

# Climate & Biodiversity Committee Meeting of Witney Town Council



**Tuesday, 20th May, 2025 at 6.00 pm**

To members of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee - A Bailey, D Enright, A Mubin, D Newcombe, J Robertshaw, S Simpson, R Smith and J Treloar (and all other Town Councillors for information).

You are hereby summonsed to the above meeting to be held in the **Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney** for the transaction of the business stated in the agenda below.

## **Admission to Meetings**

All Council meetings are open to the public and press unless otherwise stated.

Numbers of the public will be limited, with priority given to those who have registered to speak on an item on the agenda. Any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting should contact the Committee Clerk [derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk](mailto:derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk) in advance.

## **Recording of Meetings**

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 the council's public meetings may be recorded, which includes filming, audio-recording as well as photography.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings, please let the Deputy Town Clerk or Committee Clerk know before the start of the meeting.

## **Agenda**

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

To consider apologies and reasons for absence.

Committee Members who are unable to attend the meeting should notify the Committee Clerk [derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk](mailto:derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk) **prior** to the meeting, stating the reason for absence.

Standing Order 30(d)(v) permits the appointment of substitute Councillors to a Committee whose role is to replace ordinary Councillors at a meeting of a Committee if ordinary Councillors of the Committee have confirmed to the Proper Officer **before** the meeting that they are unable to attend.

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

Members are reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests in any of the items under consideration at this meeting in accordance with the Town Council's code of conduct.

### **3. Election of Vice-Chair**

To elect a Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

### **4. Public Participation**

The meeting will adjourn for this item.

Members of the public may speak for a maximum of five minutes each during the period of public participation, in line with Standing Order 42. Matters raised shall relate to the following items on the agenda.

5. **Committee Terms of Reference** (Pages 3 - 5)

To agree the Committee Terms of Reference (TOR).

6. **Committee Objectives & Work Programme for the Municipal Year** (Pages 6 - 10)

To receive and consider the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O concerning the priorities of this Committee during 2024/25.

7. **Biodiversity & Green Spaces Update**

To receive a verbal update from the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer on recent progress.

8. **Climate Change Strategy & Climate Emergency Action Plan** (Pages 11 - 15)

To receive and consider the report of the Compliance & Environmental Officer.



Town Clerk

## CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY COMMITTEE



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**Agenda Item:** Terms of Reference

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025

**Contact Officer:** Deputy Town Clerk

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The purpose of this report is for Members to review and recommend terms of reference for the Committee for the forthcoming municipal year.

### Background

At the Annual Council Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025, it was resolved that terms of reference for each Committee would be reviewed at each meeting in the current meeting cycle.

### Current Situation

As this is a new Committee, the items from the former Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee are listed below as initial suggestions.

- a) To work to achieve net zero emissions in WTC vehicles, heating and electricity (scopes 1 and 2) by 2028, in line with the Council's Climate Emergency resolution made in June 2019. To identify ways for event's organisers to reduce the carbon footprint of events held on council ground. Any financial or policy change implications should be recommended to the Council.
- b) To manage the Council's Environmental Spaces, including Amenity Areas, Witney Lake and Country Park and Tiny Forest (except recreation grounds). Any financial or policy change implications should be recommended to the Council.
- c) To oversee the management of the Council's tree stock across the town.
- d) To engage with Central Government, West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, relevant stake holders and other organisations to initiate local action on climate change (towards achieving net zero carbon emissions) air & water pollution, and other environmental issues within the town.
- e) To encourage biodiversity and healthy recreation in the environmental spaces.
- f) To explore the expansion of community energy to keep the benefits of our local energy generation in our local economy.
- g) The Membership of the Committee shall consist of 6 Members plus the Town Mayor and the Leader of the Council ex officio with voting rights.
- h) The quorum of the committee shall be 4 members.

The Committee is asked if it would like to make any amendments to the terms for the forthcoming municipal year. The Committee may like to consider the following:

- (a) To work to achieve energy efficiencies and net zero carbon emissions in the Council's operations and facilities by 2028, in line with the Council's Climate Emergency resolution made in June 2019.
- (b) To manage the Council's Environmental Spaces, including Amenity Areas, Witney Lake and Country Park, Tiny Forest and Community Orchards (except recreation grounds).  
And,
- To identify ways for event's organisers to reduce the carbon footprint of events held on council ground. Any financial or policy change implications should be recommended to the Council.
- To oversee the maintenance of the Council's infrastructure concerning planting displays (including hanging baskets).

### **Impact Assessments**

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – no direct implications.
- b) Biodiversity – see text in the report.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct implications.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – see text in the report.

### **Risk**

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Without clear terms of reference, Council committees face significant risks including role confusion, lack of accountability, and potential legal challenges. This can lead to inefficient decision-making, strategic misalignment, resource misallocation, and reduced transparency. The absence of defined responsibilities and authority undermines governance, impairs stakeholder trust, and can result in poor outcomes that do not align with the council's objectives. Clear, regularly reviewed terms of reference are essential to ensure effective, transparent, and accountable committee operations.

### **Social Value**

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and,

1. Review the terms of reference; and
2. Consider any changes to the terms of reference; and
3. Recommend such changes be made to Full Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2025.

## CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY COMMITTEE



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**Agenda Item:** Committee Objectives & Work Programme for the Municipal Year

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday, 20 May 2025

**Contact Officer:** Town Clerk/CEO

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The purpose of this report is to set out proposed objectives and a work programme for the Climate & Biodiversity Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

The Town Clerk regrets the delay in preparing this report, which resulted from competing priorities and the need to compile information from multiple sources for this newly established committee. The proposed committee objectives should be considered as recommendations rather than requirements.

***Members may wish to defer decision-making on this agenda item until after hearing from the Biodiversity & Green Spaces and Compliance & Environmental Officers.***

Alternatively, the committee may select priority items during today's meeting or defer to the officers' expertise in developing the work programme, with a comprehensive review scheduled for the September meeting.

### Background

Witney Town Council declared a Climate Emergency at the Council meeting on 26 June 2019 and subsequently held a Public Meeting on 28 July 2019 to share ideas and explore collaborative approaches to make Witney net-zero carbon as soon as possible.

The Climate & Biodiversity Committee is a newly established committee for the 2025/26 municipal year, taking on responsibilities from the former Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee but with a more focused remit on climate action and biodiversity enhancement.

The Council is committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2028, ahead of West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council's targets of 2030 and requires a structured approach to achieve this ambitious goal.

### Current Situation

Following the establishment of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee and in line with the draft terms of reference reviewed at this meeting, the Committee requires a clear set of objectives and a work programme for the 2025/26 municipal year to drive progress on the Council's climate emergency declaration and biodiversity commitments.

The proposed objectives and work programme are informed by:

- The Council's Climate Emergency declaration of June 2019
- The draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan Roadmap
- The Witney Lake and Country Park Management Plan 2024-2034
- The Council's Biodiversity Policy (November 2024)
- The Open Spaces Strategy (July 2021)

### **Proposed Committee Objectives for 2025/26**

1. Develop and adopt a comprehensive Climate Change Strategy and detailed Climate Emergency Action Plan for the Council by October 2025.
2. Establish baseline carbon emissions for Council operations (Scope 1 and 2) and set specific, measurable reduction targets to achieve carbon neutrality by 2028.
3. Implement "Phase 1: Baseline Assessment and Strategy" and begin "Phase 2: Quick Wins, Operational Change and Community Support" from the Climate Emergency Action Plan Roadmap.
4. Oversee the management of the Council's Environmental Spaces with particular focus on biodiversity enhancement at Witney Lake and Country Park.
5. Provide effective oversight of the Council's tree stock management across the town to enhance carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
6. Develop partnerships with other local authorities, organizations, and community groups to promote collaborative climate action.
7. Promote community engagement and awareness of climate change and biodiversity issues through educational initiatives and outreach activities.
8. Ensure climate and biodiversity considerations are integrated into all Council operations and decision-making processes.

### **Proposed Work Programme for 2025/26**

The work programme for the 2025/26 municipal year will focus on the following key areas:

#### **1. Climate Change Strategy and Action Planning**

- Establish a Climate Action Working Party to assist officers in drafting the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
- Commission a full carbon audit of Council operations, estates, vehicle fleets, and supply chains.
- Develop and adopt a comprehensive Climate Change Strategy and detailed Climate Emergency Action Plan
- Set specific, measurable targets for carbon reduction with clear milestones.
- Establish regular monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

## **2. Operational Changes and Quick Wins**

- Arrange Carbon Literacy training for all staff and Councillors.
- Review and update the Council's Procurement Policy to prioritise local, low carbon suppliers.
- Review Events and Hiring Policy to integrate sustainability requirements.
- Conduct energy efficiency audits of Council buildings and develop retrofit plans.
- Review vehicle and machinery fleet for decarbonisation opportunities.
- Maintain 100% renewable energy procurement for Council buildings.
- Develop a climate action handbook for staff and Councillor induction.

## **3. Environmental Spaces Management**

- Review implementation of the Witney Lake and Country Park Management Plan 2024-2034
- Oversee the management of the Council's tree stock across the town.
- Support ongoing habitat enhancement projects including hedgerow management.
- Expand wildflower areas across Council-managed land.
- Review management regimes for all green spaces to enhance biodiversity.
- Support the implementation of community orchard projects.
- Develop winter tree planting programme.

## **4. Community Engagement and Partnership**

- Engage with Central Government, West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and other stakeholders.
- Develop Council website climate action webpage.
- Plan community climate action events.
- Launch community consultation on climate priorities.
- Develop resources to support residents with home energy efficiency.
- Work with OCC and WODC on sustainable transport initiatives.
- Support renewable energy and community energy scheme development.

## **5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting**

- Conduct regular progress assessments against Action Plan
- Report to Full Council on implementation progress.
- Complete annual carbon emissions assessment

- Prepare annual climate action progress report.
- Identify areas requiring additional focus or resources.

## Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) **Equality** - The implementation of the Committee's work programme will benefit all residents equally. Special consideration will be given to ensure climate adaptation measures support vulnerable groups who may be disproportionately affected by climate change.
- b) **Biodiversity** - The proposed work programme includes numerous actions specifically designed to protect and enhance biodiversity across Witney, particularly in the management of the Lake and Country Park and other green spaces. Biodiversity considerations will be integrated into all climate actions.
- c) **Crime & Disorder** - No direct crime and disorder implications have been identified in relation to this report. However, environmental improvements can contribute to creating safer, more attractive public spaces.
- d) **Environment & Climate Emergency** - The entire work programme is designed to have significant positive impacts on the environment and directly address the Council's climate emergency declaration. The proposed actions will contribute to reducing the Council's carbon emissions and support wider climate mitigation and adaptation measures across Witney.

## Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Key risks identified include:

1. **Resource limitations** - The ambitious work programme may require additional staff time and financial resources. This will be mitigated through careful prioritisation, seeking external funding, and maximising use of available support from partner organisations.
2. **Technical capacity** - Some climate actions may require specialised knowledge. This will be addressed through training, partnerships with expert organisations, and potentially commissioning external support where necessary.
3. **Stakeholder engagement** - Success depends on effective engagement with Council staff, residents, and other stakeholders. The work programme includes specific actions to ensure robust communication and involvement strategies.
4. **Monitoring and accountability** - Without clear targets and regular monitoring, progress may drift. The proposed quarterly review process will ensure accountability and allow for adjustments as needed.

## Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

The Committee's work programme will deliver multi-dimensional social value:

1. **Environmental benefits** - Reduced carbon emissions, enhanced biodiversity, improved air quality, and more resilient green spaces.
2. **Economic benefits** - Support for the local green economy, potential energy cost savings, and improved infrastructure.
3. **Social benefits** - Enhanced community engagement, educational opportunities, improved public spaces, and healthier environments for residents.
4. **Health and wellbeing** - Access to quality green spaces, opportunities for active travel, and climate resilience measures that protect vulnerable residents.

## Financial implications

- The development of the Climate Change Strategy and baseline carbon audit may require external expertise and resources. Budget allocation for this should be considered.
- Implementation of retrofit measures and infrastructure projects will require capital investment, however many will deliver operational savings over time through reduced energy consumption.
- Staff training and community engagement activities may require additional resource allocation.
- All external funding opportunities will be explored to support climate action costs, including relevant government grants, partnership funding, and community energy schemes.

## Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and:

1. Approve the proposed objectives for the Climate & Biodiversity Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year, if possible.
2. Support the establishment of a Climate Action Working Party to assist officers in developing the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

## CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY COMMITTEE



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**Agenda Item:** Climate Change Strategy and Climate Emergency Action Plan Roadmap

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday 20 May 2025

**Contact Officer:** Compliance and Environment Officer

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The purpose of this report is to provide an update on Witney Town Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan and Climate Change Strategy.

### Background

Witney Town Council declared a Climate Emergency at the Council meeting on 26 June 2019 and swiftly followed up with a Public Meeting on Sunday 28 July 2019 enabling everyone to share ideas and visions for change, and to explore ways in which we can all work together to make Witney net-zero carbon as soon as possible.

To explain why the government, local councils and organisations have declared an emergency; Many organisations have been working for many years to try to prevent climate change but change needs to happen faster. It's a key priority to prevent global temperatures from increasing by more than 1.5%, the consequences of which, would have a massive impact on all of us.

Witney Town Council is committed to ensuring it does everything possible to address climate change and has set a target to become carbon neutral by 2028 to ensure a cleaner and better future for its residents.

West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council have made a commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

The difference between carbon neutral and net zero is defined as:

1. Carbon neutrality is when you calculate your carbon emissions and compensate for what you have produced via carbon offsetting projects. Offsetting carbon emissions, in addition to avoidance and reduction, is how this is achieved.
2. The net zero target refers to a government commitment to ensure the UK reduces all its greenhouse gas emissions by 100% from 1990 levels by 2050.

### Current Situation

Witney Town Council needs to establish a Climate Change Strategy and a Climate Emergency Action Plan. A Climate Change Strategy would provide the framework for then developing an Action Plan that contributes towards a set of strategic objectives. This will include a reassessment of the Council's present carbon emissions, identifying and enabling the

prioritising of actions which will be underpinned by data. The Action Plan will ensure the Council has the powers and resources necessary to achieve this, setting clear targets and detail the journey with clear milestones. In addition, the Council can complement and support other activities within the town that can lead to a reduction of the carbon footprint overall in the local area. The Council will also need to take account of the following Council documents:

- Witney Lake and Country Park Management Plan 2024-2034
- Open Spaces Strategy (July 2021)
- Biodiversity Policy (November 2024)

The Town Council will need to be mindful of Oxfordshire County Council's Climate Adaptation Route Map for Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire District Council's Carbon Action Plan and Climate Change Strategy. This will enable the Town Council to focus on what can be achieved within its control and remit, while at the same time being able to deliver as a collective.

The preliminary roadmap outline is:

### **Phase 1: Baseline Assessment and Strategy (Year 1)**

**Objective:** Understand current emissions and plan action.

- **Conduct a full carbon audit:** Council operations, estates, vehicle fleets, and supply chains.
- **Identify and set SMART targets:** Based on emissions baseline (e.g. reduce emissions by achievable targets).
- **Engage stakeholders:** Staff, Councillors, residents, local businesses, and partner agencies.
- **Publish a Climate Action Plan (CAP):** Clear milestones, budget estimates, and responsibilities.
- **Establish governance structures:** A Climate Action Working Party might be formed to assist officers with the establishment of the Strategy and Action Plan, and who will identify and make recommendations to the Climate and Biodiversity Committee and Council, regarding the actions required to address the climate change emergency.

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### **Phase 2: Quick Wins, Operational Change and Community Support (Years 1–2)**

**Objective:** Reduce emissions through immediate actions.

- **Retrofit and upgrades of council buildings:** Evaluate options for improving the energy efficiency of Council building - Insulation, LED lighting, solar panels on roofs, efficient heating etc.
- **Fleet and Machinery decarbonisation:** Transition fleet and machinery to electric vehicles/machinery where suitable alternatives exist.
- **Procurement Policy changes:** Review current policy prioritising local, low-carbon suppliers, consider impact on waste, carbon, and ecology.
- **Event and Hiring Policy changes:** Review of current policies to ensure the reduction of single use plastics and waste recycling is incorporated into external events on council land, property, and public spaces.
- **Sustainable energy:** Maintain 100% renewable energy from utility companies for council buildings.

- **Staff and Councillors training and behaviour change:** Training on Carbon Literacy so everyone can work towards cutting carbon emissions in their work and the decisions they make. Develop a handbook for future use and for the induction of new staff and Councillors.
- **Pesticides:** Review the Pesticide Policy adopted 25 March 2024.
- **Waste:** Review and implement continual improvement to recycling and green waste programmes across all council buildings, facilities, and operations.
- **Environmental Emergency Plan:** Develop and implement; including training of all staff for emergencies such as but not exclusive to wildfire, drought, flood, storms focussing on prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery.
- **Planning:** Integrate carbon neutrality goals into all council planning documents. Consider the impact on the environment of all planning applications and comment in the name of the Council accordingly (within statutory consultee guidelines).
- **Engage residents in behaviour change:** Recycling, active travel, home energy efficiency, circular economy projects and community litter clean-ups.
- **Education and outreach:** Foster partnerships with schools and community groups to support climate initiatives.
- **Community Fridge:** Supporting local community fridge projects with redistributing food surplus going to waste.
- **Local Produce Markets and 'Buy Local':** Support local food producers and businesses.
- **Witney Allotments and Community Orchards:** Support the Witney Allotment Association and Community Orchards within the town.
- **Ethical banking:** Review arrangements.

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### Phase 3: Strategic Projects and Infrastructure (Years 2–3)

**Objective:** Implement systemic change with long-term impact.

- **Renewable energy projects:** Support OCC and WODC initiatives including community energy schemes.
- **Sustainable transport investment:** Support OCC and WODC cycling infrastructure initiatives, EV charging networks, active travel, public transport and expanding the local network of footpaths. Consider infrastructure improvements to Council owned areas.
- **Nature-based solutions:** Tree planting, wetland restoration, urban greening, wilder green spaces, and wild meadow creation. Collaborating with specialist organisations to manage land for wildlife e.g. Windrush Project, Chilterns River Trust, Envelope Catchment Partnership & River Fly Partnership, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency etc.

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### Phase 4: Scaling Up and Community Mobilisation (Year 3 + beyond)

**Objective:** Broaden the impact beyond council control.

- **Support local businesses** to decarbonise (signposting to grants and advice).
- **Local climate resilience plans:** Assess climate risks and vulnerabilities including heatwaves, flooding, extreme weather events and develop adaptation strategies.
- **Support shared transport schemes:** Car, bike, and other transport sharing schemes.

- **Community energy and retrofit schemes:** Promote and signposting to grants and advice.
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## **Phase 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptation (Ongoing)**

**Objective:** Track progress, adjust course, and maintain accountability.

- **Annual emissions reports:** Transparent publication of carbon reduction progress.
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Introduced for department managers to monitor progress.
- **Reporting:** Progress reporting quarterly to Council.
- **Review CAP every 2 years:** Update based on new tech, funding, or legislation.
- **Work with regional partners:** Combine efforts across council boundaries.
- **Benchmarking** against successful carbon-neutral town councils.
- **Celebrate success:** Communicate regularly with residents and stakeholders promoting transparency and accountability.
- **Feedback:** Use mechanisms to gather input from the community and adjust strategies as needed to stay on course.
- **Council website:** Launch a dedicated climate action webpage. Promote Council and local community group activities on social media.

A more detailed roadmap will be formed by officers to introduce practical approaches to become carbon neutral by 2028 and this will form the Climate Action Plan.

## **Impact Assessments**

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- Equality** – The impacts of implementing a Climate Change Strategy for Witney will have equal impact on all services, customers, and staff as there is shared benefit.
- Biodiversity** – Climate change action plans can include measures to protect and restore biodiversity, which in turn can help with climate adaptation and mitigation as detailed in the report.
- Crime & Disorder** - No direct crime and disorder impact with regards to the content of this report.
- Environment & Climate Emergency** – The proposals within the report will have a direct, positive impact on the Council's operations regarding carbon reduction and wider positive benefits towards climate change mitigation and adaptation across the town.

## **Risk**

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan will be reported to Council for approval.

## **Social Value**

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates. The Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan will have multi-dimensional impact across various areas including social, economic, and environmental benefits. Stakeholder engagement will be crucial including the public, communities, and local businesses. Consideration of the effects on local communities, including economic development, social inclusion and environmental sustainability will form the draft documents.

## **Financial implications**

- There will be costs associated with the Climate Emergency Action Plan that will follow Council process to be reported to committees for approval or from existing budget allocations. Over the long term, a reduction in the Council's consumption of carbon-based energy will deliver revenue benefit to the Council.
- All external funding opportunities will be explored to support climate action costs.
- Officers will maximise the use of support by the various organisations and agencies available.

## **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Officers to draft a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
2. Officers to produce a more detailed roadmap following the production of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
3. Consider establishing a Climate Action Working Party to work with officers in drafting the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, which will be brought to a future Council meeting. In accordance with Witney Town Council's Standing Orders, membership, and terms of reference of the working party including possible external membership, the number required for a quorum and voting rights, shall be determined at their formation.