OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Climate Action overview 2022-2023

June 2023

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Climate Action Activity 2022/23

1. Climate Action Overview

This update reports on our wider approach to Climate Action taking place across the Council, in addition to our priority actions delivered through our Climate Action Programme, and Carbon Management Plan.

We acknowledged the Climate Emergency in 2020 and created our Climate Action Framework, setting out how we will achieve our three aims: 1) to become a Climate Active Council; 2) to operate at net zero by 2030; and 3) to enable a zero carbon Oxfordshire ahead of 2050 and as early as possible in the 2040s. Our first corporate priority is to put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work and is embedded in our medium term financial plan.

2. Becoming a Climate Active Council

Our first aim is to become a Climate Active Council. We are achieving this through our decision-making, training our staff, reporting our emissions, and reducing our supply-chain emissions through our procurement processes.

2.1 Decision-making

A key enabler to becoming a Climate Active Council is to ensure that our decisions consider carbon impacts, and all staff act as ambassadors for climate action. Our decisions recognise the priority of putting action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.

In 2022/23 we:

- developed a detailed Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) tool and guidance. The CIA assesses and records impact (positive, and negative) across a range of measures, identifying actions and owners to mitigate negative impacts and is reviewed by the Climate Action team. Since the development all Council reports for decision-making must now assess if proposals for decision-making have a material impact on the Council's ability to meet its climate and ecological commitments, and if so to complete a CIA.
- initiated the development of a carbon accounting tool through working with the Future Highways Research group, who develop solutions to challenges in the highways. The tool will be developed in 2023/24.
- and carried out an internal audit on our Climate Action programme to assess progress in embedding Climate Action across the Council and to identify our future workplan in 2023/24.

Additionally, all Council decisions at Cabinet and committee meeting level are based on reports which follow a set report template, containing a compulsory Sustainability Implications section.

2.2 Training

Our Climate Framework set the aim of developing a staff training programme and toolkit, to give our staff the tools to take action across the Council.

Since 2021 we have offered Carbon Literacy training from the Carbon Literacy Project. It is recognised by the United Nations and UK government as a proven method of building organisational capacity on climate action and is used by more than 4,000 organisations.

The seven-hour training course delivers foundation understanding of climate change, assessments on individual carbon footprints, information on local initiatives, exercises on how Oxfordshire's impact could be reduced, and an action plan for personal and professional steps that learners commit to taking. In 2022/23 we reached the milestone of training 200 staff members, and received bronze accreditation, becoming a Carbon Literate Organisation.

In 2023/24 we will expand the training programme further as we work towards our aim of training 15% of our staff to reach silver accreditation.

We also developed an eLearning module on climate change and made it mandatory for all our staff (new and existing) to complete.

2.3 Reporting

We are continually developing and improving our annual carbon emissions reporting. We monitor our progress in meeting our corporate emissions reduction targets through our Carbon Management Plan. The latest can be found on our website. A plan setting out strategic actions to reduce emissions from the 2025 level to the levels required by the 2030 target has been developed as part of the review of the Carbon Management Plan 2022-25.

In 2023/24 we will work to expand our greenhouse gas reporting to start to include more Scope 3 supply chain emissions.

2.4. Procurement

In our Climate Action Framework we committed to work with suppliers and the supply chain to reduce our carbon emissions, ensure our decisions consider carbon impacts, and encourage suppliers to develop more sustainable practices. We are achieving this through sustainable procurement, creation of a social value policy, and working with suppliers.

2.4.1 Sustainable procurement

Guidance on sustainable procurement and checklist for Council staff is published on our internal intranet pages and provides guidance on a variety of topics relating to sustainability when procuring goods and services, including what to consider when planning for a sustainable procurement, how to calculate whole life costs, complying with the waste hierarchy, how to identify eco-labels and certifications, evaluating and reviewing sustainability, consideration of need to buy, and circular procurement.

2.4.2 Social value policy

Our social value policy was launched in February 2022 and encourages our suppliers to provide additional value to the provision of their goods, works and services. The social value policy acts as a link between our strategic priorities and our procurements,

improving monitoring of the social value suppliers choose to deliver. Additional value can be provided in a number of areas across economic, social, and environmental categories and is set out in our Themes, Outcomes and Measures (TOMs) framework, tailored to our strategic priorities. Suppliers are free to choose from these measures, but by doing so must propose credible targets for performance monitoring.

Environmental TOMs under the category 'Taking climate action for a zero-carbon future' include reduction of carbon emissions, reduction of air pollution, safeguarding the natural environment, promotion of resource efficiency and circular economy solutions, and prioritisation of sustainable procurement; and under 'Encouraging social innovation' to safeguard the environment and respond to the climate emergency.

In line with the Council's priority around climate action, environmental measures are given a maximum prioritisation compared to other social value measures, to encourage suppliers to improve their behaviour when working with us, and understand how they can support our approach to reaching our net zero by 2030 target.

For all contracts or single purchases that are above £500,000 (the "climate action threshold"), a delivery plan is mandatory in which candidate bidders must explain their planned approach to climate action in detail. This includes explaining how they will maximise opportunities to reduce the carbon emissions associated with the delivery of the contract, and how their organisation will achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Initial findings from the first year of use suggest that suppliers are currently mainly choosing to demonstrate social value through supporting 'Diverse Local Employment and Skills'. We will engage on how we can support more social value to be demonstrated on Climate Action in 2023/24

2.4.3 Work with suppliers

In 2022/23 we received awards for our work with suppliers in reducing carbon footprints. As detailed in our Carbon Management Plan, we are working with Milestone, our highways maintenance contractor, to understand the scope 3 emissions associated with the maintenance of Oxfordshire's highways. Milestone are one of the 40 major suppliers identified in our scope 3 emissions assessment.

Our work to date with Milestone includes starting to quantify the estimated carbon emissions for the last five years in order to develop a baseline, and to set up the mechanism for receiving quarterly carbon emission reports from 2022/23. The areas the work looks at includes design, materials, plant and fleet, and depots.

In 2022/23 analytical analysis and development work was carried out to enable carbon emissions reporting via an app. Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) was also introduced into 80% of our fleet.

In 2023/24 onwards, work will involve quarterly carbon emissions data and identification, and identifying viable options for decarbonising depots and installing EV charging infrastructure.

3. Decarbonising our estate and operations by 2030

The second aim in our Climate Action Framework is to lead the way and become carbon neutral by 2030 for our major operational footprint, consisting of our highways electrical assets, buildings, fleet, and staff business travel (grey fleet). We report annually on our emissions through our Greenhouse gas report, the latest is 2021/22.

3.1 Highways electrical assets

Almost 46% of our emissions come from streetlighting (2021/22 data). At the end of 2022/23 we had converted 87%[1] of streetlighting in Oxfordshire to LED, significantly reducing this major contributor to Council emissions.

We have committed to convert 48 traffic signals (pedestrian crossings) to LEDs in 2023/24, with an additional 8 having been completed in 2022/23.

In 2022/23 we published our Streetlighting & Illuminated Assets Policy which sets out how we are using dimming of equipment during low traffic periods, reduce running hours and implement dynamic control of lighting. The policy also considers the impact of light pollution on nature when assessing where lighting should be added or reduced across our transport network. Where necessary, dimming and reduced burning hours will mitigate environmental impacts as light pollution at night negatively affects biodiversity as well as causing unnecessary carbon emissions.

3.2 Council-owned buildings

Roughly 30% of our emissions come from our buildings (2021/22 data). We are in the process of retrofitting our operational buildings to reduce emissions and become more energy efficient. We received funding for this through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), and are also utilising additional internal funding. Full details are available in our Carbon Management Plan.

17 buildings were retrofitted in 2022/23 (eight Council buildings and nine maintained schools) with improvements including air source heat pumps, external wall insulation, infra-red heating, replacement boilers, Solar photovoltaic, and battery storage.

We have completed further energy audits across 46 corporate buildings and a programme of decarbonisation works being developed as detailed in the Carbon Management Plan.

We also prepared and submitted capital bid for £28 million to accelerate decarbonisation of our wider property portfolio.

[1] 52,424 out of existing 60,329 streetlighting assets have converted to LEDs at the end of 2022/23

3.3 Fleet

21% of our carbon emissions come from our fleet, and staff travel (2021/22 data). As such, it is a key area for carbon reduction, with progress reported in full in our Carbon Management Plan. We are replacing our fleet with electric vehicles (EV) over time, ensuring where feasible all new vehicle acquisitions are zero tailpipe emission by default. Where zero emission is not feasible, we look for other ultra-low emission alternatives. Our Local Transport Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (OEVIS) support and inform our decisions in regards to our fleet, the majority of which we aim to electrify by 2028. 34 vehicles are now electric and 46 charge points installed on Council sites.

In 2022/23 we evaluated the potential for a leased EV model over ownership, procured temporary hire electric vehicles to replace some of our end-of-life/lease vehicles, and procured a fleet management system to deliver in 2023/24. £18 million was submitted to the capital pipeline to significantly accelerate the fleet's (excluding the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service fleet) transition to electric vehicles, commencing in 2023.

We also successfully bid for innovation funding to build a prototype hydrogen range extender fire engine and work with partners on an ambulance and street sweeper, leading the way for types of vehicles that cannot be easily electrified. The project commenced in May 2023.

3.4 Staff business travel

Emissions from staff business travel increased between 2021/22 and 2020/21 from 447 tCO2e in 2020/21 to 857 tCO2e in 2021/22, and we are anticipating a further post-COVID bounce back in 2022/23 due to a return to normal patterns of travel after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. In 2022/23 a staff business travel programme was instigated with the aim of reducing emissions from staff business travel, through encouraging active travel and travel hierarchy; a digital by default approach for training and internal meetings; exploring electric cars for high mileage staff; and promoting an electric car benefit scheme. Funding was allocated in the capital pipeline to support essential user EVs for high mileage users. In addition to the outline business case for the essential user EVs, a paper was taken to SLT with proposals to address carbon emissions associated with staff business travel. The proposals were supported, and a programme of work will be initiated in 2023/24 to identify and implement actions to reduce staff business travel related emissions.

4. Enabling Oxfordshire's transition to net zero

Our third aim is to enable a net zero Oxfordshire ahead of 2050 and as early as possible in the 2040s. We plan to halve emissions by 2030 through delivering the outcomes in the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Report, a goal we are working towards through our Local Transport Connectivity Plan, building retrofit support, energy, natural environment, and developing a circular economy. To enable this a partnership approach is required, along with community support and engagement to encourage the behavioural change needed across the county.

4.1 Transport

Our strategy for transport follows the 'Avoid', 'Shift', 'Improve' model, with measures to 'Improve' via electrification of our own fleet and the infrastructure for the county;

measures to 'Avoid', for example facilitating remote working to reduce congestion; and a 'Shift' to Active Travel. Carbon emissions from all road and rail transport increased to 46% of the total in Oxfordshire between 2014 and 2018[2], and are therefore a critical area for carbon emissions reductions.

4.1.1 Local Transport and Connectivity Plan

In July 2022 we published our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. The plan outlines how we will deliver a net-zero Oxfordshire transport and travel system that enables the county to thrive whilst protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents. We plan to achieve this by reducing the need to travel, discouraging individual private vehicle journeys and making walking, cycling, public and shared transport the natural first choice.

In 2021 School Streets were trialled in nine schools to create a safer street environment and encourage active travel options. School Streets have temporary restrictions on traffic on roads outside schools. As part of the LTCP's Travel to School policy, four of the trial schools wished to make their schemes permanent in 2022/23. Work to increase the numbers of School Streets and support the remaining schools to be more appealing to walk and cycle, will continue into 2023/24.

A zero emissions zone (ZEZ) was trialled in 2022 in Oxford, the first phase before a wider area is assessed and consulted on. The ZEZ is an area where zero emission vehicles (such as fully electric motorcycles, cars and vans) can be used without incurring a charge but where other motor vehicles may be charged. All petrol and diesel vehicles, including hybrids, will incur a daily charge if they are driven in the zone between 7am and 7pm unless they have a 100 per cent discount or exemption. Income generated is used for the scheme's development and others supporting our objectives.

In November 2022, the Council's Cabinet approved six trial traffic filters on main traffic routes in Oxford to reduce traffic levels in the city. During the times of operation, private cars without a permit will be prohibited from driving through the traffic filters. All other types of vehicles are allowed at all times. All parts of the city will still be accessible at any time by car, but drivers may need to use a different route. The traffic filters will:

- make walking and cycling safer and more attractive.
- make bus journeys quicker and more reliable.
- enable new and improved bus routes.
- support investment in modern buses (including 159 battery electric buses, operating nearly 70% of bus mileage in the city)
- help tackle climate change, reduce local air pollution and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.

A workplace parking levy is also proposed for Oxford to reduce commuting by car and generate funds to improve alternatives to car travel including more bus services and better cycle lanes.

[2] Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire

4.1.2 Active Travel Strategy

In 2022/23 we developed our Active Travel Strategy, setting a county-wide target to increase the number of cycle trips to 1 million per week by 2031, from our current level of 600,000 cycle trips per week.

We are also developing a strategic active travel network to link villages to towns and towns to town, primarily focused on creating comfortable safe cycle routes.

4.1.3 Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

LCWIPs are a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements at the local level. They enable a long-term approach to developing local cycling and walking networks over the next ten years and form a vital part of the Government's strategy to increase the number of trips made on foot or by cycle. In 2022/23 Abingdon, and Witney LCWIPs were created, and development is taking place in Banbury, Didcot, Chipping Norton, Woodstock and Charlbury. Other towns in the county are being considered as funding and opportunities arise.

4.1.5 Public transport

In 2022/23 the Council received funding for 159 new electric buses via the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme to help authorities introduce new buses and infrastructure. The new buses will save an estimated 9,200 tonnes of carbon dioxide every year and will be launched in 2023/24, with 34 delivered by December 2023 and remaining buses by June 2024.

In 2022/23 the Council partnered with a consortium of organisations to launch an autonomous electric bus in Milton Park in January 2023, following funding from the UK Department for Transport's Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CCAV) through Innovate UK. In 2023-24 the project will be connected with Didcot Parkway Railway station.

4.1.6 Electric Vehicles Infrastructure

In 2021 the Council adopted the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicles Infrastructure Strategy (OEVIS), setting out the Council's approach for providing the infrastructure for the county to support electric vehicles, needed for the UK's ambitions for all new cars to be electric by 2030. We are acknowledged as the national leader in charging infrastructure, and Oxfordshire also leads in adoption of EVs.

In 2022/23 we installed 250 Park and Charge EV charging points in Council car parks as part of an Innovate UK funded project with Zeta Group and others, designed to explore a new model of providing EV charging for those without off-street parking at local 'over-night charging hubs'. Some of these hubs have already been adopted for use by car-sharing clubs, which reduce the need for vehicle ownership, especially for relatively infrequent users. We have also received funding for up to 500 EV charging gullies for connecting home charges to vehicles. Other approaches to EV charging that were trialled included the Trojan DoorSTEP.

In 2023/24 we will continue to deliver the OEVIS as part of the Government Local EV Infrastructure programme, with £3.65 million capital and £259,000 capability funding.

4.1.7 Freight

In 2022/23 the Council received funding for Horizon Europe project GREEN-LOG, taking place across five countries and developing zero emission last mile freight enabling technologies. In 2023-2025 the Council will lead work in Oxford focusing on the development, siting, and piloting of mobile micro consolidation hubs.

4.1.8 Embodied Carbon

Following on from our award-winning work with Milestone on reducing emissions from roads maintenance, in 2023/24 we will work with the Future Highways Research Group on options to reduce carbon emissions in infrastructure projects.

4.2 Buildings

The International Energy Agency estimates that in 2021 buildings accounted for 30% of global final energy consumption and 27% of total energy sector emissions[3]. Ensuring emissions reductions in both our own buildings, and those in the county is therefore a key element of our Climate Action work.

4.2.1 Retrofitting of privately-owned buildings

We make funding available to eligible residents (being low-income / fuel-poor and living in poor energy-performing properties) to retrofit buildings. This has been via the Sustainable Warmth Fund under a scheme called the Local Authority Delivery phase 3 (LAD3) for properties using mains-gas for their primary heating fuel and Home Upgrade Grant phase 1 (HUG1) for properties using other fuels for space-heating such as electricity via storage heaters, air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, etc, solid fuel such as coal or biomass, or bottled LPG. Both schemes took a whole-house approach, subject to grant funding limits, tackling the fabric of properties first, followed by heating system upgrades and finally consideration of solar PV for clean electricity generation where appropriate.

In 2022/23 we completed delivery of phase 1 of the LAD, with some supply chain issues delaying LAD3 and HUG1 delivery into 2023/24, with HUG1 further slowed by a delay in awarding the funding. A proportion of the funding is forecast to be returned, approximately £720,000 of the £2.2 million awarded. A further £6.42 million of capital retrofit grant funding has been secured under phase 2 of HUG for delivery across the next two financial years to fully-fund improvements to over 300 further owner-occupier / privately rented properties.

4.2.2 Support for local communities

We provided thermography training to local communities with Low Carbon Hub and CAG Oxfordshire group members on thermal imaging to assess properties for heat loss and then interpret results to provide advice on energy efficiency. Due to the popularity of these sessions we are looking to run more in 2023/24. Additionally, we will be hosting a retrofit ‘draughtbusters’ training session in July 2023 and likely again at the beginning

[3] https://www.iea.org/reports/buildings

of the heating season to help train up community volunteers to tackle easy fabric improvements for local residents.

The Council provides tailored advice and support for residents via the Better Housing Better Health service, in conjunction with the National Energy Foundation to help improve the energy efficiency of residents' homes, save money and improve comfort. Funding for the service was increased in 2022/23 and due to be re-procured in the summer of 2023 to further improve the service offering.

In 2023/24 we will develop a multi-stakeholder retrofit partnership reporting to Future Oxfordshire Partnership

In 2023/24 the Home Upgrade Grant 2 will make £6.42 million available to residents for continued retrofitting work as outlined in section 4.2.1 above, and implementation of energy innovation programmes Net Zero Pathfinders - Futurefit One Stop Shop, Local Energy Oxfordshire Neighbourhoods and Heat Pump Ready programmes (one in Rose Hill, Oxford and another in Bicester) in conjunction with industry and university partners.

4.2.2 Schools

In addition to retrofitting, we are also working in partnership with schools in Oxfordshire through our ACES programme (Action on Carbon and Energy in Schools). ACES is an energy efficiency support service, funded by Oxfordshire County Council and delivered by Oxford Brookes University and Low Carbon Hub, to help schools in Oxfordshire carry out energy saving measures that will:

- cut carbon emissions
- save money on energy bills
- make buildings more comfortable and healthier for staff and students

In 2022/23 ACES engaged with more than 40 schools through webinars, advice, and energy assessments. In 2023/24 energy assessments, advice and school engagement will continue, with a recycling loan scheme for schools to be launched.

As a result of running the Solar Schools programme in collaboration with Low Carbon Hub, 27 of our Council-owned schools had solar PV panels installed and generating on-site renewable energy, with four installed in 2022/23, generating 3% of electricity used by all Council-owned schools.

We supported nine schools to apply for Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) funding. £1.6 million of funding was successfully awarded for insulation measures, solar PV and low carbon heating which were installed in 2022/23.

4.3 Energy

4.3.1 Energy Strategy

The Council has signed up to the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, a cross-cutting county-wide framework led by OxLEP setting objectives to achieve a clean, smart energy system and reduce countywide carbon emissions by 50% by 2030 (from 2008 base). This requires a shift to electric transport and heating, zero emissions standards for new housing and retrofitting of current housing stock to meet energy standards.

4.3.2 Local Energy Oxfordshire

In 2022/23 Project Local Energy Oxfordshire (LEO) was completed. The project was led by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks in partnership with the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University, the County and Oxford City councils and a number of commercial partners. It was one of just three smart local energy system demonstrator projects in the UK and saw a number of energy smart grid trials take place in Oxfordshire.

As well as participating in the LEO flexibility trials, the Council led the development of a spatial energy planning tool which is now being put to use to support a new local area energy planning approach being developed through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Net Zero Routemap and Action Plan workstream.

In 2023/24, as a result of the successful partnership, the LEO Energy Mapping platform will be developed further following a funding bid to support local area energy planning.

Local Energy Oxfordshire - Neighbourhoods (LEON), a successful bid for OFGEM's Strategic Innovation Fund, will build on the work in Project LEO and see the Council work in partnership to look at how a new approach to decarbonising homes and businesses combined with coordinated local energy planning can accelerate net zero. It is widely known that poor regulation and capacity planning have resulted in grid connection and capacity becoming severe limiting factors for both renewable connection and widespread electrification. Grid collapse and cascading failures of IT, water, food supplies were among the top risks identified by CCCUK in their CCRA3 risk assessment. Addressing those risks is at the top of our adaptation priorities.

4.3.3 Heat Decarbonisation

In 2023/24 the Council will work in partnership on two Heat Pump Readiness programmes (from just four awarded funding across England), aiming to transition domestic properties from fossil fuel heating to electric air source heat pumps on an area-based, at-scale delivery model.

4.4 Circular economy, waste reduction and food

In our framework we set out our aim to develop a circular economy, designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use and regenerate natural systems, in line with national strategy[4]. We are doing this through our sustainable food strategy, Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, household waste recycling centre strategy and emerging circular economy strategy

4.4.1 Circular economy

We aim to develop a circular economy in Oxfordshire, where we design out waste and pollution, keep products and materials in use, and regenerate natural systems. This is a central component of bringing our resource footprint back within planetary

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/resources-and-waste-strategy-for-england

boundaries: Oxfordshire currently uses resources at 2.8 times the rate at which the Earth system can replenish them[5].

In 2022/23 we started work to develop a Circular Economy Strategy, now due to be completed in 2023/24.

As a result of our support for CAG Oxfordshire, three new libraries of things were implemented across the county helping us move to a circular economy.

4.4.2 Household waste and recycling

Our Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy sets out our aim to increase reuse, recycling and composting of household waste, reduce waste to landfill and keep waste growth to 0%. It also sets out our plans to embrace the circular economy, embedding it into Council practices and procurements in order to minimise waste generation in the future.

In 2019 the Council committed to phase out single use plastics within our properties and these were replaced with more sustainable alternatives.

In 2022/23 Oxfordshire County Council has again been named the best performing county council waste disposal authority in England for the ninth year in a row. In 2021 - 2022, residents recycled, reused or composted 58.2 per cent of their household waste, according to the latest government figures. Increasing that significantly is at least partly contingent on central government acting on proposals for extended producer responsibility and other changes to waste management, consulted on in 2022.

Our waste wizard tool provides information to residents on how they can repair, donate and recycle items that they no longer need. This both encourages reuse, and also reduces contamination of the recycling bins (which can lead to whole loads being rejected) by letting residents know which bin items should be placed in.

Over 60% of the residual waste bin at the recycling centres could have been recycled in other containers. In 2022/23 we launched an unsorted waste campaign to encourage residents to sort their rubbish before visiting our Household Waste Recycling Centres to increase recycling rates, a campaign continuing into 2023/24.

4.4.3 Sustainable food strategy

The Council is a member of an Oxfordshire local food partnership, Good Food Oxfordshire, developed by a multi-stakeholder partnership including county and district councils, community groups, local food producers, retail and hospitality businesses and major institutions. The Council sits on its steering group in both core and advisory capacities, as well as providing funding. Good Food Oxfordshire is a network of over 150 local organisations committed to a better food system for Oxfordshire.

In May 2022 Good Food Oxfordshire published its Oxfordshire Food Strategy, setting out how the partnership will tackle challenges to food in relation to climate change, health and wellbeing, and fair incomes and employment to develop a sustainable food system.

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[5] WWF Living Beyond Nature's Means 2019

Oxfordshire County Council supports a number of community groups that make use of, or redistribute, surplus food through core funding and long-term partnership with Community Action Groups in Oxfordshire. Reducing food waste is one of the top four highest impact actions to reduce climate emissions.

Specific examples of Community Action Groups relating to redistribution of food waste and local food growing include community fridges, Replenish Oxfordshire, Food for Charities, and Oxford City Farm who bring farming and food production to the heart of urban communities in Oxford.

4.4.4 Plant-based catering

In 2021 the Council agreed to incorporate plant-based options in Council-catered schools. A one day per week vegan only meals trial took place for 6 months in the schools where the Council has a contract to cater (primary schools).

Following the trial, the offer was amended - of the 45 meals offered in our current three-week menu cycle, only 11 now contain meat. In this same three-week cycle there are a total of five days that contain no meat options. The menu cycle pre-Covid contained 15 meat dishes out of the 45 and only one meat free day in the three weeks, an overall reduction in meat from 33% to 24% of dishes.

Reducing meat consumption and shifting to predominantly plant-based diets is one of the top four highest impact ways of reducing climate emissions.

4.5 Adaptation

Reducing emissions to net zero will reduce the rate of climate change. However, due to the emissions already released into the atmosphere, the climate will continue to experience more frequent and increasingly severe weather events for the foreseeable future. There is no possibility of returning to the climatic conditions of the Holocene, but eliminating climate emissions can stabilise the climate and prevent further deterioration. Our work around adaptation aims to build an evidence base on Oxfordshire's key climate vulnerabilities and develop long-term solutions to Oxfordshire's climate resilience challenges, under 3 main headings: preparing our people, repairing and strengthening the natural world and finding technological solutions.

4.5.1 Climate risks

In 2022/23 work began to develop an evidence base for Oxfordshire on climate adaptation to highlight areas of current and future climate vulnerability for Oxfordshire. We will summarise this as a climate risk register for our own operations (including supply chain) and for Oxfordshire as a whole, where we have agreed through the FOP to take a lead role in co-ordinating work on adaptation and resilience. The evidence base and risk register will support stakeholders across Oxfordshire and within the Council to develop strategies and plans to build climate change resilience for Oxfordshire and our own services. We will publish these as outline countywide climate adaptation and resilience strategy and OCC Climate Adaptation Action Plan later in 2023.

As part of our efforts to engage Oxfordshire stakeholders and build capacity on climate adaptation, the Council has partnered with Exeter University to deliver a series of

workshops with Oxfordshire stakeholders to develop a skills and knowledge resource to support local decision makers to understand their role in building resilience to climate change, and the steps they can take to identify potential resilience measures.

We are also working with Council and local stakeholders to identify and implement climate resilience measures and will develop this work further in 2023/24.

4.5.2 Flooding

In 2022/23 planning work was carried out for the Thames Water surface water management programme. The programme aims to improve surface water infrastructure (drainage systems), with four schemes receiving funding from Thames Water to be brought forward. Work will continue into 2023/24.

A pilot programme was also created to recruit volunteer flood wardens, with recruitment underway for volunteers in two areas in 2022/23. A third area will take place in 2023/24. Following the six-month pilot, it is the intention to roll out the Flood Warden scheme countywide.

4.6 Natural Environment

Around half of emissions produced from greenhouse gases are absorbed by land and ocean ecosystems, providing nature-based solutions to climate change[6]. The natural world is also a critical component of any effective adaptation strategy. As climate change is a major cause of biodiversity loss, protecting and increasing recovery of biodiversity to mitigate the effects of climate change is key to our Climate Action. We are ensuring we develop and take advantage of assets including trees, hedges, soils and ponds, enhancing opportunities for carbon capture and storage. National requirements around biodiversity net gain and creation of a local nature recovery strategy will support our work and we have agreed to be the responsible authority in Oxfordshire for the creation of the LNRS (Local Nature Recovery Strategy).

4.6.1 Tree planting

In the Climate Action framework, we set our support for the community ambition to double tree cover in Oxfordshire with 'the right tree in the right place', with a recognition of the urgent need to increase canopy cover. In April 2022 Cabinet approved the new Tree Policy for Oxfordshire which recognises the multiple positive impacts of tree cover and defines trees as “Critical Climate Infrastructure” and states “a presumption in favour of trees” on highways and in developments. The strategy commits to increase canopy cover within County Council responsibilities. These aims are being achieved through a number of targets and areas that collectively will increase the number of trees and canopy cover in Oxfordshire:

- Tree planting on Council managed land must prioritise larger growing, shade-providing trees where suitable
- Highway improvement projects will be used as an opportunity to (re)introduce street trees as part of the overall design with the aim of maximising canopy cover in urban areas.

[6] https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/biodiversity

- New highways, developments and strategic developments must achieve 30% canopy cover
- Project planning applications must prioritise the introduction of trees as a component of design.
- For every tree of 15cm or greater removed on Council-land, two ‘standard’ (ie 5-7yo, 2-3m) trees will be planted, increasing tree cover over time.
- Removal of OCC trees will only be considered for dead, dying or dangerous trees, proven to cause significant structural damage, or considered to be an inappropriate species for the location.

In 2022/23 we planted a tree for every parish in Oxfordshire (465 ‘standard’ trees). Two new community tree and woodland roles were created as part of the Council’s successful bid, in collaboration with Oxford City Council and Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire district councils, for the Government’s Woodland Creation Acceleration Fund (WCAF). The two new roles will work to identify opportunities to increase canopy cover through community engagement, training volunteer groups and mapping tree, woodland and hedgerow planting opportunities across the county. A tree replacement programme is proposed to be delivered over four years (2023-2027) with ~£3 million Capital allocated (subject to Cabinet approval) for planting ‘standard’ trees with two in-house teams being created to deliver tree planting, aftercare and establishment for the trees planted across OCC responsibilities.

4.6.2 Tree management

All tree planting within the Highway Maintainable at Public Expense (HMPE) will be afforded a minimum of three years aftercare, maintenance and watering from the first growing season.

As part of the tree policy we formally committed to maintaining the proactive, cyclical inspection and tree care programme, started in 2020-21, aiming to achieve maximum life cycles for all trees under the Council’s responsibility, whilst adhering to the Council’s duty of care and legal responsibilities.

4.6.3 Verge and Vegetation Policy

In February 2023 we published a new verge and vegetation policy with improved references to the management of roadside nature reserves and support for areas of local community managed biodiversity. Best practice carried out by other local authorities and evidence-based recommendations from local expert groups such as Plantlife and HERO (Healthy Ecosystem Restoration Oxfordshire) has been used to help shape the new policy.

Three 'cut and collect' trial sites to promote wildflower habitats on roadside verge nature reserves have been undertaken over the last two financial years, totalling nearly 13,000 m2 of verge, with more sites being identified at present.

A wildflower management experiment is also being undertaken in The Hendreds trial site, in collaboration with the parish council to help further our understanding. The

eventual aim is that community groups are supported to take on areas of wildflower planting.

In the new policy verges are cut once per year in the autumn. (a significant reduction from when urban verges were cut five times a year, and rural three times, and an important shift in timing to maximise the opportunity for wildflowers to seed, and invertebrates to complete their lifecycle), with, where possible, wildlife refuges 1m wide at the rear of verges 3m or more, to be cleared in rotation every five years, and less frequent cuts in verges in AONB. Overall, verges will be maintained in line with Urban Verge Meadow Guidance, which the Council assisted the University of Oxford in producing.

4.6.5 Local nature recovery strategy and local nature partnership

Local nature recovery strategies are a system of spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement, designed to identify places to create or improve habitat, that collectively will cover the whole of England. The strategies are supported by a necessity for biodiversity net gain and increased duty on public authorities for biodiversity.

The development of a local nature recovery strategy in Oxfordshire was delayed in 2022/23 as a result of lack of published guidelines from the Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), but a steering group was established and recruitment was underway for a Project Manager to lead the strategy.

Now those guidelines have been published the Council is now expecting to become Responsible Authority for Oxfordshire for formal development of the Nature Recovery Strategy to commence in Q2 2023/24.

In 2022 the Council worked with the Future Oxford Partnership to establish an Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP). The partnership was established to look at three priority areas for action: nature recovery, natural capital investment, and people and nature. In 2023 the LNP began gathering supporting evidence for planning policies to deliver greater than 10% biodiversity net gain, and to agree a set of guiding principles for biodiversity net gain in Oxfordshire. The work will be developed further in 2023/24 when further biodiversity net gain guidelines are published by DEFRA.

4.7 Community support and engagement

Our climate framework was developed in conjunction with other council authorities and requires a partnership approach to meet the 2050 net zero county target. We are working with energy organisations, housing associations, community groups, universities, schools, local authorities, and suppliers to find solutions to the climate challenge.

Nationally we work with other councils to share best practice on council climate action through our membership of organisations such as UK100, Countryside Climate Network, and ADEPT (Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport), with case studies published in the LGA and UK100.

4.7.1 Residents

In 2022/23 our Climate Action Oxfordshire website was developed and published, providing information for residents, communities, and businesses on action they can take, and has been developed in collaboration with other councils in Oxfordshire.

4.7.2 Communities

Residents can join more than 100 Community Action Groups as part of CAG Oxfordshire for whom we provide core funding as partners, the largest network of its kind in the UK.

In 2022, we doubled funding to this network with the purpose of expanding their current work to focus on helping us move to a circular economy; expand the community wealth building work into new areas of Oxfordshire, developing green skills in local communities; and continue and expand projects connecting communities with nature.

We also provide funding for projects that support access, biodiversity or the community through Trust for Oxfordshire, who award grants from up to £25,000. Our climate action projects undergo equalities impact assessments to ensure that those most affected by climate change are considered.

In 2023/24 we will develop outreach and engagement, and communications strategies for the county.

4.7.3 Health services

In 2022/23 we embedded climate change into our health work through building climate vulnerability factors and risks into our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, a model which aims to improve the health and wellbeing results of the local community and reduce inequalities.

4.7.4 Cultural organisations

The Council supports Oxfordshire Great Big Green Week, an annual week-long celebration of climate work and behaviour change, delivered in partnership with cultural and arts groups. In 2022 the Council financially supported CAG Oxfordshire, who run the event, to provide seed funding grants for participating groups, with other support including promotion and marketing. Events over the week included talks and performances, exhibitions, workshops, marches, Volunteer Days, film screenings, Swap Shops and Repair Cafes. We will continue this support into 2023/24.

4.7.5 Green spaces

As part of our healthy place shaping work in 2022/23 we co-created a community insights partnership project with young women in East Oxford to understand the barriers and enablers (including sport) influencing their access to green space through surveys, workshops, Manifesto, and artwork, with the report making a number of recommendations for young women and their time in green spaces. The project promoted nature connectivity and wellbeing, supporting the known link between increased connection to nature and pro-environmental behaviour.

4.7.6 Local businesses

We provide support for businesses to decarbonise through our collaborative networks and funding support.

Oxfordshire County Council is a founding member of Oxfordshire Greentech, a members network supporting the growth of the low-carbon sector in Oxfordshire. It supports members with events, free and subsidised energy audits, and funding opportunities. Our support will continue in 2023/24.

In 2022 the Council managed the delivery of the UK Community Renewal Fund within Oxfordshire, offering businesses and organisations support to increase uptake and investment in solutions that reduce carbon and save energy. This included feasibility assessments, investment support, and installation support to 72 organisations, including small, medium and large businesses; and public, private and voluntary organisations. The Council delivered the project through the Environmental Information Exchange at Oxford Brookes University, and Low Carbon Hub as Energy Solutions Oxfordshire. It was delivered from February to November 2022, investing £1.8 million and saving an estimated 325 tonnes of CO2e per year.

4.8 Partnerships and strategy

4.8.1. Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire

Building on the Pathways to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PAZCO) report, published by the University of Oxford in 2021, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership commissioned work in 2022/23 to translate the report into a route map and action plan, focusing on the areas where joint working across the Oxfordshire local authorities could accelerate emission reductions. The resulting Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan was agreed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in March 2023, with agreement of five priority workstreams to be developed in 2023/24.

4.8.2 Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership

The Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) is a partnership set up by Oxford City Council bringing together universities, hospitals, councils, large businesses, and communities to support the city in its journey to net zero carbon emissions. In 2021 the partnership created a roadmap for Oxford to become net zero by 2040. The Council continues to support this trail-blazing work by the City and to ensure its insights and delivery mechanisms are used to full advantage in accelerating the implementation of PAZCO across the whole County.