
Agenda Item: Draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

Meeting Date: Tuesday 9 September 2025

Contact Officer: Compliance and Environment Officer

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

Background

At its meeting on 26 June 2019, Witney Town Council formally declared a Climate Emergency. In response, the Council committed to taking all necessary measures to address climate change, setting a target to achieve carbon neutrality by 2028 in pursuit of a cleaner, more sustainable future for its residents.

Current Situation

This version of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan represents a first draft and is being brought forward at this stage to seek Member input. The intention is to ensure that the final version reflects the Council's priorities.

The draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (Appendix A) has been developed based on the preliminary roadmap presented on 20 May 2025 at the Climate and Biodiversity Committee meeting. A Council carbon footprint for 2025/26 needs to be established and officers will undertake this as soon as possible. This can be compared with the Council carbon footprint established in 2019-2020 and reported by the Head of Estates & Operations to the Annual Council Meeting on 8 May 2024.

Carbon audits have been requested for Burwell Hall, Corn Exchange, Town Hall, and the Admin Office; officers are awaiting confirmation of next steps. The reports will identify improvements that could be made by the Council to improve the energy performance of buildings that are owned or long-term leased. There may be challenges with the listed buildings and any proposals will need to be agreed with the Witney Town Hall Charity (leased buildings) and West Oxfordshire District Council as the local planning authority.

As an interim measure, officers have reviewed the current energy performance data for the buildings. A comparison is provided - Appendix B for reference. The data highlights varying energy performance factors, which will need to be assessed and reviewed by the Climate and Biodiversity Committee and the Climate Action Working Party once the latest carbon audits are completed.

Certain improvement actions may be accommodated within existing maintenance budgets, while others should be considered by the appropriate committee as Capital Improvement Projects during the budget planning process.

A carbon footprint report for Witney Civil Parish has been undertaken and opportunities have been outlined within the Impact report to support and compliment wider community initiatives aimed at reducing the town's overall carbon footprint. A dedicated report by officers concerning the Impact Report will follow.

A detailed Action Plan, including key performance indicators (KPIs) and timelines, will be developed to accompany the Climate Change Strategy following feedback from Members. This will allow the Council to track progress and link strategic objectives directly to measurable outcomes.

Several targets and KPIs must be defined, with suggested KPIs subject to discussion and agreement.

Climate action relating to Planning is still to be included within the Strategy. The preliminary road map detailed the following:

- 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).

Officers will continue to work on the draft documents to include planning.

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 and Action Plan 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 information and suggested targets within the report will have a direct, positive impact on the Council's plan for the wider positive benefits towards climate change mitigation and adaptation across the town.

Risk

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

Any recommendations will be reported to the appropriate Committee and Full 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

- Any costs associated with the Climate Emergency Action Plan incorporating the reduction of the carbon footprint for Witney will follow Council process and be reported to appropriate committees for approval or from existing budget allocations.
- 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:

1. Note the progress and contents of the first draft of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
2. Provide feedback and suggestions to shape the final version of the strategy.
3. Support the development of the Action Plan with timescales and measurable outcomes to accompany the final Climate Change Strategy.