

Cheltenham Zero Annual report

September 2024-2025



Introduction

After Cheltenham Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, they made it a priority to support the local community to work towards achieving net zero carbon by 2030 and thereby introduced the Cheltenham Zero initiative. The Cheltenham Zero initiative was founded in 2021, initially developed by local sustainability charity Vision21.

In 2024, Cheltenham Borough Council brought the management of the initiative in house and appointed a business initiative manager to develop support for Cheltenham businesses.

Project deliverables included:

1. Demonstrate a well-structured, successful initiative delivering credible support and results.
2. Deliver borough-wide emission reduction.
3. Build best practice approaches.
4. Targeted support to deliver results.
5. Build and maintain public profile and communications.

In order to deliver a well structured initiative, the offering needed development. The development which has taken place over that past year is detailed below.

1. The initiative

The year began with a period of familiarisation with the current offering. The initial offering has been developed from a 'community' based initiative into a business support programme. To start, the messaging has been updated from 'The right thing to do' to 'being good for business, futureproofing and reducing costs.'

Website

To reinvigorate the programme, it was deemed important to re-build the website, simplifying it and making it more accessible to businesses. Ensuring that pertinent information, which will deliver tangible results, was easily viewable, and to dispense with the periphery information which can cause confusion and a sense of over-whelm. [Explore the CheltenhamZero website here.](#)

Approach

As part of the redefinition of the initiative, a tiered approach has been defined for supporting the many different types of organisations across Cheltenham. The tiered approach is as follows.

Micro businesses and charities/community groups – hands on support for simple reduction initiatives including advice and resources, as well as sign posting to funding.

Small, Medium Enterprises (SME's) – A complete support package ranging from advice and knowledge building, measurement tools, action planning, direct advice, to grant funding enabling upgrading.

Corporate – All corporates are regulated for what they need to report with regards to sustainability and net zero, they generally have a sustainability role in house and have much

more flexibility to make capital investments on their premises. Therefore, support from Cheltenham Zero for this group is aligned with supporting them to bolster their ESG and CSR activities by working with them to support the local community, especially regarding sustainability events, and working with them individually to develop mutually beneficial opportunities.

2. Support to deliver borough wide emissions

Zellar

To reduce, we first must measure.

Zellar uptake in the year September 2024-2025 has been low with just 5 new signups. With a total of circa 70 users, we saw around 55 missions, rituals and giving contributions and 55 projects completed. We are seeing a good spread of industries across Cheltenham using Zellar including hospitality, professional services, education, charities, manufacturing, public services, tech and IT, construction and real estate, retail, and health and social care.

The most popular reason we saw for using the Zellar platform was to reduce the impact to the planet of doing business. Most businesses using this platform have 50 or less employees.

Whilst we are pleased with the interaction, we have we have reviewed the offering and uptake it was deemed necessary to tweak this to ensure both businesses and the council were getting best value for money. The new offering will provide a 1-month licence to businesses to calculate their baseline impact. If a business wishes to continue their licence and extend it to a full year they will have to opt in and will then have to achieve a number of actions by certain waypoints throughout the year. This is mutually beneficial:

- for businesses, so they can quickly calculate their baseline, and plan how they will make changes. With the option to continue using the platform to support their journey and;
- for the council, this process stops businesses taking up free licences and not using them fully, and it boosts the amount of data we have access to regarding Cheltenham Businesses carbon impact so we can plan infrastructural changes and opportunities effectively and efficiently.

Cheltenham Zero accreditation

To drive action for carbon reduction, an accreditation system is being designed for Cheltenham Zero members. It is known that behaviour is changed through different drivers:

1. The value is recognised
2. Reward
3. Consequences

The CZ initiative so far has focused on #1. The value is recognised, i.e. businesses for whom 'doing the right thing' is intrinsic to them. These businesses are on board and working towards their goals.

We now need to focus on the businesses who need a little encouragement and education of the opportunities that being net zero carbon can bring for their business. Encouragement can be

driven through reward or consequences, both of which drive the competitiveness of businesses to keep up.

Initially the aim of an accreditation is to drive #2. the Reward driver to the fore. When one is recognised for their work and progression it builds a confidence and is encouraging for the business, and in turn encourages others to join the initiative as it creates a level of competition. This is the groundwork for #3. Consequences, where the aim is to highlight the commercial risks of inaction - such as reduced competitiveness in tenders or challenges around client and talent retention - rather than impose any punitive measures. The accreditation will bring an extra layer of credibility to net zero engaged businesses, future proofing their companies.

The Cheltenham Zero accreditation is a structured, trusted certification pathway that aligns with our net zero ambition. The product we are designing is a visible and CBC endorsed mechanism, to enable measurement, reporting and progression, with steps Bronze through Platinum. This accreditation is the core outcome; underpinned by a simple supporting delivery system, that is straightforward in design and separate from CBC's internal IT infrastructure, ensuring clarity on security and resourcing.

The system is in development stages, with the aim to be live by Autumn 2025. It is being designed to be scalable across Gloucestershire, enabling expansion beyond Cheltenham as part of wider climate partnership work.

Grants

When Cheltenham Zero was brought in house, the previous round of grant funding was in delivery phase. This totalled £100,000 from the UKSPF.

All recipients have completed their projects, and we are gathering the final evidence for the work done. As part of the grant application, recipients were given a Zellar account to measure the impact of the installation, the results of this will be available after March 2026.

We have also applied for UKSPF funding to enable another round of grant funding for SME businesses across the Cheltenham Borough. We have been awarded £35,665 to deliver carbon reduction initiatives to our businesses. As part of the 2025/2026 grants, businesses are required to have a carbon reduction audit to ensure the funds are going to projects which present the best opportunities for businesses to reduce carbon emissions. We are supporting this by funding 80% of the carbon reduction audit being delivered by SWEA (South West Energy Agency).

As part of the launch of the 2024/2025 Business grant application period we held an event showcasing 5 of the businesses who were recipients in the last round. This was an in-person event and was recorded for catch up purposes ([Snippets of the event can be viewed here](#)). It was a hugely valuable event, which clearly demonstrated how making carbon reduction changes to your business's infrastructure can reduce your costs, boost new business and growth, and retain key talent.

3. Best Practice

The approach to deliver knowledge of best practice is being delivered through the informative sessions mentioned previously, alongside LinkedIn content with relevant information and email

communication with members. Building the aforementioned platform taking members through Bronze to Platinum will also demonstrate best practice.

Collaboration

With the new direction of the initiative being to focus on growing the membership base to hard-to-reach businesses, we have taken the approach to speak to them through channels they are familiar with. To that end, we have built a strong collaboration with the numerous business groups around Cheltenham including:

- The Growth Hub
- Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce
- The BID Cheltenham
- Circle2Success
- Marketing Cheltenham
- FSB

The leaders of these groups are keen to support their members to get on track with sustainability and are happy for CheltenhamZero to take the lead in a methodical way, demonstrating best practice. We are in the process of defining what the outcomes and calendar of events will be, but they will be collaborative and inclusive to share the knowledge we have across the many different business types.

The best practice which has been developed is clearly accessible through the new website and the accreditation platform (both discussed previously).

4. Targeted support

As detailed in 1. Approach above, we are delivering targeted support to the differing business types and sizes and detailed below.

Business type	Approach	Action/support offered
Biggest emitters	Build communication with police, NHS, GCHQ, SuperDry, Renishaw, Spirax Sarco, Kohler Mira. We are in contact with GCHQ, Renishaw and Spirax Sarco	Opportunities to fund Cheltenham initiatives and event centred around net zero and sustainability such as the schools COP30 in October 2025.
SME	Actionable straight forward information and guidance on the website and information sharing through events.	Support from big emitters with knowledge and local support. Zellar access, the accreditation platform and grant funding
Micro	In addition to the SME offering support to stay up to date on regulations in tendering for bigger projects where sustainability and net zero is part of the tendering process	

5. Develop public profile and communications

Development and visibility of the Cheltenham Zero initiative is key for the borough in working towards achieving net zero by 2030. To this end CZ is building its visibility through attending and speaking at borough and county events and building a strong relationship with business groups across the borough.

Public profile

Social media and mailing lists have become very concise and aimed specifically at an outcome, moving away from the chatty newsletter style and into a more thought-provoking dialog. This approach has been used across the website and all press that has gone out whether national press releases or paid articles in SoGlos.

The paid articles in SoGlos are legacy pieces which have had a higher read rate than regular content. The 2 articles are:

[Discover how your Cheltenham business can build a pathway to net zero through cross-sector collaboration](#) post 'Net Zero New Year' event publicity to boost catch up views of the event and signpost to the support Cheltenham Zero offers.

[7 reasons why local businesses should sign up for the Cheltenham Zero initiative](#) highlighting the importance and opportunities for business.

We also gained free coverage by SoGlos publicising the business grants [Cheltenham businesses can 'kickstart' their net zero journey with grants of up to £5,000](#), this was from a press release sent out in July, which was also covered by Punchline [Cheltenham SMEs offered £5k to boost carbon reduction](#)

Aside from this we recently had a bio in the Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce, [Spotlight on Cheltenham Zero with Isobel Filipova, Business Initiative Manager](#) where Isobel Filipova CZ business initiative manager spoke with Michael Ellyatt about the initiative and what the future holds.

Events and communications

This years' outreach has focused on building the 'brand' and 'offering' and making connections with organisations and business who can support CZ to achieve its goals, alongside building best practice knowledge across all stakeholders.

As detailed below this has taken a multi-faceted approach, from hosting and attending events to social media and direct emails, as well as door to door conversations with businesses. Covering what we offer, how we support, and the expectations Cheltenham Borough Council has of local businesses.

Cheltenham Zero has attended and hosted a number of events over the year to build our network of supporters, members, and collaborative bodies.

Cheltenham Zero hosted events total attendance – 60

- Net Zero New Year – January 2025
- Funding the Future – June 2025

Catch up views of Net Zero New Year event – 8 ([view here](#))

Case studies

Recordings of presentations by 5 of our 2023-2024 grant recipients can be viewed through the following links. These case studies highlight the grants received, what they funding was used for and how it has supported their business reduce their carbon emissions.

Poco <https://youtu.be/YwsglNhWlFU>

The Cotswold Bed Company <https://youtu.be/bb2mkrTG1AU>

The SiTE <https://youtu.be/4SAr9fc5arU>

East Glos Club <https://youtu.be/lSC9gYzgl2M>

The Lido <https://youtu.be/FUg84j8lSWk>

Events attended by CheltenhamZero

Events make up an important part of building knowledge around the business community, this year CZ have taken part in the following events: (number of attended at each event)

- Networking at the Lido – September 24 (60+)
- Workshop with businesses on carbon reduction in the design world October 25 (8)
 - Presenting on the world of design and calculation
- Glos business show November 2024 – Thornbury (70+)
- Gloucestershire Net Zero conference from the Growth Hub at Oxstalls December 24 (60+)
 - Presenting on Cheltenham Zero and Life cycle assessment and measurement to reduce carbon.
- Eco-enrichment day High School Leckhampton April 25 (N/A)
 - Hosted 3 lessons with students talking about sustainability in business and Life cycle assessment.
- Cheltenham Science Festival (N/A)
- Business growth conference – Cheltenham Racecourse May 25 (Unknown)
- Cheltenham Zero event Net Zero New Year January 25 (40)
 - Moderated a panel discussion on why business should be net zero, what it will do for them and how to go about it.
- Cheltenham Zero event Funding the Future June 25 (17)
 - Showcasing previous business grant recipients, highlighting what becoming net zero can do for your business with real life examples.
- Pop up at Clockwise Cheltenham branch – June 25 (6)
- Gloucestershire business show – Cirencester July 25 (70+)
 - Cheltenham Zero was the voice of the environment on 2 panel discussion around Social Value, 1, what it is, 2, case studies, and then co moderated a closed-door discussion with key players and big construction across Gloucestershire.

LinkedIn Analytics

Visitors and followers

Visitors	Business pg followers	Chelt Zero followers	CheltZero connections
Page views 188	Total followers 149	Total followers 482	Total connections 410
Unique visitors 94	New followers this year 56	New followers this year 127	New connections 115

Posts and engagement

Posts	Unique impressions	Clicks	Reactions	Comments	Reposts	Engagement
58	4736	348	191	24	25	29

Membership Analytics - Mailchimp

We currently have 204 members of the Cheltenham Zero initiative,

New sign-ups to CheltenhamZero initiative over the last year are as follows including where they signed up –

New members	New subscribed members	Website sign up	NZNY webinar sign up	SWEA sign up
53	49	31	8	13

Email campaigns

Campaigns sent	Average open rate	Click rate
17	17%	6%

Collaboration

An important work stream for CZ is to build collaboration across Cheltenham both internally at the council and across the borough. External collaboration is detailed in the above section 3. Best practice – Collaboration. This is an important tool to enable us to build and develop our public profile and share our communications wider than just across our own network.

CZ is also part of the council sustainability network, which is a working group who convene quarterly to share insights, knowledge and best practice, as well as upcoming events and supporting other departments. Alongside speaking with other departments within the council including planning, and major developments.

Door to door

As part of the campaign for the new business grants, we have delivered 250 flyers in person to businesses across Cheltenham including industrial estates, offices, shops and eateries. This has been key in spreading the word about both the grant opportunities we have for Cheltenham businesses but also the initiative itself.

From this door-to-door campaign to date we have gained

- 13 new members
- 5 applications for carbon reduction audits and
- 2 applications for the business grants.

Website

This table shows the number of page views on the Cheltenham Zero website.

Page path and screen class	Page views
/ (Home)	445
/grant-carbon-reduction-audit/	124
/member-profiles/	75
/business-grant/	67
/events/	64
/grants-and-funding/	38
/join-us/	30
/about-us/	27
/resources/	25
/contact-and-help/	19
/event/net-zero-new-year/	15
/grants-awarded/	12
/sign-up/	12
/decarbonise/	6
/grants-24/	6
/event/funding-the-future/	5
/micro/	2
/SME/	1

Conclusion

In conclusion, 2024-2025 has been a strategic year of redefining what the Cheltenham Zero offering is, how best to utilise the platform to deliver borough wide targets. Having assessed the previous offering and defined the next steps to delivering net zero by 2030, Cheltenham Zero is now a fully rounded initiative which can support all businesses in Cheltenham to either support themselves directly or support others, which in turn boosts their ESG.

Strategically there have been some changes and developments, from rebuilding the website to clearly communicating the offering across all business types, redefining the support on offer from business groups to calculation tools, to ensure businesses and the council are getting the best out of the opportunities.

1. We have delivered a well-structured, initiative delivering credible support and results.
2. Defined how to measure and deliver borough-wide emission reduction.
3. Defined best practice for the borough and communicating this.
4. Developed a targeted support approach to deliver results to all business across Cheltenham.
5. We have built and are maintaining a public profile and boosting our communications.

Focus for next year

Measurement

Over the next 12 months, the focus will be on launching the new Zellar platform and onboarding many more Cheltenham businesses. The purpose of this is to enable CBC to gather more data to build a more specific baseline for the borough and to spotlight for the businesses how they can reduce their emissions and in turn their negative impact.

Ambition

Alongside this we will be working to build and launch the progress accreditation for businesses: building their knowledge, measuring their impact, and supporting Cheltenham business growth, whilst bringing a little healthy amount of competition to the town.

Tiered support

We will be strengthening the offering available to the three tiers; micro, SME, corporate, and ensuring we are supporting all facets of industry to thrive and collaborate.

Knowledge building and communications

We will be developing and executing a strategy with our business group partners creating a calendar of events to drive the understanding and knowledge required across all sectors, and developing the support available through the varying organisations. As well as exploring opportunities to support specific sectors on a more bespoke level with workshop style events.