



# Regional climate actions that make a real difference

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In Yorkshire and Humber, local and mayoral authorities, universities and other partners have been working together to accelerate climate action. New research by the Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission evaluated over 700 interventions to identify credible carbon reduction pathways, and is leading an innovative climate adaptation programme for local authorities. We show that regions can galvanise decisive action to reduce emissions to meet both local and national goals, and also rapidly adapt to a changing climate. Using a mission-driven approach to align policy, regulation, and investments could further unlock the power of the regions to accelerate UK climate action.

Decarbonisation and climate adaptation are happening, but not nearly fast enough to avoid costly consequences. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) finds that the UK requires an almost four-fold increase in the rate of emissions reductions to fulfil the commitments made at COP26, from 1.2% to 4.7%<sup>1</sup>. The CCC has also warned of a “striking lack of climate preparation” from current policies, stating that the National Adaptation Programme introduced by the previous Government is failing to match the scale of the challenge of the climate crisis<sup>2</sup>.

The new Government defines its five missions as “long-term objectives providing a driving sense of purpose for the country”<sup>3</sup>. In a mission-driven approach the objective directly informs regulatory

and policy change and therefore stimulates action. For example, the Environment Act 2021 created a more mission-driven regulatory basis for nature recovery policy and action. As a result, Local Nature Recovery Strategies provide, for the first time, the basis of statutory spatial plans for where effort should be focused, and engage the devolution and levelling up agendas in the mission of nature recovery by giving combined authorities the leading role. However, an equivalent linkage from mission to policy and action is much less evident for decarbonisation and climate adaptation.

New research from the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission (YHCC) helps to evidence what a regional and extended mission-driven approach could achieve for decarbonisation and adaptation.



## Regional carbon reduction

YHCC undertook an independent assessment on decarbonisation in Yorkshire and Humber, looking at progress to date and assessing over 700 interventions for their carbon- and cost-effectiveness<sup>4</sup>. This is published in the new YHCC report 'Our Carbon Story'<sup>5</sup>.

### Key findings

- Taking 2000 as a baseline and with continuation of current trends, the research finds that Yorkshire and the Humber will only have cut its direct carbon footprint by 56% by 2038 and by 60% by 2050. Addressing the 40-44% shortfall to reach net zero will require action across all sectors and well beyond the current policy focus on decarbonising energy supply.
- Really significant decarbonisation could be achieved through measures that have very clear economic and social benefits. Walking, cycling and public transport measures are especially cost-effective and bring great health benefits through increased physical activity and improved air quality.
- Decisive, mission-driven action is needed to align policy, regulation and investment to enable deeper changes, such as full retrofit of buildings and change of land use to woodlands.
- The investment required to meet the region's target for net zero by 2038 is less than 3% of the regional GDP, with the return on investment of these measures ranging from £1.10 to £7.50 for every £1 invested, while generating significant co-benefits across key public goods, like health and biodiversity.

## Connecting adaptive action

In 2022 YHCC found that most of the region's Local Authorities (LAs) did not know how to start their climate adaptation journeys, beyond flood and coastal erosion risk mitigation. To address this, YHCC developed the Climate Adaptation Programme for Local Authorities (CAPLA) to support strong and supported adaptation leadership in local authorities. The CAPLA started in January 2023.

### Key findings

- All 15 Yorkshire and Humber LAs are active participants in the CAPLA, showing strong appetite from LAs for support to build capacity and strengthen their climate adaptation expertise.
- LAs have crucial roles in adaptation both at community level and national level, through their involvement in shaping national policies (e.g. the Adaptation Reporting Power 4 pilot).
- Participating LAs agree that CAPLA is helping them accelerate the integration of climate adaptation in their organisation decision-making processes, develop or strengthen their climate resilience plans, and give them the confidence to engage with internal and external partners on adaptation.

As far as YHCC is aware, this connected working is unique in the UK regions and has great potential to be rolled out elsewhere.

## Policy implications

The UK government has an opportunity to unlock climate action and investment at local and combined authority levels by extending its mission-driven approach.

- National government should enable places to exceed national targets for Net Zero, recognising that UK-wide targets are only likely to be achieved if those places that wish to go further and faster are empowered to do so. Present national policies can constrain local efforts, e.g. limiting Local Plans' ability to set more ambitious standards for new development than in the Building Regulations. National and local leaders need to work together to address these constraints.
- Supporting local and devolved governments should be emphasised beyond the existing provisions of the National Adaptation Programme (NAP3- 2023-2028). This could include introducing a statutory duty for public bodies to adapt to climate change, and providing the financial means to fulfil this duty. However, there is a risk that making progress conditional on legislative change could lead to further delay, and non-legislative incremental approach may be more agile.
- The success of the Yorkshire and Humber partnership indicates that climate action benefits from being considered at the regional scale. Greater collaboration between mayoral authorities, local authorities and other partners is crucial.

The urgency of the decarbonisation and adaptation challenges mean that extending mission-driven and regional approaches needs to happen rapidly and decisively.

## Further information

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The Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission is an independent advisory body bringing together public, private and third sectors for ambitious climate action. [yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/](http://yorksandhumberclimate.org.uk/)

### References

1. **2023 Progress Report to Parliament.** Climate Change Committee.
2. **Climate change has arrived, yet the country is still strikingly unprepared.** Climate Change Committee. 2023.
3. **Our First Steps for Change.** UK Government. 2024
4. **A Carbon Reduction Assessment for Yorkshire and the Humber.** Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission, 2024.
5. **Our Carbon Story.** Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission. 2024