



Foreword - Cllr Richard Morris

As the Cabinet Member for Environment, it gives me great pleasure to present the Worcestershire Environment Improvement Plan.

We have a wonderful County, an outstanding environment with beautiful landscapes and high quality assets that are valued by residents, businesses and visitors. We recognise that we cannot improve our local environment and tackle climate change alone, collaboration and working together with partners in national and local government, alongside our communities and businesses is key.

By working together, we will foster a sense of collective responsibility drawing on our combined resources, expertise, and enthusiasm to drive positive impact. This plan will also support the delivery of Worcestershire County Council's Corporate Plan priority of protecting the environment which will deliver:

- A greener future;
- Our commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2050,
- A resilient transport network and
- Reducing our waste.

66 By working together, we will foster a sense of collective responsibility drawing on our combined resources, expertise, and enthusiasm to drive positive impact.

The Environment Plan brings together the key strategies under eight priorities which support positive impact on our environment and will deliver our ambition of becoming Net Zero by 2050, by focusing on the improvement of our environment, promoting clean growth and the development of a low carbon economy, we can create a healthier environment that both accelerates the transition to Net Zero whilst improving Worcestershire's resilience for the future.

Cabinet Member with
Responsibility for Environment

CIlr Richard Morris



Introduction

Worcestershire has an ideal blend of urban and rural environments. 85% of our County is classed as rural, with urban areas having good access to parks, open spaces and public rights of way. Worcestershire includes two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; The Cotswolds and Malvern Hills.

There is easy access to the countryside wherever you live in the County, promoting outdoor activities which support healthy lifestyles and attracting visitors from across the country.

Our urban areas, with their rich fabric and strong historic and cultural offers, provide a good quality of life and encourage people to live in, work and visit our County. From the splendour of Worcester Cathedral to the beauty of our varied countryside, our towns and city have something for everyone.

Worcestershire County Council (WCC) has been working to reduce its carbon emissions for over a decade now, with some significant results across many service areas within the Council.

GOur urban areas, with their rich fabric and strong historic and cultural offers, provide a good quality of life and encourage people to live in, work and visit our County.

We deliver our community leadership role by improving our environmental protection and enhancement through partnership working with District Councils, our public sector partners, the private sector, the voluntary sector, local communities of interest and for the benefit of all residents.

Our Council's corporate plan sets out the Council's core priorities, with environment being one of the four key areas that people want to see the Council deliver on.





The Environment Improvement Plan brings together our commitment to continue our strong progress across a number of key areas:







Low Carbon energy generation



Resources and Waste



Net Zero Council



The Green economy



Communities and wellbeing



Transport



Reducing the impact of environmental hazards and climate change

We will continue to invest in environmental measures that protect our natural environment, enhance our biodiversity and reduce our carbon footprint. We recognise there is more to be done to achieve our ambition as quick as possible, with an aim to be net zero in all our operations by 2050. We will learn from best practice from elsewhere and share our experiences and expertise with local, regional and national partners.



This Plan sets a framework, which takes into account the Government's 25 year Environment Plan and the recent published review in 2023.

It recognises the Council's strategies across the eight key themes and provides an overview of our objectives by theme, what we will do, how we will measure our performance and how we will work with partners and the wider community to go further, quicker by exploiting opportunities to preserve and protect our environment for future generations.

The County Council has already halved our emissions over the last decade and has a strong track record of delivering environmental improvements. Striving to go further we have now agreed a Net Zero plan which will focus our efforts to reduce our environmental impact even further. We will continue to invest in environmental measures that protect our natural environment, enhance our biodiversity and reduce our carbon footprint.

We continue to work with partners to protect our communities from the adverse impacts of extreme weather, including flooding, and ensure future developments meet national and local standards and are resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Our aim is to encourage residents and businesses to reduce, reuse, repair, recycle and compost more. By doing this we will use less raw materials and save energy whilst protecting natural resources and reducing carbon emissions. All of this will help us achieve our ambition of being a Net Zero Council by 2050. The Environment Act 2021 has introduced new measures which will help transition to a more circular economy and increase waste and resource efficiency.

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All of this will help us achieve our ambition of being a Net Zero Council by 2050.

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How will we measure this:

- Reduce kg of waste production per person.
- Improve the condition of our roads and pavements to be among the best nationally.
- Additional increase in the number of homes and businesses protected from flooding.
- Reduce Council's carbon emissions towards Net Zero by 2050.
- Cut Journey times and improve journey time reliability along key rail and road routes.



The Environment Act 2021 has introduced new measures which will help transition to a more circular economy and increase waste and resource efficiency.



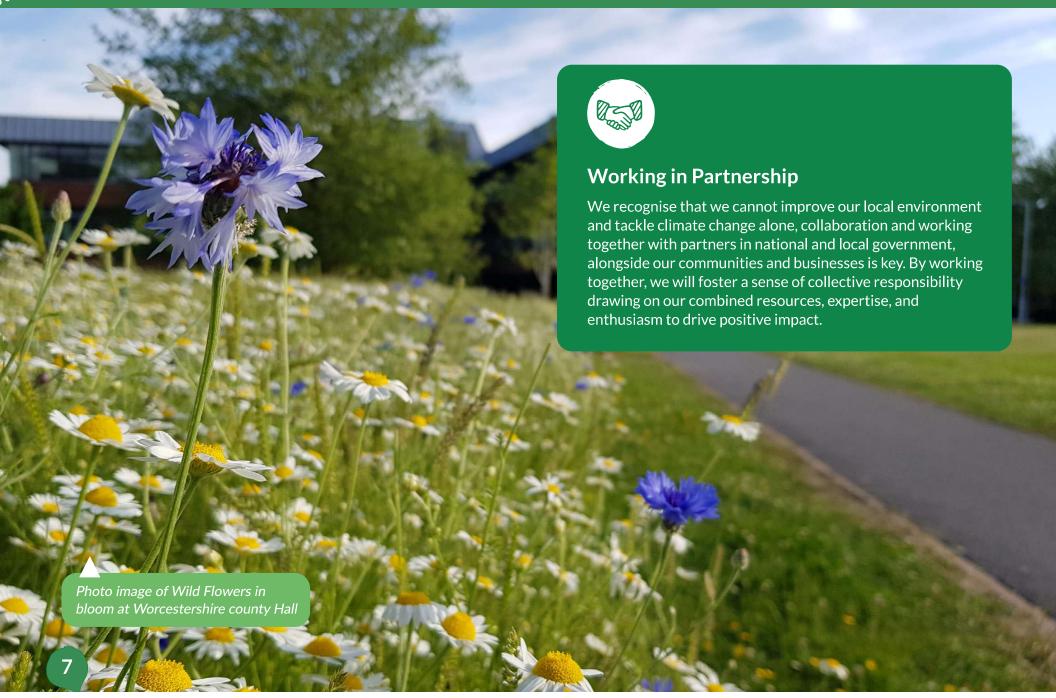
Our strategies working together

The purpose of this plan is to illustrate how Worcestershire County Council is taking action to improve the county's environment, ensuring that policies across eight priority areas are working together to:

- Enhance biodiversity and green infrastructure.
- To reduce waste.
- Improve active travel infrastructure and reliability of travel times along key rail and road routes.
- To reduce the carbon emissions of the council and its supply chain.
- To support businesses with decarbonisation plans and expand the low carbon economy.
- To protect the county against the impact of climate change through flood mitigation and adaptation, managing and minimising the likelihood and impact of flooding.
- To improve health and wellbeing.









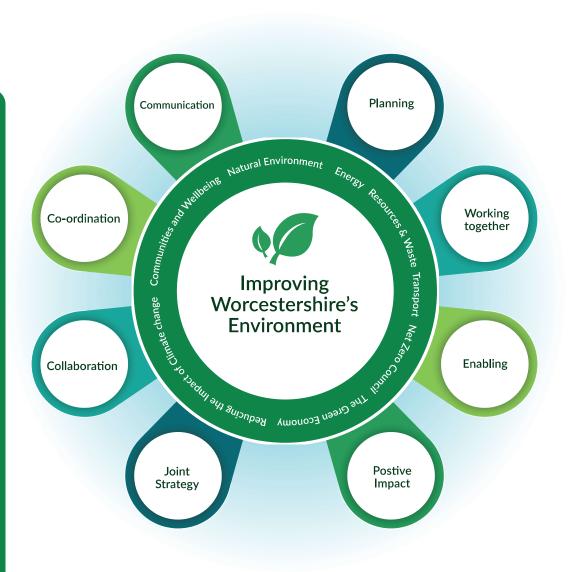
Working in Partnership



Our partners include:

- Act on Energy
- Active Travel England
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Canal & Rivers Trust
- Department for Transport
- Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)
- District Councils (should we list indiv)
- Environment Agency
- Education Sector
- Forestry Commission
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce

- Local Bus Operating Companies
- Local Nature Partnership
- Midlands Connect
- Midlands Net Zero Hub
- National Farmer Union
- National Highways
- Natural England
- Network Rail
- Our Communities
- Parish Councils
- Severn Trent Water
- Sustainability West Midlands
- Train Operating Companies
- Volunteer Groups
- Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Worcestershire Regulatory Services
- Woodland Trust
- Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.





Natural Environment

Introduction

The natural environment is valued by residents and visitors alike. The majority of the council area is classed as rural and also includes:

- Two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- Four National Nature Reserves (NNR).
- Two Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's).
- 114 Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI's).
- 553 Local Sites (LS's).
- 44 Roadside Verge Nature Reserves (RVNR's)

Strategies supporting delivery

The protection and enhancement of the natural environment is delivered through a number of plans, policies and strategies with further strategies to follow because of the Environment Act. Many of these have been developed and delivered in partnership with the district councils, government agencies and other partners.

The council is also a leading member of the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership which provides strategic leadership and guidance on natural environment matters.

Current adopted strategies include:

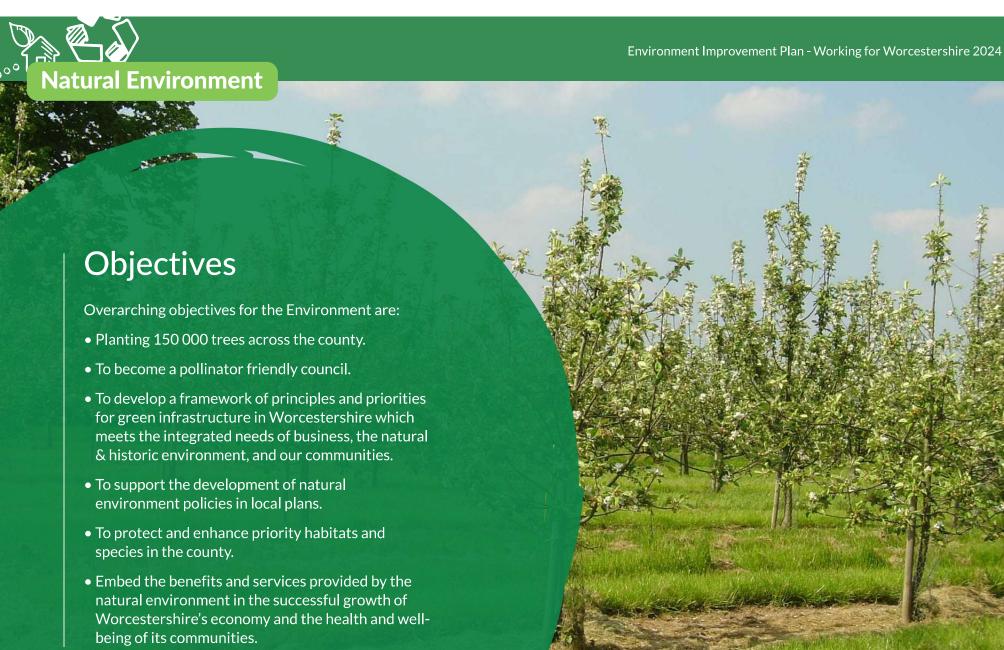
- Landscape Character Assessment and Supplementary Guidance.
- Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Pollinator Strategy.
- Worcestershire Woodland Guidelines.
- Green infrastructure strategy (produced by the Green Infrastructure Partnership of which WCC is a leading member).

In addition, development has commenced on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and local biodiversity net gain plans and policies, requirements for both of which arise from the Environment Act.

These strategies are supplemented further by planning policies which are included in district local plans and Worcestershire's Minerals Local Plan and Waste Core strategy.



Photo image of New Bush Orchard





What we have delivered

- 2018 delivery of traditional orchards regeneration.
- 2019 Worcestershire's second Biodiversity Action Plan adopted.
- 2020 Pollinator Strategy adopted.
- 2021 Worcestershire Habitat Inventory refresh complete.
- 2020 revised biodiversity and green infrastructure policies developed for the South Worcestershire Local Plan review.
- 2022 adoption of the Minerals Local Plan (green infrastructure led).
- 2022 secured Treescapes funding and Woodland Creation Accelerator.
- 2023 Development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy commenced.
- 2023 consultation on Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- 2023 Natural Networks programme delivered 98 ha of biodiversity enhancements.



What we will do:

- Implement the Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.
- Commence monitoring of Biodiversity Net Gain and Biodiversity reporting.
- Continue to develop, monitor and deliver the Local Nature Recovery Strategy alongside our partners.
- Commence delivery of Treescapes and Woodland Creation Accelerator programmes to improve landscape connectivity outside and between woodlands, and provide benefits to ecosystems and society, such as carbon absorption, flood protection and support for biodiversity.
- Endorse the Green Infrastructure Strategy which will inform planning and planning decisions, providing policy for local plans, with the aim to enhance, create and maintain green infrastructure in the county.
- Support the revised Green Infrastructure policy at Examination of the South Worcestershire Development plan review.
- Commence delivery of Natural Networks 2.0, Natural Networks is a partnership between Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Worcestershire County Council and District Councils. It aims to help create and enhance wildlife corridors across the county. The programme offers advice and grants, to projects that aim to restore wildlife-rich habitats.



How we will measure performance

- Number of trees planted.
- Hectares of biodiversity net gain delivered.
- Hectares of biodiversity enhancements delivered.
- Development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in line with agreed timetable.











How we will work with partners / wider community

We work with partners and the wider community through a number of different ways:

- Local Nature Partnership which WCC currently chair provides strategic direction and guidance on environmental matters. WCC is a founder member and provides the secretariat. Other members include the district councils, Defra family, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, voluntary groups, Earth Heritage Trust and landowner representation. The natural environment is one of the three areas of focus for the Local Nature Partnership.
- A series of partnerships have been developed on specific topic areas such as Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity Action Planning. We continue to work with these groups to deliver the natural environment objectives.
- A Local Nature Recovery Strategy Steering Group has been established for the development of this new strategy. This incudes both environmental interests and landowners.
- We will continue to develop our approach to Biodiversity Net Gain, working in partnership with developers, landowners and districts.
- We will work in partnership with Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Malvern, Worcester, Wychavon & Wyre Forest councils to deliver the Natural Networks biodiversity improvement project.

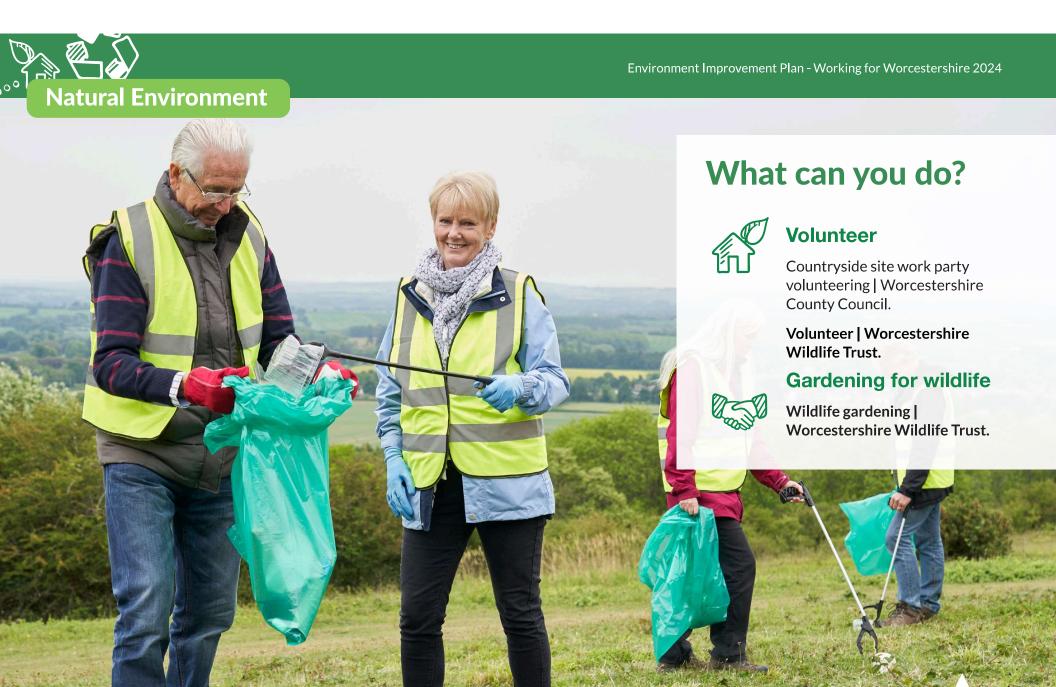


Photo image of Volunteers



Energy

Introduction

WCC has for many years been helping residents and enterprises across the county to heat and power their homes and businesses efficiently through a range of advice and grant funding programmes.

WCC coordinates Warmer Worcestershire: a network of Worcestershire's Councils, local energy efficiency charity and other agencies working together to improve home energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty. The council has been recognised for its work by the National Energy Efficiency Awards.

As the UK moves towards a zero-carbon energy system, the council is supporting delivery of Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Energy Strategy, with its focus on access to affordable clean energy and overcoming infrastructure and development barriers.

Relevant strategies/plans

- Worcestershire LEP Energy Strategy.
- Worcestershire Fuel Poverty Plan.



Targets

WCC's work contributes to achieving the following Worcestershire Energy Strategy targets:

- Reduction in county carbon emissions of 50% on 2005 levels by 2030.
- Tripling the county's energy production from renewable generation by 2030 from 5% to 15%.
- 2000 energy efficiency interventions per year for fuel poor households.



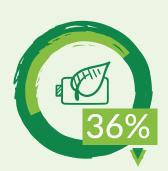




What we have delivered

WCC has:

- Led a number of countywide home energy efficiency programmes including:
 - Solid wall insulation installed in 750 privately owned homes through the Green Deal communities grant programme.
 - 1,526 vulnerable residents with warmer and more energy efficient homes through a range of support programmes, such as 'Boilers on Prescription'.
- Overseen the provision of energy and debt advice, and fuel vouchers for households struggling to afford to heat their homes.
- Provided warm spaces for local residents across Worcestershire's libraries.
- Offered Worcestershire residents the opportunity to bulk bid for solar panel and battery technology to help drive down the price. The council worked with iChoosr and Worcestershire District Councils to offer the Solar Together Worcestershire scheme. More than 5000 residents registered an interest.
- Commissioned research into heat networks and deep geothermal heat across the county.
- Generated over 135,000 MWh electricity a year from WCC's Energy from Waste plant and landfill site, the equivalent to 29 windmills. This power is supplied to the National Grid.



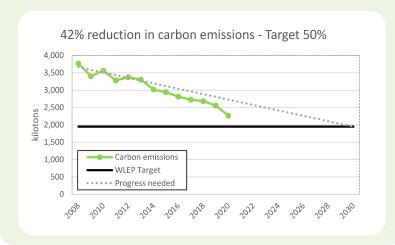
Reduction in Worcestershire's carbon emissions since 2005

(latest data: 2021)



of Worcestershire's electricity demand generated from renewable energy sources

(latest data: 2021)







What we will do:

- Continue to coordinate the Warmer
 Worcestershire home energy efficiency & fuel poverty network.
- Coordinate the provision of the Home Upgrade Grant scheme (HUG2) funding energy efficiency and zero carbon heat measures for more than 300 vulnerable households in Bromsgrove, Redditch, Malvern & Wychavon by 2025, in collaboration with district councils.
- Provide advice and grant funding for energy efficiency and decarbonisation measures for 130 Worcestershire businesses by March 2025 (see green economy section).
- Continue to explore the opportunities to generate renewable energy on our own estate and explore the utilisation of heat generated from WCC's Energy from Waste Plant.
- Continue to invest in and seek external funding for further initiatives.

How we will measure performance

- County carbon emissions.
- Number of Worcestershire homes benefiting from energy advice and grant programmes.
- Number of Worcestershire businesses benefiting from energy advice and grant programmes.
- % of Worcestershire's energy demand met from renewable energy generation.
- Amount of renewable energy generated by WCC.





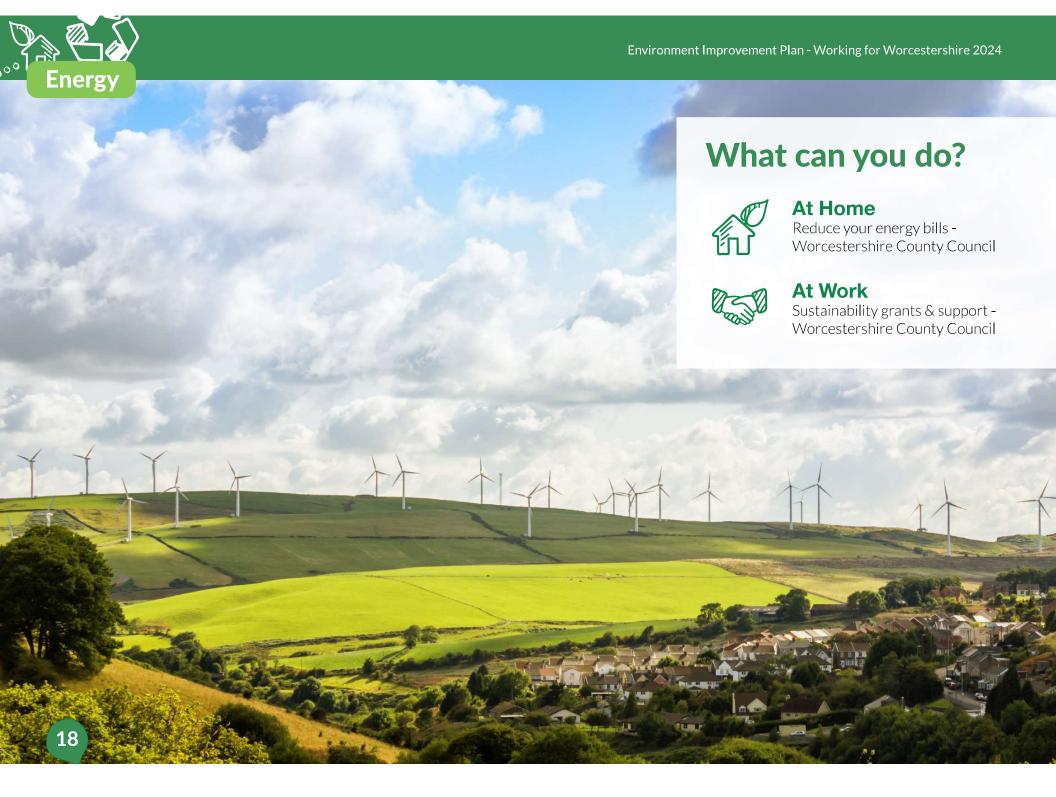






How we will work with partners / wider community

- Work with LEP partners and energy network providers to review the county Energy Strategy including assisting in the development of Worcestershire's Local Area Energy Plan (a plan to identify the most effective route for Worcestershire to meet its net carbon reduction targets).
- Lobby government for increased funding and powers through groups such as the County Councils' Network and Midlands Net Zero Hub, to support wider net zero carbon objectives.





Resources and Waste

Introduction

Resources and waste services are undergoing major reforms bringing huge changes. It is not an option to stay still as our services need to respond and evolve to meet the new requirements.

For example, food waste has to be collected separately, we need to improve the quality and quantity of our recycling.

We have to consider how a future Deposit Return Scheme, where some drinks containers can be returned to the retailer to redeem a deposit, will change what we do. Extended Producer Responsibility means that packaging producers will be paying us in the future to deal with the packaging that we collect, and we have to ensure that our services are as efficient and effective as possible.

As a growing economy, with more businesses and homes forecast, we know the importance of reducing our carbon footprint and ensuring new developments support a sustainable future.

We will encourage and grow our communities' capacity to reduce and recycle waste through the right services, support and provision.

Our Relevant strategies/plans

- National Resources and Waste Strategy (2018).
- Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste, the waste prevention programme for England (July 2023).
- Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Herefordshire and Worcestershire 2004 – 2034.
- Worcestershire County Council's Net Zero Carbon Plan.



We know the importance of reducing our carbon footprint and ensuring new developments support a sustainable future.



Love your



Resource and waste

Objectives

Our aim is to encourage residents to reduce, reuse, repair, recycle and compost more. By doing this we will use less raw materials and save energy whilst protecting natural resources and reducing carbon emissions. All of this will help us achieve our ambition of being a Net Zero Council by 2050.

New measures introduced through the national Resources and Waste Strategy and Environment Act 2021 will help transition to a more Circular Economy and increase waste and resource efficiency. This means major changes to the way in which waste is created in the first place, with new measures to reduce packaging and the way waste is collected, disposed of and treated.





Targets

Our Strategy includes targets to reduce residual waste per household, increase recycling and the amount of waste sent for energy recovery. A new target to reduce residual waste by 50% by 2042 has been agreed as part of a new suite of national targets. We are reviewing our targets alongside the Strategy to ensure these reflect the new reforms and national policies.







What we have delivered

WCC has:

- Over the last six years we have made significant progress by diverting waste which can't be recycled to our local Energy Recovery Facility rather than to landfill. The facility produces enough electricity to power approximately 32,000 homes each year.
- Last year (2022/23) 90% of the waste we handled was reused, recycled, composted or used to generate energy.
- Last year we carried out analysis looking at what is going into the general waste stream to inform our future campaigns. This showed that an average black wheelie bin in Worcestershire contains 35% food waste with over 40% of that waste still in its original packaging. Almost 70% of the food waste (or 25% of the average black wheelie bin) was avoidable i.e. it could have been eaten. This highlights that food waste is an issue that we can all do something about.
- We have continued to promote waste prevention through campaigns and initiatives including FoodSavvy, subsidised compost bins and reusable nappies.



What we will do:

- We are working with our Local Authority partners to deliver the requirements of Resources and Waste Strategy and Environment Act 2021 in the most efficient and effective way. We are reviewing our Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy to ensure that it reflects the changes and helps us move closer towards a Circular Economy.
- We will continue to make it easier for people to do the right thing to maximise the use of these resources and minimise their waste.
- We will continue to communicate with our residents and customers to ensure that they are aware of the services provided to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost.

How we will measure performance

- Joint Municipal Waste Strategy strategy targets.
- How much residual waste is produced by each household.
- How much is recycled.











How we will work with partners / wider community

- Working with our local authority partners through delivery of the Joint Municipal Waste Strategy is a cornerstone of our resources and waste services. We have achieved consistency in the core services that are provided, and we are working closely to ensure that we maintain that consistency in delivering the efficient and effective services of the future.
- Working with our local community is essential to meeting our plan to make it the norm to reduce, reuse, and recycle so we can reduce waste and make our economy truly circular and sustainable. We will do this by, providing good quality information in a range of formats and listening views about how we can make things easier.



What can you do?

Let's waste less

Resources are finite and precious. Their extraction and manufacture can cause environmental harm. We want to make it easier for people to do the right thing to maximise the use of these resources and minimise their waste.

Our plan aims to make it the norm to reduce, reuse and recycle so we can reduce waste and make our economy truly circular and sustainable.

Our dedicated website "Let's Waste Less | Worcestershire County Council provides a wealth of information about how to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost in Worcestershire.



Transport

Introduction

Worcestershire's transport network which includes road, rail and active travel is essential to our location in the heart of the country and provides economic connectivity to the important neighbouring regional economies plus those of London and the South East and Wales.

The key objectives for transport are set out in our Local Transport Plan 4, which targeted investment in 3 broad areas:

- Travel choice
- Transport Technology
- Capacity Enhancement

In addition to the County Council who are the local highways authority, motorways (M5, M50 and M42) and trunk roads (A46) are the responsibility of National Highways.

The train operating companies and Network Rail are responsible for train services and rail infrastructure.

How we choose to move in the County has a significant impact on carbon emissions and the wider environment. Around 34% (2021) of carbon emission in the County are from transport, although this does include strategic traffic on the motorway network which is passing through the county.

Our Relevant strategies/plans

- Local Transport Plan 4.
- Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy 2.
- Rights of Way Improvement Plan 3
- Transport Asset Management Plan 3.
- Network Management Plan.
- Passenger Transport Strategy.
- Bus Service Improvement Plan.
- Road Verges Habitat Action Plan.







What we have delivered

Rail

- Worcestershire Parkway Rail Station.
- Kidderminster Rail Station rebuild.
- Enhanced regional train services to Bristol.
- Secured options for future accessibility enhancements at Alvechurch and Blakedown rail stations.

Verge management

- Designation and management of Roadside Verge Nature Reserves.
- Programme of less intensive management of verges to enhance biodiversity.

Active Travel

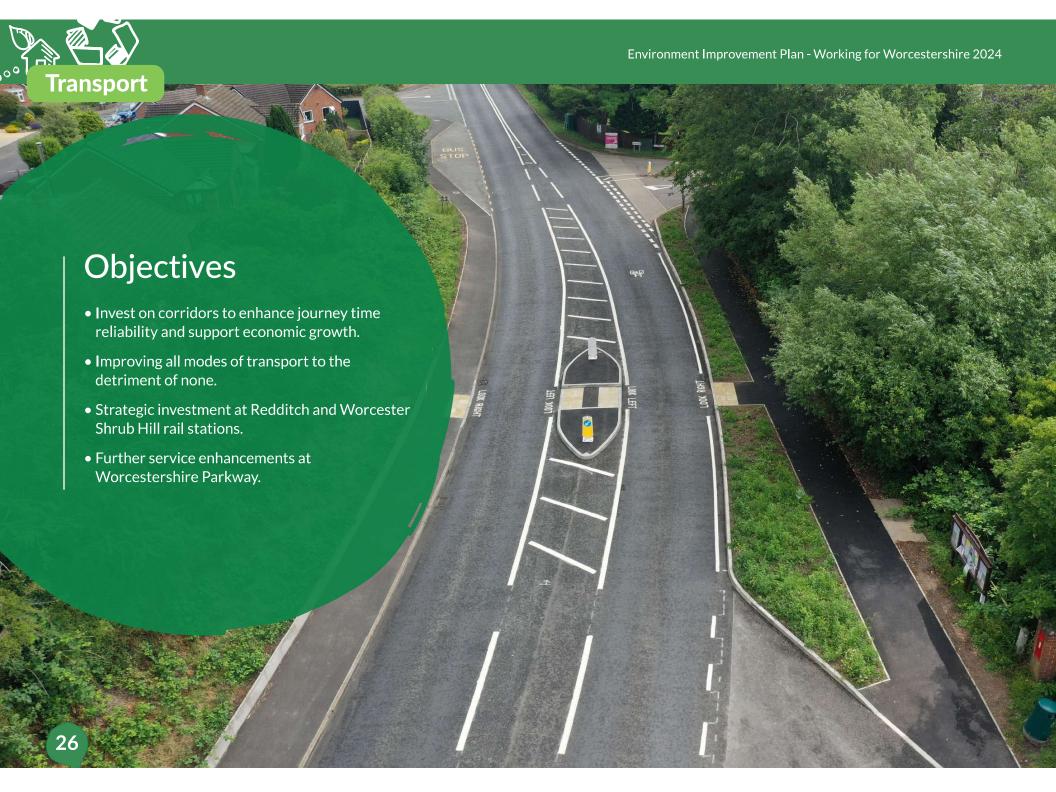
- National productivity investment funded seven active travel routes in Bromsgrove.
- Active travel England funded routes in Redditch, Worcester and Kidderminster.
- Active Travel routes in Worcester (in partnership with Worcester city and funded through the Towns Fund).
- Active travel routes in Kidderminster (in partnership with Wyre Forest DC and funded through Levelling Up Fund).
- Additional County investment in public rights of way and footways.
- A programme of cycle parking provision across the County.
- Active Travel stakeholder group.
- A annual programme of dropped kerbs and crossing points to support walking and cycling.
- Commenced development of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for key towns and City.

Highways

- Completed the dualling of the A4440, including the new Carrington Bridge and causeway.
- Secured funding for capacity enhancement of the A38 Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme.
- Hoo Brook Link Road delivered.
- A38 Upton improvements delivered.
- Pershore infrastructure improvement scheme delivered.

Bus

- Subsidy for core routes across the county.
- Worcestershire on Demand Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) in Bromsgrove and Malvern.
- A programme of Real Time Infrastructure Improvements.





What we will do:

- Develop Local Transport Plan 5.
- Publish a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for each of the main urban areas in Worcestershire 2023-2024.
- Produce an Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy 2023/24 and a delivery project (subject to funding).
- Continue to secure funding for and invest in the delivery of active travel routes.
- Work with Worcester City on the delivery of a bike share scheme.
- Deliver Hampton Active Travel Bridge, Evesham.
- Complete the delivery of Kepax Bridge, Worcester.
- Deliver the Worcester Shrub Hill masterplan.
- Deliver Redditch rail station redevelopment.
- Deliver Worcestershire Enhanced Bus Partnership.
- Continue to develop the North West Worcestershire Corridor business case.
- Work with partners to develop and deliver the Worcestershire Air Quality Action Plan.

How we will measure performance

- Cut journey times and increase journey time reliability along key road and rail routes (from corporate plan).
- Delivery of active travel routes.











How we will work with partners / wider community

It is essential that we continue to work with our partners, both nationally and locally to achieve transport outputs and outcomes outlined above. Without joint working many of the priorities, schemes and aspirations set out cannot be delivered.

This will include the District and City councils in Worcestershire, National Highways, Midlands Connect, Active Travel England, Train Operating Companies, Network Rail, Local Bus Operators and the Department for Transport. We will also work locally with stakeholders including Worcestershire Regulatory Services and specialist interest groups.