



Northumberland
County Council

Northumberland Town and Parish Council CLIMATE CHANGE TOOLKIT

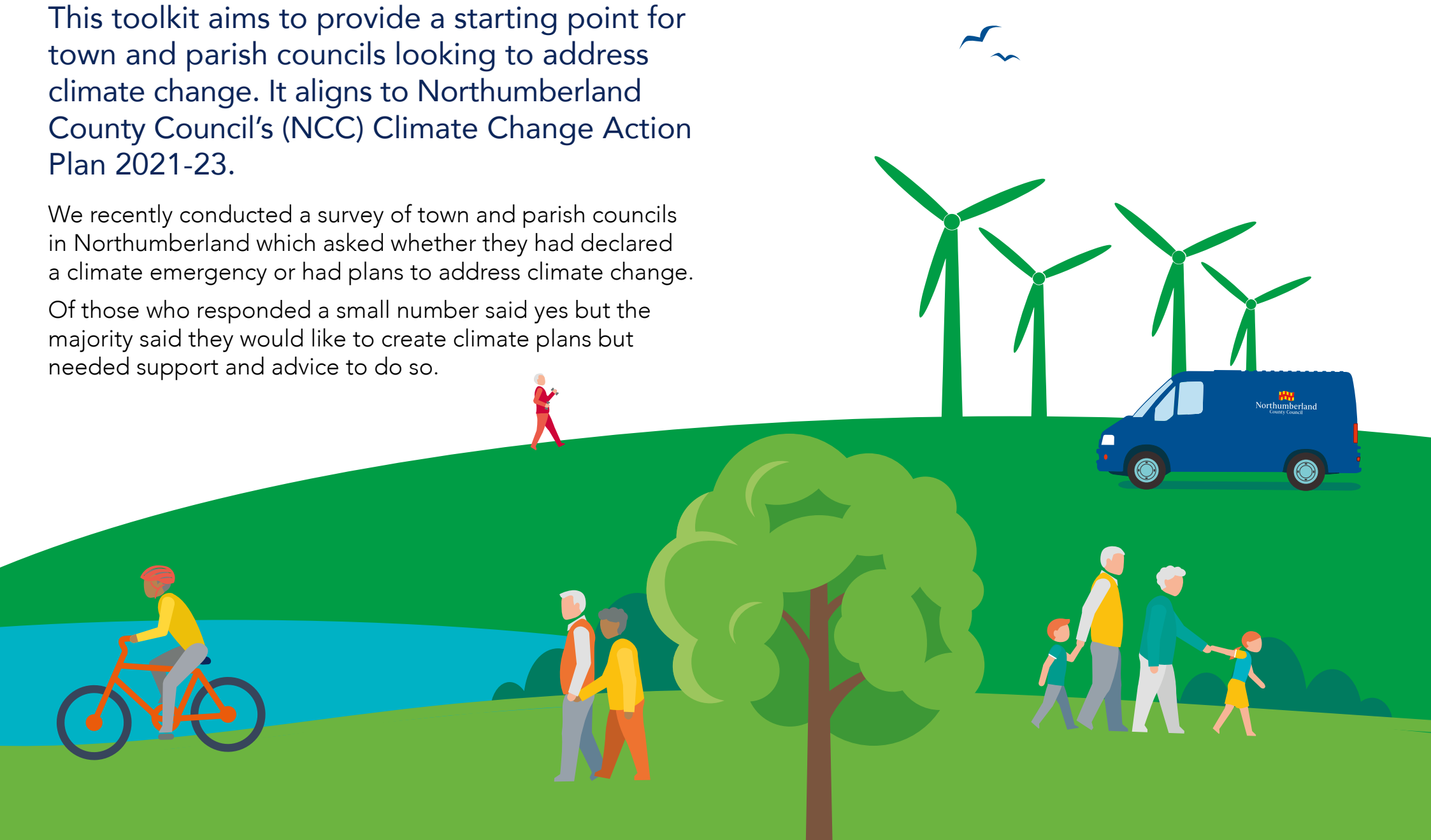


Purpose

This toolkit aims to provide a starting point for town and parish councils looking to address climate change. It aligns to Northumberland County Council's (NCC) Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23.

We recently conducted a survey of town and parish councils in Northumberland which asked whether they had declared a climate emergency or had plans to address climate change.

Of those who responded a small number said yes but the majority said they would like to create climate plans but needed support and advice to do so.



Climate change action in Northumberland

✓ Northumberland County Council published a county-wide Climate Change Action Plan in 2021. This sets out the context and the challenge facing the county. You should start by reading this plan and considering how your town or parish could contribute to its aims.



✓ The plan can be found at <https://nland.uk/climateactionplan>



✓ The next section sets out Northumberland's carbon footprint which should be in your mind as you begin to consider your plans.



✓ This is followed by ways to calculate your town or parish's carbon footprint and then suggestions for activities you could pursue.



✓ The term 'climate change' refers to the trend of global warming caused by the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

✓ There is broad scientific consensus that human impact has increased this warming trend considerably.



What is Climate Change?

✓ Greenhouse gases are gases which retain heat and therefore act to warm the planet when they sit in the atmosphere. The most prevalent of these is carbon dioxide (CO₂).

✓ Carbon dioxide is produced by burning fossil fuels such as oil and gas which we use to power our vehicles and heat our homes.

Why does it matter?

 **Climate change is impacting our planet in a variety of ways. Often the worst effects can be seen in far flung places but we are also affected locally.**

 **Rising sea levels threaten our coastal communities.**

✓ It is estimated that by 2050, high tides could encroach on areas such as Blyth and the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). <https://coastal.climatecentral.org/map/> shows the areas most at risk.

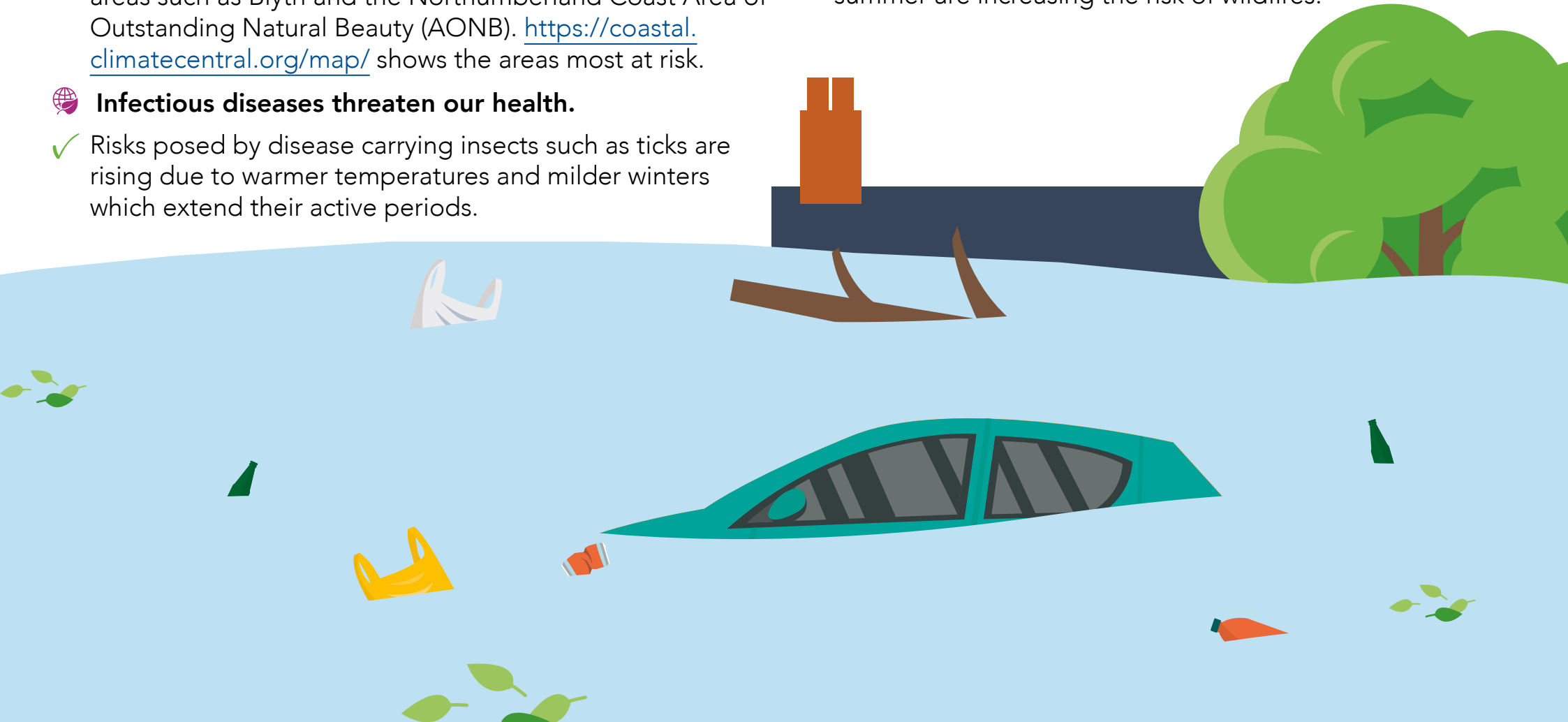
 **Infectious diseases threaten our health.**

✓ Risks posed by disease carrying insects such as ticks are rising due to warmer temperatures and milder winters which extend their active periods.


 **Extreme weather events threaten our communities and infrastructure.**

✓ Storms leading to flooding or wind damage are increasing and this can be linked to our changing climate.


✓ Higher temperatures and periods of draught in the summer are increasing the risk of wildfires.




What is a tonne of Carbon Dioxide?

 **One tonne of carbon dioxide is produced by:**

- ✓ Driving approximately 3,000 miles in a car.
- ✓ Heating an average home in Northumberland for around 4 months.
- ✓ Extracting about 15 barrels of oil.

 **Approximately 140 mature trees can absorb a tonne of carbon dioxide in a year.**

 **In the atmosphere, a tonne of carbon dioxide can hold enough heat to melt around 32 square feet of Arctic sea ice.**



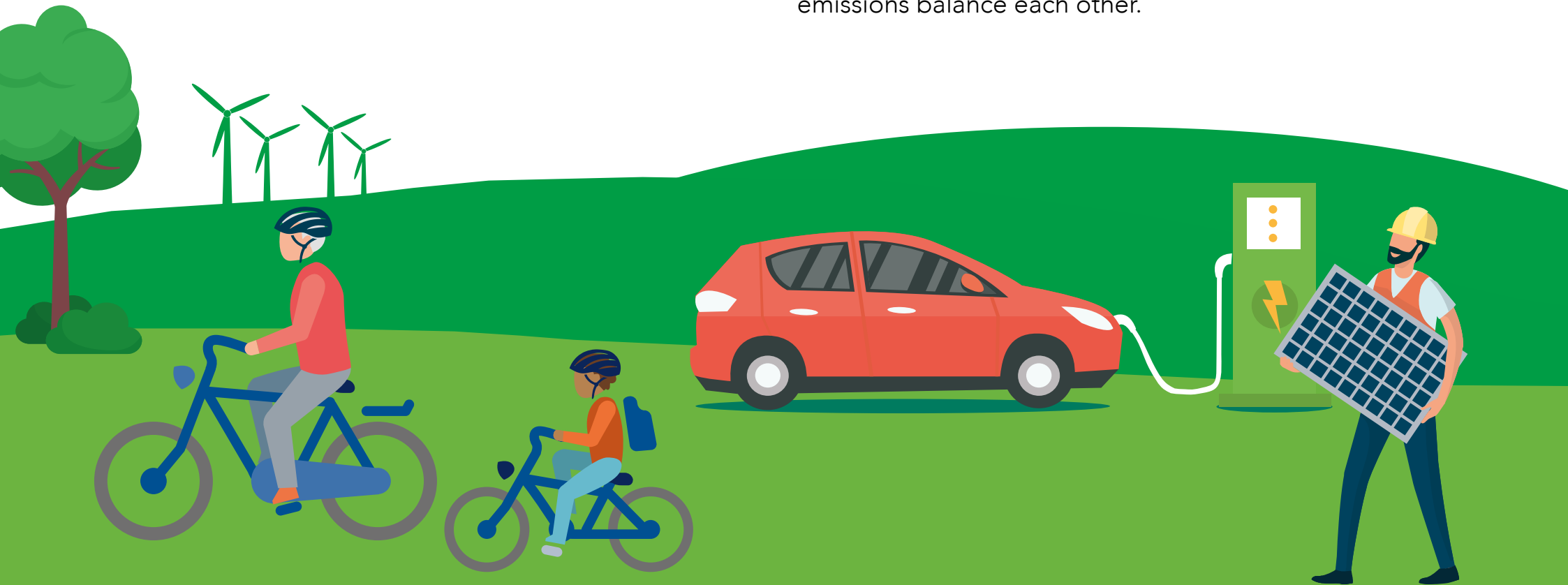
The climate emergency in Northumberland

- 🌐 Northumberland County Council declared a 'climate emergency' in 2019.
- 🌐 This reflects the urgency with which we believe we must act to slow and reduce the effects of climate change here in Northumberland.

🌐 The Council pledged to:

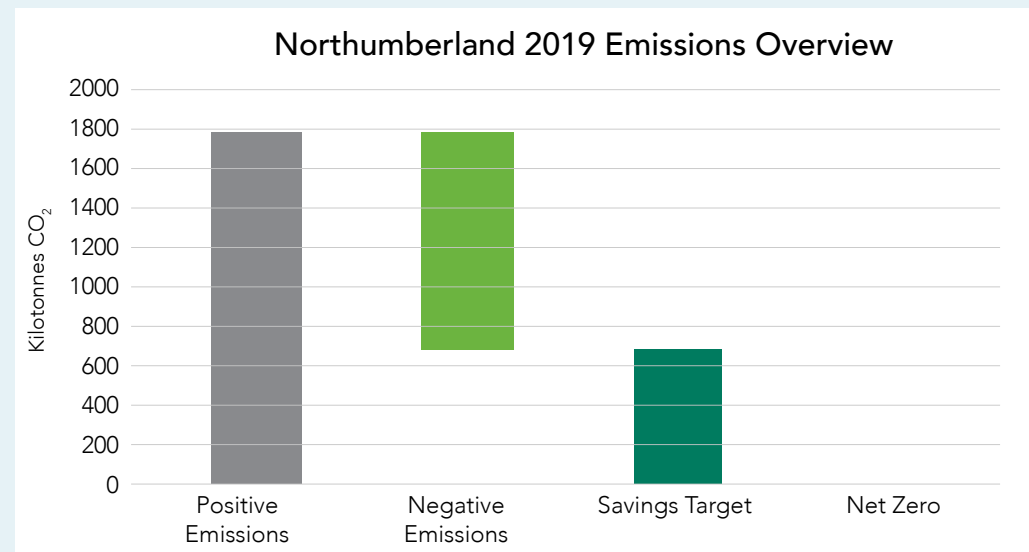
- ✓ Reduce its own emissions by 50% by 2025 (from 2010 levels).
- ✓ To work with national government to make the whole county of Northumberland carbon neutral by 2030.

NB: 'carbon neutral' and 'net-zero' mean the same thing – the point at which positive carbon emissions and negative carbon emissions balance each other.



Northumberland's carbon footprint

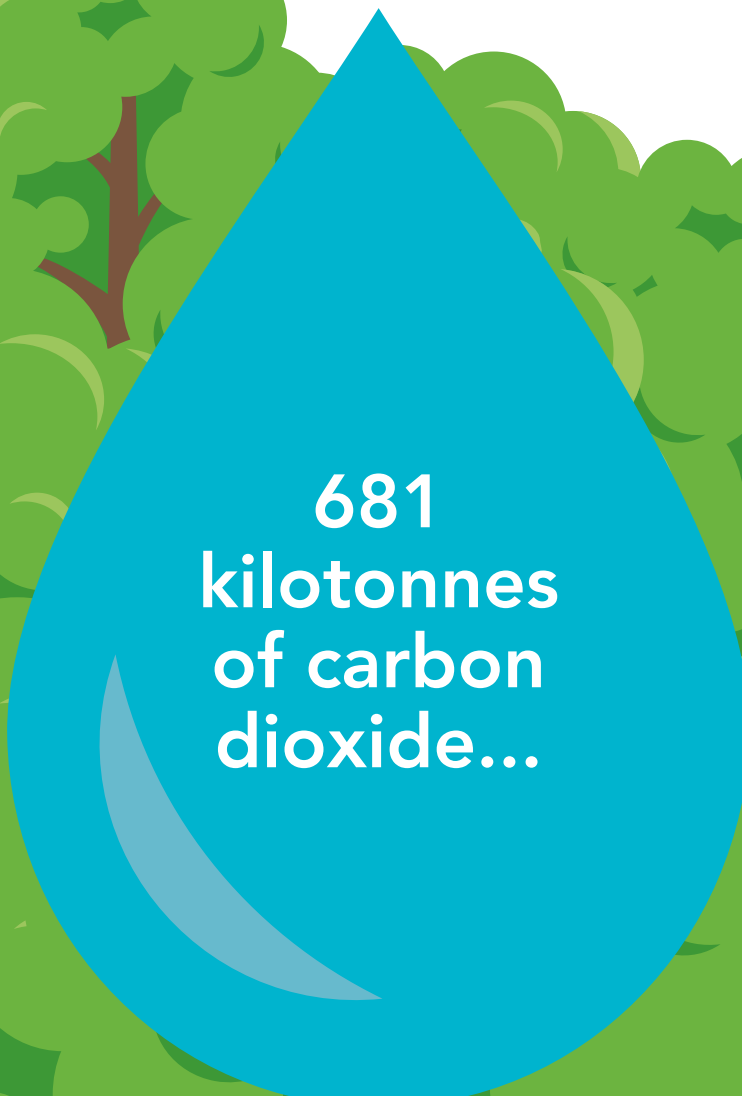
- ✓ The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) currently publishes carbon emissions data at Local Authority level annually.
- ✓ The most recent figures are from 2019.
- ✓ In 2019 1,783 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide were emitted in Northumberland.
- ✓ 1,102 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide were sequestered (absorbed) in Northumberland, primarily by our woodlands and forestry.
- ✓ This means that the savings target to reach carbon neutral emissions as a county is **681 Kilotonnes CO₂**.



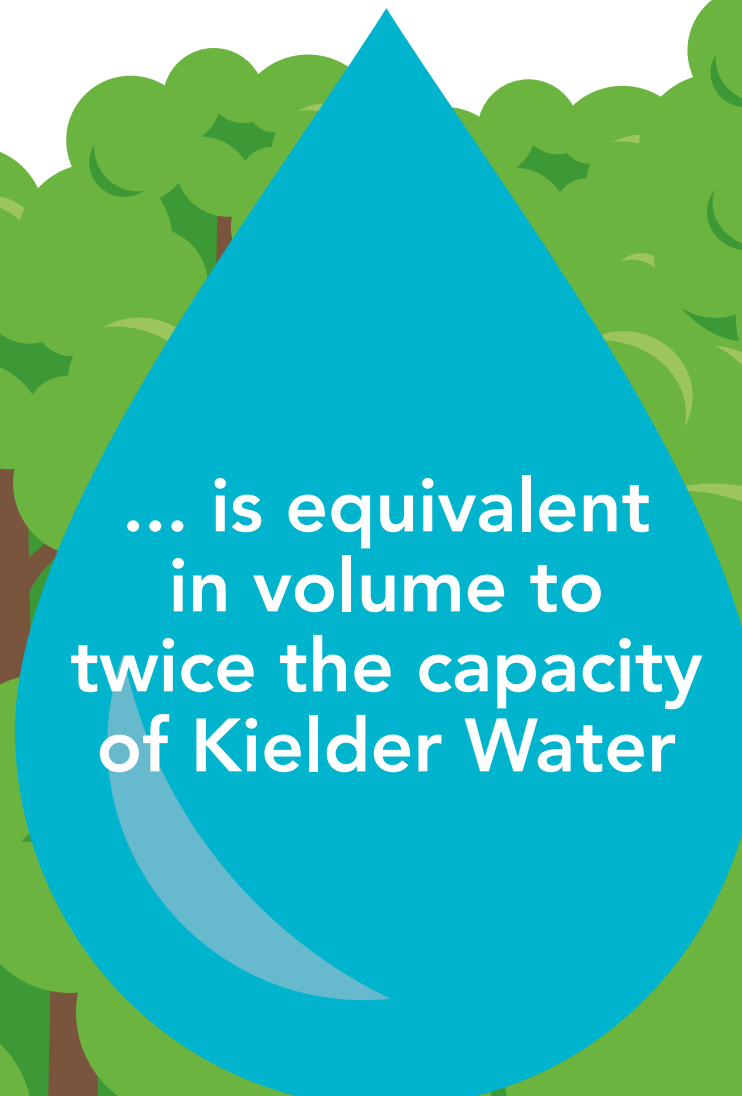
NB: These emissions are those produced inside the county. They do not include emissions for which our residents are responsible but which are produced outside the county (e.g. flights, shipping of goods etc).



What does carbon neutral look like?



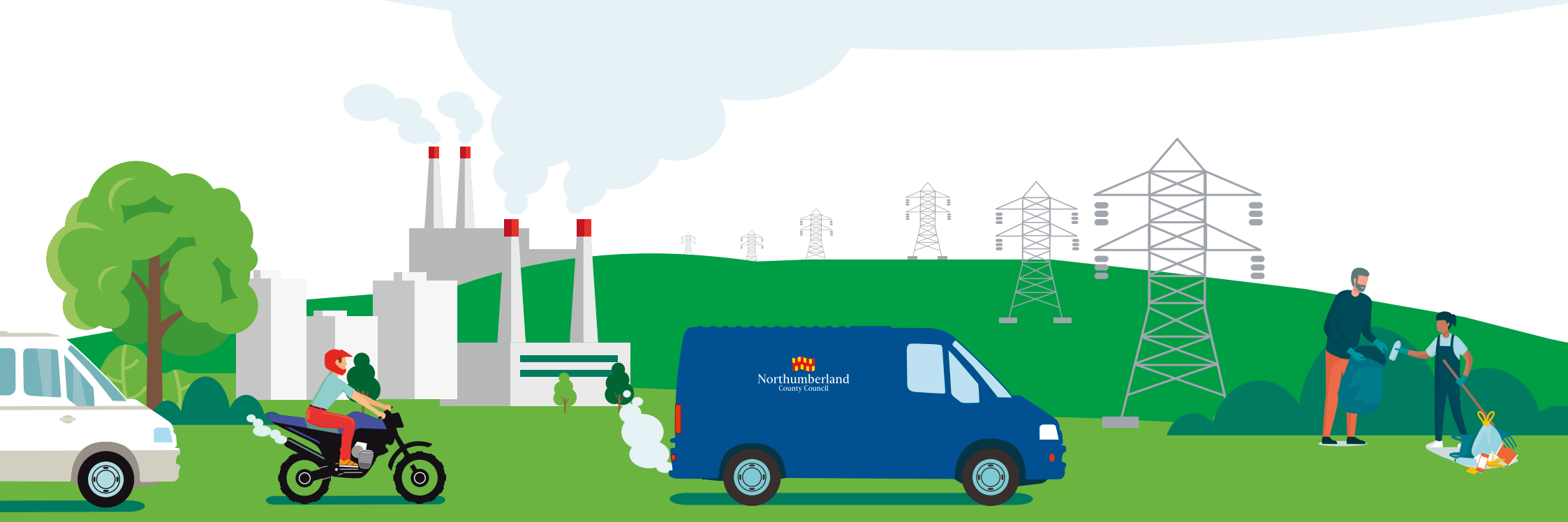
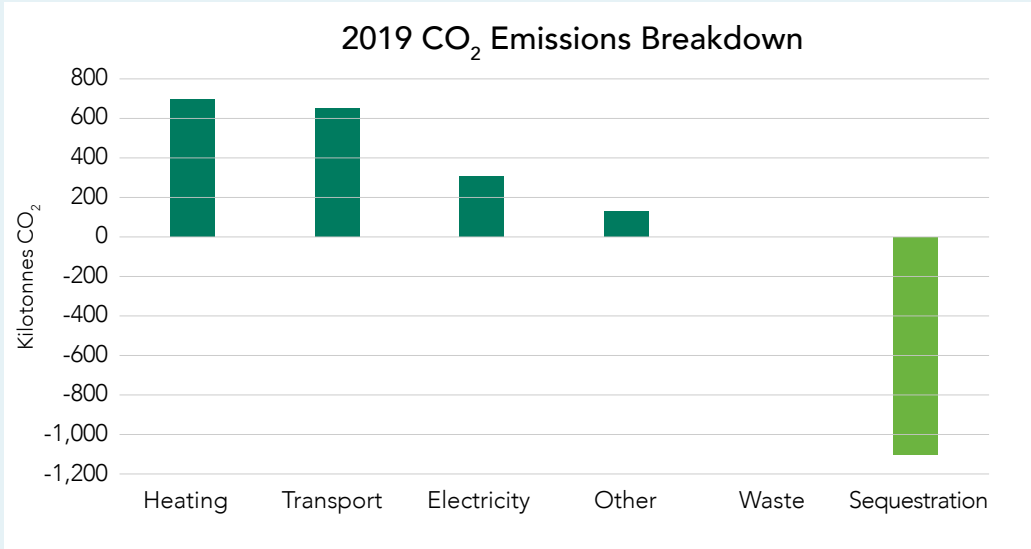
681
kilotonnes
of carbon
dioxide...



... is equivalent
in volume to
twice the capacity
of Kielder Water

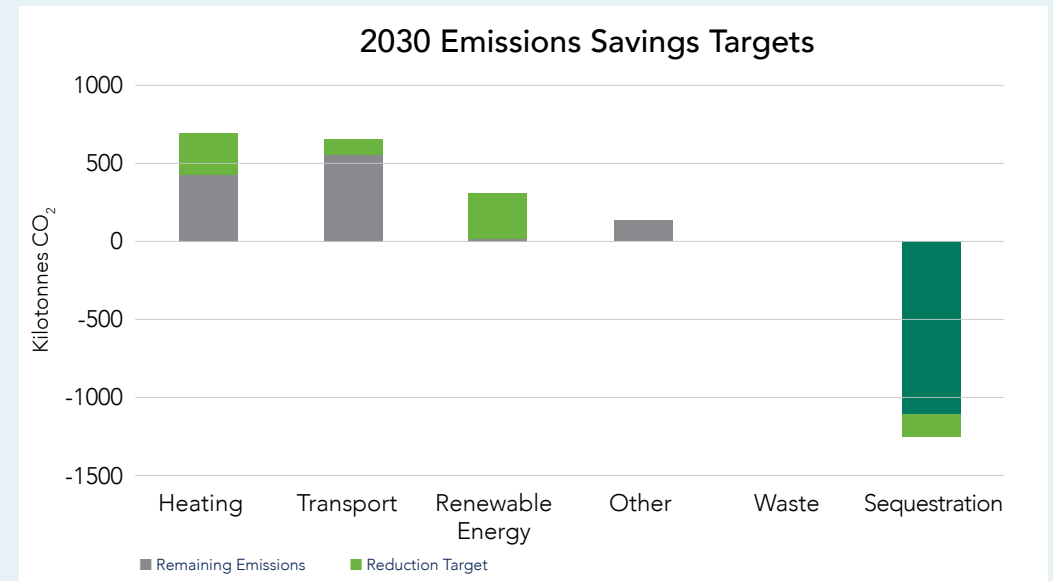
Northumberland's carbon footprint

- ✓ 2019 emissions can be broken down into sectors to gain a better understanding of where those emissions are produced.
- ✓ These sectors are now identified as the Priority Action Areas in NCC's Climate Change Action Plan.
- ✓ Waste is left at zero currently as it is not accounted for in the emissions breakdown supplied by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). We are working on a separate carbon footprint internally.



Northumberland's carbon footprint

- ✓ At a county level, we have modelled potential carbon savings across each of the priority action areas. This is based on what we feel is achievable in a high ambition scenario.
- ✓ If realised it would lead to a carbon negative overall county - i.e. Northumberland would be absorbing more carbon than it produces.
- ✓ There are many assumptions involved in this modelling and many potential projects which could contribute. For more detail, see the Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23.



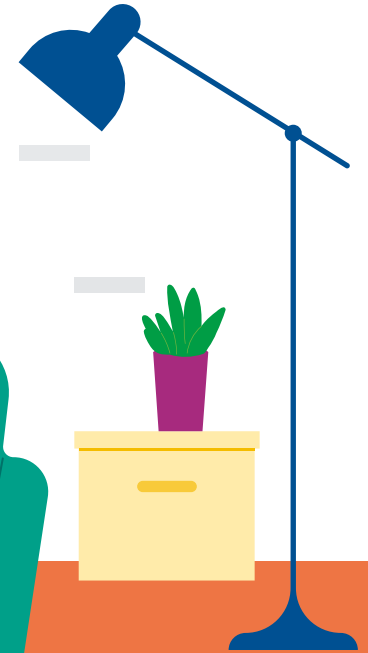
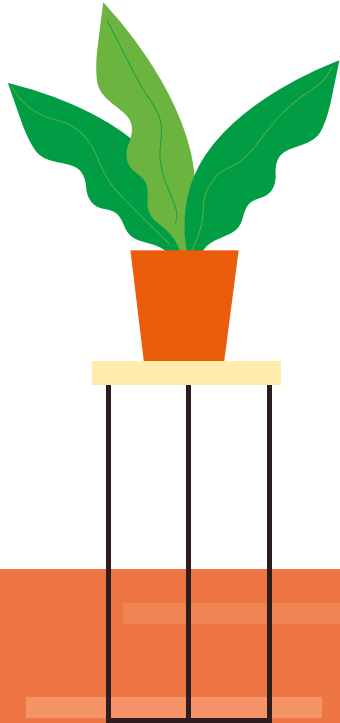
Town and parish carbon footprints

- ✓ NCC is working to produce an online tool which will give a detailed breakdown of carbon emissions in every Northumberland town and parish.
- ✓ Our tool will also include sequestration (negative emissions) and will make bespoke recommendations for towns and parishes, considering their respective carbon footprints.
- ✓ We are aiming to publish this in summer 2022.
- ✓ In the meantime there are a number of tools you can use.



Town and parish carbon footprints

- ✓ The [Northumberland Domestic Emissions](#) dashboard allows you to view emissions produced by residential dwellings in any Northumberland postcode.
- ✓ These emissions are caused by heating and powering our homes.
- ✓ This can let you see where the most and least domestic emissions are produced within your town or parish.



Town and parish carbon footprints

- ✓ <https://impact-tool.org.uk/> will calculate a carbon footprint for any UK parish.
- ✓ The data can be broken down in a number of ways either as a territorial footprint or a consumption footprint.
- ✓ You can switch on sub-categories which will show detail such as heating source (oil/gas etc).
- ✓ You can compare parishes using the compare function.
- ✓ This tool gives a carbon footprint which includes emissions for which residents are responsible but which are not produced directly in the parish. For example, flights taken by residents or shipping of goods purchased by residents. This is different to the county carbon footprint published by NCC which is only emissions produced within the county.
- ✓ This tool does not include negative emissions from woodlands for example.




How to use town and parish council carbon footprints


- ✓ Carbon footprints give you a good starting point when developing an action plan to reduce emissions.
- ✓ Start with your biggest source of emissions and consider whether there is anything you can do to reduce it (see suggestions by category).
- ✓ Think about what your carbon footprint tells you about the lifestyles, habits and behaviours of your community. How can you influence this to reduce key areas of emissions?
- ✓ Is there anything which surprises you about your carbon footprint? Could you make your community more aware of less obvious sources of emissions?
- ✓ Once you have established which areas of emissions you want to target, look at our suggestions for each category of emissions for some possible project ideas.





Creating the right environment

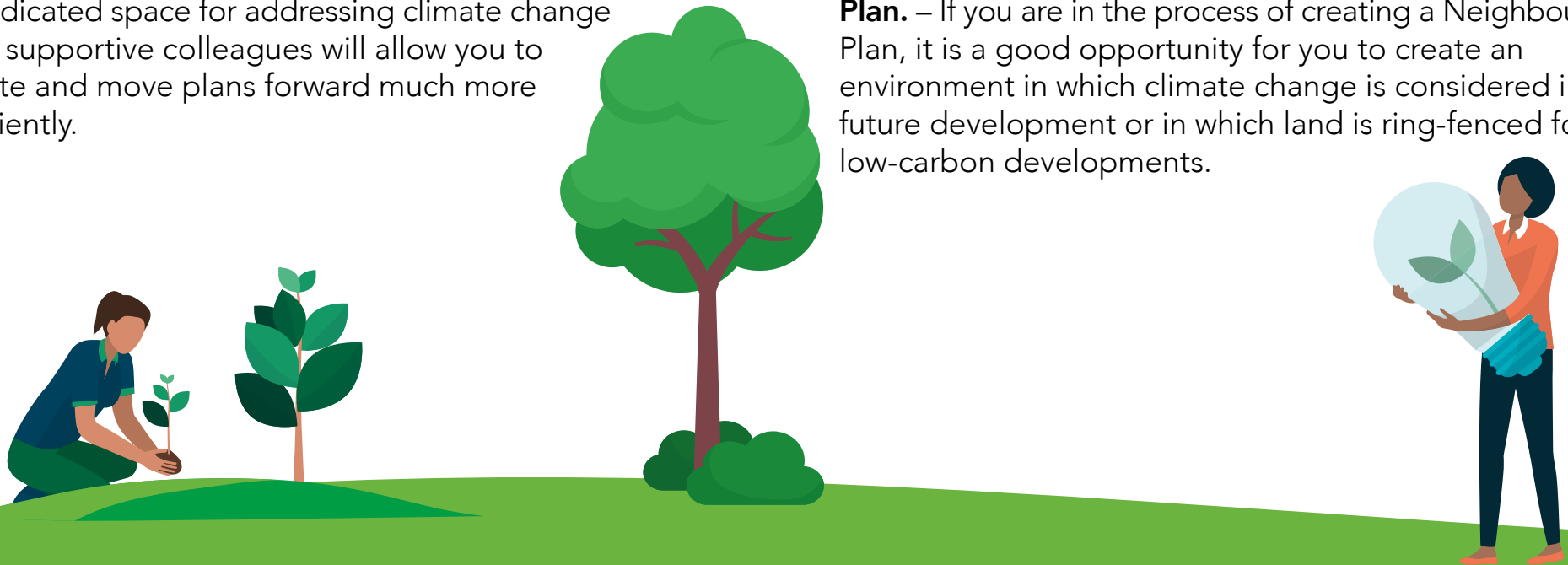
In order to ensure you have the backing and momentum to see plans through to fruition you may wish to consider the following:

 **Declare a climate emergency.** – Whilst this does not achieve anything tangible in terms of reducing emissions, it creates a useful point in time to start from. It also creates a record of your council's commitment to urgently tackle climate change and sends a message to parishioners that your council intends to take climate change seriously.

 **Create a climate change sub-committee.** – Creating a dedicated space for addressing climate change with supportive colleagues will allow you to create and move plans forward much more efficiently.

 **Allocate funding or other resources such as land.** – If you have funding available, propose that some is ring-fenced towards climate initiatives. Alternatively, if you have other resources such as land or buildings owned or operated by your council, consider how they could be used to reduce emissions.

 **Put climate change at the heart of a Neighbourhood Plan.** – If you are in the process of creating a Neighbourhood Plan, it is a good opportunity for you to create an environment in which climate change is considered in future development or in which land is ring-fenced for low-carbon developments.



See [Making a Plan](#) for a breakdown of the processes involved in the above.

Case study: Hexham policy processes

How to...

Declare a climate and biodiversity emergency.

- ✓ Propose it in Full Council. You may need to offer a short presentation on why it is required, then ask all councillors to vote on it.
- ✓ If you have already declared a climate and biodiversity emergency some time ago, you may wish to renew your declaration as you start to put it into practice.
- ✓ Make sure it is agreed that this declaration will inform all council business. For example, every decision, project, planning application, stationary order, public spaces, gardening practices, otherwise it risks being a hollow declaration.
- ✓ Tie it in with NCC's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030. This demonstrates the support of an establishment organisation.

Write a Sustainability Plan.

- ✓ Get councillors together to brainstorm a wish list of real and ambitious goals as big or small as you like. For example, public consultation on environmental project plans, making the parish or town an idling-free area, litter picking events. Break the wish list down into short, medium and long-term goals. Budget for them where necessary.
- ✓ The contents of the plan will need to be voted on in Full Council. Be aware that not all the content will be agreed upon (as was the case in Hexham when they voted on their Sustainability Plan).
- ✓ In Hexham Town Council, the Planning and Infrastructure (P&I) Committee is in charge of the Sustainability Plan, including budgeting. A Sustainability Plan can be adapted anytime as and when the P&I Committee agree.



Case study: Hexham policy processes (continued)

Write a Sustainability Plan (continued).

- ✓ Alternatively, you could set up a sub-committee which need only include one councillor. These have the advantage of being able to include non-elected residents so they can get directly involved and share the workload, expertise and energy and do not require the clerk to attend to take minutes.
- ✓ OR you could split the tasks between individuals and small groups who report back through a councillor into the relevant committee.

Create a Neighbourhood Plan.

- ✓ NCC can advise on this.
- ✓ It involves consultation and involvement from residents, a steering committee and a referendum.
- ✓ This is a long term project with can involve significant cost and resource.



Making a plan

Once you have got the backing of your council, identified colleagues to support you and analysed your carbon footprint, you are ready to create a climate change action plan.

We have broken down our suggestions into the categories of emissions you may wish to tackle which align to NCC's Climate Change Action Plan.

You must consider what is right for your context, your community and your capacity to deliver. It is far better to deliver one project well than trying to do too much at once.

No project is too small to make a difference. From chatting to your neighbour about climate change to building a low carbon heat network and everything in between, every action counts.



Policy

Encourage and collaborate with climate action groups.

- ✓ Climate action groups can help build support and momentum for political action and help you build positive community solutions.
- ✓ They should be harnessed and supported, whether they are a formal part of a town council or not.
- ✓ Get councillors actively involved with these groups and invite groups to speak at full council meetings.

Use your powers.

- ✓ Use your role as a consultee to the local planning authority to ensure that measures to reduce emissions and adapt to climate related extreme weather events are argued for in the planning process. Set a list of guidelines by which the town or parish council should examine planning applications.
- ✓ Lobby and educate other councillors and speak up about climate issues in all council meetings. Try and gain consensus by educating and debating respectfully. You might not get everyone on your side overnight but be persistent!



Policy (continued)

Create bulk purchasing groups.

- ✓ Many councils already have oil buying groups. Consider extending this to low-carbon solutions like solar PV, heat pumps or HVO (see [heating](#) and [renewable energy](#)).
- ✓ Costs of installing renewable technologies will be much lower if done in bulk. Councils can bring together local homeowners and businesses to develop schemes like this, an example of which can be seen at [Transition Streets](#) in Totnes.

Use your money wisely.

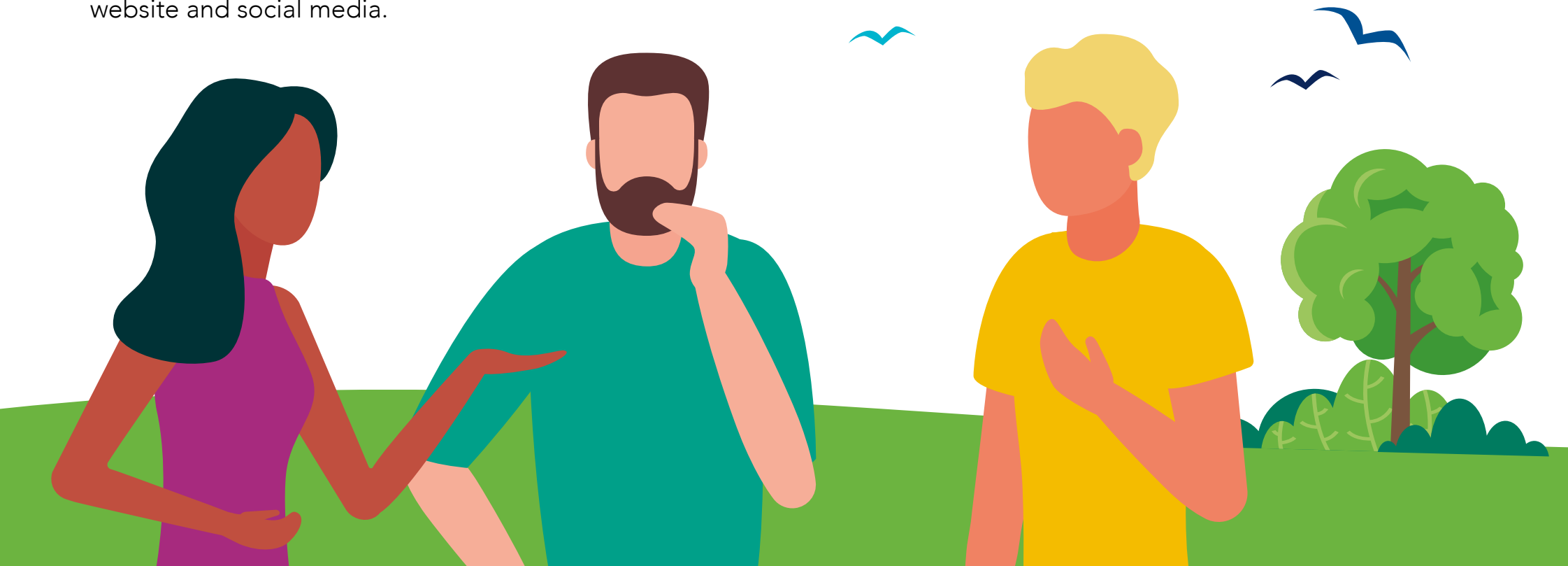
- ✓ Change your council bank account to an ethical bank that does not invest in fossil fuels. (This will require a vote at Full Council.)
- ✓ Use local and sustainable suppliers wherever possible. For example, when buying plants for public spaces.



Partnerships and engagement

Use your existing communication tools to promote climate awareness.

- ✓ Newsletters, flyers, door knocking, e-bulletins, social media – all of these can include messages encouraging carbon reduction. Make climate issues a mainstream topic.
- ✓ You may wish to consider live streaming your Full Council meetings and/or having videos available online afterwards so that residents can see the council's intent on improving the area, including work on climate-related issues.
- ✓ Include the fact that you have declared a climate emergency in your email signature, as well as on your website and social media.
- ✓ Create events to get local climate activists together to showcase their projects and ideas and encourage residents and environmental organisations to attend and join in.
- ✓ Encourage councillors and/or residents to sign up for Carbon Literacy Training from the [Carbon Literacy Project](#) to equip them with skills needed to talk about climate change effectively and plan productive climate actions.



Partnerships and engagement (continued)

Engage with other key stakeholders in your community.

- ✓ These might be schools, businesses or other community groups.
- ✓ Think about how can you raise awareness of climate change and promote ways to reduce carbon emissions.
- ✓ This might be through championing walk to school weeks, running local competitions to encourage climate awareness or simply listening to the concerns of other key stakeholders.
- ✓ Send councillors to do talks about your Sustainability Plan to community and voluntary groups, schools, care homes, youth groups and workplaces and ask for their feedback. Creating a climate resilient town or parish is as much about creating community networks and encouraging inclusivity of marginalised groups as it is about instigating environmental projects throughout the town.

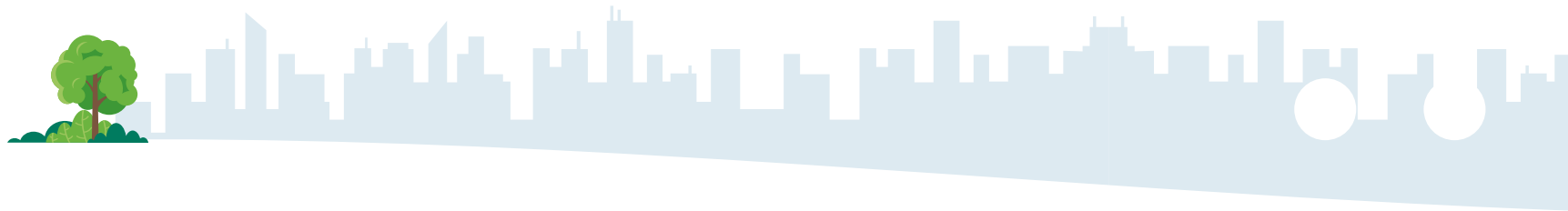
- ✓ Encourage young people to feel part of the climate decisions in your area through involvement with schools and projects. You may wish to consider setting up a Youth Council.

Use networks available to you for support.

- ✓ Engage with other councils which could mentor your council. For example, guest speakers and case studies to support knowledge sharing and best practice. If they are from the same party/political leaning as your own councillors they may be more inclined to listen.
- ✓ Join NCC's Community Champion Scheme. Make the most of the training they offer, their network within NCC and the network of other Champions which the climate change team is creating.



Heating

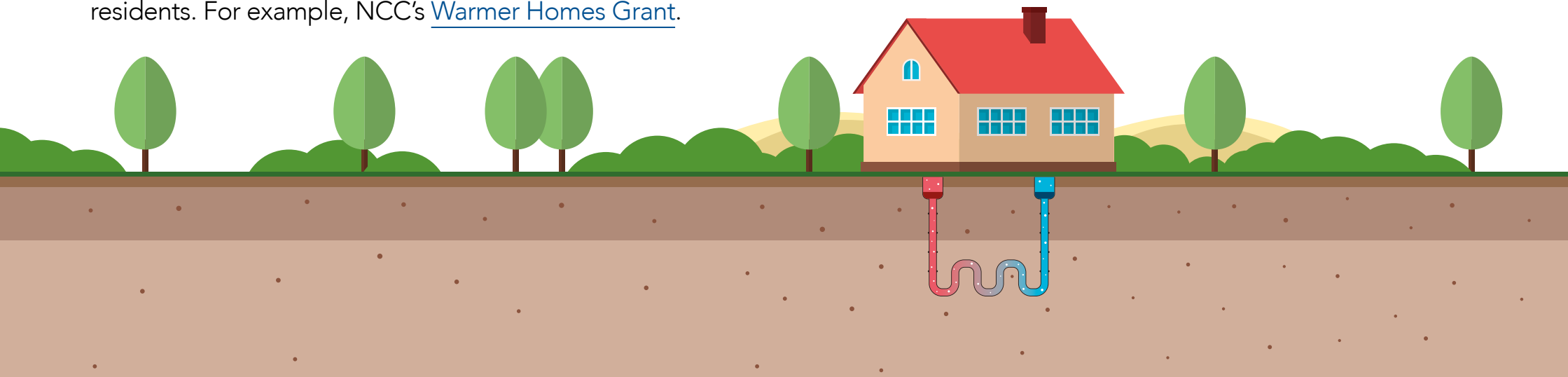


Raise awareness of carbon emissions from heating and how they can be reduced.

- ✓ Many people are not aware of how much CO₂ heating our homes and other buildings produces.
- ✓ Consider a campaign to inform and even measure more accurately, the carbon footprint of homes in your community. This could be through posters, leaflets, conversations, a town hall event, social media, a survey or a newsletter. NCC can provide and run an online survey for you.
- ✓ Ensure you promote the ways to reduce heating emissions. [The energy saving trust](#) has an excellent breakdown of the possible ways to do this.
- ✓ Flag the co-benefits of these options. As well as reducing carbon, residents can make significant financial savings.
- ✓ Ensure any newsletters or communications you are producing promote energy-saving funding currently available for residents. For example, NCC's [Warmer Homes Grant](#).

Investigate possible alternative heat sources at a community level.

- ✓ NCC is investigating low-carbon district heat networks in the county's main towns. Refer back to our action plan to see if your town is included in these plans. If it is, how can you support NCC's plans by encouraging residents and businesses to prepare for a heat network?
- ✓ If your community is not one of those targeted by NCC, do you think there is the potential for alternative heating? Are you aware of unused heat produced in your community which could be harnessed? This might be from flooded mines below the ground, or from an industrial installation which produces excess heat. Make NCC aware of any of these opportunities or investigate yourself.



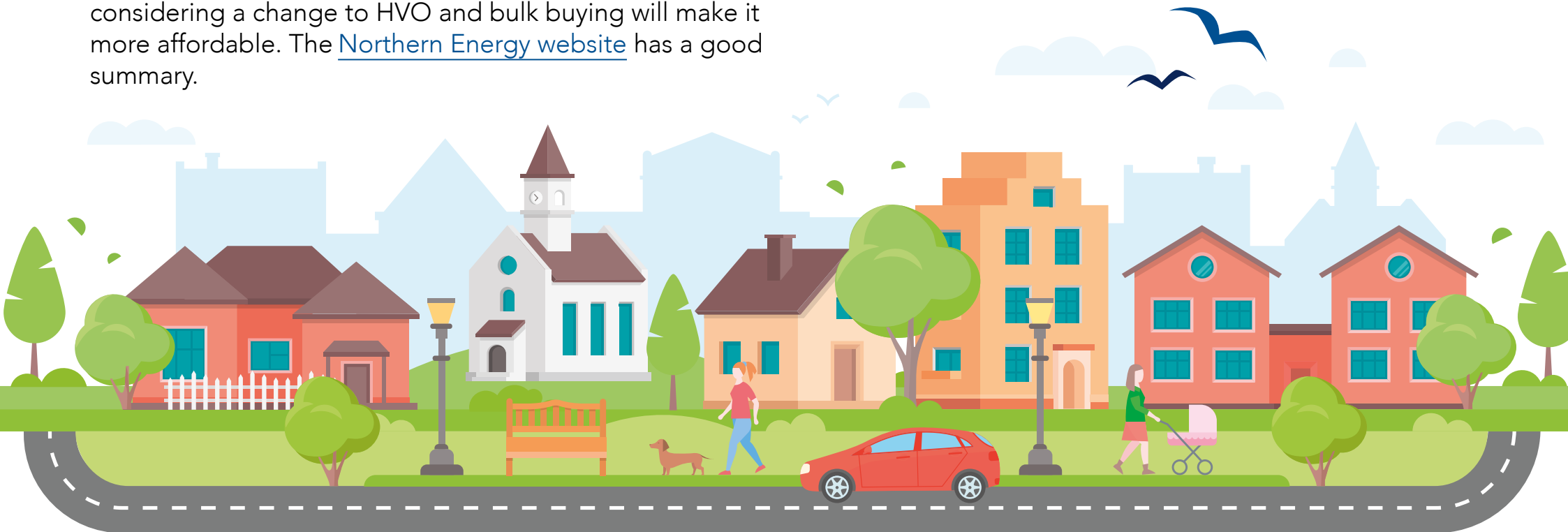
Heating (continued)

Investigate possible alternative heat sources at a community level (continued).

- ✓ If you represent an area off the gas grid, consider the use of HVO (Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil) as a possible alternative to kerosene. HVO is currently available as a transport fuel but subject to successful trials and obtaining government approval, it will be introduced by suppliers as a heating fuel in 2022. It has 90% less carbon emissions than standard heating oil and can be used in existing boilers following a small and cheap conversion. Councils with oil buying groups may be particularly interested in considering a change to HVO and bulk buying will make it more affordable. The [Northern Energy website](#) has a good summary.

Develop low-carbon heating plans for council owned buildings.

- ✓ If you have a village hall or other building owned or operated by the council, could you fund or apply for funding to improve its energy efficiency and/or install a low-carbon heating system?
- ✓ Getting an energy audit is the first step. Loans for projects with a payback of less than five years are available through [Salix funding](#).
- ✓ Get a quote for air or ground source heat pumps for your buildings.



Transport

Raise awareness of carbon emissions from transport and how they can be reduced.

- ✓ Once you know your community's carbon footprint, raise awareness of this through your parish newsletters and alternatives. For example, walking and cycling.
- ✓ Consider undertaking a survey to better understand transport habits in your community. This might be for your council colleagues (how do you travel to meetings and about council business?), for a school, or for the wider community. Use the results to help inform alternatives.

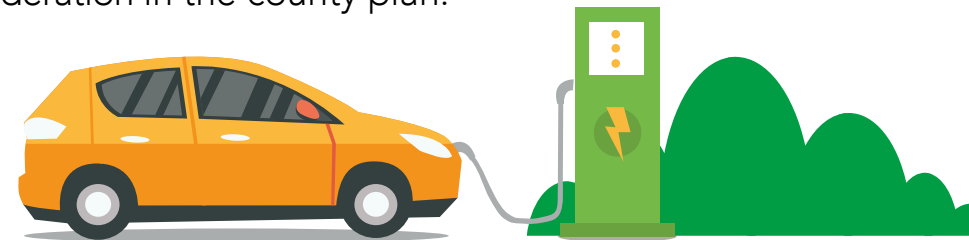
Promote low-carbon ways of travelling.

- ✓ Use your communications with residents to promote cycling and walking as alternatives to the car.
- ✓ Consider working with local schools or businesses to encourage pupils/employees to walk or cycle.
- ✓ Ensure council-owned buildings are set up to encourage cycling with secure cycle storage.
- ✓ Set a good example by walking or cycling more around your community.
- ✓ If your community is served by public transport, ensure this is promoted to your residents.



Consider locations for EV charging.

- ✓ NCC is about to embark on a much bigger programme of installing electric vehicle chargers.
- ✓ These will primarily be aimed at residents without off-street parking.
- ✓ Map out where the most appropriate locations for chargers would be in your community considering things like competition for parking spaces, pavement width, density of housing without off-street parking.
- ✓ Send these to climate@northumberland.gov.uk for consideration in the county plan.



Install EV chargers.

- ✓ If you have funding available and own land, you may want to consider installing EV chargers yourself. There are various suppliers available. NCC will be able to advise further.
- ✓ Raise awareness among residents that have access to private parking so they can apply to the **Electric vehicle homecharge scheme funding**. The latter funding will support residents installing EV chargers with up to 75% of the costs.

Transport (continued)

Develop and promote lift-sharing schemes.

- ✓ Councils may be in the position to bring together individuals, or local businesses to car-share and thus reduce car use.
- ✓ These can be particularly effective for commuting journeys.
- ✓ Something as simple as a Facebook page where residents can offer space in their cars can work.

Identify and designate safe walking and cycle routes.

- ✓ NCC has developed a series of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) which will soon be made public for consultation. These identify the priority cycling corridors which NCC will be investing in, if and when funding is made available. Once these plans are made public, familiarise yourselves with them and comment during the consultation process.
- ✓ Designating safe walking and cycle routes in your Neighbourhood Plan may be another possibility.



Renewable energy

Save energy in council buildings.

- ✓ Ensure council buildings are as energy efficient as possible.
- ✓ Simple steps like installing LED bulbs can make a difference.

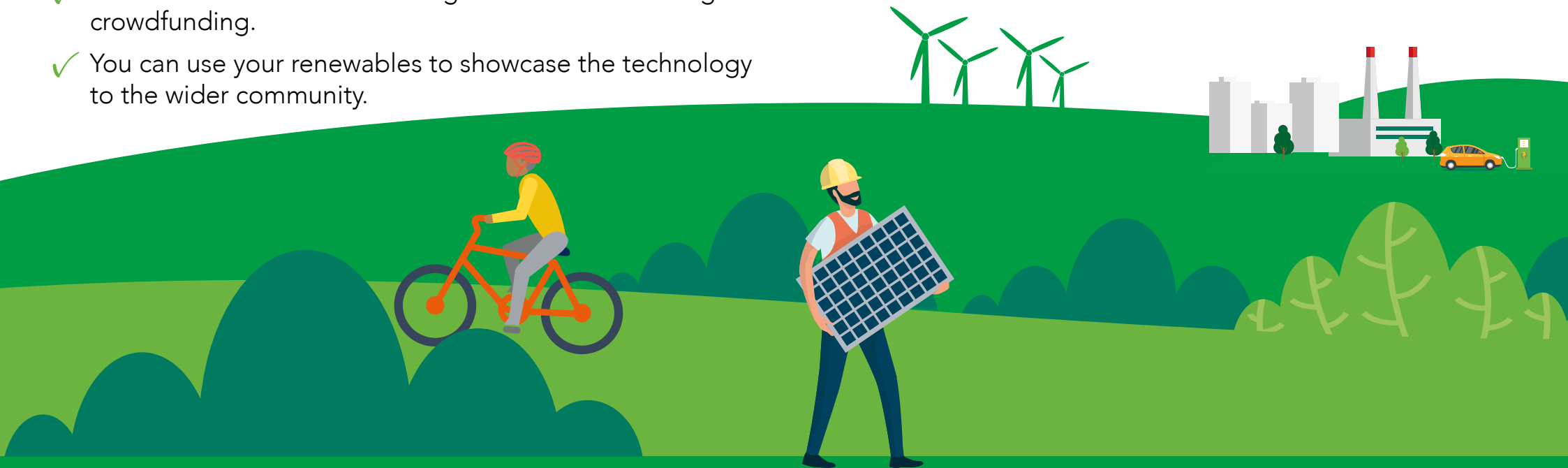
Generate green energy.

- ✓ Installing renewable energy generation like solar PV or wind turbines can save money long-term.
- ✓ Several energy companies provide smart export tariffs which pay for electricity generated and not used in the building. For example, [Octopus Energy](#).
- ✓ Funds can also be raised through Salix loans or through crowdfunding.
- ✓ You can use your renewables to showcase the technology to the wider community.

Support and follow the progress of the Local Electricity Bill.

- ✓ If made law, this bill would give electricity generators the right to become local suppliers without the current barriers.
- ✓ This would open up the potential to generate energy for the wider community which in turn would create a revenue stream to be re-invested in the community.
- ✓ NCC has recently pledged its support for this bill.

Identify and designate land for renewable energy generation in your Neighbourhood Plan.



Carbon sequestration (solutions in nature)

Manage land for nature.

- ✓ If you have responsibility for any land – allotments, bridleways, burial grounds, commons and open spaces or village greens for instance – consider managing them to enhance nature and absorb carbon.
- ✓ Something as simple as a change to the mowing regime can help.
- ✓ Promote any changes you make to the wider community.

Plant trees.

- ✓ Purchase and plant trees on suitable land you own.
- ✓ Encourage local land owners to take part in tree planting, in particular through the Great Northumberland Forest initiative.
- ✓ Encourage local residents to take part in NCC's free tree scheme and plant a tree in their garden or other outdoor space.

Reduce pesticide use and other harmful activities.

- ✓ Reducing activities which harm wildlife will help nature recover.
- ✓ Consider using peat-free compost and reducing pesticide use.
- ✓ In some areas, advice leaflets for allotment holders have proven popular, detailing sustainable gardening practices, including advice on natural alternatives to pesticides.

Designate sites within your Neighbourhood Plan for trees and nature restoration.

Encourage the community to get involved and understand the benefits.

- ✓ Reach out to local gardening clubs, schools and other community groups to raise awareness of the importance of nature and green spaces for the climate, as well as co-benefits such as community cohesion and physical and mental health.



Waste

- ✓ Ensure waste is recycled or composted where possible. Feedback to NCC where opportunities for recycling are limited and there is high demand. Use [recyclenow.com](https://www.recyclenow.com) to check the nearest recycling facilities.
- ✓ Promote the use of non-NCC waste management solutions. For example, soft plastic recycling at local Co-op stores.
- ✓ Consider setting up community composting schemes and use as an opportunity to discuss food waste with residents.
- ✓ Explore the demand for reuse in the community. What is needed to encourage reuse? What can NCC facilitate to do this? For example, repair classes, a 'library of things' or space to host repair workshops.
- ✓ Encourage the use of 'bring banks' for glass recycling. Send feedback to NCC on any 'bring banks' that are not up to standard.
- ✓ Identify problem areas for littering/fly-tipping and send feedback to NCC.



Final thoughts

- ✓ Using the ideas set out in this toolkit (which align to the seven action areas of NCC's climate change action plan) will set you on your way to helping to reduce emissions in your town or parish.
- ✓ Don't try to do too much at once. Start with something achievable, complete it and reflect on its impact.
- ✓ Take time to measure the impact of the projects you choose to undertake. This could be qualitative. For example, through resident feedback. Or quantitative. For example, the number of trees planted.
- ✓ NCC would love to hear your feedback on this toolkit and on your experiences as you pursue climate change mitigation in your town or parish.
- ✓ Please contact the NCC climate change team anytime via climate@northumberland.gov.uk.