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

Meeting Date: Tuesday 20 May 2025

Contact Officer: Compliance and Environment Officer

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.

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.

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.

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.

- a) **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.
- b) **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.
- c) **Crime & Disorder** - No direct crime and disorder impact with regards to the content of this report.
- d) **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.