

Cabinet version

# South Oxfordshire District Council

## Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024

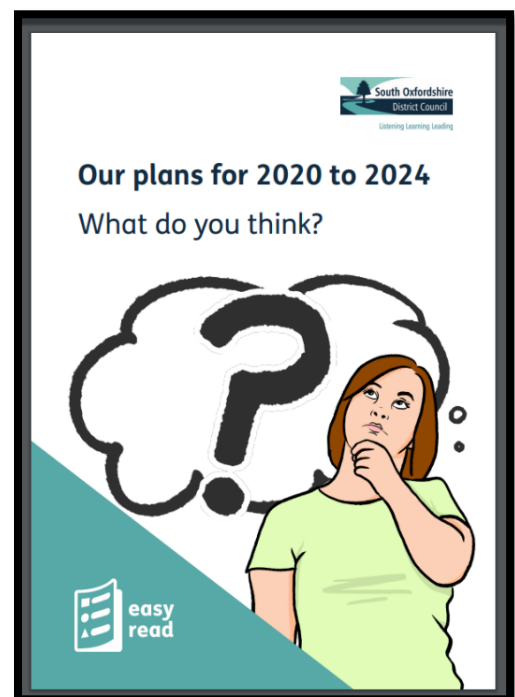
### ENGAGEMENT REPORT

A review of the feedback on the priority themes and illustrative projects for the South Oxfordshire District Council Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024. The plan will help councillors focus the councils' work on what they and those living and working in the district believe will make the district a better place now and for future generations.

SEPTEMBER 2020



*A video of Councillors talking about the Corporate Plan was used to introduce the themes and encourage participation (above); the Easy Read comment form (right) was available alongside the online survey.*



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**The appendices are available as two separate documents on the Corporate Plan page of our [website](#):**

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NB: We report in percentages even when there are less than 100 responses. When stating percentages in the analysis, we are referring to the percentage of respondents that answered the specific question, rather than the total number of responses to the overall survey. Response percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding up over .5 and rounding down under .5

Words that appear in italics are quotes taken from comments received.

## SUMMARY

This report has been produced by council officers to analyse the comments received to the six priority themes and illustrative projects in the South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 engagement survey. The Corporate Plan sets the strategic direction for the council and creates a vision and priorities for the councils’ work for those living and working in the district. The plan is updated every four years and our current plan will be replaced by this one.

We ran a public engagement exercise and asked for feedback on the six priority themes and illustrative projects and actions that are being proposed to deliver the plan. A survey was open to all those living and working in South Oxfordshire, as well as council staff and councillors. We asked for feedback on the themes particularly in the context of the financial and recovery challenges in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The engagement ran for four weeks between 16 July and 13 August 2020. The survey included 29 questions, plus another 4 questions that were aimed at district council staff and councillors. In total 932 responses were received, specifically 928 online submissions and 4 postal responses, which included an Easy Read version of the survey. The postal responses were manually inputted into our online consultation system, SmartSurvey. In the two months since launching this survey and running other council engagement activities, we’ve had around 70 new sign ups to our consultation databases. This is nearly double than what we usually have.

Overall, 5,431 comments were received; with many of those containing several remarks or points within them. Participants were asked a range of questions relating to the themes and projects, as well as their ideas for what a successful community looks like, and if they thought there was anything was missing from the themes.



*Social media posts on Facebook and Twitter were used throughout the engagement to help reach a wide audience*

The majority of people responding, 87%, did so as an individual or member of the public, while 4% of responses were made by a business, organisation or community group and 2% as a district, county or town / parish councillor or officer. 5% were district council staff and the remaining responded as ‘other’.

The engagement highlighted that there is strong overall support for the draft themes and projects in the Corporate Plan. The themes and projects received a variety of comments which will be explored further in this report.

All of the thousands of comments we received have been read and considered as part of the analysis and reporting. This engagement report has informed recommendations, discussions and decisions on the preparation of the Corporate Plan. Where specific questions were raised within the comments we have addressed them in the report wherever possible. If responders feel that there are questions that need a specific response from us, please get in touch using the contact information in the 'further information' section of this report.

### Key findings and recommendations:

The council thanks everyone who took part and gave us feedback on the draft Corporate Plan 2020-24. This report will be published online. Based on the output from the engagement the below recommendations are put forward to Cabinet:

1. There was broad support for all themes with them all scoring 3 and above (out of 5) in terms of their importance and nearly 25% of respondents choosing to add additional comments at the end of the survey that were positive about the value of the themes being proposed. The most important theme was considered to be the protection and restoration of the natural world; 80 % of respondents ranked all of the illustrative projects under this theme as very important or important.

The second most important theme was openness and accountability, all illustrative projects under this theme received a high proportion of respondents (over 78%) telling us they were important or very important. Two projects were of strong significance to respondents, receiving an exceptionally high level of 96% as being important or very important. These were '*Ensure that council departments work collaboratively to deliver best outcomes for residents*' and '*Engage effectively with residents, parishes and town councils and community organisations in Plain English and using appropriate methods and technologies to ensure equal and fair access for all.*'

Action on the Climate Emergency was the theme ranked third most important with a consistently high proportion of respondents (over 80%) telling us that five out of the 10 illustrative projects were either important or very important for the council to deliver. Though it was commented by many that this should not just be an issue that a local authority should be focusing upon but addressed nationally.

Many respondents thought that the themes had been structured in order of importance.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to consider the potential for both reordering the themes to give greater emphasis to the ones ranked most important and also consider increasing the prominence of the theme on openness and accountability by structuring projects under this theme for delivery in year 1 of the Corporate Plan given this theme scored so highly. This could lead to a strong base built on trust and openness, to deliver priorities in other areas.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to consider how to re-emphasise the mandate for action on the Climate Emergency, given the high level of support for delivery of projects under this theme.

2. There were strong concerns raised throughout the engagement on the issue of housing and perceived over-development. There's a contradiction according to respondents between development of housing and related car use and building in the countryside and the theme of action on the Climate Emergency.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to note and consider the concern of housing and over-development and consider the acceleration of the illustrative project '*Deliver Council-owned net-zero homes and use grants, planning policy and advocacy to ensure the same standards throughout the district*' to mitigate concerns.

3. There was a strong sense from respondents that they have a good understanding of the district council's level of influence in our ability to affect change and the strategic challenges we face. Several referenced the forthcoming HM Government Devolution White Paper and our interaction with national strategic programmes of work such as the Oxford-Cambridge arc. Many commented that a position or direction on these was not clear in the themes or illustrative projects.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to consider addressing this in the detail of relevant themes or ensure they are addressed in the framing of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 as part of the Foreword from the Leader of the Council and as part of the continued broader communications on the Corporate Plan 2020-24 development.

4. It was highlighted that more emphasis should have been given to the impact of Covid-19 on the themes and proposed projects. Respondents urged the council to consider the lessons learned from Covid-19 and wanted recognition of the difficulties Covid-19 has brought.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to review the impact of Covid-19 on the council and the lessons learned from this difficult time and ensure lessons are incorporated into the Corporate Plan 2020-24. Consideration could also be given to addressing the Covid-19 impact as part of the Foreword from the Leader of the Council and the continued broader communications on the development of the Corporate Plan 2020-24, as it provides important contextual framing.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to review results from the engagement exercises on the economic recovery in the district, the lockdown lifestyle survey and other sources of relevant data and ensure that feedback is incorporated into detailed delivery planning for the Corporate Plan 2020-24.

5. It is of note throughout the engagement that respondents welcomed the opportunity to engage with this work and would like to have more opportunities for engagement in the future. Further, it is clear that many respondents feel an affiliation to their district council and there has been a general upturn in the level of engagement, evidenced by similar engagements launched around the same time period. This could be attributed to residents feeling a stronger sense of community and local resilience since the Covid-19 pandemic and a greater degree of time being spent on-line. As part of our engagement residents and stakeholders were asked if they would like to be added to our consultation databases and a link for them to sign up to hear more from us was included. They were also given the opportunity to discuss the Corporate Plan development by contacting the Insight and Policy Manager directly.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to consider the development of an ongoing communications and engagement programme that frames the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and whilst the Plan is formally adopted in October 2020, explore the potential for a commitment to an ongoing engagement as detailed delivery planning begins.

6. The take up amongst age groups were not equally represented in the survey with over a quarter (26%) of respondents between 65 and 74, followed by a further 24% of respondents between 55 and 64. Whilst this is not unusual with this type of engagement, there was a desire at the start of this engagement to reach out to young people which we did not achieve. Only 4% of respondents fell in the 20-34 age group with no respondent completing the survey and submitting demographic data as being under 20 years old.

Aligned to this, respondents commented that they felt there was a lack of consideration for young people in the plan amongst the themes and illustrative projects.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to consider whether to strengthen or add in a project specifically around increasing participation and engagement with young people in local democracy and decision-making in the district.

7. It is of note that 87% of the respondents identified themselves as individuals or members of the public, with 5% of respondents identified as staff. It is important to recall that the council did have plans to have focussed staff drop-ins at Milton Park, Cornerstone and the Beacon for staff to discuss the Corporate Plan 2020-24. These could not be held due to restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic. There was also a further opportunity to submit questions to the Project Sponsor and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Andrea Powell. Whilst is a low proportion of staff and it should be recognised that staff may have responded to the survey and identified themselves as a living or working in the district.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to consider how to engage more effectively and involve staff in the development of the detailed delivery planning of the Corporate Plan 2020-24. Further consideration should also be given on how best to engage with staff that were not based at Milton Park, before the Covid-19 pandemic, as almost all staff respondents (96%) were once based at Milton Park.

8. **RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to consider reviewing the ‘these words are not clear to me’ sections of the report and replacing the words that respondents felt were difficult to understand with Plain English alternatives to increase readability and accessibility of the Corporate Plan 2020-24. Further, words that were difficult to understand and suggested alternatives should be included in the council’s style guide for future reference and communications.
9. The survey analysis will help to make improvements to the high-level themes and content. There is a lot of rich information which can inform the next stage of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 after it is formally adopted. There will be a year 1, 2 and 3 delivery plan which will set out more detailed information on how the council will deliver the commitments within the Plan and further work will also take place to develop the councils performance management framework that will monitor the progress of delivery.

**RECOMMENDATION** Cabinet to ensure that this report and specifically the comments, ideas and suggestions are reviewed in full by each service area as part of future service planning along with other relevant information to inform project delivery planning in order to allow the council to work with the insight the survey gives us and prioritise/sequence/target projects that are favourable in the public mind.

10. **RECOMMENDATION** The findings of this engagement exercise are shared with our key Oxfordshire partners, especially where comments received are in respect of responsibilities that are outside of the district councils influence. A short summary document could be sent to Oxfordshire councils, businesses, community groups and towns and parishes with information specifically of interest to these groups. Drawing attention to the engagement findings actively in the spirit of openness and accountability.

## BACKGROUND TO THE ENGAGEMENT

A new Corporate Plan for the period 2020-2024 is needed to create a vision and priorities for the council. We are working in partnership with a variety of stakeholders, public, private and the community and voluntary sector, as well as staff and councillors, to help build a better plan.

A survey asked those living and working in the district to have a say in what's most important for South Oxfordshire District Council to focus on. Councillors identified six main themes for what they feel are the most important areas they need to focus on.

The six suggested themes are:

**Theme 1: Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs**

**Theme 2: Improved economic and community wellbeing**

**Theme 3: Action on the Climate Emergency**

**Theme 4: Protect and restore our natural world**

**Theme 5: Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability**

**Theme 6: Openness and accountability**

We asked for views about these themes to ensure that the district remains a great place to live for years to come. The responses will help councillors finalise their mission statement, known as a Corporate Plan. The plan will enable them to focus the councils' work on what they and those living and working in the districts believe will make the district a better place for future generations.

Covid-19 has changed the way many of us view our priorities for ourselves and those around us. It gave greater importance to finding out what those living and working in the district think about our plans for the future, to make sure South Oxfordshire is the district our communities want it to be.

## ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

A summary of the engagement and reporting methodology is below; full details are available at Appendix B.

A total of 6,397 email notifications were sent to a wide range of internal and external stakeholders and contacts to provide a link to a video of Councillors summarising this engagement and each theme, along with a link to the survey and details of how to comment. The email notification was issued through the councils' online engagement system SmartSurvey. A copy of the email notification can be found at Appendix C;

283 letters were issued to those consultees who opted in for postal correspondence, with details of how to obtain a hard copy of the survey. South Oxfordshire district councillors and staff were informed through internal communications.

A focused online survey, paper comment form and Easy Read versions of the survey offered participants opportunity to indicate how important they consider each of the six themes and their corresponding illustrative projects to be and comment on each theme in a free text box. A copy of the survey can be found at Appendix D.

A press release was issued on the engagement launch date, and social media messages (Twitter and Facebook) posted during the engagement period to further publicise and encourage wide participation from the public. We didn't collect post code data from respondents and will consider doing this in future engagements as this information can be helpful when looking at views of respondents in local areas.

A four-week engagement period was given for submitting responses between 16 July and 13 August 2020. We had to tailor our original engagement approach and our plans to engage more widely due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions. The engagement was carried out in conformity with our public engagement charter<sup>1</sup>.

A total of 932 completed responses were received, one of these was an Easy Read paper version. 554 people looked at the survey but didn't answer any of the questions. Facebook received 6,140 views and Twitter 643 views during the engagement period.

A total of 5,431 comments were received. Most of the comments contained several remarks or points within them and, where this is the case, each comment or point has been summarised individually for analysis purposes. Therefore, the total number of actual comments received is much higher. A summary of the comments is included in this report. Any personal information supplied to us within the comments that could identify anyone has been redacted and will not be shared or published in the report. Some spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors in the original comments were corrected in this report; a full list of unedited comments can be found at Appendix G.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/about-us/have-your-say/our-commitments-public-engagement>



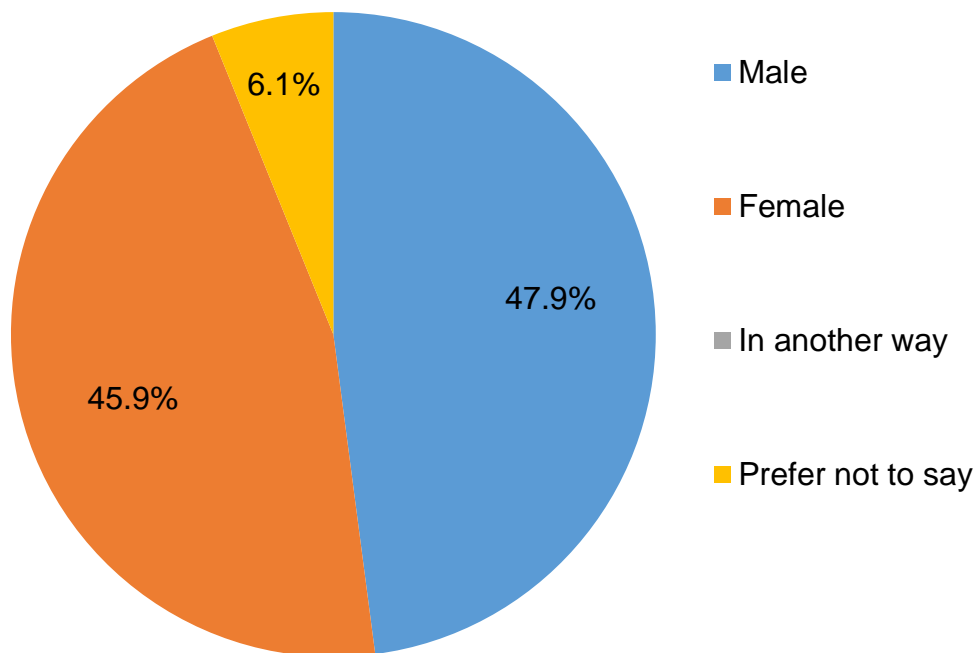
## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

To understand whether survey respondents are representative of the population and affected by the themes, projects and actions proposed, a range of questions were asked to capture demographic information.

The data collected shows that respondents were almost equally split between males (48%) and females (46%), with 6% preferring not to say. This gives a fairly accurate representation of both genders when compared against local population figures.

The actual population in the district shows there are slightly more females than males.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, there is a higher response to this engagement from males meaning that they are very slightly over represented in the data.

### Q24. Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?

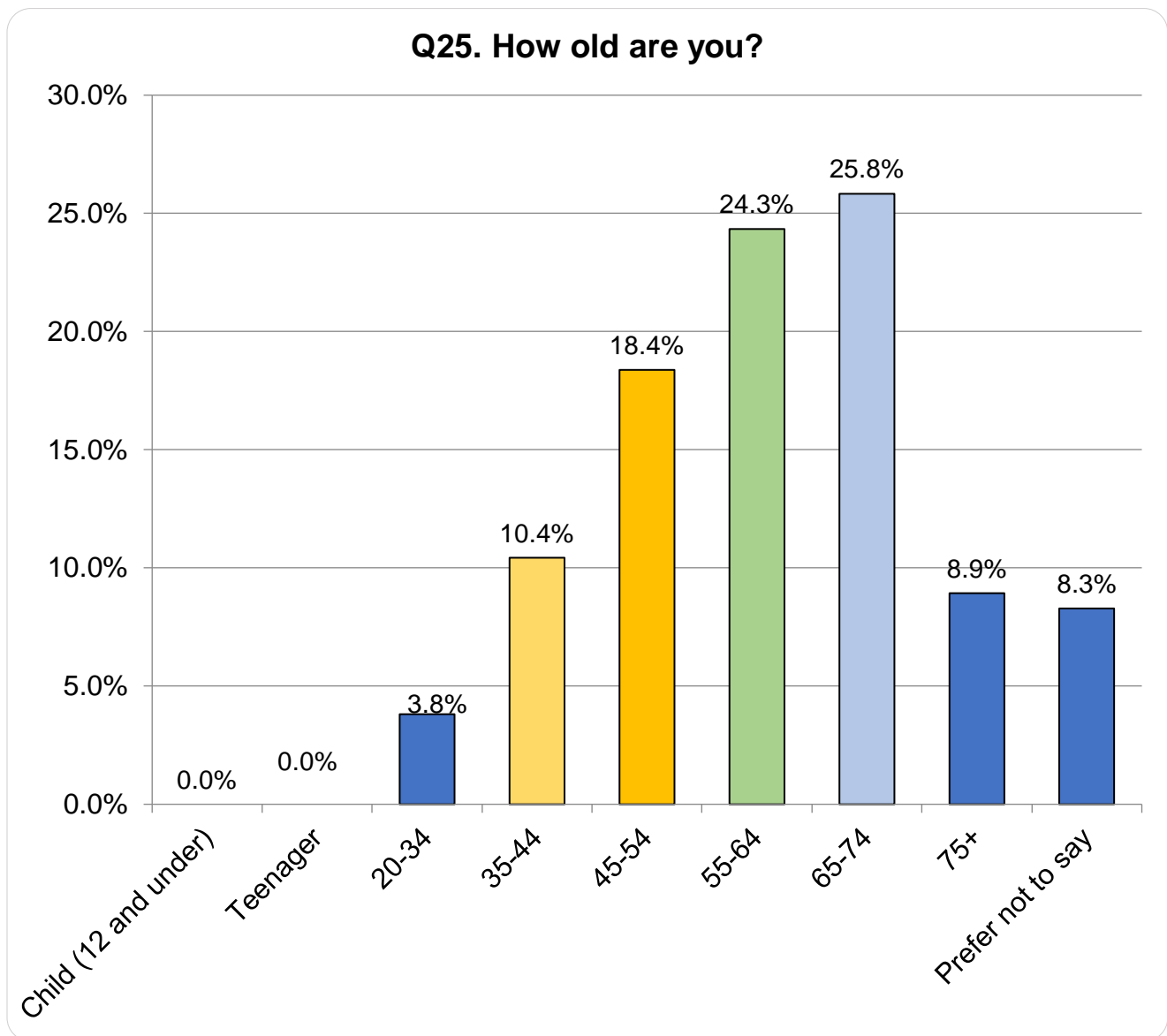


<sup>2</sup> Source: UK Mid-year population estimates, 2019/20

Conversely, age groups were not equally represented in the survey, with just over a quarter of respondents being between 65 to 74 years old (26%), followed by those aged 55 to 64 years old (24%).

These percentages do not reflect the actual distribution of the South Oxfordshire population, where 65-74 year olds and 55-64 year olds form 11% and 13% of the total, respectively. Of note is that 20-34 years old form 15% of the actual population whilst only 4% fell in the 20-34 year old age group who responded to the survey, and no one under the age of 20 responded.<sup>3</sup>

This is showing that the over 55 cohorts took up the opportunity to engage in this survey in much larger numbers – by double the percentages – when compared with the distribution in the local population.

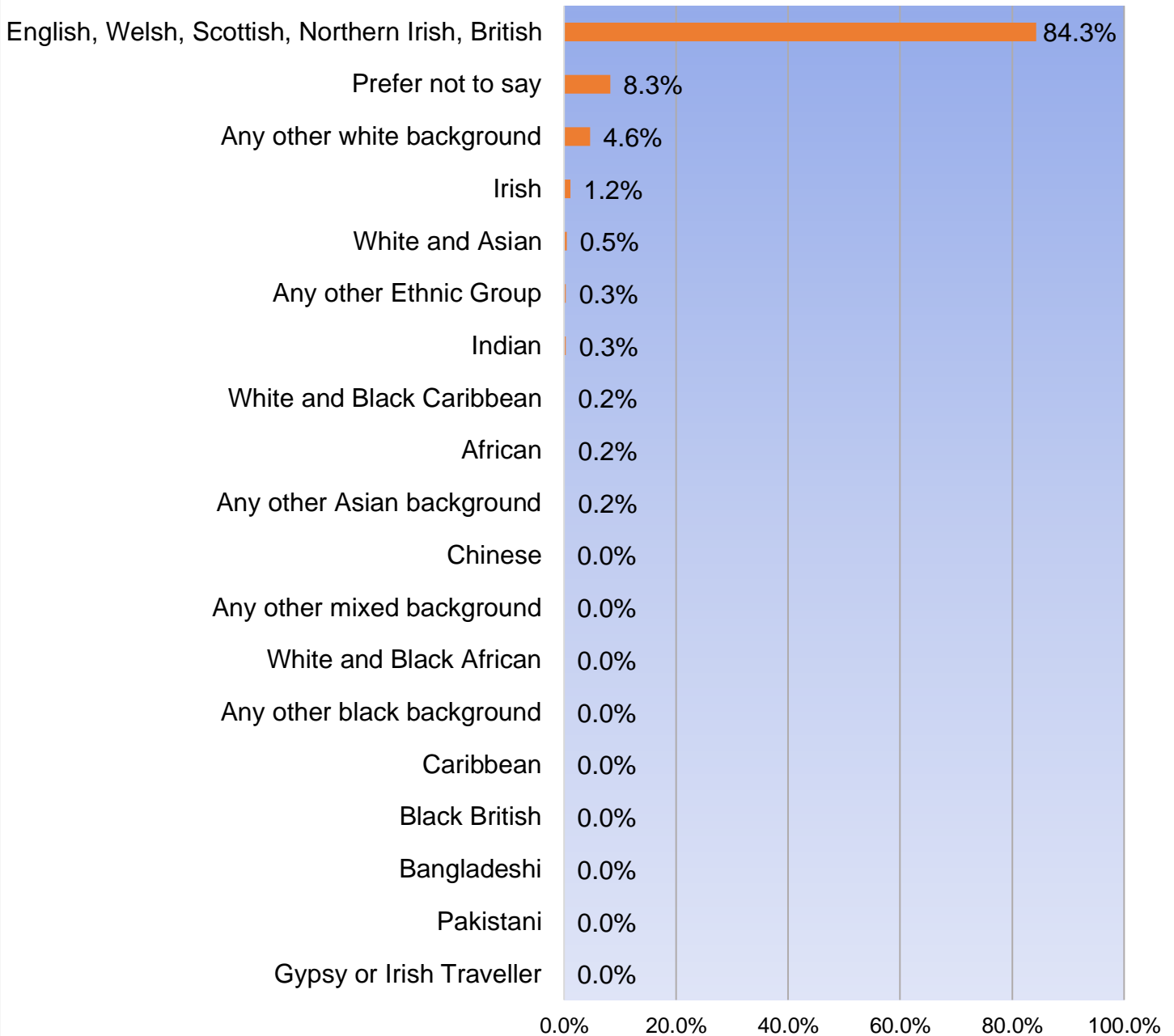


<sup>3</sup> Source: UK Mid-year population estimates, 2019/20

The vast majority of respondents told us they were White with UK-background (84%), and almost 5 were White with “any other” background. Irish respondents formed 1% of the total, whilst those with mixed ethnicities formed much smaller proportions.

This is close to the actual distribution of ethnic groups within the district’s population, which is mostly formed by White-UK (91%). White residents with non-UK background are 4 %, Irish 1 % and those with mixed ethnicities are 1 % of the total district population.<sup>4</sup>

**Q26. What is your ethnic group? Please tick one box only.**



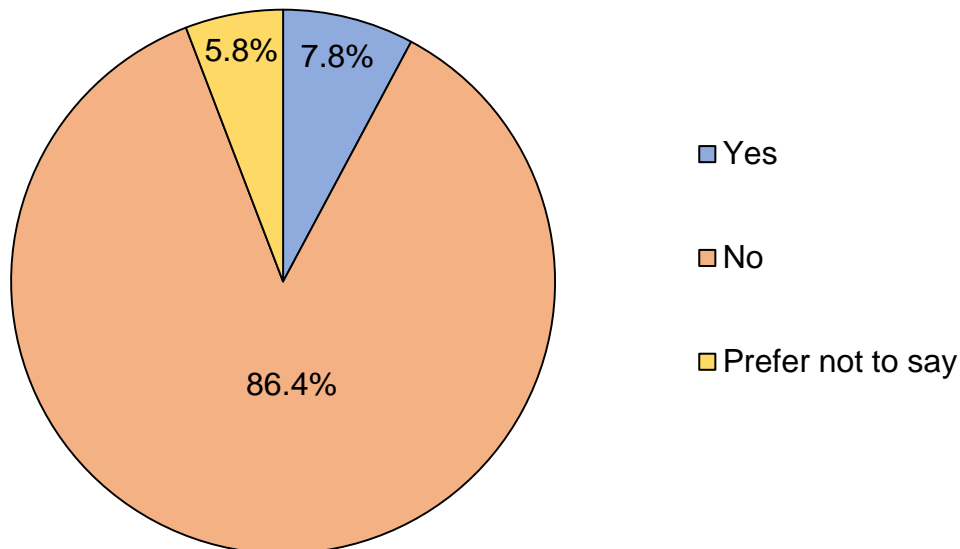
<sup>4</sup> Source: Census 2011, ONS.

Just under 8% of survey respondents told us that their daily life is affected by a health problem or disability, 35 responders provided a specific answer regarding their disability and these responses are included at Appendix E.

Responders providing data to the disability question is under-represented when this group of people is compared against local population data for South Oxfordshire as 14% are limited in their daily activities due to disability of long-term health problem.

The proportion of respondents reporting no limitations to daily activities is 86% which is a match for the proportion of the local population recorded as not having disability or long term health problem. As 6% 'preferred not to answer' this question, it's difficult to estimate how well represented this group actually is.<sup>5</sup>

**Are your day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more?**



To help us to better understand responses to this engagement and see if we are reaching a wide variety of people, we asked responders to tell us about their connection to the district. We asked if they live, work or visit the district (e.g. to shop or see family/friends). Responders could choose more than one answer to this question, so when reporting the data, the percentages will not add up to 100. For example, a responder could live and work in the district so they will have chosen both of these options.

Almost all respondents (91%) said they live in the district whilst 8% live elsewhere but come to South Oxfordshire to shop or visit family and friends. Just less than a third (31%) said that they work in the district. However, since the question allowed respondents to tick more than one

<sup>5</sup> Source: Census 2011, ONS.

option, we can assume that some of those working in South Oxfordshire are also residents. A small proportion of respondents (3%) selected “other”, thus indicating their connection to the district was not among the listed options.

The vast majority of respondents said they were taking part in the survey as individuals or members of the public (87%), whilst 5% responded as South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district council staff. The remainder of respondents participated as:

- Representative of business/organisation (2%);
- Representative of community group (2%);
- County or Town/Parish Councillor or Officer (2%);
- Other (2%);
- South Oxfordshire district Councillor (0.2 %).

Finally, among the 2% of those who selected “other”, just less than half were responding as both individuals and representatives of a business/organisation or had been Parish Councillors in the past.

Responders were asked to provide the name of the business / organisation, community group or council they were representing. 74 responses were received. Comments in italics in brackets are provided for clarification. All responses were received once, unless otherwise indicated. The list below does not include ‘*not applicable*’ and ‘*none*’ responses.

- South Oxfordshire District Council **x 7 responses**
- South and Vale District Councils **x 3 responses**
- Chinnor Parish **x 3 responses**
- Didcot First, Pryors Cars, Didcot Cricket Club
- Elsfield Parish Meeting
- Private individual
- Horspath coronavirus volunteer group
- Delta Motor Sport
- Oxford Farmhouse CIC (*Community Interest Company*)
- Consultancy practice
- Woodcote Parish Council
- Didcot Good Neighbour Scheme
- Huntercombe Residents Association
- Repair Cafés
- Private
- Henley RFC (*Rugby Football Club*)
- SOFEA
- Not relevant
- The Boys Brigade and Girls Association
- Kite Creative
- Swyncombe Parish Council
- Oxford Preservation Trust
- Sonning Eye Action Group
- Jennings
- Chalgrove (*Parish Council*)

- Wheatley community
- Oxfordshire Sexual abuse and Rape Crisis Centre
- Bed and breakfast
- Karthik G
- Stadhampton Parish Council
- Mapleduram Parish Council
- Cholsey Wildlife
- Berrick Salome (*Parish Council*)
- Stanton St John and surrounding rural areas
- Kings copse
- Tiddington (*with Albury Parish Council*)
- Wheatley Parish Council
- The Wallingford Window Co.
- Sport England
- Sonning Eye Action Group
- Highways England
- Wheatley Parish Council
- Garsington Society
- Thame (*Town Council*)
- Red Pesto Ltd
- Kidmore End Parish Council
- The Wheatley Society (civic society)
- Didcot Volunteer Drivers
- Ipsden Parish Council
- The Woodland Trust
- Thame Green Living
- My Life My Choice - Didcot Self Advocacy Group

Full demographic data can be found at Appendix E.

## KEY FINDINGS – QUANTITATIVE DATA

The key quantitative findings from the consultation are summarised below.

Respondents were not required to answer all of the questions. The only question that was required to be answered in the online survey asked in what capacity the responder was replying to the survey had the option of ticking 'other'.

The survey provided an opportunity to make comments and suggestions on each of the six themes, tell us how important they consider each one to be, comment on which words resonate or are not clear, and make suggestions or any other comments on the draft Corporate Plan themes.

There were 932 responses to the survey. This type of online engagement was a new approach for the council in developing their Corporate Plan and the number of responses far exceeded our expectations.

**For each of the proposed six themes in the corporate plan, please tell us how important you consider each one to be.**

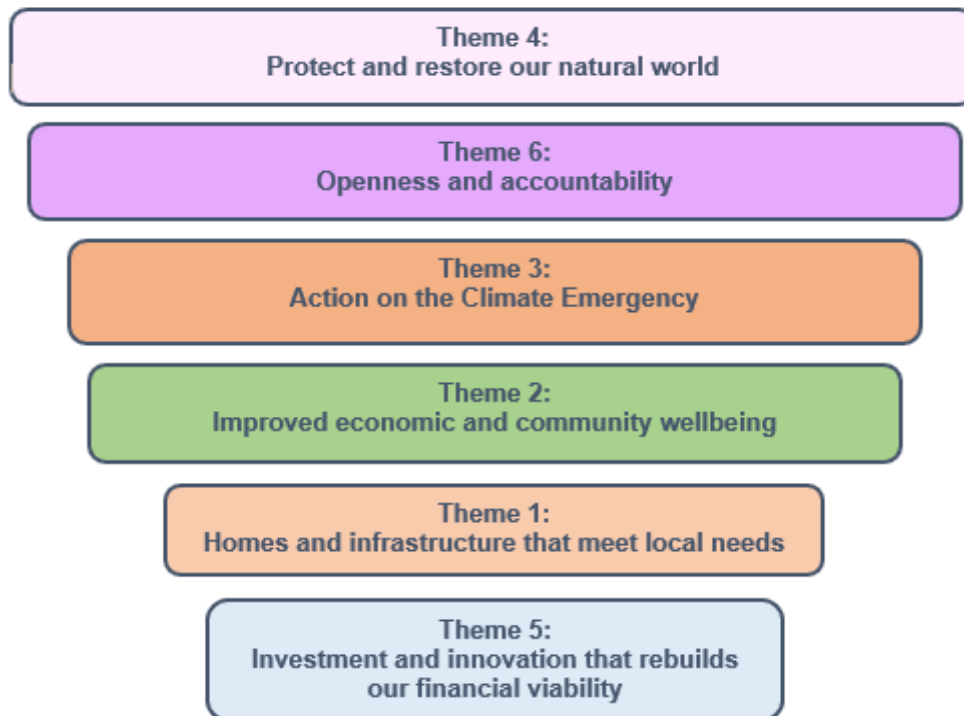
Question 1 of the feedback survey asked respondents to rate the relative importance of each of the six themes by assigning them a score between one and five, with one being the least important and five the most important.

This question was optional but was answered by all survey respondents.

Overall, the survey output tells us most respondents agreed with all six of the priorities selected by Councillors and considered all six of them to be important to some degree with Theme 4, Protect and restore our natural world being the most important.

More specifically, all themes achieved an average score greater than three, meaning most respondents deemed them relevant and hence assigned them high scores rather than low scores. See table below.

*Proposed themes in the Corporate Plan in order of relative importance:*



The best scoring theme, the one that achieved the highest average score, was Theme 4, Protect and restore our natural world (3.99), closely followed by Theme 6, Openness and accountability (3.90).

Only a little distance separates these two themes from the third and the fourth best scoring ones: Theme 3, Action on the climate emergency (3.67), and Theme 2, Improved economic and community wellbeing (3.61).



Finally, the themes that obtained the lowest average scores relative to the others were Theme 1, Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs (3.44), and Theme 5, Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability (3.28).

Although all themes received consistently fairly high scores, with the difference between the top and the bottom priority being less than a point, respondents seem to attribute greater importance to the protection of the natural environment and democratic accountability, than to themes relating to housing, infrastructure and financial sustainability.

The high relevance assigned to Theme 6, Openness and accountability, suggests that respondent's value honesty and answerability in a significant way.

It is interesting to note that Theme 4, Protect and restore our natural world, is the best scoring theme, and also presents the second lowest standard deviation<sup>6</sup>. Most respondents deemed Protect and restore our natural world to be the most important theme relative to the others.

As mentioned, Theme 4 (Protect and restore our natural world) was the most important themes and respondents mostly agreed on the level of importance to assign to it. Conversely, respondents don't agree on the level of relative importance of two of the themes - Theme 3 (Action on the climate emergency) and Theme 1 (Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs). This is shown by the high values of the standard deviation, which indicates that respondents don't agree with the level of importance of a theme, with their answers falling around the extremes of the scale – either very important or not very important.

### **How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?**

Respondents were asked to comment on the actions and projects that illustrate how we can achieve each of the six suggested themes. The survey provided an opportunity to tell us which actions and projects identified to help achieve this theme are important to respondents. This will help us decide how best to prioritise our work and budgets over the next four years.

There is a correlation between the themes which respondents are telling us are most important to them – Action on the Climate Emergency, Protect and restore our natural world and Openness and accountability and the individual projects which are most important.

The overall results for each of the six themes are shown in the tables below. The green shading indicates a project considered of high importance due to a high percentage of respondents responding with 'very important' or 'important'; a low percentage of respondents responding with 'of little importance' or 'not important'; or a high percentage of respondents responding with 'neither important or not important'. The orange shading indicates a project considered of little or no importance or neither important or not important due to a high percentage of respondents responding 'of little importance', 'not important' or 'neither important nor not important'; or a project considered of less importance due to a low percentage of respondents responding with 'very important' or 'important'.

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<sup>6</sup> The standard deviation indicates how close responses are to the average, with low values of this measure indicating that respondents tended to agree on the rate of importance of a theme and therefore submitted similar answers, and high values of the standard deviation indicating that respondents tended to disagree on the level of importance of a theme.

**Proposed Theme 1: Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs**

We are proposing a theme of ‘Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs. This is one of six themes identified for the Corporate Plan. A summary of why this theme has been developed and what it aims to achieve is in Appendix A.

The two projects where a very high proportion of respondents (both 86%) told us they were important (very important or important) are ‘New council-owned homes with a focus on quality of design, affordability and local requirements’ and Elimination of homelessness in our District and bringing empty properties back into use’. These are closely followed by ‘Spatial planning embeds public health, wellbeing and sustainability’ with 82%, and ‘sustainable transport solutions’ with 79%.

A quarter of respondents, 25%, told us that the project on ‘The transformation of Berinsfield into a thriving Garden Village’ was either important or not important, and nearly 20% felt this project was of little or no importance, both representing the highest number of responses. There were similar responses for the ‘Didcot Garden Town priority projects as identified by the Advisory Board’ project, with 22% saying the project was neither important or not important, with 15% who felt it was of little or no importance. These responses could be due to the local focus of these projects in the Berinsfield and Didcot areas and where respondents aren’t from those areas. But this could not be determined as we didn’t ask for postcode information.

<b>Q3. How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?</b>						
	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Neither important nor not important</b>	<b>Of little importance</b>	<b>Not important</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
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	27.1% (191)	35.3% (249)	22.2% (157)	7.1% (50)	8.4% (59)	706
The transformation of Berinsfield into a thriving Garden Village with improved facilities that are developed in line with the community’s needs and aspirations	18.7% (131)	36.8% (258)	25.1% (176)	9.7% (68)	9.8% (69)	702
New council-owned homes with a focus on quality of design, affordability and local requirements	38.5% (276)	32.3% (231)	14.2% (102)	6.6% (47)	8.4% (60)	716
Support and encouragement for the retrofit of our existing housing stock for low-carbon performance and to eliminate fuel poverty	37.4% (270)	38.1% (275)	13.9% (100)	6.6% (48)	4.0% (29)	722
Elimination of homelessness in our District and bringing empty properties back into use	53.3% (384)	32.6% (235)	7.6% (55)	3.5% (25)	3.1% (22)	721
Ensuring that our teams are ready to access or signpost to any	31.7% (226)	41.4% (295)	17.5% (125)	4.9% (35)	4.5% (32)	713

Government schemes or funding that is made available						
New homes are future-proofed, meeting the highest environmental standards and enhancing nature through sensitive, high quality design	52.9% (381)	33.5% (241)	7.5% (54)	2.9% (21)	3.2% (23)	720
Spatial planning embeds public health, wellbeing and sustainability	52.1% (366)	29.4% (207)	12.9% (91)	3.7% (26)	1.8% (13)	703
Changes over time in our stock of homes meet local needs	26.6% (185)	42.2% (293)	21.6% (150)	4.9% (34)	4.7% (33)	695
Sustainable transport solutions prioritise walking, cycling and public transport to reduce car dependency and air pollution	54.0% (388)	24.5% (176)	10.7% (77)	5.3% (38)	5.4% (39)	718
					answered	732
					skipped	199

## Proposed theme 2: Improved economic and community wellbeing

We are proposing a priority theme of 'Improved economic and community wellbeing'. This is one of six priority themes identified for the Corporate Plan. A summary of why this theme has been developed and what it aims to achieve is in Appendix A.

The project to 'Use our planning powers to preserve our valuable green spaces, particularly in urban areas' received an exceptionally high level (93%) of respondents telling us that it was very important or important. At 93% this is the third highest level of any of the projects across all six key themes. A very low number of respondents (3%) told us that this project was either of little importance or not important.

This project was closely followed by 'Take enforcement action on fly-tipping, dog fouling and other anti-social blights on our society (88%) and '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' (87%).

Nearly half respondents (48%) told us that the project to 'Work with local partners to introduce civil parking enforcement as a district responsibility' was either very important or important. This project also received the highest response for being of little importance (11%) and not important (9%).

Q6 How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?						
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor not important	Of little importance	Not important	Response Total
Partner with regional agencies to ensure economic recovery, quality employment, thriving businesses and vibrant communities, avoiding the blight of "dormitory towns"	35.4% (224)	45.2% (286)	14.1% (89)	2.5% (16)	2.8% (18)	633
Provide advice on access to grants, training and diversification programmes, helping local businesses to build agility and resilience	26.4% (167)	48.7% (308)	18.8% (119)	4.6% (29)	1.6% (10)	633
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	56.4% (362)	30.7% (197)	7.0% (45)	3.0% (19)	3.0% (19)	642
Launch a new community wellbeing strategy to encourage and support culture, leisure and the arts	29.7% (188)	35.1% (222)	23.1% (146)	7.0% (44)	5.2% (33)	633
Use our planning powers to preserve our valuable green spaces, particularly in urban areas	74.9% (483)	18.6% (120)	3.9% (25)	1.2% (8)	1.4% (9)	645
Work with our communities to maximise Community Infrastructure Levy funds and to allocate these to achieve best outcomes for residents in the District	33.0% (205)	38.7% (241)	23.2% (144)	3.1% (19)	2.1% (13)	622
Take enforcement action on fly-tipping, dog fouling and other anti-social blights on our society	60.0% (383)	28.4% (181)	8.0% (51)	2.0% (13)	1.6% (10)	638
Work with local partners to introduce civil parking enforcement as a district responsibility	20.9% (131)	26.8% (168)	32.3% (202)	11.3% (71)	8.6% (54)	626
					answered	652
					skipped	279

### Proposed theme 3: Action on the Climate Emergency

We are proposing a priority theme of ‘Action on the Climate Emergency’. This is one of six priority themes identified for the Corporate Plan. A summary of why this theme has been developed and what it aims to achieve is in Appendix A.

Five proposed projects received a very high proportion (over 80%) of respondents telling us that the project was either very important or important.

The project to ‘Promote the circular economy (reduce, re-use and recycle), including in our waste management contracts’ received an exceptionally high proportion (91%) telling us that it was either very important or important. This was followed by the project to ‘Mitigate climate change through planning and land use, enhancing biodiversity on our own land and strengthening the planning system to enforce environmental standards’ (86%), closely followed by ‘Take positive action on single-use plastics, air quality improvement measures and sustainable transport’ (85%). ‘Work with Oxfordshire County Council to build on our commitment to active travel including walking, public transport and cycling infrastructure’, received 83% and ‘support and encourage local businesses to respond to climate change and nature recovery’ 81%.

(73%) of responders felt that the project to ‘Promote and encourage behavioural change with informational campaigns and leading by example’ was important (very important or important) - the lowest proportion of responses received on any project in the theme.

Q9. How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?						
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor not important	Of little importance	Not important	Response Total
Achieve our own zero carbon target by 2025 and support others to achieve the district target of zero carbon by 2030	47.5% (297)	32.2% (201)	10.9% (68)	4.6% (29)	4.8% (30)	625
Develop an annually approved climate emergency programme and adequately finance it	41.0% (254)	31.8% (197)	15.8% (98)	5.3% (33)	6.0% (37)	619
Deliver Council-owned net-zero homes and use grants, planning policy and advocacy to ensure the same standards throughout the district	42.1% (262)	31.7% (197)	15.0% (93)	5.1% (32)	6.1% (38)	622
Promote and encourage behavioural change with informational campaigns and leading by example	35.2% (218)	37.3% (231)	16.1% (100)	5.5% (34)	6.0% (37)	620
Take positive action on single-use plastics, air quality improvement measures and sustainable transport	56.5% (351)	28.8% (179)	8.5% (53)	2.6% (16)	3.5% (22)	621
Mitigate climate change through planning and land use, enhancing	54.8% (338)	31.0% (191)	8.8% (54)	1.9% (12)	3.6% (22)	617

Q9. How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?						
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor not important	Of little importance	Not important	Response Total
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	55.4% (346)	36.0% (225)	5.8% (36)	0.8% (5)	2.1% (13)	625
Support and encourage local businesses to respond to climate change and nature recovery	41.0% (253)	40.0% (247)	12.0% (74)	3.6% (22)	3.4% (21)	617
Promote waste minimisation initiatives such as Repair Cafés	39.5% (244)	37.7% (233)	16.8% (104)	2.1% (13)	3.9% (24)	618
Work with Oxfordshire County Council to build on our commitment to active travel including walking, public transport and cycling infrastructure	53.3% (331)	29.0% (180)	9.8% (61)	2.9% (18)	5.0% (31)	621
					answered	631
					skipped	300

**Theme 4: Protect and restore our natural world**

We are proposing a priority theme to ‘Protect and restore our natural world’. This is one of six priority themes identified for the Corporate Plan. A summary of why this theme has been developed and what it aims to achieve is in Appendix A.

All projects received a very high proportion of respondents (over 80%) telling us that they were important (either very important or important).

The two projects received the highest proportion of respondents (90%) telling us that they were either very important or important were ‘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 and ‘Encourage the use of natural processes to combat risks arising from climate change, such as meadows and trees to reduce flooding’.

These were closely followed by ‘Recognise and support the vital role of farming in economic and ecosystem resilience, local food provision and the recovery of soils and natural processes’ at 89%.

19% of respondents told us that the project to ‘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 including wildlife corridors’ was neither important nor not important, of felt it was of little or no importance - the largest number within this theme.

Q12. How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?						
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor not important	Of little importance	Not important	Response Total
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	42.9% (264)	39.8% (245)	11.4% (70)	3.7% (23)	2.1% (13)	615
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	54.2% (332)	35.7% (219)	7.5% (46)	1.1% (7)	1.5% (9)	613
Encourage the use of natural processes to combat risks arising from climate change, such as meadows and trees to reduce flooding	58.8% (361)	31.4% (193)	6.8% (42)	1.1% (7)	1.8% (11)	614
Recognise and support the vital role of farming in economic and ecosystem resilience, local food provision and the recovery of soils and natural processes	58.3% (358)	31.6% (194)	7.5% (46)	1.1% (7)	1.5% (9)	614
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 including wildlife corridors	51.4% (313)	30.0% (183)	12.0% (73)	3.6% (22)	3.0% (18)	609
Work in partnership with the Earth Trust, Chilterns Conservation Board, North Wessex Downs AONB, the Environment Agency and others to improve access to green spaces in and around our towns, reinforcing access to nature as a priority for community wellbeing	53.9% (328)	32.9% (200)	9.0% (55)	1.8% (11)	2.3% (14)	608
					answered	621
					skipped	310

**Proposed theme 5: Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability**

We are proposing a priority theme for ‘Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability’. This is one of six priority themes identified for the Corporate Plan. A summary of why this theme has been developed and what it aims to achieve is in Appendix A.

A very high proportion of respondents (83%) told us that the project to ‘Exercise strong Stewardship of all Council assets including property and financial investments, optimising their performance for the benefit of our residents’ was important (very important or important). This is closely followed by the ‘Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and to enrich our leisure, sporting and community activities’ which received 80%.

Over three quarters (77%) of respondents told us that the project to ‘Invest responsibly and ethically with the Climate Emergency at the heart of what we do’ was also important (very important or important).

20% of respondents felt that the project to “Invest to save” for the District, including the delivery of sustainable new Council offices – on time and within budget – to realise future operational efficiencies’ was not important or of little importance. A further 23% told us that the project was neither important nor unimportant.

Q15. How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?						
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor not important	Of little importance	Not important	Response Total
Develop and implement an innovative Transformation Strategy to diversify our revenue streams, improve our effectiveness and secure our on-going viability	25.2% (145)	43.8% (252)	23.5% (135)	4.7% (27)	2.8% (16)	575
"Invest to save" for the District, including the delivery of sustainable new Council offices – on time and within budget – to realise future operational efficiencies	23.4% (136)	34.0% (198)	23.0% (134)	9.5% (55)	10.1% (59)	582
Exercise strong Stewardship of all Council assets including property and financial investments, optimising their performance for the benefit of our residents	42.5% (251)	40.2% (237)	12.7% (75)	2.5% (15)	2.0% (12)	590
Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and to enrich our leisure, sporting and community activities	40.4% (239)	39.9% (236)	13.3% (79)	2.9% (17)	3.5% (21)	592
Invest responsibly and ethically with the Climate Emergency at the heart of what we do	42.9% (255)	33.9% (202)	12.4% (74)	5.5% (33)	5.2% (31)	595
					answered	603
					skipped	328



**Proposed theme 6: Openness and accountability**

We are proposing a priority theme on ‘Openness and accountability’. This is one of six priority themes identified for the Corporate Plan. A summary of why this theme has been developed and what it aims to achieve is in Appendix A.

All projects received a very high proportion of respondents (over 78%) telling us that they were important (either very important or important).

Two projects received an exceptionally high level of respondents telling us that they important either (very or important) were to ‘Ensure that council departments work collaboratively to deliver best outcomes for residents’ with 96% and to ‘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’ with 94%. These were closely followed by the project to ‘Apply good governance and transparency in all our working and decision-making, exploring optimal structures and mechanisms for best practice in local government’ which 89% of respondents felt was important (either very important or important).

Only 0.5% of respondents felt that the project to ‘Ensure that council departments work collaboratively to deliver best outcomes for residents’ was of little or no importance – the lowest proportion for any project across the six themes.

Over three quarters (78%) of respondents told us that the project to ‘Embed an organisational culture that celebrates diversity, inclusion and respect’ was important (either very important or important) – the lowest of any project in the theme. A further 15% felt that the project was neither important or unimportant with 7% telling us that it was of little or no importance.

<b>Q18. How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?</b>						
	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Neither important nor not important</b>	<b>Of little importance</b>	<b>Not important</b>	<b>Response Total</b>
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	45.3% (268)	41.6% (246)	10.3% (61)	2.2% (13)	0.5% (3)	591
Ensure that council departments work collaboratively to deliver best outcomes for residents	57.5% (338)	38.3% (225)	3.7% (22)	0.2% (1)	0.3% (2)	588
Embed an organisational culture that celebrates diversity, inclusion and respect	41.7% (245)	36.3% (213)	14.7% (86)	4.3% (25)	3.1% (18)	587
Apply good governance and transparency in all our working and decision-making, exploring optimal structures and mechanisms for best practice in local government	47.6% (280)	41.2% (242)	9.0% (53)	1.4% (8)	0.9% (5)	588

Q18. How important are the following illustrative actions and projects to you?						
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor not important	Of little importance	Not important	Response Total
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	64.0% (380)	29.8% (177)	4.7% (28)	0.8% (5)	0.7% (4)	594
					answered	600
					skipped	331

## KEY FINDINGS – QUALITATIVE DATA

The survey asked respondents to describe, in their own words, a happy and successful community. A wide range of comments were received and a summary of the key themes that emerged from the responses is below.

Respondents were also asked which of the words used to describe each theme particularly resonate (e.g. which words mean something to them), and which words are not clear or are confusing. A range of comments and suggestions were received to this question. A summary of the ten most frequently mentioned words that resonate, and words that are not clear, using a sample of up to 100 for each question, is provided below for each theme. Where a frequently mentioned word has the same percentage frequency as the tenth word, they are combined in the same line in the table. The background to each of the themes and the reporting methodology are available to read at Appendix A.

The survey then allowed responders to give any comments to the suggested themes and the actions and projects proposed to deliver the plan. 4,342 comments were received. This opportunity allowed respondents to give reasons behind their answers to the previous questions. Respondents could also suggest anything missing from a theme or whether it needs to be expanded. A range of different comments and suggestions were made, and a summary of the key findings is below.

The opportunity to suggest any themes or priorities that may be missing from the plan, and to provide any other comments about the proposed themes attracted a range of feedback, is also summarised below.

Some spelling, grammatical and punctual errors in the original comments raised have been corrected in this report. A full unedited list of all comments raised can be found at Appendix G.

**In your own words, describe a happy and successful community**

651 responses were received by the Council in relation to this question. While they differed widely in detail, content and context, some key themes and phrases reoccurred frequently. These give a reflection of what residents (and other respondents) regard as the most important factors that contribute to happy and successful communities.

Nearly a third (33%) of responses highlighted the importance of locally accessible services, facilities and amenities in happy and successful communities. Many mentioned the importance of a local shop, post office, village hall or pub in providing a hub/anchor for the community – a place where people could meet and interact with their neighbours. Others highlighted the need for locally provided health and educational provision that help communities become sustainable and self-sufficient. While less frequently mentioned, the connected issues of the need for appropriate infrastructure (13%) and suitable housing that reflects local needs and aspirations (12%) were also in the top ten themes emerging from this question.

Respondents also focused upon the importance of the environment (27%) in the creation of happy and successful communities. The overwhelming majority of these mentioned the need to not just protect but also enhance the natural habitat – thereby, ensuring that future generations can enjoy its benefits.

Social connectivity (27%) and support (26%) were also regarded as important in the creation of happy and successful communities. Respondents mentioned the importance of neighbours not only knowing, but also looking out for, each other. This sense of camaraderie across a neighbourhood was acknowledged as an important aspect of living in a community.

Several comments were also made in relation to crime and safety. Many responses highlighted personal security as an important aspect of a happy and successful community. Mention was made by some of issues regarding anti-social behaviour and the potential for this to be curbed by community-based local policing.

Many responses also highlighted the need for inclusivity and diversity in the creation of communities. Respondents highlighted the need for all members of society to be actively encouraged to participate in activities and decisions. Further, they emphasised the importance of inclusive forms of democracy which pay heed to the needs and wishes of residents in the creation of happy and successful communities.

The responses received, therefore, suggest that a happy and successful community is one:

- where services, facilities and amenities are readily accessible;
- where the protection of the environment is prioritised;
- which is socially connected;
- where neighbours provide support and assistance;
- where people feel safe and secure;
- where everybody is included;
- where any new housing is appropriate and suitable to the locale;
- where the views of residents are listened to by decision-makers.

**Theme 1: Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs**

**Which of the words used to describe this theme particularly resonate (e.g. which words mean something to you), and which words are not clear or are confusing?**

These words resonate with me	% (sample of 100)
sustainability / sustainable	45
affordable / affordability	18
quality/ high-quality / high quality design	13
low carbon / zero carbon	13
well-being/health	11
social housing / Council homes	8
buildings in keeping with surroundings / sensitive	7
infrastructure / community facilities / improved facilities / Infrastructure – things like roads, schools and GP surgeries – have not kept up with housing development	7
walking, cycling	7
environmental / environment	
homelessness /eliminate homelessness	6

These words are not clear to me	% (sample of 100)
spatial planning /spatial	27
Changes over time in our stock of homes / meeting local needs	13
garden town / village	10
Signpost	8
none / no	8
sustainable	6
government schemes	6
affordability /affordable housing	4
future proofed	4
sustainable transport available funding / funding retrofit embeds low carbon / zero carbon	4

**Tell us if you have any comments on this theme and the actions and projects proposed to deliver it. Is there anything missing from the theme or does it need to be expanded?**

433 responses were received in relation to this question. Although there was a wide degree of variation in the detail and content of the answers, certain topics and themes reoccurred throughout.

Around a quarter (24%) of responses specifically mentioned concerns regarding inappropriate or over development. Most believed that too many houses were being built in the area and some suggested that a pause/reassessment was needed in order to understand the true local need. Moreover, concerns were raised about who the housing was aimed at (commuters etc). While less frequently mentioned, the connected issues of protecting the Green Belt and preserving the distinct character of South Oxfordshire and its communities also featured highly in the responses.

While there were strong concerns raised about over-development, many respondents agreed that where more housing was required it should be appropriate for the area and reflect local needs. In addition, it should be affordable – especially to young people with ties to the community.

Over a fifth (22%) of respondents agreed with the need for additional and improved infrastructure within the district. Many highlighted their concerns that current infrastructure and service provision had failed to keep pace with the level of housing development and that fixing this deficit should be a priority. Furthermore, they were also worried that any new developments would make the existing situation worse – some suggested that the requisite infrastructure for new developments should be constructed prior to any homes being built.

Responders to the survey also focused upon the need for new developments to be well-designed, sustainable and built to the highest environmental standards. The analysis shows a consensus amongst respondents was that recently built housing was small, sub-standard and generic (*non-descript, brick boxes, lacking in character*). They would, therefore, be supportive of any moves that improved the design and quality of new homes. In addition, many also cited the need to introduce stringent environmental standards to ensure that homes were fit for the future. Ideas put forward included: solar panels on the roof, minimum green standards for both individual properties and developments, electric vehicle charging points.

Concerns were raised by a small minority of respondents about an undue focus on Didcot and its surrounding neighbourhoods in relation to this theme. Many were concerned that areas such as Wallingford and Thame, which in their view had seen rapid development in recent years, were being marginalised when it came to infrastructure and services. Others highlighted the specific issues of rural areas and questioned how practical some of these aspirations were (e.g. reduced car use) in such a setting.

On the overall theme and the content of the survey, questions were raised about the practicality of delivery and the use of bland, ambiguous statements – some responders requested greater clarity and meaningful, measurable targets.

**Theme 2: Improved economic and community wellbeing**

Which of the words used to describe this theme particularly resonate (e.g. which words mean something to you), and which words are not clear or are confusing?

These words resonate with me	% (sample of 100)
green belt preservation / preserving green space	14
green spaces	12
vibrant communities / vibrant	8
community wellbeing / wellbeing / healthy	8
sustainable	8
wellbeing and enhancing quality of residents' lives / wellbeing strategy	6
community	6
Connecting communities by cycle and foot paths / sustainable transport	6
public transport / transport	5
quality employment / employment enforcement action on crimes against nature broadband / reliable broadband thriving businesses / economy affordable enforcement /enforcement action	5

These words are not clear to me	% (sample of 100)
community infrastructure levy (CIL)	30
civil parking enforcement / enforcement	16
na / none / no	11
partner / local partner / working with	9
community wellbeing /community wellbeing strategy / wellbeing	9
dormitory towns	7
regional agencies	7
agility	4
resilience	3
best outcomes / outcomes anti-social blights walking and cycling networks flying tipping..... make recycling easier, or waste dumps vibrant	2

**Tell us if you have any comments on this theme and the actions and projects proposed to deliver it. Is there anything missing from the theme or does it need to be expanded?**

280 responses were received in relation to this question. While they differed widely in detail, content and context, some key themes and phrases frequently reoccurred.

Concerns were raised about the generic language and use of ambiguous statements. Many respondents thought that greater clarity was required about the council's aim and ambitions in this theme. Further, some regarded it as a bit of a catch-all topic where topics and policies were not coherently connected.

Just over 13 per cent of contributors raised the issue of the protection of green spaces throughout the district. Most agreed with the aspiration of doing more to ensure that these areas were preserved for future generations. Confusion, however, existed about the emphasis on green spaces in urban areas (as mentioned within the illustrative actions and projects) as opposed to those in more rural settings. Many felt that this was an unnecessary distinction and that both urban and rural green spaces should be protected equally.

Respondents also agreed with the ambition of improving enforcement in relation to fly-tipping, dog-fouling and parking. Many believed that the current situation was unacceptable and needed to be addressed – in addition, they raised the broader issue of littering. However, concerns were raised that civil parking enforcement would mean councils using motorists to raise revenue and, thereby, inadvertently damaging the local economy. Further, it was suggested by some that the problem of fly-tipping would be solved by providing easy and free access to recycling centres.

Respondents were also supportive of measures to boost the local economy and high streets. Many were concerned about the problems caused by high rents and excessive business rates but raised concerns as to whether the council had any real power to affect change. They also questioned whether the council could prevent the decline of independent shops and businesses.

Respondents also highlighted the need for active travel (walking and cycling) to be promoted. They recognised that this would bring health benefits as well as potentially reducing congestion. Concerns were, nevertheless, expressed about its practicality in rural areas – there was some suggestion that the ambitions and policies contained within this theme were more applicable to urban areas and that there was a need to have a more distinctive rural element.

Although not quite in the top ten in terms of topics raised by respondents, there was a minority of people who questioned whether the council should be spending money on the theme of improved economic and community wellbeing. They questioned both whether it provided value for money and whether the ambitions were realistic given the district councils influence. Some suggested that many of the things included within this theme were additional add-ons, which during a time of financial pressure, should not be prioritised.

### Theme 3: Action on the Climate Emergency

Which of the words used to describe this theme particularly resonate (e.g. which words mean something to you), and which words are not clear or are confusing?

These words resonate with me	% (sample of 100)
zero carbon / net zero homes / council net zero homes	19
climate emergency /mitigate climate change	18
biodiversity	11
waste minimisation / zero waste /waste management	10
recycle / reuse	9
commitment to active travel / cycling	9
behavioural change /aspects of our lives need to change	8
repair cafes / repair	8
all of them	7
circular economy	6

These words are not clear to me	% (sample of 100)
n/a / none	16
repair café	15
active travel / sustainable transport	9
behavioural change / behavioural	7
circular economy / circular	7
promote	4
environmental standards / enforce environmental standards	4
climate emergency programme	4
Mitigate	3
net zero homes / deliver council net-zero homes	3

**Tell us if you have any comments on this theme and the actions and projects proposed to deliver it. Is there anything missing from the theme or does it need to be expanded?**

264 responses were received by the council in relation to this question. Although there was a wide degree of variation in the detail and content of the answers, certain topics and themes reoccurred throughout.

Respondents highlighted the importance of this theme and that they were pleased that the council was taking the matter seriously. Some remarked about the fact that a definite target had been set which progress could be measured against – this was contrasted to the other themes.

The most frequently mentioned topic by participants was recycling (featuring in just under 12 % of responses). While there was praise for the successes that South Oxfordshire have had in this area, the feeling was that more could be achieved. Issues were mentioned about



complexity, both in terms of what can and can't be recycled as well as what bins to use. In addition, problems were raised about the accessibility and costs of Oxfordshire's recycling centres. The concept of the circular economy was also cited in several responses, with many people enthusiastic about re-engineering the economy towards this concept.

Respondents also focused upon the issues of active travel and public transport in relation to reducing car use. Many mentioned the need for safe cycle and walking routes which were easily accessible and linked to places that people wished to go (town centres, railway stations etc). The need for reliable, cheap public transport was also a major concern, especially in relation to rural areas and older people. Several responses cited this as a contributory factor in people's reliance on cars and that it would, therefore, be difficult to change behaviours to address the climate emergency. Linking into this, the need for more electric vehicle infrastructure (for cars, bikes, scooters) was also raised – several participants cited the need for a noticeable expansion in provision to increase take-up.

Respondents to the survey were also keen to highlight the need for cooperation between councils, businesses and other interested stakeholders in order to address the climate emergency. Many stressed the importance of working together (especially with locally based companies) to reduce waste.

The responses on this theme did also include a small minority of who expressed scepticism about the council's plans. Most of these, however, agreed with the proposition behind the climate emergency but suggested that this should not be an issue that a local authority should be focusing upon, but addressed nationally.

Theme 4: Protect and restore our natural world

Which of the words used to describe this theme particularly resonate (e.g. which words mean something to you), and which words are not clear or are confusing?

These words resonate with me	% (sample of 100)
working with others /partnership /together	15
protect / protection	15
nature / access to nature / natural environment /nature as a priority	11
natural processes	9
natural assets	9
nature recovery / recovery programme / ambitious nature recovery	8
natural beauty /outstanding natural beauty / AONB	8
Enhance	8
wellbeing / community wellbeing	7
all green spaces / improve access to green spaces	7

These words are not clear to me	% (sample of 100)
na / none	21
Local Nature Partnership	9
Rewilding	7
AONBS / AONB and their setting	6
wellbeing / community wellbeing	5
natural processes	5
tourism /promote tourism	4
ecosystems / ecosystem resilience	4
promote in-depth mapping and surveying of ecosystems across the district	4
natural processes / the use of natural processes encourage the use promote	3

**Tell us if you have any comments on this theme and the actions and projects proposed to deliver it. Is there anything missing from the theme or does it need to be expanded?**

238 responses were received in relation to this question. Although there was a wide degree of variation in the detail and content of the answers, certain topics and themes reoccurred throughout.

Over a quarter (26%) of respondents raised the issue of over/inappropriate development in relation to this theme. The consensus was that the current level of housing and associated infrastructure had been the key factor in damaging our natural world and, therefore, it was important that any further growth was strictly controlled. Moreover, many thought that the

concept of protecting and restoring our natural world was incompatible with any further housing development.

21% of responses mentioned the interconnected topic of green spaces and the Green Belt. The overwhelming majority of these highlighted the need for there to be adequate places for nature to flourish throughout the district (both in urban and rural areas). While many stressed the importance of the Green Belt for providing a sanctuary for wildlife, some raised the need for minimum green space requirements in the district's towns (for both individual houses and wider developments).

Respondents also focused upon the need to protect/encourage wildlife and restore biodiversity. Some mentioned the noticeable decline in hedgehog and bird numbers that they had observed, while others focused upon the removal/destruction of habitats through human actions – this ranged from the cutting of verges to large scale housing developments. Potential solutions suggested included: biodiversity requirements for developers, the creation of nature corridors throughout the district and the planting of native flowers on open spaces. The interlinked idea of planting more trees was also cited in several responses.

Respondents were also keen on the idea of renewing, restoring and protecting habitats. Some mentioned specific areas or features that should be the focus of this work e.g. the River Thames. They also suggested that the council should work in partnership with local groups to facilitate improvements.

**Theme 5: Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability**

Which of the words used to describe this theme particularly resonate (e.g. which words mean something to you), and which words are not clear or are confusing?

These words resonate with me	% (sample of 100)
invest responsibly and ethically	25
stewardship /ethical stewardship/ Strong stewardship / strong /exercise strong stewardship of all Council assets	25
responsibly / responsible	16
ethically	14
climate change / climate emergency/climate	13
invest to save / invest	12
funding / external funding	7
sustainable / sustainability	5
none/na	4
leisure, sporting and community activities enrich our leisure	4

These words are not clear to me	% (sample of 100)
Transformation strategy to diversify / Transformation strategy / strategy	31
na / none	13
maximise external funding opportunities / external funding	13
stewardship / stewardship of council assets	11
the whole wording of the first project	9
new council offices	5
innovate /innovative	4
climate emergency	3
a lot of buzzwords / jargon	3
operational efficiencies / realise future operational efficiencies Almost all the above is jargon/ It all sounds important but pretty confusing what it actually means	3

**Tell us if you have any comments on this theme and the actions and projects proposed to deliver it. Is there anything missing from the theme or does it need to be expanded?**

207 responses were received in relation to this question. While they differed widely in detail, content and context, some key themes and phrases frequently reoccurred.

On the broad theme, several respondents believed that many of the illustrative actions and projects were vague and used unnecessary management speak/jargon – with specific concerns raised about the concept of the development and implementation of a Transformation Strategy. Many also wanted greater detail on the current financial situation of the council.

18% of comments mentioned the proposed new council offices site at Crowmarsh Gifford. The majority of these believed that the budget could not be justified. Many focused upon the

changes caused by the pandemic and suggested that smarter, cheaper alternatives were now viable. Further, some suggested that the proposed site at Crowmarsh was poorly located.

Responders also focused upon the issue of council tax/local taxation. Many expressed their belief that the current levels were too high and that it was rising by above inflation each year – particular concern was raised about the cost for people on low and fixed incomes. A minority of responses, however, stated that the rate should go up and/or more bands should be introduced to ensure that everybody paid their fair share. Further, some suggested the need for reforming the whole local taxation system – they did, nevertheless, recognise that this was a matter for HM Government.

Respondents also highlighted the related issues of waste, efficiency and accountability. Many argued that local government is particularly wasteful, spending taxpayers' money on pointless and ineffective projects and policies. Furthermore, if things do go wrong and/or money is found to have been misspent, nobody is held to account for their actions. Several responders, therefore, wish to see a greater focus on efficiency and value for money, with clear lines of responsibility.

Some respondents also wondered why such a theme was necessary. They suggested that the council should have been taking these actions as a matter of course and questioned why South Oxfordshire had not done so.

While many respondents recognised the need to maximise external funding and increase revenue, concerns were, nevertheless, raised about both approaches. In relation to external funding, some were worried that it would come with additional requirements, such as a commitment to increase housing numbers, which would be unacceptable. On the topic of increasing revenue, anxieties were expressed that charges would be raised significantly to try to alleviate the council's financial difficulties.

**Theme 6: Openness and accountability**

Which of the words used to describe this theme particularly resonate (e.g. which words mean something to you), and which words are not clear or are confusing?

These words resonate with me	% (sample of 100)
engage / engagement / engage effectively /engage with residents	23
Plain English	21
Accountability	19
good governance / governance	16
transparency / transparent	15
trust	13
diversity / celebrates diversity	11
Inclusion	10
collaboratively / working collaboratively /working together	9
openness /open respect	9

These words are not clear to me	% (sample of 100)
optimal structures/ embed appropriate optimal democratic / optimal structures and mechanisms	18
na / none	17
governance / good governance	7
organisational culture / embed an organisational culture	6
enhance trust / trust	5
Embed	4
Celebrate	3
transparency	2
engage effectively / engage	2
inclusion ensuring full accessibility of facilities and monitoring progress in an open and transparent way external partnerships sorry, much of this sounds like well-meaning but unlikely to change anything / generally not clear	2

**Tell us if you have any comments on this theme and the actions and projects proposed to deliver it. Is there anything missing from the theme or does it need to be expanded?**

196 responses were received in relation to this question. Although there was a wide degree of variation in the detail and content of the answers, certain topics and themes reoccurred throughout.

19% of responses emphasised the need for the council to heed the views and wishes of residents. The perception of many was that their opinions were disregarded on issues such as planning and that decisions were imposed from above – several of these comments specifically referred to the Local Plan.

Respondents also felt that the council could do more to meaningfully engage with both residents and town/parish councils. The majority of these suggested that the current processes were not adequate and that there was a disconnect between them and the district council. They argued that the council should be doing more to increase the levels of engagement across the district. Further, several submissions also raised the connected issue of the council's perceived inability to engage with specific communities for example those without the internet, economically disadvantaged, younger people.

There was also a focus upon the issues of transparency and accountability (respectively the third and fourth most mentioned topics amongst responders). Many stated that the public were not presented with the full facts before decisions were taken – or a comprehensive rationale afterwards. Several respondents argued that providing a clear account of why a particular course of action had been taken would give residents greater confidence in the decision-making process. Furthermore, such an instrument would provide a clearer line of accountability.

Respondents also raised the connected matters of integrity and trust. Some argued that the contentious Local Plan process had undermined their faith in the council and that serious efforts would have to be made to win back their trust.

Some participants also wondered why such a theme was necessary. They appeared unconvinced that these ideas, actions and projects would need to be restated in a Corporate Plan when they should already be integral to the working of the council.

**If you think any themes or priorities are missing in the South Oxfordshire corporate plan please use the space below to tell us.**

232 responses were received to this question. A wide range of comments were submitted, with many people addressing multiple issues. Comments were broadly classified into a series of topics. Although there was a variation in the detail and content of the answers, certain topics recurred throughout.

18% of respondents felt that more focus could have been given to the rural nature of South Oxfordshire and the environment. Of these responses most commented that protection of the Green Belt and access to green spaces were missing from the Corporate Plan. Connected to this 17% of respondents felt that the Corporate Plan was missing a theme or priority around addressing over-development. Most responses under this topic put forward that too many houses were being built in the area and this was the main contributor to the loss of green spaces resulting in the destruction of South Oxfordshire's rural environment.

11% of respondents felt that the Corporate Plan lacked focus on highways and infrastructure. The majority of the responders cited the need for appropriate infrastructure to facilitate the growth in our district and ease congestion. Respondents were concerned with the standard and condition of the highways. Whilst highways are the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council and not a district council statutory responsibility, the level of comments received in relation to this demonstrate its importance to our residents and the need for the district council to be clearer about the services they provide. Similarly, 7% of respondents referred to public transport and highlighted the need for improved access to this. Public transport was most often mentioned in connection with bus services to villages and connecting bus and rail links together; for example, Cholsey train station with bus services to local villages and towns. It was also suggested that there could be a reluctance to use public transport as a result of Covid-19 and this could mean an increase in car use.

Emerging strongly was a sense that young people did not feature in the Corporate Plan. Most comments classified under this topic referred to the need to provide facilities for young people in South Oxfordshire for them to meet, develop and gain skills and enable them to feel part of, and contribute to, the district. Respondents were keen to reiterate the need for more targeted engagement activity towards young people.

7% of responses received contained comments around the need to increase engagement activity more broadly. Many comments were welcoming the opportunity to provide feedback on the Corporate Plan and wanting more opportunities to be engaged. Comments stressed the desire for the Council to do this in more innovative ways, many suggesting the use of social media, videos and images and commenting on how this could increase chances of reaching young people. Further there was a strong sense that communities wanted to be "listened" to especially in relation to planning services.

Respondents also focussed on two issues with a similar level of interest, that of the impact of Covid-19 and national strategic infrastructure programmes and proposals including Oxfordshire Plan 2050, Oxford-Cambridge arc and the potential for a third bridge over the River Thames.

Respondents felt that the impact of Covid-19 had not been addressed in the Corporate Plan, with many citing that as a big opportunity missed. Respondents urged the council to consider lessons learned from Covid-19 and wanted recognition of the difficulties Covid-19 has brought.



Respondents also praised the locally voluntary effort in the Covid-19 response and called for flexibility in the plan in order to respond to similar events in the future.

Concerns were raised about the relationship South Oxfordshire has with national strategic infrastructure programmes and proposals. Many respondents suggested they felt the Corporate Plan did not show an awareness of, or a position on, those programmes and proposals. Respondents also outlined concerns around the need for a third bridge over the River Thames to ease congestion and provided comment on the interplay between the major national infrastructure programmes and proposals and the incompatibility with other themes in the plan.

Respondents also commented on the potential for local government reorganisation and the forthcoming White Paper on Devolution from HM Government and felt this was a gap in the Corporate Plan. The main focus of the comments was the potential for a new governance model to allow the council to be more effective, efficient and to save money with some respondents enquiring as to the council's position on it.

Generally, 10% of respondents commented that they either had nothing to add to the plan or that they felt there was a lot to do with some participants wishing to highlight and praise the level of ambition and intent.

The majority of the areas commented on are planned to be addressed in the foreword to the Corporate Plan written by the Leader of the Council.

### **Are there any other comments you wish to make about the proposed themes for the South Oxfordshire corporate plan or to help us decide future priorities?**

200 responses were received to this question. A wide range of comments were submitted with many people addressing multiple issues. Comments were broadly classified into a series of topics. Although there was a variation in the detail and content of the answers, certain topics recurred throughout, and this summary will report the topics recurring most frequently.

24% of the comments from respondents used this section to confirm that they either had nothing to add or were thanking the council for the opportunity to comment on the Corporate Plan. Positive affirmations were frequently made around the level of ambition shown in the proposed themes. Further, respondents felt that there should be a greater focus on delivery and requested that they would like to see meaningful measures and have the ability to track and receive progress updates. This aligns well with the desire to produce an annual performance report against themes and projects in the Corporate Plan and demonstrates that there is a clear interest in this.

Conversely, there were concerns around deliverability, with some comments showing a degree of cynicism about the Council's ability to deliver on the themes and projects (10%). Regarded as important was the cost of producing the Corporate Plan, running the engagement exercise and delivering the projects. While less frequently mentioned there was reference to there not being enough recognition in the Corporate Plan that our local priorities must integrate with regional and national plans. Aligned to that, levels of influence were cited within comments in respect of whether projects were deliverable under district council powers and that there could have been a greater focus given to things that were under our direct control.

16% of the comments received were additional information on the topic of over-development/un-necessary development. Most comments received emphasised the level of new housing development in the area and how this was leading to the loss of green spaces and the destruction of the unique beauty of the district and the Green Belt. A detailed point was made about the potential for re-ordering the themes as it was felt that having “Homes and Infrastructure” as theme 1 made the other themes feel subservient to it. A potential re-ordering was suggested with “Protection and Restoration” “Action on Climate Change” and “Openness and Accountability” as themes 1, 2 and 3.

There was a focus upon the importance of climate change with 13% of comments in this section welcoming the theme and its prevalence in the Corporate Plan. Many respondents acknowledged the wider impacts of climate change, linking action being required for the benefit of younger generations. It was also felt that climate change should inform all other themes and consideration should be given to re-ordering the themes to demonstrate this or it could be made clearer that the Climate Emergency crosses all council business rather than being a “stand-alone” theme.

Generally, there was strong support for this level of engagement with a desire for more opportunities to engage in the future. Many comments highlighted the importance of communities being “listened” to and that there should be a focus on more collaboration and engagement to identify priorities based on relevant community/local needs. There were several comments emphasising that respondents hoped their comments make a difference and a desire for the results of the engagement activity to be published, so they are transparent and accessible to all.

## HOW WE HAVE USED RESULTS OF THE ENGAGEMENT

This report shows the analysis of the comments received to the six priority themes and illustrative projects in the Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 engagement survey. The Corporate Plan sets the strategic direction for the council and creates a vision and priorities for the councils' work for those living and working in the districts.

There were a variety of comments and responses, and although only the most frequently mentioned comments are explored further in this report, all comments received are taken into consideration and are included at Appendix G.

Where a response is needed to a specific comment or question raised in the engagement, a separate reply will be provided where possible.

A summary of findings is collated in the report and the two separate appendices documents and will be presented to council managers and Cabinet Members and will be used to inform the preparation of the final content for the South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan. The South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 will be published, alongside this report and the appendices, on our [website](#), with the new corporate plan coming into effect from the date of publication.

The engagement highlighted that there is strong overall support for the draft themes and projects in the Corporate Plan. Following consideration of the comments received and the recommendations included with this report a table confirming action to be taken can be found in Appendix H.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For information about the engagement or the results presented in this report, please contact:

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To enquire about the council's work on the South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024, please contact the Insight and Policy team:

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# Appendices

The appendices to the South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 engagement report are in a separate document. The appendices documents can be found on the corporate plan page of our [website](#) alongside this engagement report and the corporate plan.

APPENDIX 1: A-F

**APPENDIX A – BACKGROUND TO THE ENGAGEMENT**

**APPENDIX B – ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY**

**APPENDIX C – ENGAGEMENT COMMUNICATION**

**APPENDIX D – SURVEY**

**APPENDIX E – DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

**APPENDIX F – QUANTITATIVE DATA**

APPENDIX 2: G-H

**APPENDIX G – FULL LIST OF COMMENTS RECEIVED**

**APPENDIX H – TABLE CONFIRMING RECOMMENDATION OUTCOMES**