

ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING

Date: Wednesday, 8 May 2024

Title: Climate Emergency Action Plan

Contact Officer: Head of Estates & Operations

Background

Witney Town Council declared a Climate Emergency at the Council meeting on 26th June and swiftly followed up with a Public Meeting on Sunday 28th July 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.

Members may have heard the terms carbon neutral and net zero, and there is a difference between the two.

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.

Legislation

The Climate Change Act 2008 is the basis for the UK's approach to tackling and responding to climate change. It requires that emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are reduced and that climate change risks are adapted to. The Act also establishes the framework to deliver on these requirements. The Act supports the UK's commitment to urgent international action to tackle climate change.

A Climate and Nature Bill is currently before the UK Parliament that ensures a comprehensive and joined-up approach to the climate emergency and nature crisis. While the existing Environment Act only offers to halt the decline of nature by 2030, the Climate and Nature Bill commits to reversing biodiversity loss by 2030.

Current Situation

Witney Town Council need to create a climate change strategy and a climate emergency action plan. The Town Council will have to be mindful of the County Council and District Council's climate actions, targets and objectives to enable WTC to focus on what can be achieved within its control and remit, while at the same time being able to deliver as a collective.

These documents will be produced by WTC officers setting clear targets and detail the journey with clear milestones that will include a reassessment of the Council's present carbon emissions, identifying and prioritising actions.

Since the council declared the climate emergency in 2019 the council has;

- calculated WTC carbon footprint for 2019-2020 to be 64.08 tCO₂e, and a further 34.83 tCO₂e with the inclusion of West Witney Sports Club and Langdale Hall. Appendix 1.
- purchased an electric vehicle to replace a diesel vehicle within the operations teams fleet, and the council have agreed to another electric vehicle when the next vehicle is due for renewal this year.
- invested £4,000 in replacing combustion powered ground maintenance tools, hedge trimmers, strimmers and blowers with battery powered.
- offered two forms of green burials, woodland and meadow. Both are designed to be environmentally friendly, with no plastic tributes, no headstones, and biodegradable coffins.
- recycled good quality soil from street future installations for reuse in burials.
- recycled hedge & tree cuttings being chipped and reused in flower beds, and mixed with poor quality soil to enhance and improve its use in bedding and allotments.
- distributed bark removed from play areas to allotment sites along with chippings.
- a tree replacement programme to ensure our tree stock doesn't diminish and explored expanding the programme on available land.
- improved the efficiency of the heating to Town Council offices where all new electric radiator emitters are energy efficient ceramic core units.
- replaced the heating and hot water system at Burwell hall with an efficient condensing gas boiler and a remote programming control system that has saved over £2,500 of energy use and over 200kg of CO₂ over the winter months.
- installed LED or CFL lighting in the offices.
- procured energy efficient printers in the office that include a scheme of tree planting to offset the paper used.
- provided recycling bins across all buildings and open spaces.
- selected the most competitive utilities supplier that supplies energy through 100% renewable sources.

- committed to several major projects that will reduce our carbon footprint and emissions through asset renovation and modernisation that include West Witney Social Club, Langdale Hall and a New Depot. There will also be the opportunity to offset our carbon emission using renewable technologies.
- included energy efficiency in the scoring matrix within the procurement of the Christmas illuminations contract currently out to tender.
- bus shelters with green sedum roofs with benefits to the environment not only as a carbon sink, but providing a habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, adding to the biodiversity of the town.
- recycled coffee bags to be used on the edible garden for soil nourishment
- incorporated climate and nature recovery when providing comments to planning applications focussing on the use of renewable energy and sustainable design, and environmental and biodiverse thinking for biodiversity net gain.
- Four allotment sites producing local produce encouraging healthy eating and minimising the impact of transportation.
- created 300m of new hedgerow
- created a Tiny Forest (600 whips)
- completed 60m of bank work increasing the level of carbon offset
- started working on Biodiversity Net Gain
- secured funding for wet meadow habitat reinstatement that will enhance carbon sequestration

There is a wealth of guidance and support for local councils which will be utilised to help WTC achieve its goals.

These include but are not restricted to;

- National Association of Local Councils (NALC) [Website Link](#)
- Centre for Sustainable Energy <https://www.cse.org.uk/about-us/>
- The Great Collaboration <https://greatcollaboration.uk/>
- Climate Emergency UK <https://climateemergency.uk/>

Environmental impact

As noted above.

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

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

There will be costs associated with the Climate Emergency Action Plan that will follow Council process to be reported to committees for approval.

All funding opportunities will be explored to support climate action costs and WTC 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 will produce a climate change strategy and a climate emergency action plan.