



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	COUNCIL – 19 JULY 2023
Subject	CLIMATE BI-ANNUAL REPORT
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change. Email: <a href="mailto:andrew.prosser@westoxon.gov.uk">andrew.prosser@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager. Email: <a href="mailto:hannah.kenyon@publicagroup.uk">hannah.kenyon@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report Author	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager. Email: <a href="mailto:hannah.kenyon@publicagroup.uk">hannah.kenyon@publicagroup.uk</a>
Purpose	To update Council on the climate action taken by West Oxfordshire District Council, in response to the climate and ecological emergency, over the last 12 months (July 2022 to June 2023).
Annexes	None
Recommendation	<i>That Council Resolves to:</i> <i>1. Note the contents of the bi-annual report on climate action for West Oxfordshire.</i>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Putting Residents First</li><li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li><li>• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li><li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li><li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees	West Oxfordshire District Council Officers

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 West Oxfordshire District Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in June 2019, with the aim of making the council carbon neutral by 2030 and achieving net zero in the district by 2050.
- 1.2 Following public consultation in May 2020, the Council adopted a Climate Action Plan in October 2020 and a Climate Change Strategy 2021-2025 in February 2021. These documents provide the council's framework for prioritising and taking forward a programme of work in relation to climate action and biodiversity land management.

## 2. CLIMATE ACTION AND BIODIVERSITY LAND MANAGEMENT PROGRESS

Table 1: Progress made over the last 12 months.

Climate Change Strategy for West Oxfordshire 2021-2025	
Theme One: <b>Protecting and restoring natural ecosystems.</b>	<p><b>Biodiversity land management</b> Land management plans have been used to improve habitat management on council owned land to restore nature and enhance biodiversity through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reducing the number of annual grass cuts across public open spaces.</li><li>• Establishing historical grass cutting regimes on floodplain meadows.</li><li>• Creating new wildflower meadow areas.</li><li>• Additional support for volunteers, among others.</li></ul> <p><b>Parish and town council biodiversity project</b> UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) has been secured to engage with parish and town councils to deliver ecological enhancements on their land and promote nature restoration across the district. A series of case studies showcase best practice in habitat creation and enhancement that inspire other town and parish councils to take action. Guidance on how to set up and maintain community biodiversity groups and projects will be updated. The Council is partnering with Wild Oxfordshire, a leading local environmental charity.</p> <p><b>Deer Park South</b> UKSPF funding has also been secured to improve public access at Deer Park South Wood in Witney. Works started earlier this year with the removal of redundant rabbit fencing around the site boundary to improve safety. Two footbridges are being installed across Colwell Brook and sections of the footpaths upgraded to make them accessible for all. Interpretation boards have been commissioned and these will be located at the main entrances of the site to educate visitors about the local wildlife. A new wooden bench will be installed overlooking</p>

	<p>the balancing pond. The Witney Woodland Volunteers that manage the site have been engaged throughout the process.</p> <p><b>Windrush in Witney</b>  The Windrush in Witney project aims to restore the River Windrush floodplain and increase appreciation of Witney’s local heritage. The Council is partnering with the Wychwood Forest Trust and the Lower Windrush Valley Project to secure funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Potential works include terrestrial and riparian habitat creation and restoration; reinstatement of traditional meadow management techniques; increased access to nature and green spaces; revival of traditional skills; training in biological surveys and monitoring, and a series of public events and activities. An expression of interest has been submitted for the funding.</p> <p><b>Kilkenny Lane Country Park conservation</b>  A KLCP conservation group has been established by the Council and is actively improving grassland and woodland habitats at Kilkenny Lane Country Park through coppicing young woodland; removing tree guards; collecting and sowed wildflower seeds; and surveying flora.</p> <p><b>Hedgerow planting</b>  Around 1300 hedgerow whips were planted last winter to improve connectivity across the district and mark the Queen’s Green Canopy. The planting was organised by the Council with help from community groups, schools and Publica employees. Hedgerows are being monitored and maintained by local communities and have been growing well this summer.</p> <p><b>Bioblitz</b>  The first Bioblitz event was held at Kilkenny Lane Country Park last August, in partnership Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). Its purpose was to gather as many environmental records as possible over a 24-hour period to build a picture of the lives of the different insects, animals and flowers inhabiting the park and document the level of biodiversity. Expert-led activities included a morning bird identification walk; bug hunt; wildlife survey and evening bat walk. A total of 123 new records were collected of 57 species.</p>
<p>Theme Two:  <b>Energy.</b></p>	<p><b>Future Fit Oxfordshire</b>  Future Fit Oxfordshire approach includes utilising smart technology and design to enable businesses and residents to make changes to help reduce energy consumption and reduce the impacts of climate change. The scheme initially received funding from the Innovate UK Net Zero Living Programme for a feasibility to build a ‘one stop shop’ approach to remove the non-technical barriers to retrofit. Phase 2 of the Future Fit Oxfordshire will build and test the model across the county.</p>

**Sustainable Warmth: HUG 1/LAD3**

The Council joined both the Greater South East Net Zero Hub consortium and Oxfordshire County Council's bids for Local Authority Delivery 3 (LAD 3) and Home Upgrade Grant 1 (HUG 1) funding bids. The Council was awarded over £1 million to help upgrade energy inefficient homes. The LAD 3 energy grant funding was aimed at low income households living in homes with EPC E and lower to install energy efficiency measures such as solar and low carbon heating. The HUG scheme was aimed at low income homes in off gas grid areas to install low carbon heating alternatives such as air source heat pumps. Applications to the GSENZH Sustainable Warmth scheme closed in January with 26 LAD 3 measures installed in 22 homes and two HUG 1 measures installed in the district. Oxfordshire County Council's Sustainable Warmth programme resulted in 22 measures installed in 13 homes under LAD 3 and 40 measures were installed in 23 homes under HUG 1. In total, £572,522 of the Sustainable Warmth fund was spent in the district.

**Sustainable Warmth: HUG 2**

The Council is part of Oxfordshire County Council's HUG 2 funding bid which has been awarded £5.5 million of capital funding for retrofit. HUG 2 is aimed at low income households who do not have mains gas for their heating systems and will fund a whole house retrofit. HUG 2 delivery will run until March 2025 and the Council will be supporting communications to promote residents' applications to the scheme.

**Better Housing Better Health**

Better Housing Better Health (BHBH) service is currently managed by the National Energy Foundation (NEF). The service aims to reduce the number of households in fuel poverty. BHBH provides a telephone helpline to Oxfordshire residents offering impartial energy advice, access to energy efficiency grants and emergency heating vouchers and free home energy visits to vulnerable residents. The service works closely with both health and social services who refer clients vulnerable to the effects of a cold home. BHBH also works with third sector partners such as Citizens Advice and Age UK for help, for example, with income maximisation and benefit advice. Due to the cost of energy crisis over the last winter heating period, there was an unprecedented demand for the BHBH service. In West Oxfordshire, 241 Warm and Well assessments and 31 home visits undertaken. 31 households had energy efficiency installations and 63 households were referred to additional support services.

**Energy advice**

Cost of living events have been held across the district to offer energy advice to help residents reduce energy bills and save carbon.

**Eynsham Smart and Fair Futures**

	<p>The Eynsham Smart and Fair Neighbourhood trial has developed a Zero Carbon Energy Action Plan for the Eynsham primary substation area as well as plans for its long-term governance structure. The Council is on the local steering group chaired by Transition Eynsham Area (GreenTEA), the local low carbon group and founding community shareholder of the Low Carbon Hub CIC.</p> <p><b>Local Area Energy Planning</b>  The Council was one of lead authorities in developing the LEO Integrated Land Use mapping inform countywide energy planning. Oxfordshire Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) aims to provide a geospatial view of energy use, generation and network capacity across Oxfordshire to help identify the most appropriate place-based and cost-effective options to deliver net zero. The LAEP is one of the priority actions of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and is being progressed with other councils, electricity and gas network operators, communities and other key external stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Nature-based carbon sequestration and offsetting</b>  Opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation, are being explored in partnership with the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and other Oxfordshire local authorities. This is also being considered in the Local Plan call for sites.</p>
<p>Theme Three:  <b>Low-carbon transport and active travel.</b></p>	<p><b>Park and Charge Oxfordshire</b>  Fast 7-22kW electric vehicle (EV) charging hubs are being managed in five of the council's public car parks including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Bourton Road, Carterton</li> <li>• New Street, Chipping Norton</li> <li>• Back Lane, Eynsham</li> <li>• Woodford Way, Witney</li> <li>• Hensington Road, Woodstock.</li> </ul> <p>The use of the EV chargers has continued to increase from 668 sessions (8,035kwh) last July to 1238 sessions in June (21,152kwh).</p> <p><b>District-wide rollout of electric vehicle charge points</b>  Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) funding has been awarded to deliver further charge point infrastructure for West Oxfordshire residents without off-street parking. Proposals are being developed by the Council, with Oxfordshire County Council and other Oxfordshire authorities, to install EV car points in more council owned car parks and community micro hubs.</p> <p><b>Electric car club pilot scheme</b>  As part of an Oxfordshire wide car sharing pilot scheme, EVs are available to hire at Back Lane car park, Eynsham, and Woodford Way car park, Witney on an hourly or daily basis. The Council has partnered</p>

	<p>with car club providers Co Wheels and Enterprise CarClub to offer pay per use EVs on a 12 month trial basis.</p> <p><b>Local cycling and walking infrastructure plans</b> The Council have shaped the Witney Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which identifies destinations in the town and surrounding area that are accessible by walking and cycling and makes suggestions for how to improve routes.</p>
<p>Theme Four: <b>Standards in new development.</b></p>	<p><b>Sustainability Standards in planning</b> The planning validation process has been improved to raise sustainability in new build and retrofit development. All applications are now required to submit a Sustainability Planning Statement which sets out the extent to which development meets the exemplary standards in the Sustainability Standards Checklist. Supplementary guidance and templates have been created to assist applicants in meeting this new requirement. The climate change manager is a non-statutory consultee on applications to encourage applicants to commit to exemplary sustainability standards.</p> <p><b>Salt Cross Area Action Plan</b> A review of UK net zero policies was undertaken. Rights Community Action (RCA) has issued a High Court legal challenge to the Inspector’s decision to water down the net zero ambitions of the Council in its plan for Salt Cross Garden Village.</p> <p><b>Local Plan review</b> A net zero evidence base for the Local Plan 2041 is being developed to ensure exemplary net zero policies for new build and retrofit are adopted. Carbon assessment of spatial options is likely to be undertaken over the next few months to direct growth in the most sustainable locations in the District.</p>
<p>Theme Five: <b>Engage, support and educate.</b></p>	<p><b>Climate Impact Assessment Tool</b> The purpose of the Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT) is to embed climate, environmental and social considerations within the project development and decision-making processes. This aims to ensure decisions consider potential trade-offs, highlights areas for improvement, and ensures negative impacts are minimised as much as possible. In summer 2022, the CIAT was used on a number of pilot projects to test the functionality of the tool and get feedback on how and when it should be used. In November and December 2022, the outcomes of the pilot projects were presented to Informal Executive/Cabinet at West Oxfordshire, Cotswold, and Forest of Dean district councils. Approval was given to proceed with a 6-month</p>

	<p>trial period to test a wider roll-out of the tool. In January, use of the tool was embedded within Publica’s Project Management Framework and business manager briefings were carried out to ensure teams knew to use the tool on their upcoming projects and proposals. The trial period for projects will run from February 2023 to July 2023. Feedback will then be reviewed and recommendations will be made for the full roll-out of the tool. The project and recommendations will be presented to Cabinet in Autumn 2023.</p> <p><b>Greenlight online hub</b> Greenlight, a dynamic nature and climate online hub, is going live this July. The digital platform provides a space where the local community can connect, collaborate and take action for a greener future. Parish and town councils, residents, community groups and businesses are invited to share ideas, celebrate projects and work together to combat climate change, restore nature and enhance biodiversity in our local environment.</p> <p><b>Parish and town events</b> The Council hosted a climate change and nature event for parish and town councils on 8 March 2023, in partnership with Wild Oxfordshire and Wychwood Forest Trust. The event provided an opportunity to share knowledge and collaborate on carbon reduction measures to meet our ambitious net zero targets, climate change adaptation, and ecological enhancement across the district. The event was well attended by the council’s members and 18 parish and town councils. These initiatives are all part of the council’s drive to facilitate wider action across the district.</p>
<p><b>Carbon Action Plan: The Pathways to Achieving Carbon Neutral by 2030</b></p>	
<p><b>Council offices, property and sites.</b></p>	<p><b>Carbon account</b> The annual carbon accounts are held on the climate pages of the council’s website. The data gathering process for the next council’s carbon account is underway. An officer working group has been established across Publica councils to agree on a reporting process and update emissions being accounted for, particularly in relation to Scope 3. Work has started with the Data team to streamline the data gathering process to improve reporting in future years.</p> <p><b>Decarbonisation of council offices</b> In April, a bid was submitted as part of the Low Carbon Skills Funding, provided by the Government and delivered by Salix, to fund detailed assessment of the energy efficiency and heat decarbonisation options for Elmfield and 3 Welch Way. The Council has been successful in receiving £20,845 of grant funding to deliver these assessments by the end of March 2024, and are in the process of procuring a consultant</p>

	<p>for this work. The assessments will propose a fully costed programme of works to decarbonise the two sites, which will inform the viability of the sites for future funding opportunities like the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS).</p> <p>Increased wall and roof insulation is being considered at Woodgreen council offices to improve the energy efficiency of the building.</p> <p><b>Roof mounted solar PV on council and tenanted buildings</b></p> <p>The commercial solar PV project for tenanted buildings in the council's portfolio has identified four sites in West Oxfordshire that might be suitable for roof mounted solar, subject to council approval and tenant agreement to proceed. Installation of solar panels on these buildings will reduce emissions from energy used onsite and positively contribute to the building's EPC rating.</p> <p><b>Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards compliance and decarbonisation of tenanted buildings</b></p> <p>A work programme is being developed to assess the council's portfolio of assets, to determine the level of investment that may be needed in the future to comply with the Government's Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards. It is expected that the standard will require an EPC rating of B or above by 2030.</p> <p><b>Reduction in staff's carbon footprint</b></p> <p>Staff have continued to combine home and office working as part of an agile working approach. Publica have provided information to staff on how to make energy and cost savings. Learning at work webinars were held with external partnerships, including Oxfordshire Greentech and Good Food Oxfordshire, to help staff reduce their carbon footprint in relation to food, home energy, waste, and sustainable travel.</p>
<p><b>Leisure centres and facilities.</b></p>	<p><b>Decarbonisation of Carterton Leisure Centre</b></p> <p>Carterton has been selected as the first leisure centre to decarbonise out of the council's leisure buildings as the main gas-fired heating system is approaching the end of serviceable life. In October 2023, the Council submitted a PSDS 3b bid and was successful in securing circa £1.6m of funding.</p> <p>To progress with the PSDS programme, an options appraisal for the low-carbon heating system was commissioned using a design and build contractor under the SCAPE framework. The purpose of the options appraisal was to have greater confidence in the long-term costs of the project, particularly operational costs given the high electricity prices during winter 2022/23.</p> <p>In January 2023, the delegated authority decision was taken to proceed with the PSDS 3b project and accept funding. The contractor is now in the process of developing an investment grade proposal for the</p>



	<p>design of the project, and once completed in autumn 2023 will be subject to Council and GLL approval.</p> <p><b>Decarbonisation of Witney and Chipping Norton leisure centres</b> The Council was successful in securing Local Carbon Skills Funding for desktop energy assessments for the council's other leisure centres to establish the financial and energy implications of low-carbon heating technologies and solar PV. These assessments are expected to be completed in July and will inform funding applications for building decarbonisation.</p>
<p><b>Council vehicle fleet, machinery and transport.</b></p>	<p><b>Electric service vehicles</b> Three electric vans (Maxus E 2022) have been leased on a two year contract since April 2023. Two of the EVs are utilised by the parking team and replace old diesel vans. The third van is used by the environmental health team to replace staff vehicles. Both teams have duties that require regular trips around the district and therefore the EVs will help to lower carbon emissions from travel.</p> <p><b>Electric road sweepers</b> 2 new EV sweepers are being introduced to the council's vehicle fleet. This will reduce the reliance on diesel vehicles for street cleansing services performed by Ubico Limited.</p> <p><b>Waste Service Review</b> Further modelling is being undertaken to feed into the review on carbon impacts of alternative waste collection systems. This will include the vehicles needed to collect different waste materials as well as the subsequent sorting and processing of materials.</p>

### 3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 An alternative option is for the Council to take no climate action at all, which is a course of action not recommended.

### 4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 In 2019/20 the Council allocated £200,000 annual budget for climate action for three years. The allocated climate budget for 2022/23 was £112,786 and spend was £126,068.91 due to additional assessments for the decarbonisation of council buildings. For the current year (2023/24), the budget is £259,391 and spend for Q1 is £45,276.14).
- 4.2 The Biodiversity and Countryside Land Management Officer (BLMO) post has been made permanent and demonstrates the council's strong commitment to restoring nature and enhancing biodiversity in the district.

4.3 The BLMO has been on a paid secondment to the Lower Windrush Valley Project for 0.5 days a week over the last nine months. This has strengthened the council's connection with this conservation project, which aims to improve access and biodiversity on land to the south of Witney to Newbridge.

4.4 The Council has been successful in securing external funding for climate action, as highlighted in the sections above.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no perceived legal implications associated with the actions in this report.

## **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

6.1 There are no immediate risks arising from the contents of this report.

## **7. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

7.1 Projects in this report aim to address climate action for all. Individual projects which may have an equalities impact are evaluated on a project specific basis.

## **8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Climate mitigation and adaptation are vital in tackling climate change and lessening its impacts.

8.2 Climate action has multiple co-benefits, for example increasing the efficiency of council operations and improving health and well-being in our local communities.

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

9.1 The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Carbon Action Plan to Full Council on 28 October 2020.
- Climate Change Strategy to Full Council on 24 February 2021.

9.2 These documents will be available for inspection online at [www.westoxon.gov.uk](http://www.westoxon.gov.uk) or by contacting democratic services [democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk) for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)