

Whanganui District Council

Emissions Reduction Plan 2026-2036

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Version: 1



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Whanganui

DISTRICT COUNCIL

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Strategic Principles	3
Guiding Principles	3
Emissions Profile	4
Project Prioritisation Matrix	5
Splash Centre Optimisation	6
Current heating system	6
Splash Centre Pool Covers	6
Splash Centre Variable Speed Drives (VSDs)	8
Splash Centre Gas Boiler Replacement	9
Wastewater Treatment Plant Primary Pond Improvement	10
Solar	12
Fleet Electrification	14
Recommendations	15
Financial Summary	16
Delivery Plan	16
2026 Quick Wins & Business Cases	16
2027 Renewables & Electrification	17
2028 Major Emissions Reduction Projects	17
2029 Strategic Infrastructure Delivery	17
2030+ Continuous Improvement	17
Monitoring Framework	18
Reporting Cycle	18
Success Measures (2030)	19

Introduction

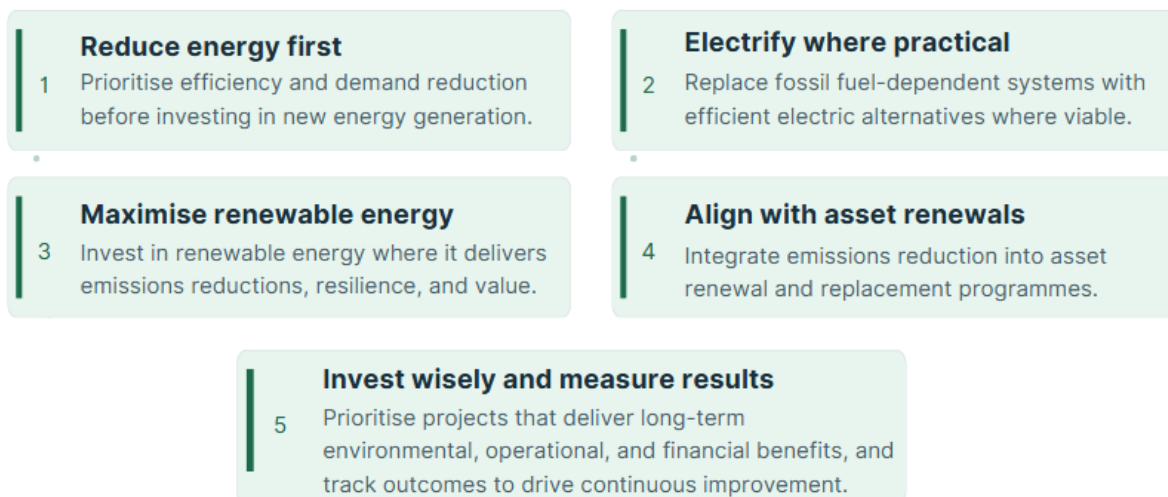
The Whanganui District Council Operational Emissions Reduction Plan 2026–2036 (the Plan) provides a practical roadmap for reducing emissions from Council operations. It identifies priority actions that improve efficiency, lower costs, strengthen resilience, and reduce Council's carbon footprint. The Plan helps guide future investment and asset decisions while supporting Council's commitment to a more sustainable Whanganui.

Strategic Principles

The projects identified in this Plan have been selected using a consistent decision-making



Guiding Principles



Emissions Profile

Our current emissions profile is dominated by wastewater treatment (42%), with the remaining emissions spread across buildings, fleet, and energy use, meaning long-term decarbonisation depends on both major infrastructure upgrades and steady operational improvements.

Whanganui District Council's organisational emissions baseline is 7,684 tonnes of CO₂-equivalent (tCO₂e), based on the FY24 carbon footprint.

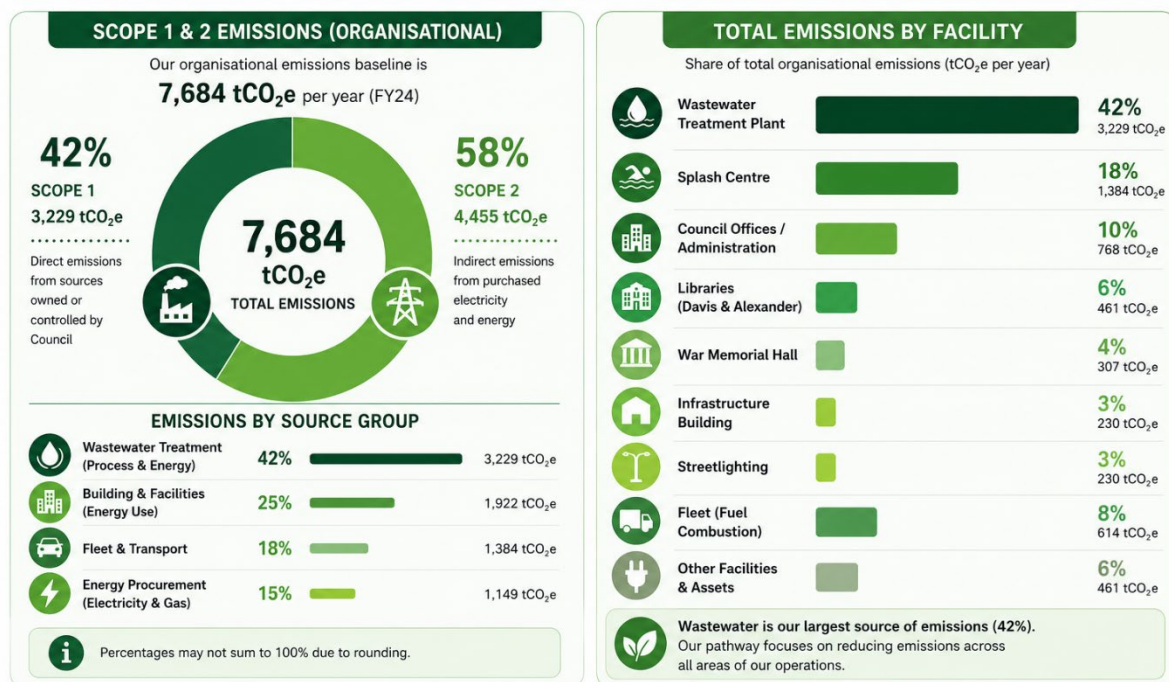
- Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) is the single largest source, accounting for approximately 42% of total organisational emissions.
- Emissions are primarily associated with:
 - Process energy use
 - Biogas handling and efficiency limitations

The remaining 58% of emissions come from other council operations, including:

- Council facilities (buildings, pools, HVAC, electricity and gas use)

WHANGANUI DISTRICT COUNCIL

OUR EMISSIONS PROFILE (FY24)



Target

Deliver a minimum annual reduction of 900 tCO₂e in operational emissions by 2036 through cost-effective energy efficiency, renewable energy, fleet, and infrastructure improvements identified in this Plan.

Plan Overview

Total 10-year investment \$2.2mil	Expected emission reduction 9,130 tCO ₂ e
Expected savings (OPEX) \$3.74mil	Net Benefit \$1.52M

Pathway

The pathway prioritises projects that have been identified through the 2025 Decarbonisation Roadmap and supported by subsequent feasibility studies, focusing on initiatives that deliver measurable carbon reductions, operational savings and long-term value.

Rather than setting aspirational targets, the pathway outlines a staged programme of achievable projects that can be implemented through Council's existing asset management, business planning and capital investment processes, ensuring emissions reduction is integrated into the way Council plans, invests and operates.

Project Prioritisation Matrix

Project	Carbon	Savings	Payback	Complexity	Priority
Pool Covers	Medium	Very High	3 yrs	Low	★★★★★
VSD	Low	High	3 yrs	Low	★★★★★
Solar Splash Centre	Low-Medium	High	4-5 yrs	Low	★★★★★
Solar Council Offices	Medium	High	5 yrs	Medium	★★★★★
Splash Heat Pump	Very High	High	6-8 yrs	High	★★★★★
WWTP Biogas	Very High	Medium	Long	Very High	★★★
Fleet Right-Sizing & Hybridisation	Medium	High	Renewal driven	Low	★★★★★



Splash Centre Optimisation

Energy Source	Annual consumption
Electricity	2.0–2.1 GWh/year
Natural Gas	1.3–2.1 GWh/year

The Splash Centre has been identified as:

- The second largest gas user in the Council portfolio (33% of all Council gas use).
- The third largest electricity user (11% of all Council electricity use).
- Emissions- 549 tCO₂e/year

Current heating system

The Splash Centre currently uses a combination of heat pump and gas-fired heating systems to maintain pool water temperatures and provide heating throughout the facility. The primary heating source is an existing heat pump that operates continuously, providing baseload heating for all pools and the HVAC system.

The system supplies low-temperature hot water (LTHW) at approximately 48°C and returns water at around 43°C. The heat pump has a nominal installed heating capacity of 520 kW on the condenser side and 420 kW on the evaporator side.

Alongside this, a 590 kW natural gas hot water boiler provides supplementary or peak heating when additional heating demand is required. The boiler operates on a primary low-pressure hot water (LPHW) heating loop, delivering water at approximately 82°C with a return temperature of 67°C.

Domestic hot water requirements for showers, hand basins, and other amenities are provided separately by two gas-fired instantaneous hot water heaters (califonts), each with a heating capacity of 57.8 kW.

Together, these systems provide the thermal energy required to operate the Splash Centre while ensuring a reliable supply of pool heating, space heating, and domestic hot water throughout the year.

Splash Centre Pool Covers

Project	Capitall Cost	Opex Saving	Carbon Saving Annually	Net Annual Cost Saving	Cost Saving Per Ton Carbon
Splash Centre Pool Covers	\$80,000	\$28,300	48	\$22,335	\$465.31

Purpose

Install thermal pool covers on the main pools at the Splash Centre to reduce heat loss, minimise evaporation, lower heating demand, and improve overall energy efficiency. Further feasibility assessment required prior to implementation.

Why this project?

Pool evaporation is the largest source of energy loss in heated pools. The Decarbonisation Roadmap identified the installation of pool covers across five pools as one of the most cost-effective emissions reduction opportunities available to Council, with a simple payback period of less than three years. Pool covers were previously used at the facility, and advancements in operational systems and procedures create an opportunity to revisit their use.

Benefits

- Reduces heat loss and associated gas and electricity consumption.
- Estimated emissions reduction of approximately 48 tCO₂e per year.
- Reduces humidity levels inside the building, lowering ventilation and dehumidification demand.
- Low capital cost compared with many other decarbonisation projects.
- Short payback period and immediate operational savings.
- Could provide a model for application at other Council-owned pool facilities.

Risks

- Historical operational challenges may reoccur if management procedures are not improved.
- Covers require storage space and ongoing staff involvement.
- Savings depend on consistent use by operational staff.
- Potential maintenance and replacement costs over time.

Next Steps

- Confirm pool suitability across Splash Centre facilities.
- Complete a whole-of-life cost assessment.
- Assess operational and staffing impacts.
- Evaluate health and safety requirements.
- Confirm net emissions and financial benefits.
- Return a refined business case before investment decisions are made.
- Assess storage, handling, and operational requirements to ensure covers can be consistently deployed.
- Obtain supplier quotations and evaluate available cover systems.
- Implement a trial period and establish staff procedures for operation and maintenance.
- Monitor gas and electricity consumption before and after installation to verify actual savings.
- Consider future application at Whanganui East Pool if savings and operational outcomes are positive.

Splash Centre Variable Speed Drives (VSDs)

Project	Capital Cost	Opex Saving	Carbon Saving Annually	Net Annual Cost Saving	Cost Saving Per Ton Carbon
Splash Centre VSD	\$75,000	\$23,300	9	\$17,708	\$1,967.54

Purpose

Install additional Variable Speed Drives (VSDs) on key pool filtration, circulation, and hydroslide motors to reduce electricity consumption by matching motor speed to operational demand rather than operating continuously at full speed.

Why this project?

Many of the existing Splash Centre motors currently operate at fixed speeds while flow is controlled through valves. This is inherently inefficient and wastes electricity. The Decarbonisation Roadmap identified several motors where VSD installation would provide measurable energy savings with low implementation risk. Because motor power consumption decreases exponentially as speed reduces, even modest reductions in operating speed can generate significant electricity savings.

Benefits

- Reduces electricity use and operating costs.
- Extends equipment life by reducing mechanical stress.
- Improves operational control and flexibility.
- Low technical complexity compared with major infrastructure upgrades.
- Estimated annual emissions reduction of approximately 9 tCO₂e.

Risks

- Carbon savings are relatively modest compared with larger projects.
- Actual savings depend on operational settings and staff optimisation.
- Some motors or control systems may require additional upgrades to enable VSD installation.
- Benefits could be reduced if systems continue to operate at unnecessarily high speeds.

Next Steps

- Undertake an electrical assessment of the identified motors and confirm compatibility with VSD technology.
- Confirm operational requirements and identify optimum operating speeds for each system.
- Bundle installation with planned maintenance works where possible to minimise costs.
- Install VSDs and commission system controls.
- Monitor electricity consumption and adjust operating parameters to maximise efficiency.

- Develop operating guidance for staff to ensure long-term savings are maintained.

Splash Centre Gas Boiler Replacement

Project	Capital Cost	Opex Saving	Carbon Saving Annually	Net Annual Cost Saving	Cost Saving Per Ton Carbon
Gas Boiler Replacement	\$750,000	\$112,100	336	\$56,178	167.20

Purpose

Replace the existing 590 kW gas-fired boiler at the Splash Centre with a high-efficiency air-source heat pump to reduce natural gas consumption, lower operational costs, and significantly reduce the facility's carbon footprint. The project supports Council's transition away from fossil fuels while maintaining reliable pool and building heating.

Why this project?

The Splash Centre is one of Council's largest energy users and currently relies on natural gas for a significant portion of its heating requirements despite already having an existing heat recovery heat pump system. The Decarbonisation Roadmap identified boiler replacement as one of the highest-impact building decarbonisation opportunities, with estimated emissions savings of up to 336 tCO₂e per year. The subsequent feasibility study confirmed there is likely a viable heat pump project, although further monitoring is required to optimise system sizing and validate financial performance under future electricity pricing.

Replacing the gas boiler with an air-source heat pump would:

- reduce emissions by 150–193 tCO₂e annually
- save between \$47,000 and \$104,000 each year
- replace approximately 930–1,200 MWh of natural gas annually

Depending on final sizing:

Heat Pump	Estimated Payback
200 kW	4–8 years
400 kW	9–15 years
600 kW	Not economically attractive

The report concludes that a 200–400 kW heat pump appears most likely to be viable, although additional monitoring is required before confirming the preferred size.

Benefits

- Significant reduction in natural gas consumption and associated emissions.
- Potential emissions reductions of approximately 150–336 tCO₂e per year, depending on final system design.
- Reduced exposure to future natural gas price increases.

- Supports Council's transition away from fossil fuels.
- Opportunity to eventually remove the site's reliance on gas completely when combined with domestic hot water upgrades.

Risks

- Final economics depend heavily on future electricity pricing.
- Additional monitoring is required to determine the optimal heat pump size and avoid over-investment.
- Retaining the gas boiler for backup may reduce financial benefits.
- Heat pumps can have reduced performance during peak winter conditions if not appropriately sized.
- Capital costs are significant and will require a robust business case.

Next Steps

- Install temporary or permanent metering to accurately measure gas use and boiler load over a full operating cycle.
- Confirm future electricity pricing following energy contract negotiations and update project economics.
- Determine the optimal heat pump capacity (likely within the 200–400 kW range identified through the feasibility study) and assess resilience requirements.
- Investigate replacing the domestic hot water gas califonts at the same time to enable eventual removal of the site's gas connection.
- Develop a detailed business case, including capital costs, carbon savings, operational savings, and lifecycle costs.
- Integrate installation timing with planned Splash Centre maintenance shutdowns to minimise disruption.
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Wastewater Treatment Plant Primary Pond Improvement

The Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) is the largest source of Council's operational emissions, accounting for approximately 42% of the organisation's total carbon footprint. The facility currently produces biogas through the wastewater treatment process, however much of this potential energy source is flared rather than utilised. Improving methane capture and recovering energy from biogas presents one of Council's most significant opportunities to reduce emissions while improving energy efficiency and resilience. This project focuses on transitioning wastewater treatment from a traditional waste management approach toward a resource recovery model, delivering environmental, operational, and long-term financial benefits.

Project	Capital Cost	Opex Saving	Carbon Saving Annually	Net Annual Cost Saving	Cost Saving Per Ton Carbon
WWTP Primary Pond Improvement	\$1,000,000	\$114,000	451	\$39,438	\$87.44

Purpose

The primary pond improvement aims to improve methane capture from the wastewater treatment plant and utilise the recovered biogas as a renewable energy source. Rather than treating biogas as a waste product and flaring it, this project seeks to recover energy from existing wastewater processes through methane capture, gas treatment, and onsite energy generation. This will reduce fugitive greenhouse gas emissions, offset purchased electricity, improve energy resilience, and support Council's transition toward a more circular and resource-efficient wastewater system.

Why this project?

Wastewater treatment activities account for approximately 42% of Whanganui District Council's organisational emissions and represent the single largest source of operational greenhouse gas emissions. The Decarbonisation Roadmap identified methane capture and onsite electricity generation as one of Council's most significant decarbonisation opportunities, with the potential to substantially reduce emissions while creating an ongoing source of renewable energy. The biogas feasibility study found that the wastewater treatment plant produces a consistent supply of biogas and that the current practice of flaring represents a lost energy opportunity. The study concluded that there is significant potential to improve both environmental and financial outcomes by recovering and utilising this gas rather than disposing of it.

The project is intended to move the wastewater treatment plant beyond a waste management approach and toward a resource recovery model. It provides a pathway for future investment in methane capture, gas treatment, electricity generation, heat recovery, and other beneficial uses of biogas as technologies and infrastructure decisions evolve.

Benefits

- One of the largest emissions reduction opportunities available to Council.
- Estimated emissions reduction of approximately 451 tCO₂e per year through improved methane capture and onsite electricity generation.
- Recovers value from an existing waste stream and converts it into a renewable energy source.
- Reduces electricity purchases through onsite generation and improves long-term energy resilience.
- Supports a circular economy approach by moving from waste disposal to resource recovery.
- Aligns strongly with future wastewater treatment plant planning and long-term infrastructure investment decisions.
- Demonstrates Council leadership in infrastructure decarbonisation and renewable energy initiatives.

Risks

- Requires significant capital investment and specialist technical expertise.
- Final project scope and economics will depend on future wastewater treatment plant investment decisions.

- Detailed engineering, gas quality assessment, and feasibility refinement are required before implementation.
- Ongoing operation and maintenance requirements will be greater than traditional flaring systems.
- Gas production rates and performance may vary over time, potentially affecting generation output and financial returns.
- Delivery timeframes are longer than building energy efficiency projects and will likely require staged implementation.

Next Steps

- Complete further investigation into biogas utilisation opportunities.
- Confirm preferred technology options and energy recovery pathways.
- Align future energy recovery projects with broader wastewater treatment plant planning.
- Develop a detailed business case for Council consideration.
- Progress implementation opportunities that demonstrate strong environmental, operational, and financial benefits.
- Monitor emerging technologies and future opportunities for resource and energy recovery.



Solar

Council's buildings and facilities consume significant amounts of electricity to support essential services and day-to-day operations. With suitable roof space available at both the Splash Centre and Council Offices, solar photovoltaic (PV) generation offers an opportunity to reduce reliance on grid electricity, lower operating costs, and increase the use of renewable energy across Council operations. While solar delivers more modest emissions reductions than some of the larger decarbonisation projects, it provides predictable long-term savings, improves energy resilience, and complements Council's broader electrification and emissions reduction objectives.

Project	Capital Cost	Opex Saving	Carbon Saving Annually	Net Annual Cost Saving	Cost Saving Per Ton Carbon
Council Offices	\$80,700	\$14,700	6	\$8,683	\$1,447.14
Splash Centre	\$232,000	\$42,000	20	\$24,702	\$1,235.08
Total	\$312,700	\$56,700	26	\$33,384	\$1284.01

Solar provides approximately \$1,284 of net annual savings for every tonne of CO₂e reduced.

Purpose

Install rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) systems on the Council Building/Chambers and Splash Centre to reduce reliance on grid electricity, lower operating costs, and improve energy resilience while supporting Council's broader decarbonisation objectives.

Why this project?

Both the Council Building and Splash Centre are significant electricity users with available roof space suitable for solar generation. Solar generation aligns with daytime electricity demand and can offset a portion of Council's purchased electricity. While the emissions reduction potential is smaller than major gas reduction projects, solar provides predictable long-term operational savings and helps reduce exposure to future electricity price increases. The benefits are particularly attractive at the Splash Centre due to its large and relatively consistent daytime electricity demand.

Benefits

- Reduces purchased electricity and associated operating costs.
- Provides long-term protection against rising electricity prices.
- Improves energy resilience and visibility of Council's climate action programme.
- Complements electrification initiatives such as heat pumps by producing renewable electricity onsite.
- Relatively mature and proven technology with low operational requirements.

Risks

- Lower carbon reduction per dollar invested compared with some energy-efficiency projects.
- Financial performance depends on future electricity pricing and self-consumption rates.
- Roof condition, structural requirements, and future building plans may impact feasibility.
- Generation varies seasonally and cannot fully offset demand during winter peak periods.
- Upfront capital investment is required for relatively modest emissions

Splash Centre Solar Next Steps

- Confirm roof condition, available area, structural capacity, and network connection requirements.
- Validate generation forecasts and self-consumption assumptions using current electricity data.
- Assess opportunities to align solar generation with future electrification projects, particularly the proposed heat pump replacement.
- Confirm final system sizing and delivery model (Council-owned or third-party financed).
- Obtain detailed pricing and procurement options.
- Install monitoring systems to track generation, avoided electricity purchases, and emissions reductions.
- Review opportunities for future expansion if operational performance is strong.

Council Building Solar Next Steps

- Confirm long-term plans for the Council offices to ensure investment aligns with future accommodation decisions.
- Undertake structural and electrical assessments of the building.
- Validate solar generation potential and electricity demand profile.
- Assess whether installation should proceed independently or be bundled with other Council solar projects.
- Develop a detailed business case incorporating electricity savings, carbon benefits, and asset life considerations.
- Install and monitor the system if financial and strategic benefits are confirmed.



Fleet Electrification

Council's fleet contributes a significant proportion of operational emissions through the consumption of petrol and diesel fuels. As vehicles are replaced over time, opportunities exist to transition to lower-emission alternatives, including electric or hybrid vehicles where operationally appropriate. A planned and staged approach to fleet renewal will enable Council to reduce emissions while balancing cost, operational requirements, asset lifecycles, and service delivery needs.

Project	Capitla Cost	Opex Saving	Carbon Saving Annually	Net Annual Cost Saving	Cost Saving Per Ton Carbon
Fleet right sizing and hybridisation	Renewals	\$39,200	43	\$39,200	\$911.63

Council will transition suitable light fleet vehicles to electric alternatives as they reach the end of their service life, subject to operational requirements, market availability and business case assessment.

Purpose

Reduce fleet emissions, fuel consumption, and operating costs by ensuring Council vehicles are appropriately sized for their operational requirements and progressively transitioning suitable vehicles to hybrid, plug-in hybrid, or low-emission alternatives as existing vehicles reach the end of their useful life. The programme focuses on reducing unnecessary fuel use before investing in new technology and supports a gradual transition to a more efficient and lower-emissions fleet.

Why this project?

Fleet emissions remain a significant contributor to Council's operational footprint and represent an area where emissions reductions can often be achieved through relatively simple operational changes. Many councils across New Zealand have found that reviewing vehicle utilisation, reducing oversized vehicles, sharing vehicles across teams, and transitioning to hybrid vehicles during normal replacement cycles provides cost-effective emissions reductions without requiring major infrastructure investment. Unlike some decarbonisation projects, fleet improvements can be implemented progressively and

integrated into existing asset renewal programmes, reducing the need for dedicated capital funding. This approach is also consistent with the ERP principle of prioritising low-cost, high-impact opportunities before more complex carbon reduction projects.

Benefits

- Reduces fuel consumption and associated greenhouse gas emissions.
- Delivers operational cost savings through lower fuel and maintenance costs.
- Can be implemented gradually through normal vehicle replacement cycles.
- Reduces exposure to future fuel price increases.
- Encourages more efficient use of Council assets.
- Provides visible leadership in sustainable fleet management.
- Supports future transition to electric vehicles as technology and infrastructure become more suitable.

Risks

- Some operational roles may still require larger specialised vehicles.
- Vehicle availability and supply chain constraints may affect replacement timing.
- Hybrid and low-emission vehicles can have higher upfront purchase costs.
- Not all vehicle types currently have suitable low-emission alternatives.
- Savings depend on vehicle utilisation patterns and ongoing fleet management.

Next Steps

- Undertake a fleet utilisation review to identify opportunities for right-sizing and vehicle sharing.
- Develop fleet replacement criteria that prioritise hybrid and low-emission vehicles where operationally appropriate.
- Integrate emissions and fuel efficiency considerations into future procurement decisions.
- Monitor fuel consumption, vehicle usage, and emissions annually.
- Identify opportunities to retire under-utilised vehicles and reduce overall fleet size.
- Review future opportunities for electric vehicle adoption as technology, charging infrastructure, and operational requirements evolve.

Recommendations

Council should:

- Adopt this Emissions Reduction Plan as Council's internal roadmap for reducing operational emissions.
- Prioritise projects that deliver the strongest combination of emissions reductions, operational savings, and practical implementation.
- Progress structural, electrical, and business case assessments for projects moving toward implementation.
- Align emissions reduction projects with asset renewal programmes wherever practical.
- Confirm future electricity pricing, feed-in tariffs, and electrification plans before finalising solar investments.

- Review progress annually and refresh the plan following major infrastructure or investment decisions.

Financial Summary

The table below is based only on documented values contained in the feasibility studies and roadmap. No additional assumptions have been applied.

Project	Capital Cost	Annual Operational Savings	Annual Carbon Savings	Estimated Payback
Splash Centre Pool Covers	\$80,000	\$28,300	48 tCO ₂ e	~3 years
Splash Centre VSDs	\$75,000	\$23,300	9 tCO ₂ e	~3 years
Solar – Splash Centre	\$232,000	\$42,000	20 tCO ₂ e	5.5 years
Solar – Council Offices/Chambers	\$80,700	\$14,700	6 tCO ₂ e	5.5 years
Splash Centre Heat Pump	\$750,000	\$112,100	336 tCO ₂ e	<7 years (estimated)
Wastewater Energy Recovery Programme (Biogas)	\$1,000,000	\$114,000	451 tCO ₂ e	Not specified
Fleet Electrification	-	\$39,200	43 tCO ₂ e	
Total	\$2,217,700	\$373,600	913 tCO₂e	

Delivery Plan

2026 | Quick Wins & Business Cases

Focus on implementing low-risk, high-value projects that deliver immediate operational and emissions benefits while preparing larger projects for future investment.

- Splash Centre Pool Covers
- Splash Centre Variable Speed Drives (VSDs)
- Fleet Right-Sizing and Hybridisation Programme
- Confirm electricity pricing and solar investment cases
- Further investigation of Wastewater Energy Recovery opportunities
- Detailed design and business case development for Splash Centre Heat Pump replacement

2027 | Renewables & Electrification

Focus on reducing grid electricity consumption and progressing building decarbonisation projects.

- Solar PV – Splash Centre
- Solar PV – Council Offices / Chambers
- Final investment decision for Splash Centre Heat Pump
- Preferred Wastewater Energy Recovery option confirmed

2028 | Major Emissions Reduction Projects

Focus on delivering projects with the greatest carbon reduction potential.

- Splash Centre Heat Pump implementation (subject to approval)
- Detailed design and investment decisions for Wastewater Energy Recovery Programme

2029 | Strategic Infrastructure Delivery

Focus on delivering long-term infrastructure improvements and embedding sustainable operations.

- Progress Wastewater Energy Recovery Programme implementation
- Review additional renewable energy and electrification opportunities across Council facilities

2030+ | Continuous Improvement

Focus on maintaining momentum and identifying the next generation of emissions reduction opportunities.

- Continue fleet transition through asset renewals
- Review progress against emissions reduction targets
- Identify emerging technologies and funding opportunities
- Refresh the Emissions Reduction Plan

Monitoring Framework

Area	Measures	Reporting
Energy	Electricity and natural gas consumption, solar generation, renewable electricity contribution	Annually
Fleet	Fuel consumption and expenditure, fleet emissions, low-emission vehicle uptake	Annually
Financial	Capital expenditure, operational savings, cumulative savings, business case performance	Annually
Emissions	Total Scope 1 & 2 emissions, project emissions reductions, progress towards emissions targets	Annually
Programme Delivery	Project status, milestone completion, risks and issues	Quarterly
Programme Delivery	Lessons learned and programme performance review	Annually

Reporting Cycle

Quarterly

- Project delivery progress
- Milestone achievement
- Risks and issues

Annually

- Organisational emissions inventory
- Energy and fuel consumption review
- Operational and cumulative savings
- Progress against emissions reduction targets
- ERP performance report

Every Three Years

- Review and refresh the Emissions Reduction Plan, including priorities, targets and emerging technologies.

Success Measures (2030)

By 2030, Council aims to achieve:

- Reduced organisational Scope 1 and 2 emissions
- Lower electricity, gas and fleet fuel consumption
- Increased renewable energy generation
- Operational cost savings from decarbonisation initiatives
- Delivery of priority projects on time and within budget
- Integration of emissions reduction into asset management and infrastructure planning