

The [Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission](#) is an independent and politically neutral body that brings together organisations across all sectors, united by a shared [Climate Action Plan](#). In an election year that is complex for climate policies, we have picked out some of the big talking points for the region where we know there is good, factual evidence that can cut through the electoral noise.

There is a huge appetite for climate action

Three quarters of UK citizens are [worried about climate change](#). This spans party political allegiances and has [not been reduced by the cost-of-living crisis](#). Our region has big ambitions for climate action, with four of our councils (Leeds, York, Kirklees and Wakefield) achieving [global environmental leadership status](#) in 2023. South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority has recently run a [Citizens' Assembly](#) on climate to help decision-makers learn about the hopes and concerns of communities. Young people are especially keen to see climate action, as the [Green Youth Deal](#) and Youth Climate Champion Awards by the Regional Youth Climate Assembly (RYCA) demonstrate.

We must decarbonise much faster

In the past 33 years, Yorkshire and Humber's carbon dioxide emissions have reduced by 50%. But we have less than half that time – just 14 years – to meet our regional target of net zero emissions by 2038. In other words, by 2038, any carbon we are still releasing into the atmosphere needs to be cancelled out by measures that remove carbon from the air and return it to the ground. Because this is very hard to achieve, reducing emissions as much as possible is the priority. To achieve this, we need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions four times faster than at present.

Relying on shifts in our energy system, from fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas to clean electricity, will only get us part of the way there, so a range of other changes are needed. These include insulating our buildings; reducing our use of cars; using public transport more and increasing walking and cycling; and making changes to how we use land, such as reducing animal agriculture and planting more trees. The major industries around the Humber have big plans to get to net zero emissions, which are particularly important for our region's role in global climate action.

Prioritise nature and build resilience

As well as cutting carbon, we need to put nature on a path to recovery. [A third of all species in the UK are in decline and 13% are at risk of extinction](#). Climate change is a significant driver of this, and it's not just our wildlife and ecosystems that are suffering. From wildfires and heatwaves to storms and floods, we've already seen dramatic impacts on people, places and livelihoods across our region. One important way we can turn this around is by putting nature first when adapting our infrastructure – for example, how we manage flood risk and water resources – because the buildings and infrastructure we're installing now will be with us in a rapidly changing climate and need to work positively for nature and for decarbonisation and be resilient to extreme weather. Projects such as [Living with Water](#) in Hull are an important part of the solution.

Recognise the economic benefits

Acting on climate action by cutting carbon dioxide emissions, adapting to the increasing frequency and ferocity of extreme weather, and restoring our depleted natural systems, certainly requires significant upfront investments from government and from the private sector. But many of these investments will more than pay for themselves in terms of new jobs and business opportunities, savings in energy bills and reductions in the costs arising from poor health and climate impacts on communities.

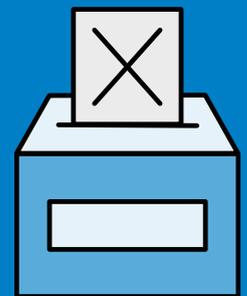
Across the Yorkshire and Humber region, local and combined authorities are already investing substantial amounts in climate-friendly measures. Leeds, for example, has already [invested £47m in its flagship district heating network](#), which is currently supplying renewable heating energy to whole neighbourhoods and industrial developments and has supported 400 jobs. And in South Yorkshire the local and mayoral authorities have teamed up to provide [grants helping small businesses to reduce their carbon footprint](#). Leadership like this across the region is encouraging – but we desperately need clear, long-term policies from national government to give confidence to people who want to invest.

Make people's lives better

Climate action will only succeed if it also reduces inequalities and helps people to pursue healthy, fulfilling lives. Yorkshire and Humber's public health sector [has adopted climate change as a top priority](#). Many climate-friendly policies, such as increasing walking and cycling, and upgrading our homes, have huge benefits for physical and mental wellbeing, but many people are excluded from benefitting due to their income levels or the types of homes they live in. Some communities can be hit hard by job losses when carbon-intensive industries shrink or shut down. People can only really make climate-ready choices if systems – such as public transport and energy supply – are upgraded. There are some great initiatives in our region, such as City of York's projects to deliver [600 Passivhaus homes](#) which will address housing needs, energy costs and carbon emissions together; and there is much more to be done.

Policy changes to unlock action

Across the many people and organisations we work with through Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission we hear again and again the same priorities that they want in terms of bolder leadership on climate action:



- 1** Set out a clear path to reducing emissions and restoring nature, and empower places to use local targets and go further and faster on that journey than national government targets if they wish.
- 2** Create locally managed funding pots, on minimum five-year financial cycles, so that key sectors such as housing upgrades, public transport and active travel don't need to bid repeatedly for multiple, disjointed funding sources.
- 3** Join up climate, skills and economy strategies and ensure they address the big challenges together, including ageing populations, poverty, skills shortages and climate risks.
- 4** Commit to a 'nature-first' approach to publicly funded infrastructure projects, so that our buildings and infrastructure can cope with future climate scenarios, and that nature recovery is woven into all climate actions.