



a million voices for nature

Addressing climate change through planning

While we need to work nationally and internationally to secure progress on climate change, we also need to galvanise local action.

Find out how you can influence your council and help make your area more sustainable for the future.

Climate change

The first decade of this century has been the warmest decade so far documented. These globally higher temperatures have affected physical and biological systems in many ways, including: shrinkage of glaciers, more frequent, persistent and intense El Niño events, shifting of plant and animal ranges, and declines in some plant and animal populations.

The UK Climate Change Act (2008) requires a 34% reduction in CO₂ from 1990 by 2020. Dependent on greater commitment, or EU emissions reductions, it is hoped this will increase to a 42% reduction. Ultimately, though, we are working towards an 80% reduction by 2050, which is required if we are to have a reasonable change of avoiding dangerous climate change.

To help achieve these targets, action will be required at both local and national level. Find out how you can respond to planning applications and Local Development Frameworks to help ensure that new developments are created in a way that takes into consideration their climate change impacts.

Reducing the greenhouse gas emissions from new development

There are two ways of reducing the climate change impacts of built development. One is to reduce the amount of energy such development uses, and the other is to ensure that as much of the energy as possible is produced by on-site or local renewable energy.

- Using planning policy to influence Local Development Frameworks and planning applications

When commenting on planning applications or Local Development Frameworks it is important to strengthen your response by quoting relevant parts of national planning guidance.

National planning policy is produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). Planning Policy Statements (PPS) are national policy documents that set out general guidance for planners. Local planners will refer to and follow this national guidance when producing Local Development Frameworks (LDF) or deciding local planning applications. This also means that it is worth looking at the relevant LDF

documents for your area as they may provide you with useful policies to use in your responses.

The most immediately relevant national policy that will be helpful to quote when commenting on climate change aspects of planning applications or Local Development Frameworks is Planning and Climate Change: Supplement to PPS1. However, it may also be helpful to look at the entire policy documents.

Paragraph 26 of this Planning Policy Statement states that 'Planning authorities should have an evidence-based understanding of the local feasibility and potential for renewable and low-carbon technologies, including microgeneration [this is small-scale renewable technology such as roof mounted solar panels or roof-top wind turbines], to supply new development in their area. This may require them, working closely with industry and drawing in other appropriate expertise, to make their own assessments.

Drawing from this, and ensuring consistency with housing and economic objectives, planning authorities should:

(i) set out a target percentage of the energy to be used in new development to come from decentralised and renewable or low-carbon energy sources where it is viable. The target should avoid prescription on technologies [This allows the developer to choose the type of renewable – wind, solar etc] and be flexible in how carbon savings from local energy supplies are to be secured...'

The Code for Sustainable Homes measures the sustainability of a new home against categories of sustainable design, rating the 'whole home' as a complete package. The code uses a 1–6 star rating system to communicate the overall sustainability performance of a new home.

The code sets minimum standards for energy and water use at each level.

- Responding to Local Development Frameworks

The government policy highlighted above states that 'Local Planning Authorities can set their own targets for on-site renewable energy for new development.' Try to ensure that, as a bare minimum, the council adopt a policy such as that below.

'The council will require all developments, to strive towards achieving the principle for all developments to provide for their energy needs through renewables.'

If there are opportunities for bigger renewable energy generation projects, such as Combined Heat and Power, that could service many developments locally, then this percentage should be raised. It is important to bear in mind that the PPS states that all policies on on-site renewables must be properly tested and therefore must be achievable; however, this does not mean that they cannot be ambitious.

This approach also helps to increase the energy efficiency of developments. By taking

steps to increase efficiency developers can reduce the amount of renewable energy that needs to be produced on-site.

- Responding to planning applications

There are minimum standards for energy efficiency at each level of the Code for Sustainable Homes so when responding to planning applications ask that the development be built to the highest energy efficiency standard possible. If it is a housing development, suggest that it should reach level 4 of the code or above.

Planning and climate change adaptation

Providing better space for wildlife eg, parks, gardens and wildlife corridors (green infrastructure), and creating development that leaves room for biodiversity will give species room to move and adapt to climate change.

- Planning and Climate Change. Supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1

Paragraph 24 states that planning authorities should take into account:

- the effect of development on biodiversity and its capacity to adapt to likely change in the climate
- the contribution to be made from existing and new opportunities for open space and green infrastructure to urban cooling [areas that are not built on help to cool cities], sustainable drainage systems, and conserving and enhancing biodiversity’.

- Action through Local Development Frameworks

All developments should make some provisions for biodiversity. By creating more space for wildlife we can increase its ability to adapt to changes in the environment. Therefore we have to ensure that all new development provides as much room for wildlife as possible.

Encourage your local authority to protect and expand the network of local protected sites. Ensure that the local authority has also identified some new areas for habitat recreation. This may be wetland, heathland or another priority habitat depending on the area where you live.

- Planning applications

When responding to planning applications, look for the following;

- Ensure that all developments are designed to function effectively in future climatic conditions, with low energy inputs
- Ensure the development incorporates the provision of multifunction greenspace that provides opportunities for both recreation and biodiversity.
- Ask whether green roofs have been considered (a green roof is a roof of a building that is partially or completely covered with vegetation and soil, that provides useable habitat for plants and invertebrates).
- Ask for ponds planted with native species as these help with biodiversity and can provide important drainage functions.

- Ensure that the development minimises the extent to which it cuts off any existing link between green spaces and ask for green corridors to be provided between green areas – ensure the development does not completely isolate an area important for biodiversity.
- Ask developers to provide gardens, or at the very least balconies. Even a small area like a balcony can, with the help of potted plants, provide shelter and food for birds and all kinds of other wildlife, such as butterflies and dragonflies.

Further information

A coalition of planners, local authorities, developers and environmental organisations, including the RSPB, has launched a planning and climate change guide. *Planning for Climate Change Guide: guidance and model policies for local authorities* is designed primarily for local authorities who want both to tackle climate change and to reap the benefits that renewable energy and effective adaptation can bring.

The guide is available to download from the Town and Country Planning (TCPA) website (www.tcpa.org.uk).