

Carbon Offsetting Policy Statement

7 January 2025



Introduction

This policy helps the Council achieve its goal of net zero carbon emissions from 2030, as part of the [Sustainable Futures Strategy 2023](#). It explains why we need carbon offsetting, prioritises where it should happen, and outlines the different types of offsetting. It provides guidance and consistency to ensure we apply integrity in developing a carbon offsetting plan and maximise benefits when pursuing solutions.

The policy applies only to activities from Council operations and excludes any wider county offsetting needs.

There is a list of key terms used in this document included on the final page.

Why We Need Offsetting

Warwickshire County Council aims to be net zero carbon by 2030. We've measured our carbon emissions since 2019/2020 and plan to reduce them by 46% by 2030, aligning with the Sectoral Decarbonisation Approach¹ (SDA) to limit temperature rises to 1.5°C. Decarbonisation will be our priority, but for emissions we can't eliminate, we'll use carbon offsets. By 2050, we aim to reduce emissions by around 90%.

Forms of Carbon Offsetting

Carbon offsetting includes²:

1. Emissions removal (carbon sequestration): removing carbon from the atmosphere to the biosphere (e.g., tree planting and soil management) or geosphere (Biochar and enhanced rock weathering).
2. Emissions avoidance: funding projects to reduce future emissions (e.g. home insulation).
3. Carbon capture and storage: capturing and storing the carbon emissions generated when a facility burns fossil fuels. This technology is at an early stage of development and more suitable for industrial applications.

A carbon credit can represent any of these forms and all solutions will be considered for implementation, recognising that each offer both benefits and disadvantages.

Exclusions

Purchasing renewable electricity through a green tariff isn't considered offsetting and doesn't contribute to decarbonisation.

¹ [Ambitious corporate climate action - Science Based Targets Initiative](#)

² [Oxford Principles for Net Zero Aligned Carbon Offsetting \(revised 2024\). Oxford: Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, University of Oxford.](#)

Ensuring High-Quality Offsets

The principles of carbon offsetting, as defined by the Climate Change Committee³ and others⁴, state that offsets must be:

- Not overestimated
- Not claimed by another entity
- Additional
- Long-lasting
- Measurable and verifiable
- Free from environmental or social harm.

Maximising Benefits

Carbon offsetting can derive several health, social, recreational and environmental co-benefits that support both Council and countywide priorities. These can include improved air quality, amenity and wellbeing, habitat creation, climate adaptation as well as financial savings. A review of co-benefits along with any potential unintended consequences should form part of a proposal in adopting any carbon offsetting option.

We prioritise solutions in the following order to maximise benefits:

1. Using Council-owned land or assets. Where offsetting occurs within our value chain, this is classified as carbon insetting, and we will favour local supply chains where possible.
2. Offsetting within Warwickshire.
3. Offsetting where we have strategic links (e.g. Coventry, Solihull and the wider WMCA area).
4. Considering national solutions if needed.

Carbon offsetting solutions taking place outside of the UK will not be pursued.

³ [Voluntary Carbon Markets and Offsetting - Climate Change Committee](#)

⁴ [ISO IWA 42:2022](#)

Links to Other Plans

An offsetting plan will be finalised by the end of Q1 in 2025/26 (June 2025) and updated as science and solutions evolve. This is part of the [Sustainable Futures Strategy 2023](#), which includes actions for nature-based inseting and offsetting. Available co-benefits vary by solution although there are common themes. These themes commonly link with plans including:

Sustainable Futures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Green Infrastructure Strategy 2024 • Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Natural Capital Investment Strategy 2024 • Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2022 • Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2016 • Warwickshire County Council Biodiversity Strategy 2008 • Tree and Woodland Strategy and the Warwickshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy both currently working to a 2025 adoption timeframe.
Best Lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor Education and Learning Strategy 2022 • Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2026.
Vibrant economy and places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Strategic Approach to Green Spaces • The refreshed Smallholdings Strategy, currently working to an adoption timeframe by the end of 2025/26.

Key Terms Defined

Absolute Reduction. A reduction in total emissions in tonnage terms, as opposed to emissions intensity which can be expressed tonnes per m² or per £ spend.

Biochar. This describes any organic material that has been carbonised under high temperatures (300-1000°C), in the presence of little, or no oxygen. In doing this carbon that would otherwise have been released back to the atmosphere upon natural decay of the organic material is locked in and stored over a time period in excess of 100 years.

Carbon Credit. One carbon credit represents a reduction, avoidance or removal of one metric tonne of carbon dioxide or its carbon dioxide-equivalent (CO₂e).

Carbon Footprint. The emissions resulting from assets and activities within an agreed operational boundary. The boundary and magnitude of the footprint for the Council is published in the Sustainable Futures Strategy and will be reported on annually. The size of this footprint is prone to flux as assets (e.g. properties) are disposed of or acquired.

Carbon Insetting. An action or process of compensating for carbon dioxide emissions by removing carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere using an organisation's own products / boundaries or value chain. An example for the Council would be a biodiversity or tree planting scheme on land owned by the Council. Insetting gives organisations total ownership over the type and location of their projects.

Carbon Offsetting. Involves investing in projects that are not related to an organisation's products or boundary, for example purchasing carbon credits or tree planting outside its own organisation.

Enhanced Rock Weathering. This accelerates the natural rock weathering process to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. When spread over land the rock dust reacts with rainwater releasing chemical products back into the soil, eventually to forming a solid carbonate mineral stable for many thousands of years.

Net Zero Carbon. Balance of carbon emissions and removals, focusing on Absolute Reductions in operational boundaries prior to investments in external carbon removals.

Sectoral Decarbonisation Approach (SDA) or science-based targets. This approach to progressive decarbonisation commits the Council to reduce emissions by 46% by 2030 against a baseline of 2019/20. This equates to an annual 4.2% reduction on average. Following on from 2030, an Absolute Reduction trajectory should be set to decarbonise emissions to the fullest extent before 2050.