

Developing Thinking on the Corporate Plan 2020-24

Scrutiny Committee

8 July 2020

Cllr. Andrea Powell

- An opportunity for Committee to review the Cabinet's developing thinking on the Corporate Plan 2020-24 themes and illustrative projects and provide any recommendations to Cabinet in advance of any public engagement and Cabinet on 9th July.

Corporate Plan Format

Theme

Actions/Projects

Measures

Theme One

Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs

Why?

- The average price of a home is many times higher than the average salary, particularly for the young, and renting is also expensive. The pressure to build new homes in our district sometimes outweighs local wishes. Infrastructure – things like roads, schools and GP surgeries – have not kept up with housing development. Too many houses being built today are not fit for a low-carbon future.

So...

- We will strive to ensure that new homes and infrastructure in South Oxfordshire meet local needs, are sustainable, zero carbon in their build and operation and high quality in design. We will provide homes that people can afford to live in. New developments will be accessible with walking, cycling and public transport a priority. Neighbourhood plans and local participation will sit at the heart of our planning process. We will work with partners to ensure that development is appropriate for our communities.

Homes that people need

Illustrative Actions/Projects

Working constructively with local, regional and national partners we will shape and influence programmes to deliver appropriate homes and infrastructure, including:

- Didcot Garden Town priority projects as identified by the Advisory Board, specifically a sustainable plan to redevelop the Didcot Gateway site, a public transport and active walking and cycling network, community facilities and accessible green spaces for Didcot residents
- The transformation of Berinsfield into a thriving Garden Village with improved facilities that are developed in line with the community's needs and aspirations
- New council-owned homes with a focus on quality of design, affordability and local requirements
- Support and encouragement for the retrofit of our existing housing stock for low-carbon performance and to eliminate fuel poverty
- Elimination of homelessness in our District and bringing empty properties back into use

We will use the local plan policy development process and controls to ensure that:

- New homes are future-proofed, meeting the highest environmental standards and enhancing nature through sensitive, high quality design
- Spatial planning embeds public health, wellbeing and sustainability
- Changes over time in our stock of homes meet local needs
- Sustainable transport solutions prioritise walking, cycling and public transport to reduce car dependency and air pollution

Theme Two

Improved economic and community wellbeing

Why?

- South Oxfordshire has a large number of small and micro businesses, and is well placed to adapt to changes in the economy, but support will be needed for it to remain a healthy and vibrant place to live and work. The Coronavirus pandemic has shown the strength of the community but there are areas of isolation and deprivation in our district, and the benefits of access to culture, leisure and community for all has been made clear.

So...

- We will reimagine our high streets, helping **independent small businesses** to thrive and to encourage cultural well-being for all. We will encourage clean local economic development and support our **business hubs, centres of scientific excellence and our educational establishments** to become leaders in sustainable technology, innovation and enterprise. We will help our **community groups** to strengthen cohesion, reduce social isolation and tackle areas of deprivation.

Illustrative Actions/Projects

- Partner with regional agencies to ensure economic recovery, quality employment, thriving businesses and vibrant communities, avoiding the blight of “dormitory towns”
- Provide advice on access to grants, training and diversification programmes, helping local businesses to build agility and resilience
- Plan for communities connected by walking & cycling networks, with sustainable, accessible and affordable public transport and reliable Broadband, learning the lessons from the Covid-19 experience and enabling more home-working
- Launch a new community wellbeing strategy to encourage and support culture, leisure and the arts
- Use our planning powers to preserve our valuable green spaces, particularly in urban areas
- Work with our communities to maximise Community Infrastructure Levy funds and to allocate these to achieve best outcomes for residents in the District
- Take enforcement action on fly-tipping, dog fouling and other anti-social blights on our society
- Work with local partners to introduce civil parking enforcement as a district responsibility

Theme Three

Action on the Climate Emergency

Why?

- The greatest challenge we face as a society is the **Climate Emergency** and our ability to **adapt our lives and our behaviours** to ensure a safe and resilient future. While statements and targets are welcome, the challenge for our district is to take action, transform our operations and inspire our residents and businesses to do the same. Aspects of our lives will need to change, but we have a duty to make this transition fair for all parts of society.

So...

- We will show leadership by developing and implementing a climate change programme to make the council net carbon neutral by 2025. We will help our communities to plan a fair transition to a future that will be defined by climate change.

Illustrative Actions/Projects

- Achieve our own zero carbon target by 2025 and support others to achieve the district target of zero carbon by 2030
- Develop an annually approved climate emergency programme and adequately finance it
- Deliver Council-owned net-zero homes and use grants, planning policy and advocacy to ensure the same standards throughout the district
- Promote and encourage behavioural change with informational campaigns and leading by example
- Take positive action on single-use plastics, air quality improvement measures and sustainable transport
- Mitigate climate change through planning and land use, enhancing biodiversity on our own land and strengthening the planning system to enforce environmental standards
- Promote the circular economy (reduce, re-use and recycle), including in our waste management contracts
- Support and encourage local businesses to respond to climate change and nature recovery
- Promote waste minimisation initiatives such as Repair Cafés
- Work with Oxfordshire County Council to build on our commitment to active travel and cycling infrastructure

Theme Four

Protect and restore our natural world

Why?

- South Oxfordshire is a largely rural district, including parts of two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Oxford green belt, as well as a long stretch of the River Thames. The natural world is proven to provide benefits to both mental and physical health, as well as having its own intrinsic value, and it needs our protection.

So...

- We will **respect and protect our natural environment**, especially our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other nature-rich areas. We will champion the **opportunity to restore our natural world** in both biodiverse and bio-depleted areas through nature recovery networks and other means. We will connect urban communities to their **local green spaces** and restore nature to urban environments.

Illustrative Actions/Projects

- With partners, promote in-depth mapping and surveying of ecosystems across the district, planning for restoration of the natural world and working closely with land-owners and specialist agencies
- Celebrate, protect and enhance our natural assets, including the River Thames and the AONBs and their setting, promoting our rural district for tourism, leisure and wellbeing
- Encourage the use of natural processes to combat risks arising from climate change, such as meadows and trees to reduce flooding
- Recognise and support the vital role of farming in economic and ecosystem resilience, local food provision and the recovery of soils and natural processes
- Call for the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire to promote an ambitious nature recovery programme, including tree and meadow planting, rewilding and providing habitats for wildlife
- Work in partnership with the Earth Trust, Chilterns Conservation Board, North Wessex Downs AONB and others to improve access to green spaces in and around our towns, reinforcing access to nature as a priority for community wellbeing

Theme Five

Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability

Why?

- Coronavirus has cost, and lost, the Council money. Many years of austerity before that, as well as a failure to increase council tax in line with growing costs, makes it hard to balance the books. The future funding picture for councils from Government remains unclear. In order to deliver a **progressive and ambitious agenda**, we need to reduce the gap between income and expenditure in our Medium Term Financial Plan.

So...

- We will invest to save and act responsibly and ethically with our financial resources. We will work with other councils for fair funding and will investigate new viable sources of revenue in order to maintain and improve vital services. We will ensure all financial operations and reporting support effective decision-making and strong, ethical governance.

**Investment that
rebuilds our
financial viability**

Illustrative Actions/Projects

- Develop and implement an innovative Transformation Strategy to diversify our revenue streams, improve our effectiveness and secure our on-going viability
- “Invest to save” for the District, including the delivery of sustainable new Council offices – on time and within budget – to realise future operational efficiencies
- Exercise strong Stewardship of all Council assets including property and financial investments, optimising their performance for the benefit of our residents
- Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and to enrich our leisure, sporting and community activities
- Invest responsibly and ethically with the Climate Emergency at the heart of what we do

Theme Six

Openness and accountability

Why?

- The complexity of modern society and local government structures can be hard to navigate. Many services are delivered as part of external partnerships, so it can be hard for residents to see what we do and how we do it. There are some groups within our District with whom we have little engagement or interaction, so the diversity of our district is not always recognised and supported.

So...

- We will maintain and improve **high levels of satisfaction** with the services we provide and will reach out to all sectors and age-groups to foster a culture of openness and participation. We will use our influence to champion **inclusion, diversity and transparency** across all elected and unelected bodies in our region. We will **empower and invest in our staff** and conduct our operations with the highest level of **integrity and accountability**.

Illustrative Actions/Projects

- Enhance trust and accountability in democratic decision-making, including live-streaming and recording of meetings, ensuring full accessibility of facilities and monitoring progress in an open and transparent way
- Ensure that council departments work collaboratively to deliver best outcomes for residents
- Embed an organisational culture that celebrates diversity, inclusion and respect
- Apply good governance and transparency in all our working and decision-making, exploring optimal structures and mechanisms for best practice in local government
- Engage effectively with residents, Parish and Town Councils and other community organisations, using plain English in our communications and using appropriate methods and technologies to ensure equal and fair access for all