

Think Global, Act Local

Net-Zero Barnet: Where are we?



This briefing provides an overview of the current situation relating to Barnet becoming Net Zero. It has been prepared by Barnet FoE to help inform and inspire accelerated and effective action by all. The analysis is based upon public domain material.

Barnet background

As the London borough with the highest population, Barnet can make an important contribution to London and the UK becoming net-zero in line with the Paris commitments. To do this, it is [estimated](#) that Barnet needs to “reach zero or near zero carbon no later than 2042”. Barnet Council has set the target of “Barnet Borough Net Zero as soon as possible and by 2050 at the latest”.

Sources of current carbon emissions in Barnet are split as follows: Housing 50%, Transport 29%, Industrial & Commercial 21%. As Housing and Transport comprise 79% of emissions, this briefing focuses on these two areas.

Housing overview

In Barnet only 42% of homes are designated as well insulated – less than the best performing similar London Borough with 50% and significantly below the official target of 89% plus the FoE target of 100%. Poor insulation means we waste money and produce more emissions.

According to Barnet Council over two thirds of Barnet’s housing stock was built before 1944 and the carbon emissions associated with the heating of Barnet’s older housing stock creates a higher than average contribution to the borough’s overall carbon emissions compared to the rest of London.

Use of gas for warming homes and providing hot water contributes significantly to household emissions. While shifting away from use of gas is not a short term solution for the majority of home-owners and renters, and doing it will require support and advice from central and local government, more immediate results can be achieved by making our houses more energy efficient so that we use less gas and emit fewer emissions.

Shifting housing to 100% renewable energy for heat and power will be achieved through a mix of central and local solutions. In Barnet there is currently around 4 gigawatt hours (GWh) of locally produced renewable energy available in the area. This compares to the official target of 68 GWh and the FoE target of 132 GWh. Barnet council has said they “will work to develop a proposal to install and generate electricity from solar panels on Barnet’s buildings...explore alternative energy generation...assess the potential for the implementation of district heating”. Development of the council sustainability strategy provides the opportunity to provide further detail about how the council will drive net-zero housing.

Barnet lies within an area that is suffering from serious water stress, where current or future demand for household water is, or is likely to take, a high proportion of the effective rainfall which contributes to supply. Protecting and enhancing our streams and reducing water demand (through increased



water efficiency and behaviour change) are pressing issues. However, the focus is mainly on energy efficiency of homes rather than energy and water efficiency.

Households are a source of other forms of waste. We throw a lot of stuff into our bins but in Barnet only 32% is reused, recycled or composted (compared to the best similar borough at 49%, the official target of 68% and the FoE target of 100%).

When considering the wider supply chain, household consumption accounts for more emissions and waste than considered above. Our consumption footprint is much greater than most of us are aware of – when we buy a coffee from a barista do we understand how much energy and water is used in the production and transportation of coffee beans and how this compares to a cup of tea?

The Barnet Sustainability Strategy Framework seems to focus on improving the energy efficiency of council owned property to help achieve net-zero council operations by 2030. There appears to be little detail about what the council will do to ensure that privately owned homes reduce emissions beyond providing residents with information.

Transport overview

Barnet has high car use for an outer London borough, particularly for households in the north of the borough. Barnet has the second highest car ownership levels per household in London, almost double the level of neighbouring Haringey. However, almost a third of Barnet households do not have access to a car.

Two thirds of car journeys in the borough are under 5km and a quarter of car trips begin and end in the borough. All seven main Barnet town centres have a PTAL rating above 4, meaning they are easily accessible by public transport, although radial journeys are much easier than orbital travel.

TfL estimates there are almost half a million journeys per day in Barnet that could be converted from motorised transport to walking and cycling, after excluding journeys that are too long, part of a chain (such as from home to the shops to school) or involving carrying heavy shopping or equipment.

The key barriers to walking and cycling are environments dominated by fast flowing traffic, lack of cycling infrastructure and fears over safety.

Transport and health

According to the Barnet Transport Strategy just under half of Barnet's residents are failing to achieve the recommended level of physical activity participation. This is particularly acute for people who commute: residents aged 35-44 years report the second lowest levels of physical activity participation compared to other age groups, and levels are significantly lower than the national average.

When asked to select what would help them maintain a healthy lifestyle, more opportunities to walk and cycle as part of my daily routine was the second most common response after cheaper healthy food and drink.



Inactivity levels also contribute towards one in five 5-year-olds, one in three 10-year-olds and more than half of adults in Barnet being overweight or obese.

Social isolation leads to multiple ill health consequences: older adults are at particular risk of social isolation caused by poor transport infrastructure. In areas where public transport is insufficient, this can increase the risk of social isolation amongst older adults.

Air Quality

The Transport Strategy says air quality in the borough must be improved. 6.5% of all deaths in Barnet are caused by poor air quality.

Within Barnet, emissions from traffic have the most severe and pervasive impact on air quality; the whole borough has been designated an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). Air quality in some areas of Barnet breaches legal limits, particularly at major junctions in the borough where there is a higher traffic flow and a high number of stationary vehicles. Pollution levels are higher along arterial routes, particularly the North Circular, M1, A1 and A5.

Idling Action

[Idling Action London](#) is a London-wide behaviour change campaign which is helping to reduce localised air pollution caused by motorists leaving their engines running when parked. Barnet Council are the only council not taking part as explained in a 2019 [post](#) by Andrew Dismore who was told by the London Mayor that

“In the current round of the Mayor’s Air Quality Fund, London’s boroughs were granted £500,000 for a pan-London anti-idling campaign, including awareness raising, events, direct engagement with drivers, and enforcement against idling vehicles. Barnet Council have decided not to take part in this scheme. All of London’s other boroughs are active members of the project, but Barnet council have advised the Mayor that they are not willing/able to take part. Mr Khan added that he would very much welcome their participation in the scheme if they were to change their minds.”

In Oct 2019 a press report said that *“Labour Cllr Schneiderman proposed that Barnet join the other London boroughs in the campaign against engine idling. Conservative members voted against his suggestion, with the exception of Cllr Laithe Jajeh, who abstained”*.

Barnet Council plans overview

Barnet Council have published a number of policies, strategies and plans. Many of which are determined by central government and the London Mayor.

The draft [Barnet Local Plan](#) commits Barnet to following the guidance of the London Plan and sets out policies, including some relating to transport, housing and the environment.

The council [Sustainability Strategy Framework](#) includes commitments relating to housing, households and support for electric vehicle as follows:



- Improve the energy efficiency of the borough's housing and buildings by retrofitting social housing to an average of EPC B by 2030
- Install 500 on-street residential electric vehicle charge points by November 2022, with a total project value of £4.65M including a £3.5M grant from government
- Further install a comprehensive network of electric vehicle charge points across the borough by 2030
- Establish a scheme which will give residents the opportunity to borrow household items as and when needed, reducing waste and supporting a culture of reusing
- Support residents and businesses to help make sustainable choices, including signposting to available grants and government schemes

Comparison of the framework to other councils plans suggest Barnet are currently less ambitious in speed and scope of action.

Next steps on the sustainability strategy will include resident focus groups in early 2022, followed by wider consultation in the summer to give residents, businesses and partners an opportunity to help shape the strategy.

[Barnet Council Long Term Transport Strategy 2020-2041](#) which was approved by the Environment Committee in September 2020 includes proposals about walking, cycling, public transport, car, freight and logistics, behaviour change.

The strategy recognises the need to increase walking and cycling and also says that “there is scope for greater public involvement in the monitoring of success of proposals. As well as engaging with Councillors as residents’ elected representatives, the Council will provide opportunities for residents to provide their feedback and insight on transport in the borough”. It is unclear what progress has been made in 2020/21 on delivery of the proposals in the strategy.

The [London Borough of Barnet Air Quality Action Plan 2017-2022](#) includes actions on encouraging walking, cycling and cleaner transport. Initiatives in 2018/19 include the introduction of electric vehicle charging points, the planting of trees in poor air quality areas and education and communications with school children

The council intends to deliver a biodiversity plan by the end of 2022.

The majority of London Boroughs have already published detailed plans and actions for net-zero while Barnet has only recently approved the sustainability strategy framework which identifies many areas where more work is needed to develop detailed plans.

Barnet is one of 4 out of 32 London councils not to declare a climate emergency and is the only council not to participate in the programme to address pollution from car engine idling (see above).

Main Sources:

<https://takeclimateaction.uk/near-you>

<https://www.barnet.gov.uk/sustainability-barnet/barnets-sustainability-strategy>

Links to other sources are embedded in the document above.

