

# Achievements to date: Milton Keynes Sustainability Strategy

Delivery and achievements since 2019



## Economy

*A city that uses the opportunities from growth to achieve its climate goals*

For the City Council work, activity under the Economy theme focusses on the City Council as a business, how it makes Council services more sustainable, and on how MKCC's supply chain can better meet the sustainability ambitions of the city.

For our city based work, our activity will focus on working with businesses/industry to deliver our climate targets (including green economy and green skills work), the development of the city's circular economy, and encouraging innovation to support work on the climate agenda in our city.

### Council:

- Encouraging MKCC suppliers to support the Net Zero targets for the organisation. As an example, since their appointment as waste and recycling contractors Suez have opened multiple reuse centres in Milton Keynes.
- The Council reports annually on their greenhouse gas emissions for its operational emissions and is expanding this work to include more procured goods and services.
- Completed a Net Zero Procurement Playbook for internal staff, advising MKCC staff responsible for buying services on how council contracts can help meet the City Council's climate ambitions.

### City:

- Milton Keynes City Council's response to the Covid-19 Pandemic included a half a million pounds investment in a **Green Business Recovery Programme**. The Green Business Recovery programme directly supported over 1200 individuals and 200 businesses and included, amongst others:
  - **Net Zero MK project** – originally started through the Green Business Recovery programme, the Net Zero MK project has now supported over 150 businesses and 1000 individuals take practical action to reduce their carbon footprints. This included fully funded carbon footprint analysis, monthly surgeries and follow ups, expert led workshops, and themed events and conferences, all focussed on taking practical action to improve the sustainability of Milton Keynes businesses.
  - **Milton Keynes Green Business Network**. An initiative started by Joe Gilbert, the founder of Red Giraffe Marketing Services, a business community formed to gather some of the most forward-thinking companies in Milton Keynes who aspire to increase their sustainability practices. The network now has over 50 members, meeting quarterly to discuss the opportunities and issues affecting businesses.
  - A **green space maintenance training scheme** delivered by the **Parks Trust**, focussed on landscape management, making green spaces in MK efficient,

and in the business management vital for environment and landscape management.

- **A green growth** business development programme for 50 Milton Keynes based businesses, run by **Cranfield University's Bettany Centre for Entrepreneurship**. The course focussed on the adoption of green business practices, creation of green jobs and skills and on the reduction of carbon emissions.
- 2024 saw the opening of **Milton Keynes College's Green Skills Centre** – addressing the skills gap locally for individuals trained in the installation and essential upgrades needed to support the green economy. Courses taught in the centre include, amongst others, installation of Small Scale Solar Photovoltaic Systems and Electric Vehicle charge points<sup>1</sup>.
- On Circular Economy, the City Council and local partners supported the opening of the city's first **Library of Things**<sup>2</sup>, encouraging sharing of items that residents may otherwise need to individually purchase.
- The Milton Keynes Business Community has recognised the importance of sustainability plans and ambitions. In 2022 the **Milton Keynes Business Achievement Awards** celebrated all things green economy, with the theme "Milton Keynes – Leading the UK's Green Recovery." Winners of the prestigious awards included Bridgman and Bridgman, more:trees, Clearview Intelligence, and Emerging Market Quality Trials/Naturally Tribal<sup>3</sup>.
- Milton Keynes has used its Smart City and Innovation agenda to help address climate challenges. Starship Robots, started trials in the city in 2018 and now run a fully commercial service. It is estimated that since 2020, Milton Keynes has been home to over 100 robot residents who have made over 800,000 deliveries, and delivered a reduction of 230,000kg of reduction in carbon emissions, reducing emissions through the city embracing new technologies<sup>4</sup>. Most recently, the Smart City programme has seen the fully electric and autonomous Ohmio vehicles being trialled in Central Milton Keynes.

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<sup>1</sup> [MK College Group opens new Green Skills Centre - MK College](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Amazing 'Library of Things' opens in Milton Keynes for people to borrow everything from sewing machines to baby buggies for free](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Winners announced at Milton Keynes Business Achievement Awards 2022 - MKFM 106.3FM - Radio Made in Milton Keynes](#)

<sup>4</sup> Milton Keynes Tech, Smart City, Digital, and Creative Industries Strategy 2024-29, [Milton Keynes Tech, Smart City, Digital, and Creative Industries Strategy 2024-29](#)

## Energy

*A resilient and energy secure city, producing clean energy, and using energy in moderation*

For Milton Keynes City Council, our work on this theme will focus on the reduction of our energy use, renewable energy generation and resilience of energy.

For our city-wide work, we will focus on energy resilience and transition, maximising renewable energy generation and use, and reducing energy demand to produce carbon reductions. We'll also be demonstrating real place leadership through supporting the creation of a District Heating network for the city.

### Council:

- We have reduced the energy consumption in City Council buildings by 80% since 2019.
- The Milton Keynes Waste Recovery Park now generates enough energy to power 11,000 homes.
- We have switched over 55,000 streetlights to LED lighting, producing a cumulative saving of 29.2 million kWh of electricity and over 38,000 tonnes of carbon.
- We have recently developed plans to connect three Council buildings into the heat network via the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

### City:

- Milton Keynes City Council has worked in partnership with MK Community Energy, a CIC focussing on uniting residents and organisations to create a more sustainable future for Milton Keynes. The Community Energy partnership has focussed on building confidence in retrofit solutions, through events, working with networks, and providing free resources for homeowners on their website. They are currently engaging with homeowners across 45 postcodes in the city, directly engaging with over 1,000 people in Milton Keynes.
- Published our Heat Networks - Pathway to Net Zero policy paper, outlining the Council's position on the development of heat networks in Milton Keynes.
  - An Outline Business Case has been completed to progress Milton Keynes Waste Recovery Park as a source of heat.
  - Work is underway to discuss a proposed investment in developing a heat network for the city with £200m of Government funding to deliver this over the next five years.
- The City Council has secured funding and delivered a number of Energy efficiency programmes for the benefit of Milton Keynes residents including:
  - Sustainable Warmth – 85 energy efficiency measures installed within MK households including heat pumps, insulation and solar panels.

- Home Upgrade Grant 2 – 24 households in MK received funded retrofit with 71 measures installed, including air source heat pumps, insulation and solar panels.
- Thousands of Council Homes have received energy efficiency upgrades and improvements, including through initiatives like the Social Housing Decarbonisation fund.



## Emissions

*A city actively reducing its impact on the climate through lowering emissions*

For Milton Keynes City Council, activity on this workstream focusses on the reduction and mitigation of MKCC direct emissions, including the decarbonisation of its fleet vehicles and building heating systems.

For the city-wide work, this theme focusses on reducing and mitigating emissions in the city to ensure clean air, with a focus on reducing and mitigating transport, domestic, and industry emissions. This will include the development of plans for step change in public transport provision in Milton Keynes by realising the plans for a Milton Keynes mass rapid transit system.

### Council:

- The City Council has cut its own carbon emissions by tens of thousands of tonnes in the last four years.
- Good progress has been made on electrifying the City Council's fleet, with 30 electric fleet vehicles, including refuse trucks, already on the streets of Milton Keynes. 25% of the Waste and Environmental Services Contract vehicles are electric.
- MKCC added 7 electric cargo bikes to their fleet and 5 electric bikes for use by the Landscape Team, Tree Inspectors and Highways.
- The City Council has implemented a staff Electric Vehicle salary sacrifice scheme, which opened in summer 2024. Already, 88 colleagues have ordered new hybrid or fully electric vehicles, reducing their personal emissions.

### City:

- The City Council has been using the growth of the city to directly fund sustainability work. The Milton Keynes Tariff has to date collected £3.9m from developers building new homes and commercial spaces in the city which has been invested in the Carbon Offset Fund. In addition to the Tariff, over £6.5m more has been captured through section 106 agreements for carbon neutrality projects on new residential and commercial developments through progressive planning policies. The growth of the city is directly contributing towards its sustainability goals.
- Using the funding secured from new developments, the Council created the Carbon Offset Fund (COF). Backed with over £4.6 million of funding, the fund provides up to 50% match funding for community groups and public organisations in Milton Keynes for projects that provide long term carbon emissions reductions. 23 organisations have had completed projects supported to date with more projects currently underway.

Some examples of organisations supported include:

- Inspiring Futures Through Learning Academy Trust have received over £260k of COF for a programme of energy efficiency works across 10 Milton Keynes schools.

- Milton Keynes College will receive over £800k of Carbon Offset Funding to decarbonise their Bletchley campus with air source heat pumps.
- Olney Centre received over £160k to run a programme of improvement works including installation of solar panels, LED lighting, an air source heat pump system and double-glazed windows.

A further £1.5m of projects have been allocated COF funding and are currently in the delivery phase.

- Milton Keynes has been a leading UK city on Electric Vehicles since 2008, pioneering the installation of EV chargepoints. The UK's first Electric Vehicle Showroom ran in centre:MK from 2017-2022, providing interested consumers with independent advice on Electric Vehicles, funded through the Go Ultra Low project. Ownership of battery electric vehicles has increased in MK by 16,000% compared with the national average of 2600% since 2015. Today, 16% of vehicles in Milton Keynes are fully electric, and including hybrids, around 25% of all registered vehicles in Milton Keynes are more sustainable.
- Milton Keynes introduced e-bike and e-scooter hire schemes for residents, E-scooter trials were introduced in the city in 2020, the first trial in the UK with multiple scooter operators. To date, over 3.5 million trips have been made between both modes, saving over 175 tonnes of co2.
- The Transport team in Milton Keynes have given a clear focus to cycling in the city. Achievements include:
  - 14 cargo bikes have been provided to local businesses, parish councils and the Parks Trust to transform the way that they provide services. Beneficiaries include Urb Farm, Urban Beelievers, The Salvage Hacker, and MK Food Connect.
  - 132 bikes provided for schools to enable young people in Milton Keynes to learn how to ride and cycle safely.
  - In 2021, the City Council introduced a scheme Providing free bikes, helmets and locks to people who are on low income, with health and social needs, or to get to work or school. 294 bikes have been given out since the scheme started.
  - Over the past four years, MKCC's transport team have delivered cycle training to over 10,000 people in Milton Keynes.
  - Through the Workplace Travel Plan process, the City Council has provided £45,000 worth of cycle storage to local businesses to enable their employees to travel more sustainably. We have also provided over 100 cycle and scooter parking places to Milton Keynes schools.
  - Significant investment in Redway Super Routes<sup>5</sup>, including improving lighting, cutting back vegetation, and installing wayfinding.

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<sup>5</sup> V8, V6, H6 and H2 Redway Super Routes

- In 2023, the 50p city hopper fare was introduced in Central Milton Keynes. This initiative has led to a 250% increase in bus journeys in the city centre.
- The City Council secured £3.6 million from the Department for Transport to improve public transport services and to increase patronage in the city.
- Public Transport infrastructure is also becoming more sustainable. A bus shelter replacement scheme is in delivery encouraging full recycling of shelters and upgrading materials. Real time passenger information screens that use e-ink have already started to be rolled out across the city and are fully recyclable. Green roofs were also installed on 15 bus stops across Milton Keynes, in total delivering over 8 tonnes of direct CO2 emissions savings<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> [Bus stop green roofs provide a route to sustainable ambitions](#)



## Environment

*A city adapting to climate change, to ensure it remains a great place to live*

For the City Council, this work will focus on physical environment, biodiversity, and nature that the Council's teams are directly responsible for, with the city-wide work focussing on the same issues, but outside the City Council's direct control. We will take forward our aim for Milton Keynes to be a leading green city.

### **Biodiversity:**

- Milton Keynes City Council has undertaken a significant programme of tree planting, since 2019 MKCC alone has planted over 8000 trees, including 10 forest gardens.
- We have converted 15 hectares of arable land to species rich meadow whilst ensuring protection of the archaeology of the Roman town of Magiovinium.
- In 2020, as part of the Council's priorities to increase biodiversity, 40m<sup>2</sup> of grass verges and underpass edges along the high-speed grid road network were re-worked and prepared for hydroseeding with a wildflower mix to encourage biodiversity.
- As a result of the council's action, the number of wildflowers planted in the city has increased<sup>7</sup>. This has had a positive impact on more than 1,000 different species such as bees and beetles, and plants such as Bee Orchids are beginning to make a local comeback.

Other activities the Council has undertaken to encourage and increase biodiversity in the last 4 years include:

- Introducing new woodland corridors along the grid roads
- reduced grass cutting/mowing cycles<sup>8</sup> – including no mow May - to allow plants to flourish.
- bulb planting along approximately 80m of the grid roads and on a number of roundabouts.
- trials of micro clover planting.

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<sup>7</sup> Wildflowers seeded in Milton Keynes include:

- Rough Hawkbit (*Leontodon Hispidus*)
- Yarrow (*Achillea Millefolium*)
- Ox eye daisy (*Leucanthemum Vulgare*)
- Self-heal (*Prunella Vulgaris*)

<sup>8</sup> Where safe to do so

### **Flood management:**

We have worked with our communities on delivering resilience projects across the city. Achievements to date include:

- Delivery of Coffee Hall Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SuDS) Pilot which included design and creation of two raingardens, SuDS planters' installation, tree planting and tree pits. This project will stop water from flooding homes by redirecting it, temporarily holding the extra water, and slowing down how quickly it flows into the public sewer system. This project benefited from MKCC, Anglian Water and Shared prosperity funding.
- Delivery of the Cold Harbour School SuDS project - a project that involved the design and implementation of SuDS to reduce the risk of flooding from surface water. As part of the project, we installed special planters on the school building and created two raingardens. These new features not only help reduce the risk of flooding, but also support wildlife and create new natural spaces. They also give students a chance to learn about nature and water management. The raingardens and SuDS planters also provided an opportunity for learning for the school pupils. This project benefited from Anglian Water, Department for Education and MKCC funding.
- We have been working with flood groups in the city and continue supporting them by helping them set up, providing comments on draft plans, attending meetings and supporting them in collaborating with the Environment Agency flood resilience officers.
- We have worked on feasibility studies to ensure that any flood resilience or flood prevention measures proposed that could be implemented have been fully modelled and costed. The completed Feasibility Studies will be used to appraise potential Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management scheme options. To date we have successfully delivered the following feasibility packages:
  - Overland flow in Milton Keynes rural areas that helps us to understand the flood risk at three rural locations (Ravenstone, Stoke Goldington and Tathall End)
  - Feasibility package for Lavendon Flood Alleviation Scheme

## **Infrastructure, Fleet, Service:**

Delivery of key projects with the City Council's infrastructure:

- The roll out of wheeled bins has increased the city's recycling rate by 76 places from 83 to 7 in the country. Official statistics show 60.2% of the city's household waste was sent for recycling, reuse or composting in 2023/24, up from 48.1% the previous year. The national average for recycling is 44%.
- MK Waste Recovery Park (MKWRP) generating 7MW of renewable electricity – 25% is sleeved back to Council buildings.
- A mechanical treatment extracting recyclables from rubbish has increased our recycling rate by an additional 4%.
- An anaerobic digester which processes organic (food) waste extracted from rubbish collected from our black wheeled bins and turns it into electricity powering MKWRP.
- Residents' waste which goes to the MKWRP fuels vehicles through a private wire which electrifies our environmental services fleet.
- Cables installed ready for the delivery of further electric RCVs to meet carbon reduction targets.
- Upgrading all lights in and out of the Environmental Services Depot to reduce electricity usage. Pay back is estimated to be less than a year.
- Work has started of refurbishment of the Waste Transfer Station office which includes greater insulation and allowing future connection to a heat network.
- Wood that cannot be chipped and left on site from our Arboricultural works is now taken to the Waste Transfer Station and then sent to be used as biomass for energy.

## Engagement

### *A city that encourages everyone to get involved in the Climate agenda*

For MKCC work, we will focus on working across the organisation to share best practice between departments, other public sector bodies, and engage Council suppliers in the conversation about our climate aims.

For our city-wide work, we will focus on working with our citizens, organisations and businesses to achieve the goal of a net zero Milton Keynes, recognising that MK City Council's direct impact alone cannot achieve our bold aims for the city.

#### **Council:**

- Completed an 'Eco Champions' initiative for staff to increase awareness and participation in environmental initiatives
- Climate change e-learning module has been introduced for MKCC staff, providing all MKCC staff with access to learning and development
- Annual updates on the first Sustainability Strategy have involved colleagues from across Milton Keynes City Council, including transport and highways, planning, public health, economic development, environment and waste, housing, and property.
- Initial work to produce Council Service Climate risk registers, to help future proof the provision of public services from climate risk have been produced with sustainability colleagues promoting this learning across the organisation.

#### **City:**

- The first Milton Keynes Sustainability Conference took place in early 2020 with around 100 attendees from businesses, voluntary and third sector organisations, and members of the public joining the City Council to discuss the actions that could be taken to reduce emission. In 2022, the first Milton Keynes Low Carbon conference took place bringing together key people and organisations working to achieve the city's climate goals.
- In 2024, Milton Keynes was successful in getting a place as a twin city on the EU's Net Zero Cities programme. Milton Keynes has been twinned with the City of Lyon, France. Work is taking place over an 18-month period to capture the learning from Lyon's commitment to community engagement with residents, business and organisations in introducing sustainability measures.
- In April 2025, Santander UK and Milton Keynes City Council announced their year-long partnership on the 'Tomorrow's Homes Milton Keynes' project<sup>9</sup>. The project has already surveyed Milton Keynes residents on the challenges they face in improving energy efficiency in their homes, issues which are now being explored in more detail with a newly established citizen's panel.

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<sup>9</sup> [City Council and Santander partner to help residents improve energy efficiency | Milton Keynes City Council](#)