

Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee



Report of Acting Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations

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To: Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee

DATE: 12 April 2021

AGENDA ITEM

Climate Action and Biodiversity 2021/22 Work Programme

Recommendation(s)

- (a) Committee to note the progress and process to date, including the activity commissioned within the 2020/21 budget, in respect of providing a strategic response to the Council's climate emergency declaration and adopted carbon neutral targets for the Council and the District.
- (b) Committee to review the proposed 2021/22 climate action and biodiversity work programmes, in respect of providing a strategic response to the Corporate Plan 2020-24, which will provide a base for the South Oxfordshire District Council Climate Action Plan and proposed Biodiversity Action Plan.
- (c) Committee to approve the submission of the proposed 2021/22 climate action and biodiversity work programmes to Cabinet.
- (d) Committee to recommend to Cabinet that the proposed quarterly Corporate Plan 2020-24 performance reports are brought forward to the CEEAC, in order for them to check, challenge and provide advice on project progress to Cabinet, against the projects included in this work programme for 2021/22.

Purpose of Report

1. This report outlines a proposed programme in 2021/22 that the Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee (CEEAC) could recommend to

Cabinet as a strategic response to the Corporate Plan together with the climate and ecological emergencies declarations and adopted carbon neutral targets for the Council and the District.

2. The items put forward for inclusion in the 2021/22 work programme have been defined by the Corporate Plan projects that have been agreed by Council members for delivery in 21/22. They are complemented by projects from the 2020/21 CEAC Year One Work Programme that have been carried forward (principally due to the delays arising from the Covid-19 pandemic). This report also outlines the climate and biodiversity items considered business as usual for council officers. It further indicates new proposed areas of work so reflects the totality of action that the Council is taking in respect of the climate and ecological emergencies
3. Officers have categorised the work programme into four key headings: Foundational projects, Council projects, District projects and County-wide partnerships and projects.
4. With the new priority accorded to protecting and restoring the natural world in the Corporate Plan there are distinct work programmes presented for Biodiversity and the Climate Emergency respectively.
5. The report indicates those projects which we are currently able to take forward within allocated budgets (in colour) and those which require further scoping and funding (greyed out).

Strategic Objectives

6. This work is supported by both the Council's carbon neutral targets and the new South Oxfordshire Corporate Plan 2020-24 which states: *"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."*
7. The Corporate Plan also establishes a new priority to Protect and Restore the Natural World with a pledge to: *"We will respect and protect our natural environment, especially our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) 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."* The importance of the Council's biodiversity work has been reinforced by the recent Full Council declaration of an ecological emergency on 11 February 2021.

Background

8. A climate emergency was declared by the South Oxfordshire District Council administration at Full Council in April 2019. The motion outlined the intention for the Council to consider adopting an early carbon neutral target.
9. To support a response to the climate emergency, the Council established the Committee to develop and recommend mitigating actions and advise Cabinet on matters relating to climate change.
10. The Year One Work Programme for 2020/21 was recommended by the Committee and approved by Cabinet in January 2020. Despite the restrictions occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic considerable progress has been made in delivering the programme.
11. Much of the work completed has been foundational and will provide the basis on which the Council can determine the priority actions to take in order to progress towards the achievement of the carbon neutral targets. Baselines have been completed for both the Council and the district and the next step of modelling different scenarios for how the targets may be achieved is due to be completed and presented to all Councillors and SMT in May 2021. These scenarios will be key to the development of a Climate Action Strategy and Plan and specifically a Carbon Management Plan that will define the pathway to becoming carbon neutral.

Annual Summary 2020/21

12. While the Covid-19 pandemic created many challenges in 2020/21 that impacted the delivery of the Year One Work Programme, there were also some positive outcomes, including a reduction in the Council's carbon emissions. The table below shows the key operational areas in which emissions reductions were made in the first three quarters of 2020/21

South Oxfordshire CO ₂ emissions (tonnes) Quarter 1 to Quarter 3 2020/21				
	2019/20	2020/21	Change on 2019/20	% change on 2019/20
Leisure Centres	923	363	-560	-60.67%
Council offices	67	50	-17	-25.37%
Cornerstone	78	49	-29	-37.18%
Staff mileage	24	11	-13	-54.17%

13. The Leisure Centre reductions can be attributed exclusive to closures due to Covid-19 related closures and restricted access. Sustained reductions will only be achieved through the implementation of decarbonisation projects.
14. For office and staff related emissions there is an opportunity to consolidate some of the emissions reductions into longer term adjustments to working arrangements. Though it should be noted that carbon emission savings from the council buildings will have transferred to some extent to individual officer's homes.
15. The key activities that have been completed or progressed in 2020/21 from the Year One Work Programme are:

- Baseline carbon emissions data reports for district compiled by Aether and presented to Councillors.
- Distinct climate and nature themes embedded in the new Corporate Plan 2020-24 with climate action and sustainability integrated throughout the plan. Significant input from the CEAC into the development of the plan.
- Recruitment of two Climate Action leads (from Nov 2020 and Jan 2021)
- Seven CEAC meetings held
- Task & Finish groups covering: Year One Work Programme prioritisation, scoping and development, staff conference design, joint design guide and biodiversity
- Membership of Oxfordshire Greentech
- Climate and ecological implications added to formal democratic report templates. Each decision and report will now be presented with detail on the climate and ecological implications so that members are fully cognisant of the impact of any formal decisions.
- Commissioning Anthesis to conduct a district climate action scenario modelling report and Town and Parish Council mapping.
- Completion of the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (OEVIS) 2020-25.
- Council motion declaring an ecological emergency and change of committee name to the Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee (CEEAC)
- CEEAC review held to review the Committee's effectiveness to date and to identify recommendations for improving effectiveness and alignment to the corporate plan going forward.

In addition to the Year One Work Programme, over the past year the Councillor Community grant has supported several projects by our communities that address climate action. This included tree planting and biodiversity schemes, improving the local environment, encouraging residents to enjoy the outdoors, and enhancing wildlife friendly areas in public spaces as well as private gardens. One project also assisted with the installation of new LED lighting in a community building which will result in immediate energy saving for the organisation.

Prioritisation for 2021/22

16. The priority items have been drawn from the new Corporate Plan. Some of these projects were included in the budget approved by Council in February (in colour) and some are subject to future discretionary growth (greyed out). Should the opportunity arise during the year to consider funding further corporate plan activities, these could be brought forward for consideration as supplementary estimates.

17. This has been complemented by a review of the Year One Work programme and identification of projects which need to be carried forward, including some which have been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some projects have been deprioritised due to the changing work patterns with staff predominantly working from home.
18. This process has involved review and scoping meetings with the CEEAC Chair, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Transformation, the Cabinet Lead for Climate Action and officers from Insight & Policy.
19. The focus for 2021/22 is to move from policy development into the delivery phase and make progress towards achieving the carbon neutral targets for the Council's own operations. This will be reinforced with the development of a three-year Climate Action Plan for 2021-2024.

Corporate Plan Climate Action Items

20. The greyed-out items in the table below have not been included in the Council budget for 2021/22 as approved by Full Council in February 2021. The Lead column identifies the SMT member responsible for ensuring delivery together with the Insight & Policy team member advising on delivery.

NEW CORPORATE PLAN CLIMATE ACTION PROJECTS					
Project		Description	Cabinet Lead	Lead	Notes
Theme 3: Action to Tackle the Climate Emergency					
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS					
ACE1	Becoming carbon neutral	Produce a Carbon Management Plan to set out the pathways to achieving our own zero carbon target by 2025 and working with others to achieve the district target of zero carbon by 2030	Cllr. Sue Cooper	Suzanne Malcolm; Climate Action Team	
ACE2	Annual programme	Develop an annually approved climate emergency programme and adequately finance it	Cllr. Sue Cooper	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	
COUNCIL PROJECTS					
ACE3	Net zero homes	Deliver Council-owned net-zero homes and use grants, planning policy and advocacy to ensure the same standards throughout the district	Cllr. Robin Bennett	Suzanne Malcolm;	
ACE4	Behaviour change	Promote and encourage behavioural change with informational campaigns and leading by example	Cllr. Andrea Powell	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	
ACE6	Planning and land use	Mitigate climate change through planning and land use, enhancing biodiversity on our own land and strengthening the planning system to enforce environmental standards	Cllr David Rouane	Adrian Duffield;	
DISTRICT PROJECTS					

ACE4	Behaviour change	Promote and encourage behavioural change with informational campaigns and leading by example	Cllr. Andrea Powell	James Carpenter ; Elizabeth Kingdom	
ACE5	Single use plastics, air quality and sustainable transport	Take positive action on single-use plastics, air quality improvement measures and sustainable transport	Cllr. David Rouane	Liz Hayden; Elizabeth Kingdom	
ACE7	Circular economy	Promote the circular economy (reduce, re-use and recycle), including in our waste management contracts	Cllr. David Rouane	Liz Hayden; Heather Saunders	
ACE8	Business support	Support and encourage local businesses to respond to climate change and nature recovery	Cllr. Robin Bennett	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	Greentech annual membership fee
ACE9	Waste reduction	Promote waste minimisation initiatives such as Repair Cafés	Cllr David Rouane	Liz Hayden; Elizabeth Kingdom	Promote existing initiatives
ACE10	Active Travel	Work with Oxfordshire County Council to build on our commitment to active travel including walking, public transport and cycling infrastructure	Cllr. Pieter Paul Barker	Suzanne Malcolm	

Theme 4: Improved economic and community wellbeing

DISTRICT PROJECTS

ECW3	Active travel and broadband	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 homeworking	Cllr. Anne-Marie Simpson	Suzanne Malcolm	
ECW5	Green spaces	Use our planning powers to preserve our valuable green spaces, particularly in urban areas	Cllr. Anne-Marie Simpson	Adrian Duffield; Andy Egan	

Theme 5: Homes and Infrastructure that meet local needs

COUNCIL PROJECTS

HILN7	Government funding	Ensuring that our teams are ready to access or signpost to any Government schemes or funding that is made available	Cllr. Robin Bennett	James Carpenter ; Michelle Wells	
HILN9	Spatial planning	Spatial planning embeds public health, wellbeing and sustainability	Cllr. Pieter-Paul Barker	Adrian Duffield;	

DISTRICT PROJECTS

HILN1	Garden communities	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	Cllr. David Rouane	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	Provide support for Didcot, Berinsfield,
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		walking and cycling network, community facilities and accessible green spaces for Didcot residents			Garden Communities contribution towards net zero carbon developments
HILN4	Retrofit	Support and encouragement for the retrofit of our existing housing stock for low-carbon performance and to eliminate fuel poverty	Cllr. Sue Cooper	Liz Hayden; Elizabeth Kingdom	Feasibility and scoping study on options for setting up a district retro fit scheme. Support to South Oxfordshire Scrutiny Committee, Task & Finish group on this area
HILN8	New homes	New homes are future-proofed, meeting the highest environmental standards and enhancing nature through sensitive, high quality design	Cllr. Anne-Marie Simpson	Adrian Duffield;	
HILN11	Sustainable transport	Sustainable transport solutions prioritise walking, cycling and public transport to reduce car dependency and air pollution	Cllr. Pieter Paul Barker	Suzanne Malcolm	

Theme 6: Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability
COUNCIL PROJECTS

IRFV2	Invest to Save	“Invest to save” for the District, including the delivery of sustainable new Council offices – on time and within budget – to realise future operational efficiencies	Cllr. Leigh Rawlins	Adrianna Partridge; Climate Action Team	
IRFV4	External Funding	Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and to enrich our leisure, sporting and community activities	Cllr. Maggie Phillipova-Rivers	Suzanne Malcolm; Michelle Wells	
IRFV5	Ethical Investment	Invest responsibly and ethically with the Climate Emergency at the heart of what we do	Cllr. Leigh Rawlins	Simon Hewings;	

New Priority Climate Action Items

21. In addition to the Corporate Plan projects a number of other projects have been identified as priorities to take forward over the coming year. These are being delivered within current staffing resources.

NEW PRIORITY CLIMATE ACTION ITEMS

Project		Action	Lead	Notes
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS				
	Climate Action Plan 2021-24	Develop a three-year Climate Action Plan including the establishment of internal governance and engagement structures. This will be supported by a Communications and Engagement Plan.	Suzanne Malcolm; James Carpenter Andy Egan; Elizabeth Kingdom	See separate paper
	Officer training	Implement training for officers on South Oxfordshire' target and work to address the climate emergency	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	eLearning module (buy from another Council) <i>Investigate options</i>
COUNCIL PROJECTS				
	Low Carbon Council Estate	Prepare site decarbonisation plans for council buildings including heating and renewable energy options appraisals. Compile data in preparation for external funding applications.	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	
COUNTY WIDE POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS				
	Oxfordshire Growth Board	Advise on Zero Carbon Economy Study and Environmental Sub- Group development	Suzanne Malcolm; Michelle Wells; Andy Egan	
	Ox-Cam Arc	Advise on climate action and environmental principles and seek to ensure the Arc makes a positive contribution to achieving the Council's carbon neutral and nature recovery objectives	Suzanne Malcolm; Michelle Wells; Andy Egan	
	Rivers Thames Champion	Work to support the Thames Valley Rivers Network Group, with the Thames Champion and scope and explore projects and funding that link to Climate Action and Biodiversity goals	Michelle Wells; Elizabeth Kingdom	
	COP26	Participate in the Oxfordshire COP26 Alliance	Michelle Wells; Elizabeth Kingdom	

Climate Action Items Already Commissioned

22. The following projects are either continuing or being carried forward from the previous Year One Work Programme and were budgeted for 2020/21.

CARRY FORWARD AND ONGOING CLIMATE ACTION PROJECTS				
Project		Action	Lead	Notes
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS				
	Council emissions	Create a 'glidepath' tool that tracks the contribution of delivered and planned	Suzanne Malcolm	

	baseline	projects and external factors towards achieving a carbon neutral council	Heather Saunders	
	Scenario Modelling	Develop a model to demonstrate the detailed scope and size of actions needed by all stakeholders to achieve a pathway towards a carbon neutral district	Michelle Wells; Andy Egan; Heather Saunders	
	Town Energy Mapping	Provide baseline energy and carbon emissions data and maps for our market towns	Michelle Wells; Elizabeth Kingdom; Heather Saunders	
	Climate Action Briefing	Session for Councillors and staff on the Council's climate action plan	Andy Egan; Elizabeth Kingdom	
	Intranet	Internal staff intranet (Jarvis) page on the climate emergency	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	Currently in development due to go live April 2021.
COUNCIL PROJECTS				
	Solar energy	Identify opportunities to invest in solar energy off site and offset the council's own emissions. Research the investment and partnership options available	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	
	Planning Design Guide	Support the development of policies in the Joint South and Vale Design Guide that will contribute towards a carbon neutral district	Adrian Duffield; Heather Saunders	
	Green Travel Plan	Implement a green travel plan for officers and members	Suzanne Malcolm; Elizabeth Kingdom	
	EV fleet	Support teams in preparing a business case for leasing or purchasing electric vehicles for the council's fleet	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	
DISTRICT PROJECTS				
	Town Councils Workshops	Work with town councils across the districts and facilitate a workshop to understand theirs and their parishes' local needs in respect of the climate emergency.	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	Town and Parish Council Forum due in Spring 2021
	Grants Programme	Refocus of the South grants programme to support community led initiatives which address climate change	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	
	EV Hire Scheme	Initial feasibility study into an electric vehicle hire facility for residents/staff	Adrianna Partridge; Elizabeth Kingdom	

COUNTY WIDE POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS				
	Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy	Work with partners to increase EV charging infrastructure across Oxfordshire.	Liz Hayden; Andy Egan	
	Park and Charge	Work with partners to provide electric charging points in Council car parks.	Liz Hayden; Andy Egan	External funding secured

Corporate Plan Biodiversity Items

23. The greyed-out items were not included in the Council budget for 2021/22.

CORPORATE PLAN BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS				
Project		Description	Lead	Notes
Theme 1: Protect and Restore the Natural World				
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS				
PRN1	Ecosystem Mapping	With partners, promote in-depth mapping and surveying of ecosystems across the district, planning for restoration of the natural world and working closely with landowners and specialist agencies	Adrian Duffield; Dominic Lamb	Base budget 5,000 from Planning budget
DISTRICT PROJECTS				
PRN2	Natural assets	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	TBC	
PRN3	Nature based solutions	Encourage the use of natural processes to combat risks arising from climate change, such as meadows and trees to reduce flooding	TBC	
PRN4	Regenerative agriculture	Recognise and support the vital role of farming in economic and ecosystem resilience, local food provision and the recovery of soils and natural processes	TBC Andy Egan	Investigate regenerative farming and upscaling local food production
COUNTY WIDE POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS				
PRN5	Local Nature Partnership	Call for the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership (LNP) for Oxfordshire to promote an ambitious nature recovery programme, including tree and meadow planting, rewilding and providing habitats for wildlife including wildlife corridors	Adrian Duffield; Dominic Lamb	Requires ongoing revenue funding
PRN6	Access to green spaces	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	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan; Elizabeth	

		nature as a priority for community wellbeing	Kingdom	
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New Priority Biodiversity Items

24. In addition to the Corporate Plan projects a number of other projects have been identified as priorities to take forward over the coming year. Some of these are being delivered within current staffing resources. Those that are greyed-out require additional resources and will be subject to future discretionary growth.

NEW PRIORITY BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS				
Project		Description	Lead	Notes
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS				
PRN9	Biodiversity Steering Group	Set up a South and Vale Biodiversity Steering Group to advise and help shape the delivery of the Councils' Corporate Plan biodiversity, nature protection and nature recovery objectives.	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	See separate paper
PRN10	Biodiversity Plan	Develop a 10-year biodiversity plan for how the Council will lead on nature protection and recovery.	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	
PRN11	Tree Policy	Develop a tree policy and strategy for South and Vale that covers council owned land, private land and community land.	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	
DISTRICT PROJECTS				
PRN12	Tree Planting Programme	Establish a district wide tree planting programme	TBC; Andy Egan	Requires new capacity and resources
		Develop proposal for at least one Tiny Forest in partnership with Earthwatch	TBC; Andy Egan	Potential to secure CiL funding
PRN13	Habitat Banking	Feasibility study into setting up a Habitat Bank to deliver biodiversity offsetting requirements	TBC; Andy Egan	Scoping study

25. BIODIVERSITY ITEMS ALREADY COMMISSIONED (existing 2020/21 budget):

CARRY FORWARD AND ONGOING BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS				
Project		Description	Lead	Notes
COUNTY WIDE POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS				
PRN7	Nature Recovery Strategy	Contribution to a county wide strategy to be produced by the Local Nature Partnership (LNP)	Adrian Duffield Dominic Lamb	From Planning budget. Part of the Environment Bill and expected to become a statutory duty for local authorities

PRN8	Net Biodiversity Gain	Contribution to a county wide net biodiversity gain strategy to be produced by the LNP	Adrian Duffield Dominic Lamb	From Planning budget. Part of the Environment Bill and expected to become a statutory duty for local authorities
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Items Considered Business As Usual

26. Climate Action Plan: For the Council to meet the Climate Emergency declaration and Corporate Plan targets, we need a robust strategy and policy framework, that will include a Climate Action Strategy and Plan. This plan will be informed by the Corporate Plan, carbon neutral targets, learning from the year one work programme and critical data from the Council and district baseline data and forthcoming carbon neutral scenario modelling due for completion in May 2021.
27. CEEAC support and co-ordination: In order to facilitate the effective running of the CEEAC a significant proportion of officer time will be spent liaising with the Chair and CEEAC members on agenda and forward plan management and report preparation. This will also be in close liaison with the Cabinet Lead for Climate and Environment projects in the Corporate Plan.
28. Governance: Across the Council we will formalise climate action within our internal governance so that it becomes embedded within business as usual activity. One essential element of this is to establish senior officer engagement in developing and ensuring effective delivery of the Climate Action Plan. This has recently been progressed with the establishment of a Climate Action Steering Group. Other important aspects are procurement and major contract renewal and includes early preparation for the specification of the new leisure facilities and waste management contracts in 2024, ongoing leisure centre maintenance and refurbishment and grounds maintenance. It is important that when other policies are developed or reviewed, they are informed and guided by climate and biodiversity considerations. A policy and strategy guidance document will soon be in place as part of the council's Corporate Delivery Framework. This will provide staff with the tools they need to develop robust fully rounded policy.
29. Engagement: In order to achieve this transformation in the way we do business we need to encourage and support a change in culture so that climate action is embedded at the heart of the organisation. We will engage with staff to ensure that there is a deep understanding of both the climate and ecological emergencies. This will help to build an assured commitment of staff across the organisation. An organisation wide staff and member climate conference will be organised once the Climate Action Plan is approved. This will be followed by staff training in areas such as carbon literacy. We are also proposing to establish a Climate Action Delivery Group of key officers and a network of Green Champions drawn from across the Council staff.
30. Partnership: We will continue to work in partnership to progress our climate action goals. We will collaborate to develop external funding bids in order to deliver agreed targets and commitments. Where appropriate we will adopt a joint South

and Vale approach and work with other districts and Oxfordshire County Council, as well as relevant charitable and community organisations. We will actively monitor or participate in projects by trusted partners as resources allow. There may be specific projects that directly contribute to the target that is set which could be funded by South Oxfordshire and delivered by outside partners who have an established track record and expertise with the work.

31. Influencing and lobbying: We will continue to seek to positively influence central government policy in relation to the climate and ecological emergencies. We will respond to relevant consultations to make the case for effective central government legislation, policies and funding for local authority climate and nature protection and recovery action.

Climate and ecological implications

32. The implementation of the Council's climate emergency work programme is explicitly designed to achieve positive climate and ecological outcomes. It is understood that embedding consideration of climate and ecological impacts across all Council decision making and project development is an important step towards reducing carbon emissions and making meaningful progress in protecting and restoring the natural world in South Oxfordshire.
33. Sustaining and increasing staffing capacity and project funding to implement projects that will reduce council and district carbon emissions and protect and restore nature will be essential in ensuring that the 2021/22 work programme delivers positive impacts.
34. Consideration should be given to the creation of a Biodiversity Lead role that could provide leadership and co-ordination, given the level of commitment in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24 and the recent declaration of an ecological emergency.

Financial Implications

35. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the council's overarching financial position. For South, the position reflected in the council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full Council in February 2021 showed that the council is due to receive £4.3 million less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2021/22 (with the balance coming from reserves including unallocated New Homes Bonus).
36. This funding gap is predicted to increase to over £5 million by 2025/26. As there remains no certainty on future local government funding, following the announcement of a one-year spending review by government, and as the long-term financial consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic remain unknown, this gap could increase further. Every financial decision made needs to be cognisance of the need to eliminate this funding gap in future years.
37. It was noted last year that many items included within the proposed year one programme of work were feasibility studies and it was acknowledged that there would be significant resource implications and additional budget required beyond year one of the programme. This has been reinforced by the agreement of the new Corporate Plan 2020-24. A further key element of the transformation required to

embed climate action and nature recovery work across the Council, is that in addition to identifying new resources, existing resources will need to be redirected or reallocated to support commitments in the Corporate Plan 2020-24.

38. The district scenario modelling and Climate Action Plan will inform and help to scope the climate and nature projects that will be tabled for consideration in any future discretionary growth bids, that would be considered as part of a future supplementary estimate.
39. It is equally clear that we cannot as a Council fund and undertake all of the work that is required to achieve the carbon neutral targets for the district. Additional sources of funding and resourcing will be needed in addition to any new budget allocation. This could include government grants, investment by businesses, households, town and parish councils and contributions by environmental charities and community action groups. What we do need to ensure as a Council is that we have the capacity to position ourselves to secure climate action funding made available by central government and other bodies.
40. The Council has allocated funding to employ two Climate Action Lead officers for 12 months until September and December 2021 respectively. This cost has been shared on a 50:50 basis with Vale of White Horse District Council. However, given the breadth and depth of the work programme for 2021-22 and central emphasis of this area in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24 consideration should be given to the longer-term management and delivery of projects in this area.

Legal Implications

41. Carbon neutrality itself is not a legal requirement and consequently there is no legal duty for the Council to undertake actions and activities to achieve this.
42. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Legal implications may arise in respect of individual projects included within the subsequent work programme as they are scoped, approved by Cabinet and implemented. These will be subject to identification and appropriate action as required.

Risks

43. Climate action is not currently a statutory function for district councils; however local authorities have a statutory duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) Many of the projects/activities detailed within this report require a funding stream and have resource implications, including implications arising from redirecting current resource from areas across the Council to this agenda if this is the approach the Cabinet decide to take.
44. Moreover, due to the current financial position, it may not be possible to deliver on the full climate and ecological emergency aspirations declared by the Council.
45. South Oxfordshire District Council is in partnership with the Vale of White Horse District Council and any items implemented in relation to council operations could lead to complexities, due to shared resources and offices at 135 Milton Park.

Conclusion

41. This report describes the process by which projects were identified for the coming year. It further details which projects have been prioritised from the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and included in the budget approved by Council in February 2021. The report further sets out the Corporate Plan projects that may be brought forward in as part of future discretionary growth.
42. The report also sets out the ongoing projects the Council is already involved in to address the climate and ecological emergencies, and detailed items considered business as usual for council officers as well as items which have already been commissioned within the existing 2020/21 budget to support meeting the climate emergency targets

Background Papers

None