Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

Ready for RESP

Local Decarbonisation Planning Approaches

Enabling Network Investment

Publication 2 from the Ready for RESP series

Greater South East Net Zero Hub

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The Ready for RESP Programme

Ready for RESP

This document has been produced as part of the Ready for RESP programme: Funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) led by the North West Net Zero Hub on behalf of all Local Net Zero Hubs across England and authored by the Energy Systems Catapult.

The programme supports English regions at all stages of energy planning, helping regional partners and local authorities to understand the Regional Energy Strategic Plan (RESP) process, how it can unlock future energy investment and decarbonisation opportunities, and the practical steps needed to maximise its value.

This guide provides detail on different approaches and methods that are available for local decarbonisation planning to help local authorities understand and prioritise what they can do and how this might help them to prepare to engage with RESP.

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About the Net Zero Hubs

There are five Net Zero Hubs in England, which provide free strategic and technical support to local authorities and public sector bodies to develop and deliver decarbonisation projects.

Funded by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), the Hubs help turn local Net Zero ambitions into investable projects by offering expertise in project development, funding, and stakeholder engagement.

About Energy Systems Catapult

Energy Systems Catapult (the Catapult) is an independent, non-for-profit innovation centre established by Innovate UK to accelerate Net Zero energy innovation. The Catapult provides expert support to innovators, local authorities, and policymakers to design, test and scale low-carbon solutions across the UK energy system.

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Why now is the time to act

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Regional Energy Strategic Plans are a new approach being delivered by National Energy System Operator (NESO) aiming to take local bottom-up data, and aligning with national top-down modelling, to ensure strategic investment across energy infrastructure can deliver clean power 2030 and net zero 2050.

To do this effectively, they need **local decarbonisation plan data** from local areas, to know where to invest in the network ahead of when you need it.

Additionally, with **local government reform**, more strategic authorities forming, and the need to produce **Local Plans**, having a local decarbonisation plan in place can help underpin the housing, transport and infrastructure spatial strategies to ensure energy networks are not a barrier to realising these ambitions.

Great British Energy has also been established to fund local and community energy projects, and therefore, having a local decarbonisation plan can help identify opportunities with local authorities taking a leading role.

RESPs – why do we need them?

1. **Local voices & needs** - ensure that local voices & needs are at the heart of the way we plan the energy system
2. **To drive investment** - ensure local areas get the energy infrastructure they need to realise local goals
3. **Ensure efficient network investment** - that keeps bills low by looking at the whole energy system

Great British ENERGY

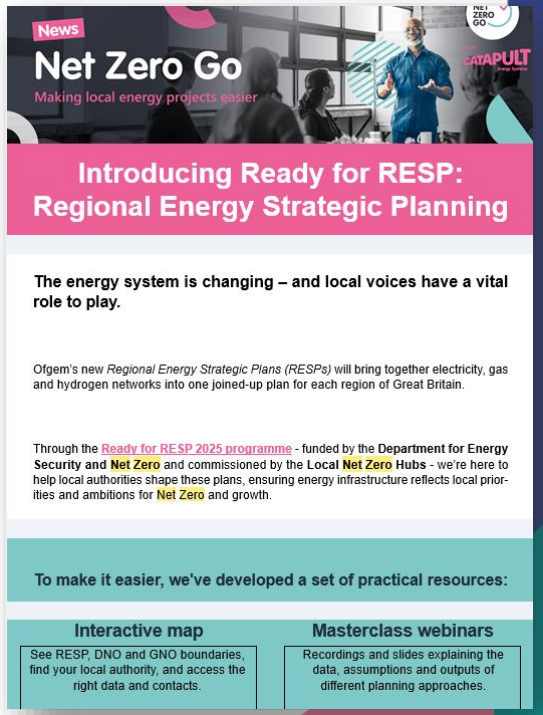
"The creation of Regional Energy Strategic Plans mean local needs and priorities will directly influence how energy networks are developed, resulting in a more democratic, low carbon, energy system."

ofgem

Contents

Ready for RESP

This guide provides clarity on what we mean by local decarbonisation planning and how it can be used to support local authorities, helping to get them in a strong position to engage with the RESP, and ultimately leading to delivering the projects they need in their area.



NET ZERO GO

An **e-learning** version of this content with additionall detail and supporting resources will be available to local authority officers on Net Zero Go. You can register for the platform and will be able to access the programme here: https://netzerogo.org.uk/collection/ready-for-resp-2025-regional-energy-strategic-plans/

Local decarbonisation planning: One page summary

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What is it:

Local decarbonisation planning maps how an area can cut energy emissions to reach net zero, coordinating cost-effective actions across heating, power, and transport. **It's voluntary, so approaches differ by authority.**

Why it is important now:

New policies like Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs) aim to align local needs with energy network investment, reducing delays and ensuring capacity ahead of demand. Local authorities play a key role by sharing data efficiently with minimal resource impact.

What are local authorities doing now:

The following demonstrate two use cases for how local authorities are undertaking local decarbonisation planning and what approaches are most relevant:

Whole system local energy planning

Purpose:

- Map a cost-effective path to net zero for the whole area, across electricity, heat, and transport
- Shape strategies that link to local growth and spatial plans
- Highlight investment opportunities and attract partners

How it's done:

- **Energy System Baseline:** Data on the current energy system to inform planning
- **Local Area Plans** Detailed, council-led plans showing priority projects and investment needs Eg. Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs)

Sector and geographic specific planning

Purpose:

- Secure funding for targeted projects (e.g., EV charging, home retrofit)
- Build a pipeline for specific technologies (e.g., rooftop solar, storage)
- Support strategies focused on a single resource or technology

How it's done:

- Use data platforms to pinpoint project sites for feasibility checks
- Focus on one energy type (electricity or heat), not the whole system
- Provides current data only (no future scenarios)
- Area size varies

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1:What is local decarbonisation planning and what are the benefits

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What is local decarbonisation planning and why does it matter?

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Local councils are key players in helping the UK reach its net zero goals.

But what does "local decarbonisation planning" actually mean?

It's about creating a plan for how your area can cut carbon emissions from energy use, across heating, electricity, and transport in line with national targets. The aim is to find the most cost-effective local actions that make a real impact.

You might hear other terms like:

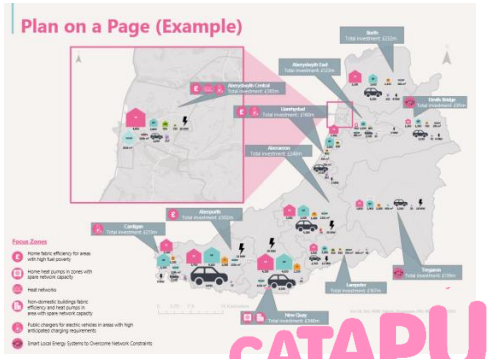
- Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP)
- Energy master planning
- Strategic energy planning

These all focus on understanding how energy is used and produced locally and building a clear roadmap to net zero, shaped by councils, energy networks, businesses, and residents.

This guide walks you through the different approaches in use and how you can apply them.

Some of the tool providers include:

- Energy Systems Catapult
- AI – Advanced Infrastructure
- City Science - Cadence



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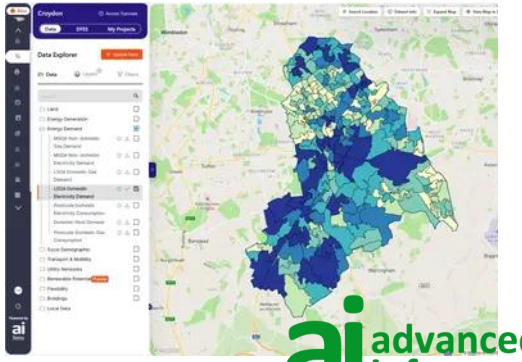

ai advanced infrastructure

cadence

Why it matters:

- Enables LAs to better understand their areas characteristics and needs and identify priorities
- Outputs can be used for funding proposals, developing project pipelines, enabling project development with partners
- Data is used in regional planning through RESP and DNO network investment to help give long term certainty of economic development zones and industrial clusters.

How does local decarbonisation planning support wider policy

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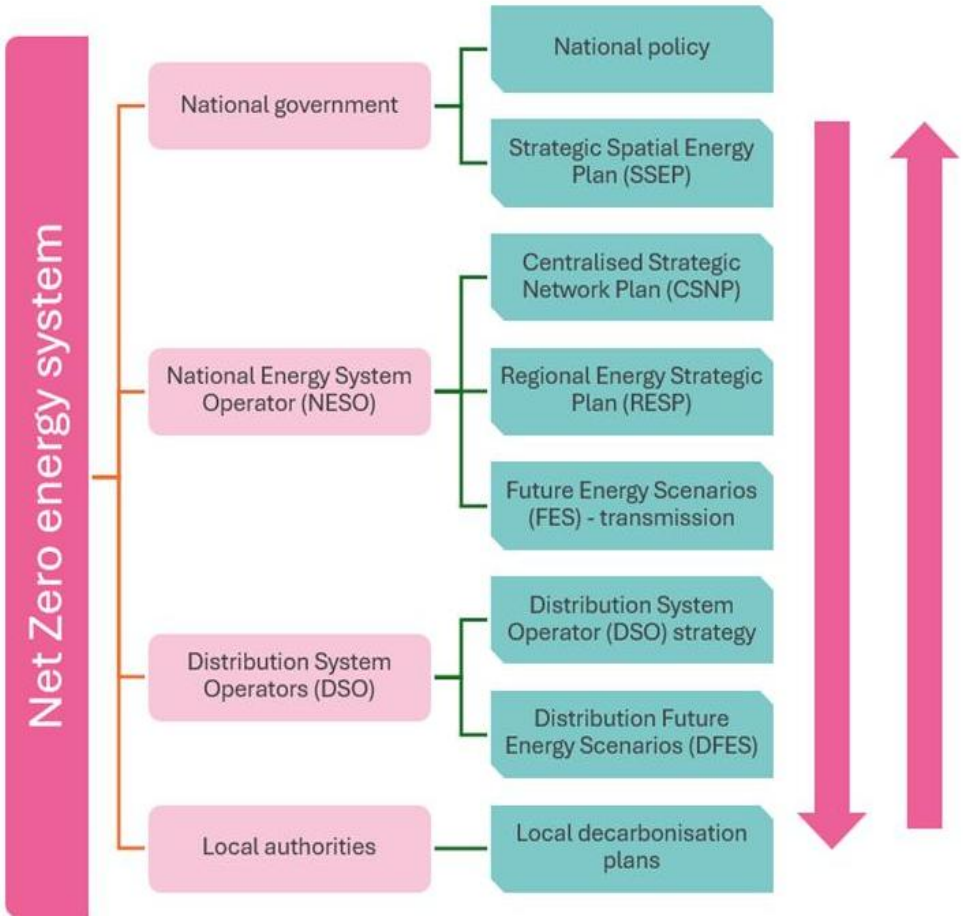
Local decarbonisation plans help councils define their role in achieving net zero and attract investment from government, private developers, and network operators.

They also support national policy by guiding investment to the right places at the right time.

The purpose of the **Regional Energy Strategic Plans** (RESPs) is to inform electricity and gas distribution network planning and proactive investment - it is essential that local data feeds into this to ensure local priorities and projects have the grid capacity needed for their implementation.

Without this data, local priorities may be overlooked, leading to delays in meeting net zero goals.



1.**Government** sets targets and delivery programmes (e.g., Clean Power 2030).

2.**NESO** creates national strategic plans (CSNP, SSEP) and regional blueprints (RESPs) to translate targets into regional infrastructure needs. These inform strategic investment and sequencing of network upgrades via Ofgem and ED3)

3.**Ofgem** (via ED3 and RESP policy decisions) provides regulatory frameworks and funding to networks so they can invest at the scale required. ED3 timeframe is 2028–2033.

4.**DNOs** use DFES to plan and deliver local network upgrades, flexibility markets and connections.

5.**Strategic authorities & local authorities** embed net zero priorities into Local Plans, LAEPs and spatial strategies so planning, consenting and local policy are consistent with regional and national plans.

Approaches to local decarbonisation planning

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Choosing the Right Approach to Local Energy Planning

There's no one-size-fits-all way to plan for local decarbonisation. Some methods are more detailed and require more time and resources, but they also give stronger, more reliable results.

Who's Involved?

- **Local authorities** can choose from different planning services offered by various providers.
- **Other organisations** also create their own energy plans and need input from councils:
  - District Network Operators (DNOs) develop *Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES)*
  - National Energy System Operator (NESO) leads *Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs)*

What Do Councils Need?

The type of planning output a council needs will depend on:

- How far along they are in their decarbonisation journey
- What resources they have
- Their local priorities

Two common use cases:

Strategic planning

- to guide long-term decisions and investment

Project delivery

- to support specific schemes or funding bids

What are others doing that need LA engagement:

DFES (Distribution Future Energy Scenarios)
DNO-led, electricity focus
Informs network investment
Timescale: 2028–2033 (ED3)
Area: DNO region

RESPs (Regional Energy Strategic Plans)
NESO-led, with local input
Whole system: electricity, heat, transport, hydrogen
Area: 11 UK regions and nations

Key takeaway:
The best approach depends on what your local stakeholders want the plan to achieve.

Key takeaway:
Tailor the planning approach to your council's goals, capacity, and stage of progress.

Key takeaway:
Councils play a key role in shaping wider energy plans, not just their own.

Approaches to local decarbonisation planning

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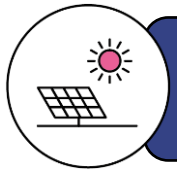
Whole system local energy planning

Purpose:
- Build a long-term, area-wide roadmap to net zero
- Align with broader strategies (e.g. local growth, strategic spatial planning)
- Attract strategic investment and partnerships

Outputs:
- Timeline of priority decarbonisation actions
- Detailed energy modelling and maps
- Socio-economic and policy insights
- Evidence for RESP and DFES planning

Considerations:
- High cost (consultants, modelling)
- Development time (often 6 months - 1 year)
- High confidence in outputs for network planning

Best for:
- Councils leading multi-borough strategies
- Programme-level teams shaping long-term investment



Sector and geographic specific planning

Purpose:
- Secure funding for specific projects (e.g. EV infrastructure, retrofit)
- Develop pipeline for targeted technologies (e.g. solar)
- Support localised strategy areas

Outputs:
- Current system data
- Project opportunities and business cases
- Visual maps of potential sites

Considerations:
- Lower cost (some tools free or subscription-based)
- Fast access (tools available now)
- Limited scope, not suitable for whole-area strategy

Best for:
- Delivery teams focused on specific schemes
- Quick wins and funding bids

A **strategic county scale plan** may be overseen/lead by a strategic/combined authority and delivered with engagement from boroughs, each managing their individual plans.

The **technology specific option** may be more suited to unitary authorities or teams responsible for delivering specific programmes.

When should you do a local decarbonisation plan?

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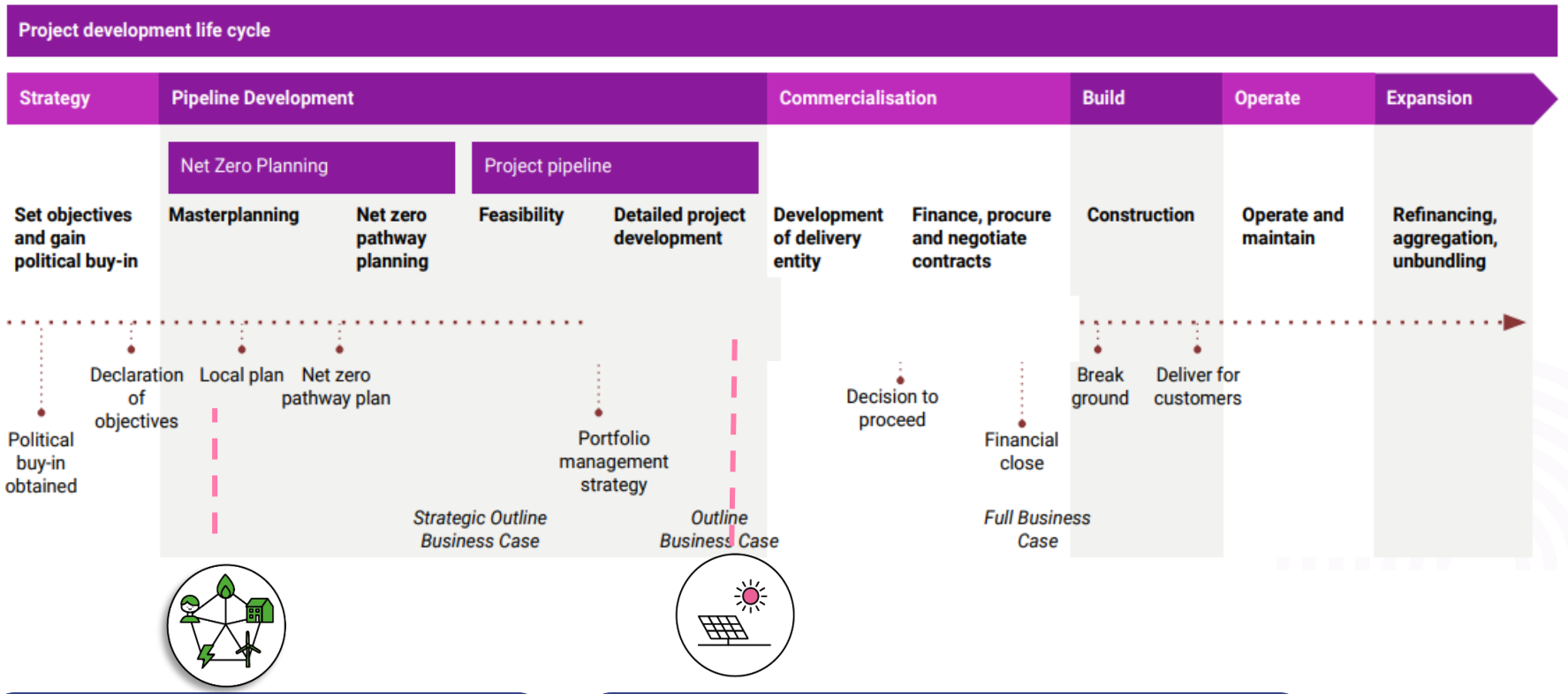
The Plan Is Just the Start

Your needs determine **when** and **how** to plan
Plan set strategy and guide action, based on local data
It helps shape programmes, partnerships, and projects
Planning is part of the wider project lifecycle

The image below shows the typical project development lifecycle, however, could also refer to programmes or portfolios of work and how local decarbonisation planning is part of the process



Whole system local energy planning

Create evidence base to inform priorities and strategy for whole area

Sector and geographic specific planning

Could be done as more detailed follow up in specific technology or if responding to certain fund

Match Your Planning Approach to Your Stage

Your planning method should reflect where you are in the development journey.

Starting out? Use a strategic plan to set direction and shape long-term priorities

Chasing specific funding? Use a technology-focused plan to build quick, targeted projects like EVs or retrofit

Key takeaway: Align your planning approach with your current goals – strategic or delivery-focused

Benefits of local decarbonisation planning to a local authority

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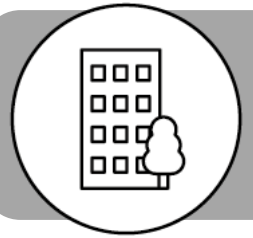
Some of the key challenges we hear from local authorities about delivering decarbonisation projects include:

Grid constraints and costs major barrier to wide range of net zero projects – e.g. EV chargers.



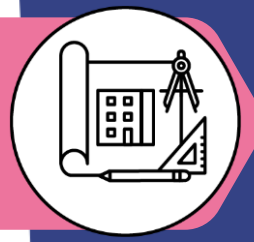
Developers will likely choose sites that are most commercially attractive leaving local authorities to develop the more challenging sites.

Public funding is available over relatively short time periods, and it is challenging to secure and spend this effectively.

There is a need for local data and inputs to identify key areas for grid infrastructure upgrades.

A local decarbonisation plan can help overcome these by:

A local decarbonisation plan will help identify highly constrained areas which can support finding more suitable locations, or making the case for why grid upgrades are needed



A local decarbonisation plan helps councils understand what is needed in their area, enabling them to lead on projects and unlock funding opportunities.

A local decarbonisation plan can provide the area priorities and can be used to develop detailed programmes more effectively as it reduces the time needed for feasibility studies.

The local datasets behind local decarbonisation plans are key inputs RESP and DFES required to ensure these regulatory plans and investment reflect local priorities

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2. What are the different approaches?

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Understanding Local Decarbonisation Planning Options

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This document summarises the main approaches, what they are useful for, how they fit into the wider energy system and what they mean for your role.

The types of locally led decarbonisation planning include:

- Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP)
- Visualisation Tools (e.g. LAEP+, Cadence)
- Heat Network Zoning
- Technology / Resource Feasibility Studies

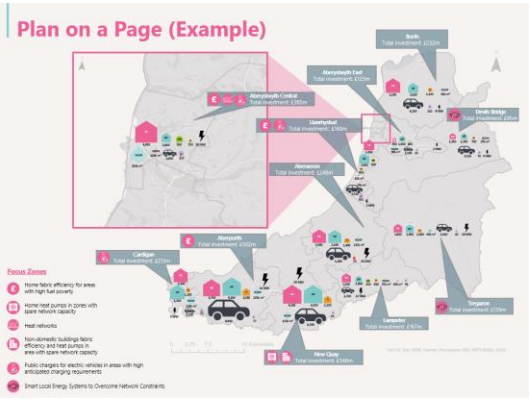
Local authorities are increasingly being asked to shape the transition to Net Zero.
A growing number of planning tools and processes now exist, each offering different types of insight.

Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP)

Purpose: Strategic whole system energy planning for an area, to a recognised methodology tested by many councils in England and Wales.

What it gives you:

- A clear view of *what technologies* are needed, *where* they should go, and *when* they should be deployed to reach net zero.
- A whole-system approach covering heat, power, transport, and energy storage.
- Evidence that can influence DNO and NESO network planning.
- Useful input to local plans, spatial strategies, and climate action plans.



Things to consider:

- LAEPs are detailed and can be costly, but methods are improving and becoming more affordable.
- Most LAEPs are still delivered as static reports, though digital tools are emerging.
- Updating a LAEP can be challenging if the original modelling approach is not easily repeatable.
- LAEPs do not create project business cases–you need follow-on work.

When it's useful for you:

- When you need a strategic direction and a clear, evidence-based roadmap.
- When you need confidence that actions add up to net zero cost-effectively.
- When you want a strong basis for engaging network operators and senior leadership.

Visualisation Tools (e.g. LAEP+, Cadence)

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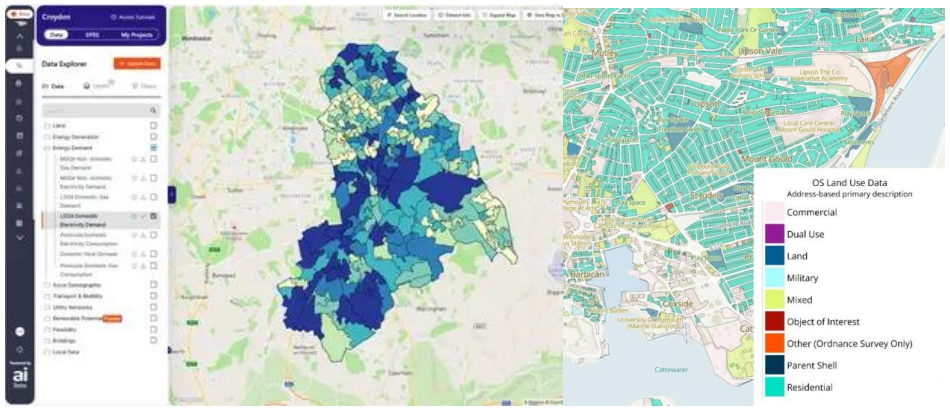
Purpose: Quickly identify local opportunities and develop project pipelines.

What they give you:

- Easy-to-use maps showing energy use, building types, and local constraints.
- Fast identification of promising project locations.
- Support for early business cases and funding bids.
- Often free or low-cost for local authorities.



Things to consider:

- They do *not* produce an overarching strategy.
- They rarely provide net zero pathways for a local authority area.
- They do not give whole-system analysis (heat, transport, power together).
- Socio-economic impacts are usually limited.

When it's useful for you:

- When you need to prepare funding applications quickly.
- When you want a "first cut" list of project ideas.
- When you need accessible visuals to support engagement.

Heat Network Zoning

Purpose:

Use planning powers to encourage heat networks in appropriate areas.

What it gives you:

- A statutory framework (coming soon) to identify and prioritise zones for heat networks.
- A strong basis for coordination with developers and heat network providers.

Things to consider:

- Updates to policy coming early 2026
- Modelling data available to local authorities through this form

When it's useful for you:

- When planning for dense urban areas where heat networks are viable.
- When aligning local planning policy with low-carbon heat requirements

Technology/Resource Feasibility Studies

Purpose:

Assess the potential for a specific technology (e.g., solar, heat pumps, retrofit).

What they give you:

- Site-specific evidence for funding bids or business cases.
- Direct routes to delivery.

Things to consider:

- Do not provide a whole-system view.
- Usually driven by available funding rather than strategic priorities.

When it's useful for you:

- To understand opportunities for technology.
- To develop a more detailed pipeline of individual projects.

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Planning at the regional level: Regional Energy System Planning

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Purpose:

Plan how the energy system should evolve at a regional level.

Led by NESO however engagement with LAs vital and resources will be required to lead this from local government.

What it gives you:

- A view of future grid needs and investment at regional scale.
- An opportunity for LAs to influence regional network planning.
- Regional NESO teams who can support engagement.

Process under development however following points are useful to be aware of:

- Outputs unlikely to replace the need for local plans as the granularity of data will not be building/street level.
- **Local authority support will be available** from NESO but not provide funding or create a LAEP.
- Process and details are still being defined with RESP methodology consultation open until Jan 2026, and first full RESP to be published in 2028.
- Will need inputs from multiple teams (energy, housing, planning, transport, economic development, investment, etc) in the LA so using existing working groups or committees, or creating new ones, would be a productive first step.

RESP:

- RESP is a new process being developed therefore exact engagement methods, data requirements and outputs are not yet clear
- LAs will have a role in working groups, strategic boards, and be able to access local actor support which may include access to data that can inform local planning.

For more information on RESP click here

DFES (Distribution Future Energy Scenarios – produced by DNOs)

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Purpose:

Shows how local energy demand and generation may change over time.
Informs DNO investment and business planning.
Led by DNOs, with input from local authorities.

What it gives you:

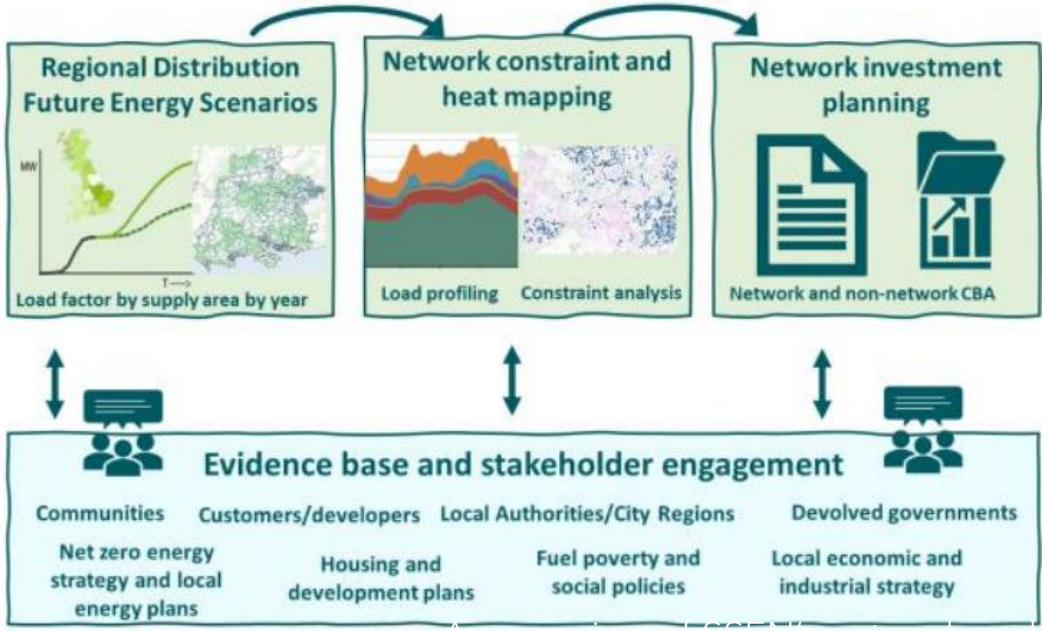
- Insight into future electricity needs
- Influence DNO plans (they actively seek LA input).
- Evidence for EV, heat, and development policies.
- Access to DNO data and tools.

Considerations:

- Not for guiding local delivery projects.
- Data detail varies; may not reach building level.
- Different DNO approaches can make alignment tricky.

DFES Key Points:

- Electricity network focus only
- Each DNO has different processes and areas cover multiple LAs
- LAEP data has been used to inform network planning to ensure local needs are reflected, read more here



A summary of the different planning approaches

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Geographic Scope

- Local Energy Plans, LAEPs and visualisation tools focus on combined, local authority or sub-authority areas.
- RESP is regional.
- DFES covers DNO licence areas (larger than LA boundaries and some LAs will be covered by multiple DNOs).

Data Granularity

- Building-level data (more common in LAEPs/visual tools) helps identify specific project opportunities.
- Aggregated data (RESP, DFES) is better for high-level planning but not project delivery.

Timescale

- Short term (0–5 years): project delivery (EV charge points, heat pumps).
- Medium term (5-15 years): strategic rollout (retrofit, renewables).
- Long term (15+ years): whole-system transformation.

Technical Scope

- LAEP: whole system (heat, transport, power, storage).
- Visual tools: current system only.
- Feasibility studies: typically, one or small number of technologies.
- RESP: whole system (heat, transport, power, storage)
- DFES: electricity system mainly.

Approach

- Datasets: All approaches rely on a mix of national and local data. Quality improves with local authority input.
- Spatial mapping: Makes insights clear and helps stakeholders.
- Scenario modelling: Used in LAEP, DFES and RESP to show "what should be done" not just "what could be done".
- Whole-system modelling: Helps prioritise cost-effective actions to reach Net Zero.

LAEPs cover all three; visual tools mostly support short-term action; RESP and DFES focus on medium–long-term infrastructure needs.

Stakeholder engagement

- Local Energy plans include wider engagement with LA stakeholders, developers, community energy groups, networks and industry
- DFES typically includes engagement with energy users and LAs
- RESP includes significant engagement across broad range of stakeholders
- Visualisation tools create resources to support engagement with wide audience

What "Good" Local Decarbonisation Planning Looks Like

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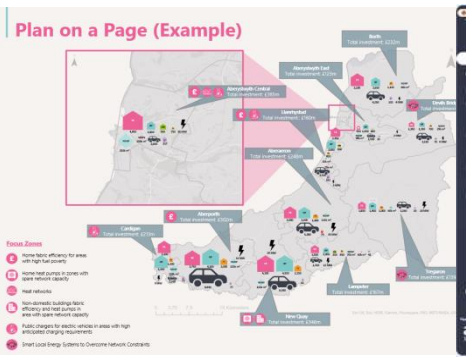
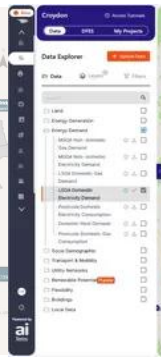
The strongest plans:

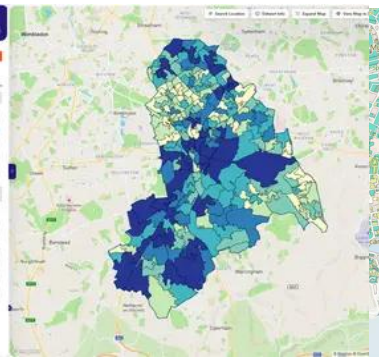
- ✓ Use a wide range of relevant, high-quality data.
- ✓ Apply whole-system modelling to understand the most effective pathway.
- ✓ Present results in accessible visual tools.
- ✓ Share data with network operators to influence their investment.
- ✓ Engage widely to secure buy-in and support delivery.

This helps ensure that local needs shape regional and national decision-making, and that your pipeline of projects is robust and evidence-based.

These approaches can require significant time and resource, but the **outputs are more detailed and can give you greater certainty and potential influence** over infrastructure investment through having better understanding of your areas strategic priorities.







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3. Who should be involved?

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Turning Plans into Action Through Engagement

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Getting the **right people** involved at the **right time** is what makes a local decarbonisation plan work in practice.

Without genuine support from leadership, even strong plans risk being ignored or misunderstood.

Key point: Effective engagement turns plans into action, by building support, sharing data, and embedding net zero across services.

By engaging effectively, councils can:

- Build momentum and keep projects moving
- Unlock resources and partnerships
- Embed net zero goals across all services and teams

Key points:

- Tailor your approach: understand each stakeholder's priorities and show how net zero connects to their work
- Keep relationships going, engagement isn't one-off, it's an ongoing process
- Communicate clearly, use simple language and practical examples to make the case for net zero
- The development of RESP and importance of local data to enable and future proof a wide range of projects demonstrates the need of local decarbonisation plans.

Who to involve:

Stakeholders who can share data and insights to shape the plan, and those who can use the results to guide their own strategies.

Benefits of a local decarbonisation plan to key stakeholders

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Internal Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Benefit	Role / Ask
Senior Leadership	Positions net zero as a strategic priority; attracts funding & jobs	Champion at director level
Climate & Sustainability	Empowers teams to drive change	Lead and shape the plan
Economic Development	Draws investment, creates employment	Input on growth opportunities
Housing	Unlocks retrofit & development funding	Identify and collaborate on housing programmes
Transport Teams	Identifies sites, supports business cases	Share data, align with transport plans
Procurement & Legal	Ensures robust delivery	Advise on procurement, contracts, compliance

External Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Benefit	Role / Ask
Network Operators (DNO/GNO)	Local data for network planning	Share data, plan capacity & investment
RESP / NESO	Informs regional & national strategies	Use local priorities in wider plans
Community Energy Groups	Opportunities for local projects	Explore generation, flexibility, ownership
Developers & Large Energy Users	Certainty on future projects	Align demand with local priorities
Other Public Bodies E.g. Lower tier authorities, NHS trusts & Academic institutions	Validation, buy in, collaboration opportunity	Priorities, relevant data and net zero plans, consultation
Universities and research institutes	Apply research to real world issues	Support with data, modelling and analysis and wider research priorities

Benefits of a Local Decarbonisation Plan

- Builds a **resilient energy system** that supports communities and businesses
- Attracts **investment and jobs** in green industries
- Provides **evidence and data** to unlock funding and strengthen business cases
- Helps plan for **grid upgrades** and infrastructure like EV charging
- Improves **public health** through cleaner air and warmer homes
- Strengthens **community trust** when developed with genuine engagement

Key point:
Engaging key stakeholders in a local decarbonisation plan ensures shared priorities, stronger evidence, and collective delivery, turning net zero ambition into practical outcomes for communities and councils.

Internal Stakeholders

To secure buy in and ensure the maximum benefit from the plans, is essential to identify what matters most to each internal stakeholder, so your approach can be tailored to address those priorities and dovetail with existing LA functions and operations; this slide sets out the key ask for each stakeholder

Ready for RESP

Senior Leadership

Benefit
Demonstrates ambition and promotes area to attract funding, developers and investors, jobs and skills in a way that is aligned to area needs.

Ask or role in plan
Position Net Zero as a strategic priority that can enable other programmes and priorities

Champion the approach and support at director level.

Climate and sustainability teams

Benefit
Empowers the teams to drive real change in their area

Ask or role in plan
Involve this team in leading and shaping the decarbonisation plan

Transport

Benefit
Planning will support identification of suitable sites and help business case development/fund delivery

Ensure decarbonisation plan supports transport plans

Ask or role in plan
Request data and support for the transport side of planning.

Align with existing plans and strategies.

Housing

Benefit
Can unlock funding for retrofit and new developments

Ask or role in plan
Ask for collaboration on retrofit or development programs.

Align with existing plans and strategies.

Economic development and investment

Benefit
Attracts investment for projects and creates employment

Ensure decarbonisation plan supports local development and investment plans.

Ask or role in plan
Provide inputs to identify key local growth opportunities.

Align with existing plans and strategies.

Procurement, Legal

Benefit
Engaged early to support with high quality plan development and post plan delivery.

Ask or role in plan
Advise on procurement approaches, timelines, budgets. Advise on statutory and contractual alignment

External Stakeholders

A local decarbonisation plan is one step to realising the net zero ambitions of an area. For this to become reality, a wide range of stakeholders are required to take the plan and implement. It is therefore valuable to engage with these potential delivery partners during the development of the plan, giving a sense of shared ownership and buy in. Some key stakeholders include:

Community Energy Groups

Benefit
Identify potential opportunities for community energy projects

Ask or role in plan
Explore local generation, flexibility, and ownership models

Developers and large energy users

Benefit
Align requirements with local priorities and identify potential opportunities for net zero projects

Ask or role in plan
Incorporate any plans or energy demand changes within plan

Support with identifying strategic priorities

Distribution Network Operators (DNO) and Gas Network Operator (GNO)

Benefit
Granular local data to inform network planning activities

Ask or role in plan
Data sharing, capacity analysis, investment planning

RESP – NESO Forums, Strategic Boards, Working Groups

Benefit
Granular local data that can be used to inform regional plan

Increased certainty of strategic investment needs being realised

Ask or role in plan
Awareness of local priorities to inform the strategic regional and national plans

Ensure data from plan in format that can be used by RESP

Other Public Bodies E.g. Lower tier authorities, NHS trust

Benefit
Ensure plans and priorities are included as part of wider strategic plan and help to validate these and get wider buy in to support implementation

Ask or role in plan
Sharing of relevant data, priorities and strategic plans to help develop strategic plan

Academic institutions

Benefit
Include net zero plans as part of wider strategic plan

Potential opportunity for collaboration and role in research and innovation in local area

Ask or role in plan
Share relevant plans, prioirities and data.

Potential to validate results and consult as part of plan development process

Ready for RESP

Tips for Stakeholder Engagement

Ready for RESP

From our experience delivering local decarbonisation plans across the UK, effective stakeholder engagement is critical to building momentum and ensuring successful implementation. The following framework establishes clear governance, technical rigour, and broad ownership throughout the planning process.

Strategic Steering Group

Purpose: Provides strategic direction, agrees priorities, and signs off key LAEP stages.
Membership: Senior representatives from the council, DNO, GNO, NESO RESP, and Combined Authority (where present).
Frequency: Quarterly meetings

Technical Working Group

Purpose: Oversees modelling, evidence gathering, and scenario testing to ensure robust technical foundations.
Membership: Officers and technical experts including energy officers, data analysts, and planning specialists.
Frequency: Monthly or as needed

Stakeholder & Community Forum

Purpose: Reviews progress, tests assumptions, and identifies local opportunities through broader input.

Membership: Developers, local businesses, community energy groups, universities, and other key local partners.

Frequency: 2–3 meetings during plan development (kick-off, scenario development, draft review)

Elected Member Engagement

Purpose: Ensures political ownership, accountability, and alignment with council priorities.

Format: Regular briefings for cabinet members and relevant committees (e.g., climate, planning, scrutiny).

Frequency: At key milestones throughout the process

The climate or energy lead is typically responsible for convening and managing these groups, with support from your LAEP or plan provider. This multi-layered approach ensures technical excellence, strategic alignment, and broad stakeholder buy-in

RESP Strategic Boards

Ready for RESP

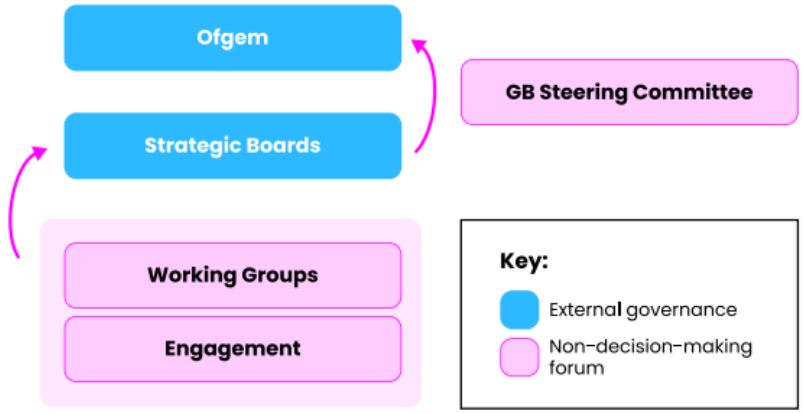
Regional Strategic Boards are new regional groups set up by the National Energy System Operator (NESO) to guide and oversee regional energy strategic plans and regional decision making.

They bring together key players from:

- Local and devolved governments
- Electricity, gas, and hydrogen network operators
- Infrastructure bodies
- Public and private sector stakeholders

Their job is to align national energy plans with local priorities by:

- Ensuring plans reflect regional needs, growth, and net zero goals
- Coordinating across electricity, gas, heat, and energy flexibility
- Focusing on major regional infrastructure investments
- Supporting joined-up delivery between NESO, networks, and local authorities
- Promoting transparency and accountability in energy decisions



Proposed RESP Governance process (NESO RESP forum slides)

Practical Next Steps for LA officers

- Engage early with **NESO's regional planning leads** and your **Distribution Network Operator**.
- Monitor NESO and Ofgem updates on RESP development.
- Prepare a **local evidence pack** summarising energy demand, generation potential, and planning priorities.
- Collaborate with neighbouring councils or combined authorities to present shared regional positions.
- Identify internal contacts (planning, climate, infrastructure) to coordinate engagement.

Key point:
The establishment of Regional Strategic Boards marks a major shift toward **integrated, place-based energy planning**.
Active participation by local authorities will be essential to ensure future network investment and energy infrastructure reflect **local needs and opportunities.**
More will be available on this topic early 2026.

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4. Tips to help you prioritise what approach may be best for your requirement

Programme delivered by CATAPULT Energy Systems

What approach is best for us?

Ready for RESP

When deciding what local decarbonisation planning approach may be right for you, as well as the overall purpose and technical considerations that have been explained in the previous sections, there are wider considerations that may also be important, including but not limited to:

Main outputs we want from the plan…

- Provide a strategic county-scale plan
- Understand current energy system baseline of area
- Provide a pipeline of projects
- Provide more detailed project specific plans
- …

Technical considerations…

- Include LA/strategic authority/ regional area
- Have high granularity of data - building level
- Include 2050 scenarios
- Include whole energy system modelling
- Provide datasets and visualisation of scenarios for stakeholder engagement
- …

Key point:
Resources from the NEEDs programme (more details coming soon) have been developed to help detail procurement specifications of required data and services to support local decarbonisation planning. These will be available on Net Zero Go.

Other considerations…

- Cost
- Format to use in house and update
- Time to deliver
- Provide quality, robust inputs to RESP DFES to influence network investment
- Identify best pathway to realise net zero
- Provide engagement tool to use with a wide range of stakeholders: developers, investors, community groups
- Support economic growth by providing information on jobs, skills, growth

….

How different approaches meet the requirements

Ready for RESP

As a local authority I want a local net zero plan to..		How well is the need met by the solution:	
		Local Energy Plan	Technology opportunities (ie solar) using current system visualisation tool (e.g. LAEP+, or LAEP stages 1-3)
Overall purpose	Provide a strategic county-scale plan	High	Low
	Provide a pipeline of projects	Medium	Medium
	Provide project specific plans	Low	Medium
Technical considerations	Include LA/strategic authority/ regional area	High	Low
	Have high granularity of data - building level	High	High
	Include 2050 scenarios	High	None
	Include whole energy system	High	Medium
	Provide datasets for internal use and visualisation of scenarios for stakeholder engagement	High	High
Other considerations	Cost	High	Low
	Format to use in house and update	Medium	High
	Time to deliver	Long	Quick
	Easily provide quality, robust inputs to RESP for network investment	High	Medium
	Identify best pathway to realise net zero	High	Low
	Provide engagement tool to use with wide range of stakeholders: developers, investors, community groups	Medium	Medium
	Support economic growth by providing information on jobs, skills, growth	Medium	Low

This comparison table here shows how different local decarbonisation plan approaches compare against the overall purpose, and considerations you may have.

Key point:
This is just to illustrate the differences in approach and potential requirements.
To do this in more detail the requirements should be prioritised/weighted to identify best option to take.

This table is just for illustrative purposes

Resourcing requirements and capacity building

Ready for RESP

There is a growing desire for local authorities to own and manage their own local decarbonisation plan and regularly update without the need for regular consultancy support.

In the current market there are many options for purchasing/licensing data, some of which will be formatted in the right way to visualise through certain platforms that a local authority could manage themselves.

This approach can be helpful when identifying individual specific project locations and strengthening the business cases and providing evidence for the need of network upgrades.

However, a scenario-based model to provide a long-term strategic view on what is needed across an area will need to be delivered be specialised consultancy as these include complex modelling tools, requiring specialised skills to run and analyse the data (at present).

The table provides an overview of the different skills and resourcing requirements that a likely to be needed to deliver a local decarbonisation plan effectively. **A further guide which will have more details and examples on this will be published early 2026.**

Approach	Important factors for a local authority			
	Time	Cost	Resources required	Skills required
Visualisation of current energy system – LAEP+, Cadence	1 month	Low (platform available for free to some LAs through DNO however data may need to be purchased)	• Energy/climate officer • Project manager • Data/GIS analyst	• Energy sector experience • GIS skills and data analysis • Business case development • Stakeholder engagement • Financial/techno-economic modelling
Strategic Plan - Scenario modelling - LAEP	12 months	High (consultant needed to run modelling scenarios and lead/support stakeholder engagement)	• Consultant required – inhouse LA skills to understand modelling capabilities and limitations • Project manage delivery • Stakeholder manager • Steering groups	• Energy sector experience • GIS skills and data analysis • Business case development • Stakeholder engagement • Financial/techno-economic modelling

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5. Summary, Key Takeaways and how to find out more

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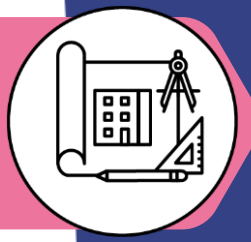
CATAPULT Energy Systems

Summary on Local Decarbonisation Planning

Ready for RESP

- Local decarbonisation planning is **not mandatory**, and different approaches are used depending on the local authority needs.
- Previous plans were static reports, however more digital tools are now available to **improve visualisation, accessibility and internal use**.
- The digital tools currently **provide a view of the current energy system** which is best suited to identifying specific projects, such as responding to a fund for a technology like EV infrastructure.
- However, they do not provide an **area wide strategy** as modelling the energy system under future scenarios to identify the most suitable net zero options is not considered.
- To achieve a spatial area strategy, a Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) is most suitable.
- These enable LAs to better understand their areas characteristics and needs and identify priorities.
- Outputs can be used for funding proposals, developing project pipelines, enabling project development with partners.
- The data from a LAEP is used in regional planning through RESP and DNO network investment, ensuring local needs are captured and can influence this. By sharing this information, there is less likelihood of economic development zones, industrial clusters, or other developments being delayed or scrapped due to grid constraints.

A local decarbonisation plan will help identify highly constrained areas which can support finding more suitable locations, or making the case for why grid upgrades are needed



A local decarbonisation plan helps councils understand what is needed in their area, enabling them to lead on projects and unlock funding opportunities.

A local decarbonisation plan can provide the area priorities and can be used to develop detailed programmes more effectively as it reduces the time needed for feasibility studies.

The local datasets behind local decarbonisation plans are key inputs RESP and DFES required to ensure these regulatory plans and investment reflect local priorities

Are you part of a local authority?

Ready for RESP

If you work in a local authority and want to find out more about local decarbonisation planning, or other net zero topics then sign up to our free platform Net Zero Go for further resources and tools.

- An e-learning version of this content with additionall detail and supporting resources will be available to local authority officers on Net Zero Go. You can register for the platform and will be able to access the programme here:

https://netzerogo.org.uk/collection/ready-for-resp-2025-regional-energy-strategic-plans/

Links to key references and further information

Organisation	Reference brief description	Link
Energy Systems Catapult	LAEP guidance, blogs, FAQs and case studies	https://es.catapult.org.uk/tools-and-labs/local-area-energy-plans/
Energy Systems Catapult – Net Zero Go	Collection of resources related to RESP including links to DNO support and map to identify RESP region and DNO/GNO for each LA	https://netzerogo.org.uk/collection/ready-for-resp-2025-regional-energy-strategic-plans/
Net Zero Hubs	Resources and support available through your local hub	https://www.gsenetzerohub.org.uk/resources/net-zero-tools/ https://www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/north-west-net-zero-hub https://www.swnetzerohub.org.uk/ https://www.neynetzerohub.com/ https://www.midlandsnetzerohub.co.uk/
Regen	Support for local authorities and guidance on RESP	https://www.regen.co.uk/local-authorities
Ofgem	RESP policy framework	https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/decision/regional-energy-strategic-plan-policy-framework-decision
NESO – RESP	Details on RESP developments including forums, webinars, consultations and tRESP outputs	https://www.neso.energy/what-we-do/strategic-planning/regional-energy-strategic-planning-resp
ENA – DNO introduction	Introduction to Distribution Network Operators	https://www.energynetworks.org/energy-networks-explained/

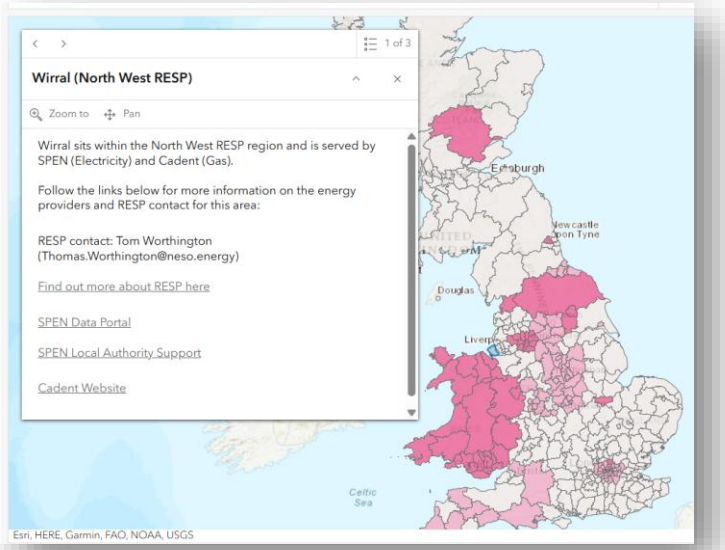
These are key resources available to help you better understand local decarbonisation planning and all these and more can be found through Net Zero Go, available to local authority officers. Register here.

Other materials as part of Ready for RESP

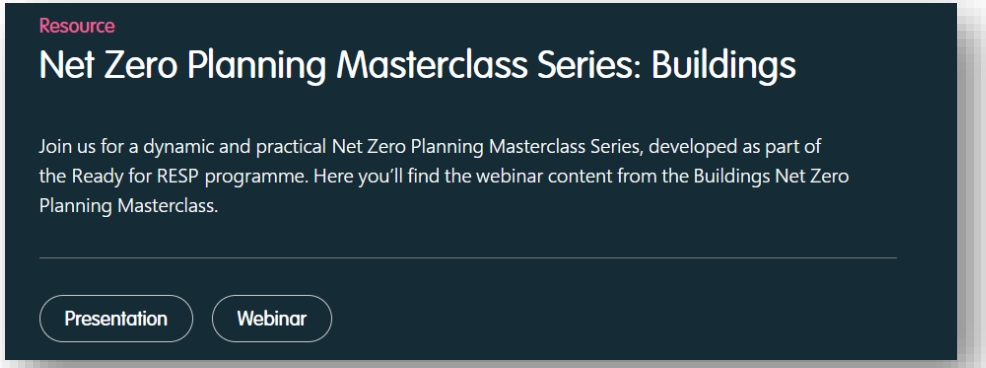
Ready for RESP

Guide 1: Understanding the transitional RESP

Interactive map to identify your RESP region, contacts, DNO and support available



Net Zero Planning webinars: Topic deep dives to better understand the data and modelling approaches used in Local Area Energy Planning



RESP and LAEP FAQs and blogs, more information about the programme, and supporting organisations.

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Ready for RESP

For more from the Ready for RESP programme visit the website by clicking the link or scanning the QR code below

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