CLIMATE ACTION WORKING PARTY MEETING OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Thursday, 11 June 2026

At 3.30 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor S Simpson (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	D Enright
	D Edwards-Hughes	J Robertshaw
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Kate Heeley	Admin Support Assistant - Facilities
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Janine Sparrowhawk	Compliance & Environment Officer
	Carl Whitehead	Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer
Others:	Councillor Ruth Smith	

16 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

Members noted that Cllr D Enright would arrive late to the meeting.

17 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Climate Action Working Party meeting held on 25 September 2025 were received.

13 - Members of the Working Party who were also West Oxfordshire District Council representatives provided an update, advising that an approach to the Audit & Governance Committee had not yet been made.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that an opportunity could arise to access Carbon Literacy Training through one of the Council's existing training partners, which could provide a practical and flexible route to supporting both Member and Officer development in this area.

Members noted the updates and welcomed the potential for exploring alternative training avenues to support the Council's ongoing commitment to achieving carbon neutrality.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, opportunities to access Carbon Literacy Training via existing training partners be explored and,

3. That, the minutes of the Climate Action Working Party meeting held on 25 September 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

During the following Item.

The Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer arrived at 3:51pm

Cllr D Enright arrived at 3:58pm

18 **CARBON REDUCTION PLAN**

The Working Party received and considered the report of the Compliance & Environment Officer, supported by a detailed update of ongoing and planned activity to support the Council's carbon reduction objectives.

Members were advised that, following completion of the West Witney project, the Project Officer would provide increased focus to climate action priority areas. This would include internal engagement with the Operations Manager to identify smaller-scale, practical measures, as well as liaison with energy providers regarding the potential for the installation of smart meters across Council buildings.

It was further noted that discussions would take place with the West Oxfordshire District Council as the planning authority to clarify requirements relating to potential installations at the Corn Exchange due to its protected building status. Officers also confirmed that available grant funding opportunities would be actively pursued, including maximising the use of match funding available through Energy Solutions Oxfordshire and Members were supportive of Officers intentions to submit an application ahead of the 9th September deadline.

Members discussed potential options for carbon reduction measures, including solar PV and air-to-water heat pump systems. It was noted that while both options were of comparable indicative cost, the air-to-water system could deliver more significant carbon savings. Members also suggested that the estimated cost of solar installation may be lower than initially indicated; however, it was acknowledged that the procurement of the required quotations in line with the Council's Financial Regulations would provide further clarity of competitive costings.

In response to a query regarding heating usage at the Corn Exchange, Members were advised that a heating engineer would be attending site to provide guidance on system operation, efficiency improvements and programming..

The Working Party reflected on the Council's overall carbon footprint, currently estimated at 65.08 tCO_2e. Members acknowledged that some emissions were inherently linked to operational requirements, particularly where equipment did not yet have suitable low-carbon alternatives.

Members were reminded that a budget of £50,000 was available and that, in line with previous decisions of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee (Meeting 19.05.2026 Minute: CB251 Relates), priority should be given to projects at the Corn Exchange and Windrush Cemetery. The Working Party agreed that Burwell Hall should also be included within the scope of works to maximise overall carbon reduction impact.

Members emphasised the importance of identifying "quick wins" including measures that could be delivered through existing maintenance budgets or improved staff awareness. A proposal was

made that smaller-scale items be grouped and considered as part of general maintenance activity, alongside increased staff engagement and education.

It was noted that matched funding applications to Energy Solutions Oxfordshire could be submitted in stages as individual projects are developed, allowing flexibility and responsiveness in delivery. Members also welcomed the commitment to, where possible, procure locally and utilise local contractors, in line with existing financial and tendering policies.

Members requested that a clear schedule of works be developed by Officers, outlining planned activities and progress. It was agreed that authority be delegated to Officers to proceed with grant funding applications to ensure that opportunities are not missed within required timescales.

It was noted that the focus of the current plan related to Council-owned buildings, including its halls and buildings. Any works to the Town Hall or Reception Office would require approval from the Town Hall Charity as the property owner. Members who sat on the Town Hall Charity were encouraged to raise this matter at forthcoming meetings of the charity.

Members also noted that water usage formed part of the Council's overall carbon footprint and this had increased in recent years, partly reflecting the success of facilities such as Café 1863 and the Splash Park. It was noted that steps had already been taken to improve efficiency, including the removal of the water tank at the Corn Exchange, allowing direct mains supply and reducing water wastage.

Overall, Members welcomed the progress being made and the clear direction of travel, recognising the importance of a structured and deliverable programme of works to support the Council's carbon neutrality ambitions.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and update be noted and,
2. That, Officers be delegated authority to develop and implement a carbon reduction programme focusing on the Corn Exchange, Windrush Cemetery and Burwell Hall and,
3. That, a schedule of works be prepared and presented to Members, identifying priority actions including "quick wins" and maintenance-based improvements and,
4. That, Officers progress grant funding applications as opportunities arise in order to maximise external funding support and,
5. That, measures to improve operational efficiency, including staff engagement and system optimisation, be incorporated into the programme of works.

19 **ECO FAIR 2026**

The Working Party received an update from the Chair reflecting on the success of the Eco Fair held in 2025. Members noted that the event had been well supported, particularly by West Oxfordshire District Council and a range of partner organisations. However, it was recognised that attendance from such organisations may be more limited should a future event be held at a weekend.

In considering arrangements for 2026, Members discussed opportunities to further enhance the event by targeting engagement more effectively toward individuals and community organisations. It was suggested that the event adopt a Nature Recovery theme and align with a recognised national initiative in the latter half of the year.

Members unanimously supported the principle of holding a 2026 Eco Fair and explored ways to build upon the previous event's success. Suggestions included incorporating talks or short presentations, potentially utilising the Gallery Room for these sessions while hosting the main exhibition in the Corn Exchange Main Hall. Emphasis was placed on securing high-quality exhibitors to ensure a meaningful and engaging experience.

Members unilaterally agreed that a weekday event, held in the late afternoon and early evening, would provide the best opportunity to maximise participation. It was also proposed that invitations be extended to higher-profile attendees, such as the local Member of Parliament and representatives from Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP), to broaden the event's reach and impact.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the event be planned to take place during the period 7th to 11th September 2026, on a weekday between 2pm and 6pm.

Members further agreed that West Oxfordshire District Council be approached regarding the potential to either co-host the event or provide support. A request would also be made to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee for the use of the Corn Exchange and that Officers liaise with the Bookings Team to identify a suitable date.

Additionally, Members agreed to develop their own promotional display board for use at session of Councillors at the Café to help communicate the Council's aims in relation to carbon reduction. All Members of the Council should be encouraged to actively support and promote this initiative as part of the Council's wider climate engagement work.

Recommended:

1. That, the update be noted and,
2. That, an Eco Fair be held in 2026 during the period 7th to 11th September, on a weekday between 2pm and 6pm and,
3. That, West Oxfordshire District Council be approached to explore joint working or support for the event and,
4. That, approval be sought from the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee for use of the Corn Exchange and,
5. That, Officers liaise with the Halls Bookings Team to secure a suitable date and,
6. That, a promotional display board be developed to support Councillors in promoting the Council's carbon reduction aims.

20 WILDFLOWER PLANTING - CURBRIDGE ROUNDABOUT

The Working Party received and considered the report of the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer, supported by a verbal update explaining the available options for addressing root intrusion at the Curbridge roundabout.

Members noted that the works required could not be undertaken using the existing equipment available to the green spaces team and would necessitate the use of heavier machinery, either through the larger Operations Team or via an external contractor.

Members were keen to ensure that improvements were carried out to enhance the appearance of the roundabout, recognising the positive impact of similar initiatives such as the Fiveways roundabout and the wildflower planting at Windrush Cemetery, both of which had received favourable public feedback.

Following discussion, it was proposed by Councillor J Aitman, seconded by Councillor R Smith, that a hybrid approach be adopted. Under this proposal, an external contractor would undertake the initial removal of the roots, following which the Council's Operations Team clearing and preparing the site for sowing by the Green Spaces Team.

Members noted that the estimated cost for the contractor element of the works would be in the region of £500–£800, with an additional £500 for suitable low-height wildflower seed, ensuring that visibility and sightlines were maintained. The cost of the Council's workforce would be met through existing budgets and recharged accordingly.

A vote was taken and Members were unanimous in their support for the proposed hybrid approach. Members welcomed this as a practical and cost-effective solution that would both resolve the existing issue and contribute positively to the visual and environmental quality of the area.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and update be noted and,
2. That, a hybrid approach be adopted, with a contractor undertaking root removal and the Operations Team completing site preparation and planting and,
3. That, provision be made for the associated costs as outlined, including the purchase of suitable low-height wildflower seed.

Cllr D Edward Hughes left the meeting at 5:12pm. Hearing the majority of the debate on the following item but not participating in the vote

21 **NATIONAL EMERGENCY BRIEFING**

The Committee Clerk provided a verbal update, advising that concerns had been raised by Members outside of the meeting regarding the suitability of the film's content for a younger audience. It was noted that the material was more sensitive and thought-provoking than originally anticipated and, as such, the initial concept of a youth-led screening may benefit from being reconsidered.

Members further noted that attendance at a recent OALC briefing had highlighted a recommendation for the film to be shown across towns and parishes to encourage wider public engagement with the subject matter.

Following discussion, Members were supportive of the Council hosting a screening, to follow the event being arranged at St Mary's Church on 16th July. It was agreed that the screening would take place on 27th July at 2pm. Members emphasised that the event should be clearly advertised as suitable for audiences aged 16 and over.

It was further agreed that the event would be free to attend but ticketed, and would include a facilitated discussion following the screening, to be hosted by Councillors, enabling attendees to share views and reflections in a constructive environment.
Members welcomed the opportunity to support informed community engagement on climate issues and agreed that arrangements and publicity be progressed by Officers.

Resolved:

1. That, the update be noted and,
2. That, a public screening be held on 27th July at 2pm, with attendance advised for those aged 16 and over and,

3. That, the event be free and ticketed, with a facilitated discussion hosted by Councillors following the screening and,
4. That, Officers progress the necessary arrangements and publicity.

The meeting closed at: 5.15 pm

Chair