

Terms of Reference

Climate Action Working Party



Objective

The purpose of this Working Party is to support the development of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, and to help direct Council resources towards achieving the Council's carbon neutrality goals. These objectives were established following the Climate Emergency declared by the Council on 26 June 2019, which included the following commitments:

1. Witney Town Council joins other Councils in declaring a Climate Emergency and commits to the vision of carbon neutrality by 2028 at the latest, and;
2. explores the expansion of community energy to keep the benefits of our local energy generation in our local economy, and;
3. works with partners anchored in the area to deliver carbon reductions and grow the local economy.

The Climate Change Strategy will provide the framework for developing an Action Plan that contributes towards 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, support and promote other activities within the town and immediate surroundings that can lead to a reduction of the carbon footprint overall in the local area.

Timeframe

A draft action plan for Council facilities should be presented to the Council on 6th October 2025 to highlight any potential budgetary requests in the 2026/27 fiscal year and beyond.

A final Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan should be presented to the Council on 16 February 2026 based on the following roadmap agreed by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee on 20th May 2025 (minute no. CB295).

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.

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.

Once adopted the implementation of actions will be reviewed by the Working Party on an ongoing basis until 2028.

An update from each meeting of the Working Party should be prepared for the Climate & Biodiversity Committee meetings on the following dates:

- 9th September 2025
- 13th January 2026

Constitution

Working Party rules fall under the remit of the Council's Standing Orders and will only be properly constituted once the following criteria have been met:

- a) The number of Councillors on the working party will be five.
- b) The Chair of the working party will be appointed at its initial meeting and must be a councillor unless otherwise agreed.
- c) A minimum of three Town Councillors must be in attendance at each meeting in order for it to be considered Quorate.
- d) With the authority of the Full Council the working party can co-opt members of the public who have specific knowledge/expertise on the subject to assist the group and/or relevant local users and stakeholders.
- e) An officer of the Town Council should be present at all scheduled meetings and will prepare minutes/notes to be presented at the next meeting of Full Council.
- f) All Members of Council are to be informed of any meetings of the working party; and are able to attend and ask for any relevant working party documentation.
- g) All meetings of the working party are to be fully accessible and open to members of the public, subject to any items of a confidential nature.
- h) Meetings will be held on an ad-hoc basis with the agreement of the Chair and Town Clerk (or her representative)
- i) The timing of the meeting shall be judged as appropriate by members of the working party.
- j) Any changes to these terms will be subject to confirmation by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee.

It should be noted that the working party, nor its members can make decisions on behalf of Witney Town Council and any recommendations made will be subject to approval by Climate & Biodiversity Committee and the Full Council.

Likewise, no monies or funding can be spent or committed by the working party nor its members without delegated authority or prior Policy, Governance & Finance Committee and Full Council endorsement.