



**Wigan[♥]
Council**

Wigan Annual Progress Report on the Climate Crisis 2023 - 2024

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Foreword – Councillor Paul Prescott

In the past year, we've made significant strides in our commitment to tackle climate change and build a better borough for all our residents. Taking steps to reduce our carbon emissions doesn't just impact climate change – it also brings opportunities to reduce inequality, improve health and wealth, make our communities more resilient, and makes our borough a cleaner, greener and better place to live.

This year, we launched [Progress with Unity](#), a new movement for change for the next decade. We know that the world around us has changed significantly and the challenges and opportunities that our communities are living through requires a bold response. Two key missions have been identified: creating fair opportunities for all and breaking down inequalities, and making all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish for those who live and work in them.



We cannot achieve these missions without tackling climate change at the same time.

This annual report highlights key projects and achievements for the last year, and includes our priorities for the coming year. We are proud of what we have already achieved, but we recognise that we still have so much to do. Climate change will impact us all, regardless of age, gender, race or background. However, we know that climate change disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable residents and communities. We all have a part to play in protecting those residents and communities, and creating a borough that is resilient, thriving, healthy and economically prosperous for us and future generations.



Our Strategy

Our Strategy

Wigan Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019 and, in response, developed a 5-year strategy to outline our ambition to tackle climate change, adapt and build resilience to the climatic changes we're already seeing, and take action to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2038. Our [Outline Climate Change Strategy](#) (OCCS) was adopted by Cabinet in 2020, and sets out how we will work to reduce our emissions and adapt to climate change.

The OCCS organises our work around climate change into 6 Action Themes:

- Our Built Environment
- Our Natural Environment
- Our Transport & Air Quality
- Our Adaptation & Resilience
- Our Sustainability & Consumption
- Our Communities & Wellbeing

With the launch of the OCCS and six Action Themes, we set up dedicated multi-service working groups to help us work collaboratively towards our targets. We established a clear governance structure to ensure we have a strong focus, clear direction and are held to account.

Each Action Theme has its own strategy document, details what we've done so far, and outlines actions including lead service areas and officers, timescale, KPIs, partner organisations and RAG ratings. Each year, we take stock of what we have achieved and create an Annual Progress Report.

However, we also recognise that addressing climate change and limiting its devastating impacts cannot be achieved by a single organisation. The effort requires changes to how we all live and work, and every resident has a role to play in securing a climate resilient future. The Council has worked with staff, businesses, partner organisations, community groups, and residents to raise awareness of climate change and develop ways we can all make positive changes.

This report provides an overview of progress made in delivering Wigan's OCCS during the last financial year – April 2023 – March 2024.



Our Built Environment

Our Built Environment

The energy used in homes accounts for 33% of the borough's emissions¹. This is the second largest source of climate emissions after transport. 80% of the buildings that will exist in 2050 have already been built². This means that decarbonising our homes, schools, public and commercial buildings is a major priority, and new homes need to be built for a future net zero world. We want all our homes, workplaces and schools to be comfortable, healthy and efficient.

- We were **awarded over £200k** from Sport England to install solar panels and energy-saving swimming pool pumps in the community-owned Pelican Centre in Tyldesley, and Leigh Leisure Centre.
- We installed solar panels, an air source heat pump (ASHP) and LED lighting at Shevington Library. The solar panels alone are expected to **reduce the site's energy usage by 40 per cent.**
- **Over 600 solar panels** have been installed on Robin Park Leisure Centre, reducing energy consumption by 36% and saving around 51 tonnes of carbon every year.³



¹ [UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-statistics)

² [Climate Change Mitigation | UKGBC](https://www.ukgbc.org/)

³ [Vital Energi complete solar installation at Robin Park Leisure Centre](https://www.vitalenergi.co.uk/news/vital-energi-complete-solar-installation-at-robin-park-leisure-centre)



Our Built Environment

- We were **awarded £1.9m funding** to decarbonise our social housing. We have installed ASHPs at over 420 properties and solar panels on nearly 1,500 properties.



- Between 2022-2024, we have **delivered over 200 low carbon new social homes**. A further 32 extra care apartments with ASHP are due in early 2025, and a further 22 homes new homes with ASHPs will complete in 2025.





Our Built Environment

- **67%** of our social housing has an EPC rating of A-C.
- We are due to deliver
53 homes and 74 apartments
to Passivhaus specification in 2025.



- **Over 21,911mWh of renewable electricity** was generated in Wigan borough in 2023⁴. Since 2019, we have increased local renewable energy generation by 6.9MW⁵.
- [Places for Everyone](#), the long-term plan for nine of Greater Manchester's districts, including Bolton, was adopted in March. It states that **all new homes and buildings should be net zero carbon by 2028**.

⁴ [Regional Renewable Statistics - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ [Workbook: Five Year Environment Plan \(2019-24\) progress](#)



Our Natural Environment

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. UK species have declined by about 19% since 1970 and nearly 1.6 species are now threatened with extinction.⁶

Wigan borough is 70% green space, and home to a wetland mosaic of open water, swamp, reedbed, tall herb fen, wet marshy grassland, meadows and wet woodland, much of which has been created through the flooding of partially collapsed deep coal mine workings. Our landscape is deeply connected to the proud, industrial history of the borough, and an example of the incredible adaptive capacity of the natural world.

Protecting our green spaces is vital for our mental and physical well-being, biodiversity, adapting to climate change, and acting as a carbon sink.

- More than **15% of the UK's willow tits** live in the North West, and Wigan is a key central point for them.



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Our Natural Environment

- The 20-year [Wigan Greenheart Landscape Recovery Scheme](#), launched in Autumn 2023, covers over 1,400 hectares including the Flashes of Wigan and Leigh National Nature Reserve. The scheme will **restore, create and connect** good quality habitats to aid species recovery, and give local communities and visitors more opportunities to discover, enjoy and connect with nature in our area.



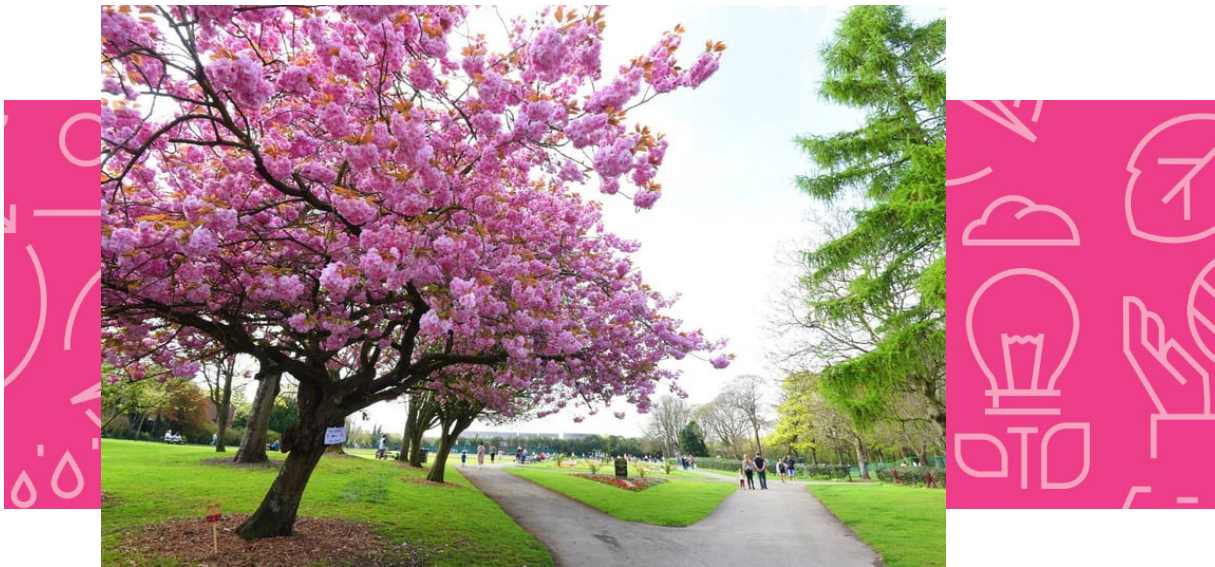
- The first **Flashes Festival of Nature** was a 2-day event at Pennington Flash, coinciding with National Nature Reserve week.





Our Natural Environment

- Community-led sites at Colliers Corner in Howe Bridge and Tanners Lane Embarkment in Golborne were awarded **Green Flag awards** in 2024. Mesnes Park (Wigan), Pennington Hall Park (Leigh), Alexandra Park (Newtown) and Jubilee Park (Ashton-in-Makerfield) also retained their Green Flag credentials.



- 2 community groups were awarded funding through **Greater Manchester Mayor's Green Spaces Fund**. The Pemberton Green Spaces project builds biodiversity in Wigan's colliery streets, and the Friends of Low Hall are [restoring a neglected reserve](#), boosting biodiversity, accessibility and creating a much-loved community asset.





Our Natural Environment

- The **new Horticulture team** at Haigh Hall is sustainably restoring the estate, developing wildflower meadows, rainwater harvesting, introducing a forest garden, and re-using materials – the demolition of the model village was recycled for use in building the [new Amphitheatre](#).
- An **urban ‘mini park’** has been created at Robin Hill Field, Standish.
- Meadowland creation at Nicol Mere Recreation Area has seen wild orchids flourish. With City of Trees, over **0.45 hectares** of woodland and hedgerows will be created.





Our Adaptation and Resilience

Our Adaptation and Resilience

Global climate change is bringing new uncertainties, challenges and risks that the council needs to consider to ensure the future wellbeing of our borough, its residents and businesses.

Even if all emissions were stopped today, the impacts of climate will continue to increase in frequency and severity. We will see more extreme weather, flooding, sea level rise, extreme heat and cold, drought and wildfires. At a local level, we need to prepare our services, borough and residents against these shocks. This will not only build resilience to the impacts of climate change, but it will support our existing priorities around reducing inequalities and supporting flourishing towns and neighbourhoods.

- **New surface water mapping** was carried out for two high priority areas
- We have installed Natural Flood Management schemes, such as leaky dams, to **reduce the risk of flooding** along the network.





Our Adaptation and Resilience

- **New Flood Action Groups** will provide help and advice to residents in high-risk areas of the borough
- Project Yellowfish, which informs the next generation about flooding and resilience, was delivered to over **1,000 pupils**.
- The Highways team are trialling a range of electric plant to help **reduce emissions** and deliver their service more sustainably.
- The **Regions4Climate global project** is providing funding for [building resilience in Higher Folds](#), Leigh, an area at a high-risk of flooding. The multi-agency approach listens deeply to residents to support building of resilience in the face of increasing extreme weather events.
- The **Health Protection Board** carried out several preparedness exercises looking at how Wigan would cope during events that may become more prevalent due to climate change, such as power outages and flooding.



Our Transport and Air Quality

Our Transport and Air Quality

Transport is the largest source of emissions in Wigan borough, accounting for 37%⁷. Our lifestyles have become more reliant on road transport in recent decades – it is efficient and affordable for most people. Despite the increase in low-emissions vehicles and more efficient models, transport emissions continue to rise. However, road transport is deeply polluting to both the environment and our health.

The council's focus is on supporting a modal shift to more sustainable and less polluting forms of transport. We want to make it easier, safer and more convenient to consider alternative ways of traveling to and from school, work, home and leisure.

- **The Bee Network**, the UK's first franchised bus operation outside London, launched in Wigan in September 2023. There are now more electric buses powering millions more journeys across Greater Manchester. New bus services have been launched between the borough and Middlebrook and the Trafford Centre, and a 24-hour service between Leigh Infirmary and Manchester Royal Infirmary was trialled. These changes are boosting access to jobs, healthcare, retail and leisure for Wigan residents.

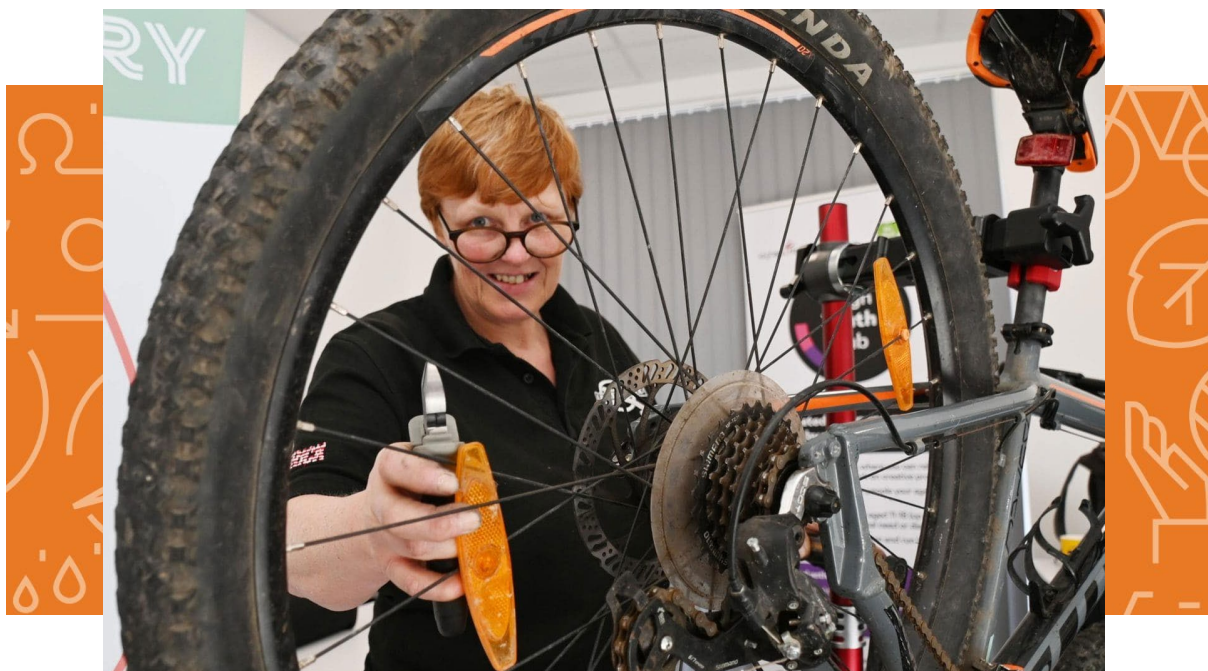


⁷ [UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)



Our Transport and Air Quality

- Our air quality monitoring stations in Wigan and Leigh town centres measured **decreased air pollution** between 2022 and 2023.
- We have been **awarded funding** to develop our Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure strategy in the coming year.
- **56 new publicly available car charging points** were installed last year. Wigan borough has 77 publicly available electric car chargers per 100,000 people.
- **Leigh Bike Library** was launched, the largest and most successful across Greater Manchester. It has 270 members and 225 bikes have been loaned since April 2023.





Our Transport and Air Quality

- We launched our first ever walking festival: Big Wigan Walk Week. More than **40 organised walks** took place in May-June.



- The Be Well team and 60 volunteers hosted over **1,500 leisure walks/rides** with over 15,000 attendees.

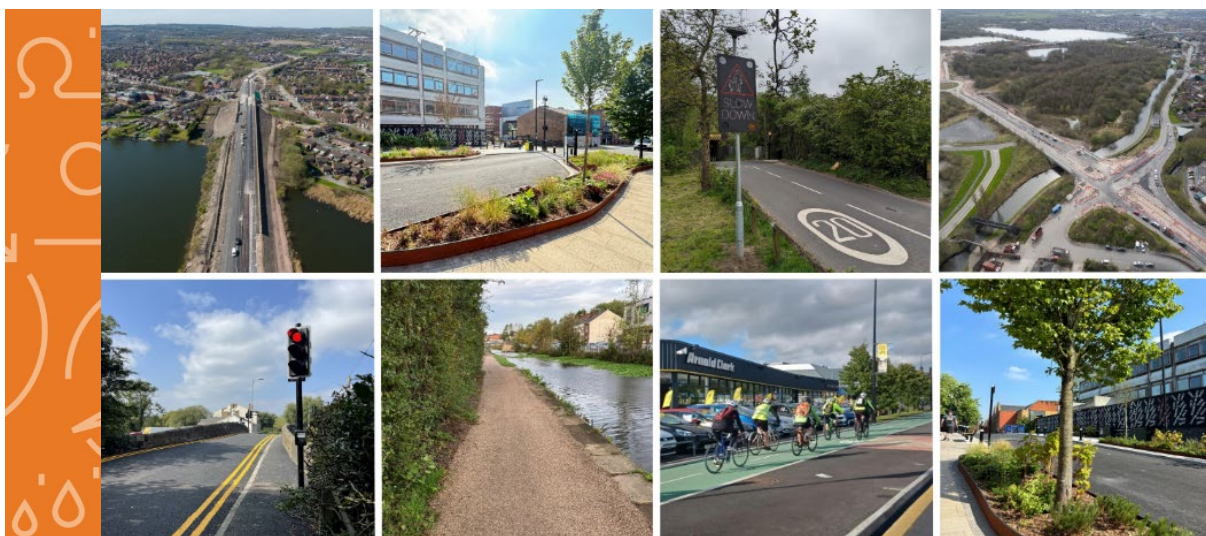


- We have partnered with **British Cycling** and have recruited our first Cycling Community Developer.



Our Transport and Air Quality

- We have delivered **two more active travel schemes**: one scheme along the Leeds to Liverpool canal towpath, and one between Wigan and Standish.



- **Three further active travel upgrades** are currently under construction.
- A new cycle totem counter installed on Wallgate measured a **103% uplift in usage**.
- St Mary's in Platt Bridge is the only school in Greater Manchester to be awarded an **Excellent accreditation** level for its Modeshift STARS work on reducing car use around schools.





Our Sustainability and consumption

Our Sustainability and consumption

Almost everything we do involves raw materials (natural resources) like trees, gas, oil, metal ores, and water. Our appetite for raw materials continues to increase: if everyone lived like we do in the UK, we would need 2.6 Earths to sustain us⁸. We aim to raise awareness about consumption, ask residents to think differently, and make sure that what they are using can be recycled or reused, if possible.

- In 23/24, **51.5%** of waste was sent for reuse, recycling or composting.
- **Only 1.7%** of household waste was sent to landfill.
- **Household waste has reduced** from 574kg per capita in 19/20 to 401.7kg per capita in 23/24.
- We were **shortlisted for 2 awards** at the Letsrecycle Awards, and 2 at the National Recycling Awards, including Facility of the year.
- **Second Chance Saloon** was launched at Slag Lane Recycling Centre in Leigh, in partnership with our waste and recycling partner, FCC Environment. The Saloon, made entirely from repurposed materials on-site, asks residents to rethink their discarded items, and acts as a drop-off point for donated items.



⁸ [How many Earths? How many countries? - Earth Overshoot Day](#)



Our Sustainability and consumption

- Walking aids are being given a new life by Wigan Council and FCC – Wigan, Wrightington and Leigh NHS Trust now receives over **900 refurbished walking aids** every quarter.



- We purchased a fully electric panel van, reducing the fleet service department's emissions by **over 50%**.
- **99% of our fleet** is compliant with Euro 6/zero emissions.



Our Communities, Businesses and Wellbeing

Our Communities, Businesses and Wellbeing

Climate change can sometimes seem like an abstract issue, one that simply requires government intervention, technological fixes and drastic emissions reductions in the built environment, energy and infrastructure. However, we also need to take a people-centred approach. We need behavioural change and a greater understanding of the threat we face.

We aim to engage schools, businesses, community groups and residents to raise awareness of the human impact of climate change, and collaborate to make sure we achieve a just transition that doesn't leave any person, business or community worse off in terms of health, wealth and wellbeing. The journey towards 2038 across Wigan borough needs to support every member of our community and enable a sustainable transition whilst positively promoting people's health and wellbeing, a thriving local green economy and access to fulfilling life opportunities, allowing all residents and neighbourhoods to flourish.

- The Climate team has delivered in-person Climate Awareness Training to over **400 members of staff**, as well as businesses, community groups, partner organisations and schools.
- 20 Wigan small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) and 30 green tech SMEs have accessed support from **Green Economy**⁹. 30 green tech SMEs are on their marketplace, which showcases the installers, suppliers and manufacturers of low carbon technologies and services.
- The **Climate team and Aspiring Futures**, an employment and skills service, are working together to build awareness of green careers.

⁹ Green Economy is a government- and GMCA-funded organisation which helps businesses decarbonise and aims to grow businesses in the green technology sector



Our Communities, Businesses and Wellbeing

- The Climate team is supporting schools in developing action plans. **The Department of Education** has stated that all schools will need a sustainability lead and action plan by 2025.
- Climate change was a key theme at the **Annual School Governor Conference**. Guest speakers included the Council's Climate team, Man Met University, the National Governance Association, Positive Planet and Surfers Against Sewage.
- The 3rd Annual **Wigan Youth Climate Summit**, hosted at The Edge, saw dozens of schools, colleges and organisations come together to discuss climate change, consumerism, mental health, and how we can all make a difference. Bedford High School performed their very own song about climate change.





Our Communities, Businesses and Wellbeing

- **Wigan Climate Coalition** is a network of public, private and VCFSE organisations that come together to take meaningful, collaborative action on climate change in the borough. This year we finalised our Vision and Mission as a group, and held several workshops.
- **57 schools** in the borough are registered [Eco-Schools](#), one of the largest global sustainable schools programmes, empowering educators and young people to tackle environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity-loss, and plastic pollution.





Summary and next steps

Overall, good progress is being made on the delivery of the Outline Climate Change Strategy and six Action Themes as outlined in this annual report.

Engagement has been a strong focus for work this year, as we aim to make climate change everyone's responsibility. We will continue to develop and engage deeply with staff, residents, communities and businesses, as real positive change needs us all.

The primary focus for 24/25 is:

- **Refreshing our strategy** – not only is the world very different to when we first published it in 2020, we have also made a great deal of progress. The climate strategy refresh will reflect the changing world and outline new opportunities and areas of focus. It will also act as a cornerstone of achieving our Progress with Unity missions.
- Focus on **supporting our residents** through behaviour change, awareness raising, and resilience.
- Continue to build our **strategic leadership, governance structures and policy changes** that will embed climate change into the heart of way the Council works.
- **Collaborate** with partnership organisations, agencies, businesses and community groups to achieve real change, together.
- Continue to explore **new and innovative funding opportunities**.
- **Upskill** our staff through Climate Awareness Training, including elected members and senior officers.
- **Deliver 2 events** – the launch event of the Wigan Climate Coalition in Spring 2025 and the 4th Wigan Youth Climate Summit in Autumn 2025.
- Continue to develop **energy generation, storage and low carbon technology** projects.
- Climate change and air quality will be 2 **priority areas for Public Health** in 24/25.