CLIMATE ACTION WORKING PARTY

Agenda Item:	Carbon Reduction Plan
Meeting Date:	Thursday, 11 November 2026
Contact Officer:	Administrative Support Assistant – Communities, Environment & Planning

This report provides an update on the implementation of the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, including progress against current carbon reduction initiatives. It also invites the Climate Action Working Party to consider and prioritise potential projects for inclusion within a proposed £50,000 carbon reduction allocation as part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process.

Background

At its meeting on 8 September 2026, the Climate & Biodiversity Committee agreed that a provisional allocation of £50,000 for carbon reduction projects should be considered through the 2027/28 budget-setting process, subject to further review. Officers have since assessed potential projects and investment opportunities for this proposed allocation. This report presents their findings to the Climate Action Working Party to inform future budget recommendations.

Current Situation

Full Council adopted the Climate Change Strategy on 12 October 2026 following a programme of officer-led review and development. Since adoption, work has continued to progress actions aimed at reducing the Council's carbon footprint and supporting wider environmental objectives.

However, due to competing demands on limited Works Team resources, along with the scale and complexity of several major projects, a number of actions within the Climate Action Plan and relating to Council facilities have not yet been progressed this year. The Head of Estates & Operations anticipates that, subject to successful recruitment and increased capacity, these actions can be delivered during the first part of 2027. Should this not prove achievable, a further report will be presented to Council setting out potential options for progressing the outstanding actions to meet the climate and carbon objectives.

This report provides an update on progress against the Climate Change Action Plan and presents potential projects for Member consideration as part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process.

Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan Review

During a recent work experience placement, an opportunity arose to seek the views of a younger resident on the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. As part of the

placement programme, the student reviewed the Strategy and provided feedback on the Council's approach to climate action.

The student commented: *"Hoping to see many more updates in the future as the Action Plan progresses. As a young person, it is easy to feel uncertain about the future as climate change worsens, so seeing action being taken by those responsible is both encouraging and reassuring."*

This feedback demonstrates the importance of maintaining momentum in delivering climate related initiatives and communicating progress to the wider community. A fuller report on the student's review will be presented to a future meeting of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee.

Climate Action Updates:

Windrush Cemetery Depot

Property Maintenance

The measures identified within the Carbon Reduction Recommendations Report have been referred to the Operations Manager for implementation. Due to current resource constraints, these works have not yet been progressed and have been placed on a list of future maintenance works. Delivery will be undertaken as resources permit and funded through existing maintenance budgets. The recommendations are as follows:

- Recommendation 3: Install loft insulation.
- Recommendation 4: Install a timer on the hot water system.
- Recommendation 6: Add draught-proofing to the main external door.
- Recommendation 8: Install appropriate signage on the accessible toilet door.

Officers are currently assessing the costs, and potential carbon reduction benefits associated with the remaining recommendations, including the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and an air-to-air heat pump. Further updates will be provided to Members as this work progresses.

Corn Exchange

Energy Survey

The findings of the out-of-hours energy survey are currently being reviewed to identify opportunities for reducing energy consumption within the building. Particular focus is being given to establishing which appliances, equipment and systems may be left operating when not required and could be switched off during periods when the building is unoccupied.

The review will help identify practical measures to reduce unnecessary energy use and associated costs while ensuring that essential services remain operational. Any actions identified through this exercise will be implemented where appropriate, and a further update will be provided to the Climate & Biodiversity Committee in due course.

Heating System

The review of the Corn Exchange heating system remains ongoing. The Operations Manager continues to gather information on the existing boiler and heating infrastructure and is obtaining comparative quotations to inform options for future replacement.

As part of this process, consideration is being given to the feasibility of alternative low-carbon heating solutions, including the installation of a heat pump, together with other relevant measures identified within the Carbon Reduction Recommendations Report. The assessment will take account of operational requirements, capital costs, ongoing maintenance implications, and potential carbon reduction benefits.

Work on this project is continuing, and a further update will be provided to the Climate & Biodiversity Committee once the review has been completed and recommendations for the next steps have been identified.

Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Panels Feasibility

The Deputy Town Clerk has submitted a Pre-Application Planning Advice request to West Oxfordshire District Council to explore the feasibility of installing solar photovoltaic (PV) panels at the Corn Exchange.

As the Corn Exchange is a Grade II listed building located within a Conservation Area, any proposal will need to carefully consider the impact on the building's historic character and appearance. Following discussions with Planning Officers, including a site visit undertaken with the Conservation Officer, initial feedback has been positive. Officers have indicated that planning permission may be feasible, subject to the detailed design of the scheme and satisfactory resolution of heritage considerations.

Key points identified through the pre-application discussions include:

- The solar panels should be sympathetic to the colour and appearance of the existing slate roof.
- Panels should be confined to the south-facing roof slope.
- An appropriate installation and fixing method should be agreed in advance to ensure there is no unacceptable impact on the historic fabric of the building.

The Council remains at an early stage in assessing this project and sought pre-application advice to establish the principle of installing solar panels before committing resources to further design work. West Oxfordshire District Council has encouraged the Council to continue utilising the pre-application process as proposals develop and has confirmed that further advice can be provided throughout the project's development prior to any formal planning application being submitted.

At this stage, no formal planning application has been submitted, and further investigations and design work will be required before the project can progress.

Water Use

The Council's water supply contract is provided by Castle Water and is overseen by the Responsible Finance Officer.

Water Efficiency Audits

Castle Water offers water efficiency audits to business customers, providing advice and recommendations to help reduce water consumption and identify potential savings. Officers will explore the availability of these audits for the Council's metered properties and assess any opportunities to improve water efficiency and reduce water usage where practicable.

The Leys Splash Park Water – Grey Water Reuse

The Council currently collects water from the Leys Splash Park in a greywater holding tank and reuses it for the irrigation of bedding plants, rather than discharging it to the public sewer network.

Under Castle Water's tariff arrangements, a standard assumption is made that 95% of water supplied is returned to the wastewater system. However, where it can be demonstrated that more than 5% of the water supplied does not enter the public sewer, a reduction in wastewater charges may be applied.

Officers are investigating the extent of water reuse at the Splash Park to determine the volume of water diverted from the sewer network and assess whether a revised wastewater charging arrangement may be applicable. To support this assessment, the following evidence will be collated:

- System description and operational overview
- Technical specifications
- Water usage and volume records
- Photographic evidence
- Drainage and sewer connection confirmation

Based on 2024/25 foul water charges, it is estimated that wastewater charges attributable to the Splash Park water consumption total £8,200 per annum. Subject to the outcome of the assessment and acceptance by the water supplier, there is potential to realise a reduction in these charges, together with an estimated carbon saving of 0.9 tCO_2e.

It should be noted that these figures relate to the previous Splash Park installation. A new Splash Park was commissioned during 2025/26, and officers will shortly be establishing water consumption and reuse volumes associated with the new system to determine the applicability of any future savings.

The continued reuse of grey water supports the Council's objectives to improve resource efficiency, reduce operational costs and minimise carbon emissions associated with water treatment and wastewater disposal.

Eco Fair 2026

The second Eco Fair was held in the Main Hall, Corn Exchange on Thursday 24th September 2026 and was open to the public 14:00 – 18:00 hrs. A full report on the event will be provided at the next Climate and Biodiversity Committee meeting. However, it would benefit the ongoing delivery of the event if a minimal budget were allocated of £200.

Replacement Operational Vehicles and Equipment

The Operations Team is currently reviewing vehicle and equipment replacement requirements for the next financial year. Electric alternatives will be considered where suitable; however, due to the specialised nature of certain operational activities and associated payload requirements, electric options may not always be viable. All replacement proposals will include a clear rationale for the selected vehicle or equipment type, demonstrating consideration of available low-emission alternatives where appropriate. A report outlining the findings and recommendations will be presented to a future Climate & Biodiversity Committee.

Fuel

100Green has confirmed that the gas supplied to the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall is 100% green gas and has provided certification for both gas and electricity at the sites it supplies. These certificates can be used to support promotional and communications activities, demonstrating the Council's commitment to the use of renewable energy sources.

The current energy supply contract with 100Green is in place until 31 March 2027 and is managed by the Responsible Finance Officer.

This achievement represents a positive step in reducing the Council's carbon footprint and is expected to contribute to a reduction in reported carbon emissions. The impact of this change will be reflected in the Council's 2025/26 carbon emissions assessment.

Energy Audits

Officers have implemented out-of-hours energy surveys at the Town Hall and Admin Office. This will identify opportunities for reducing energy consumption within the buildings. Particular focus is being given to establishing which appliances, equipment and systems may be left operating when not required and could be switched off during periods when the building is unoccupied. Both these buildings operate solely on electric.

The review will help identify practical measures to reduce unnecessary energy use and associated costs while ensuring that essential services remain operational. Any actions identified through this exercise will be implemented where appropriate, and a further update will be provided to the Climate & Biodiversity Committee in due course.

Budget Request 2027/28

A range of potential projects and initiatives have been identified for Member consideration as part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process. The combined value of the proposals exceeds the provisional £50,000 allocation identified by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee and therefore prioritisation will be required.

Members are invited to consider each proposal against a range of factors including anticipated carbon reduction benefits, contribution to the Council's environmental objectives, deliverability, affordability, operational benefits and the potential to attract external grant funding.

The projects presented within this report are intended to support informed discussion and do not represent a final or prioritised programme. Recommendations arising from the Climate Action Working Party will be reported to the appropriate committee as part of the Council's budget setting process.

1. **Burwell Hall – Energy Improvements - Solar PV Panels**
   The hall's east and west-facing roofs offer sufficient space for the installation of solar photovoltaic panels, which will contribute to reducing electricity consumption and carbon emissions.

   Estimated: £16,000

2. **Burwell Hall – Energy Improvements – Ceiling Insulation**
   The main hall ceiling currently meets only the insulation standards of the 1980s. Enhancing insulation below the ceiling will help reduce heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer, improving comfort for users and lowering annual energy costs.

   Estimate: £22,000

3. **Tower Hill Cemetery – Replacement of dead Buxus sempervirens**
   During summer 2026 15no. Box specimen topiary plants suffered from Box blight and died. These plants need replacing as they form an important part of the landscape of the cemetery. It is proposed that these are replaced with Taxus baccata (English Yew) as there are Yew specimens on site. Yew is slow growing plant and longer lived, with more carbon stored. The Carbon Performance Certificate for Yew plants are rated B, 2230kg. This relates to the amount of carbon it will absorb from the atmosphere and store within its woody tissues, over its anticipated lifespan. The replacement plants will be 1-1.5m container grown plants and will be installed with hydration bags, stakes etc.

   Estimated cost: £3,750

4. **The Leys Splash Park - Grey water reuse - Water Bowser**
   Water tests on the grey water collected from the splash park operation have confirmed that the grey water can be utilised on watering plants, trees, and green spaces. It is planned that the sports pitches, cricket square, trees, and flower containers can be watered using the grey water collected from the splash operation. To enable the Operations Team to undertake this task a towable water road legal water bowser will be required.

   Estimated: £5,000

5. **The Leys Splash Park - Grey Water Reuse Additional Pipework**
   New pipework is required to facilitate the collection and transfer of grey water. This will ensure that water collection activities can be undertaken without disrupting the operation of the Splash Park during opening hours. The current arrangement presents the potential for conflict between vehicles accessing the facility for water collection purposes and members of the public using the Splash Park. The proposed pipework will

improve operational efficiency and reduce health and safety risks associated with vehicle movements within the facility.

Estimated: £2,000

6. **Lake & Country Park - Swift Tower**
   A swift tower at the Country Park would provide additional nesting habitat for swifts, a species experiencing significant population decline due to the loss of traditional nesting sites within buildings.

   The tower would also benefit other cavity-nesting species, including house sparrows, tits, and house martins, where suitable. In addition to its biodiversity value, the structure would provide opportunities for public engagement through educational activities, interpretation signage, school visits, wildlife monitoring, and citizen science projects, helping to raise awareness of local conservation initiatives and the importance of protecting declining bird species.

   Estimate: £5,000

7. **Lake & Country Park - Tern Raft**
   Additional tern raft to supplement grant funded Turn Raft from TOE to enable formation of a Tern colony on the Lake.

   Estimate: £2,100

8. **Operations Team – Powered Muck Truck**

   An electric-powered muck truck with an 8 cu ft skip and a 365kg carrying capacity would enable the Operations Team to move heavy materials, including bark mulch, gravel, aggregates, timber, fencing materials, and green waste, more efficiently. The equipment would reduce reliance on manual wheelbarrows and tractors for transporting materials over longer distances and uneven terrain, supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of the Operations Team while reducing operational emissions.

   Estimate: £4,000

9. **Operations Team – Battery Powered Plant & Machinery**
   Introduction of battery-powered equipment, including chainsaws and strimmers, to reduce reliance on petrol-powered machinery. The equipment will lower noise levels and manual handling demands through its lighter weight, supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of the Operations Team while contributing to the Council's carbon reduction objectives.

   Estimate: £4,000

10. **Eco Fair - 2027**
    A budget allocated to support the delivery of the Eco Fair.

    Estimate: £200

11. **Litter Bin Signage**

    Installation of enhanced signage on dual-purpose litter and recycling bins to encourage correct waste segregation, improve recycling rates and reduce contamination of recyclable materials.

Estimate: £1,000

12. **Carbon Literacy Training**
    To be undertaken by a selection of 8 officers across all Council departments.

    Estimate = £1,600

13. **Thermal Blinds – Council Chamber, Town Hall**
    The existing curtains in the Council Chamber have reached the end of their serviceable life and require replacement due to deterioration caused by age and sun exposure. As the chamber is now used as office accommodation by officers, it is proposed that thermal blinds are installed in place of the existing curtains. This would improve temperature regulation within the large open plan space, enhancing occupant comfort and supporting energy efficiency.

    Estimate = £4,000

Budget Summary

Item Number	Description	Estimate
1	Burwell Hall – Solar PV Panels	£16,000
2	Burwell Hall – Ceiling Insulation	£22,000
3	Tower Hill Cemetery – Replacement Planting	£3,750
4	Splash Park – Water Bowser	£5,000
5	Splash Park – Additional Pipework	£2,000
6	Lake & Country Park - Swift Tower	£5,000
7	Lake & Country Park - Tern Raft	£2,100
8	Operations Team – Powered Muck Truck	£4,000
9	Operations Team – Battery Powered Plant & Machinery	£4,000
10	Eco Fair - 2027	£200
11	Litter Bin Signage	£1,000
12	Carbon Literacy Training	£1,600
13	Thermal Blinds – Council Chamber	£4,000

Total Project Value: £70,650 (excluding VAT)

With a proposed provisional budget allocation of £50,000, the identified projects exceed the available funding by £20,650.

Members will therefore need to prioritise projects as part of the 2027/28 budget setting process.

Grant Funding

Officers will actively explore external grant funding opportunities to support the delivery of approved projects and maximise the impact of any Council investment. Where available, external funding may enable additional projects to be progressed or reduce the level of Council funding required.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

7. **A Green and Resilient Town** – Rooted in the Council's 2019 Climate Emergency declaration, with a commitment to embedding environmental responsibility into all Council activities and achieving carbon neutrality by 2028.

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 – All procurement will be in accordance with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.
b) Biodiversity – No significant adverse impacts anticipated; positive impacts expected through emissions reduction.
c) Crime & Disorder - No direct implications identified.
d) Environment & Climate Emergency – Positive contribution toward climate mitigation and adaptation objectives.

Risk

Members should consider the financial, operational and delivery risks associated with each proposal when determining priorities. Recommendations arising from the Climate Action Working Party will be subject to consideration through the Council's established committee and budget approval processes before any expenditure is committed.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates. The delivery of the carbon reduction programme will generate wider benefits, including:

- Community engagement and awareness.
- Support for local businesses.
- Environmental improvements.

Project Procurement

All procurement activities will comply with:

- Relevant legislation.
- Council Procurement Policy.
- Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

The Council will ensure best value, balancing cost, quality, and service delivery, while maintaining efficiency and effectiveness.

Financial Implications

- Provisional request by the Climate & Biodiversity Committee of £50,000 budget for carbon reduction projects to be considered within the budget setting process.
- Expenditure will follow established Council approval processes.
- Additional external grant funding opportunities will be actively pursued.

Recommendations

Members are invited note the report and:

1. Consider and prioritise the projects identified within this report, together with any additional proposals Members wish to put forward.
2. Identify any projects that officers should investigate further, including opportunities for external grant funding and partnership working.