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## Briefing on Planning & Infrastructure Bill - Climate & Nature Duties

*This briefing has been prepared by Climate Emergency UK and Wildlife & Countryside Link and is supported by Friends of the Earth, UK100, Wild Card, Zero Hour, South East Climate Alliance, Hampshire Climate Action Network, Climate Action Network West Midlands, Climate Action Leeds and Dorset Climate Action Network*

### Role of councils in climate and nature action

The UK has set urgent and stretching environmental targets in law. The Climate Change Act 2008 and the Environment Act 2021 are world-leading frameworks. However, delivery of these twin frameworks will not succeed without local action.

Without local authorities making more climate-positive decisions, the UK will fail to reach national carbon budgets and net-zero by 2050. Without local authority actions such as better land management and planning and development control, the Environment Act target to halt biodiversity decline by 2030 will be missed.

**Voluntary actions by select frontrunners are not sufficient.** While authorities do have general environmental duties, these are too weak and vague to drive change. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill should be amended to include a strong duty on local authorities to contribute to delivery of targets under the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Environment Act 2021.

### Need for councils to have a climate and strengthened nature duty

Local authorities' general environmental duties have not proven effective, despite considerable costs for authorities on reporting. A more specific climate and nature duty would be more effective and better value for money.

As the Climate Change Committee states in its [7th Carbon Budget](#) advice, the ambition of UK councils to tackle the climate crisis *“needs to be harnessed more effectively, as delivery against it is currently inconsistent, hindered by a lack of clarity on who should be doing what, limited resources, competing priorities, and a fragmented, short-term funding landscape.”*

In relation to delivery of Environment Act targets, the Office for Environmental Protection also stated the importance of councils: *“local authorities are a key delivery partner and they need support to build and maintain the capacity needed.”*

Climate Emergency UK's Council Climate Action Scorecards show the inconsistency in climate action.

- The average score in the **Action Scorecards** for UK councils was **32%**, with 52 councils scoring 20% or lower.
- Of the **52 councils that score 20% or below** in the Action Scorecards, **49 are English and Northern Irish councils**, nations that have no statutory duty for councils to act on climate.



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Wildlife and Countryside Link research also found that despite a statutory nature duty, many councils in England are struggling to meet legal requirements.

- Only **a quarter of local authorities** have met the **legal requirement to consider the biodiversity actions** they need to take. However, their objectives and policies to support this action had not yet been published, almost a year after the January 2024 deadline.
- Almost **half (48%) of local authorities have no relevant biodiversity policies or objectives in place** (regardless of whether they have met the first part of the duty to 'consider' what biodiversity action they could take).

With climate and nature responsibilities codified in law, councils would be more likely to prioritise and nature climate action in planning policy-making and decision-making and allocate necessary resources.

Climate and ecological expertise and capacity is already very low in councils, with as many as 26% of local planning authorities without any access to ecological expertise. Councils must invest in planning and ecological expertise. In 2021, [climate officers stated](#) that the main challenge to securing expertise and increasing skills at their council was short-term funding.

A climate and nature statutory duty linked to specific targets would give more clarity to councils for expectations. This would enable transparent and robust benchmarks to track progress, improving reporting on climate and nature action and emission reductions and progress against Environment Act targets, with the sector currently without a standardised model for reporting either council or area wide emissions.

### **Council support for a climate statutory duty**

Since November 2024 the Local Government Association supports the principle of a climate statutory duty.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the District Council Network, in their [General Election prospectus](#), [London Councils](#), [ADEPT](#) and [88% of UK100 members](#) have called for a climate statutory duty.

There are good precedents for this change. The Greater London Authority has had a [climate duty](#) (Section 42, 43, 44) since its inception. The [Health and Care Act 2022](#) placed new duties on integrated care boards, NHS trusts and foundation trusts to consider statutory emissions and environmental targets in their decisions. More recently, the Government has updated statutory duties for the Crown Estate and Ofwat to consider nature and climate targets.

We hope that Parliamentarians and Government will support the addition of a climate and nature duty for local authorities in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill as an efficient and effective contribution to the delivery of the UK's climate and nature targets.

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<sup>1</sup> Confirmation from the Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board chair, Cllr Adam Hug, [here](#)

This briefing is supported by the following organisations:

