



Climate Action Guide

for community
groups

What you can do
for the climate in
your community
or organisation

Why should communities take action?

A lot of action on climate change is directed by government. Other campaigns focus on what we can do as individuals or as families and households. Communities are a middle ground that sometimes gets overlooked, but communities can be powerful agents for change.

You don't have to run a building or have a big programme of activities to make a difference. The power of community groups lies in the people – in shared learning, identity and purpose. When people take an interest in the climate together, they can support each other to take action, learn from each other and inspire each other. The effects can ripple out through the town.

As the environmental campaigner Rob Hopkins often says, if we wait for governments to lead on climate change, it might be too late. If we only act as individuals, it will be too little. "But if we act as communities, it might be just enough, just in time."

About this report

This guide is aimed at anyone with a community role. If you are in a position to motivate and guide a group of people, it's for you – whether that's a place of worship, a sports club, a cultural network, or any group that meets around a shared interest.

As you'll see, these groups have a significant role in creating change. Read on to find out about what others are already doing around the town. Think about what you could do in your community, and find your place in the story as we create a greener future for Luton.

Luton Council has already produced an online guide for personal action on climate change, and has run climate engagement programmes for schools and for businesses.



LUTON 2040

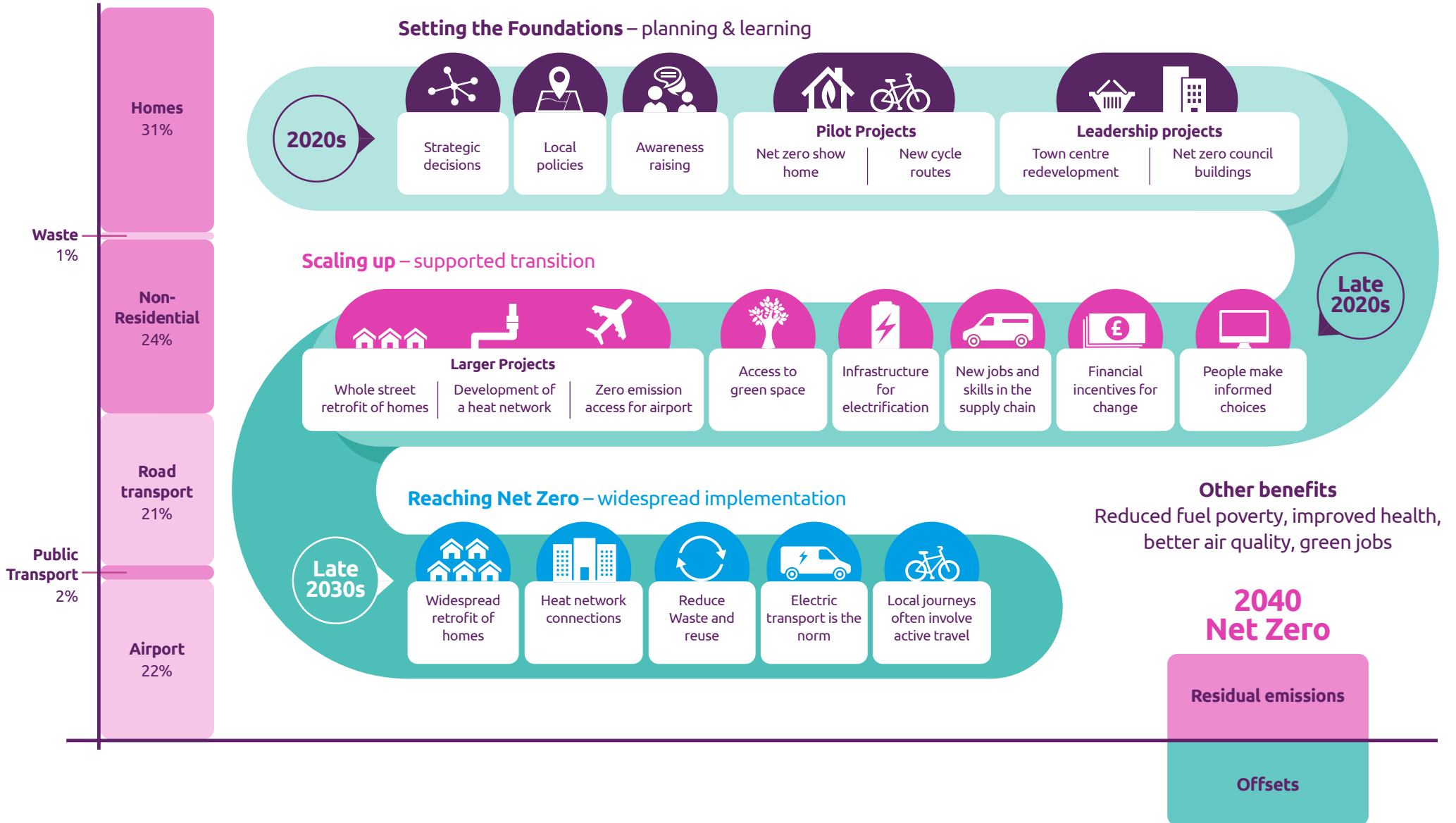
The UK has a target to reach net zero by 2050. That means that as a country, we will no longer be contributing to the damage of climate change. In Luton we have a more ambitious target, to be zero carbon ten years earlier. Why the hurry?

Because there are so many other benefits – the steps we take to reduce our carbon pollution will also make Luton a better place to live. We don't need to wait for 2050 for less traffic, lower bills, cleaner air and greener streets.

It won't be easy, but we have a step-by-step roadmap to get us there, and everyone has a part to play.

Luton Net Zero Roadmap

2019 - 790 kt CO₂e



Inspiring change at St Luke's

St Luke's is an Anglican church in Leagrave, serving a diverse community with a lot of different needs. The environment hasn't been a big focus for the church when there are so many other pressing issues – including a leaking roof. But the leadership recognises the need to act, and sees opportunities too. If the whole roof needs replacing, why not make it a solar roof?

While the bigger projects are in the planning, St Luke's plans to sign up to the Eco Church programme, run by the charity A Rocha. This will give them a series of steps to take, and they hope to take on a part time project manager to oversee their climate actions.

Our vision is to integrate climate action into every aspect of the life and work of Saint Luke's.



Contents

- 2 Why should communities take action?
- 5 How we keep warm
- 7 The energy we use
- 9 How we travel
- 11 What we throw away
- 12 What we eat
- 13 Making space for nature
- 14 How we spend our money
- 16 Further resources

How we keep warm



For most of us, heating is the biggest part of our household carbon footprints. The same is true for many organisations. If you have a building or use one regularly, it will need to be heated. Most heating is gas, which is a fossil fuel and therefore a contributor to climate emissions.

There are two main approaches to reducing emissions from heating. The first is to lower heating needs through insulation. The second is to switch from gas heating to a more sustainable form of heat, such as a heat pump or electric heaters.

One advantage of insulation is that it has multiple benefits. It'll be warmer and more comfortable. Lower gas use means lower bills as well as lower carbon, so insulation will save your group money in the long term.

How can you make your space warmer

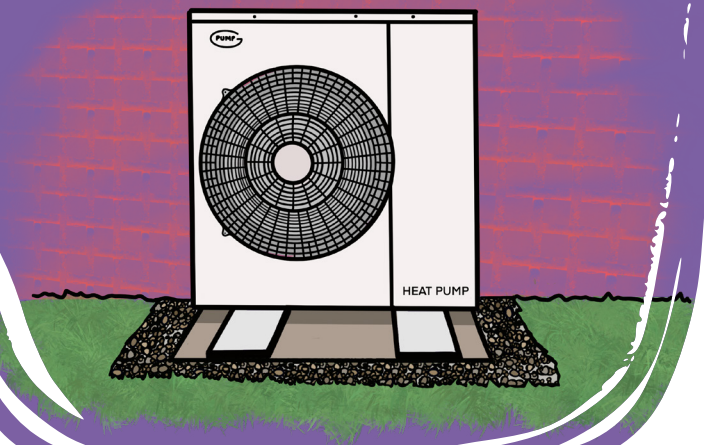
- Invest in loft insulation.
- Install double glazing.
- Seal up gaps to stop draughts.
- Add thick curtains, carpets or rugs.
- Insulate walls if it hasn't been done.
- Insulation can be added under some floors



What alternatives are there to gas heating?

- Air source heat pumps.
- Infrared heating panels.
- Electric storage heaters.
- Wood burners or pellet boilers.
- Biogas

Luton Sixth Form has a low carbon geothermal heating system that draws heat from an underground stream.



Ross Park Scouts' climate friendly scout hut

Ross Park Scouts meets in the Stopsley area of Luton. Throughout their half century they have met in their own hut, an old parachute packing shed that had been relocated from the airport.

The hut is made of wood and has been maintained well over the years, but it needs substantial renovation. Insulation is a priority, reducing energy use and making the hut more comfortable and cheaper to run. Doing it all in one go is too expensive, so the community hopes to draw on parents with practical skills and do it one wall at a time as budgets allow.

They will also look at LED lighting, adding timers to the heaters so that cannot be left on by accident at the end of meetings. Secondary glazing for the windows is also on the list.

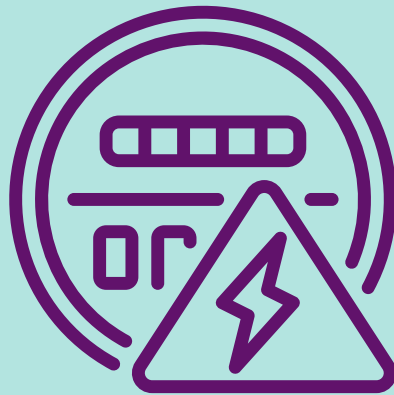


The energy we use

As well as heating, electricity use is a source of carbon emissions. It's improving all the time as more renewable energy is added to the national grid, but reducing electricity use will save your group money and is well worth doing.

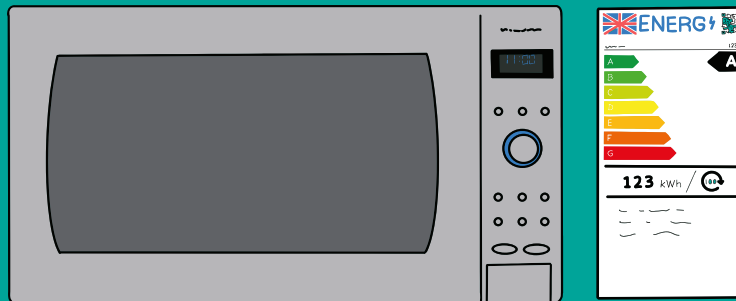
How to save electricity

- Install a smart meter and monitor usage.
- Switch off appliances and lights when not in use.
- Buy energy efficient, A-rated appliances and IT equipment.
- Switch lights to LEDs.



Energy efficient catering

- Microwaves are more efficient than ovens.
- Choose electric over gas to reduce emissions.
- Use slow cookers or air fryers.
- Put lids on pans when cooking.
- Only heat up what you need.



Create your own energy

We love to see schools, places of worship and community spaces with their own solar power. It puts them in control of their energy use and can save tens of thousands of pounds over the lifetime of the panels.

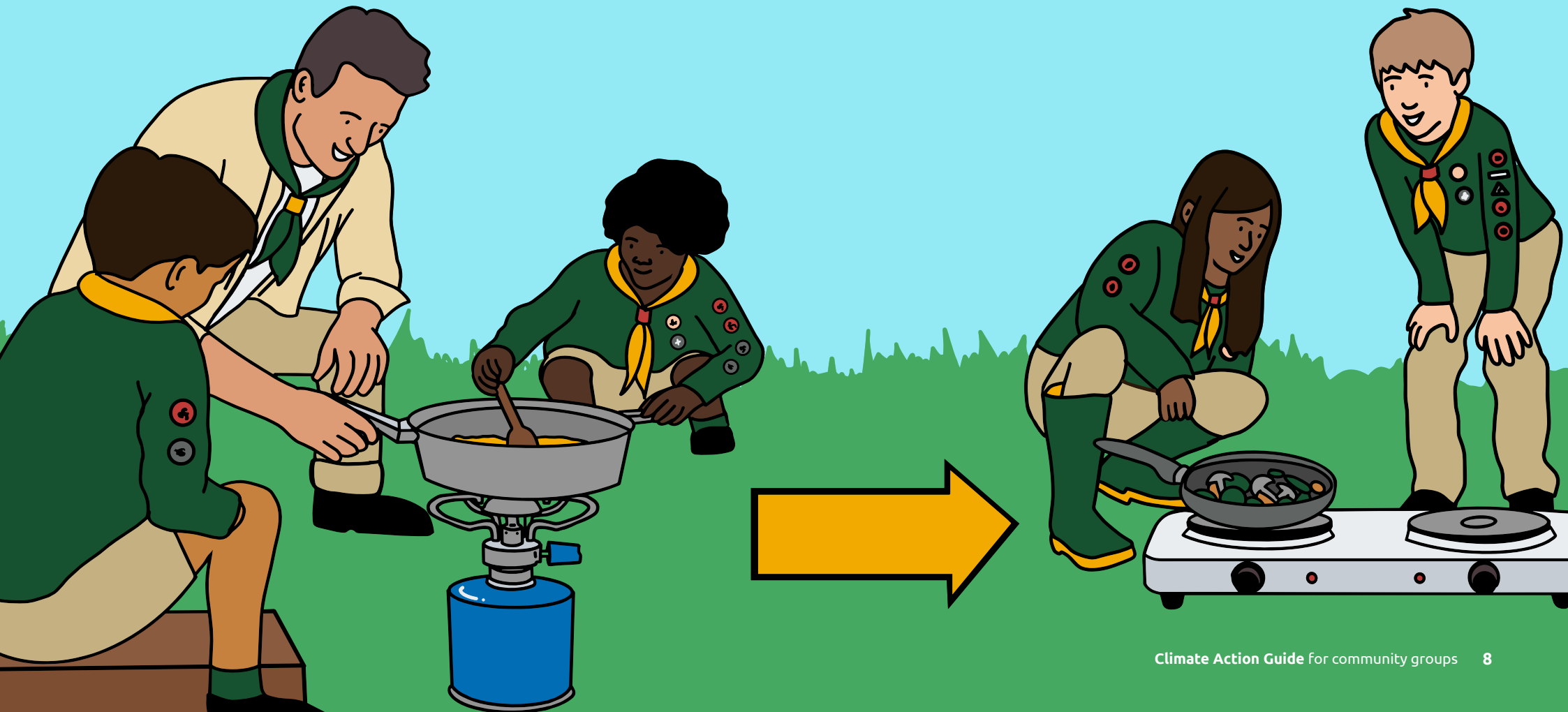
There is an upfront cost to solar panels, but they will save money from day one and are a good investment. Apply for funding if necessary, run a community fundraising campaign, or look out for opportunities to partner with community energy organisations.

Active Luton has been installing solar arrays on its community centres and sports facilities

Luton groups cutting energy use

When **Pride** ran for the first time in Luton, the event used eight diesel generators to run the various stages, stalls and food trucks. By working with partners and running cables from buildings, they were able to reduce that to just one generator at the latest event, with plans to eventually be all electric.

Ross Park Scouts has been able to reduce emissions from their camping trips by switching from gas lighting to electric lighting. They have purchased a large battery bank and a small solar panel. This can be charged up ahead of time and used to run LED lights as well as charge phones when on camp.



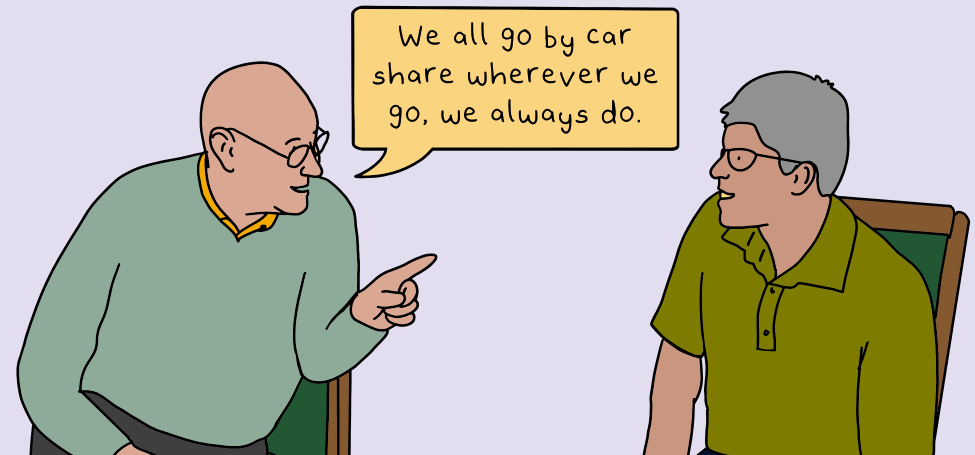
How we travel

Here in Luton, transport is our biggest source of carbon pollution. You might not organise transport directly as part of your group's activities, but you can still take action. If people travel to be part of your events, encourage them to travel sustainably.

What counts as sustainable transport? Try the MAPS framework:

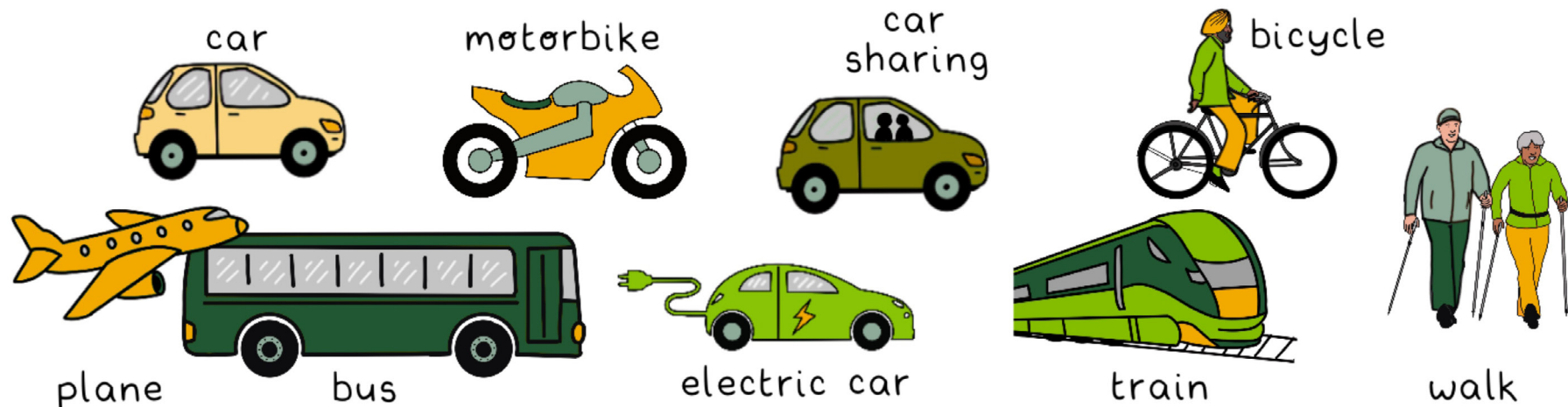
- **Minimise** the need to travel – do you need to go at all?
What's the shortest route?
- **Active** transport first – can you get there on foot or by bike?
- **Public** transport if it's too far – is there a bus or train I could take?
- **Shared** transport – can I share a ride or take a taxi?

All of these reduce traffic and air pollution as well as carbon emissions, all helping to make Luton a better place to live. If all else fails, travel by car – but consider electric vehicles and how you can encourage your community to make greener travel choices.



MOST

LEAST



Lift-sharing with the Luton Indoor Bowls Club

Luton indoor bowls club was founded in 1988 and runs a large bowling facility in Round Green. The building has room for eight games at once on its swathe of green carpet, and it welcomes members from across the town.

While the club's activities mainly take place at their own facility, there are opportunities to travel to away games, visit other clubs or to support players in tournaments. (One member is through to the national finals.) "We all go by car share wherever we go, we always do," says Pip. "That's encouraged to everybody if they want to go somewhere." Coaches or minibuses are also organised for trips involving larger groups, reducing the need to drive individually.

The Bobbers Travel Club has run coaches to Luton Town away games for 45 years.

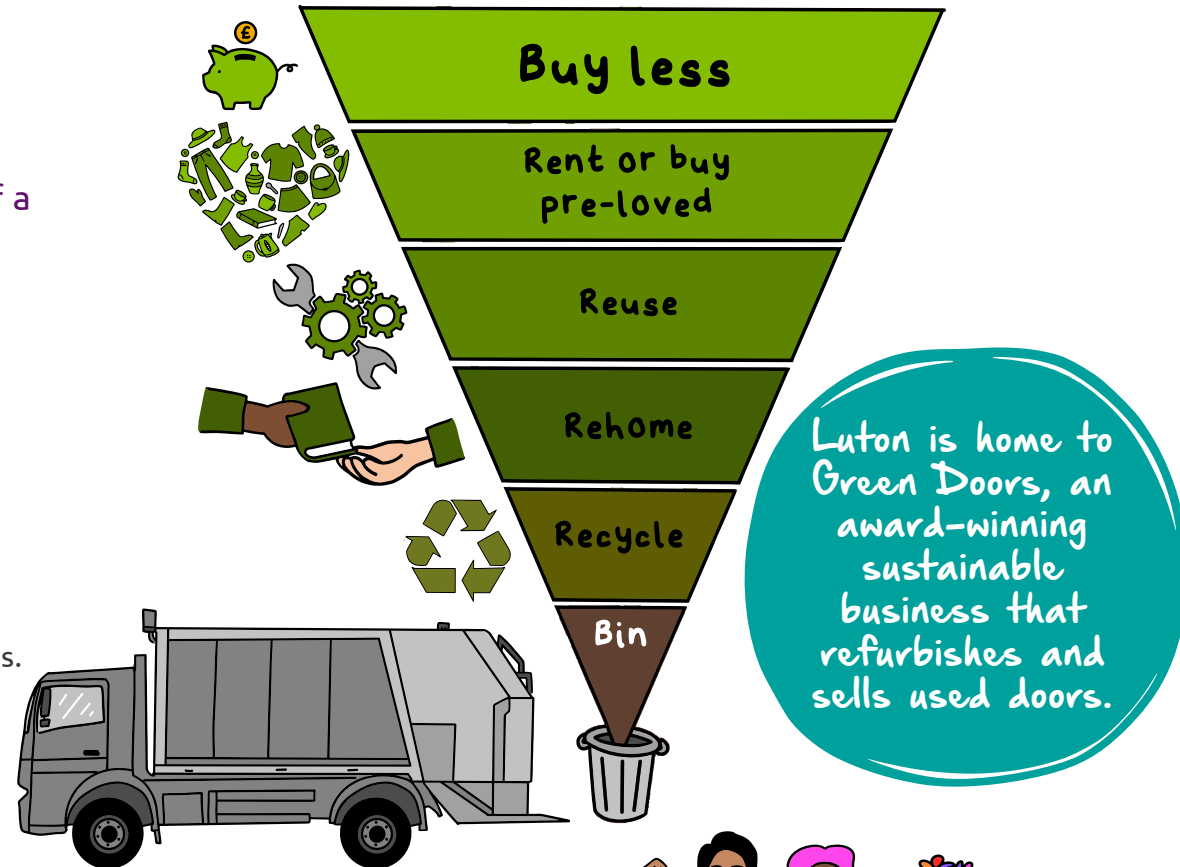


What we throw away

Everyone learns the three R's at school: reduce, reuse, recycle. They are familiar to the point of being taken for granted, and so Keep Britain Tidy encourage us to think of a hierarchy for waste.

- Buy less in the first place.
- Shop secondhand or rent the things you need.
- Use things again, repair them as necessary.
- Swap, share, or donate what you don't need.
- Recycle.

Community groups can support this approach to waste by organising clothes or toy swaps, sharing repair skills, or collecting donated items. Look out for the clothes swaps organised by Luton Council's waste team, and for repair days. There are regular ones in Flitwick and Letchworth, and local organisers are working to bring the idea to Luton.



How Pride reduced single-use plastics

Pride in Luton's flagship event is in early summer, and the large crowds get through a lot of drinks. To cut waste, Pride bought three thousand branded plastic cups that can be reused every year and at other community events.

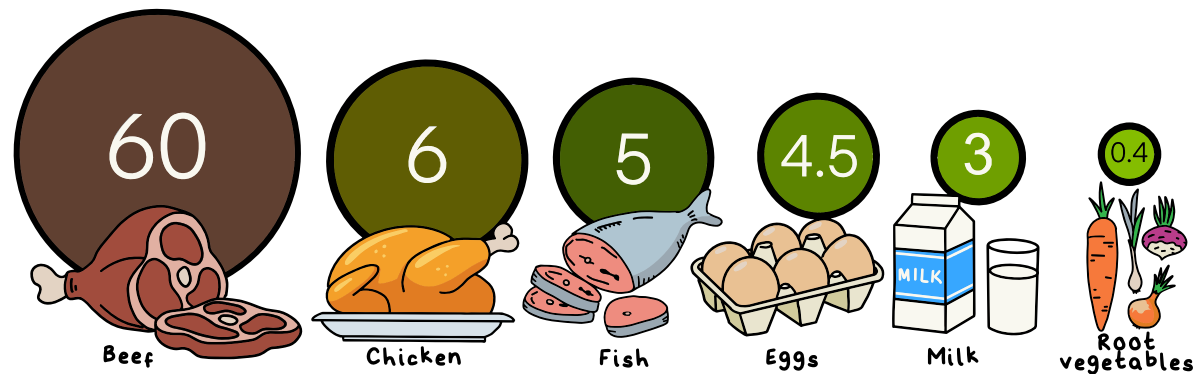
They worked with local pubs and bars to ensure that everyone serves drinks in the same reusable cups on the day.



What we eat

The food we eat is another big source of emissions. Some of those emissions come from transport, or 'food miles', but what you eat is more important than where it comes from.

Fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts and grains are all less polluting to produce. Dairy products and eggs are higher in carbon. Meat is the most damaging food for the climate – especially beef, because of the methane emissions from cattle and forests cleared for ranching. The good news is that a greener diet is also a healthier one! Many people eat too much meat and don't get their recommended five a day.



Greenhouse gas emissions (in kg CO₂e) per kg of food

- Serve good quality meat-free options when catering. Encourage people to try them.
- Swap out beef for more sustainable meats such as chicken or pork when appropriate.
- Try using less meat in recipes, for example combining mince with lentils or mushrooms.
- Support local producers where you can.
- Eat more seasonally to reduce emissions from transport and on farms.
- Encourage your community to grow food, creating space and sharing expertise.

Groups choosing sustainable food options

St Luke's are organising a children's cooking club on a nearby estate, where families will cook and eat together. They have a target to serve 50% meat-free meals, and also to teach children where different foods come from.

Luton Keralites, a social network for Luton residents from the Kerala region of India, hosted a gardening competition to encourage families to grow their own food. There were workshops to share tips, and prizes were awarded during the community's annual festival. Entrants made short videos of their vegetable gardens, and donated vegetables were auctioned as a fundraiser.

Edible High Town grow food in unused spaces around High Town and encourage local residents to help themselves. They also run the Apple Amnesty, which collects surplus apples from orchards, schools and gardens and presses it into fresh Luton-grown apple juice.

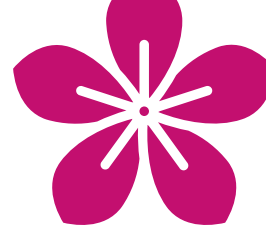


Making space for nature

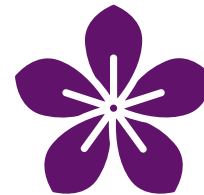
There's more to the environmental crisis than climate change. Along with cutting emissions, we also want to make Luton greener, with more trees and more wildlife. If you have a building or car park, you may be able to add more green features. Encourage your community to do the same.

- Find spaces for more plants, shrubs and trees.
- Plant trees. These will provide shade in the hotter summers to come.
- Avoid pesticides and herbicides in your gardening and maintenance.
- Add birdboxes, hedgehog homes and other habitats where you can.
- Grow plants that bees and other pollinators love, like lavender or sunflowers.
- Leave untended corners where the grass grows long, or make a woodpile.

See edibleluton.org for examples of existing community gardens around the town.



Something's not getting across and how we're communicating about climate change, but I think it's really grassroots level stuff just changing how we relate to where we live.



Luton Central Mosque has plants in the courtyard, cared for by volunteers.

St Andrew's welcomes all to its community garden

St Andrews Church, Biscot, has recently begun working more closely with the health centre and pharmacy next door. That has led to the creation of a 'health and wellbeing hub'.

A new community garden is taking shape around the church, with a wildflower meadow on one side, and a small orchard area on the other. Each of the brick bays alongside the church have been made into a different themed growing space, including an 'apothecary garden' with medicinal herbs in honour of the adjacent pharmacy.



How we spend our money

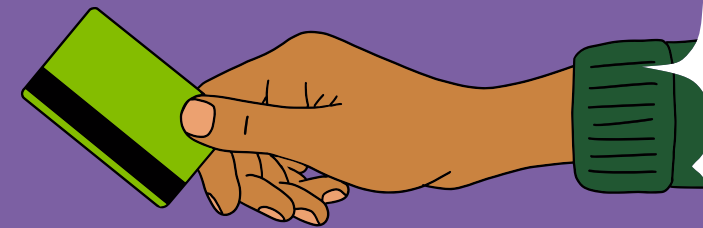
There is a lot we can do to reduce our carbon footprints, as we have seen already. Other sources of emissions are beyond our direct control. They come from the companies that we buy from and the products that we use.

We can still make a difference here. Think of each spending decision as a vote for the kind of world you would like to see.

- Buy from companies with a good reputation for sustainability, and that pay fair wages.
- Choose greener products, such as recycled paper or efficient appliances.
- Support local businesses when you can, and the money you spend will stay in Luton!
- Choose a better bank – some banks continue to invest in oil and gas, and are making money from destroying the climate.

Investing for a better future

Bedfordshire University was one of the first universities in the country to pull its investments (or divest) from fossil fuels. Many others have done so since as part of a movement to make sure that investments are not supporting an industry that is damaging the environment.



What motivates environmental action?

Lots of environmental campaigns are based on the idea that belief drives action: if we raise awareness about climate change, people will be convinced to act. Neuroscientist Kris De Meyer (University College London) suggests that it works the other way round.

When we do something for the environment, we see the difference it makes and how we feel about that, and it

changes our minds. Our actions lead to new beliefs about what we can do.

What does this mean for your community? It means you don't need to scare people with climate facts or try to convince them that it matters. Focus instead on creating opportunities for action. Help people to take small actions that lead them towards bigger actions.

UCL
Climate
Action
Unit



The ripple effect

We started this report by suggesting that communities are a powerful force for change in Luton. That's because change is all about people – learning from each other, helping each other, making it normal to care for the planet and the creatures who share it with us.

As community groups, your biggest impact will be through the choices your members make. How can you inspire them? Talk about climate change. Learn together and share your experiences. Empower your members to take action in their own lives, and your impact will ripple out through living rooms and across kitchen tables, at school gates and in front gardens across the town.



Empowering communities to make greener choices

All across the town groups are empowering their communities to live more sustainably, creating opportunities for small actions that lead to bigger ones.

Blenheim Scouts run activities that encourage their members to live more sustainably, offering reward badges for cycling, global issues, and cooking. These mix learning with practical projects, and are a good way to start conversations about the environment in families.

Deborah Abodunrin who helps to organise the breakfast club at **Strathmore Avenue Methodist Church**, is an experienced podcaster. She is planning a podcast series where local experts will answer questions on different environmental topics, helping the community to learn more about climate change and what we can all do about it.

Luton Keralites plan to start a cycling club for their members, hosting regular bike rides. This would be a social event, but it would also build skills and road confidence, making it easier for people to cycle to school or to work. There would be multiple benefits, reducing emissions and encouraging healthier and more active lifestyles.

Pride in Luton organise eco-themed workshops that bring people together around a fun activity. Past examples have included planting seeds in pots to take away, and a workshop on how to mend and upcycle your own clothes. These are engaging socials that also equip people with skills and confidence to live more sustainably.



Community checklist



This guide may have given you some ideas for how your group can take action on climate change. We offer some key points below that will help you reflect.

- People power. What can your group do to share the lessons of this guide, previous actions, and plans for the future?
- Heating is a huge part of our collective carbon footprint. Can your group lower demand through insulation, behaviour change or investing in green technology?
- Being smart with power use, investing in generating your own energy, or learning about the different power uses of appliances can all play a part!
- Travel is Luton's largest source of carbon emissions. Can you **minimise** the need to travel, encourage **active travel** or **public transport** use, or **share journeys (MAPS)?**
- Can your group buy less, shop second-hand, repair, swap, share or recycle more?
- Encourage alternatives to beef, use less high-carbon foods and support local, seasonal and home-grown produce.
- Make space for nature. The climate crisis extends into the natural world via declining biodiversity. Providing habitat, planting new trees and avoiding harmful chemicals can all play an important role in preserving our natural world.
- Consider the companies you use and emissions beyond your direct control. The choices your group make matter!

Acknowledgements

This guide was produced by the climate team at Luton Council in collaboration with a number of local organisations, who were supported in developing climate action plans. These organisations have served as examples and case studies for this guide.

Groups were recruited through the Luton Citizen's Fund, managed by Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation for Luton Borough Council and compensated for their time through an uplift fund from the council's climate change team. This guide is a combination of learning gathered during the programme including from a training day and several one-to-one sessions.

Thank you to the Social Justice Unit at Luton Council for their support and collaboration.

Text written by Jeremy Williams from [Zero Carbon Luton](#), with illustrations by Mandy Johnson from [Sketchnotes](#)

Where to find more information



Measure your carbon footprint with the first carbon calculator designed for charities, community groups and small organisations: www.360carbon.org

Mosques can find resources on climate change at: www.almizan.earth

Luton has several churches registered with Eco Church programme: www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

For information about what you can do as an individual, see the m.luton.gov.uk/Page/Show/Environment/climate-change

National Grid's guide for communities nationalgrid.co.uk/downloads-view-reciteme/624101

Climate action through community business powertochange.org.uk/what-we-do/community-climate-action/

