

Council Plan for the Forest of Dean District Council 2024-2028

Responding to the Climate and Nature Emergency

Overarching Principle: We strive to meet the needs of the Forest of Dean while taking into account the needs of the Forest's future generations.

Introduction

This plan is our local response to the worldwide climate and nature emergency. We aim to do everything in the most environmentally sustainable manner possible.

The plan will help us outline a path to creating thriving communities, decarbonising, protecting nature and fostering a sustainable local economy.

Rooted in the principles of maximising social value, resident participation, financial sustainability, and value for money, it is a comprehensive plan to address the need for urgent action.

Embodying the values of engagement, inclusion, kindness, this plan aims to mitigate the impacts of climate breakdown and the collapse of nature, and to transform our district into a model of environmental stewardship and community resilience.

Priority 1: Thriving Communities

Objective: To foster resilient and inclusive communities that are motivated and competent to adapt to the challenges and opportunities posed by the climate and nature emergencies.

Strategies:

1. **Community Empowerment:** Encourage partnership and community-led initiatives that promote community cohesion, sustainable living, biodiversity, and environmental education. Where funding permits to provide resources, training, and support to empower people to co-create initiatives and take active roles in climate action.
2. **Communication and Engagement:** Target our resources to build full resident appreciation of the enormity of the climate and nature emergency. This will include the understanding that only radical solution options remain to us and the catastrophic consequences of inaction. This will be delivered through an ongoing programme of biodiversity or climate-related items for local press, social and other media.
3. **Infrastructure:** Secure investment in green spaces and sustainable, affordable housing, with active travel infrastructure to enhance the quality of life. Champion a better digital infrastructure and foster partnerships with local businesses and organisations to develop local projects such as community food production, biodiversity enhancement, property insulation and retrofit.

4. **Social Equity:** Prioritise vulnerable and marginalised communities in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. Ensure that access to resources, information, and opportunities is equitable; and addresses specific needs. Seek to ensure that the *polluter pays principle* applies and obtains climate justice throughout the Forest.

5. **Community Well-being:** Encourage resilient, well connected and active communities that take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. Help facilitate access to leisure and cultural activities to promote fun and healthy lifestyles for all ages.

Priority 2: Decarbonisation and nature recovery

Objective: For the Forest of Dean to have a protected and enhanced natural environment, and be on target to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Strategies:

1. **Renewable Energy Transition:** To encourage investment in renewable energy projects such as wind, solar, hydroelectric power, and battery storage. Collaborate with energy providers, social landlords, businesses, and communities to accelerate the transition to clean energy sources, with the overall aim of making the Forest energy self-sufficient.
2. **Energy Efficiency:** Implement energy-efficient practices across public facilities, businesses, and households. To adopt a fabric-first policy and where possible to provide incentives, education and training to encourage the adoption of energy-efficient technologies, leading to reduced consumption, household bills and emissions. To encourage retrofitting of insulation to older properties and those with poor EPCs.
3. **Transportation Transformation:** Promote public transport, cycling, and walking by improving infrastructure and offering incentives for eco-friendly commuting. Support the electrification of public transport and promote the adoption of electric vehicles by expanding charging infrastructure. Encourage the reduction of commuter travel via remote working where appropriate.
4. **Food Resilience:** Through working with the local farming community and other stakeholders, encourage the expansion of local food production for local consumption. Develop and provide opportunities for residents to learn food growing skills, identifying sites for individual and community gardens as required.
5. **Nature Recovery:** Protect and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment, including our rivers. This will include the investigation of opportunities for rewilding where appropriate.

Priority 3: Sustainable Economy

Objective: To foster economic prosperity while ensuring environmental sustainability and social well-being.

Strategies:

1. **Circular Economy:** Promote the circular economy by encouraging reduction of waste, recycling, reuse and composting where these activities make good carbon sense. Work with local businesses and industry to keep as much of the value generated by local production and retail within the Forest.
2. **Business Support:** Provide financial incentives, grants, and technical assistance to businesses, especially those adopting eco-friendly practices. Foster a supportive environment for sustainable start-ups and enterprises that aim to create employment opportunities while preserving the natural environment. Support business endeavours to improve energy efficiency and transition to renewable energy.
3. **Workforce Skills:** Work with Hartpury University, schools, colleges and training centres to help develop a skilled Forest workforce.
4. **Natural Capital Preservation:** To continue to explore the best ways of reconciling the protection of biodiversity with its sustainable use. Partner with conservation organisations, researchers and local communities to safeguard natural capital, ensuring the long-term sustainability of our environment and economy.
5. **Sustainable Towns:** Promote the climate and nature emergency resilience of the Forest towns.

Underlying Principles**To maximise:**

1. **Social Value:** Every decision and initiative will be evaluated based on its potential to maximise social benefits and improve the well-being of our residents.
2. **Public Engagement:** Actively work with people who live in the Forest, encouraging participation through public meetings, surveys, and community fora to ensure all voices are heard and form part of the decision-making process.
3. **Value for Money:** Implement cost-effective solutions and responsible financial management, ensuring that resources are utilised efficiently to achieve the desired outcomes. Our aim will be to achieve and demonstrate organisational excellence.
4. **Financial Sustainability:** Strive for financial stability by exploring innovative funding mechanisms, grants, and partnerships to support the implementation of climate and nature emergency initiatives without compromising the council's fiscal health.

Our **core council values: Engagement, Inclusion, Kindness**

Engagement will foster a sense of community ownership, encouraging active participation and collaboration.

Inclusion will guide our efforts to address the needs of all people in the Forest, ensuring no one is left behind in our pursuit of a sustainable future.

Kindness will permeate our interactions, creating a supportive and empathetic environment where everyone is valued and respected. The well-being of council staff is a key priority.

Conclusion

This plan for the Forest of Dean District Council is more than simply a strategy document; it is a commitment to the people who live here, to our natural environment and to future generations.

This plan will be implemented and monitored through a regularly-updated delivery plan that is incorporated into our Performance Management Framework.