This Report will be made public on 23 February 2026

Report Number: **OS/25/15**

To:	**Overview & Scrutiny Committee**
Date:	**3 March 2026**
Status:	**Non key**
Responsible Officer:	**Ewan Green, Director – Strategy & Resources**
Cabinet Member:	**Councillor Stephen Scoffham, Cabinet Member for Climate, Environment and Biodiversity**

SUBJECT: **REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S CARBON REDUCTION AND ECOLOGICAL WORK**

SUMMARY: This report provides an overview of the council's carbon reduction and ecological work, responding to the areas of focus set out in the Overview & Scrutiny work programme 2025/26.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report OS/25/15.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 This report provides an update to Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) on the council's climate change and biodiversity activities. The report follows an update report provided to OSC on 19 November 2024 (ref: OS/24/09).

1.2 This report follows the areas of focus set out in the OSC work programme 2025/26:

> *"It would be helpful to demonstrate how carbon reduction in the district has progressed over time.*
>
> *As government policy continues to shift what are the plans in relation to nuclear energy?*
>
> *We would also welcome an assessment of how our local commitments to carbon reduction compare with current national standards and the approaches adopted by neighbouring councils.*
>
> *How is the council contributing to biodiversity recovery for example through rewilding, tree planting, pollinator corridors, and strategic use of land, particularly in alignment with Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations?*
>
> *To what extent are biodiversity net gain principles and low-carbon design being embedded into local planning decisions and development approvals?*
>
> *How are residents, landowners, and businesses being mobilised to support sustainability goals through education, incentives, or collaborative projects?"*

2. CARBON REDUCTION IN THE DISTRICT

2.1 The Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ) publishes estimated data for greenhouse gas emissions at national, regional, county and local authority level.

2.2 There are different sets of data, including:

- A full set of greenhouse gas emissions (set out in DESNZ Table 1.1), as well as a breakdown of emissions per capita.
- A subset of the data (set out in DESNZ Table 2.1) that the deparment labels as *'emissions within the scope of influence of local authorities'* - these figures exclude large industrial sites, railways, motorways, land-use, livestock and soils. This data set also includes a breakdown of emissions per capita.

2.3 These datasets cover emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4) and nitrous oxide (N_2O) going back to 2005; before 2005 figures record carbon dioxide emissions only. Figures are published two years in arrears, so the latest publication (July 2025) includes emissions for the years 2005 to 2023.

Emissions within the scope of influence of local authorities – total emissions

2.4 Within the 'influence of local authorities' subset, figures are reported in kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (kt CO_2e) across a range of sectors including industrial, commercial, public sector, domestic, road transport, agriculture and waste.

2.5 This subset shows that total greenhouse gas emissions in Kent have decreased by 46 per cent over the 19-year period (2005 to 2023), a more marked reduction than for the South East of England (43 per cent) or England (43 per cent).

2.6 For the individual authorities within Kent, decreases range from 36 to 55 per cent.

2.7 For Folkestone & Hythe district, emissions have fallen by the highest proportion to the lowest total, by 55 per cent from 736.2 kt CO_2e in 2005 to 334.3 kt CO_2e in 2023 (see Figure 1).

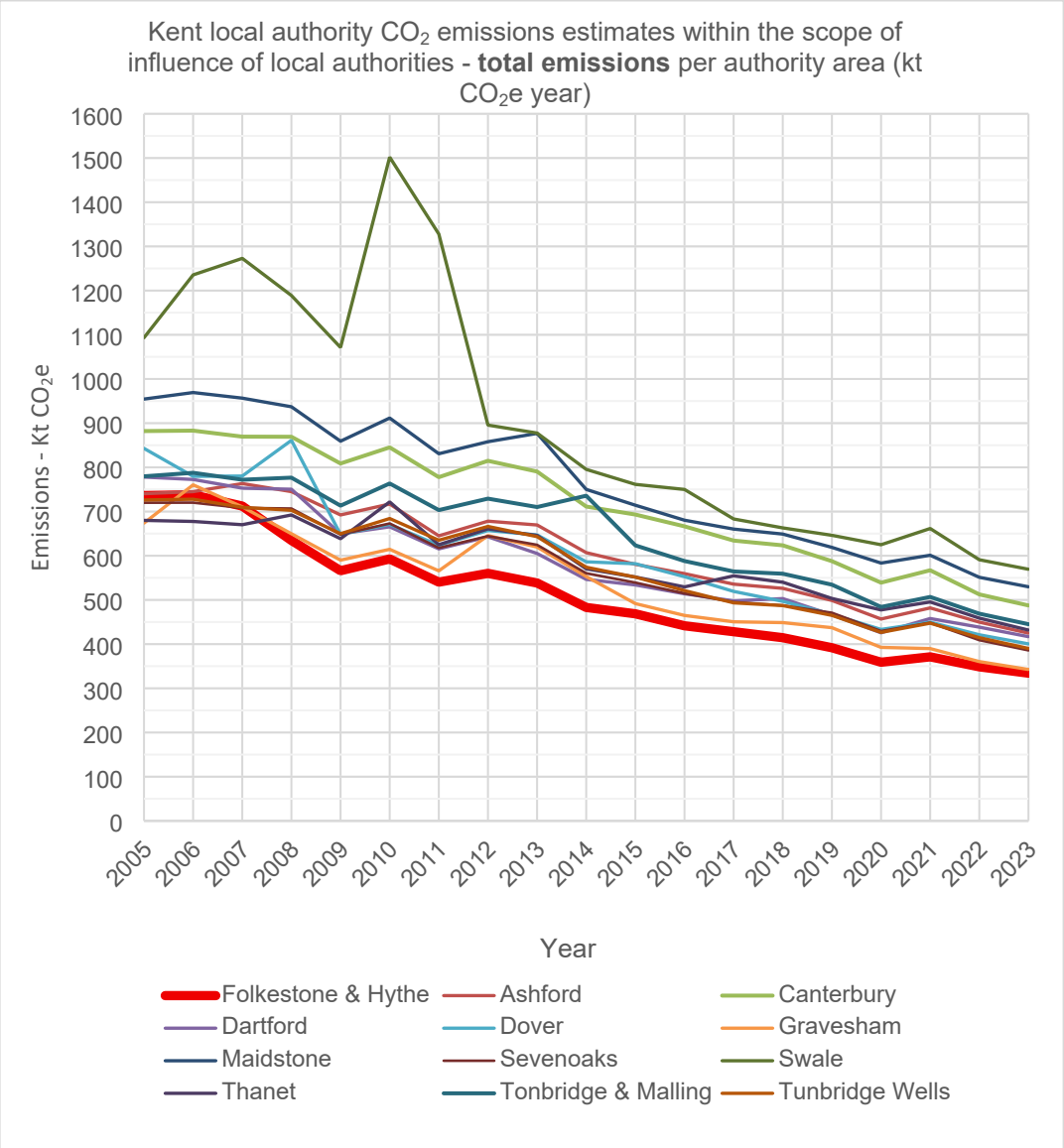

Figure 1: Kent local authority area CO_2 emissions estimates within the scope of influence of local authorities - total emissions (kt CO_2e year) (DESNZ data tables)

Emissions within the scope of influence of local authorities – per capita emissions

2.8 The 'influence of local authorities' subset also include per capita greenhouse gas emissions, taking account of population changes over the 19 years of the reporting period. Per capita greenhouse gas emissions show broadly similar patterns to the total figures but with faster reductions.

2.9 Per capita greenhouse gas emissions have fallen across Kent by around 54 per cent. All Kent local authorities have experienced a decrease in per capita emissions, with decreases ranging from 42 per cent to 59 per cent. Folkestone & Hythe and Dartford have experienced the highest rates of per capita decrease (59 per cent). By 2023, Folkestone & Hythe had the second lowest greenhouse gas emissions per capita (3.0 tCO_2e), with Maidstone having the lowest per capita emissions (2.9 tCO_2e) (see Figure 2).

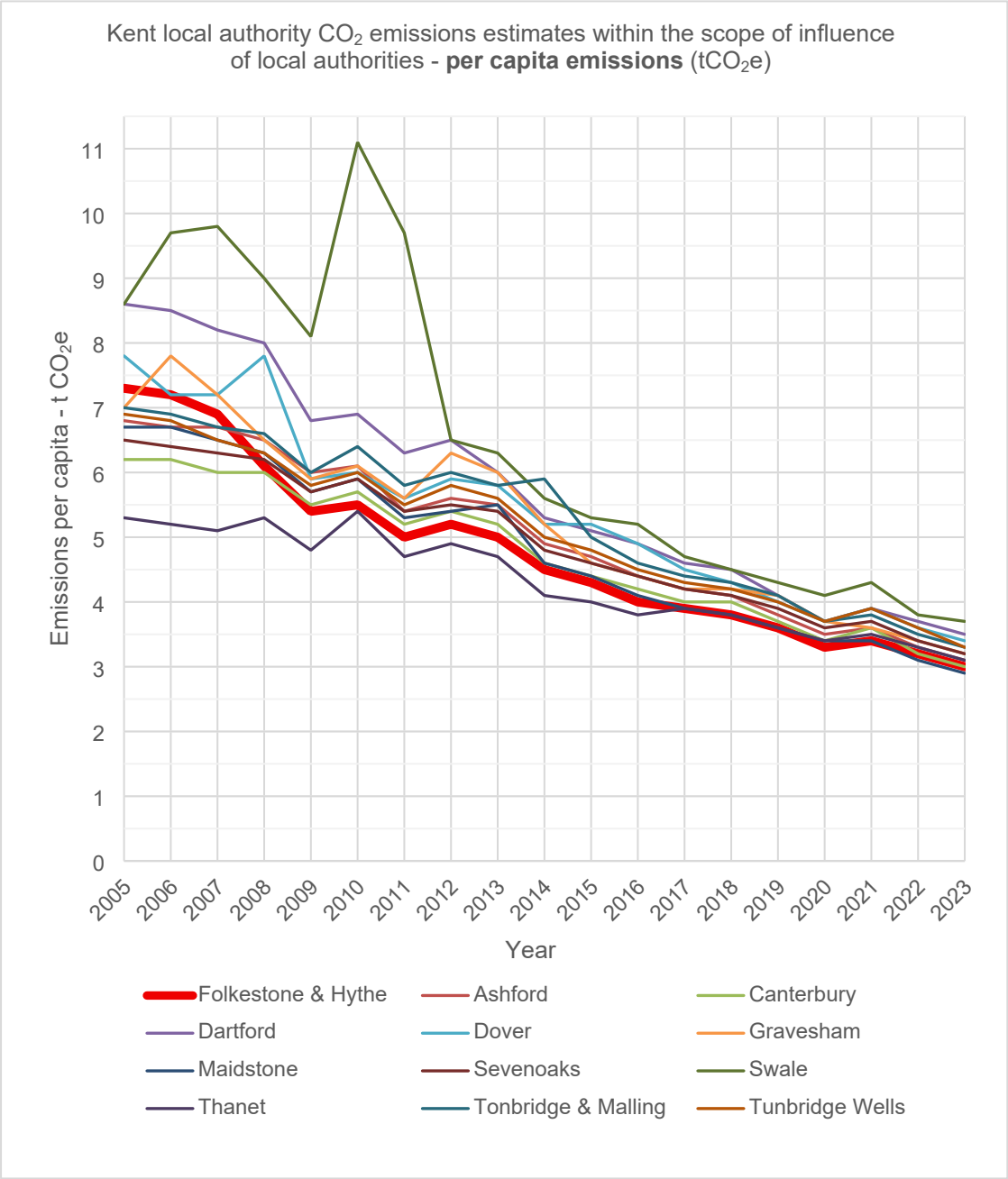

Figure 2: Kent local authority area CO_2 emissions estimates within the scope of influence of local authorities – per capita emissions (tCO_2e year) (DESNZ data tables)

Full dataset of greenhouse gas emissions – total emissions

2.10 As noted, DESNZ publishes a full dataset of greenhouse gas emissions alongside the subset of figures 'within the scope of influence of local authorities'.

2.11 The full dataset includes sources of emissions that are not recorded in the local authority subset: large industrial sites, railways, motorways, land-use, livestock and soils. The full dataset shows different patterns from the local authority subset, although emissions have also fallen significantly over the 2005 to 2023 reporting period.

2.12 It should be noted that the full dataset reflects the presence or absence of large industrial facilities, railways or motorways within a local authority's administrative area, not the use of those facilities by a local authority's residents. For example, some Kent authorities (Canterbury, Dover, Thanet and Tunbridge Wells) record zero emissions for motorways, whereas those authorities with motorways that pass through their areas (Ashford, Dartford, Folkestone & Hythe, Gravesham, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Swale and Tonbridge & Malling) record emissions of tens or hundreds of thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide from this source.

2.13 The full dataset shows that Kent emissions have fallen by 50 per cent over the period 2005 to 2023, a faster rate than within South East of England or England as a whole (see Table 1 below).

2.14 The Kent local authorities with the greatest reductions in emissions are Gravesham (78 per cent) and Tonbridge & Malling (60 per cent). For Gravesham and Tonbridge this seems to be largely the result of decreases in the 'large industrial installations' category; this presumably reflects the decarbonisation or closure of major industrial operations. In general, emissions from the other additional sources included in the full dataset (motorways, railways, land use, livestock and soils) have decreased only marginally over the 19-year period or emit negligible amounts of greenhouse gases.

2.15 For the individual Kent authorities, emissions have fallen by rates between 78 and 37 per cent. Total emissions within Folkestone & Hythe district have fallen by 49 per cent, within the upper range of reductions for the Kent districts.

Area	Total emissions 2005 (kt CO_2e)	Total emissions 2023 (kt CO_2e)	Total percentage reduction in emissions (2005-2023)
Country / region			
Kent	14,511.1	7,305.9	50%
SE England	75,617.3	38,963.8	48%

Area	Total emissions 2005 (kt CO_2e)	Total emissions 2023 (kt CO_2e)	Total percentage reduction in emissions (2005-2023)
England	510,070.2	275,589.3	46%
Kent local authorities			
Gravesham	1,792.0	397.5	78%
Tonbridge & Malling	1,855.9	745.0	60%
Dover	986.0	485.4	51%
Folkestone & Hythe	**928.4**	**471.2**	**49%**
Swale	1,923.2	1,024.9	47%
Tunbridge Wells	803.0	422.8	47%
Canterbury	993.0	540.2	46%
Maidstone	1,269.2	758.4	40%
Ashford	992.0	606.9	39%
Sevenoaks	1,179.0	727.7	38%
Thanet	783.8	497.0	37%
Dartford	1,005.7	628.9	37%

Table 1: Kent local authority area CO_2 emissions – full dataset, totals per area ($ktCO_2e$ year) – ordered by percentage reduction from highest to lowest (DESNZ data tables)

Full dataset of greenhouse gas emissions – per capita emissions

2.16 The full dataset also features a per capita breakdown. This dataset follows a broadly similar pattern to the total emissions, with greater falls in Kent than in the wider country (see Table 2 below).

2.17 For the Kent local authorities, per capita emissions have fallen in a range from 80 to 43 per cent. The highest falls have been in Gravesham (80 per cent), Tonbridge & Malling (67 per cent) and Swale (56 per cent).

2.18 Per capita emissions in Folkestone & Hythe district have fallen by 54 per cent over the period (from 9.1 tCO_2e in 2005 to 4.2 tCO_2e in 2023), within the mid-range of reductions for the Kent local authorities.

Area	Per capita emissions 2005 (tCO_2e)	Per capita emissions 2023 (tCO_2e)	Percentage reduction in per capita emissions (2005-2023)
Country / region			
Kent	10.6	4.5	57%
SE England	9.2	4.1	55%
England	10.1	4.8	52%
Kent local authorities			
Gravesham	18.5	3.7	80%

Area	Per capita emissions 2005 (tCO_2e)	Per capita emissions 2023 (tCO_2e)	Percentage reduction in per capita emissions (2005-2023)
Tonbridge & Malling	16.6	5.5	67%
Swale	15.2	6.6	56%
Dover	9.2	4.1	55%
Folkestone & Hythe	**9.1**	**4.2**	**54%**
Maidstone	8.9	4.1	54%
Dartford	11.2	5.2	53%
Tunbridge Wells	7.6	3.6	53%
Ashford	9.1	4.4	52%
Canterbury	7.0	3.4	51%
Sevenoaks	10.6	6.0	43%
Thanet	6.1	3.5	43%

Table 2: Kent local authority area CO_2 emissions – full dataset, per capita emissions (tCO_2e year) – ordered by percentage reduction from highest to lowest (DESNZ data tables)

Summary

2.19 In summary, trends in carbon emissions vary according to the measure used, whether this is the full dataset, the 'within the scope of influence of local authorities' dataset, totals or per capita emissions. However, by all measures, carbon emissions have fallen significantly since 2005, with Kent seeing faster decreases than South East England or England as a whole.

2.20 Emissions within Folkestone & Hythe district have fallen at the fastest rate of the Kent authorities to some of the lowest 2023 totals if the 'within the scope of influence of local authorities' dataset is used. The decrease within Folkestone & Hythe is not so pronounced if the full dataset is used, and other Kent local authority areas have recorded greater percentage decreases and have lower 2023 totals, although this dataset tends to favour local authorities which do not have motorways in their administrative areas or which have not experienced the closure of major industrial installations.

2.21 While there have been significant falls since 2005, it is anticipated that rates of decrease will slow in coming years as more difficult sources of emissions, such as from domestic energy use and transport, remain to be tackled.

2.22 If the district council is to influence this trend, it must work in partnership with local residents, community groups and businesses, as the council's own emissions only account for around 0.4 per cent of the district total.

2.23 To assist the council's leadership role, the council has developed a District-wide Carbon Strategy following consultation with the public and other keyholders. The strategy sets out priorities for action across five 'pillars': sustainable transport; resilient residents; sustainable business; reduced

waste and water usage; and carbon absorption and biodiversity (see key features in **Appendix 1**). The District-wide Carbon Strategy was launched at the Sustainable Futures Forum on 27 January 2026 (see Section 6 below) and it is proposed that annual progress updates are given to Members.

3. GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR NUCLEAR ENERGY

Government policy position

3.1 The 'Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A new era of clean electricity' (December 2024) sets out how the government will work with the energy sector to create a clean power nation by 2030. Delivering clean power by 2030 will enable the decarbonisation of the wider economy by 2050 through the electrification of heat in buildings, transport and industry.

3.2 The National Energy System Operator (NESO) has produced a report 'Clean Power 2030: Our Next Steps'. This anticipates that by 2030 the clean power system will feature:

- 43 to 50 Gigawatts (GW) of onshore wind.
- 27 to 29 GW of onshore wind.
- 45 to 47 GW of solar power.
- 23 to 27 GW of battery capacity.
- 4 to 6 GW of long-duration energy storage (LDES).
- 10 to 12 GW of consumer-led flexibility.

3.3 The system will also require the development of gas carbon capture and hydrogen to power, as well as the rapid delivery of 80 transmission reinforcement projects. The Planning and Infrastructure Act, which received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025, contains measures to streamline the delivery of critical energy infrastructure in the planning process.

3.4 Regarding nuclear energy, the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan states that the government is:

> *"committed to nuclear, including the lifetimes of existing nuclear projects, where possible, and the development of emerging low carbon and renewable technologies that will play an important role beyond 2030"* (page 13).

3.5 All routes to a clean power system will require the mass deployment of offshore wind, onshore wind and solar, the government states, with nuclear *"continuing to deliver a backbone of vital firm low carbon power"* (page 28).

3.6 In its report 'Clean Power 2030 – Advice on achieving clean power for Great Britain by 2030' NESO modelled scenarios to achieving clean power, principally a 'Further Flex and Renewables' scenario, featuring the highest demand flexibility and fast deployment of renewables, and a 'New Dispatch' scenario, featuring a lower level of renewable energy growth and the

deployment of hydrogen energy and carbon capture and storage (see Figure 3).

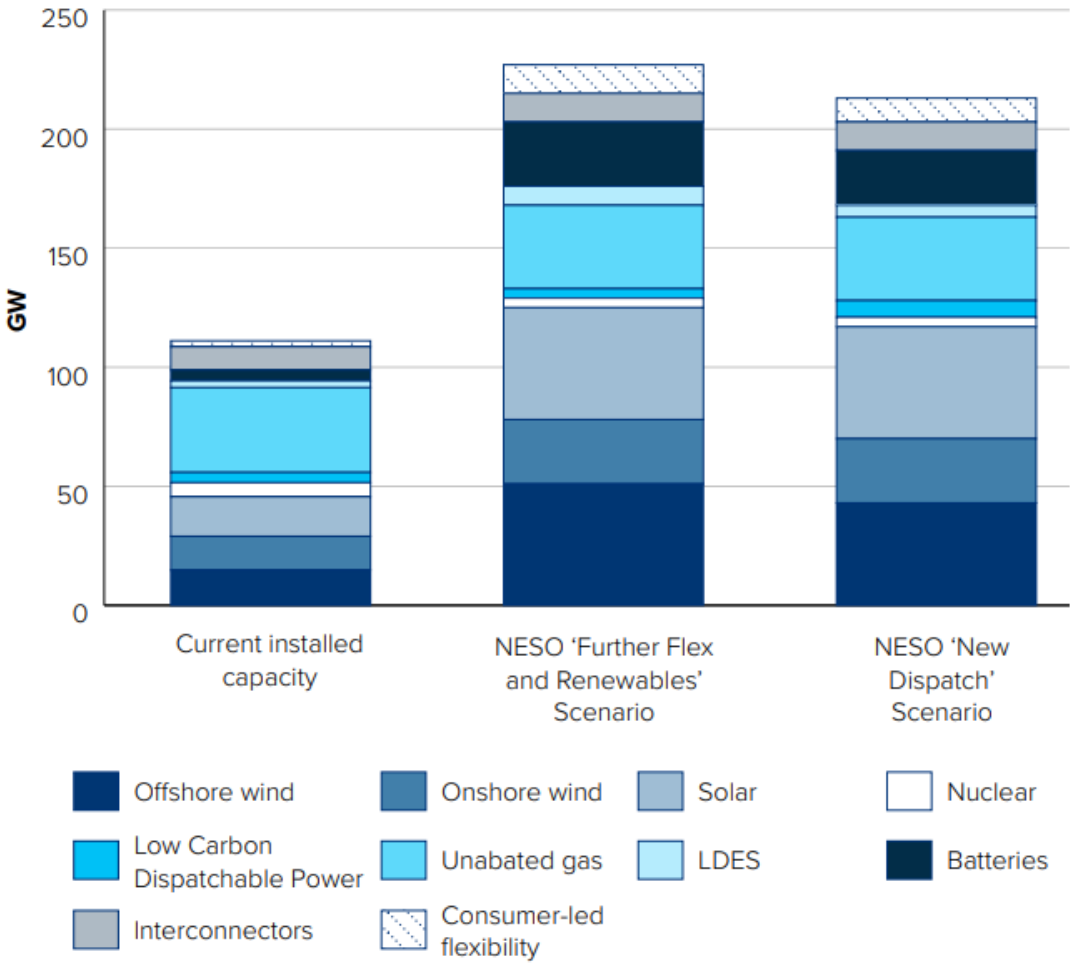

Figure 3: Installed capacity in 2030 in the NESO 'Further Flex and Renewables' and 'New Dispatch' scenarios, compared to current installed capacity (GW) (from 'Clean Power 2030 Action Plan: A new era of clean electricity', p. 33)

3.7 Under both scenarios, nuclear is expected to contribute energy capacity of around 4 GW by 2030, a reduction from the 5.9 GW of current installed capacity, reflecting that some existing facilities will come offline by 2030.

Existing nuclear power sites

3.8 Up to 2030, the Clean Power Action Plan states that the government will work with EDF to support the delivery of two new nuclear reactors at the existing site of Hinkley Point C in Somerset, which are expected to come online between 2029 and 2031, delivering 3.2 GW of capacity. EDF is also extending the lives of four Advanced Gas-cooled Reactor (AGR) stations, meaning that two of the AGR stations, at Heysham (Lancashire) and Torness (East Lothian), are expected to continue generating electricity until 2030.

3.9 The government also intends to bring forward post-2030 generation, including providing funding for Sizewell C in Suffolk, and the Small Modular

Reactor programme led by Great British Energy – Nuclear (GBE-N). According to the Action Plan, the government *"will continue to seek to streamline regulatory processes, and foster innovation in nuclear technology, to ensure that new nuclear continues to play an important role in the net zero transition after 2030"* (page 81).

3.10 In July 2025, the government agreed to the final investment decision on Sizewell C, which will see the government becoming the largest shareholder in the project, alongside private investors EDF, Centrica and others. Sizewell C will be a 3.2 GW power station that can supply around 6 million homes with energy.

Advanced nuclear technologies

3.11 Alongside plans for new large-scale nuclear facilities, the government is also progressing plans for advanced nuclear technologies, including small modular reactors (SMRs) and Advanced Modular Reactors (AMRs). These types of reactors are smaller than conventional nuclear power station reactors and are designed so that much of the plant can be fabricated in a factory and transported to site. SMRs are generally water-cooled and similar to existing nuclear reactors but on a smaller scale; AMRs use alternative cooling systems or fuels.

3.12 The government is providing more than £2.5 billion for the SMR programme in the current Spending Review period. In June 2025 it selected Rolls-Royce as the preferred bidder to build the country's first SMRs. The press release announcing the selection of Rolls-Royce stated that once small modular reactors and Sizewell C come online in the 2030s, combined with the new station at Hinkley Point C, this capacity will deliver more nuclear-generated energy to the grid than over the previous fifty years.

3.13 In November 2025 the government announced that Wylfa on Anglesey had been selected as the location for the UK's first SMR nuclear plants, to be built by Rolls-Royce SMR. The site will host three SMR units, with potential for up to eight units in total. The press release states that GBE-N *"will start activity on the site in 2026",* with the SMRs providing power from the mid-2030s.

Figure 4: Aerial view of Wylfa, site of proposed Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)

3.14 In September 2025 the government announced that the UK and United States was about to sign major deals to construct new nuclear power stations in both countries.

3.15 The deals include agreements for X-Energy and Centrica to build up to 12 AMRs in Hartlepool, which would generate up to 960MW, providing enough power for up to 1.5 million homes. Construction is planned to start in 2026 on a site adjoining Hartlepool's existing nuclear power station, which will cease generating electricity in 2028. The AMRs are expected to start generating electricity in the mid-2030s.

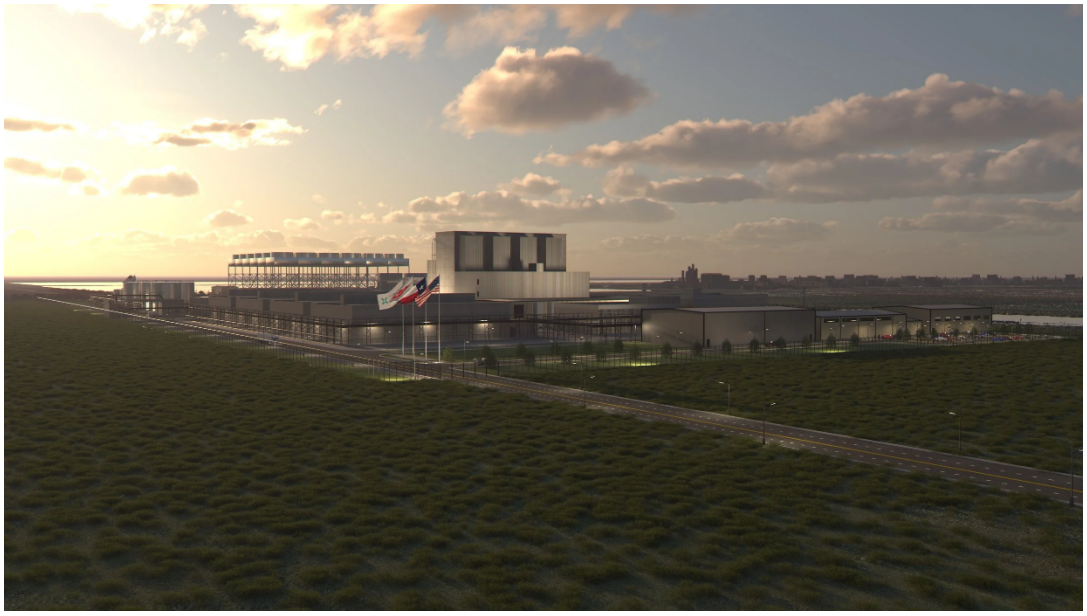

Figure 5: Proposed X-Energy Advanced Modular Reactor plant, Texas, USA.

Additional large-scale nuclear

3.16 In addition to plans for SMRs and AMRs, the government has tasked GBE-N with identifying suitable sites for additional large-scale nuclear plants of the scale of Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C. At the time of writing, its recommendations are still to be published, but it is believed that Oldbury-on-Severn could be one of the sites being considered.

Decision-making process

3.17 Projects of the scale of new nuclear facilities, whether conventional nuclear or advanced nuclear technologies, will be decided through the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) process established by the Planning Act of 2008. Under the NSIP process, proposals are assessed by a panel of Planning Inspectors who hold a public examination into the development. The Inspectors will then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State who will make the final decision. Local authorities are consultees and can appear at the public examination to make representations.

National Policy Statements - nuclear

3.18 To inform the NSIP process the government has published a range of National Policy Statements (NPSs) which set out government policy for the development of nationally significant infrastructure in different sectors. There are a range of NPSs for energy, covering renewable energy, gas and oil, electricity infrastructure and nuclear energy generation. Many of these statements are being updated.

3.19 EN1 – Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy was updated in December 2025. Regarding nuclear power EN1 states that:

> *"… additional nuclear capacity beyond Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C will be needed to meet our energy and Net Zero objectives. Nuclear technology is developing and opportunities for flexible use may grow as the energy landscape evolves. The role of nuclear power could be filled by large-scale nuclear fission, Small Modular Reactors, Advanced Modular Reactors, and fusion power plants."* (Paragraphs 3.351-3.353)

3.20 EN-6 – National Policy Statement for nuclear power generation dates from 2011. EN-6 is the primary decision-making document for the construction of new nuclear power stations on sites deployable by the end of 2025 listed in the document, which are limited to Bradwell, Hartlepool, Heysham, Hinkley Point, Oldbury, Sizewell, Sellafield and Wylfa. The government is currently updating EN-6.

3.21 EN-7 – National Policy Statement for nuclear energy generation came into force on 18 December 2025. EN-7 sets out general design policy and criteria for the assessment of new sites for nuclear development. In the introduction EN-7 states that:

> *"In addition to … traditional large-scale nuclear power stations, newer technologies, including Small Modular Reactors and Advanced Modular Reactors, are looking to provide quicker and more flexible deployment. These technologies also provide a route for enhanced capability in engineering and manufacturing through innovation, advanced techniques and new facilities. High-skilled manufacturing jobs for the future will be crucial for underpinning the rollout of these new technologies in the UK, as well as putting the UK at the centre of the international programme of deployment."* (Paragraph 1.1.4)

3.22 EN-7 adds that: *"New nuclear technologies are likely to be suitable for deployment on a wider range of sites, which may differ in size to previously identified sites, and/or be closer to locations of high energy demand"* (paragraph 1.7.1). To guide this process, the policy statement sets out a range of assessment principles including good design, impacts of multiple reactors, radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel, site security, proximity to military activities, flood risk, coastal and landform change, proximity to civil aircraft movements, biodiversity and geological conservation, landscape and heritage value and other factors.

Summary

3.23 In summary, the government is supporting the construction of large-scale nuclear facilities at Hinkley Point and Sizewell and is currently assessing the

potential for large-scale nuclear facilities at other UK locations. The government is also progressing plans for SMRs, with the first three SMRs due to be built in North Wales over the next few years. The UK's first AMRs are to be constructed in Hartlepool. Nuclear power is referred in government policy documents as providing *"a backbone of vital firm low carbon power"* to support sources of green energy such as wind and solar.

4. LOCAL COMMITMENTS TO CARBON REDUCTION

The council's carbon footprint

4.1 For calculating an organisation's carbon footprint, emissions are usually broken down into three scopes, according to the Greenhouse Gas Protocol. These are:

- Scope 1 – Direct greenhouse gas emissions, including owned or controlled mobile sources (such as from fuel used in transport) and stationary sources (such as from fuel used to heat buildings).
- Scope 2 – Electricity indirect greenhouse gas emissions, such as emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, heat or steam that is used to power equipment or operations.
- Scope 3 – Other indirect emissions, such as from business travel or water use.

The scopes are illustrated in Figure 6 below.

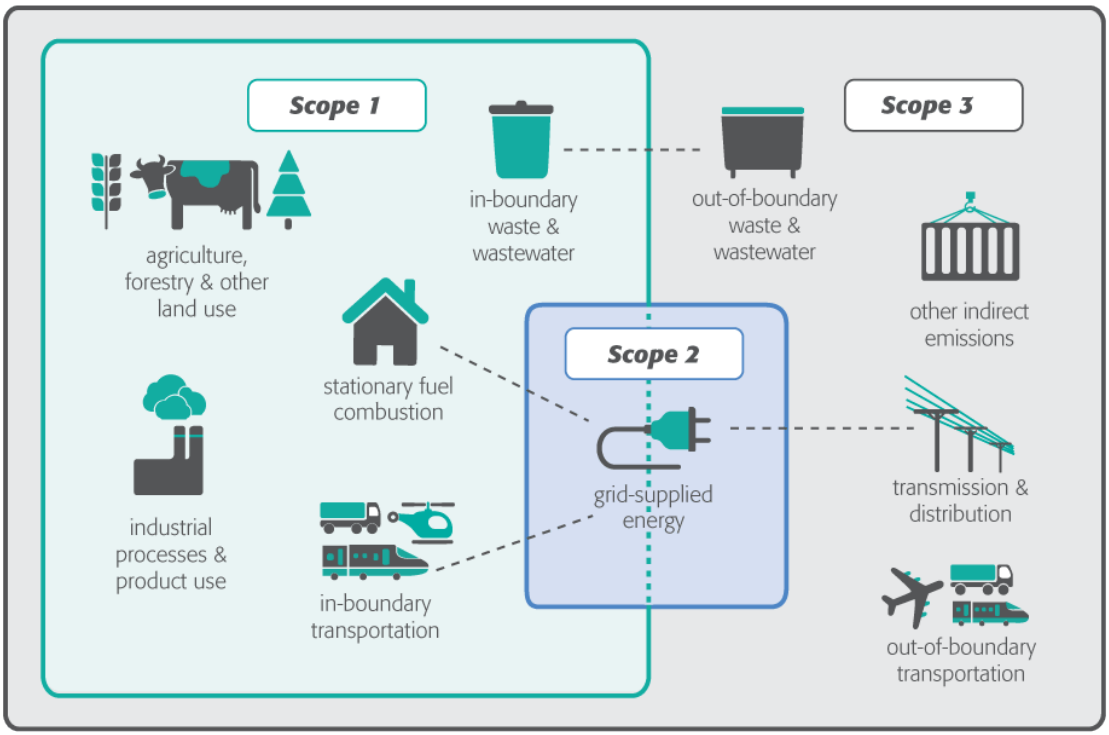

Figure 6: Scopes of greenhouse gas emissions (from Greenhouse Gas Protocol).

4.2 Laser Energy were commissioned to complete an updated carbon footprint for the council's operational emissions for the financial year 2024-25, building on earlier work undertaken by Laser in 2018-19 to establish the council's baseline emissions. The 2024-25 audit assessed current emissions, trends

since the baseline year, and site-specific emissions. Data was analysed across the council's core estate utilities, vehicle fuels, grounds maintenance fuels, street lighting, staff miles reclaimed, car parks, water supply and treatment, and contracts and services.

4.3 The total carbon footprint for the council for the period 2024-25 is estimated to be 3,094 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO_2e). Table 3 and Figure 7 below show the emission sources.

Scope	Emission Source	Emissions (tCO_2e)	Scope percentage (%)
1	Council's direct emissions, e.g. fuel used in council-owned vans or boilers in owned buildings	291	9%
2	Council's purchased energy, e.g. electricity the council buys for the offices or streetlighting	276	9%
3	Indirect contractor and supply chain emissions, e.g. emissions from any external contractor, supplier, or purchased goods/services	2,527	82%

Table 3: Council's carbon footprint – percentage by scope 2024-25

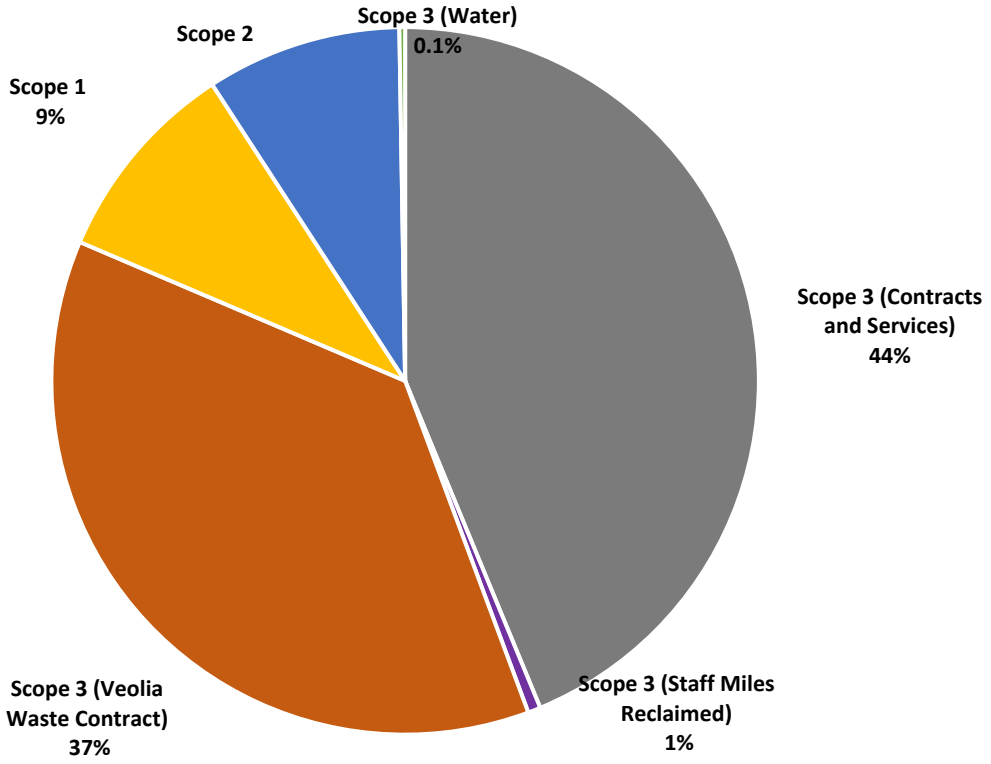

Figure 7: The council's carbon footprint - percentage by scope 2024-25

4.4 Scope 3 emissions are not directly comparable to the baseline data, as Scope 3 emissions were not captured extensively by Laser during the baseline calculations. In terms of the council's Scope 1 and 2 emissions, these have fallen around 151 tCO_2e or 20 per cent between 2018/19 and 2024/25 (Table 4).

Financial Year	Emissions (Scope 1 & 2)
2018/19	726 tCO_2e
2024/25	575 tCO_2e
Reduction	151 tCO_2e (20%)

Table 4: Council's carbon footprint – 2018/19 and 2024/25

4.5 This reduction is primarily due to changes to the sources listed in Table 5 below.

Emission Source	**Baseline Emissions 2018/19** (tCO_2e)	**Emissions 2024/25** (tCO_2e)	**Percentage Reduction** (%)
Diesel for council vehicles	126.6	70.2	44%
Red diesel use	53.0	5.6	89%
Gas emissions	219.5	195.5	11%
Street lighting	46.5	37.0	20%

Table 5: Council's carbon footprint – principal reductions in emissions by source 2018/19 – 2024/25

4.6 The council's top three energy consuming sites, which cumulatively emit 308 tCO_2e (approximately 60 per cent of the council's Scope 1 and 2 emissions) are shown in Table 6 below.

Site	Total Annual Emissions 2024/25
Hythe Swimming Pool	142 tCO_2e
The Civic Centre	102 tCO_2e
Connect 38	101 tCO_2e

Table 6: Council's carbon footprint 2024/25 – three highest emitting sites

4.7 The carbon footprint data contains several important caveats to note. For around nine buildings the council owns, utility data was not available in time for the analysis, meaning their emissions are not fully represented in the dataset, but the inclusion of these buildings would not significantly alter the total footprint estimate. Veolia's emissions, for the council's waste contract, are reported on a calendar-year basis rather than a financial year, creating a mismatch in reporting periods, however the figures still provide a useful overall estimate. There are likely gaps in the water-related emissions data, as some billing information was not captured in this carbon footprint.

4.8 To give a fuller picture of overall emissions, officers have also estimated emissions from contracts and services (Scope 3), although these emissions were not included in the 2018-19 baseline. The emissions from contracts and services were calculated using 2024-25 awarded contracts, with totals divided by contract length in years and converted using averaged Government greenhouse gas conversion factors, meaning these figures are likely underestimated as they do not reflect rolling or historic contracts from previous years (see Table 3 above).

Summary

4.9 Although a reduction of 20 per cent in the council's Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions is welcomed, more needs to be done to reduce emissions further. The council is exploring measures to address emissions from Hythe Swimming Pool, the largest source of emissions, as part of wider work looking at the future of the building. Decisions on other council-owned buildings will made in the context of local government reorganisation.

Climate Emergency UK Climate Action Scorecards

4.10 There is no official government ranking of the climate change activities of local authorities.

4.11 One available source is provided by the campaign group Climate Emergency UK. This organisation assesses English councils annually using a range of criteria, and grades councils with a percentage score. Climate Emergency UK uses nine scoring categories as part of the Climate Plan Scorecards. This provides one way of comparing councils, although as noted below, there are reservations about some of the organisation's scoring measures.

4.12 In the 2025 data, Folkestone & Hythe has a score of 34 per cent. This is within a national range of between 11 to 69 per cent. This places Folkestone & Hythe joint 91st out of 164 district councils.

4.13 For the Kent district and borough councils, scores range from 23 per cent to 45 per cent. Folkestone & Hythe is eighth of the 12 Kent authorities (see Figure 7).

Kent local authority	Climate Emergency UK score 2025 (percentage)
Maidstone	45%
Tunbridge Wells	40%
Dover	40%
Canterbury	39%
Thanet	37%
Dartford	37%
Gravesham	36%
Folkestone & Hythe	**34%**
Tonbridge & Malling	33%
Swale	30%

Ashford	25%
Sevenoaks	23%

Table 7: Climate Emergency UK – Kent authorities' 2025 scores

4.14 While the Climate Action Scorecards provide a useful benchmarking tool, there are limitations that can affect how accurately they reflect the council's climate work. The scoring process relies primarily on publicly available information from council websites and councils that do not actively participate or respond may be misrepresented. The 'yes/no' nature of the scoring may also fail to capture a local authority's work; for example, the district council is scored zero for employing a planning ecologist to scrutinise applications for biodiversity net gain improvements, although in fact the council contributes to a shared ecological resource at county level.

4.15 It should be noted that the 2025 scoring uses information up to October 2024, so the work outlined in this report is not reflected in the score. The council's climate change webpages have also been substantially redeveloped to make information more easily available (see paragraph 6.13 below) and this may be reflected in future scores.

4.16 Climate Emergency UK's scoring system will itself need to be significantly revised for future years. Many of the planning criteria the system rewards (such as introducing requirements for energy efficiency improvements above building regulations, whole life carbon assessments of new buildings and biodiversity net gain above the national 10 per cent level) will be explicitly ruled out by the new National Planning Policy Framework, if the final version reflects the current draft (see paragraphs 5.15-5.18 below).

5. BIODIVERSITY RECOVERY

Local policy requirements

5.1 Policy CC1 of the council's adopted Places and Policies Local Plan (PPLP) (2020) requires low carbon design for major housing and commercial developments and requires a reduction of 10 per cent over the target emission rate set out in the Building Regulations.

5.2 Policy CC2 of the PPLP also requires other measures aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of development, such as passive design. Policy NE1 requires enhanced access to the natural environment and references open spaces in the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

5.3 Policy NE2 sets out a framework for protecting sites of international, national and local importance for biodiversity.

5.4 Policy NE3 seeks to protect areas of landscape character and to take opportunities to remediate and improve damaged landscapes as they arise.

5.5 Policy CSD4 of the Core Strategy Review requires development to provide net gains in biodiversity at least to comply with national requirements, to demonstrate that they protect and enhance valued landscapes and sites of

biodiversity and, as far as possible, deliver improvements in green infrastructure assets.

5.6 The council's monitoring of local plan policies, reported in the most recent Authority Monitoring Report, indicates that design and space standards policies were cited most frequently in the refusal of planning applications. However, policies on biodiversity (NE2) and protecting the countryside (NE3) were also used frequently, in 13 per cent and 12 per cent of decisions respectively.

5.7 All planning applications are determined with reference to the council's development plan which has requirements both for enhancing biodiversity and the use of low carbon design.

National requirements

5.8 The requirement for biodiversity net gain was brought in by the Environment Act 2021 which amended Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Biodiversity net gain is measured through a system of biodiversity units. Developers must deliver a net gain of at least 10 per cent as part of new developments. Certain types of development are exempt from this requirement, including householder applications, self-build and custom build applications below a certain size threshold and developments with impacts of less than 25 square metres of on-site habitat. (However, as set out in paragraphs 5.15-5.16, the government is proposing changes to raise site size thresholds.)

5.9 Under the Environment Act 2021, local authorities are required to report on actions they have undertaken to conserve and enhance biodiversity. In 2024 the council was required to publish a report, known as a 'First Consideration', setting out what it will do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. This report outlines some of the ways in which the council is contributing to biodiversity recovery and how it will do so in the future.

5.10 The council must publish an update report, known as a First Report by the end of March this year, to cover the monitoring period from January 2024 to January 2026. This will provide a fuller picture of the council's contribution to biodiversity. At the time of writing this report, officers are preparing the First Report ready for publication by 31 March 2026, and this can be shared with Overview and Scrutiny Committee when it is finalised.

5.11 The current development plan, supported by the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2023) (published before the biodiversity duties were introduced) contains policies that promote the enhancement of biodiversity, including the creation of pollinator habitats as part of new developments. As part of its grounds maintenance work, the council reduces grass cutting in specified areas in the district to encourage local pollinators under the Bee Kind Initiative.

5.12 The council has worked with Kent County Council on the production of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Kent and Medway, which was published in November 2025, and this will inform the review of local plan policies. The LNRS and the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy will

enable the council to take a strategic approach to enhance biodiversity in the district, for example by identifying areas to improve connectivity in its new local plan and as part of development proposals.

5.13 On 16 December 2025 the government launched consultation on a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other changes to the planning system. The consultation runs until 10 March 2026. Proposed amendments to the NPPF state that local plans should safeguard and enhance the natural environment, reflecting Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The draft NPPF adds that proposals for development should take suitable opportunities to connect to and strengthen ecological networks that extend beyond the site, drawing on measures proposed by Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

5.14 In addition to the above, the council is working with Natural England on developing an Environmental Development Plan for the Stodmarsh and engage with them on their proposed Protected Sites Strategy for Stodmarsh.

National policy changes

5.15 As the council begins to prepare its new local plan, the government is introducing further reforms to the planning system. In a written statement to the House of Commons (HCWS1187) on 16 December 2025, the Minister of State of Housing and Planning, Matthew Pennycook, set out government proposals for the next phase of planning reform. In the statement the Minister set out that:

> *"… the government will exempt smaller developments up to 0.2 hectares from biodiversity net gain, and introduce a suite of other simplified requirements to improve the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on small and medium sites that are not exempted. Defra will also consult rapidly on an additional targeted exemption for brownfield residential development, testing the definition of land to which it should apply and a range of site sizes up to 2.5 hectares."*

5.16 At the time of writing, the amendments to BNG requirements have not yet been formalised by the government and the relevant regulations have not been amended. Until the government effects this change, the current lower thresholds will remain in place.

5.17 As part of changes to the NPPF (see paragraph 5.13), it is proposed to limit the circumstances in which local authorities can seek biodiversity net gain contributions which exceed the statutory requirement (i.e. greater than 10 per cent). Local authorities will only be permitted to have higher requirements where sites are allocated in the local plan and where higher levels of biodiversity net gain can be specifically justified by evidence. If this proposal is confirmed following consultation, the council will not be able to introduce a policy that requires biodiversity net gain contributions of more than 10 per cent in its new local plan.

5.18 Regarding environmental standards and energy generation in new buildings, the new draft NPPF states that local plan policies should not cover matters which are already addressed by Building Regulations, other than in relation

to accessibility standards or water efficiency. They should also not cover matters relating to the construction or internal layout of buildings in local plans unless they are to implement the nationally described space standard. If the draft NPPF is brought into force as proposed, the council will not be able to require higher energy efficiency standards in new developments or introduce other environmental policies (such as for the reuse of construction waste, the use of green roofs or walls or the introduction of heat networks) in its new local plan. It is expected that the final version of the NPPF will be published this summer.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Sustainable Futures Forum

6.1 The council has helped facilitate a series of Sustainable Futures Forum events over the past year.

April 2025 Sustainable Futures Forum at The Workshop in Folkestone's Creative Quarter

6.2 This event aimed to provide local people, community groups, and small businesses with a platform to develop, connect, and showcase sustainable ideas, focusing on securing funding through the district council's Green Grant Scheme. The event featured two main sessions, (1) a grant application surgery and a panel discussion with successful past applicants, followed by (2) networking to encourage partnerships.

6.3 The event attracted strong participation with over 100 signups and an 89 per cent attendance rate. Engagement extended beyond the venue, achieving significant social media reach (over 10,000 impressions across social media platforms), website views and local press coverage. Attendee feedback was highly positive, averaging 8.8/10, with participants citing networking, learning about grants and partnership opportunities as key benefits.

Figure 8: Sustainable Futures Forum, April 2025

October 2025 Sustainable Future Forum at the Grand in Folkestone

6.4 The October 2025 event featured a local volunteer and green skills fair, aimed at harnessing “people power” and supporting local green and environmental initiatives and projects. With more than 70 attendees from 125 sign-ups, the event was well attended. While there were more projects than volunteers, several attendees represented bigger corporate volunteer teams including Saga, Holiday Extras, Walker Construction, Amey and Sleeping Giant Media in attendance.

Figure 9: Sustainable Futures Forum, October 2025

January 2026 Sustainable Future Forum at the Grand in Folkestone

6.5 The January 2026 forum was aimed to be a social value exchange, “Bringing Together Business and Community for Social Impact”, providing a networking and insight-sharing session for businesses and charities to explore environmental and sustainable themed collaboration and long-term relationships. Across both the recent events, attendance was strong, with highly engaged participants benefiting from networking, panel discussions and social value exchange activities.

6.6 In total, 355 partnership “matches” were recorded, demonstrating the value of connecting businesses seeking to support local initiatives with community groups needing resources, volunteers and collaboration. Feedback received highlighted the quality of interactions, the effectiveness of the event, and tangible outcomes such as new partnerships, resource exchanges and follow-up actions that continue to support local social and environmental initiatives. (Further details can be found in **Appendix 2** with this report.)

Figure 10: Sustainable Futures Forum, January 2026

Future planned Sustainable Futures Forum events

6.7 Officers are currently working on plans to host a 'Local Green Project Showcase / What's on Locally Fair' to take place in April 2026 to showcase 2025 Green Grant Projects.

Green Grant Programme

6.8 The council's Green Grant Programme was approved by cabinet in February 2025, with £210,000 funding designed to support community-led environmental projects that improve climate resilience, cut carbon emissions and enhance nature across the district.

6.9 Following from the council's Green Business Grant scheme, the new scheme was opened up to a wider range of organisations, including community groups, charities, schools, town and parish councils, and small businesses, enabling them to bring forward practical sustainability projects that align with the district's climate and ecological commitments.

6.10 The council received 62 applications, and a panel of councillors selected 35 eligible and impactful local projects.

6.11 The Green Grants Programme continues to make strong progress:

- 26 of 35 funded projects submitting updates in November 2025 and most are now underway or at mid-delivery stage.
- Four projects have already been completed, and others are planning launch events during spring 2026.

6.12 Highlights include:

- Extensive district-wide engagement through Charivari Day.
- Significant electrical waste reuse by Go Folkestone.

- New biodiversity enhancements delivered by Hythe Town Council.
- Improved accessibility at the Touchbase Community Garden.
- Renewable energy projects are also advancing, with Kent Community Energy installing 147 kW of solar capacity, which is expected to cut electricity use by 58 per cent and save £19,000 annually.

Figure 11: Charivari Day (top left), Dymchurch Parish Council Battery and solar panels (top right, bottom left), and Touchbase Care new equipment (bottom right).

The council's climate change webpages

6.13 The council's climate change webpages have undergone a major redevelopment, providing a clearer, more accessible hub for all climate-related information, actions and partnerships. The updated site brings together key topics such as climate change, biodiversity, energy use, sustainable transport, circular economy, water conservation and greenhouse gas reduction in one place, improving public understanding of the council's work and climate priorities.

6.14 By consolidating updates on the council's strategies, engagement activities, green grants, community partnerships and resilience initiatives, the revamped platform is now more accessible. It also supports the council's performance in the Climate Action Scorecards (see paragraph 4.15), where making information publicly available contributes to improved scoring. The review of the webpages also helps to demonstrate the council's accountability on climate action, showcasing the breadth of climate work underway and reinforcing our commitment to open, visible climate leadership.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

7.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
None	-	-	This report provides an update on work that has been completed since the previous report to OSC on 19 November 2024.

8. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

8.1 Legal Officer's Comments (OS)

This report is enabled by the following laws:

1. Climate Change Act 2008
2. Environmental Act 2021
3. Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
4. Planning and Energy Act 2008

Whilst not exhaustive, the Council Report is guided accordingly.

8.2 Finance Officer's Comments (SC)

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

8.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (AT)

No direct implications. This report summarises work that is already underway or outlines existing government policy. Any new strategies or policies would need to be subject to an Equality Impact Assessment in line with council procedures.

8.4 Climate Change Implications (AT)

No direct implications. The report summarises work that is already underway or outlines existing government policy.

9. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting

James Wilderspin, Climate Change Specialist
Telephone: 01303 853226
Email: james.wilderspin@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Hazel Sargent, Strategy & Planning Policy Officer
Telephone: 01303 853318
Email: hazel.sargent@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Adrian Tofts, Strategy & Policy Manager

Telephone: 01303 853438
Email: adrian.tofts@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

(Note: only documents that have not been published are to be listed here)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Our pathway to net zero by 2041 – key messages

Appendix 2 - Sustainable Futures Forum Impact Report – Volunteer & Skills Fair (1 October 2025) and Business & Community Eco Partnerships Meet Up (27 January 2026)