# Darlington council declares nature restoration emergency despite Tory backlash



Darlington Borough Council has made a significant step in its environmental efforts by passing a motion that declares a nature restoration emergency. This decision aims to integrate ecological concerns into the council's decision-making processes by establishing their plan for biodiversity enhancement and nature recovery by 2040. Despite the backing from Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors, the motion faced strong criticism from Conservative members, who labeled it as an instance of "woke" virtue-signalling, stating it distracts from more pressing social issues such as local inequality.

Councillor Kate Mammolotti, a member of the Green Party and the architect of the motion, expressed her passion for this initiative, stating, “I wrote this motion with hope and passion. The work ahead of us is considerable and there is no room for idling or complacency. This is a win for nature and for all the residents who cherish her.” Councillor Chris McEwan, who oversees economic matters at the council, reinforced the need for the local authority to adopt measures that support nature on its owned lands.

However, members of the Conservative grouping, including its leader Jonathan Dulston, countered that the council should prioritise tackling inequality rather than focusing on what they described as "pie-in-the-sky green and woke agendas." Councillor Scott Durham echoed these sentiments, arguing that residents prefer straightforward decisions that have a direct impact on their communities. Meanwhile, Councillor Lorraine Tostevin acknowledged that while Conservatives are in favour of protecting green spaces, many of these policies are already encapsulated within the council's existing climate change plan.

The context of this declaration unfolds against a backdrop of increased advocacy for local authorities to recognise the nature emergency. Campaigns from wildlife organisations, including the Woodland Trust, have implored councils to declare a nature emergency, urging them to devise actionable strategies for reversing biodiversity loss and enhancing local habitats. Despite this, sources indicate that Darlington Borough Council has yet to create a comprehensive action plan that includes firm commitments, such as safeguarding 30% of its landholdings for nature recovery by 2030.

The local authority's current initiatives demonstrate a growing awareness of environmental issues, with an independent audit revealing that council-owned land is sequestering approximately 1,192 tonnes of CO2 annually. This figure represents nearly 20% of the council's reported emissions, as the authority aims for carbon neutrality by 2040. Nevertheless, residents have recently raised alarm over potential threats to local biodiversity, particularly concerning Blackwell Parkland, a designated Local Wildlife Area. Concerns have been voiced regarding restoration work that could endanger habitats crucial for endangered species, calling for protective measures to be implemented swiftly.

Moreover, recent changes to environmental legislation have prompted fears among local activists regarding heightened risks of pollution in Darlington's waterways. These new laws could exacerbate existing challenges faced by local rivers, ponds, and becks, further underscoring the urgent need for proactive measures from the council to safeguard water quality and aquatic wildlife.

As the council moves forward with its declarations and plans, it faces the challenge of balancing diverse community priorities, from biodiversity enhancement to social equity. Stakeholders are keenly aware that while ambitious environmental initiatives are essential, they must also resonate with the immediate concerns of residents, ensuring that policies are not perceived as mere gestures but rather as actionable commitments to sustainability and ecological health.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059946/darlington-borough-council-approves-nature-emergency-plan), [[4]](https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/23382805.campaigners-call-darlingtons-blackwell-parkland-protected/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2059946/darlington-borough-council-approves-nature-emergency-plan), [[2]](https://www.natureemergency.com/councils/darlington-borough-council/), [[6]](https://www.darlington.gov.uk/ecology/nature-recovery/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/carbon-counting-darlington), [[5]](https://darlington.greenparty.org.uk/2023/09/20/darlington-waterways-at-risk-of-even-more-pollution-as-environmental-laws-are-ripped-up/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## 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.natureemergency.com/councils/darlington-borough-council/> - This page provides information on Darlington Borough Council's stance regarding the nature emergency. It indicates that the council has not declared a nature emergency, developed an evidence-based action plan for nature recovery, or committed to protecting and managing 30% of council landholdings for nature recovery by 2030. The page also offers resources and recommendations for local authorities to enhance their nature recovery efforts.
3. <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/carbon-counting-darlington> - An article detailing Darlington Borough Council's independent audit assessing the potential of its land to absorb carbon from the atmosphere. The audit revealed that the council's land is sequestering 1,192 tonnes of CO2 annually, representing almost 20% of the authority's latest reported emissions. This initiative is part of the council's commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2040.
4. <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/23382805.campaigners-call-darlingtons-blackwell-parkland-protected/> - A report on residents' concerns over potential damage to Blackwell Parkland in Darlington due to ongoing restoration work. The parkland, designated as a Local Wildlife Area in February 2022, is home to endangered species. Campaigners are urging the council to protect the site amid fears of 'destructive digger activity' affecting the wildlife habitat.
5. <https://darlington.greenparty.org.uk/2023/09/20/darlington-waterways-at-risk-of-even-more-pollution-as-environmental-laws-are-ripped-up/> - An article by Darlington Green Party highlighting concerns that recent changes to environmental laws could increase pollution in Darlington's rivers, ponds, and becks. The piece discusses the potential impact of these legislative changes on water quality and local wildlife, emphasizing the need for the council to take action to protect the waterways.
6. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/ecology/nature-recovery/> - A page on Darlington Borough Council's website outlining their approach to nature recovery. It discusses the importance of protecting and conserving habitats and species, restoring and reconnecting landscapes, and embedding nature's recovery into all strategic plans and policy areas. The page also mentions the Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the council's commitment to biodiversity net gain.
7. <https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/business/net-zero/tees-valley-local-nature-recovery-strategy/> - An overview of the Tees Valley Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which includes Darlington Borough Council as a supporting authority. The strategy aims to support efforts to recover nature across England, help planning authorities incorporate nature recovery objectives, and deliver the government's national environment targets. The page provides information on the strategy's development and contact details for further engagement.