

Climate/UK Policy & Commitments

A Brief Timeline

Global Commitments and events

UK moves forward

UK moves backwards

1712 Thomas Newcomen develops first commercial steam engine

1850 Global Population 1.2 billion
Atmospheric CO₂ 285ppm*
Temperature Rise -0.2°C**

1859 CO₂ linked to climate

John Tyndall, Irish scientist, concludes that, because CO₂ molecules can absorb heat, changes in the CO₂ in the atmosphere would change climate.

1886 First motor car patented

Karl Benz patents first gasoline car engine design.

1896 Combustion linked to rising temperature

Svante Arrhenius, Swedish scientist, concludes that doubling of CO₂ would raise global temperatures by 5-6°C (now thought 2-3°C).

1900 Traces of CO₂ absorb heat

Knut Ångström, Swedish scientist, discovers that even small concentrations of CO₂ can absorb heat.

1914 First commercial passenger airline flight

First fixed wing flights within Florida.

1939 Hottest five years recorded

Guy Stewart Callendar, British steam engineer, finds weather stations all recording increasing temperatures.

1952 The Great Smog in London

A five-day smog event in London reduced visibility and killed an estimated 4,500.

1956 Clean Air Act 1956

UK Parliament Act to reduce the levels of smog, creating areas where smokeless fuels must be used.

Sellafield, world's first 'commercial' nuclear reactor

1957 Confirmed increase in global carbon

Roger Revelle and Hans Suess, US scientists, record increasing levels of global atmospheric carbon.

1958 Charles David Keeling proves CO₂ increase

Charles David Keeling begins systematic measuring of CO₂ to chart global increase (Keeling Curve).

1960 Global Population 3 billion

Atmospheric CO₂ 317ppm*
Temperature Rise +0.03°C**

1962 *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson published

1972 UNEP formed

First UN conference on the environment focuses on pollution, atomic testing and whaling. The United Nations Environment Programme formed.

Limits to Growth by the Club of Rome and Blueprint for Survival by the Ecologist

1974 CFCs linked to breakdown in ozone layer

Mario Molina, Mexican scientist, and Frank Sherwood Rowland, US scientist, discover link.

1975 Term "Global Warming" first coined

Wallace Smith Broecker, US scientist, uses term in paper.

1983 WCED formed

The World Commission on Environment and Development formed to be an independent body to look at environmental and developmental problems.

First cloud computer server available

CompuServ offer first web-based storage space.

1984 Building Act limits fuel use and emissions

First reference to testing, measuring and reduction.

1986 Chernobyl, world's worst nuclear disaster

1987 Sustainability defined

Gro Harlem Brundtland, chair of WCED, defines it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Montreal Protocol agreed

Global agreement to restrict the use of CFCs and chemicals damaging the ozone layer.

1988 IPCC established

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change formed to collect, analyse and share evidence on climate change.

James Hansen testified to the US Senate that "the greenhouse effect has been detected and it is changing our climate now."

1989 *The End of Nature* by Bill McGibben published

1992 Rio Earth Summit

Non-binding agreements signed limiting greenhouse gas emissions and more sustainable development.

Agenda 21

1995 WBCSD formed

World Business Council for Sustainable Development, along with over 200 companies, working together for a sustainable world.

Green Building Tool created

Certification for buildings that meet green criteria.

Building Regulations updated with Part L

Ecological Footprint concept created
Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees, sustainability advocates, invent way to measure human demand on nature.

1997 Kyoto Protocol

Countries agree to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

1998 Green Building Challenge Conference held

First international conference on green buildings.

Egan Report published

Report on improvements needed in the UK Construction Industry.

2000 Global Population 6.1 billion

Atmospheric CO₂ 369ppm*
Temperature Rise +0.53°C**

2000 Millennium Development Goals set

UK Sustainable Development Commission set up to advise government on sustainable development

2001 Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) formed as part of Kyoto Protocol

Carbon Trust formed

2002 World Green Building Council founded

2003 London Congestion Charge introduced

2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment published

Report highlighting human strain on ecosystems and the need to reverse the degradation.

EU Emissions Trading Scheme introduced

2006 Code for Sustainable Homes established

Government commitment that all new homes would be zero-carbon by 2016. The Code for Sustainable Homes was drawn up (operational in 2007 and temporarily mandatory from 2008).

Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change

2007 Zero Carbon Hub established

A non-profit organisation formed to achieve UK government target of zero-carbon homes.

Building Regulations tightened to achieve 2016 goal

First by 25% in 2010, and then by 44% three years later.

2008 Climate Change Act

Committee on Climate Change established and all new buildings to be zero-carbon by 2019.

2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Summit

Limits temperatures to 2°C above pre-industrial levels and possibly 1.5°C.

Prosperity without Growth by Tim Jackson published

2011 Green Construction Board formed

Natural Capital Committee formed

Sustainable Development Commission closed

2012 Rio+20 UN Conference

Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post 2015 development agenda.

2013 Construction Leadership Council formed

Construction 2025 set key targets.

2015 Paris Agreement

Non-binding agreements signed limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

UN Sustainable Development Goals launched

A blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. It addresses global challenges including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice, with a target to achieve all Goals by 2030.

National Infrastructure Commission established

Code for Sustainable Homes withdrawn

The code was made non-mandatory unless required in a local authority's local plan.

2016 Zero Carbon Hub closed

Organisation closed due to lack of funding.

2017 Clean Growth Strategy

2018 Global Population 7.7 billion

Atmospheric CO₂ 411ppm*
Temperature Rise +1.0°C**

2018 IPCC sets temperature increase limit

Report recommending a maximum 1.5°C increase in temperature over pre-industrial levels.

Greta Thunberg began School Strike for Climate

Extinction Rebellion founded

Global Climate Action Summit

National governments called to join forces to step up climate action ahead of 2020 - the year when global greenhouse gases need to peak and fall sharply, to therefore avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

25 Year Environment Plan published

UK Government approves fracking

2019 UK Government amended the Climate Change Act to require 100% net zero-carbon by 2050

UN Climate Summit

The latest analysis shows that, if we act now, we can reduce carbon emissions within 12 years and hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C and even, as advised by the latest science, to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

IPBES report on biodiversity decline published

2020 COP26 Glasgow Global Climate Change Summit

We all really need to act now with resolution in the reality of the climate and ecological crisis.