

Milton Keynes

Sustainability Strategy

2026-2050



Foreword

Councillor Shanika Mahendran, Cabinet Member for Planning and Placemaking



Five years ago, we produced Milton Keynes' first Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan. Great progress has been made since then.

The City of Milton Keynes has reduced its emissions by hundreds of thousands of tonnes since 2019. The City Council has cut its own carbon emissions by tens of thousands of tonnes, and we have reduced the City Council's energy consumption by 80% since 2019.

For more information on Milton Keynes' climate achievements since publication of the first Sustainability Strategy for Milton Keynes, see the accompanying document.

There is much to celebrate, but we know our work on sustainability is more important now than ever. Milton Keynes has already seen several climate events over the past 5 years, and we know how disruptive and costly these events are to residents, businesses and the city itself.

With the scale of this challenge in mind, we recently established a new approach to sustainability work within Milton Keynes City Council. We have separated and resourced the twin agendas of our sustainability work as an organisation, and that of our role in leading sustainability work in the City itself. This new Strategy sets out clearly the direction of travel

for both the City Council's work, and the work we will undertake in the city. We have revised and simplified the themes of our Sustainability to five main themes: Economy, Energy, Emissions, Environment, and Engagement. This Strategy should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Sustainability Action Plans, which outlines in detail the specific actions and work the City Council will undertake. The Sustainability Strategy and Action Plans will be reviewed in 2028, and an annual report of progress will be provided to the Council's Cabinet each January.

We also recognise that climate action goes beyond what we can achieve as one city, and we will continue to work with, and speak with UK government to ensure we have the support and funding that our city needs.

With the City Council responsible for approximately 4% of total emissions in the City, this strategy will ultimately need the organisations and people of Milton Keynes to play their part in assisting the Council to deliver the City's aims. We recognise that the City Council has an important leadership role to play in convening the city to take action to deliver these goals.

We invite everyone in Milton Keynes to be part of the journey with us to make Milton Keynes a world leader in sustainability.



Executive Summary

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) already delivers a wide range of initiatives that contribute towards the sustainability and climate change agenda. But the scale of the challenge is huge and in the Sustainability Strategy and City Action Plan we aim to address areas where we could do more. The purpose is not to duplicate existing work but to address gaps and add value to ongoing programmes.

It sets out the impacts of climate change on Milton Keynes, our vision and the five themes where this Strategy will focus.

It covers the entire administrative area of the City of Milton Keynes, including all its urban and rural areas. The Strategy and Action Plan will be delivered through a combination of MKCC-led initiatives and partnerships.



Milton Keynes climate in context

What do we mean by Net Zero for Milton Keynes?

Net Zero is the concept of achieving a zero balance between the greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) produced to the amount that are removed from the environment. By 2050, the UK is legally required by the **Climate Change Act (2008)**¹ to reduce GHGs by 100% from levels in 1990. There are direct links between emissions caused by human activities and rising temperatures².

What are the current greenhouse gas emissions for Milton Keynes?

Most of GHGs in Milton Keynes currently come from transport (35%) and domestic housing (30%).

The commercial and industrial sectors account for another 28%, with waste, and the public sector accounting for the remaining 7%³.

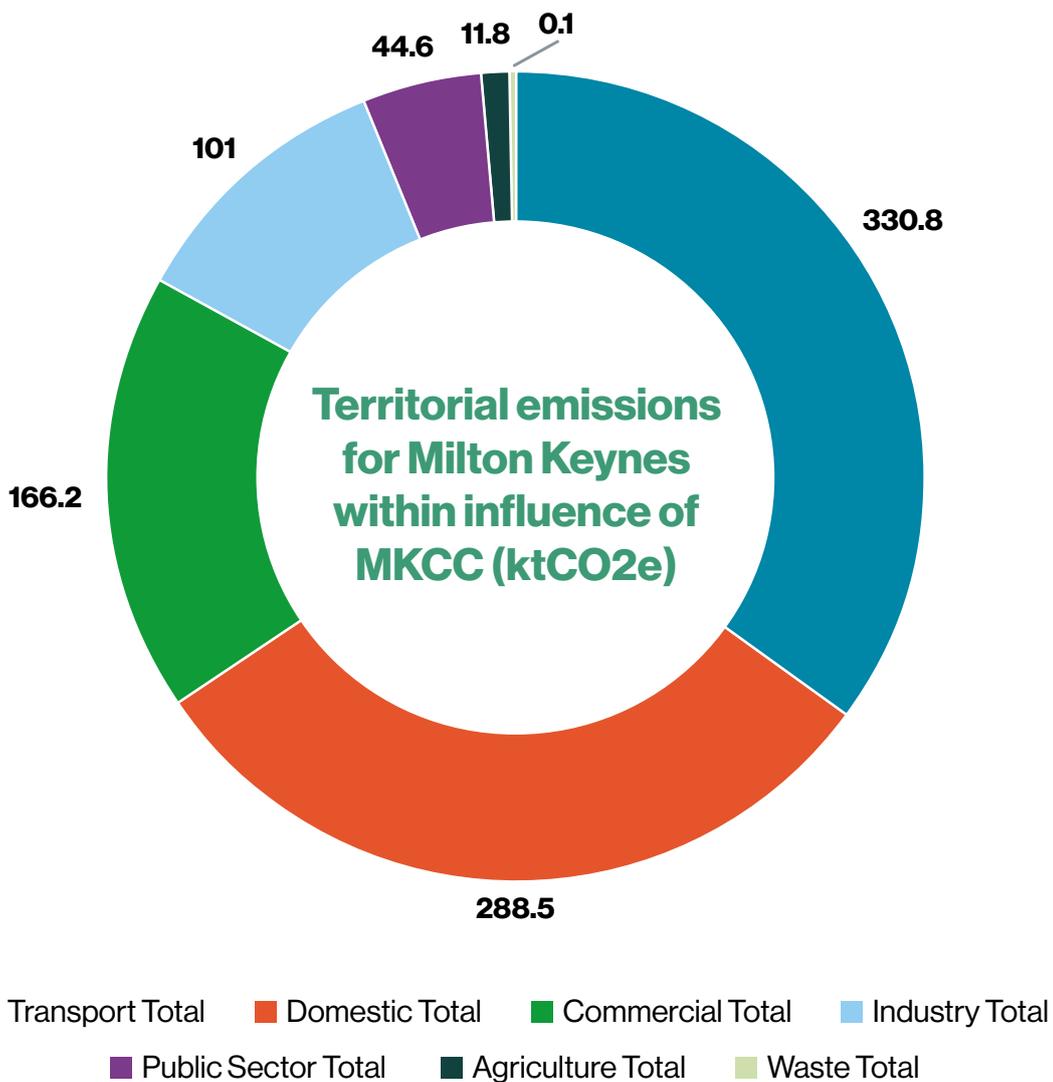


Figure 1: Territorial Emissions for Milton Keynes (2023)

The public sector shown in Figure 1 includes emissions from Milton Keynes University Hospital, emergency services, and MKCC. The City Council itself is responsible for just 4% of GHGs in Milton Keynes, demonstrating the importance of joint working

What impacts will Climate Change have on the City of Milton Keynes?

Milton Keynes is already feeling the impacts of climate change, from the heatwave in July 2022, to more recent surface water and fluvial flooding across the city.

Local climate projections from the **Met Office**⁴ show our summer temperatures are likely to increase relevant to the three future global warming scenarios (1.5°C, 2°C and 3.5°C). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified 1.5°C of global warming as a crucial threshold. This is because, according to the IPCC's **Special Report**⁵ on Global Warming of 1.5°C, even this level of warming can lead to significant risks for health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth.

We are already experiencing air temperatures exceeding 1.5°C of warming that are projected to be normalised by 2050⁶. As temperatures rise, the effects of climate change are projected to worsen and have an impact on everyone in Milton Keynes.



Heat

Increased energy demand for summer cooling



Health

Increased risk to health from heat stress



Transport

Increased disruption to transport due to heat, e.g. rail buckling



Drought

Risk to water supplies and agriculture from drought



Energy

Infrastructure such as gas pipes are at high risk from flooding events



Heavy Rainfall

Increased risk of river and surface water flooding



Environment

Increased risk to biodiversity (plants and animals)



Drainage

Increased disruption to urban drainage systems

Figure 1: Impacts of Climate Change in Milton Keynes.

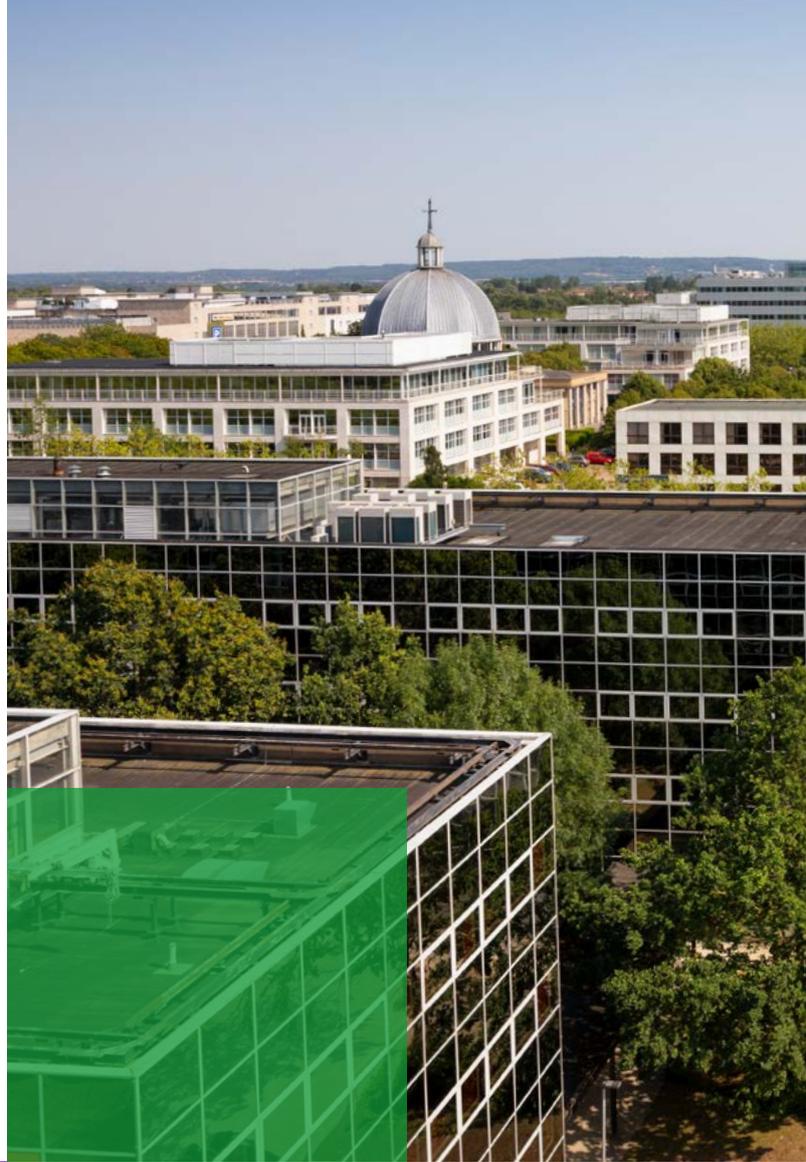
Source: Met Office Local Authority Climate Service

How are partners in Milton Keynes addressing the climate issue

Milton Keynes is already home to a wide range of sustainability initiatives led by organisations across the public, private, and third sectors. These efforts demonstrate that climate action is not solely the responsibility of the City Council but a shared commitment across the borough.

From ambitious carbon reduction targets to practical projects on the ground, partners are driving change in their own operations and supporting the city's transition to a low-carbon future.

For example, the Open University has committed to Net Zero carbon by 2030 for their scope 1 and 2 emissions and Net Zero carbon by 2050 for their scope 3 emissions. Key projects are underway at their Walton Hall campus such as heat decarbonisation, fabric upgrades and installing solar PV⁷. The NHS nationally have set a 2040 Net Zero target, but in our city, Milton Keynes University Hospital (MKUH) is going further by setting an internal target of 2030 to reach Net Zero in their Green Plan (2025).



Their target is supported by ambitious programme of decarbonisation works, including connection low-carbon district heating system⁸. The district heating network will connect MKUH plus other public buildings, replacing gas boilers and cutting ~15,000 t CO₂/year.

Milton Keynes College Group aims to be carbon neutral by 2030 by reducing their Scope 1 and 2 emissions as far as possible and offsetting any residual emissions.

This is their interim target on their path to reaching Net Zero by 2050. Their decarbonisation projects will contribute towards city wide emissions reduction, but they equally have an important role in equipping our residents with the right skills⁹.

Our communities are also playing their part in our transition to a low carbon city. Milton Keynes Community Energy is delivering a 1MW rooftop solar for schools scheme and supports retrofit projects via a community benefit programme¹⁰.

The Parks Trust manages approximately 6,000 acres of high-quality green assets and as Milton Keynes continues to grow, so do the areas managed by the Parks Trust. The work of the Trust provides important climate adaptation and biodiversity work and their volunteering programmes help increase awareness and engagement¹¹.

The Milton Keynes Green Business Network brings together local businesses to collaborate, learn, and take tangible sustainability actions. The network hosts regular events—such as site visits to sustainable buildings and expert speaker sessions—promoting peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing, access to green suppliers, and practical guidance on reducing business emissions¹².

This is just a snapshot of the activities and ambitious plans already developed across Milton Keynes. The Council also has a degree of influence on city emissions through the contracts we award and our suppliers. By working closely with them over the years we managed to reduce our emissions and environmental impacts.

We are committed to continuing working with our suppliers to achieve further efficiencies and jointly deliver more climate positive initiatives. MKCC's **Pathway to Net Zero 2030 Plan (2025)** outlined ambitions to be a Net Zero Authority by 2030¹³.

There is also a wide range of partners and organisations across the city that engaged with us during the production of this Strategy. We will look to strengthen our relationship with them to do more on the sustainability agenda. The diagram below highlights just some of the suppliers we are working with and some of the key. This is not an exhaustive list and are just some of the key organisations that have interest in supporting climate action. The council would welcome working with anyone who wants to be involved in delivering the climate and sustainability agenda across Milton Keynes.

We strongly believe together we can achieve much more for the benefit of our residents, environment and economy and encourage anyone interested to be part of this exciting journey to reach out to our Sustainability Team. (carbon@Milton-keynes.gov.uk).

Partners



What are the opportunities to tackle wider social and economic issues?

Our actions will have a direct impact on minimising the GHGs from Milton Keynes and contribute towards efforts of limiting global warming. However, this strategy is designed to achieve much more than this. By delivering on the Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan we will address any gaps, complement existing policies and will unlock the multiple benefits and opportunities that come with climate action.

Evidence suggests that economic growth can be decoupled from emissions¹⁴. Between 1990 and 2021 the UK managed to successfully grow its economy, while achieving 40% emissions reduction¹⁵. Equally, there is evidence that climate-related events already cost UK's GDP 1.1% per year and if we fail to act now this is projected to triple by 2050¹⁶. By implementing initiatives to make residents' homes more energy efficient, we make them warmer during the winter, cooler during the summer and cut their energy bills. These measures will help the most vulnerable in our society and improve their quality of life¹⁷.



Building resilience into the local energy system will help protect our businesses from energy shocks such as the one in 2022¹⁸. By supporting businesses to use less, generate more on-site and share surplus energy, we can improve the City's energy and economic resilience.

The City Council recognises the role that nature, and land use change and management play in making our city and rural areas more resilient to flooding, extreme heat, drought and soil erosion¹⁹. There is also extensive evidence showing that access to green spaces leads to improved educational outcomes, and health and wellbeing²⁰. The Action Plan makes clear links to the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**²¹, the Environment Action Plan and the **Urban Tree Action Plan**²², which are the primary local policies that govern nature recovery, sustainable food production and to a large degree climate adaptation. Investment in energy efficiency and clean technology will increase the demand for green skills and better paid jobs. Case studies from across the UK show how retrofitting programmes create new jobs and have a positive impact on the local economy²³.

Our vision for Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes City Council recognises that local government has an important role to play in setting the vision for Milton Keynes, but also in showing leadership when it comes to climate issues. In this strategy, we set out our renewed vision for a more sustainable Milton Keynes.

Our vision: Milton Keynes can be a world leading sustainable city, using the opportunities of our city, population and economic growth to tackle the challenges of climate change and resource competition to create a more prosperous city for all our people and future generations.

The City of Milton Keynes will aim to:

Work towards achieving net zero for Milton Keynes by 2030, recognising this as an ambitious goal that will require collaboration across the city

Reach net zero for the City Council's activities by 2030

Limit rising temperature to 1.5°C degrees based on the **Paris Agreement**²⁴

Prepare for the current and future impacts of climate change

We recognise the impacts of climate change are not equally felt by all communities, and we will encourage initiatives that create a just transition in Milton Keynes.

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Sustainability themes



Economy



Energy



Emissions



Environment



Engagement



Economy

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

Milton Keynes is the UK's fastest growing city, with a highly productive, strong, and growing economy. Milton Keynes remains a pro-growth city, and also recognises that balancing this growth with environmental sustainability is necessary. It is recognised that the global net zero transition itself represents a clear economic opportunity, for example, through the supply of goods and services to enable the net zero transition.

Through initiatives to develop a more circular economy in the city, taking steps to ensure our people can develop green skills, and ensuring that businesses play their full part in the climate transition, we will use the opportunities presented from Milton Keynes' economic growth to make progress on the sustainability agenda.

What is Milton Keynes going to do?

For the City Council work, activity under the Economy theme focusses on the City Council as a business. This includes our existing programmes to make Council services more sustainable, and working with MKCC's supply chain to 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 Milton Keynes.



Relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Energy

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

The decarbonisation of energy is critical to meeting climate and sustainability targets. As we can see from the emissions in Milton Keynes, a large proportion come from domestic, commercial and industrial buildings.

The way we live and work means we are increasingly reliant on the provision of energy, it is critical that energy is used efficiently and that the local energy system is fit for the future. Energy security is an increasingly important consideration, as well as increasing sustainable energy generation. Work to deliver greater energy efficiency of buildings will be an essential part of ensuring a reduction energy consumption, and the resulting impact on emissions.

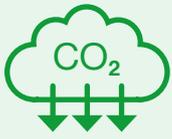
What is Milton Keynes going to do?

For Milton Keynes City Council, we will continue to deliver and build on initiatives that reduce our energy use and increase renewable energy generation and energy resilience.

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



Relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Emissions

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

Milton Keynes has seen recent falls in GHGs, but has considerable work to do in order to meet its net zero targets. Emissions remain high in the city from the built environment and from transport. These are specific areas of focus for our sustainability work. Transport is an area in which Milton Keynes' emissions remain stubbornly high, and on which a step change is needed.

As the City continues to grow, it is likely that emissions will too, so careful thought and action, like that seen in the **MK City Plan 2050**²⁶, is needed to continue to reduce the emissions of Milton Keynes, its residents, and its businesses.

What is Milton Keynes going to do?

MKCC's emissions have been on a downward trajectory since 2022/23. We have ambitious programmes to continue the reduction and mitigation of the City Council's direct emissions, including the decarbonisation of its fleet vehicles and building heating systems.

For the city wide work, this theme focusses on reducing emissions in the city and mitigation, 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 the Milton Keynes mass rapid transit system.



Relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Environment

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

Milton Keynes has been purposely designed to be a great city in which to live and work, and major consideration in the city's design on the environment has always been central to its plans. Milton Keynes is one of the most physically green cities in the UK. Parks, woodlands and lakes are easily accessible to most of our residents and businesses. Climate change means that greater focus is needed to preserve these spaces, and the wildlife that call our city home.

Whenever feasible, we will look to implement nature-based solutions to tackle flooding and improve water quality. Urban cooling will increase in importance as an issue, and clean air enhancements are likely to be needed to ensure the city remains a great place to live.

Recent changes to waste collections in the city saw the biggest increase in recycling of any authority in the country, demonstrating how the City Council and Milton Keynes residents can work together for the benefit of the city's environment.

What is Milton Keynes going to do?

The City Council has a long history of delivering high quality green spaces. Our work will continue to focus on physical environment, biodiversity, and nature that the Council's teams are directly responsible for. The city wide work will focus 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.



Relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Engagement

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

The City Council is committed to showing leadership on the sustainability agenda, but also recognises it cannot deliver on this agenda on its own. MKCC will show clear leadership through delivery of its own net zero 2030 plans, but it will also bring together partners across the city who share its ambitions to deliver change for the people and businesses of Milton Keynes.

We will work to better inform people and organisations about opportunities they have to get involved related to the climate, and to promote and celebrate the great work being undertaken in the city on the sustainability agenda.

What is Milton Keynes going to do?

For MKCC work, we will continue 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 MKCC's direct impact alone cannot achieve our bold aims for the city.



Relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Reference links:

- 1 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/27/contents>
- 2 <https://royalsociety.org/news-resources/projects/climate-change-evidence-causes/basics-of-climate-change/>
- 3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-statistics>
- 4 <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/506ff7d53c884badb0d8fd36d6280a91>
- 5 <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>
- 6 <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2024-first-year-exceed-15degc-above-pre-industrial-level>
- 7 https://university.open.ac.uk/sustainability/sites/www.open.ac.uk.sustainability/files/OU%20Net%20Zero%20Carbon%202030%20Plan_v1.2_2025_FINAL.pdf
- 8 https://www.mkuh.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/MKUH-Green-Plan-2025_2028.pdf
- 9 https://mkcollege.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/MKCG_Climate-Action-Plan-2024---2030_FINAL.pdf
- 10 <https://mkcommunityenergy.co.uk/1mw-mk-schools/>
- 11 <https://www.theparkstrust.com/our-work/>
- 12 <https://mkgreenbusiness.org>
- 13 <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Five%20Year%20Plan%20-%20Pathway%20to%20Net%20Zero%202030.pdf>
- 14 <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/new-ndcs-to-deliver-climate-action-for-growth/investing-in-climate-for-growth-and-development-the-case-for-enhanced-NDCs-key-messages.pdf>
- 15 <https://www.ciip.group.cam.ac.uk/reports-and-articles/navigating-the-path-to-net-zero/>
- 16 <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Climate-costs-UK-policy-brief.pdf>
- 17 <https://www.nea.org.uk/who-we-are/retrofit-technical-research/>
- 18 <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/sustainability>
- 19 <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/Principles/WhyPrinciples.aspx>
- 20 https://www.ucl.ac.uk/engineering-exchange/sites/engineering_exchange/files/119746_ucl_green_inf_fact_sheets_health.pdf
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- 22 https://milton-keynes.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s10204/Urban%20Tree%20Planting%20Plan%202023-2030_Annex%20A.pdf
- 23 https://www.gsenetzerohub.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/GSEnz_Retrofit-skills-plan_V3.pdf
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- 25 <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/sustainable-milton-keynes/our-net-zero-journey>
- 26 <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/mk-city-plan-2050/evidence-base>

