

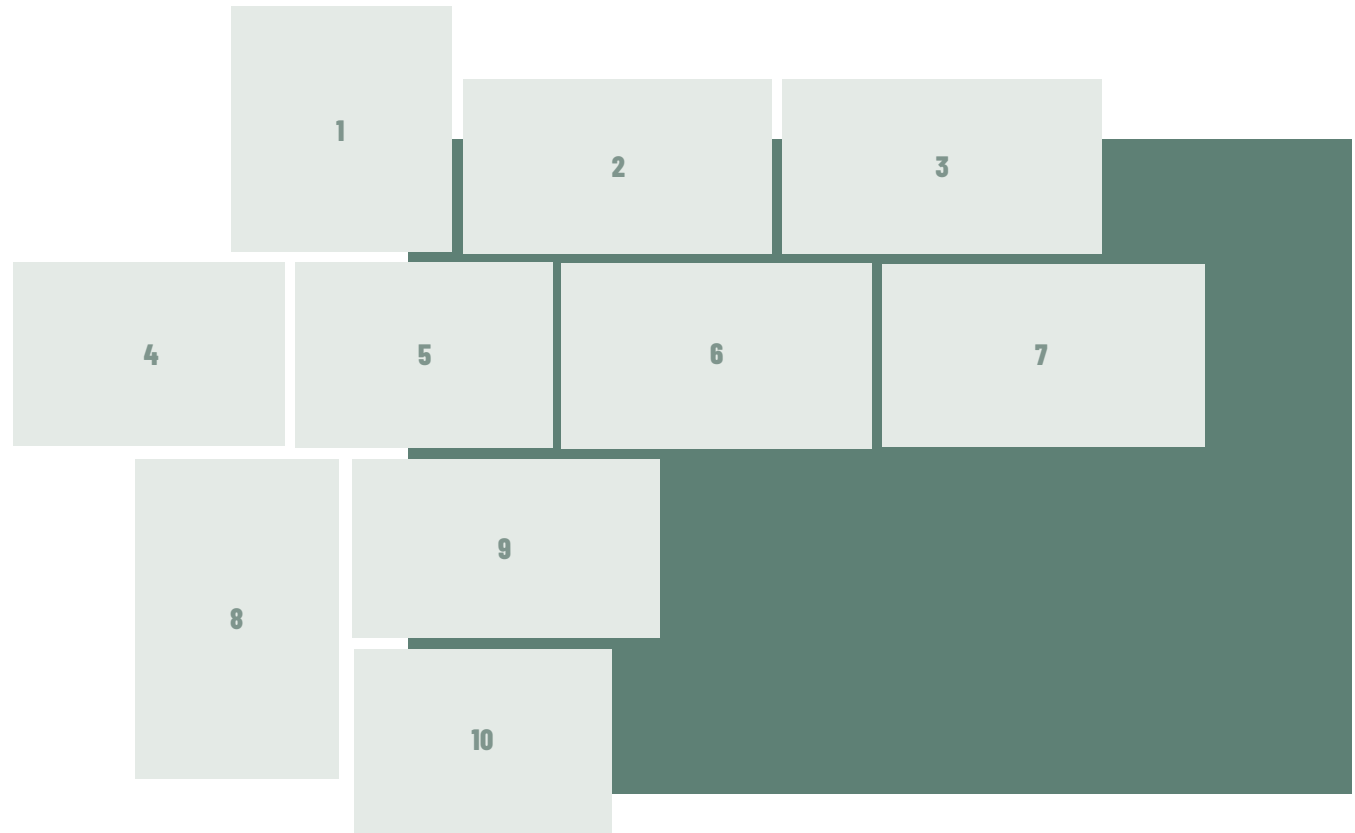


# Taking action together on Climate Emergency declarations

Recommendations for councils based on the Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab



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# Taking action together on Climate Emergency declarations

Recommendations for councils  
based on the Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab

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# Introduction

Across the UK, councils have been making Climate Emergency declarations to demonstrate that they acknowledge the urgency of tackling climate change and are committed to taking action. At the time of writing, Climate Emergency UK shows that 336 councils out of 409 have declared a Climate Emergency and 270 have declared an emergency and have a plan to reach net zero. Despite these commitments, local authorities still need to understand how these targets will be met and put monitoring and evaluation processes in place to measure and report on progress.

In 2021, the Centre for Alternative Technology's Zero Carbon Britain team and Keele University worked with 10 councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-trent to explore the challenges they face in reaching net zero and co-create an approach to achieve their climate goals. A Zero Carbon Britain Innovation Lab brought together representatives from the 10 councils for three days of workshops to explore how they could work together to take climate action. The process helped the participants to better understand the barriers to reaching net zero, create a vision for the county, and set out objectives towards achieving their individual and collective aims.

By working collaboratively across the county to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies, the councils hoped to save money, work more efficiently, and have a better chance of making progress at the speed and scale needed. The Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab included the nine district, borough and county councils within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Stoke-on-Trent being geographically situated within the county of Staffordshire offers opportunities for collaboration across the county as a whole. From this point, 'Staffordshire councils' has been used for brevity, however please note this includes the unitary authority of Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

This report shares findings and recommendations from the Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab. It aims to support other councils across the UK in developing their climate action plans and working towards net zero.

## Aims

The Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab had the following aims:

- Understand how councils can work together to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies
- Improve understanding of the principles of CAT's Zero Carbon Britain research (see box, page 2)
- Explore the barriers to reaching net zero
- Understand the needs of the councils in their journey to net zero
- Determine appropriate governance for climate and biodiversity emergencies work across Staffordshire councils.
- Support councils on their journey to net zero and ensure they have the appropriate tools
- Ensure effective collaboration and resource sharing into the future



In addition to these aims, the Lab intended to:

- Provide a collaborative co-creative approach to engage and empower councils in driving action towards Climate Emergency declarations and reaching net zero
- Bring representatives from all county, district, borough and city councils across Staffordshire together to create a cross-council county-wide approach to implementing climate action plans
- Include voices and representation from all levels within councils, from officers to senior management and elected members
- Facilitate a space for reflection and learning together to benefit from all individuals' expertise
- Understand the barriers currently faced by councils and work with them to explore and devise solutions and ways forward from this initial process
- Create a series of recommendations specific to Staffordshire councils to enable the Innovation Lab process to drive organisational change and action to tackle the climate and biodiversity emergencies
- Create a series of recommendations that local authorities could implement in their own counties and regions

Although the Zero Carbon Britain team at CAT compiled this report, the outputs and findings are based solely on reflections, discussions and feedback from participants. During each workshop, notetakers recorded points raised during breakout room activities which informed the analysis, and at each stage, the findings were fed back to participants. With this in mind, please note, the detailed outputs do not necessarily reflect the views of CAT, however, the recommendations are our recommendations based on the findings.

## Zero Carbon Britain

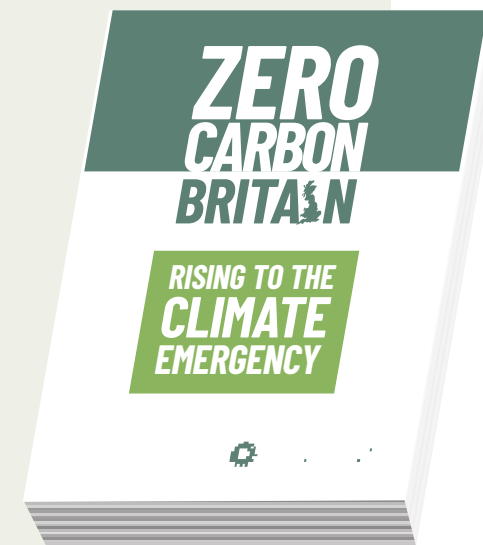
All emissions that can go to zero must go to zero – as rapidly as possible. Not just from electricity, but also from heat, transport, industry and land use.

We have the tools to do it. CAT's Zero Carbon Britain research clearly demonstrates that we already have all the technologies we need to achieve zero carbon emissions.

Our latest report, Rising to the Climate Emergency, is free to download: <https://cat.org.uk/zcb-report>

The Zero Carbon Britain Hub and Innovation Lab helps turn climate and biodiversity emergency declarations into action. With technical solutions readily available, the momentum is building in our towns and cities to reach net zero as quickly as possible.

We provide councils, communities and other organisations with the knowledge, confidence and skills to transform complex economic, social and political systems and achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040.



## Participants

The Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab brought together representatives from 10 councils (Table 1). Having representation from all county, district, borough and city councils maximised opportunities and efficiencies in co-creating an approach to tackling the climate and biodiversity emergencies. This is also significant as climate issues and infrastructure investments invariably cross council boundaries.

**Table 1: 10 councils involved in the Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab**

Staffordshire County Council	Stafford Borough Council
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council	Lichfield District Council
South Staffordshire District Council	Tamworth Borough Council
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Cannock Chase District Council

Participants in the Innovation Lab represented a broad range of services and roles at different levels across the councils, including officers, managers, directors, CEOs and elected members. Involving a diverse range of staff was important to benefit from expertise and perspectives from across the councils and recognise that climate action needs to happen in all areas of council operations. Bringing people together and listening to the voices of those who may not usually have the chance to collaborate would help identify new connections and shared opportunities both within and between councils.



# The Innovation Lab approach

An Innovation Lab approach was chosen due to its ability to help tackle complex issues or challenges using collaborative problem solving.

The process is:

- **Co-creative** – Drawing on a range of perspectives and experiences to inform the process and ultimately co-design solutions that are fit-for-purpose and feasible.
- **Experimental** – Taking an iterative approach, prototyping interventions and amending them until they are right (learning from failure along the way).
- **Sense-making** – Helping participants understand what's happening and why, let go of preconceived ideas and be open to new approaches.
- **Design thinking** – Taking a user-centred approach, based on the experience of those impacted by the problem and those who deliver the solution.
- **Systemic** – Ensuring the ideas developed go beyond dealing with the symptoms to address the root cause of the problem.

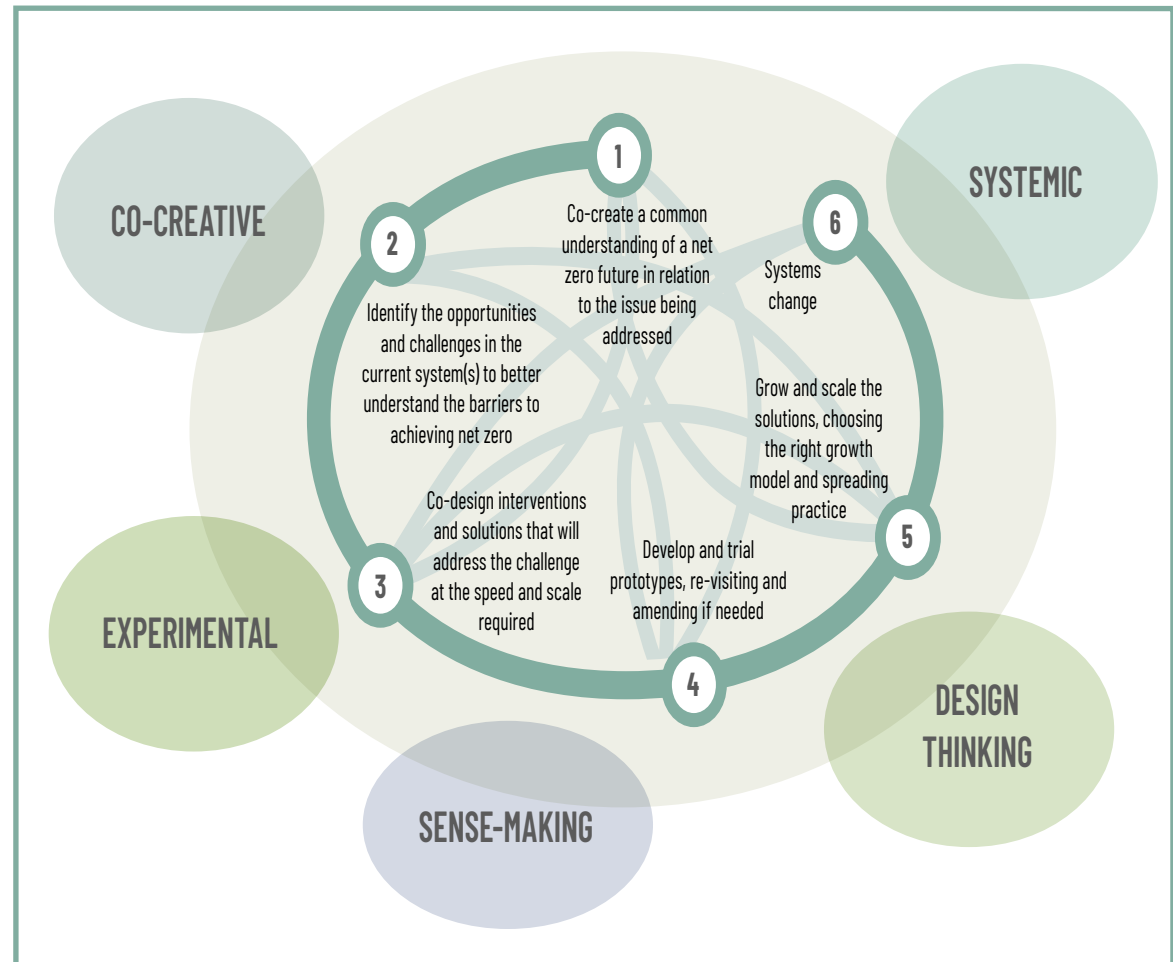


Figure 1: The Innovation Lab process



The Roaches in Staffordshire  
Lukasz Pajor/Shutterstock.com

## The workshops

The Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab comprised three full-day participatory workshops.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all the workshops took place online, with some facilitated breakout room sessions for smaller group discussions. Mural – an online collaborative tool – was used to collect and explore ideas, develop understanding together, and construct a plan for action.

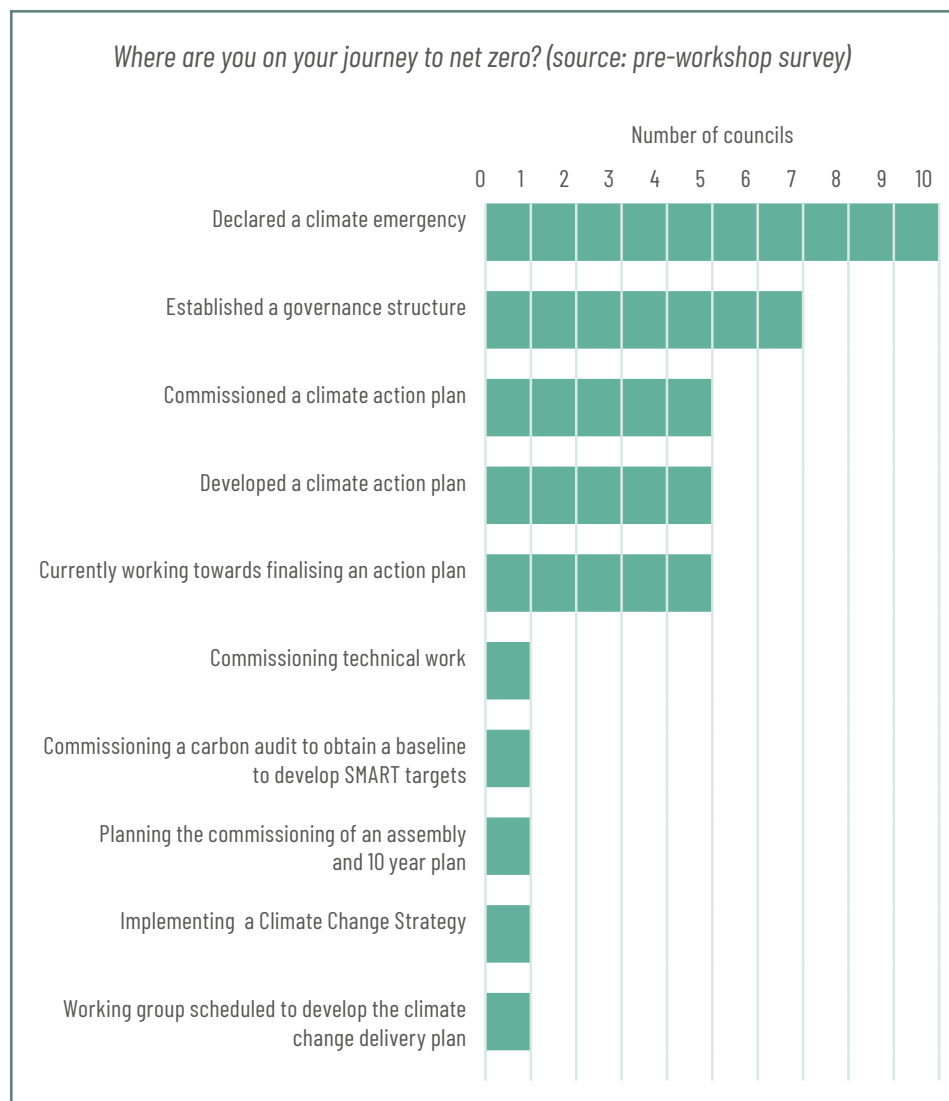
The workshops built on each other, including reflection on previous sessions so the participants could better understand the context the councils are working in, the challenges they face, and the next steps to turn Climate Emergency declarations into action.

The first two workshops explored:

- The barriers to achieving net zero within the current system
- What a net zero Staffordshire could look like
- Potential interventions to better enable the councils to reach net zero

The third workshop explored priority areas for collaborative action and potential governance structures to support cross-council collaboration.

The Lab generated a significant amount of data from the contributions of participants. This data was analysed to identify themes across the responses. Grouping the data in this way enabled the Zero Carbon Britain team and the council participants to understand the relationships between the challenges and consider the role of the underlying structures at organisational, local, regional and national levels impacting progress towards net zero. Building on this understanding, the participants worked together to propose strategies to overcome these challenges.



**Figure 2: Pre-workshop survey results showing where the 10 councils were in their journey to net zero**

## Before the workshops

Before the first workshop, participants were invited to complete a survey to establish the current position of the councils across Staffordshire – a benchmark against which to measure progress. It enabled the Zero Carbon Britain team and the participants to understand commonalities and differences between the councils' commitments, aims and ambitions, and the scope of their net zero targets.

**Figure 2** shows the range of activities taking place across the county when the Innovation Lab began, with the most common action being the declaration of a climate emergency, followed by the establishment of a governance structure to take action. Fewer than half of the councils had moved beyond commissioning a climate action plan to the development and implementation stages. However, one council reported working towards finalising their action plan, commissioning technical work and a carbon audit, planning a climate assembly, implementing a climate change strategy, and scheduling a climate change working group.

The pre-workshop questionnaire also identified variation across Staffordshire in terms of the date when councils aimed to reach net zero, and the scope of their ambition. Target dates ranged from 2030 to 2050, with some councils aiming to address only their own emissions, while others intended to include emissions from across the locality (scopes 1, 2 and 3).

The participants were asked what they wanted to get out of the Lab. As well as helping to shape the process, this was useful to start them thinking about their goals and challenges.



## Workshop 1

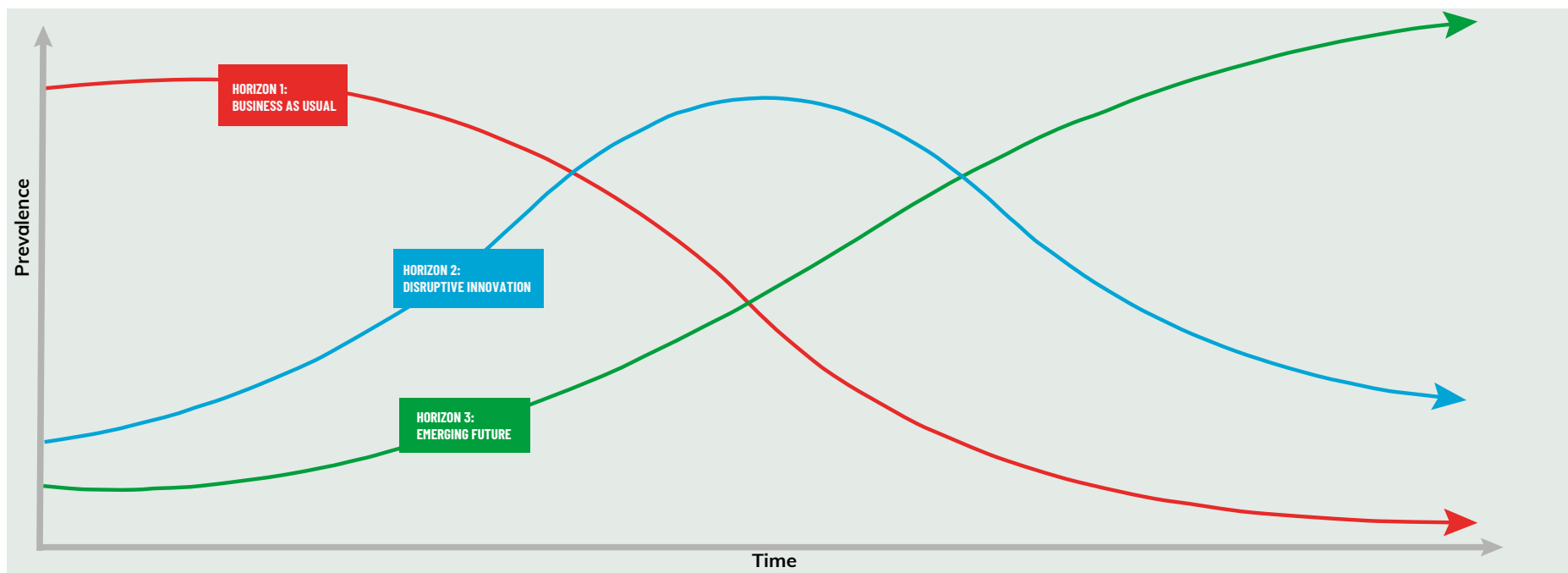
Workshop 1 aimed to understand the current context the participants were working in, and introduce how the Innovation Lab process could help them overcome their challenges and take action to tackle the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

The workshop began with an invitation to share reflections about what makes Staffordshire great. Themes identified were:

- Pride in the local area and ownership of place
- Access to green space, beautiful countryside and diverse landscapes
- A mix of rural and urban
- A mix of heritage and post-industrial
- Connectivity and location
- Diverse and down-to-earth communities
- Partnership and networking
- Entrepreneurialism and creativity
- A sense of being underestimated – an undiscovered hidden gem



Figure 3: What participants hoped to get out of the Innovation Lab



**Figure 4: Example template of Three Horizons graph that post-it notes can be mapped to for post-workshop analysis and theme identification**

The participants then used the Three Horizons tool to explore current ways of working, what interventions were needed to collectively move towards a viable future, and what was no longer fit for purpose and should be phased out. Horizon 1 shows the barriers to achieving the goal, Horizon 3 shows the participants' vision of a net zero future, and Horizon 2 shows the interventions that can make Horizon 3 a reality.

Participants recorded their thoughts on digital post it notes, which were then placed on the appropriate area of the Three Horizons tool.

All of the outputs for each 'horizon' were analysed and common themes identified. These were then mapped out as leverage points, as shown in **Figure 5**, to demonstrate which interventions will have the greatest impact.

Themes included:

- Infrastructure
- Mindsets and beliefs
- Policy and politics
- Communication
- Land use
- Finance/economics
- Expertise and knowledge
- Health and wellbeing
- Culture
- Technology
- Equality

## Workshop 2

At the start of workshop 2, the participants were presented with the outputs from the first workshop and the results of the analysis of their responses, contributions, reflections and discussions.

Participants then went on to explore the next steps they could take based on this analysis, understanding their potential role in creating and implementing interventions to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

By exploring 'leverage points', the participants used the outputs of the Three Horizons tool to identify which interventions could have the most impact in changing the current high carbon systems. This was intended to enable these high impact interventions to be prioritised.

'Opportunities' (things there is desire and momentum for) and 'enablers' (things that can make an opportunity happen, e.g. funding) were mapped onto a 'lever' diagram. The further along the lever interventions appear, the greater the leverage in terms of changing the system. Interventions with 'shallow' leverage may be relatively easy-to-implement 'low hanging fruit', and there is value in implementing them, but they will not be enough alone to reach net zero. By contrast, 'deeper' leverage points have the potential for greater impact but may be under-researched and carry more risk. Figure 6 shows the individual interventions within the themes in Figure 5.



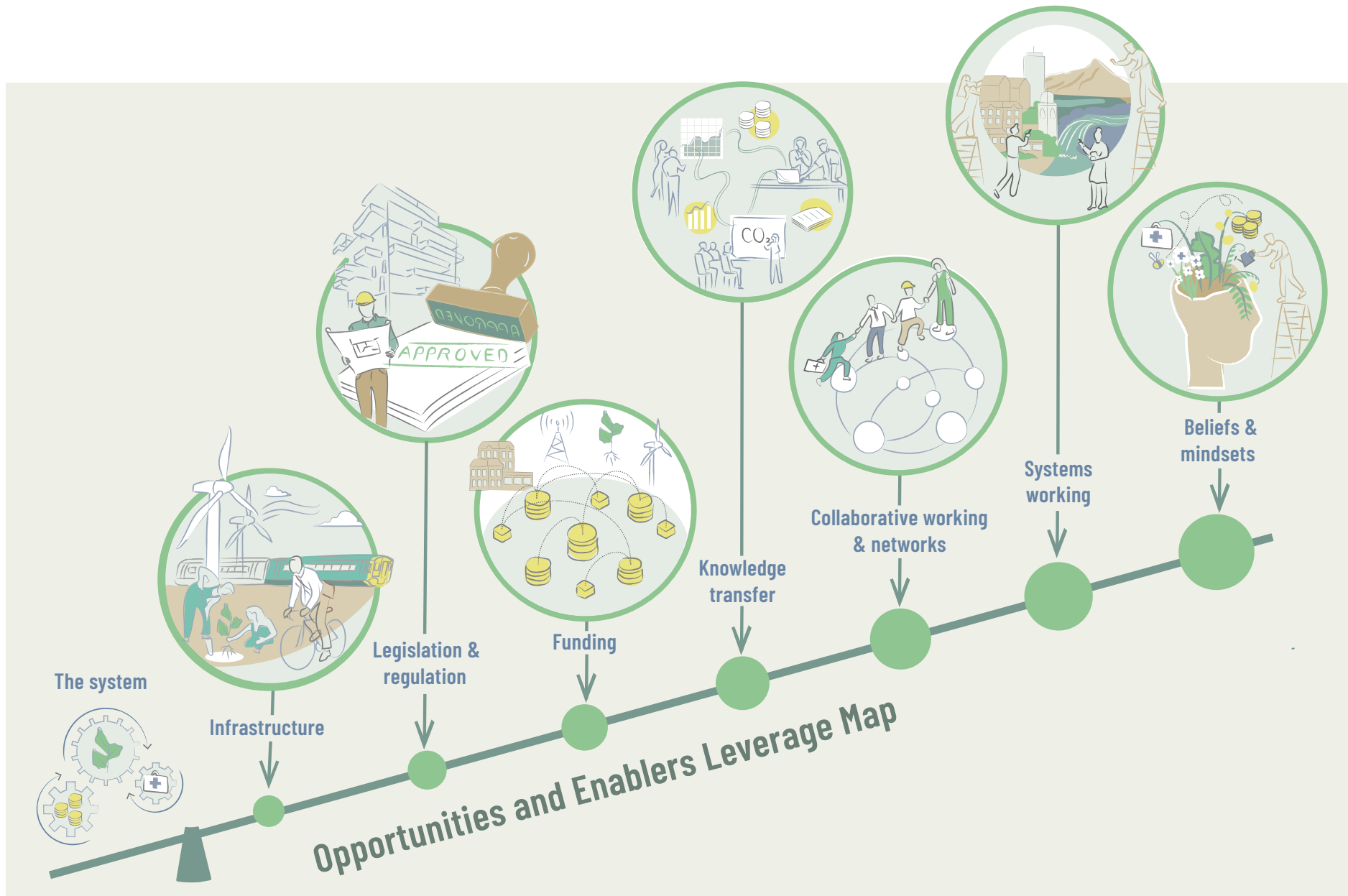


Figure 5: Intervention 'opportunities' and 'enablers' mapped on a lever diagram to prioritise those with most potential impact<sup>1</sup>

Figure 6: Opportunities and enablers developed by participants through the Three Horizons activity

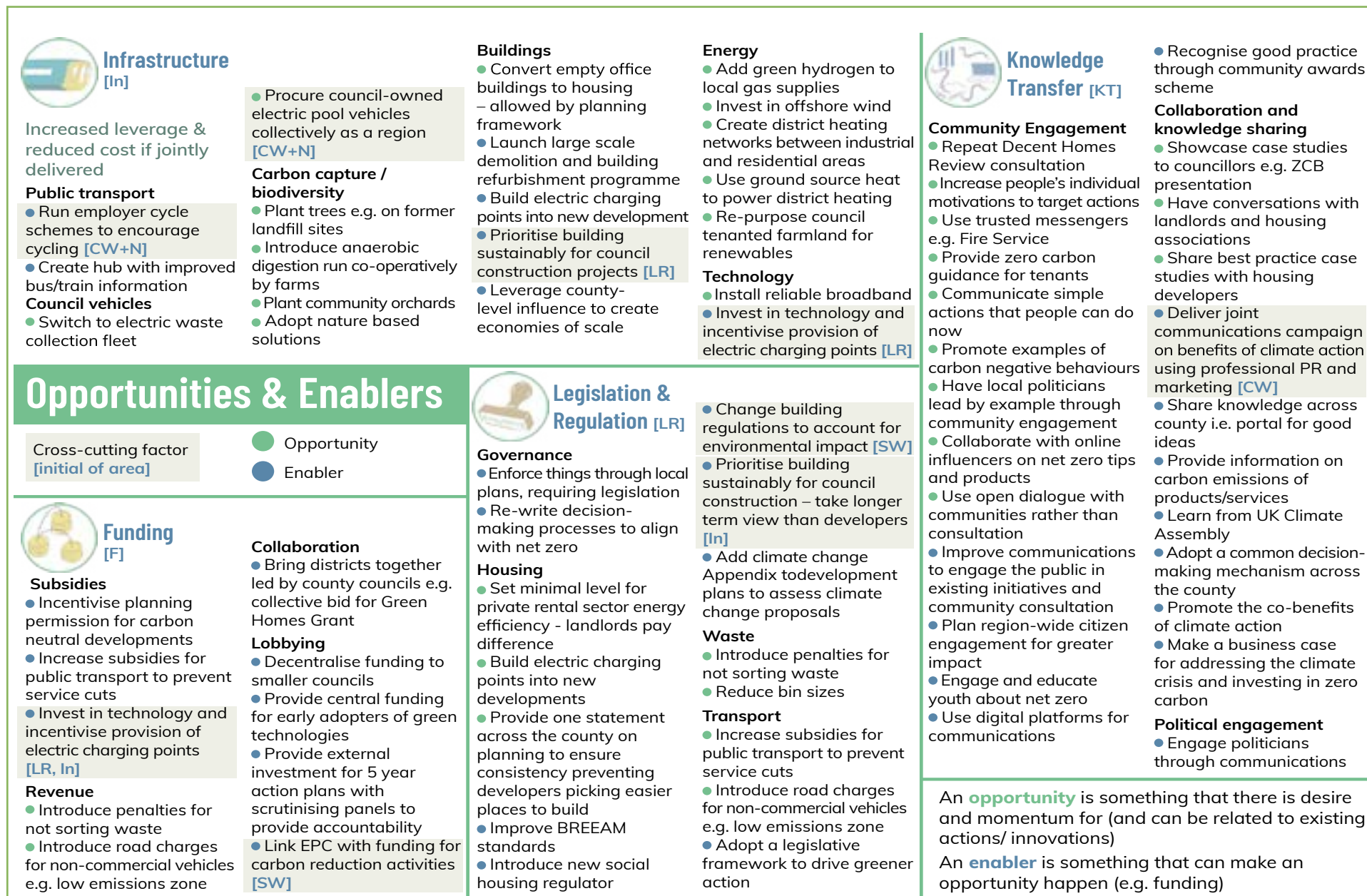




Figure 6 continued : Opportunities and enablers developed by participants through the Three Horizons activity



The map revealed several interventions that would require or be more impactful through collaboration within or between councils and with local communities and organisations. Understanding the need for collaboration and the influence councils have was therefore explored through stakeholder mapping.

The participants mapped the stakeholders and the relationships between their goals and the councils' goals, including indicating strong or weak alignment. They also looked for opportunities and threats in these relationships. **Figure 7** shows an example template that councils could adapt to create their own stakeholder map.

## Workshop 3

To make the most of the time available, participants began the third workshop by voting for their top three previously identified interventions from five defined categories:

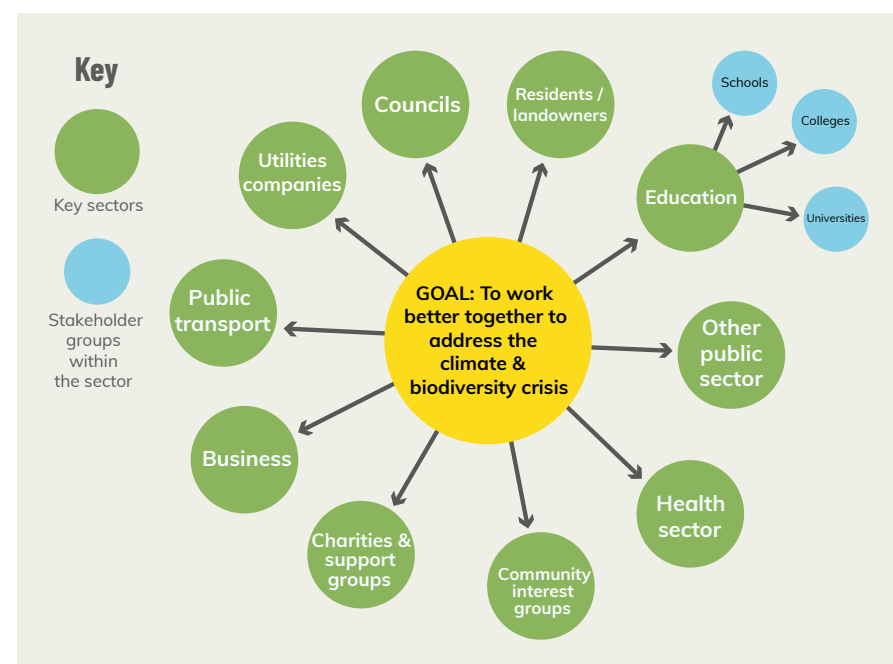
- Infrastructure
- Legislation, stakeholder support and funding
- Improving information flows, knowledge and expertise
- New rules for systems working and co-benefits
- Collaborative working and beliefs and mindsets

Participants went on to explore how to tackle these priorities around a 'how might we' statement, building on each other's ideas through a co-creative process. For each intervention, participants wrote a 'how might we' statement as follows: 'How might we...' (action) 'for...' (user group) 'so that...' (outcome). An example statement based on promoting the business case

for addressing the climate crisis is: 'How might we ensure that businesses can capitalise on green initiatives/grants to maximise carbon saving benefits?'

As collaboration was an overarching aim of the Innovation Lab, the participants then focused on how a more collaborative approach could be adopted by the councils to implement these high priority interventions.

Discussions about how collaborative processes could be implemented led to 'governance' being identified and explored as a central driver and enabler for collaboration both within and outside the councils. This is outlined further in the findings and recommendations.



**Figure 7: Example of stakeholder mapping template**

# Findings and recommendations

The following findings and recommendations are based on the discussions and proposed interventions co-designed with the participants of the Staffordshire Councils Innovation Lab. Like the workshops, they focus on how councils can work better together to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies and what changes can be made within councils.

## Governance

Good governance is essential at all levels to achieve net zero goals. To achieve this, systems-thinking should be built into all processes, policies and decision-making.

- Clear internal structures and roles are needed to enable clarity around accountability and delivery on climate action – genuine distributed responsibility empowers people across all services to act
- Regular internal communications on the climate and biodiversity emergencies are necessary to remind staff of the commitment to achieve net zero and develop a culture of action
- Leading by example and ‘walking the talk’ demonstrates responsibility and legitimacy for achieving commitments set out in Climate Emergency declarations
- Consistency and transparency between councils enables learning, sharing and mutual accountability

## Recommendations

- » **High-level decision-makers and elected members must consider the climate and biodiversity emergencies and related issues in all decisions**
- » **Form a small working group of decision-makers from each council in the county or region to develop a proposal for co-ordinating cross-council climate action**
- » **Establish an independently-led regional climate hub, including external partners, to act as a steering group for all matters related to addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies**
- » **Make the climate and biodiversity emergencies a fixed item on regular meeting agendas**
- » **Review internal structures to reduce silo working and promote genuine distributed responsibility, drawing on approaches in other councils**
- » **Share regular internal communications reminding staff of the council’s Climate Emergency declaration and commitment to achieving net zero**
- » **Address the differences between councils in net zero targets and scope, with a view to aligning them (this could be facilitated through external support)**

## Collaboration and impact

There are several opportunities for councils to collaborate to have a bigger impact, including:

- Lobbying e.g. central government, for funding, guidance and support; funding bodies; building regulations and planning bodies, to ensure commitment to the climate and biodiversity emergencies and consistency in their approach
- Communication (e.g. county-wide external communication to ensure clarity and consistency in approach; internal communications to emphasise climate action is everybody's business) – drawing on behavioural insights and highlighting the co-benefits of addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies
- Procurement and development (potential for county-wide procurement, e.g. electric vehicle (EV) networks, investment in renewables, training)
- Sharing and driving good practice within councils, between councils and with external stakeholders (e.g. developing a peer-review system; comparing activities, targets, and structures; working with external stakeholders to create innovative practice and projects; creating and sharing case studies to enable good practice to be adopted by others; engaging elected members more directly with climate action work, including collaboration within and between councils; promoting co-benefits of climate action, such as improved health and wellbeing, equality and green jobs)
- Reducing silo working – creating a culture of genuine collaborative working to empower people and encourage ownership for implementing interventions

- Delivering Carbon Literacy, train-the-trainer, and leadership/facilitation training across all councils – empowering staff to act in their own sphere of influence; creating cascaded learning to increase reach; enabling staff to apply collaboration, co-design and facilitation skills

## Recommendations

- » **Include a focus on opportunities for collaboration as part of a governance working group, with a view to creating working groups to lead on each area**
- » **Deliver Carbon Literacy training for service leads (as a minimum) and training for several individuals to deliver further in-house training**
- » **Offer leadership and facilitation training for staff in all service areas to develop facilitation, collaboration and co-design skills in the context of addressing the climate and biodiversity emergencies**

## Stakeholder engagement

In addition to developing collaboration within and between councils, there are opportunities to build relationships and collaborate with external stakeholders across the county – including businesses, sectors such as health and education, environmental groups and the wider community. This can increase knowledge exchange, help achieve shared goals, and enable partners to enjoy the co-benefits of climate action. Genuine stakeholder engagement can make action on the climate and biodiversity emergencies more efficient and more effective, while avoiding reducing engagement to low-impact tick-box exercises.

Potential interventions include:

- Promoting partnership with the wider community – including businesses, environmental groups, and sectors such as health and education, for expertise, funding and collaborative projects
- Establishing a stakeholder engagement structure with officers with assigned responsibilities that include regular communication with stakeholders
- Bringing all stakeholders together to identify local needs and working collectively to develop solutions on climate action
- Working with stakeholders to identify the co-benefits of climate action, such as meeting individual and collective needs and priorities
- Communicating local climate action policies to identified user groups so there is a co-ordinated and consistent approach
- Establishing local environmental funding streams
- Making joint funding applications within and between councils and with external stakeholders
- Allocating budget for climate change working groups
- Building staff capacity e.g. establishing a technical solutions team
- Investing in infrastructure e.g. funding EV charging points and district heating networks; setting up a green energy fund from levies raised from the use of EV charging points
- Applying for funding from central government for early adopters of green technologies
- Linking with universities to support applications to fund research projects and innovations
- Working with stakeholders to maximise opportunities for co-benefits from projects and interventions that contribute to reaching net zero
- Embedding carbon reduction into post-COVID policies and investments to provide co-benefits and learn from positive outcomes from changes implemented during the pandemic

## Recommendations

- » **Bring together people across the county to collaboratively map stakeholders and design an engagement strategy**
- » **Provide workshops and training on effectively engaging with community groups and other local stakeholders**

## Resourcing

Through collaborative cross-county approaches, resourcing action on the climate and biodiversity emergencies can be made more efficient through:

## Recommendation

- » **Hold a workshop with finance officers, procurement officers and senior management from across councils to focus on resourcing**



## Shared learning and knowledge exchange

Sharing learning can be an effective way to increase engagement and drive action by citizens, businesses and other councils, through:

- Communicating simple actions that can be adopted immediately by citizens, councils and businesses
- Sharing knowledge, reflections and outcomes from consultancy projects
- Using digital communication to share knowledge and information
- Improving communication with stakeholders through existing initiatives (e.g. Transition Towns)
- Communicating messages that will resonate with and motivate the wider community
- Linking with local media to share messages and achievements with the community
- Engaging with schools to inspire future generations and encourage young people to engage in local politics

### Recommendation

- » **Develop a cross-council collaborative online platform and community (e.g. through Microsoft Teams) to create a 'safe space' to share information, offer ideas and ask questions**



Lichfield Cathedral, Staffordshire  
Gail Johnson/Shutterstock.com

# Glossary

## **Climate action plan**

A framework with targets and objectives to work towards achieving net zero.

## **Climate assembly**

A form of deliberative participatory democracy, enabling citizens to be engaged in decision making on issues such as climate change.

## **Climate and biodiversity emergency**

Climate breakdown that will result in serious humanitarian, social and environmental impacts. Irreversible biodiversity loss driven by climate change, land use change, over-exploitation and pollution, among other factors.

## **Climate emergency declaration**

An acknowledgement of the climate emergency by an organisation and a commitment to reduce their emissions and impact.

## **Co-benefits**

Additional outcomes beyond carbon reduction that could be realised through interventions, for example, increased wellbeing.

## **Co-creation**

A form of open policy, strategy or product development, which draws on the perspectives of a range of key stakeholders and blends their ideas to create new ideas.

## **Councils**

All the county, district, borough and city councils within Staffordshire that participated in the Innovation Lab.

## **Innovation Lab**

A form of collaborative problem solving, drawing on insights and experiences of stakeholders to create solutions to the problem in question.

## **Interventions**

Actions that were identified that could enable councils to reduce their carbon emissions.

## **Net zero**

Reducing emissions to zero from operations, energy, buildings and infrastructure and powering activity with clean energy, with residual emissions being balanced with natural carbon capture.

## **Participants**

The members of the councils who took part in the Innovation Lab.

## **Scope**

The context and boundaries that councils are including in their net zero targets.

## **Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions**

Scope 1 accounts for direct emissions from sources councils own or control; scope 2 emissions are generated from energy purchased by councils for heating, cooling or power; scope 3 covers remaining indirect emissions in supply chains, for example, procurement.

## **Stakeholder**

An individual or organisation that has influence over, or will be impacted by the process in question, e.g. a project or policy.

## **Target date**

The date by which councils commit to reach net zero.

## **Three Horizons**

An approach used in the Innovation Lab to help groups think about the future, by exploring systemic patterns to understand which are no longer fit for purpose, emerging trends that can help shape the future, and the interventions required to move us towards a viable future.



## More climate action examples and resources

**ARUP:** <https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/promotional-materials/section/youve-declared-a-climate-emergency-what-next-guidance-for-local-authorities>

**Ashden & Friends of the Earth – 31 Climate Actions for Councils:**  
<https://ashden.org/storage/2020/08/31-Climate-Actions-for-Councils.pdf>

**Ashden – Climate action co-benefits toolkit:**  
<https://cobenefits-toolkit.ashden.org/>

**Climate Emergency UK climate action plan checklist:**  
<https://www.climateemergency.uk/local-authority-checklist/>

**Cornwall Council - Doughnut economics:**  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/cornwall-council-doughnut-economics>

**Cumbria Action for Sustainability:** <https://cafs.org.uk/>

**LGA Climate Change Hub:**  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/climate-change-hub>

**Zero Carbon Dorset:** <https://www.dorset2030.com/>

**Zero Carbon Shropshire:** <https://zerocarbonshropshire.org/>

**CAT Zero Carbon Britain Hub and Innovation Lab:**  
<https://cat.org.uk/info-resources/zero-carbon-britain>

A wide range of other resources to support councils in their work can be found in the Zero Carbon Britain Resource Hub. The Zero Carbon Britain team is also able to deliver Carbon Literacy and bespoke training courses to support councils in their net zero journeys. Contact the Zero Carbon Britain team for more information.



## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Keele University, and in particular Professor Zoe Robinson, both for part-financing the Innovation Lab and providing input and support throughout the process. Thanks to the Moondance Foundation, which funds the Zero Carbon Britain Hub and Innovation Lab at the Centre for Alternative Technology, making possible this crucial work to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies. We would also like to thank the Masters students from CAT's Graduate School of the Environment who took meticulous notes for us in the workshops, and Dr Ruth Stevenson for providing academic rigour to the process. And finally, a huge thank you to all the participants from the 10 councils who dedicated their invaluable time and energy to the process.

This report presents findings from the Staffordshire Councils Zero Carbon Britain Innovation Lab and makes recommendations to accelerate action on the Climate Emergency declarations made by councils across the UK.

## The Authors



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Anna is the Innovation Lab Manager at the Centre for Alternative Technology. Anna is a qualified and experienced facilitator, specialising in co-creative and systems thinking processes. She is passionate about bringing stakeholders together to co-design sustainable solutions that address the climate and biodiversity emergency. Anna has an academic background with a PhD in Sustainable Citizenship.



### Sarah Briggs

Sarah is a Research Assistant in the Zero Carbon Britain Innovation Lab, supporting the lab design and delivery. Sarah has a BSc in Environment and Sustainability, a Masters in Higher Education Practice and is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Sarah is a sustainability practitioner with experience in curriculum design and is an experienced facilitator.

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