



October 2023
V8

From Aspiration to Action

An updated Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan for Camden Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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, including more focus on adapting to the unavoidable effects of climate breakdown.

We explain why Camden Council is not taking sufficiently urgent action in the face of the climate and ecological crises, and make recommendations for meaningful action based on the following objectives:

- 1) **Mitigation of climate breakdown through the minimisation of greenhouse gas emissions**, including consumption emissions typically generated outside the Borough of Camden.
- 2) **Regeneration of ecological systems**, both in Camden and globally.
- 3) **Adaptation to a more precarious present and future.**

We believe that actions by Camden Council should be guided by an approach that incorporates the following key elements:

- Cross-party action
- Collaboration
- Forward Planning
- Scrutiny and transparency
- Residents' involvement in decision-making.

The individual actions listed are illustrative of the type of strategic planning that we think is necessary to be implemented at a local level, and are split four sections:

- Combined action on the climate and ecological crises
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Nature and biodiversity
- Adaptation and resilience.

1 The context

1.1 Industrial civilisation has caused irreversible climate change. Actions by governments fall far short of fulfilling the Paris Agreement objective of keeping related global warming below 2°C. Our chance to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all is disappearing. Climate breakdown is starting to affect us directly via extreme heat events, flash floods, inflation, supply-chain problems and loss of eco-services such as soil quality.

1.2 Effective action to transition to 'net zero' is thwarted by near-universal commitment to maximising growth. Global energy use is forecast to rise by 50% between 2020 to 2050 as a result, with no realistic prospect of 'decarbonising' the global energy system in the meantime.

1.3 Camden Council maintains a strong commitment to economic growth in the Local Plan without evidence of achievable "de-coupling" to justify it.

1.4 An immediate focus on adaptation is essential to enable Individuals, businesses and local government to cope with possible extreme heat, flooding and collapse of food and other global systems on which we rely.

2 Camden Council's role

2.1 Local authorities are left to their own devices although their actions are critical to the UK's ability to mitigate climate breakdown. Approaches vary in effectiveness.

2.2 Climate Emergency Camden pointed out the shortcomings of Camden's 2020 citizen engagement process that led to publication of the Climate Action Plan 2020-25:

- it was not a true 'citizens' assembly'
- it did not cover all the issues fully
- the actions chosen were non-strategic.

Council officers have admitted that the Climate Action Plan is a tool for community engagement, not a net-zero or decarbonisation plan.

2.3 The Climate Action Plan limits consideration to emissions inside the Borough and overstates the Council's role in reducing them (progressive decarbonisation of the national grid explains the emissions improvements).

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. The fund results from failure of developers to meet their operational carbon targets on site, allowing them to pay a fee instead. Since 2016 Camden's fund has collected £4.4m enabling developers to 'offset' nearly 60,000 tonnes of carbon. According to Camden's review of its Climate Action Plan, payments made from the fund resulted in only 213

tonnes saved in 2020–21, and 157 tonnes saved in 2021–22. There is a lack of transparency in the operation and effectiveness of the fund.

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 Council has been dallying with a few "pilot" retrofit projects for several years. How scaling up to retrofit all Camden-owned homes will happen remains unclear.

2.8 There is no reporting on embodied carbon resulting from the Council's own operations e.g. construction work on public highways. The Council committed to formulating a way to deal with emissions caused outside the Borough's boundaries but has failed to do so.

2.9 The Council's planning department, guided by the Local Plan, promotes growth that is inextricably linked to increased fossil fuel consumption. Commitment to growth means bigger buildings on the sites of smaller demolished ones. The planning department permits demolition of existing buildings without considering up-front GHG emissions or refurbishment options. Camden Council is currently revising its Local Plan, which provides a golden opportunity to embed stronger measures to tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

2.10 The proposed Biodiversity Strategy and Tree Planting Strategy are weak and not sufficiently ambitious.

2.11 The Council 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.

2.12 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. 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.

2.13 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.

3 OBJECTIVES

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

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.

Regeneration of ecological systems, both in Camden and globally.

Adaptation to a more precarious present and future, in collaboration with everyone in Camden, other boroughs and the GLA.

4 APPROACH

To achieve these objectives Camden Council should pursue the following:

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

Collaboration: Work with other London boroughs and the GLA to ensure systems-wide transformation is coherent, including strategies for energy, transport, housing, infrastructure and skills.

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.

Scrutiny and transparency: 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.

Residents' involvement in decision-making: The initial 'citizens' assembly' process has ended, and the citizens' panel is not functioning. The Council should continue to actively 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.

5 UPDATED ACTIONS

5.1 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.
- Connect communications on the Climate and Ecological Emergency with social justice.

BOROUGH-WIDE COMMUNITY ACTION

- Work in partnership with community groups across the Borough to take forward priorities such as retrofit, re-use, repair and other carbon reduction measures.
- Create Climate Resilience Centres, including:
 - demonstration of materials and technologies used in retrofit
 - a garden showing how to plant fruit and vegetables for future conditions
 - repair and re-use workshops.

COUNCIL PROCUREMENT

- Prioritise contractors who have true sustainability credentials by revising 'social value' criteria to increase scores for meaningful actions on the climate and ecological crises.
- Ensure effective monitoring and enforcement of contract conditions.
- Prioritise local sources of agroecological food for Council canteens and school meals; Reduce meat and substitute attractive veg-based substitutes.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

- Prioritise policy development to address the climate and ecological crises.
- Ensure effective monitoring and enforcement of planning policy.
- Resist property developers' narratives which tend to operate against the best interest of people, climate and biodiversity.
- Minimise offsetting to achieve zero operational carbon and green space requirements, as such offsetting is ineffective.

WASTE AND MATERIAL MANAGEMENT

- Engage with other North London Councils to ensure that the forthcoming Joint Waste Strategy commits the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) to:
 - doing all it can to reduce waste and to manage the far smaller amount of waste at the highest level of the waste hierarchy.

- 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.
- Provide full and easy-to-use recycling facilities for all businesses, housing estates, homes, streets and public spaces.
- Provide facilities for storing materials for re-use, including building materials.

5.2 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:

LOW CARBON OBJECTIVES

- Produce a measurable plan for reducing GHG emissions from the Council's own estate.
- Publish details of the Council's energy consumption monthly (fuels in litres, gas in m3 and electricity in mWh). Data should be published in disaggregated form, so that people can see where the greatest reductions are taking place and where reductions are proving more difficult.

EDUCATION

- Provide carbon literacy training for all councillors and officers.
- Provide courses for individuals who want to find out more.
- Provide information for housing estate residents about the environmental benefits of refurbishment and retrofit.
- Provide on construction skills apprentices with the information and knowledge to understand the importance of the work that they can do in retrofit and refurbishment.

COUNCIL'S OWN DEVELOPMENT

- Use low-carbon methods of construction in the Council's own development and avoid partnerships with developers who demand high-carbon construction.
- Halt use of development finance models that depend on construction of private homes for sale, as these do not address local housing need and result in unnecessary GHG emissions.

TOWN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

- Reorientate planning policy towards improving existing resources and places.
- Develop a planning narrative which focuses on quality of life rather than consumption or opportunities for conspicuous consumption (such as Camden Market).
- Advocate town planning on a regional basis: together with London Councils and the GLA, argue for development of the urban periphery and new settlements or 'new towns', built according to strict sustainability principles.
- Take full and proper account of the up-front emissions caused by construction when determining planning applications:
 - prioritise refurbishment and retrofitting over demolition and rebuilding (as this will result in lower GHG emissions).
 - Do not approve applications for the demolition of existing buildings unless they have defects that justify it.

- Promote retrofit measures in conservation areas by updating planning policy and guidance and carrying out audits of CAs to identify achievable retrofit measures.

CAMDEN CLIMATE FUND

- Reform the Camden Climate Fund to prioritise GHG emissions reduction as required by the London Mayor.
- 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, comprising of:
 - an ambitious but realistic plan for the next 5 years
 - a developed, strategic plan for all remaining council homes, ready to be implemented as soon as future funding becomes available.
- Maintain and repair council buildings to enable future retrofit works.
- Plan for transition to low- and zero-carbon energy and stop installing gas boilers.
- Gear up for retrofitting by:
 - developing facilities such as the Holmes Road Depot to provide a well-resourced base for housing maintenance, repair, retrofit and training, including:
 - increasing the Council's direct labour force.
 - increasing the number of apprenticeships and training opportunities for local people.
 - involving the Council's workforce and unions in development of the retrofit strategy for council homes.

INCINERATION

- Engage with the North London Waste Authority to develop a revised waste strategy that avoids unnecessary burning of recyclable waste.
- Minimise incineration of biomass, such that resulting from over-pollarding trees.

TRANSPORT

- Provide more road space for car clubs at low cost.
- Reduce commuter traffic by reducing workspace parking spaces.
- Electrify the whole of the Council's fleet of vehicles.

5.3 NATURE 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, deforestation, pollution, industrialised agriculture and other forms of exploitation. These activities have an impact on nature and people around the globe, including within the UK. There are many ways in which Camden Council can reduce the environmental impact and begin to restore nature, both globally and within the Borough:

REDUCE IMPACT OF CONSUMPTION ON THE BIOSPHERE

- Prioritise retention and reuse of existing resources - including buildings - over the procurement of new ones, to reduce harmful extraction processes globally.
- Review all council procurement and contracts to ensure the highest environmental standards for sustainable resourcing and human rights.
- Adopt the Doughnut Economics model for living within planetary boundaries to guide procurement and development.

REDUCE POLLUTION IN CAMDEN

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

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

- Require all development to include GLA Urban Greening Factor guidance as fundamental element of site and building design and deliver high-scoring proposals commensurate with a genuine Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Build on Camden's commitment to Nature Recovery Networks by creating, improving and connecting Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation, and ensuring that new development clearly contributes to these Networks.
- Protect existing greenspaces from development, including private gardens.
- Require that any proposal from homeowners to reduce natural surfaces or vegetation, by paving, artificial grass or buildings, be subject to planning permission (Article 4).
- Require householder development applications to comply with Urban Greening Factor and Biodiversity Net Gain guidance and principles.
- Monitor the area of land with natural surface (in square metres); set and apply targets for all types of development
- Require areas (square metres) of wildlife habitat provision for all types of development.

TREES

- Stop cutting down mature trees that are in good health.
- Require a higher standard of evidence before felling trees and removing vegetation at the behest of insurers.
- Rethink the precautionary pollarding strategy and reduce frequency and extent.
- Increase watering of new street trees during warm dry weather.
- Replace street trees that have died promptly.
- 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.

GREEN SPACE

- Change management of public green spaces including pavement borders to replace 50% of lawns with wildflower meadows and native vegetation.
- Encourage wildflower plantings around street trees.

5.4 ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE

It is not known how climate change will affect us directly here in Camden. However, indications are that systems which society is reliant upon will be compromised, including the

economy, healthcare, and food production. This will add to the pressures already being experienced due to the cost-of-living crisis. In addition, our environment will be subject to change. 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:

TOWN PLANNING

- Question the commitment to further economic consolidation in London's central area, which results in stress on the workforce and residents.
- Halt the drive towards densification which results in tall buildings which will be vulnerable to climate breakdown (expensive to maintain and dependent on complex systems).
- Prioritise affordable housing for existing populations over homes for sale that result in increased numbers of people moving to inner London, resulting in stress on existing physical and social infrastructures.
- Consider the effects of transient populations e.g. tourists and short-term workforce, and whether Camden is excessively adapted towards them.
- Protect green space for families and children to enjoy, as a means of enhancing mental health and wellbeing.
- Increase targets for publicly accessible green space in new development.

HOUSING

- Prioritise the construction of new council homes.
- Maintain council homes in a good state of repair with functioning ventilation to address issues of condensation and mould.
- Aim for simplified construction systems which can be connected easily to localised labour.
- Ensure private landlords are held to building performance and safety standards.
- Bring empty homes, both social and private, into use as quickly as possible.
- Develop housing typology database with design relevant data about:
 - long term performance and robustness of different building types
 - their social value
 - their capacity to sustain and accommodate change and adaptation.
- Enable alternative pathways to social rent-type housing e.g. Central European BauGruppe model.
- Provide strategic review of remaining land-resources which goes beyond current approach

PLANNING AND LOGISTICS

- Set out the challenge to supply chains from extreme weather events and the long-term implications for national life. Recognise the need to secure supply chains, to onshore food production capacity and to lessen impediments to trade and policymaking with the EU.
- Work with GLA, voluntary sector and other boroughs to loosen grip of the corporate grocers by supporting diversification of the grocery sector and its supply chains.
- Explore projects that address the vulnerability of:
 - power supplies: including local resources to support maintenance
 - food distribution: food security and storage capacity (cold storage)
 - storage and freight: increase strategic public capacity with less reliance on private sector "black box" systems.
- Carry out emergency planning of public services.

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

- Help people to grow their own food in a strategic way by:
 - creating more allotment space in Camden, including on Housing land
 - supplying materials for allotments and community gardens.

- protecting services like Global Generation, Castlehaven and The Calthorpe Project to support families in growing their own food.
- enabling professionally run food cooperatives.
- Provide community space and workspace in new developments to enable local economic and social activity.
- Use zoning and land-use designation to deliberately undermine speculative land-value appreciation
- Advocate for revenue generation from waste streams and outline schemes that communities can pursue.

REDUCE THE IMPACT OF EXTREME WEATHER

- Explore projects to reduce impact of flash flooding and heat events.
- Provide significant rainwater retention infrastructure.
- Restrict replacement of natural surfaces where this leads to increased risk of runoff and flooding and reduces soil quality.
- Preferentially manage SuDS risks, e.g. with road drainage, through biodiversity-enhancing solutions, including swales and raingardens.
- Use permeable paving for roadways and pavements.
- Retain mature trees for shading around buildings and in streets.
- Reduce planning restrictions on external shading on buildings.
- Seek robust design solutions in new housing to challenge of extreme heat.

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

- Continue Council commitment to Fairtrade and remain a Fairtrade Council.