# Darlington council declares nature restoration emergency amid local opposition



Darlington Borough Council has made a significant move by passing a declaration of a Nature Restoration Emergency, signalling its intent to prioritise environmental concerns in decision-making. Despite facing criticism from some Conservative councillors who describe the initiative as "woke" and merely "virtue-signalling," the Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition claims that this declaration is essential for the town’s future. The motion, championed by Green Party councillor Kate Mammolotti, reflects a growing recognition that local governance must address ecological issues head-on, marking a pivotal moment in the council's environmental policy framework.

This initiative follows on from a 2019 declaration of a climate emergency, further emphasising the council’s commitment to tackle ecological degradation and enhance biodiversity within the borough. The council aims to accelerate its environmental ambitions by setting a target to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2040, a challenge it formally recommitted to in July 2023. The updated Council Plan for 2024-2027 specifically outlines objectives that include not only mitigating the climate crisis but also addressing social inequalities and promoting sustainable resource use.

Critics within the Conservative faction have argued that, while protecting green spaces and wildlife is important, existing frameworks already address these issues sufficiently. Councillor Jonathan Dulston, leading the Conservative group, suggested that the focus should be on immediate social inequalities rather than pursuing what he perceives as "pie-in-the-sky" green agendas. This viewpoint echoes a broader national debate where concerns about tangible community needs often clash with ambitious environmental goals.

Nevertheless, the reality is that Darlington’s environmental initiatives are pressing against a backdrop of ongoing challenges. Recent developments, such as the proposed housing project at Skerningham, threaten local ecosystems, which highlights the urgency of comprehensive plans to protect nature. With plans for up to 1,650 homes, residents express concern over the potential destruction of woodland habitats and local wildlife, a pressing issue that the new nature emergency declaration aims to address.

Moreover, Darlington Borough Council is integrating its environmental strategies with broader regional efforts, participating in the Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy established under the Environment Act 2021. This strategy aims to create a coordinated effort across different local authorities to restore and conserve natural habitats, serving as both a guideline and a framework for local councils working towards ecological resilience.

The interest from wildlife charities, such as the Woodland Trust, underscores a growing societal demand for urgent action in the wake of a recognised biodiversity crisis. As the UK is reported to be one of the most nature-depleted countries, initiatives like Darlington’s Nature Restoration Emergency are not just symbolic. They represent a critical response to both local and national ecological challenges, aiming to reconnect landscapes and enhance the borough’s biodiversity.

In conclusion, while Darlington Borough Council navigates the complexities of local governance and environmental responsibility, its declaration of a Nature Restoration Emergency represents a crucial step toward forging a sustainable and ecologically sound future. The debate surrounding this motion not only reflects regional priorities but also echoes a national discourse on the intersection of environmental stewardship and social responsibility, encapsulating the hopes and criticisms of a community increasingly aware of its ecological footprint.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059946/darlington-borough-council-approves-nature-emergency-plan), [[3]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/ecology/nature-recovery/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059946/darlington-borough-council-approves-nature-emergency-plan), [[2]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/climate-change-and-sustainability/climate-change/), [[7]](https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/24169227.darlington-reveals-ambitious-planto-best-place-live-work/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/23631013.skerningham-woodland-threat-darlington-housing/), [[6]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/local-plan/news/posts/2023/march/nutrient-neutrality-advice-updated-24-march-2023/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/ecology/nature-recovery/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/carbon-counting-darlington)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059946/darlington-borough-council-approves-nature-emergency-plan), [[2]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/climate-change-and-sustainability/climate-change/), [[3]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/ecology/nature-recovery/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059946/darlington-borough-council-approves-nature-emergency-plan), [[3]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/ecology/nature-recovery/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059946/darlington-borough-council-approves-nature-emergency-plan> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/climate-change-and-sustainability/climate-change/> - In July 2019, Darlington Borough Council declared a climate emergency, committing to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. On 20th July 2023, the council reaffirmed this commitment, bringing the target forward to 2040. The council's climate change strategy has been revised, and an action plan is continually updated to meet this target. The Council Plan (2024-2027) emphasizes addressing inequalities, tackling the climate crisis, and making efficient use of resources. Darlington is also a member of the Tees Valley Combined Authority, which has its own region-wide net-zero strategy.
3. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/ecology/nature-recovery/> - Darlington Borough Council acknowledges the UK's status as one of the most nature-depleted countries and emphasizes the duty to protect and conserve remaining habitats and species. The council is committed to restoring and reconnecting landscapes to support biodiversity. The Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy, introduced under the Environment Act 2021, aims to support efforts to recover nature across England. Darlington falls under this strategy, with the Tees Valley Combined Authority appointed as the Responsible Authority for preparing and publishing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the region.
4. <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/carbon-counting-darlington> - Darlington Borough Council commissioned an independent audit to assess the potential of its land to absorb carbon from the atmosphere. The initial results show that the council’s land is sequestering 1,192 tonnes of CO2 annually, representing almost 20% of the authority’s latest reported emissions. This figure is expected to increase further once soil sequestration data is added and additional tree data is complete. These results will form an essential part of the council’s carbon calculations as part of its aim to become carbon neutral by 2040.
5. <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/23631013.skerningham-woodland-threat-darlington-housing/> - The future of Skerningham woodland in Darlington is at risk due to a proposed housing development. Up to 1,650 houses and facilities such as a GP surgery and schools could be built at the Skerningham Garden Village by 2036, with a further 4,500 homes planned on the site in the future. The development has received mixed reactions from residents, with concerns about the location of a new distributor road through the woodland and the potential impact on the environment and local wildlife.
6. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/local-plan/news/posts/2023/march/nutrient-neutrality-advice-updated-24-march-2023/> - Natural England and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced that the entire administrative area of Darlington Borough Council is now located within the catchment area of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area (SPA). Under the Habitats Regulations, planning authorities within this catchment must carefully consider the nutrient impacts of any projects, including new development proposals, on habitat sites and whether those impacts may have an adverse effect on the integrity of the site that requires mitigation.
7. <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/24169227.darlington-reveals-ambitious-planto-best-place-live-work/> - Darlington Borough Council has unveiled its draft Council Plan 2024-27, aiming to make the town one of the best places in the UK to live, work, learn, and invest. The plan is underpinned by six priorities: Economy, Homes, Living well, Children and young people, Communities, and Environment. The council emphasizes addressing inequalities, tackling the climate crisis, and making efficient use of resources. Residents have been invited to provide feedback on the plan.