

# A greener, cleaner Watford: making our town more sustainable

September 2021



**WATFORD  
BOROUGH  
COUNCIL**



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Watford and  
Three Rivers**

# Introduction











*“The future of humanity and indeed, all life on Earth, now depends on us. Right now, we are facing a man-made disaster on a global scale, our greatest threat in thousands of years: climate change. If we don’t take action, the collapse of our civilization and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.”*

Sir David Attenborough

Welcome to Watford’s first sustainability booklet, produced together with *Three Rivers District Council* and *Watford and Three Rivers Friends of the Earth*. The booklet is here to help you understand more about the environmental challenges we are all facing, and the actions you can take to safeguard our planet - both now and for future generations.

In 2019, Watford Borough Council declared a climate emergency, and committed to an ambitious target of becoming a net carbon neutral borough by 2030. You can read our strategy here: [Watford Sustainability Strategy](#).

This booklet focuses on those areas where we can make a positive impact - both in our homes and in how we live our lives. It will cover:

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*“Watford has long been committed to fighting climate change and preserving the town’s rich biodiversity and stunning natural spaces. It’s vital that we take the lead in becoming a more sustainable place, one that recognises the vital importance of our ecosystems and the role that we play in giving the world a greener, healthier future.”*

**Peter Taylor, Elected Mayor of Watford**



# 1. Water



Hertfordshire has been designated by the UK government as an area that is 'under serious water stress', and is considered to be one of the driest in the country.

## Water in the home

Water companies abstract water from a variety of sources - including groundwater, aquifers and rivers. In Hertfordshire, your water comes from chalk streams. These rare habitats support a wide range of species, such as brown trout and water voles, which are sadly at risk due to over abstraction.

Watch: Protecting our precious chalk streams

Affinity Water, our local supplier is working to protect these streams, and in 2020 stopped abstracting water from two sites on the River Chess.

Did you know that people in Hertfordshire consume 8% more water than the national average, at 153 per person, per day? The Government target is for people to use 105 litres per person, per day. Take a look at your water bill, calculate your daily usage, and use the tips below to help reduce your water consumption.

## What can I do?

Sign up to Affinity Water's Save our Streams campaign - [www.saveourstreams.co.uk](http://www.saveourstreams.co.uk) - for advice and free water saving devices.

### In the kitchen:

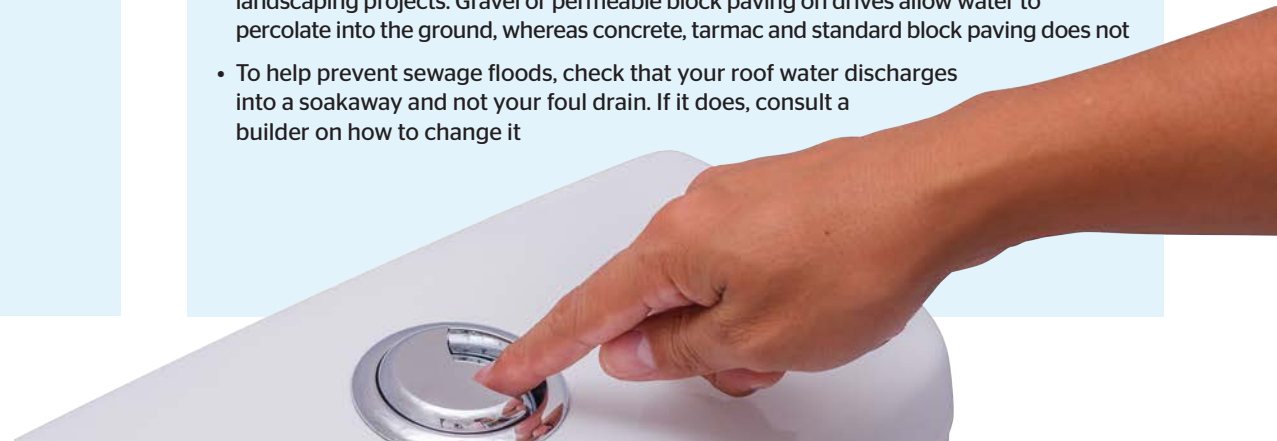
- Fix dripping taps is a free online search facility for approved plumbers
- Completely fill washing machines and dishwashers before use
- Don't overfill the kettle - use only the water you need
- Water your plants with 'grey' water (water previously used for washing)
- Use washing-up water to rinse recyclables
- Ensure new appliances have a good energy rating
- Use 'eco' settings on appliances

### In the bathroom:

- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth
- Take four-minute showers. Apply for free timers and water-saving shower heads at [www.savewatersavemoney.co.uk](http://www.savewatersavemoney.co.uk) and [www.saveourstreams.co.uk](http://www.saveourstreams.co.uk)
- Minimise baths - each bath uses around 80 litres of water
- If you have a dual-flush toilet, use the half-flush button. For lever-handle toilets, install a Save a Flush device in the cistern (which can save up to 5,000 litres a year)

### In the garden:

- Collect rainwater for plant watering and car washing
- Using a watering can, and water plants early in the morning or in the evening when it is cooler
- Let your grass grow longer in dry periods to trap dew. Leave lawn cuttings on the lawn, to return moisture and nutrients to the soil
- Choose plants that thrive in dry conditions and use mulches to retain moisture
- Avoid dripping hoses - use a trigger hose to control water release
- Move containers and baskets into shady areas
- Use containers made from glazed terracotta or wood
- Add swell gel crystals to plant pots to help retain soil moisture
- Reduce the likelihood of local flooding by using water-permeable materials in landscaping projects. Gravel or permeable block paving on drives allow water to percolate into the ground, whereas concrete, tarmac and standard block paving does not
- To help prevent sewage floods, check that your roof water discharges into a soakaway and not your foul drain. If it does, consult a builder on how to change it







# 1. Water

## Waste water

Did you know that flushing wet wipes, nappies, sanitary items or even tissues can pollute our rivers?

**To protect our rivers - bin it, don't block it.**

Heavy rain can cause sewer overflows, meaning unflushables are washed into waterways, with plastics taking hundreds of years to break down.

That's why it's really important to only flush the 3 'P's - pee, poo and (toilet) paper.



## What can I do?

There are loads of great reusable options that work brilliantly:

- Wet-wipe alternatives:
  - Reusable cotton face pads
  - Washable cloths
  - Cleansing foam - to moisten normal toilet paper
- There are also plenty of environmental options for sanitary products, nappies, tissues, cotton buds and other unflushables
- If using unflushables, dispose of them properly

## What are we doing about WATER?

Watford's new Local Plan seeks to reduce water consumption, prevent water pollution, and lower flood risks through robust planning policies.

In 2019, we launched a 10-year project to improve the River Colne. The river, which is tributary of the Thames, will undergo an extensive clean-up over the next decade, with the key goal of attracting back the original biodiversity of the river and its banks - including plants, fish, birds and insects and other species.

# 2. Energy

Most of the energy we use at home is generated from fossil fuels: coal, oil and gas. When burnt, they release carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

We can all contribute to lowering carbon by reducing our energy consumption, improving home energy efficiency, and switching to renewable energy. See [Ethical Consumer Magazine](#) for recommendations.

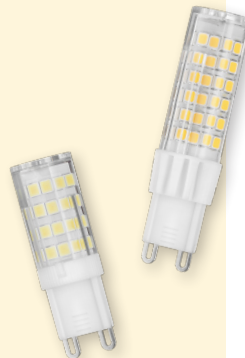
## What can I do?

### Energy-saving tips:

- Turn off lights when you leave the room
- Unplug devices when not in use
- Use LED light bulbs
- Dial down the thermostat
- Wash clothes on low heat and dry washing outdoors
- Switch to energy-efficient appliances
- Reuse and repair

### Home developments:

- Improve insulation
- Install double or triple glazing
- Look at alternatives to gas boilers, such as heat pumps
- If buying a new home, ensure it has a [Home Quality Mark](#)

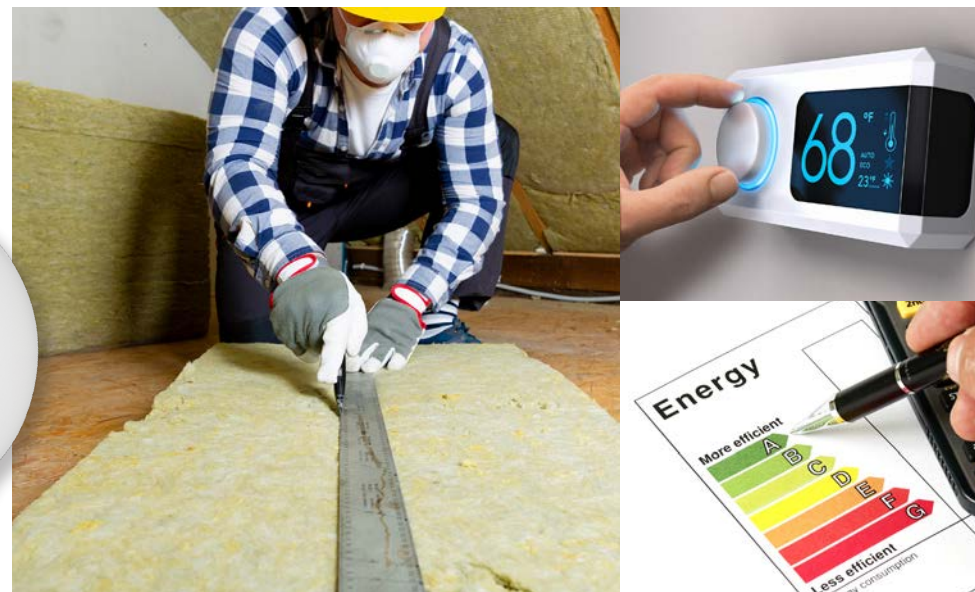


## What are we doing about ENERGY?

Watford Borough Council is managing Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery schemes for lower-income households in energy-inefficient homes. Under the scheme, residents can get energy efficiency upgrades, such as insulation, solar panels and low-carbon heating, worth up to £10,000, installed for FREE.

- Watford Council provides incentive grants to residents for energy-efficiency measures: <https://www.watford.gov.uk/carbon-assistance>
- Three Rivers Green Homes Grant Funding for energy-saving home improvements: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/egcl-page/green-homes-grant>

The Council is also enabling more residents to access Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding by offering Flexible Eligibility Criteria, which broadens the scope of eligibility criteria to include low-income residents vulnerable to the cold or in fuel poverty. Eligible residents can get ECO funding towards the cost of energy-efficient boilers and cavity-wall and loft insulation. [Find out more.](#)





# 2.1 Light pollution – lights out to help out

Light pollution means many of us will have never gazed up at a dark sky. Artificial light at night has negative, and sometimes lethal, effects on many nocturnal species, upsetting their natural foraging, breeding, navigation and sleep-wake behaviours.

Just 22% of England has night skies completely free of light pollution.

Fortunately, light pollution is easy to reverse – by ensuring outdoor lighting is well-designed and used only where and when needed.

**Help our wildlife, see more stars, get better sleep, save energy and money, and cut your carbon footprint – turn the lights out!**



## Light to protect the night

5 principles for responsible outdoor lighting



**Illuminating**  
ENGINEERING SOCIETY



### Useful



#### All light should have a clear purpose

Before installing or replacing a light, determine if it's needed. Consider how the use of light will impact the area, including wildlife and the environment. Consider using reflective paints or self-luminous markers for signs, curbs and steps to reduce the need for permanently installed outdoor lighting.

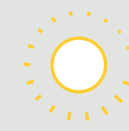
### Targeted



#### Light should be directed only to where needed

Use shielding and careful aiming to target the direction of the light beam so that it points downward and does not spill beyond where it is needed.

### Low light levels



#### Light should be no brighter than necessary

Use the lowest light level required. Be mindful of surface conditions as some surfaces may reflect more light into the night sky than intended.

### Controlled



#### Light should be used only when it is useful

Use controls such as timers or motion detectors to ensure that light is available when it is needed, dimmed when possible, and turned off when not needed.

### Colour



#### Use warmer colour lights where possible

Limit the amount of shorter wavelength (blue-violet) light to the least amount needed.



# 3. Food



Meat and dairy production creates more carbon dioxide than plant-based food production, so switching to a more plant-based diet is a great way to help tackle climate change.

In addition, when food is wasted, it's also a waste of other resources, such as water, labour, energy, manufacturing, packaging, and transportation.

*Did you know: In the UK the average family throws away 22% of their weekly shop, worth £730 per year.*

## What can I do?

- Increase plant-based meals: aim for one or two meat- and fish-free days a week to start
- Switch to plant-based milks (oat, soy and nuts), vegetable spreads and reduce cheese consumption
- Grow your own fruit and vegetables or join a community-based project
- Use your local council provided food bin or a compost bin for inedible waste
- Minimise waste. Use leftovers and share food you can't use with friends, charities, and food banks
- Use odd bits of vegetables to make stock or soups
- Shop local, shop ethical, eat in season:
  - Look out for ethical retailers who use less plastics and minimise transport emissions
  - Buy in season to reduce long-distance transportation
- Find out your diet's carbon footprint using the [BBC's own carbon calculator](#)



## What are we doing about FOOD?

Watford Borough Council and our waste and recycling partner Veolia aim to keep improving the recycling and waste services we deliver for the local community. In 2020 we introduced a new food waste collection service - all the material gathered is sent to a local anaerobic digestion plant where it is converted into electricity and fertiliser. Our current recycling rate is 51%, which is higher than the national average (45.5%).

**Allotments** - Watford has a thriving allotment community with around 800 local people regularly growing their own produce at one of the 12 well-established sites in the town. To apply for a plot visit [www.watford.gov.uk/allotments](http://www.watford.gov.uk/allotments).

**Veolia's Recycling Fund for Communities** sponsored the [Love Your Leftovers Cookbook](#) featuring the UK's most wasted food items made into delicious recipes, a collaboration between Veolia Watford's Education, Communications and Outreach (ECO) Team and West Herts College's trainee chefs. It also includes the benefits of buying local, organic and in season, how to avoid waste, save money and the planet.

**Veolia's Recycling Fund for Communities** supports grassroots projects that protect the environment and encourage people to do the right thing with their waste. [More information can be found here.](#)

**Hertfordshire WasteAware** are working on a new campaign to tackle food waste. Watford and Three Rivers Council continue to encourage all residents to put their food waste in the food pod, and reduce 'avoidable' waste.







# 4. Clothing



'Fast fashion' is designed, manufactured and marketed quickly and cheaply, causing 15.1 million tonnes of textile waste each year, with much of it being plastic. Microfibres are also released when washing fabrics made from plastic (i.e. polyester) which is leading to polluted soil, waterways and oceans.

## What can I do?

- Buy second-hand or swap with friends or at a swishing event
- Find brands you love that are aligned with your values: [www.fashionrevolution.org](http://www.fashionrevolution.org) or [www.stylewithheart.com](http://www.stylewithheart.com)
- Think: "Will I wear it at least 30 times?"
- Only buy items that you can use all year round
- Donating or selling unwanted clothes helps others to be more sustainable. Try a one-in-one-out policy
- Look after your clothes so they stay their best for longer, and try to repair them
- Buying better quality is likely to cost you less over time
- Spend your money on items you will wear every day. Think about hiring 'special occasion' wear

## What are we doing about CLOTHING?

Watford Borough Council runs clothes swap events, where residents donate a number of clothing items to the event and then pick from the selection others have brought. [Hertfordshire Waste Aware](#) is working with local Councils to tackle fast fashion and are running future 'Swishing' events where you can swap unwanted clothes. If you would like to hold a swishing event, find out more [here](#).





# 5. Waste

Our throw-away culture cannot continue. If everyone consumed at the same rate as us in the UK, we would need 2.8 earths to sustain ourselves. Currently:

- Watford residents recycle, compost and reuse over 51% of their waste
- Herts recycles an average of 52.3%, with over 85% processed in the UK

## What can I do?

Remember the 6 Rs - **rethink, reduce, refuse, reuse, repair and recycle.**

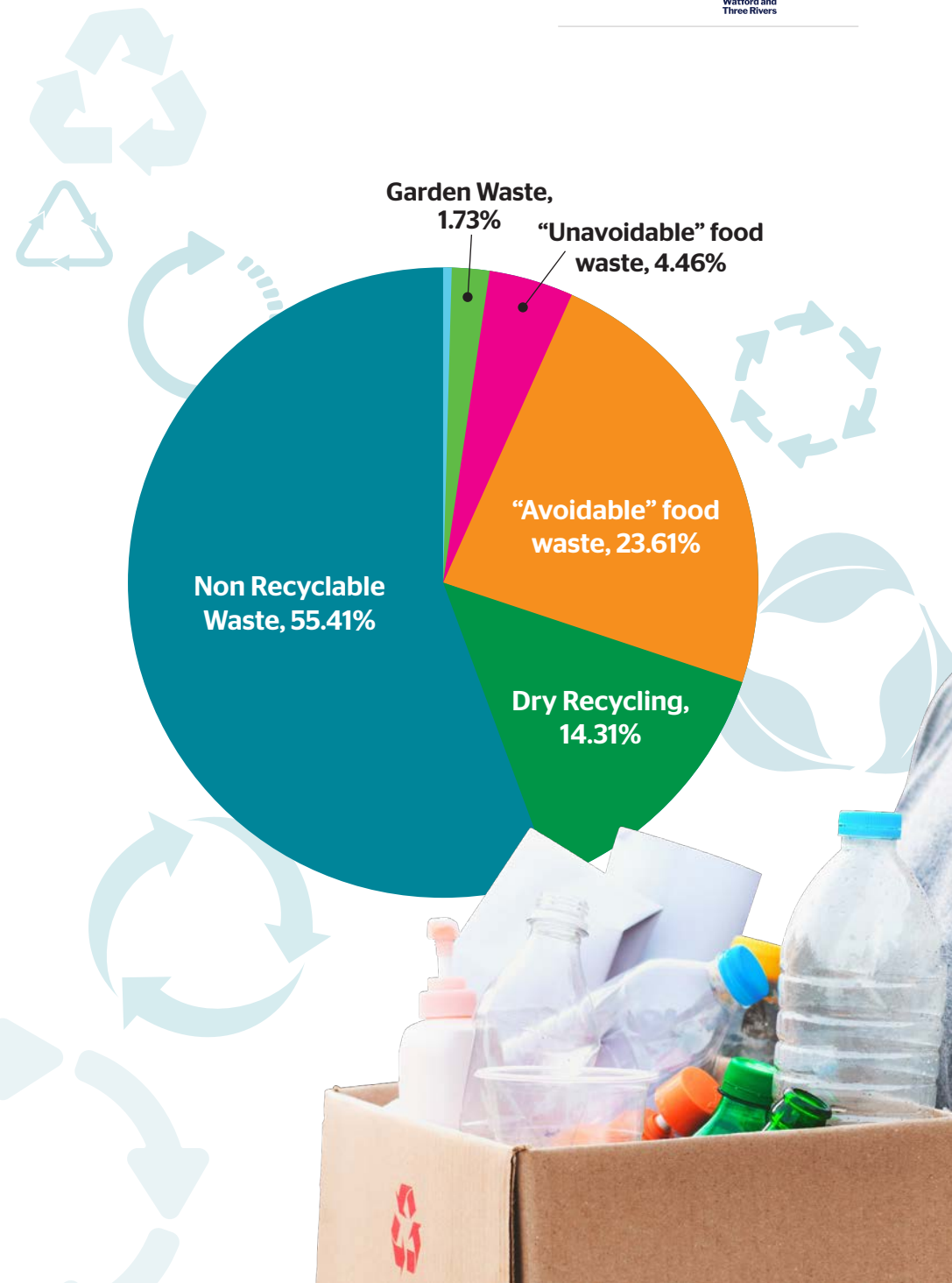
Reduce, refuse, and reuse are always first, recycling should be a last resort!

- Before you buy, stop and think: Do you really need it. Can you borrow it? Buy second-hand? Buy a more sustainable option?
- Choose lower-waste options when shopping, and remember your reusables
- Think about 'hidden' waste - nappies and period products are full of plastics too!
- Recycle everything you can. Use the [Recycle Now recycling locator](#)
- Visit or follow [Herts WasteAware](#) for tips and updates

## What are we doing about WASTE?

In 2020, Watford Borough Council introduced a new weekly food waste collection service and at the same time reduced the collection of general black bin waste so that households would recycle more. Over the past 12 months our recycling rate has risen from 45% to 51%, but up to 70% of household waste can be recycled so we will continue to drive further improvements.

We have been encouraging local bars, cafes and restaurants to reduce their single use plastic by signing up to the national **Refill** scheme, which aims to allow everyone access to free refillable drinking water instead of buying single-use plastic water bottles.





# 6. Transport



Did you know that air pollution, linked to vehicle use, is the largest environmental health risk we face today? Every year, air pollution causes up to 36,000 deaths in the UK.

In Hertfordshire, 70% of our personal journeys are made by car.

## What can I do?

Replace local car journeys - the government has stated 50% of all journeys in towns and cities should be cycled or walked by 2030.

- Living Streets is the UK charity for everyday walking. They offer guidance on how to get walking and campaign for safer streets in Watford and Three Rivers
- Spokes, the local cycle club for SW Herts, encourage cycling, organise rides and campaign for safer routes
- Use public transport, cycle or walk - here are some useful links to help plan your low-carbon journey:
  - [Transport for London \(TfL\)](#)
  - [City Mapper](#)
  - [Google Maps](#)
  - [Cycling UK](#)

Change the way you use your car:

- Buy or lease a hybrid or electric car
- The government's [Electric Vehicle Home charge Scheme](#) provides grants towards the cost of installing a home charger
- Look for the shortest routes
- Don't leave the engine on when parked.

Reduce use of delivery vans:

- Shop local
- Group online purchases and deliveries
- Look out for suppliers who are piloting low-carbon delivery, e.g. delivery robots

## What are we doing about TRANSPORT?

Watford Borough Council introduced a range of sustainable transport options for residents and commuters in 2020 including an on-demand bus service and the Beryl bikeshare scheme with 100,000 journeys and 500,000 km travelled to date.

We recently developed a 20-year [sustainable transport strategy](#) that aims to reduce carbon dioxide, congestion and pollution by improving the local public transport system, introducing car clubs and more electric vehicles and encouraging more walking and cycling. [Read more](#)

As part of Watford's Local Plan, low and zero carbon transport infrastructure is required on new developments in Watford.







# 7. Biodiversity



Around 20% of Hertfordshire species are at risk of extinction, according to the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust State of Nature Report 2020. And globally there has been a 68% decline in our planet's wildlife populations since 1970, according to the World Wildlife Fund's 2020 Living Planet report.

## What can I do?

At home:

- Use environmentally-friendly cleaning products
- Buy local, visit farmers' markets
- Put a bell on your cat - cats kill around 55 million UK songbirds annually

In the garden:

- Avoid pesticides. Use organic, nature-friendly products
- The 'No Dig' method of gardening keeps carbon in the soil
- Make your own compost or always buy peat-free
- Reduce lawn-mowing frequency
- Support bees - sow wildflowers and native plants. [Make a bee hotel](#)
- Grow your own flowers, fruit and vegetables
- Plant a tree in your garden and join local tree-planting projects
- Create a wildlife corridor by cutting small holes in your fences to allow small mammals like hedgehogs to travel
- Put out nuts, seeds and fat balls for birds



## BIODIVERSITY in Watford

Watford Borough Council has a number of active projects aimed at improving biodiversity in the town including:

- Colne river improvement project which aims to clean up the river and encourage wildlife, insects and plants back to the river and riverbank
- Cassiobury wetlands restoration project which will transform the area's former watercress beds into a wildlife sanctuary
- Whippendell woods ancient woodland restoration project which is improving the species diversity of the woodland to support more wildlife
- We are also increasing the tree canopy in the town by from 18% to 20% over the next ten years

## We are also

Watford Borough Council has commissioned studies to determine exactly what biodiversity exists across the areas, which will establish opportunities for nature and where to create new corridors for wildlife.



# 8. Business

Larger business often have sustainability strategies. If you are part of a smaller business, help is on hand with grants and advice on how you can help your business do their bit.

## Low carbon workspaces grants

Often one of the biggest barriers to moving further forward with major energy efficiencies is the cost of technology. With a match-funded grant of between £1,000 - £5,000 you can recover up to a third of the cost of many different energy-saving measures reducing the upfront cost and the time to recover your investment.



**Save  
Money**



**Cut Energy  
Usage**



**Reduce Carbon  
Footprint**



**Improve Working  
Environment**



**Boost  
Eco-Credentials**



**Engage  
Staff**

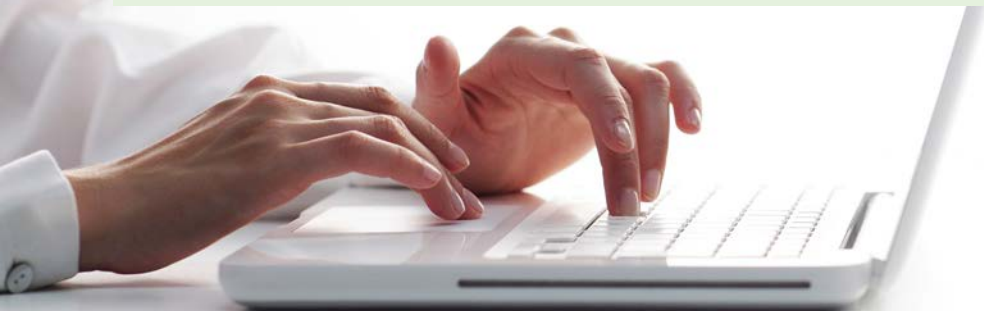


**Drive  
Innovation**



**Increase  
Productivity**

<https://www.lowcarbonworkspaces.co.uk/>



## Eastern New Energy (ENE) - growing a low-carbon economy in the East of England

ENE provides support services and workshops which are **free of charge** to a range of business types and organisations to achieve their goal of creating jobs and growing the local, low carbon economy across the East of England. This includes advice, energy and carbon reviews, grant funding and setting pathways to net zero. They work with:

Other grant schemes:

Workplace Charging Scheme

Plug-in vehicle grant

eCargo Bike Grant Fund







# 9. What your Council is doing

Watford Borough Council is taking a stand against climate change, having declared a climate emergency back in 2019, and setting a goal of being carbon-neutral by 2030.

Below are just some of the ways that we're helping to make Watford a greener, cleaner, and healthier town.

## EV charging points

We installed five on-street electric vehicle (EV) charging points back in 2020, and in 2021, are installing seven additional 7kW fast EV chargers - offering residents an environmentally-friendly way to charge their vehicles for as little as 32p per kilowatt hour.

## Warmer, greener homes

We're helping residents across the town to lower their bills while making a difference to carbon emissions, with our Green Homes Grants. These grants are worth up to £5,000, and can be used towards energy-saving measures like smart meters and insulation.



We're aiming to increase the town's tree canopy cover from 18% to 20%, over the next 10 years.

## Transforming Travel in Watford

We've embarked upon an ambitious 20-year journey to create a brighter future for travel in Watford - one with less traffic congestion, cleaner air, and more and safer cycling and walking routes.

## Rediscovering the River Colne

We've launched a new 10-year project that aims to clean up the River Colne and its surrounding areas. The river will undergo an extensive clean-up, with the key goal of attracting back the original biodiversity of the river and its banks - including plants, fish, birds and insects and other species.

## Rewilding of Cassiobury Park

Work started this summer on the new wetlands restoration project in Cassiobury Park Nature Reserve. Its aim is to transform the area's former watercress beds into a wildlife sanctuary, complete with reeds, ponds and scrapes - creating an ideal long-term habitat for the area's native birds, mammals and insects.





# 10. Environmental community groups in Watford and Three Rivers

## Watford Green Gym



This unique scheme helps local residents to get fit and healthy through conservation work such as tree planting, step construction, path improvements and hay making. Volunteers have been working in Cassiobury Park, Garston Park and along the River Colne, helping to transform these areas and support the habitat for local wildlife. Visit [www.watford.gov.uk/greengym](http://www.watford.gov.uk/greengym)

## Watford Parks Volunteer



We need different types of support from volunteers to help maintain local parks and open spaces. It could be helping with planning future management, clearing river banks, conducting wildlife surveys or consultation with users. If you want to get involved, visit [www.watford.gov.uk/parksvolunteering](http://www.watford.gov.uk/parksvolunteering) for more information.

## Friends of Cassiobury Park



The Friends of Cassiobury Park was formed in 1973 to encourage greater interest in the park and to represent the interests of users. Members help to preserve and enhance the natural appearance of the award winning park and they assist in the preservation of habitats for diverse species of wildlife that include trees, plants, insects and birds. <https://friendsofcassioburypark.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/>

## Friends of the Earth Watford & Three Rivers



Creating a safer climate, flourishing nature, and healthy air, water and food, now and for future generations. We campaign for change in our community to make a difference to the environment locally, nationally and globally.

## H.E.A.R.T. Community Group



We are a Herts residents' group who believe that we are facing existential threats brought about by climate change and other associated predicaments. We are committed to contributing to local community resilience, both practically and emotionally.



## Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Is the leading voice for wildlife conservations across the area, taking practical action every day to help wildlife flourish.



## Horticultural Society

Most areas have a local horticultural society whose members have years of experience growing vegetables and plants, and are happy to share their knowledge.



## Oxhey Village Environment Group

A residents' group run by volunteers since 1974 to maintain, protect and enhance the character and environment of Oxhey Village and its surroundings.



## River Chess Association

Formed to protect and enhance the River Chess for future generations.



## RSPB Chorleywood & District

Local branch of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.



## SW Herts Cycling Group

Encouraging cycling by organising rides and campaigning for better and safer cycling routes.



## The Soil Association

Is managing a local farm and has plans to turn it into a model of biodiversity good practice with community involvement. Find out more [here](#).







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