



# Community Wealth Building and Climate Action

Policy Links, Practice, and Opportunities

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# Executive summary

**This research examines how Community Wealth Building (CWB) and climate action are being aligned across three Scottish local authorities, through policy documents, strategic plans, and practitioner insights.**

The Scottish Government's goal of net zero by 2045 places climate action at the centre of its 2025–2026 Programme for Government. As Community Wealth Building (CWB) develops, and with forthcoming legislation and associated local plans, there is a key opportunity to embed climate action within this agenda and support a fair, just transition.

Because CWB and climate priorities are closely linked, many local CWB strategies already reflect climate considerations. Understanding where these links appear and how they are being delivered in practice is essential to shaping and strengthening the future direction of CWB across Scotland.

The study had three aims:



**1. Identify where policy documents link climate action and CWB**



**2. Assess whether these policy connections are being implemented in practice.**



**3. Identify themes, overlaps, and opportunities to strengthen the integration of both agendas.**

The research consisted of a document review of six strategic policies and interviews with officers across the three case-study councils. Across all sources, a strong and consistent pattern of alignment emerged.



## Key findings

### Shared overarching aims

All reviewed documents articulate broad ambitions for a wellbeing economy, economic resilience, sustainability, and a Just Transition. These shared visions provide a natural foundation for integrating CWB and climate activity.



### Procurement

Sustainable procurement is a consistently strong point of connection. Councils are increasingly leveraging procurement to reduce emissions through shorter, more efficient supply chains while supporting local businesses, SMEs, and social enterprises. This retains wealth locally and reducing carbon impact.



### Circular Economy

Circular economy principles feature prominently in both climate and CWB strategies. Reuse, repair, and waste reduction initiatives support climate goals while also generating local jobs, community ownership opportunities, and reduced economic leakage.



### LHEES

LHEES provides a direct overlap between climate targets and CWB by creating place-based opportunities for local supply chains, fair work, and potentially community- or publicly owned clean heat infrastructure.



### Green Jobs and Skills

All councils recognise that meeting net zero targets requires workforce development and local business support. Investment in skills, retraining, and green job pathways directly supports CWB goals around fair work, inclusive growth, and reducing inequalities.





### Active Travel

Active travel is widely recognised as low-carbon transport that also enhances economic participation, access to opportunity, and town-centre vitality.

### Green Spaces and Food Growing

Climate strategies tend to emphasise nature-based solutions, habitat restoration, and food growing more than CWB strategies. This represents a major opportunity to broaden CWB's land and assets work to include green infrastructure, community food initiatives, and nature recovery.



### Energy Security

All three councils identified renewable energy ownership, particularly wind and heat networks, as a major opportunity to combine emissions reduction with local wealth generation. Community and municipal ownership models have significant potential to reinvest profits locally.

### Governance and Culture

Across all three councils, strong governance arrangements and organisational culture play a central role in aligning CWB with climate action. Where integration is most effective, councils have established cross-service groups, shared strategies, and joint reporting structures that connect these agendas.



## Conclusion

The research demonstrates that CWB and climate action share extensive thematic overlaps and interdependencies. Both require whole-council approaches, strong governance, and collaboration across teams and sectors. By recognising and intentionally strengthening these connections, local authorities can deliver climate action that is fair, inclusive, and economically transformative.

The insights from both document review and practitioner interviews provide a practical framework for councils designing new CWB plans, updating climate strategies, or building cross-service governance structures to accelerate a just and community-centred transition to net zero.



# 1. Introduction

The Scottish Government aims to reach net zero emissions by 2045 and has set ‘tackling the climate crisis’ as a key priority in the [Programme for Government 2025-2026](#). Community Wealth Building (CWB) is evolving rapidly, and the forthcoming Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill legislation and associated local strategic plans offer a valuable opportunity to integrate climate considerations into this agenda and accelerate just and equitable climate delivery.

*“We see community wealth building as a key mechanism to achieving a well-being economy, but that doesn’t happen in isolation from the climate agenda.”*

**Interviewee**

Given the interconnections between the two agendas, many existing CWB plans at local authority level already incorporate climate considerations. Identifying where and how these integrations are occurring is essential to inform and future-proof the development of the nascent CWB movement across Scotland. Additionally, it is crucial to understand the extent to which the connections made in policy documents are being implemented in practice.

This document review, interviews and analysis have been carried out to identify linkages between council climate change strategies and plans and Community Wealth Building (CWB) for three local authority areas: East Lothian, North Ayrshire and Orkney Islands. These local authorities have been chosen as councils progressing CWB development across different geographies.

The aim of this review is to identify areas where co-benefits can be achieved and areas where these agendas are well aligned.

This report had three key aims:

1. To examine where and how policy documents are establishing links between climate action and Community Wealth Building.
2. To evaluate whether these policy-level connections are being effectively translated into practice.
3. To identify recurring themes and areas of overlap that could support local authorities in developing CWB plans that embed climate considerations, thereby fostering greater alignment between these policy agendas.



## 2. Methods

This research consisted first of a document review, followed by practitioner interviews.

For each relevant document, a “key phrase” search was used to narrow the scope of enquiry and ensure consistency, followed by a thematic analysis to identify key, recurrent themes.

The results section is structured by theme and includes excerpts from strategy and interviews relating to the themes identified through the document review. The final section ‘enablers of collaboration’ is informed only by the interviews to provide an idea of how these collaborations are realised in practice.

Interviews with practitioners were then carried out to understand where and how these connections are being realised in practice. Interviews focused on governance and working relationships, key projects and enablers of collaboration between climate change and CWB officers.

For the purposes of this work, CWB is defined as:

“A practical approach to local economic development that aligns with a wellbeing economy, which involves reorganising the economy to serve people, place, and planet. It focuses on minimising economic ‘leakage’ and ensuring that wealth is retained and recirculated within local communities”.

For the purposes of this work, Future Economy Scotland’s definition of Just Transition will be used where Just Transition is defined as:

“a coordinated plan to decarbonise Scotland’s economy and tackle the nature crisis while:

- Creating well-paid, secure, unionised, green jobs throughout urban and rural Scotland alike.
- Supporting the reskilling and retraining of workers as part of a managed decline of carbon-intensive industries.
- Actively reducing social, economic and regional inequalities, alleviating poverty, and increasing living standards – particularly for low- and middle-income households.
- Ensuring that impacted communities, trade unions, workers and businesses are given a meaningful stake and say over decisions that affect them.
- Fairly sharing the costs and benefits of decarbonisation, including by embracing more democratic forms of ownership and governance.
- Ensuring that Scotland, as a high historic and current emitter, recognises global imbalances created by climate and environmental breakdown and builds a reparative approach.

(Future Economy Scotland, 2023)



## 3. Document summaries

### North Ayrshire Council Community Wealth Building Strategy

North Ayrshire Councils (NAC) strategy positions the Just Transition as a complementary and parallel commitment, aligned with its broader aim of achieving a wellbeing economy. This alignment is outlined at the national level through the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and traced down locally through collaborative efforts with the Council's sustainability team to embed CWB principles across operations. The connection is made explicitly: "Use Community Wealth Building to deliver on our ambitions to become a carbon neutral Council and ensure a green and Just Transition for North Ayrshire" (p.62). The commitment to a green transition is a recurring theme throughout the strategy and is formally recognised as an additional pillar within the Anchor Charter.

### North Ayrshire Council Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy

The Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy 2024-27 outlines the steps NAC has taken and will take to achieve its ambitious area-wide and organisational net zero targets of 2030. The strategy outlines nine principles to guide this journey, operationalised through five key workstreams: energy, nature, transport, waste and adaptation. The council emphasises the importance of CWB as an underlying theme throughout these workstreams and essential in the council's aim for a "just and fair energy transition and a wellbeing economy".

### East Lothian Council Proposed Local Economy Strategy

East Lothian Council's (ELC) Local Economy Strategy 2024 - 2034 identifies the Just Transition as a central objective (Objective 4). The strategy places particular emphasis on the economic opportunities presented by the green transition, positioning it as a key emerging sector. The principles of Just Transition are woven throughout the document, alongside a strong focus on Community Wealth Building. Similar to North Ayrshire Council, ELC makes formal commitments to achieving net zero through its anchor charter, underscoring the integration of environmental and economic goals.

### East Lothian Council Climate Change Strategy 2020-2025

Having declared a climate emergency in 2019, the ELC Climate Change Strategy 2020-2025 covers the council's vision, aims and steps taken to reach a net zero council and a carbon neutral East Lothian. Across seven key outcomes, ELC outlines its key priority areas for a holistic approach to climate mitigation and adaptation in East Lothian. The Strategy highlights high-level connections between CWB and climate action, including an emphasis on local economic development and placemaking; in addition to concrete actions strengthening both imperatives such as increase in Zero Waste hubs, sustainable procurement and decarbonised heat networks.



### **East Lothian Council Climate Change Strategy 2025-2030**

The strategy's vision explicitly links emissions reductions to tackling inequality, promoting fair work, supporting CWB, and contributing to a wellbeing economy. It outlines actions across four key themes: Governance, Assets, Services, and Place, with "Economy" being a focus area under Place. A significant point of integration is the East Lothian Partnerships Community Wealth Building Charter, which (like North Ayrshire) notably includes climate change as a sixth pillar, alongside the conventional five CWB pillars.

### **Orkney Islands Council Orkney Community Wealth Building Plan 2025**

Orkney Islands Council's (OIC) Community Wealth Building Action Plan embeds climate action throughout, with climate-related initiatives integrated into each of the CWB pillar actions. The plan highlights the importance of agriculture, farming, and renewable energy generation, reflecting the local economic and environmental context. Focus is distributed evenly across all pillars, supporting a holistic and place-based approach to sustainable development.

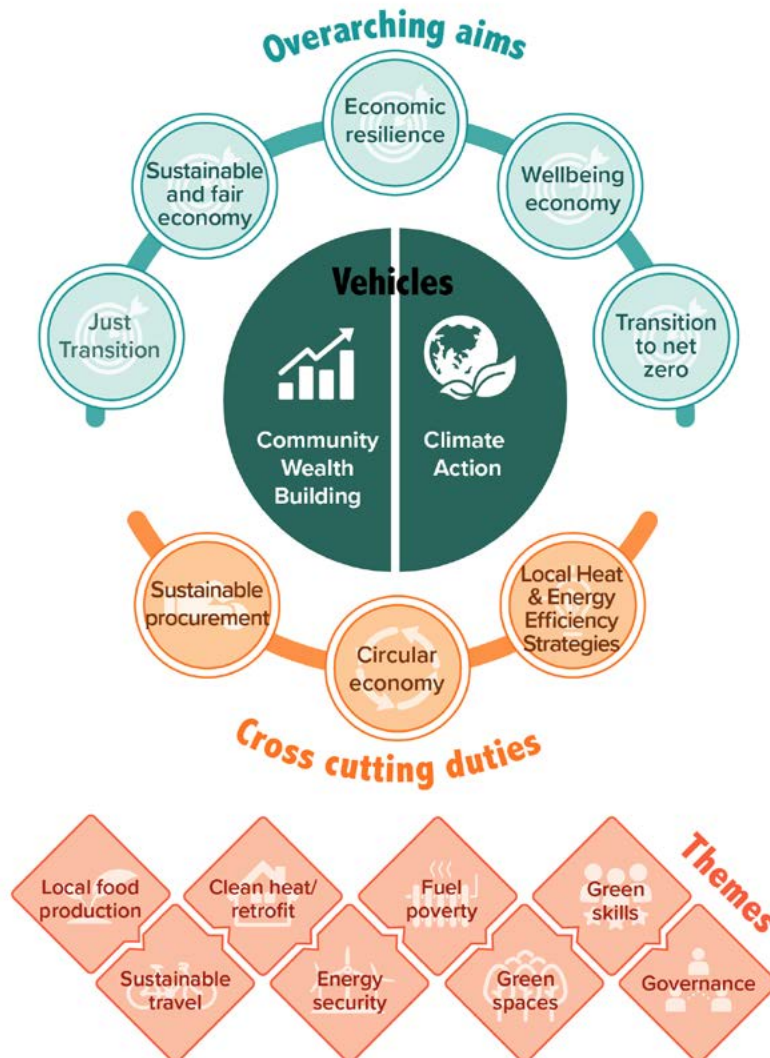
### **Orkney Islands Council Sustainable Energy Strategy**

The Orkney Sustainable Energy Strategy 2017-2025 outlines a vision for Orkney as a secure, sustainable, low carbon island economy driven by innovation and collaboration. A core aim of this strategy is to add value to Orkney's renewable energy resources for the benefit of the local economy and local communities, while minimizing environmental damage. One of its five strategic action themes is "Maximum local value and efficiency (from local resources)," which aims to drive and incentivize business growth and supply chain developments by harnessing local resources and fostering innovation.



## 4. Findings

### A. Literature review



#### 4.1 Overarching aims

An analysis of the six strategic documents reveals a convergence of key conceptual themes where CWB and climate action intersect. Notably, the concept of economic resilience emerges as a central driver facilitating the alignment between green initiatives and CWB approaches. In this context, economic resilience refers to the capacity of local economies to absorb, adapt, and thrive amid economic and environmental shocks.

In parallel, the documents frequently reference broader guiding visions such as a sustainable economy, a wellbeing economy and a Just Transition. These overarching ambitions reflect a systemic shift toward models of development that prioritise social equity, environmental stewardship, and long-term community prosperity over short-term growth metrics.



## 4.2 Sustainable procurement

Procurement is one of the five core pillars of CWB, and all CWB-related strategic documents reviewed articulate clear aims and actions centred on leveraging local authority and anchor institution spending to support local economies. This includes: the redirection of procurement expenditure toward local suppliers, SMEs, social enterprises, and cooperatives — retaining wealth within communities and fostering inclusive economic growth.

From a climate change perspective, sustainable procurement plays a critical role in reducing carbon emissions. This is achieved by shortening supply chains, prioritizing low-carbon goods and services, and embedding sustainability criteria within procurement processes and contractual obligations.

The analysis of strategic documents revealed strong and consistent linkages between procurement and climate objectives. All CWB strategies examined include climate-related procurement actions, such as maximizing social and environmental value through contracting, favouring suppliers with demonstrable climate commitments, and reducing emissions through localised and more efficient supply chains. These findings highlight procurement as a key mechanism through which economic and environmental goals can be jointly advanced at the local level across CWB and Climate strategies.

### East Lothian Council

East Lothian Council recognises that many of its emissions come from indirect sources like purchased goods and staff commuting - which fall under Scope 3 emissions. To address this, the Council is aligning its Sustainable Procurement Policy with circular economy principles and climate mitigation goals. For example, when sourcing office furniture, the Council prioritises refurbished items over new purchases, reducing lifecycle emissions and waste. Contracts now include clauses that encourage suppliers to minimise packaging and use low-emission transport. By increasing spend with local suppliers, the Council not only cuts down on transport emissions but also supports Community Wealth Building by keeping economic benefits within.



## 4.3 Circular economy

The circular economy serves as a key point of intersection between CWB and climate action, addressing the systemic limitations of the current linear economic model. The linear economy which is based on extract, use, and dispose, has been critiqued within CWB frameworks for driving economic leakage and reinforcing inequality. It is also a major contributor to resource depletion, environmental degradation, and greenhouse gas emissions.

In contrast, the circular economy promotes sustainable production and consumption by designing out waste, keeping materials in use for longer, and regenerating natural systems. This transition supports climate objectives by improving material efficiency and reducing emissions across supply chains. At the same time, it aligns with CWB goals by fostering local enterprise, stimulating innovation in reuse and repair, and creating quality jobs in circular industries.

By advancing a more regenerative and inclusive economic model, circular economy policies offer significant co-benefits; delivering environmental gains while supporting local economic transformation and resilience. As such, they provide a powerful mechanism for integrating climate and community wealth building agendas within local and regional development strategies.

### Orkney Islands Council

In Orkney, circular economy principles are being embedded into local climate and economic strategies to retain wealth and reduce waste. For instance, the newly established Orkney Circular Economy Network, coordinated by the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub, brings together initiatives like Orkney Restart and Orkney Zero Waste to promote repair, reuse, and sustainable consumption. This network supports local production and distribution, ensuring that economic value stays within the community. Additionally, Orkney's Sustainable North Energy Strategy highlights actions such as expanding mixed recycling services and developing Energy from Waste facilities, which not only improve resource efficiency but also align with broader Community Wealth Building goals by making better use of community assets and fostering local innovation.



## 4.4 Local Heat Energy Efficiency Strategies

Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES) was identified as a critical intersection between CWB and climate action objectives. LHEES strategies set out place-based priorities and actions aimed at decarbonising heat and improving energy efficiency across Scotland. In doing so, LHEES contribute directly to national goals on net zero emissions and fuel poverty alleviation.

By focusing on tailored, locality-specific energy planning, LHEES not only support Scotland's climate commitments but also should embody the Just Transition principle - ensuring that the shift to a low-carbon economy delivers equitable outcomes and protects vulnerable communities from disproportionate impacts.

The content of LHEES align strongly with areas where CWB can have significant impact. The transition to low-carbon and clean heat infrastructure generates significant economic opportunities at the local level. These include the stimulation of local supply chains, the creation of fair work through energy retrofitting and infrastructure delivery, and the potential for increased community and public ownership of energy assets. As such, LHEES is a key area where CWB and climate intersect.

### East Lothian Council

East Lothian Council has adopted a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) which is a routemap for decarbonizing heat in buildings across the region. This includes both domestic and non-domestic properties. The strategy focuses on low-cost, low-emissions technologies and aims to support local jobs, skills, and community wealth. The Council's Local Housing Strategy 2024–2029 helps guide the net zero approach for social housing. It includes tailored solutions based on property and town types. The Local Economy Strategy 2024–2034 supports the LHEES by including actions about harnessing the economic opportunities decarbonisation offers such as opportunities to develop heat networks and associated jobs and supply chains.



## 4.5 Green skills and jobs

Green jobs - for example, those in renewable energy, retrofitting, sustainable transport, and land management - are essential for achieving national and local climate targets. However, ensuring that the transition to a low-carbon economy is just and inclusive requires that individuals and communities most affected by economic and environmental change can access and benefit from these emerging employment opportunities.

Green skills development plays a critical enabling role in this process. By equipping workers with the competencies needed to enter, remain in, or advance within low-carbon sectors, green skills support a Just Transition. When green jobs and training initiatives are strategically targeted at the local level, they can also contribute directly to the goals of CWB. Equally, it is important to support businesses to develop green job opportunities, particularly at the local level. Ensuring the availability of good quality green jobs requires attention to both the supply of skilled workers and the demand for their expertise. The strategic documents reviewed illustrated this alignment.

### North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshire Council has expressed a clear ambition to become a carbon neutral Council and to deliver a green and Just Transition for the region, underpinned by Community Wealth Building principles. A strategic principle within the Councils approach is recognising the need to assess both the potential costs and the skills requirements necessary to meet net zero targets. This reflects an awareness of the critical importance of workforce development in enabling the climate transition.

North Ayrshire Council acknowledges the significant potential in upskilling existing services and in promoting employment within renewable energy and low-carbon technology sectors. A key initiative supporting these aims is the Councils Net Zero Accelerator Programme, delivered by its Business Development team. This programme has already supported over £1.14 million of investment across 65 businesses, including a dedicated North Ayrshire cohort of 17 businesses participating in the initiative.



## 4.6 Active travel

Active travel was identified as a cross-cutting priority that aligns both with climate change mitigation and CWB. As a low-carbon mode of transport, active travel directly supports climate action by reducing reliance on fossil fuel-based transport, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, and contributing to improved air quality and public health.

At the same time, active travel contributes meaningfully to inclusive local economic development. It offers a low-cost, accessible transport option, particularly important for individuals and communities on low incomes, enabling access to employment, education, training, and social opportunities. This economic accessibility supports the core goals of CWB by improving individual economic participation and reducing place-based inequality.

Additionally, the development of active travel infrastructure such as walking and cycling routes can stimulate local economies by increasing footfall to town centres, supporting small businesses, while also creating jobs in planning, construction, and maintenance.

### Orkney Islands Council

Orkney's Community Wealth Building Action Plan identifies active travel as an affordable and accessible option for individuals on low incomes. It enables access to employment, education, training, social activities, and leisure. To support this, the plan emphasises the need for community access to land for walking and cycling, backed by the Orkney Sustainable Travel Group and the Orkney Local Transport Strategy. A key action is for the Travel Group to develop a vision for promoting active and sustainable travel. This vision aims to reduce inequalities, improve physical and mental health, lower emissions, and contribute to a wellbeing economy.

In alignment with this, the Orkney Sustainable Energy Strategy includes "smart, low carbon transport and heat" as a strategic action theme. It promotes the use of low carbon transport options and smart transport solutions to reduce emissions and improve air quality. These efforts are supported by public transport improvements, with public bus usage in Orkney increasing significantly since 2010.



## 4.7 Green spaces and food growing

The ‘Land and Assets’ pillar of CWB encourages public bodies to leverage publicly owned land and property to deliver greater public value. This creates significant opportunities for alignment with climate action, particularly through the development of renewable energy projects, green infrastructure, but also community owned/managed green spaces and food growing initiatives.

In the analysis, alignment around energy infrastructure (such as community energy schemes) was more prevalent in CWB strategic documents. In contrast, themes related to food growing, land stewardship, and nature-based solutions were more explicitly articulated within climate-focused strategies. This highlights a clear opportunity to broaden and scale the range of green projects delivered under the land and assets pillar of CWB, enabling a more comprehensive integration of environmental and community priorities while strengthening alignment with the Community Empowerment Act, particularly in relation to allotments and community food growing.

### East Lothian Council

East Lothian Council is working to enhance nature and the built environment through partnerships that ensure communities benefit from the energy transition. A key focus is on Green and Blue Networks — natural and designed spaces like grasslands, woodlands, and water features. These areas are connected to absorb emissions, manage water, and support biodiversity. They also offer health and wellbeing benefits, including informal play areas for children and valued outdoor spaces for communities and visitors.

To support climate resilience, the Council is expanding nature networks across the local authority area. These connect important habitats and will be improved for quality and connectivity. Key actions include protecting sand dunes, enhancing watercourses to reduce flood risks, and planting trees for shade during heatwaves. Wherever possible, the Council will use nature-based solutions and green infrastructure.

This work is being embedded into planning policy. Nature Networks will be identified in Local Development Plan 2 and linked with the upcoming Open Space Strategy. A new Local Biodiversity Action Plan will also align with the Climate change Strategy to strengthen green and blue networks. The Council is also promoting community involvement. Planning guidance will support nature-based solutions and community food growing to increase climate resilience.



## 4.8 Energy security

Energy security - ensuring a stable, affordable, and resilient energy supply - emerged as a key cross-cutting theme that links climate action and CWB.

As regions transition toward low-carbon economies, the need to reduce reliance on imported fossil fuels becomes both an environmental and economic imperative. This is particularly evident in areas like Orkney, where the economy remains dependent on imported fuels for sectors such as agriculture and marine transportation. In such contexts, securing local, renewable energy sources is critical to maintaining economic stability while progressing toward net zero.

CWB strategies offer a compelling framework to address this challenge through municipal or community ownership of renewable energy infrastructure. By repurposing publicly owned land for green energy generation, local authorities can reduce carbon emissions while capturing and reinvesting financial returns within the local economy.

### Orkney Islands Council

Orkneys energy strategy places energy security at its core. The main aim is to use energy efficiently and ensure a secure, affordable supply for the future. A key goal is achieving energy security while transitioning to a low-carbon system. Orkney has already shown strong progress, generating 120.5% of its electricity needs from renewables in 2016. This highlights its existing energy resilience.

Community ownership is central to Orkneys approach. Eight communities run their own large-scale wind turbines. Orkney Islands Council plans to own the Orkney Community Windfarm, using profits for local services and net zero goals. On the ferry-linked isles, communities often control energy assets to support local services.



## 4.9 Governance and participation

A key area of intersection between CWB and climate action lies in the development of intentional governance arrangements that facilitate cross-service collaboration.

Effective responses to both the climate and economic challenges of our time require integrated, whole-system approaches. In this context, formal governance structures that embed CWB principles within climate planning such as cross-departmental workstreams or inter-agency charters, serve as crucial mechanisms for aligning policy, investment, and delivery.

For example, both East Lothian and the Ayrshire CWB Charter include a dedicated sixth pillar on climate action. With signatories including local authorities, NHS, other relevant public bodies and third sector partners, these Charters reflect a shared commitment to collective action across both economic and environmental agendas.

Closely related is the ambition to engage and empower communities in shaping climate responses. Community participation in the creation of climate responses, reflects a democratic approach to climate governance that aligns directly with CWB's commitment to local empowerment and provides communities with a greater stake in their local place.

### North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshires 2024–2027 Community Wealth Building Strategy is designed to align with key Council strategies, including the Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy. The Council Plan 2023–2028 identifies “Climate change – achieving net-zero by 2030” and “A Sustainable Council – a Community Wealth Building Council” as top priorities. This links climate action and CWB at the highest strategic level.



Governance plays a strong role in this integration. The Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) oversees delivery of the Sustainable North Ayrshire Strategy. It also acts as a sounding board for new carbon-related projects. The CCSG supports the sixth pillar of the CWB Anchor Charter, which focuses on climate action. The Charter, signed by local anchor institutions including NHS Ayrshire & Arran and Ayrshire College, commits to shared climate and CWB goals. These include achieving net-zero, supporting sustainable supply chains, and investing in sustainable communities and biodiversity.

Operationally, The Councils Economic Development team works closely with its Sustainability team to ensure a CWB-led response to the climate crisis. This includes becoming a carbon-neutral Council and plans to use land and property assets to support green energy projects, such as the solar PV farms at Nethermaines and Shewalton, expected to supply two-thirds of the Councils energy needs.



## 5. Interviews

### Enabling collaboration and opportunities – practitioner insights

Building on the thematic crossovers identified above, the practitioner interviews provide insights into how successful collaboration across these agendas can happen in practice.

Interviews from Orkney involved both the CWB and Climate leads, in East Lothian the Climate lead, and in North Ayrshire contributions come from a CWB perspective.

Following review, insights have been organised into three key themes: 1. Working Relationships; 2. Governance Arrangements; 3. Council Culture. The section concludes by detailing opportunities for action highlighted by interviewees.

#### 5.1 Working relationships

In Orkney, there has long been a strong connection between the climate change team and community planning. One officer expressed how developing a climate change strategy in isolation from community planning would make little sense given how closely the two are intertwined. Since CWB is being advanced through community planning, this alignment has emerged naturally - with community planning serving as the “hook.”

In North Ayrshire, the 2020 Recovery and Renewal paper which was developed in response to COVID-19 and the climate emergency sets a clear tone for integrating inclusive economic growth with a green and just transition. While not a formal strategy, the paper has been instrumental in shaping how teams across the council embed these priorities in their work. The Council Plan (2023-2028) positions climate change, wellbeing, and local democracy as central themes, all framed within the vision of a sustainable council and working towards a wellbeing economy. This strategic alignment between CWB and climate action also translates into practice. The council’s sustainability and CWB strategies sit side by side, each with its own action plan. These plans contain overlapping and consistent actions with teams reporting progress accordingly. While formal collaboration exists through these shared reporting mechanisms, much of the practical integration happens across different teams, such as business support and development, which work closely with sustainability colleagues on initiatives like net zero acceleration and community energy.

In East Lothian, the Climate Change Officer described the CWB officer as a central figure who connects various strands of work across the Council and with external partners, including the Climate Hub and third sector organisations. Their collaboration is informal but effective. The CWB officer has supported governance design for climate-related projects, such as the proposed community-owned heat network, and has helped the Climate Change Officer strengthen the climate strategy by reviewing and enhancing links to community wealth building.



## 5.2 Governance arrangements

In Orkney, the CPP Business Manager and Climate change Strategy Officer both collaborated on the development of the CPP Net Zero Vision. This document outlines Community Wealth Building and Just Transition as principles underpinning the net-zero vision for Orkney. Within this is an explicit aim to: ‘Develop a Community Wealth Building strategy as the means to deliver a wellbeing economy and supports the Just Transition principles and this vision for Net Zero’ (p4).

An important governance link is the Energy and Enterprise Task Group, which is responsible for developing Orkney’s energy strategy. This group includes representatives from both the public sector and the local renewable energy sector, ensuring that energy planning is informed by both community needs and technical expertise. The task group is supported by the Sustainable Development Delivery Group, which sits within the Community Planning Partnership. This group provides strategic oversight and ensures that the energy strategy aligns with broader community planning objectives, including sustainability and community wealth building.

In East Lothian, their CWB Anchor Charter includes an additional climate pillar, clearly identifying climate as a core priority of CWB. In practice, however, the anchor group for climate lost momentum and was paused. As a result, the climate actions have been woven through the other functioning groups and while progress is still tracked for the climate actions, this will be reported through the climate change strategy. This rearrangement demonstrates the need for organisational flexibility when collaborating across service areas, in addition to the working proximity between the two agendas.

Another important governance arrangement which supports the alignment of CWB and climate change in practice is the East Lothian Poverty Action plan, which has a climate pillar at its core. This pillar led to the creation of a ‘poverty and climate change group’ which aims to identify opportunities to tackle poverty and climate change simultaneously, using strategic levers and collaborative governance between the council and NHS. Since the climate pillar for the CWB Anchor Partnership was paused, the ‘poverty and climate change group’ continues to progress work tackling the same ‘core issue’, also with a climate lens.

The Climate Change Officer also serves as a link between the poverty and climate change group and the Community Wealth Building work, helping to ensure climate-related insights are shared across both agendas. This triangulation between poverty, climate change, and community wealth building, is seen as a valuable governance arrangement that supports integrated working and strategic alignment.

In North Ayrshire, the Community Wealth Building strategy and action plan sit alongside the sustainability strategy, with overlapping and consistent actions across the two. This is a formal arrangement, with officers working and reporting on those actions in their teams. Beyond reporting, collaboration is mostly informal and project-based, depending on the activities. North Ayrshire’s whole-council approach to delivering CWB means some



activities are not fully visible to the CWB team, but it encourages organic integration of CWB principles into different services.

## 5.3 Council culture

Orkney also has a well-established history of investment in renewable energy, which is, for them, where climate action and CWB most clearly intersect. Whether due to its island geography or the local culture, there has been a consistent emphasis on ensuring that development remains as local as possible. Even when large multinationals are involved, there is a strong focus on securing tangible community benefits from those developments. Across the council, there is a deeply rooted ethos of working for the public good. This values-driven approach has helped CWB gain strong traction across multiple service areas, reinforcing its relevance and appeal within Orkney's local governance.

In North Ayrshire, key enablers include strategic leadership, dedicated funding and capacity (for example, through Net Zero Nation), and a receptive organisational culture. Council officers are encouraged to adopt creative and innovative approaches, with a strong willingness across teams to engage with both the CWB and climate action agendas. The 2020 Recovery and Renewal document also acted as an important catalyst, shaping how teams conceptualise and communicate the links between the climate and the economy. There is now a well-established understanding of CWB principles across council services, enabling staff to apply them within their own areas of work, even where projects are not explicitly framed as CWB initiatives. Underpinning this is a shared narrative across the organisation that asks a central question: how do we want our economy to operate?

In East Lothian, the council's prioritisation of poverty and tackling poverty was seen as particularly conducive to aligning CWB and Climate. The enthusiasm around tackling poverty has brought these two areas together as described in the governance section above: "we're quite good at prioritising the people who need it most" (East Lothian Interviewee).

## 5.4 Opportunities

Notably, when talking about future development all practitioners identified renewable energy as a key opportunity for CWB and climate action. All three local authorities had specific renewable energy projects developing that were seen as key to the connection between CWB and climate action. Ownership of renewable energy infrastructure was identified in all three interviews as key to unlocking wealth for communities.

### East Lothian Council

In East Lothian, emerging work on a community-owned heat network was highlighted as a key opportunity. East Lothian Community Benefits - a pool of community benefits - funded a feasibility study for a community-owned heat network in East Lothian. This initiative has been driven from the bottom-up by a community coalition with the shared purpose of



designing a heat solution that works for East Lothian's people and business. While this work is in the early stage and, at the time of the interview it was not clear what role the local authority would play in its development, it was identified as a key opportunity for future alignment between the CWB and climate action agendas.

### Orkney Islands Council

Renewable energy has been a cornerstone of Orkney's development for over two decades, with innovation in this sector gaining national recognition. Interviewees highlighted the Community Windfarm which is key to both climate and CWB work. This wind farm will be council owned, all profit would stay in the islands, enabling OIC to preserve and enhance key services that local people value and depend upon. In addition, the projects would bring in £432,000 per year for a 'location-specific Community Benefit Fund' for communities to drive transformational projects of their own. Community ownership of renewable assets is viewed as a way to link the net zero agenda with economic benefits for local communities. Profits from wind farms feed back into local representative bodies, creating wealth locally.

*"If we could get this off the ground, that would build community wealth like nothing else"*

**East Lothian Council interviewee**

*"there is a lot going on, but also there's a lot of potential, a lot of lot of potential there" (Orkney Interviewee)*

### North Ayrshire Council

In North Ayrshire, a nationally acclaimed part of their Community Wealth Building approach has been the development of their council owned solar farm on former landfill sites which reinvest their surplus into the communities to alleviate impacts of fuel poverty. North Ayrshire are now developing a renewable energy strategy with a strong emphasis on community energy ownership. This presents a significant opportunity for CWB to influence how ownership of local resources evolves. The council is actively exploring ways to support diverse models of ownership, while acknowledging that not all community groups will have the capacity to directly manage energy assets.

*"I see that as real, honest, true community wealth building, in terms of just who owns that bit of natural capital essentially, your wind and your solar."*

**North Ayrshire Council interviewee**



## 6. Conclusion

Both climate action and CWB require a whole-council approach: no single service area or team can deliver them in isolation. This research underlines this fact while highlighting a range of common themes and cross-cutting responsibilities to support the alignment of these agendas within local authorities.

By identifying areas of overlap, this review aimed to support more streamlined and coordinated implementation across Council services. If cross-service groups are being established separately for CWB and climate action, the shared themes identified here may serve as a useful framework for fostering collaboration between these groups.

Additionally, our practitioner interviews revealed some important enablers for joined-up delivery. These insights should be of particular interest to local authorities looking to implement cross-cutting policies that can create multiple benefits across and beyond climate change and CWB agendas.

**With thanks to the practitioners interviewed for this report for their time and expertise.**



Find out more about how the Improvement Service is supporting local authorities build capacity to [reduce area-wide emissions](#).

Find out more about how the Improvement Service is supporting local authorities [implement Community Wealth Building](#).

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