

# Written responses to question – 14 July 2022

## Council meeting

A. Question from Councillor Mocky Khan to Councillor Sue Cooper, Cabinet member for Environment, Climate Change and Nature Recovery

It seems that all other towns within South Oxfordshire are getting Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points except Didcot. Can the Cabinet member for Environment, Climate Change and Nature Recovery explain the criteria for selection and why Didcot was excluded?

### Written Response

Thank you for the question, and I am sure that you are as pleased as I am to be seeing the Council deliver on its climate commitments through such projects as the one identified.

You are correct to note that a number of electric vehicle charging points have been delivered across car parks in South Oxfordshire, and elsewhere in the County. Park and Charge was an externally-funded pilot project with a set budget to test whether this kind of provision is effective and was delivered in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and an organisation called EZ Charge.

There were a number of criteria in the selection of sites set by the pilot including identifying areas where there are larger numbers of residents without off-street parking within a five-minute walk. Other criteria set by the project included the electricity network connection available, the size of the local population and level of car ownership.

Whilst the car parks in Didcot did not meet the threshold for the Park and Charge pilot, it does not mean that our other car parks will not have an opportunity to install charging infrastructure in the future as EV ownership continues to increase and should further funding opportunities arise.

Officers are currently in the process of seeking funding through the governments local electric vehicle infrastructure (LEVI) pilot funding and the Edinburgh Drive car park in Didcot has been identified as one potential option through that scheme, should a bid be successful.

B. Question from Councillor David Bartholomew to Councillor Andrea Powell, Cabinet member for Corporate Services, Policy and Programmes

At the Full Council meeting in May you announced there will be six FTE officers in the core climate action team.

What is the annual cost of this to the council and what exactly are these officers going to do?

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### Written Response

Thank you, Cllr Bartholomew, for your question. The most recent South Oxfordshire District Council budget has created a provision for an additional three officers in our joint Climate and Biodiversity team for one year, creating a total provision of up to six officers, although as the matters covered by these roles are a council priority, I would expect our senior officers to do what is needed to achieve them and report by exception to cabinet should the resource need be different.

Of these six officers, three are fully funded by South Oxfordshire District Council and are therefore solely dedicated to the delivery of projects in support of our Corporate Climate and Biodiversity priorities, although by the nature of our joint working with Vale of White Horse, their knowledge and skills will be available in any wider discussions and engagement with other teams in the Councils, as in line with best practice, our s151 Officer undertakes a reconciliation each year. The remaining three officers are split equally between South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and therefore work across a variety of projects and initiatives which serve both districts.

When undergoing the budget process, South Oxfordshire District Council made specific provision within the budget for one year for these three additional roles; the one-off cost of these additional posts is in the order of £167,000, although that is an estimate, as items such as travel, and other costs that could be incurred, may impact this. The ongoing cost of the existing shared team to South Oxfordshire is around £87,000 a year, but as I mention above, in line with legal requirements, this is assessed by our s151 on an annual basis and will vary depending on workloads and actual costs.

In addition to the work required to deliver our ambitious Climate Action Plan, the team provides input and guidance for a number of projects and initiatives across the Council and with partner organisations. This includes, but is not limited to, providing Climate input and advice on projects and formal decision documentation in order to ensure that we are making the best decisions possible in the context of the wider environmental issues we face, seeking external funding (for example to decarbonise our asset base through schemes like the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme), running pilot schemes to enhance biodiversity such as habitat banking, monitoring upcoming changes in legislation such as the developments and opportunities relating to the Environment act. The three dedicated officers, whilst also working on a number of Climate and Biodiversity opportunities for SODC, will also have a focus on supporting the delivery of some specific projects.

These projects were identified by Cabinet as priority areas and include:

- An enhanced Retrofit offer to residents. Whilst we are unable to provide direct Retrofit assistance, we will be looking at what we can do in terms of provision of advice and support, signposting to funding where possible with the aim of reducing carbon emissions, and helping residents reduce their heating and

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electricity bills through a range of retrofit possibilities. This work is ever more important as we see the increasing cost of living crisis taking hold.

- An enhanced offer to support towns, parishes and community organisations to plant trees, hedges and encourage activities to improve biodiversity. This could mean direct advice in terms of species selection, signposting to funding opportunities, advising on site selection or other advice/support where possible.
- An enhanced offer to support better access and use of blue and green natural assets across the district – this will include, but is not limited to, projects like the management of the Bathing Water Status application for Wallingford beach and working to make the waterways in our district cleaner, safer and more accessible for residents to use.

It should be noted that the delivery of these projects is the responsibility of our senior managers, and it should not be assumed that there will always be a direct correlation between the officers in post today, and those tasked with delivery in the future.