



Hexham Town Council's Climate Emergency Vision

Introduction

In June 2021 Hexham Town Council declared a climate and biodiversity emergency and committed to becoming a net zero carbon town by 2030. In 2019 Northumberland County Council also declared a climate emergency and shares the same goal of net zero by 2030.

Background

Although our senses cannot always easily detect the pollution, our world is being contaminated by more and more carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and other "greenhouse gasses". These form a heavy blanket forcing the temperature of the Earth to rise. Hexham contributes to that over-heating. Figures from Exeter University and its Climate Impact Tool show that Hexham puts over 88,000 tonnes of CO₂e (the internationally agreed equivalent measure of all the different greenhouse gasses) into the atmosphere each year.

Climate scientists tell us that an Earth-average rise of over 1.5 degrees Centigrade (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels will create huge changes which will affect the way we live here in Hexham.

The Earth's over-heating will create more severe heatwaves, more dangerously strong winds and more periods of torrential rain and flooding. Some of the birds, animals, plants and insects we are used to seeing will not be able to cope and will disappear. As the temperature rises we can expect pressure on those areas of the Earth where food is grown. More deserts will be created. We can expect food shortages and price rises. As temperatures rise and the ice caps melt we can expect the sea level to rise putting coastal populations at risk, increasing

migration and the numbers of environmental refugees. In our area, towns and villages along the Tyne may be more prone to flooding. Our infrastructure, especially the sewage system, bridges and flood defences will be put under stress.

In Hexham we have seen abnormal heatwave temperatures of 40 ° C in 2023, flooding causing landslides preventing the operation of the Newcastle to Carlisle railway line, fires on the moors on Allendale and storm Arwen disrupting power across the whole of Northumberland. Even our neighbouring county, Cumbria, the wettest place in England is looking at implementing drought measures in 2023.

Therefore we have a choice. We can continue as we are and allow the global temperatures to spiral upwards and have the resultant drastic lifestyle changes forced upon us or we can determine to make less severe changes now so that we avoid the more extreme and painful ones climate change will impose upon us.

Northumberland County Council and Hexham Town Council believe in acting now to reduce the climate impacts which are coming and which will affect us, our children and our grandchildren. To do this we need to reduce our production of CO2e and the Town Council wishes to take a lead in this.

As a council, we will do everything we can to reduce the carbon footprint of the work of the council and we will work with all partners necessary to encourage and enable the people and businesses of the town to also reduce their carbon output. If the necessary steps are taken and we make the required lifestyle changes, what would Hexham be like in 2030?

The vision for 2030

Our vision for 2030 is of a resilient, healthy, connected community. This is what Hexham needs to look like in 2030 to reach net zero emissions.

- A network of safe, accessible cycle & walking routes
- A sharing town with sharing hubs and libraries of 'things'
- Community growing areas
- Homes and businesses connected to affordable and renewable heating and increase use of solar panels and other sustainable systems
- Open spaces in Hexham used to encourage biodiversity

A network of safe, accessible walking and cycling routes means that active travel is the norm, for the majority of local trips. This has had a huge impact on health and wellbeing. Air pollution has been slashed, reducing health impacts such as asthma and lung cancer. Active lifestyles have helped to reduce the risk of major illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes

and cancer by up to 50%, lowering risk of early death by up to 30% (1). Electric vehicles, bikes and rickshaws are used for longer journeys and deliveries and affordable shared transportation has meant traffic and congestion have significantly reduced, making streets safer for active travel, outdoor pursuits and easier for communities to connect. Along with health benefits commuters switching from car to bike are saving around £3000 a year (2). The need to travel has also reduced through local employment, home working, teleconferencing, local facilities, services and sourcing and 'staycations' (3).

Hexham has become a sharing town. Neighbourhood sharing hubs mean that instead of buying an electric drill, used on average for only thirteen minutes in its lifetime, communities share resources as and when they need them, through a "Library of things". This has slashed emissions, reduced waste due to initiatives such as repair cafes, reduced inequality and created new neighbourhood connections including other initiatives to reduce waste, such as repair cafes.

Most people grow food in community growing areas in schools, allotments and other green spaces. This has increased the amount of plant protein people are eating, significantly reducing emissions (4) and boosting health (5). Food waste has also been almost eliminated. Local, more sustainable sourcing has reduced the amount of food wasted by farming and retail, and food waste at home has reduced through increased awareness and food planning. This is likely to have saved residents in the region of £600-£800 a year.

Hexham's energy landscape has changed by working with Northumberland County Council, community groups and organisations in the public and private sector. Energy bills have also been reduced and fuel poverty has been eliminated, making the need for Warm Rooms and log banks obsolete in town. Homes and buildings are significantly cheaper to power and heat as they are well insulated. Homes and businesses use LED lighting and efficient appliances which are designed to last and be repaired. Homes and businesses are connected to affordable renewable heat and new district heating networks have been developed. Most buildings have solar panels on them providing free or significantly discounted electricity. A number of wind turbines, mainly community owned, solar farms and other clean energy sources ensure that the town has net zero carbon for energy generation, and provide major funding back to the town for further carbon reduction and community projects.

People have a stronger connection with nature and regularly spend time in local green spaces, meadows and woodlands. Open spaces in Hexham are used to encourage biodiversity and active carbon removal is thriving due to well connected woodlands, fields, meadows, and local low impact food production, all managed by the community. This has also helped to boost wellbeing.

To achieve the vision Hexham Town Council is committed to supporting the town to develop an even greater self-sustaining and climate resilient community as part of the Town Council's aim of reaching net zero by 2030.

- 1 <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-health-benefits/>
- 2 <https://www.cyclescheme.co.uk/community/featured/how-much-money-does-cycling-save-you>
- 3 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staycation>
- 4 <https://www.drawdown.org/solutions/food/plant-rich-diet>
- 5 <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/why-5-a-day/> 2 community owned, wind turbines ensure
- 6 Humshaugh solar PV project <https://www.humshaughnetzero.org/pv-project> (1 MW installation capable of supporting 150 households)