 - o contractors who use local resources where possible.

- Ensure effective monitoring and enforcement of contract conditions.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

- Ensure effective monitoring and enforcement of planning policy.
- Prioritise policy development to address the climate and ecological crises.
- Minimise offsetting to achieve zero operational carbon and green space requirements, as such offsetting is ineffective. FOOD
- Prioritise local sources of agroecological food for Council canteens and school meals.
- Reduce meat in Council canteens and school meals and substitute attractive veg- based substitutes.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Engage with other North London Councils to ensure that the forthcoming Joint Waste Strategy commits the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) to:
 - o doing all it can to reduce waste and to manage the far smaller amount of waste at the highest level of the waste hierarchy.
 - o continuously and publicly updating data on waste collected and recycled, monitoring progress against targets and adjusting its approach and forecasts in line with the evidence.
- Scrutinise NLWA's plans to build a new incinerator.
- Scrutinise NLWA's decision not to install an advanced mixed-waste sorting facility in Edmonton to extract plastics and other recyclables from the waste stream prior to incineration.

3.3.3 Greenhouse gas emissions

The reduction of GHG emissions is critical if we are to have a chance of reducing the impact of climate breakdown. This should include emissions generated outside Camden (Scope 3 emissions) for the consumption of goods and services within Camden. Actions specifically focused on reduction of GHG emissions include:

NET-ZERO OBJECTIVES

- Produce a measurable plan for reaching net-zero for the Council's own estate. EDUCATION
- Provide Climate and Ecological Emergency training for all councillors and officers.
- Provide carbon literacy training for all councillors and officers working in planning.
- Provide courses for individuals who want to find out more.

COUNCIL'S OWN DEVELOPMENT

- Use low-carbon methods of construction in the Council's own development; avoid partnerships with developers who demand high-carbon construction.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

- Take proper account of the up-front emissions caused by construction when considering options.
- Prioritise refurbishment and retrofitting over demolition and rebuilding (this will result in lower GHG emissions).

- Discourage demolition of existing buildings unless they have defects that justify it.

CAMDEN CLIMATE FUND

- Overhaul the Camden Climate Fund to prioritise GHG emissions reduction.
- Incentivise carbon reductions through payments to individuals, for instance payment for giving up a car and free Car Club membership.
- Fund energy assessments for people who want to carry out works to insulate their homes and businesses and install low- and zero-carbon technologies.
- Make take-up of retrofit funding easier.
- Fund a loan scheme for heat cameras supported by guidance on how to interpret the results and options for remedies.

COUNCIL HOMES

- Publish a costed plan to decarbonise energy use in all Camden Council's housing stock.
- Maintain, insulate, and carry out energy efficiency programmes to 'retrofit' homes.
- Install low- and zero-carbon energy systems, including solar panels, heat pumps and community systems.
- Plan for transition to low- and zero-carbon energy (gas heating infrastructure is currently being renewed without planning for air source heat pumps).
- Stop installing gas boilers.
- Develop facilities such as the Holmes Road Depot to provide a well-resourced base for housing maintenance, repair, retrofit and training.
- Increase work carried out by the Council with direct labour.
- Increase apprenticeships and training opportunities for local people.
- Involve Camden's workforce and unions in development of the retrofit strategy for council homes.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Engage with the North London Waste Authority to insist on development of a revised waste strategy that avoids unnecessary burning of recyclable waste.
- Provide full recycling services on housing estates.
- Minimise incineration of biomass.

TRANSPORT

- Continue to prioritise improvements to support cycling, public transport and walking, whilst ensuring that local business is not harmed by lack of access to their premises.
- Provide more road space for car clubs.
- Reduce commuter traffic by reducing workspace parking spaces.
- Electrify the Council's entire fleet of vehicles.

4.3.4 Ecology and biodiversity

The biosphere – the total of all nature on this planet – is vital for the survival of humanity, but we are in the process of destroying it through harmful extraction processes and exploitation. These activities have an impact on many people living in areas of the world where minerals and other

resources are located. There are many ways in which Camden Council can reduce the environmental impact.

REDUCE IMPACT OF CONSUMPTION ON NATURE

- Review all council procurement and contracts.
- Continue Council commitment to Fairtrade and remain a Fairtrade Council.
- Prioritise retention and reuse of existing resources, including buildings, over new ones.

POLLUTION

- Radically reduce the use and availability of plastic.
- Stop the use of Glyphosate.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

- Plan for the implementation and delivery of joined-up wildlife corridors throughout Camden.
- Monitor the area of land with natural soft surface (in square metres); set and apply targets for all types of development. Increase targets for publicly accessible green space in new development.
- Require areas (square metres) of wildlife habitat provision for all types of development.
- Prohibit any net loss of natural soft surface. Protect existing greenspaces from development, including private gardens.
- Prohibit the development of outbuildings that would impact on trees and biodiversity in private gardens; reduce permitted development rights if necessary.
- Prohibit installation of impermeable paving in private gardens, including front gardens.
- Require hedges to be incorporated into all boundary treatments.

TREES

- Stop cutting down trees and building on green spaces.
- Rethink the precautionary pollarding strategy and reduce the frequency and extent of pollarding street trees.
- Require a higher standard of evidence before felling trees and removing vegetation at the behest of insurers.
- Increase watering of new street trees during warm dry weather
- Protect all trees in conservation areas in accordance with national guidance.
- In line with London Plan Policy G7, protect trees of value and define them as categories A, B and C
- Develop and publicise an inventory of veteran trees.
- Adopt Trees and Design Action Group 'Trees in the Townscape' best practice, for all types of development.

4.3.5 Adaptation

It is not known exactly how climate change will affect us directly here in Camden. However, indications are that systems that society is reliant upon will be compromised to some extent, including the economy, healthcare and food production. In addition, our physical environment will be subject to change, with increased heat and flooding. We need to be prepared to be able to work collaboratively across all communities in Camden, as during the Covid-19 pandemic, to address these challenges.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

- Carry out emergency planning of public services.
- Involve communities in planning for future resilience.
- Help people to grow their own food by providing land access and supplying materials, especially for allotments and community gardens.
- Reduce restrictions on the use of under-utilised housing land for food growing and other activities.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

- Provide community space and workspace in new developments to enable local economic and social activity.
- Prioritise development of infrastructure for distribution, including provision of logistical space in Camden.
- Consider priorities for energy use and distribution.
- Protect services like Global Generation, Castlehaven and The Calthorpe Project to support families in growing their own food.

REDUCING THE IMPACT OF INCREASED HEAT

- Retain mature trees for shading around buildings.
- Reduce planning restrictions on external shading on buildings.

REDUCING THE IMPACT OF INCREASED FLOODING

- Stop paving over existing green spaces, including private gardens.
- Use permeable paving for roadways and pavements.
- Provide significant rainwater retention infrastructure.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Protect green space for families and children to enjoy, as a means of enhancing mental health and wellbeing.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

- 'Twin' Camden with a place in the Global South and fundraise to support adaptation work.