



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 10 SEPTEMBER 2025
Subject	OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL AREA ENERGY PLANNING
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery Email: andrew.prosser@westoxon.uk
Accountable officer	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager Email: hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager Email: hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To seek approval to proceed to Phase 2 of the Oxfordshire local area energy planning programme and complete a districtwide local area energy plan.
Annexes	Annex A – Stage gate acceptance criteria Annex B – Phase 2 minimum officer resource requirement Annex C – OxLAEP Memorandum of Understanding
Recommendation(s)	That the Executive resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, to approve the remaining Phase 1 key deliverables of the Oxfordshire local area energy planning project programme.2. Subject to the completion of phase 1, agree to proceed to phase 2 of the Oxfordshire local area energy planning project programme and the completion of a districtwide local area energy plan.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency• Working Together for West Oxfordshire

Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None

I. BACKGROUND

I.1 Local area energy planning is a process which sets out the pathway on how we get from our current energy system to the energy system we need for a zero-carbon future. The Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee (formerly the Future Oxfordshire Partnership) is supporting the six Oxfordshire councils to work together to develop Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) for Oxfordshire. Further information on the Oxfordshire local area energy planning (OxLAEP) project programme is available on the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee website.

I.2 Some of the benefits of having a LAEP are:

- Sets out a clear plan of actions and projects needed to transition an area's energy system to net zero. This can then be the basis on which further feasibility work and project delivery and investment can be prioritised, providing clarity for both local authorities and District Network Operators (DNOs).
- Aims to create a local supply chain capacity and capability for projects, and training and employment opportunities for residents.
- Phase 1 identifies where upgrades and flexibility solutions are needed to ensure homes, businesses and essential services have secure and affordable energy.
- Phase 2 translates this analysis into district-level action plans, helping councils prioritise projects like renewable generation, energy storage and infrastructure improvements.
- These phases will enable faster investment in the right areas, reducing the risk of energy shortages and lowering long-term costs for residents and businesses. They will also support growth opportunities by ensuring that new housing, commercial developments and community energy projects can connect to the grid without delays.
- This work will create a stronger and more resilient energy system that benefits households, local economies and the environment.
- Identifies solutions, such as energy flexibility and renewable generation, for areas where there will not be sufficient electricity grid capacity to meet demand.
- Improves the process to allow more targeted grid infrastructure investment by providing evidence of when and where additional grid capacity will be needed – this evidence can be used to unlock DNO, and other, investment. As well as giving the local authority a blueprint for action, they also provide all geographic stakeholders with a basis for taking forward activity and prioritising investments. DNOs are now permitted to invest ahead of need if they have sufficient high-quality evidence.
- Can save money in the long term due to planned energy infrastructure investment compared to unplanned and piecemeal delivery, despite the initial cost associated with commissioning a LAEP. This should avoid lengthy waits for grid connections.
- LAEPs help local authorities to create and monitor a project pipeline of energy projects to advance decarbonisation, economic growth, energy security and climate resilience in alignment with local strategies and policies. It will also provide greater transparency in why pipeline projects represent the best way forward to achieve local authority priorities.

- 1.3** The LAEP and West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 will be developed and implemented together. The LAEP is critical to enabling the delivery of Local Plan objectives by ensuring the right energy infrastructure is in place to support sustainable growth. The assessment of renewable energy resource potential and local electrical network constraints will feed into the Local Plan's spatial strategy and site allocations. Local Plan policies on renewable energy schemes, new housing and infrastructure will help DNOs understand projected energy consumption, alongside the Distribution Future Energy Scenarios. The LAEP will help to identify any areas of grid constraint early so that the DNO, the Council and developers can work collaboratively to find a solution which delivers the council's ambitions set out in the Local Plan.
- 1.4** Ove Arup & Partners have been appointed as experienced lead consultants in the development of the LAEPs.
- 1.5** Countywide analysis has been undertaken in Phase 1. District-wide analysis happens in Phase 2 and district-level support in Phase 3.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1** All the Oxfordshire councils are currently only committed to participating in Phase 1 of the project programme. Two stage gates have been built into the project programme to give each council the opportunity to opt out of the programme at the end of each phase or to delay participation by up to six months. This decision relates to the first of these stage gates at the end of Phase 1.
- 2.2** The decision to progress through this stage gate is based on two factors:
- 1)** West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) is satisfied that the acceptance criteria have been met for key deliverables in Phase 1 (see Annex A). The criteria were developed and agreed with Oxfordshire councils and Ove Arup.
 - 2)** There is sufficient WODC officer resource available to deliver Phase 2 across the council's teams. The minimum officer requirement is included in Annex B.
- 2.3** Some of the acceptance criteria for Phase 1 has been completed, as shown in Annex A. Deliverables that have been completed include:
- Stakeholder mapping (on the proviso that councils are responsible for maintaining)
 - Engagement Plan
 - Baseline Summary Report
 - Modelling Assumptions Log
 - Stakeholder workshops and supporting materials, including the awareness raising and fact-finding workshop, baseline review assumptions workshop, and a finance and investment workshop.
- 2.4** Some critical deliverables remain outstanding and will be completed by September to a high standard before proceeding to Phase 2 of the project programme. These include:
- Policy Document Review included in scenario modelling
 - Data audit report, part of data audit and gap analysis
 - Data set library and technical note
- 2.5** Deliverables that are not critical to Phase 1 and will be completed in Phase 2 include:

- Energy literacy training
- Data Management System, part of data audit and gap analysis
- Baseline GIS Visualisations – ideally these will be completed for use in phase 2
- LAEP Data Library (GIS and Excel)

2.6 Other Phase 2 deliverables to be completed include:

- Digital/visualisation
- Survey
- Priority inventions packages
- Capacity building on net zero financing
- Stakeholder engagement in action planning and prioritisation
- Commercialisation, investment, and route to market strategy review
- Output reports

2.7 The wider benefits of completing a LAEP are summarised below:

- 1) Achieving Climate and Net Zero Ambitions - Provides a clear, cost-effective roadmap to help councils and communities meet their carbon neutral and net zero targets.
- 2) Safeguarding Local Energy Security - Ensures reliable energy supplies by identifying future demand and planning upgrades to grid infrastructure.
- 3) Innovative, Data-Driven Planning - Uses advanced digital modelling and shared data to develop smarter, evidence-based energy solutions.
- 4) Collaborative County-Wide Approach - Brings councils, businesses, network operators and communities together to deliver joined-up local energy planning.
- 5) Unlocking Investment and Economic Growth - Creates a pipeline of investable green projects, attracting funding, jobs, and skills development to Oxfordshire.
- 6) Empowering Communities - Integrates local priorities into energy plans, supporting neighbourhood-led projects and equitable access to affordable energy.
- 7) Supporting Sustainable Development - Aligns energy planning with housing, transport and infrastructure strategies to enable low-carbon growth.
- 8) Reducing Future Costs and Risks - Minimise long-term costs and disruptions by proactively managing energy needs and preparing for future challenges.

2.8 The full programme (phases 1-3) is due to be completed by the end of 2026.

2.9 A lead consultant from Ove Arup will oversee the West Oxfordshire LAEP.

2.10 The climate team will provide the lead project officers and the most time on the project, each equating to half a day per week. Time will also be required from planning policy and development management, economic development, finance, and property officers. All teams have been consulted and have not raised concerns about the level of time required. If there are clashes with periods of heavy workload, there will be some flexibility within the project programme to accommodate this, and climate officers would be able to step in if colleagues are unable to contribute.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1** Alternative option 1 – not to progress into Phase 2. The intention has been to complete the full project programme, with stage gates built in to give each district council the opportunity to opt out if there are any serious concerns, which is not the case. Resourcing has been secured for WODC's involvement in the whole programme and would be unavailable for other energy projects if WODC decided not to progress to Phase 2 of the project programme.
- 3.2** Alternative option 2 – the stage gate process that has been established allows for each district to defer their participation in the delivery of Phase 2 of the project programme by up to six months at the stage gate. There is no need to delay has been identified and an unnecessary pause may cause the districts to lose momentum and reduce engagement levels of stakeholders.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1** It is recommended that WODC proceed to Phase 2 of the project programme and complete a districtwide LAEP.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** The Oxfordshire Joint Leaders Committee has allocated a fixed production budget amount of £ 172,726.47 and a variable amount of £100,000, across all local authorities, to Phase 2 of the project programme, which is held by Oxfordshire County Council, the project managing authority. The Ove Arup contract will be funded entirely from this budget and no funding contributions are required from the district councils. This funding would not be available for other projects if WODC do not to progress to Phase 2 of the project programme.
- 5.2** WODC officer time is required, as covered in the main section of the report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the project programme has been signed by all the participating authorities (see Annex C).

7. RISKS

- 7.1** There is uncertainty around local government reorganisation (LGR); however, Phases 1 and 2 of the project will be completed by January 2026, prior to the formation of the shadow authority. The LAEP will contain valuable district level information for the new authorities. Consideration will be given as to how to mitigate LGR impacts and ensure the LAEP outputs have longevity through the reorganisation process.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.1** None.

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10. The aim of the project programme is to identify the most cost-effective pathway to achieve net zero. A West Oxfordshire LAEP is the roadmap to achieve reductions in district-wide greenhouse gas emissions.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None.

(END)