

Agenda



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Listening Learning Leading

A MEETING OF THE

Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee

WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY 10 JUNE 2024 AT 6.00 PM

THIS WILL BE A VIRTUAL, ONLINE MEETING.

This meeting can be watched live from our YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@SouthandValeCommitteeMeetings/streams>

Members of the Committee:

Ali Gordon-Creed (Chair)

James Barlow

Sue Cooper

Maggie Filipova-Rivers

Stefan Gawrysiak

Mike Giles

Katharine Keats-Rohan

Denise Macdonald

Freddie van Mierlo

Andrea Powell

Leigh Rawlins

Andrew Tinsley (Vice-Chair)

Substitutes

Ken Arlett

Pieter-Paul Barker

Tim Bearder

David Bretherton

Peter Dragonetti

Georgina Heritage

Kellie Hinton

Mocky Khan

Axel Macdonald

James Norman

Jo Robb

Anne-Marie Simpson

Tony Worgan

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Vivien Williams

Head of Legal and Democratic (Interim)



1 Chair's announcements

To receive any announcements from the chair and general housekeeping matters.

2 Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence and the attendance of substitute members.

3 Minutes of the last meeting (Pages 5 - 11)

To review and agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 December 2023.

4 Declaration of interests

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

5 Urgent business

To receive notification of any matters which the chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent.

6 Public participation

To receive any questions or statements from members of the public that have registered to speak.

7 Update from the Cabinet member for climate action

An update from Cllr David Rouane

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF THE COMMITTEE

8 Understanding the Net Zero Challenge for SMEs in South and Vale (Pages 12 - 40)

SME = Small and Medium sized Enterprises.

A presentation from Nick King (Economic Development Manager), Karen Tolley (Principal Economic Development Lead) and Sara Le Roux from Oxford Brookes University.

9 Local Area Energy Planning (Pages 41 - 49)

Presented by Jessie Fieth, Senior Climate Action Officer

10 Progress on the Draft Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan

A verbal update from Chloe Bunting, Senior Climate Action Officer

11 Progress of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Action Plan

A verbal update from Dominic Lamb, Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader.

12 Task and Finish group updates and future items

For committee members to suggest topics for the future consideration of the committee. If there are any updates from task groups, members will be updated.

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



Listening Learning Leading

Climate and Ecological Emergencies

Advisory Committee

HELD AT 6.00 PM ON MONDAY 11 DECEMBER 2023
THIS WAS A VIRTUAL, ONLINE MEETING.

Attendance:

Councillors: Sam Casey-Rerhaye (chair), James Barlow, Ali Gordon-Creed, Alexandrine Kantor, Denise Macdonald, Leigh Rawlins and Andrew Tinsley

Officers: Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader), Jessie Fieth (Senior Climate Action Officer), Ben Whaymand (Leisure Facilities Team Leader) and Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer).

Guests: Alison Offord, BBOWT

52 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Stefan Gawrysiak, Katharine Keats-Rohan and Sam James-Lawrie.

53 Declaration of interests

None.

54 Urgent business and chair's announcements

The chair welcomed everyone to the first CEEAC meeting of the administration. There would be task and finish groups in addition to the public meetings.

Chair mentioned meeting arrangements and etiquette for those wishing to speak.

55 Minutes of the last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 3 April 2023 were discussed and agreed to be an accurate record.

Chair mentioned People's Plan for Nature as she had raised it at the last meeting. She added that this document would be included in the suite of documents for creating the Corporate Plan and the Climate and Nature Recovery Plan (CNRP). This was raised in the last meeting and was being taken forward.

56 Public participation

None.

57 An introduction to the Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray project

An introduction to the Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray project was presented by guest speaker Alison Offord from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). This presentation was for noting but open to committee questions and comments, and to consider any advice for Cabinet from CEEAC. Alison explained that the BBOWT team's role was to work beyond and between nature reserves and protected sites to create better conditions for wildlife across big landscapes.

It was explained that the current focus was on the Bernwood, Otmoor and Ray landscape and this presentation was to show plans for the area and what BBOWT was hoping to achieve in partnership with others. Committee were asked for their support and involvement going forward in addition to the ideas and input from officers. The Trust covered Wheatley, Beckley and Stanton St. John as some of the key settlements in the South Oxfordshire part of the boundary. There's no overall designation at the landscape scale but it does have some really important protected wildlife sites and local heritage. There were very good areas for nature but generally quite small and fragmented, whereas there were some quite large areas that were not currently managed well for wildlife and had been influenced by historic agricultural intensification modifications of the river and drainage system and more recently the cumulative impact of a number of high-profile developments such as HS2 and other infrastructure and housing projects throughout the landscape and so this project had really come about in response to these pressures and ongoing negative trends in the key wildlife populations, which were now also threatened by climate pressures. As a result of these developments the area was highlighted as one of the priority strategic scale landscapes to focus nature recovery effort and the current boundary brought together a number of existing conservation target areas and biodiversity opportunity areas across the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire borders.

Following on from this, BBOWT was funded by Bucks Council initially to undertake a feasibility study to help bring forward nature recovery action at the landscape scale. Over the past year and a half, we've consulted with over 200 individuals from over 44 organizations to identify opportunities with broad support that would deliver for nature and people and that could be initiated within 5 years. This process had now produced a working vision for the landscape around six broad areas of action which we're now in the process of developing further and these are these six were:

1. Setting up a farmer cluster to coordinate nature recovery across third party land and this had already been initiated so we're working with about 25 local farmers at the moment.
2. A project to enhance the river Ray and its associated habitats and flood plain meadows.
3. Increasing the connectivity of green infrastructure between the city of Oxford right through the landscape to the Upper Ray.
4. Reconnecting woodlands and improving habitat mosaics between woodlands.
5. Condition and quality of key linear habitats such as hedgerows and verges
6. Enhancing nature connection pathways for a more diverse range of people living or working in the area

Full details of the consultation and report had been published, which was sent in the initial papers to the committee and a link can be sent after this presentation. In order to translate the vision quickly into action we needed to raise some of the funding. We were moving forward with a round one application to the National Lottery Heritage fund for an ambitious 5-million-pound program covering the whole landscape and all six themes working in

partnership with a range of organisations both within and outside the natural environment sectors. We're currently in the process of building the content for the application, aiming to submit the application no later than May. If successful, this would lead us to seven years of funding including a 2-year development phase to further test ideas and plan projects close to the communities we work with followed by five years of delivery funding at the end of which there'd be potential to pivot to a landscape recovery project to continue over the longer term - in the context of landscape and species recovery we're really talking about a much longer time than funding programs reflected.

The project was currently divided into three core themes which were all about creating and connecting more and better-quality habitats for wildlife and people in nature and exploring human relationships with nature at a range of local sites and enhancing green spaces. We hope that other partners will join the partnership at a later date.

To reflect on a possible role for South Oxfordshire District Council within such a program, officers had already inputted to this project, and we are keen to maintain and develop existing links to complement local nature recovery and place shaping policies. With other partners we had been provided with letters of support and expertise and advice and we welcome thoughts from committee.

Below summarises the committee's main comments:

- It was confirmed there was some cover of Cherwell under this project. It was explained that the project was hoping to utilise existing channels and not set up further layers of governance.
- A member asked can we create funding for student projects – spatial GIS? It was confirmed that BBOWT had been talking to universities and welcomed other contacts.
- A member raised the risks of muddy flooding – how can we prevent that? Can landscape connectivity and wildlife be part of Planning GIS? It was responded that BBOWT had been working with Environment Agency and the Freshwater Habitats Trust to undertake modelling and were planning to use natural measures of flood management.
- A member suggested creating an increase of biodiversity and knowledge in gardens – hedgehogs, bats owls. Was BBOWT doing anything urban – connectivity issues. It was responded that yes, work was confirmed in urban areas – e.g.s include Slough, Wild Bicester, Wild Banbury. Guest speaker would be happy to provide contacts for such projects.
- Discussion was had around farmer clusters and supporting regenerative farming. Guest speaker explained that the work was collaborative and supportive as farmers have their own challenges to deal with. Farmland was still needed to produce food but working with farmers to produce more space for wildlife on farmland where possible.
- Muntjac control.
- Anthropogenic biomes – human land management dictating habitats and what lives there.
- Mention of transport infrastructure impacts, e.g., HS2, M40, East-West rail, for consideration.

CEEAC showed much support for this project, chair suggested that the District Council should look at how we can support these projects and would provide this comment to Cabinet.

Resolved:

CEEAC advise Cabinet to look at how SODC can support BBOWT projects.

58 Progress report on Leisure Centre Decarbonisation

An update report was presented to the committee by the Leisure Facilities Team Leader for committee to note.

46.8% of council's emissions come from leisure centres, therefore the work on decarbonisation of leisure centres was crucial. This report summarised all of the work so far on leisure centre decarbonisation.

The officer summarised the report, covering topics such as the impact of lockdown in reducing emissions for leisure, but shared use of centres (joint user agreements) including County Council for school swimming lessons etc, also emergency use during Covid, meant that there was still energy consumption. Consideration had to be given to pool and building structures at the time to ensure they weren't damaged, which resulted in some energy consumption, but then the facilities were ready for use again and needed to be heated. Post covid there was still some measures in place and work was done to adjust opening hours depending on usage, as well as sorting out the financial support package from Government.

Projects carried out to reduce consumption included LED lighting replacing halogen. Officers worked closely with the infrastructure and development team to draw down developers funds through Section 106 funding and Community Infrastructure Levy funding so that we could deliver those projects and use developers funds to move forward those lighting programs. Working with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) officers ensured contributions were fairly apportioned as per the joint use agreements.

We had an exercise conducted which looked at the turnover of the swimming pool in the leisure industry - a lot of the time circulation pumps work at 100% during the day and then leisure operators turn them down to 50% during the day but the officer's view at the time was who had actually calculated that this was the right percentage? The feedback received from the engineers in terms of the turnovers of those swimming pools was that we didn't need to be circulating the pumps in that amount of velocity, we only needed to turn over at 30%, so that one suggestion saved a lot of energy usage. So, centre operation as well as project delivery had helped reduce consumption of energy.

The Leisure team had been working with the Climate team and also talking to like-minded local authorities and key individuals in the industry to come up with ideas to reduce our carbon emissions in the leisure centres. A project on destratification of our leisure centres was delivered at White Horse Leisure Centre in July, to improve old buildings, their heating and ventilation systems.

Destratification fans around the pool side slowly push the air back down. Units don't consume much energy and keep the centre warmer. This had recently been completed at Didcot Wave also, and this will be monitored to see how well it works.

We had recently recruited an external funding lead in the council who's been applying for grant funding, and we've just recently put in for the Salix phase 3 C grant funding, which was government grant funding to support public facilities including educational facilities.

We will be hearing in January whether we're successful with that bid for Didcot Wave and Park Sports Centre. For those two facilities we'll be looking at solar PV insulation for the roof and air source heat pumps on the side of the buildings to support with the decarbonisation of the centres.

An application had been submitted for a specific swimming pool support fund. Officers had put in applications, except Riverside, as outdoor pools are not included in the funding, and the funding was specific to the pools themselves and not changing rooms etc. A lot of progress had been made and further projects planned, working with new technology, ideas and funding opportunities as they emerge.

When planned projects complete, we will have managed to reduce carbon emissions by just over 3.2 million kilowatt hours since the declaration of the climate emergency. The current Leisure contract expires on 31st August 2026. Work in the run up will inform performance monitoring for future contracts to ensure we can monitor the progress of all the work so far on decarbonisation, and we wanted to continue to reduce energy consumption under new contracts with the help of providers and service users.

Comments from committee:

- Point 24 clarification: 96 and 99% savings - what did this represent? It was responded by the officer that on those sites, it was the whole building approach using Salix grants – the figures were expectations from Concept Energy who conducted the heating savings report for these projects. We will be generating renewable energy from Solar PV to support emissions reductions. Gas boilers will be changed over to air source heat pumps that will be run on energy from the solar installations – aiming to move completely away from gas use.
- It was raised whether we can share as well as seek out best practice.
- We have Local Government Association presence - cross working was happening.
- Combined heat and power (CHP) was not used anymore, and new technology will mean it won't be needed anymore.
- Local hospitals (John Radcliffe) had been sharing heating – their heating generated electricity that they share between buildings – can we learn from this example?
- Consideration of ethical sourcing of solar panels. Officer explained that this had been considered in tendering and we will continue to look at framework models as well as the tendering process questioning.
- Clarification asked for on big energy savings at Riverside. It was explained that the figures were impacted by installation of pool covers, creating savings. They kept water vapour in place and maintained the temperature (reducing gas consumption).
- EV chargers at Leisure centres – can we consider this?
- Chair suggested whether this could be a task and finish group topic.

Committee noted this report and thanked the officer for his work.

59 Report on Progress with Retrofit Activities

CEEAC members were previously asked to provide a steer on actions the councils should take to upscale the retrofitting of buildings in the district. Senior Climate Action Officer provided an update report and presented it to committee.

The report discussed actions that the council should take to upscale the retrofitting of buildings in the district, mostly homes but also businesses and community buildings. The Council doesn't have direct control over this but homes were the second biggest source of carbon emissions in the district so there was a strong feeling that we should do as much

as we possibly can to encourage and facilitate retrofitting. The progress made had been presented in the report within the agenda pack.

Members congratulated the officer for the work achieved. Can we publicise more in parish magazines etc, to reach groups and less heard voices such as those in fuel poverty – stretch our reach further? Officer encouraged members to signpost people as well to help. Chair referred back to the Joint Scrutiny Committee task and finish report on retrofit that was written, and said she was glad to see these recommendations taking effect. On planning advice, chair suggested being proactive, by replying to applications with “have you considered retrofit...” at that point, it was more direct than putting the information on the website.

It was questioned whether we can monitor the number of retrofit homes, but the officer explained that so far, a solution had not been found, but this was being considered by officers already. A member mentioned Project Red as a contact group regarding prioritisation of retrofitting.

It was noted that we had a dedicated communications officer, Lucy Billen, and there would be feedback to Lucy about the communications to widen our reach.

Resolved:

Committee noted the update report.

60 Update from the Climate and Biodiversity Team

As the Cabinet Member was on leave, Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader gave a brief update.

- Developed a climate impact tool so officers can see climate impact of council decisions across council teams. It will be used in corporate decision making and will be rolled out as a six-month trial at first and then will be formally factored into reporting as standard.
- In October the annual Greenhouse Gas report was published. Work is currently underway to assess progress against our climate targets using projections of future emissions.
- In 2022, an application was submitted to DEFRA for bathing water status in Wallingford, which was unsuccessful. This October another application was submitted, with help from charity Thames 21. Officers believe that we now meet the criteria which DEFRA has published. Result expected in March 2024.
- UK100: Cllr Cooper previously suggested we become members. South will need to go through the same process Vale did. This involves motioning at Full Council to join. Chair will follow up on this.

The Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader shared a short presentation with updates on; Task and Finish groups, the Environment Act, and Climate Action Scorecards – the presentation is attached to the minutes.

- A member asked about Net Zero task and finish – officer confirmed that net zero would form part of the greenhouse gases target projections work and will inform the development of the Climate and Nature Recovery Plan.
- A member asked whether we could discuss biodiversity net gain in a Task and Finish Group. Can we better protect what’s already there in terms of biodiversity – for example, mitigation such as green bridges. Officer responded that members

would be involved in the Joint Local Plan all member briefings because of the wide level of interest.

- Legacy wildlife infrastructure: hedgerows, filled in ditches – potential to help connectivity in the urban environment and reinstate features based on local knowledge.
- A member asked if connectivity of habitats can be considered along with biodiversity net gain (Environment Act item) – officer responded yes, this could be considered for the Climate and Nature Recovery Plan.
- Joint Local Plan includes hooks to the future Nature Recovery Strategy. This will be strengthened once the strategy was finalised. The timescales were slightly misaligned.
- Climate Action Scorecards – the council achieved 35% against the national average of 29%. The council were 17th out of 153 district councils.

The team leader was thanked for the update.

61 Draft Climate Action Plan Q2 Performance report

A member suggested that in the RAG column we could use a letter rather than using colour, to save on the print.

A member asked about Environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) in finance investment, and ethical procurement (green procurement and supply chains). Were these potential future items / task and finish groups.

The committee noted the Q2 report.

62 Future agenda items

The next formal meeting is on 10 June 2024. Potential items coming are:

Draft Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan
Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy
Local Area Energy Planning – local heat networks/market towns
Green finance
Berinsfield Community Energy

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

Chair

Date

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Understanding the Net Zero Challenge for SMEs in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

Dr Sara le Roux and Dr Lauren Tuckerman

Executive Summary

- SMEs within South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse have a high level of awareness of the Net Zero intentions of the UK, with 64% reporting that they were aware of and understood the Government's intentions for the UK to be net zero
- 32% of respondents say that they are aware but do not understand the intentions for Net Zero, while 4% reported that they were unaware of the UK Government's intentions
- Most small businesses report being active (70%) or wanting to be active to address emissions (24%)
- 70% of businesses said they were likely or very likely to be doing more to reduce their carbon emissions over the next 2 years
- Access to finance is the top reason that businesses are not taking action (66% of respondents), followed by lack of time (34%) and lack of internal resource (28%)
- Support that SMEs reported would be most helpful towards their sustainability journey included ear-marked grant financing (89%), access to a platform that signposts sustainability actions and resources (53%) and 1-2-1 mentoring (51%)
- We recommend a blended approach to the support provided, particularly while the efficacy of each approach is evaluated

1. Introduction

In 2019, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils (hereafter referred to as South and Vale) declared a climate emergency and committed to achieving Net Zero by 2030 - ahead of the national government target of achieving Net Zero by 2050. To achieve this target, it is important to unlock action towards Net Zero across the different stakeholder groups in the area, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs). While small businesses are typically not involved in heavy emitting industries, the cumulative effect of small amounts of emissions are important to consider. The British Business Bank suggests that small businesses make up around half of the UK's business greenhouse gas emissions¹.

South and Vale have received UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) from the UK Government, and intend to use this funding to support SMEs to progress on their Net Zero journey. To better understand how this funding could be spent, South and Vale commissioned Oxford Brookes Business School to conduct a survey of local small businesses. The following report is based on the survey conducted between November 2023 and February 2024 and shares findings from 131 responses to the survey.

In the following section, we give an overview of the survey method and descriptive statistics on the respondents to the survey. We then go on to report on the current actions of small businesses in the area, outlining their future ambitions before discussing the support they report as necessary to progress their Net Zero ambitions. We then outline some ways in which South and Vale can respond to the different support mechanisms requested, before closing with our recommendations.

2. Overview of method and survey responses

Our survey is designed to gauge the current awareness, understanding and actions, and future ambitions of SMEs in the South and Vale area. While the focus was firmly on the two local authority areas, we did allow for a handful of responses from the wider Oxfordshire

¹ British Business Bank (2021). *Smaller Businesses and the Transition to Net Zero*. Available at https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/J0026_Net_Zero_Report_AW.pdf (Accessed 24/02/2023).



County area. Table 1 below shows that 93 per cent of our responses were from South and Vale.

Table 1: Location of respondents

Location	Freq.	Percent
South Oxfordshire	68	52%
Vale of White Horse	54	41%
Oxford City Council	5	4%
Cherwell	4	3%
Total	131	100%

The survey respondents spanned a diverse range of sectors from organisations representing charities or with a community focus, to cafés, restaurants and retail, arts and recreation, professional and scientific, administration and support services, accommodation, construction and so on. The diversity of the respondents’ sectors provides us with a rich perspective from across South and Vale and is broadly in line with the Business Register and Employment Survey² of 2021, which provides a detailed breakdown of the broad industry sectors that workers in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are employed in.

In terms of targeting the SME population, the majority of survey respondents could be considered SMEs, with 24 per cent being sole entrepreneurs, 49 per cent being micro businesses employing between 2-9 people, 21 per cent as small businesses (employing between 10-49 people, and 5 per cent as medium businesses, according to number of employees.

Table 2: Business sector of respondents

Sector	Freq.	Percent
Community or Charity	21	16%
Café, Restaurant or Retail	19	15%
Arts and Recreation	18	14%
Professional and Scientific	16	12%
Administration and Support Services	12	9%
Accommodation	9	7%
Construction	7	5%
Tourism and Travel	7	5%
Transport and Storage	7	5%

² Source: Office for National Statistics, (2022); Business Register and Employment Survey 2021.



Information and Communication	5	4%
Health and Beauty	4	3%
Manufacturing	2	2%
Primary (fishing, farming, mining, etc)	2	2%
Finance and Insurance	1	1%
Wholesale Trade	1	1%
Total	131	100%

Table 3: Business size of respondents

Size	Freq.	Percent
Just me	32	24%
2- 9	64	49%
10 - 24	17	13%
25 - 49	11	8%
50 +	7	5%
Total	131	100%

3. Current actions

To unlock action towards Net Zero, it is important to understand how aware businesses are of the Government’s intentions for Net Zero. Within South and Vale, SMEs have a high level of awareness of the Net Zero intentions of the UK, with 64 per cent reporting that they were aware of and understood the Government’s intentions for the UK to be net zero. This is far higher than awareness at the national level, where only 46 per cent of SMEs reported they were aware and understood the Government’s net zero intentions (le Roux et al, 2021).³

However, 32 per cent of respondents say that they are aware but do not understand the intentions for Net Zero, while 4 per cent reported that they were unaware of the UK Government’s intentions. This demonstrates that there is still work to be done to make clear what Net Zero is, and how small businesses can begin to address it in their own businesses.

³ Source: le Roux et al, 2021 <https://smallbusinessbritain.uk/downloads/Small-Business-Britain-Sustainability-Basics-Insight-And-Implications.pdf?v=2>

Table 4. Business' awareness of the Government's intentions for the UK to be net zero on carbon emissions by 2050

	Freq.	Percent	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse
Aware, and I understand what it's about	84	64%	38	40
Aware, but I don't understand what it's about	42	32%	27	12
Not aware	5	4%	3	2
Total	131	100%		

Similarly, when we explore how SMEs perceive their actions towards Net Zero, most small businesses report being active (70 per cent) or wanting to be active to address emissions, with only 5 per cent saying they did not intend to do anything to lower their emissions. A large section of the respondents are either looking to do more (51 per cent), or looking to start lowering emissions (24 per cent). Working with those who are already interested is likely to be the best way forward to scale impact on emissions, over trying to convince a small sceptical handful.

Table 5. Business' current activity towards lowering carbon

	Freq.	Percent	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse
The business is fully active in lowering our emissions, and is actively investing in ways to do so	25	19%	11	11
The business is doing several things to lower its emissions, but could do more	67	51%	38	24
The business is not doing anything around lowering emissions, but would like to start	32	24%	17	14
The business is not doing anything around lowering emissions, and does not intend to	7	5%	2	5
Total	131	100%		



When we dig further into the actions that businesses are typically engaged in to lower emissions, we see that 50 per cent of respondents are improving their business processes to lower emissions and 24 per cent report having already completed this optimisation. Reducing plastics and packaging was also an area many businesses were taking action on, with 44 per cent saying they were currently working on this and 15 per cent saying this was complete for their business. A third of businesses reported that they were currently installing energy efficiency measures (insulation, LED lighting and/or efficient air conditioning systems), with a further 24 per cent of businesses having already completed this action. Communicating with customers, the local community and staff also proved to be an action many respondents were currently taking, or had already taken. Finally when it comes to actions already complete, 28 per cent of respondents said they had moved to a renewable energy supplier already. See table 6 below for a full breakdown of actions taken.

Table 6. Business' current actions towards lowering carbon

	Already completed		Currently doing		Likely to do in the future		Unlikely to do in the future		Total
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Install energy efficiency measures (insulation, LED lighting, efficient air conditioning systems)	32	24%	43	33%	34	26%	22	17%	131
Improve business processes (optimising energy and resource use within the business operation, reusing, recycling waste)	28	21%	66	50%	21	16%	16	12%	131
Move to a renewable energy supplier	37	28%	11	8%	49	37%	34	26%	131
Produce renewable energy (such as using solar panels)	9	7%	9	7%	55	42%	58	44%	131
Reduce transport emissions (fleet and vehicle management, and/or business travel, travel to work, sourcing a local supply chain)	15	11%	42	32%	34	26%	40	31%	131
Create projects, products or services that lower emissions	13	10%	31	24%	40	31%	47	36%	131
Encourage our supply chain to reduce their emissions (e.g. selecting suppliers on the basis of their carbon credentials)	6	5%	27	21%	50	38%	48	37%	131
Reduce plastics and harmful materials for packaging	20	15%	58	44%	23	18%	30	23%	131
Consider the carbon impact of our suppliers	11	8%	40	31%	41	31%	39	30%	131
Measure the business' total emissions	12	9%	15	11%	63	48%	41	31%	131
Offsetting carbon emissions	7	5%	16	12%	49	37%	59	45%	131
Communicating environmental commitment to customers and local community	14	11%	51	39%	47	36%	19	15%	131
Creating a green/climate aware culture amongst staff	24	18%	56	43%	35	27%	16	12%	131
Reporting on environmental performance	4	3%	25	19%	62	47%	40	31%	131

4. Future ambitions

We asked respondents how likely it was in the next 2 years that they would do more to reduce their carbon emissions. We found that 70 per cent of businesses said they were likely or very likely to be doing more to reduce their carbon emissions over the next 2 years. Similar to those that report they are inactive and unlikely to become active, those that are not looking to take action in the future make up a small percentage (9 per cent) of the overall sample. Those that are neither likely nor unlikely make up an interesting group (21 per cent), where there is currently scope to persuade SMEs to take action.

Table 7. Likelihood to take more action towards sustainability in the next 2 years

	Freq.	Percent	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse
Very likely	51	39%	27	19
Likely	41	31%	19	19
Neither likely nor unlikely	27	21%	17	10
Unlikely	7	5%	3	3
Very unlikely	5	4%	2	3
Total	131	100%		

When it comes to actions SMEs in the area are likely to be taking in the future, measurement and reporting are high on the agenda. 48 per cent of respondents are looking to measure their emissions in the future, and 47 per cent are planning on reporting their environmental impacts (See Table 6). This could be related to the expectation that businesses think they may be required to do these actions in the near future.

When it comes to funding potential future sustainability actions (See Table 8), 76 per cent of respondents reported that they would look to local government grants to do so, with 61 per cent also seeking national government funding. While 45 per cent of respondents would fund changes with funds from within the business, only 22 per cent are currently considering passing costs on to customers, and/or reviewing prices accordingly. While this might be suitable for one-off costs, this will need to be balanced when it comes to actions which may continually cost more (e.g. alternative packaging) and would in the long run need to be

passed on to customers. This could be related to comments that suggest the cost of living is having an impact on sales from the general public.

Table 8. Funding future sustainability projects

	Freq.	Percent	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse
Local Government grants	99	76%	49	45
National Government grants	80	61%	43	34
Funds within the business	59	45%	32	20
Passing cost on to customers/price review	29	22%	12	16
Specialist funder or lender	24	18%	10	12
Private funder or lender	19	15%	9	8
Sharing resources or funds with other businesses	18	14%	9	7
Business loan	17	13%	8	8
Crowdsourcing	9	7%	3	6
Respondents	131	100%		

5. Support required

With access to finance being a top reason that businesses are not taking action (66 per cent of respondents) and lack of time (34 per cent) and resource (28 per cent) being secondary reasons, it's important that we carefully consider the support put in place for small businesses to enable them to take action towards becoming more sustainable. Clearly since finance is a key issue, grant financing is a popular option (89 per cent of respondents). Participants also favoured access to a platform that signposts you to sustainability actions and resources (53 per cent of respondents) and 1-2-1 mentoring (51 per cent). We explore these different options in more detail in the sections that follow.

Other factors preventing businesses from taking action on reducing carbon emissions included business' mistrust of the issue/government policy, planning systems in place,



landlords preventing action and building limitations, to name a few. Please see Appendix A.1 for a full list.

Other types of support that respondents felt would have value included grants towards solar panels, reduced bureaucracy in funding, reduced rates for sustainable businesses, databases that collated information on sustainable suppliers and support for working with landlords on green issues. Please see Appendix A.2 for a summary of comments.

Table 9. Factors preventing business from taking action on reducing carbon emissions

	Freq.	Percent	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse
Access to finance	87	66%	43	39
Lack of resource internally	44	34%	25	15
Lack of time	37	28%	18	18
The return on investment is not sufficient	30	23%	14	15
Other (please specify)	22	17%	10	10
As a business, we do not understand what action to take	20	15%	13	7
Ensuring our supply chain also meets our sustainability standards	16	12%	6	6
Lack of best practice/standard across the sector	15	11%	10	2
Technological barriers	10	8%	6	4
It is low on the list of priorities for the senior leadership team	8	6%	6	2
None of these	7	5%	4	1
Lack of interest	4	3%	3	1
I don't understand the benefits	0	0%	0	0
Respondents	131	100%		

Table 10. Support to progress businesses' sustainability journey

	Helpful		Neither helpful or unhelpful		Unhelpful		Total
A small grant that is ear-marked towards capital investment in green technology/innovation/change business processes	116	89%	12	9%	3	2%	131
Be given access to a sustainability platform that signposts you to sustainability actions and resources	70	53%	43	33%	18	14%	131

Receive 1-2-1 mentoring from a sustainability expert that supports you in putting a sustainability plan in place	67	51%	44	34%	20	15%	131
Participating in an online 6-week action-oriented sustainability programme	46	35%	45	34%	40	31%	131
Participating in a face-to-face 6-week action-oriented sustainability programme	32	24%	58	44%	41	31%	131

5.1 State of Current Provision

A recent review of provision by the Enterprise Research Centre suggests that there are only 17 national Net Zero support programmes for SMEs. Within the South East region, their research found 36 programmes with 79 interventions. Scanning the list of programmes identified those relevant to South and Vale were incorporated into the profile of platforms in section 5.3.⁴

This research makes a series of recommendations for local and national governments.

These included:

- Local authorities should consult with a diverse range of local businesses when designing programmes on net zero, to ensure that the needs of all businesses are met and that they are able to see benefit from programmes
- Local authorities should share more information about net zero support programmes with neighbouring local authorities and allow them to participate. This will ensure that regions are able to provide more comprehensive offerings to businesses
- Local authorities should - where possible - offer businesses a combination of audits and grants
- Programmes – where possible – should aim to offer one-to-one support from an adviser who understands the challenges and constraints of running a small business

These generic recommendations are broadly in line with the findings from our own tailored survey. Specific support suggested as requested by our survey participants included small

⁴ Mole, K & Belt, V, 2023. A report by the Enterprise Research Centre for the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Available: <https://www.enterpriseresearch.ac.uk/publications/the-less-than-1-club-mapping-net-zero-support-for-small-businesses-across-england/>



grants earmarked for green projects, digital platforms which signpost to action and 1-2-1 mentoring.

5.2 Grant programmes

It is unlikely that, if offered a grant, someone will say that it is not needed, however the way in which that grant is provided and administered is important. We profile three areas which have used UK funding to provide support for green business initiatives.

Sevenoaks – UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Green Business Grants: There are two types of grants available - one specifically for Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy (LCREE) businesses to “build short-term resilience and provide the foundations for future growth” and another for lowering business premises’ carbon footprint, open to all local businesses that operate from a commercial property. Both grants cover 40 per cent of eligible costs; the LCREE grant is up to £8,000, while the premises carbon reduction grant is for up to £5,000. They have listed types of business eligible under each category.

West Midlands Combined Authority – UK Shared Prosperity Fund: Business Energy Advice Service (BEAS) Business Support: Support consists of a free energy audit for 400 businesses and funding of up to £100,000 to take action on recommendations. Funding needs to be matched. The grant could cover investments such as new equipment, improvement in processes, lighting/insulation etc.

Glasgow City Council (City Deal) - Green Business Programme: SMEs can claim up to £10,000 to reduce their energy bills. The grant will cover 50% of project costs and can be used for anything that will help reduce energy use in the long term for a business, and as such reduce their emissions. Staff costs are not eligible. They are encouraging match funding for energy and renewables through the Scottish Government’s SME Loan Fund and cashback to maximise the impact.

It is worth considering ways in which to maximise potential grants given, as most of the grants provided here suggest match-funding; however, this might prove unpopular based on the verbatim comments received in our survey. It could be that formalising blended finance



options could be a way of doing this. Some of the large banks are already offering specific green/Net Zero loans. An example can be found below:⁵

NatWest Green Loans: from £50,001 to £10 million for spending under one of the following categories: Clean Energy, Clean Buildings, Clean Transport and Agriculture. Fixed interest rate or no upper limit on a variable rate, subject to approval. For any businesses with an annual turnover of less than £25 million. Repayment terms from 3 months up to 25 years.

Opportunities to Experiment

Providing grants can also open avenues for interesting experimentation to understand the efficacy of support.

Opportunity 1: There is scope to combine grants with mentoring and track the outcome of the spend towards different types of green initiatives in the business to check if there is a difference compared to if grant funding is combined with a sustainability platform, i.e., if the spend is different. This could also be compared to a final group who receive no other intervention, only grant funding.

This would generate insight on what combination of support is most successful for different types of action and activities. This is something that Innovation Growth Lab has trialled before.

Opportunity 2: We have seen some examples run in collaboration with the Innovation Growth Lab, looking at understanding applications for oversubscribed funding. It is important that the fund is kept open to the final dates as those who are the first applicants might be the least in need of help. Then you can randomly allocate funding, rather than use an unproven assessment process.

This creates a treatment and control group and we can better understand the effect of the funding on the businesses. Some incentive would need to be provided to fully engage the control group who do not receive funding - perhaps access to the platform. Something similar was conducted with Innovation Growth Lab and Innovate UK.⁶

⁵ While some large businesses offer their own support programmes and information too, feedback from other research we have conducted suggested that big businesses are better to work through trusted intermediaries than provide direct support therefore signposting SMEs to large counterparts may not be productive outside of finance options.

⁶ See Innovation Growth Lab working papers for examples e.g. <https://www.innovationgrowthlab.org/igl-working-paper-no-2004-0>



5.3 Profile of Platforms

There are many platforms available that provide slightly different offerings. Carbon accounting platforms, for example, are easy to come across. We have curated a list below that focuses on platforms that provide more than a carbon accounting tool.

Platform name & description	Core components	Costs
UK Business Climate Hub UK Government Focus: All Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Database of actions by industry and theme ● SME Climate Commitment ● Database of finance ● Guides to actions 	Free
Planet Mark Independent Business Focus: All Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accreditation ● Accurate and transparent carbon reporting across Scope 1, 2 and core Scope 3 emissions ● Trusted sustainability certification ● Over a decade of expertise ● Anti-greenwashing assurance ● Net Zero Programme ● 6 stage programme including Baseline and Upskilling, Strategy & Planning, Action & Delivery ● Guides and toolkits ● Scope 3 - deep dive into mapping supply chain emissions ● Supply Chain Engagement ● Supplier segmentation ● Access to data ● Supplier seminars 	Can inquire about particular costs if helpful

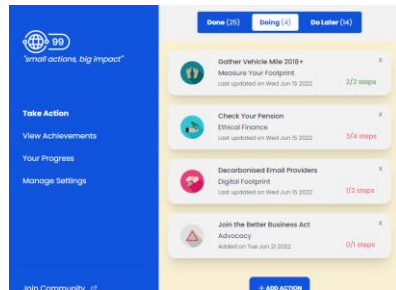


	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Supplier Communication strategy● Science-based Target Setting● Net Zero Strategy and Action Plan● Stakeholder engagement● Defining strategic approach● Net Zero governance● Communicating progress● Clean Energy Procurement● Reverse auction (SMEs) – force up to 20+ suppliers to bid against one another to win your business● Net Zero Pledge● Training & Upskilling	
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Small 99

Independent Business

Focus: Net Zero Small Business




Extract from Hero

- Carbon Reduction Action Box (CRAB)
- An introductory 1 hour workshop that gives a small business everything they need to get started, with a carbon reduction plan
- Overview of business opportunity from climate action
- Carbon Footprint Estimate of their business
- Set of reduction action cards to build a plan
- Certificate of reduction actions
- Access to accountability sessions
- CPD Accreditation
- A 'train the trainer' programme available
- Full day workshops, which typically cover:
 - Climate Risk Overview
 - What is Net Zero?
 - How to Measure your footprint Measurement
 - How to build a carbon reduction plan
 - How to communicate your journey
- Free Small Business Carbon Footprint Calculator, including personalised actions
- Hero - Free Carbon Reduction Plans for Small Businesses
- Includes action checklists
- Badges for completions
- Aligned with BCorp and other standards
- Tailored for 4 industries
- Support from other businesses and consultants
- Consultancy packages
- Plan: detailed carbon footprint and action plan
- Lead: as above, plus sustainability page written, certification recommendations and a press release
- Accelerate: as above, plus regularly updated marketing materials and supply chain engagement
- Accountability sessions

CRAB: £50 per business

Full day: £150 per business

Plan: £3,000
Lead: £6,000
Accelerate: £6,000 up front +
£1,500 p/month
Free first session, £50 for members

<p>Sustainable Pathways</p> <p>Independent business</p> <p>Focus: Sustainable Small business</p>  <p>Extract from SatNav output</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pathways ● Strategy and workshops ● Leadership development ● Net Zero and carbon reduction advice ● 'Become a BCorp' advice ● Sustainable branding and marketing advice ● Diversity, Equality and Inclusion advice ● SatNav ● An ESG assessment mapping tool that spans across all sustainability dimensions ● Toolkits to take action with ● Coaching calls ● Monthly accountability check-ins ● Acceler8 ● 8 short modules ● 10 sustainability experts ● 25+ tools and resources 	<p>Free access to SatNav £5 month for slack channel, social media posts and maintenance check-ins</p>
<p>SME Climate Hub</p> <p>Nonprofit associated with Oxford University</p> <p>Focus: Net Zero Small Business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Carbon emissions calculator ● Free course on small business climate action ● Climate Hub pledge and badge ● Action Guides and Resources ● Annual update scheme ● Other free resources 	<p>Free</p>



<p>Zellar</p> <p>Independent Business</p> <p>Focus: Net Zero all businesses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses business data to create SMART behavioural and operational recommendations that drive sustained action, cost savings and tangible climate impact • Connect to a network of action partners • Build a simple sustainability score 	<p>£29/month £299/year</p>
<p>Eco Act</p> <p>International Independent Business</p> <p>Focus: All Businesses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measurement and Net Zero Strategy • Read more about Measurement and Net Zero Strategy • Climate Risk Assessment • Read more about Climate Risk Assessment • Net Zero Targets and Sustainability Reporting • Read more about Net Zero Targets and Sustainability Reporting • Voluntary Carbon Offsetting • Read more about Voluntary Carbon Offsetting • Climate Mitigation • Read more about Climate Mitigation • Digital Climate Solutions • Knowledge Hub 	
<p>Energy Solutions Oxfordshire</p> <p>Environmental Information Exchange</p> <p>Nonprofit associated with Oxford Brookes</p> <p>Focus: Energy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Workplace Energy Efficiency Checklist • Workplace Energy Efficiency Assessment • Free webinars • Free case studies • Free resources 	<p>£1,500 (approx) per assessment</p>

5.4 Mentoring support

While there is little academic evidence on the effectiveness of mentoring and coaching on the environmental outcomes of businesses, there is some related evidence that can help design a Small Business Net Zero mentoring programme.

Strong relationships between mentor and mentee that create trust are more likely to create positive outcomes. To facilitate these relationships, mentors should be trained, as although experience level matters, it has been suggested that trained mentors build more successful relationships, leading to a more trusting relationship and therefore increased learning and more autonomy in the mentee (St-Jean & Mitrano-Méda, 2016).⁷

Mentors who have been entrepreneurs in the past are most effective in mentoring other entrepreneurs towards opportunity recognition, creating founding teams, fundraising, creating realistic career expectations and connecting to important stakeholders, including investors (Eesley & Wang, 2017).⁸

Research suggests that online platforms to match mentors are most effective when they come with some kind of personalised introduction or video of the mentor. This increases the likelihood of mentees reaching out to a mentor, but does not improve chances of a strong relationship between mentor and mentee (Lall et al., 2023).⁹

Values-based mentoring also might support small businesses towards long term change towards Net Zero. Hampton et al (2022) found that engaging through values-based support can unlock lasting change within SMEs toward environmental goals¹⁰. This is supported by our recent (as yet unpublished) research that suggests that most small businesses are

⁷ St-Jean, É., & Mitrano-Méda, S. (2016). Should mentors of entrepreneurs be trained or their experience is enough. *Entrepreneurship-practice-oriented perspectives*, 39-61.

⁸ Eesley, C., & Wang, Y. (2017). Social influence in career choice: Evidence from a randomized field experiment on entrepreneurial mentorship. *Research policy*, 46(3), 636-650.

⁹ Lall, S. A., Chen, L. W., & Mason, D. P. (2023). Digital platforms and entrepreneurial support: A field experiment in online mentoring. *Small Business Economics*, 61(2), 631-654.

¹⁰ Hampton, S., Blundel, R., Wahga, A., Fawcett, T., & Shaw, C. (2022). Transforming small and medium-sized enterprises to address the climate emergency: The case for values-based engagement. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 29(5), 1424-1439.



motivated by their own personal values on this issue over other motivators such as government agendas, customers and supply chains.

We have profiled two organisations that profile tailored environmental mentorship/coaching below:

Sustainable Pathways¹¹: is a group of sustainability experts who can provide mentorship towards sustainability in small businesses. They are currently delivering mentorship as part of the Small Business Green Skills programme delivered by Oxford Brookes Business School and Small Business Britain, which has so far been very successful. Sustainable Pathways is also listed under Platforms as they also provide support through a digital platform.

Climate Change Coaches¹²: are an Oxfordshire based BCorp aiming to create change in organisations to help them combat climate change. Carly Cox, the founder of Climate Change Coaches, is an entrepreneur in residence at Oxford Brookes Business School and has written a book on climate change coaching.

6. Recommendations

We conclude the report by summarising some recommendations for South and Vale when seeking to support SMEs towards Net Zero:

- Firstly, the three core support mechanisms most sought by small businesses are grants, an online platform and 1-2-1 mentoring
- We recommend a blended approach to the support provided, particularly while the efficacy of each approach is evaluated
- There is opportunity to experiment with the way grants are allocated/combined with other support, in order to evaluate which support-mix is most effective in achieving maximal reduction in carbon emissions

¹¹ <https://www.sustainable-pathways.com/sustainable-business-services>

¹² <https://climatechangecoaches.com/>

- There are a variety of digital platforms available; choosing the right platform depends on the functionality needed, but specialised knowledge is advisable, so that SME owners can be provided with ‘actionable information’¹³
- Mentoring has been shown to be effective in other entrepreneurial contexts and choosing mentors who have entrepreneurial experience, as well as training, is seen as most effective
- Motivations for small businesses in becoming more sustainable typically centre around values, and it is important to consider how to engage personal values and unlock action through values-based support

Appendix

A.1 Other factors that prevent business from taking action on reducing carbon emissions

¹³ Mole, K. & Ri, A., 2023. Actionable Information enables SMEs to Journey towards Net Zero. Available: <https://www.enterpriseresearch.ac.uk/publications/actionable-information-enables-smes-to-journey-towards-net-zero/>



Theme	Comments
Unsure of relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not relevant to most of our activities ● Not relevant to our charitable operation ● We are a desk based business and hire office space with very small carbon footprint but will always look to lower (EG: Elec cars for personal use) ● We don't have business premises and don't produce a product ● As a primarily virtual business offering a face to face service in rented accommodation our ability to make changes to our carbon footprint is limited and many of the options offered in the previous question are simply not relevant
Unsure of next steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We have done the things we could see to do and now don't know what to do next. Nothing else seems viable ● Done as much as I can ● As a services company with no office or production facilities, it is hard to know how much more we can do, beyond the measures we have put in place. Data is our biggest carbon issue and this is managed by Google! ● I wouldn't be aware as for example mt landlord includes my electric usage within my rent I don't have access to the information as were based on a industrial estate
Mistrust of issue/government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Don't believe in it ● Distrust in government Net Zero policy
Planning systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Planning System ● Limitation and cost of planning permission in a conservation area
Landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Landlord will not spend ● Our landlord is incharge of our premises so are limited with what we can do ● We are bound by our using preferred suppliers/ service provided by our landlord
Building limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listed grade 2 star building ● We don't own the buildings we operate, or have long enough leases to enact all the change we would like to make ● We don't own our premises
Economic needs prioritised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I would say it is not low on the list of priorities for senior leadership but it is not actively practised by leadership. The priority is cost over environmental impact ● It's important but not an immediate priority based on business needs



Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are a very small operation
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current legislation regarding the taking of motorcycle tests

A.2 Other types of support that would be helpful for your business on its sustainability journey towards lowering emissions

Theme	Quote
100% grant funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We would need a 100% grant, not matched funding as we just do not have surplus cash. We wholeheartedly want to do more but are not in a financial position to do so
Solar panel grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have extremely limited internal funding but would like to investigate solar panels if funding could be provided Solar panel grant
Reduced bureaucracy in funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realistic levels of grant funding to match-fund projects, and without the endless red tape/long application forms/time needed to apply!
Reduced rates for sustainable businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentivise local businesses to take action towards lower emissions by giving lower Business Rates to those that due
General funding/financing comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main thing that would help is funds The costs of implementation have to have a cost and environmental benefit as does the impact of downtime during installation. My landlord is a national charity and any 'hard' changes eg . changing of boiler , insulation would require their approval and during installation they would still require their full open commercial market rent to be paid whilst I'm not receiving any income. I have implemented many 'soft' changes to adopt efficiencies and also working practices to make significant improvements but can not afford to find any additional investment with no return/cost benefit as any investment I could have invested has been wiped out by an £800 a month rental increase in a fragile



	<p>economy post covid so am now looking to find ways of being even more inventive to increase business growth whilst keeping within the parameters of local regulations and my lease</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We have had a visit, survey and reports made by Oxford Brookes and Energy Solutions Oxfordshire so we know what needs doing. But without funding we are unable to progress and of the recommended projects. We have now surplus funds to invest so would have to rely on grants ● The Pavilion is superb but unfortunately the finance was insufficient to allow for Solar Panels and also allow rain water capture for use on the pitches during dry weather when water is needed to ensure the turf survives ● I am a mobile bicycle mechanic, based in Didcot. I am reasonably content with my carbon footprint but getting the message out to others by encouraging cycling / their active travel is where I think that I can make the biggest difference. I attend approximately 68 hours of free events each year where I repair bicycle for free (or spare parts only), encouraging those who may not get on their bikes to get them working. Unfortunately this is taking away from work for which I would normally be paid, reducing my income. A small grant to cover these costs would ensure that I was able to maintain these services, being generally free to end users ● Large grant instead of small? ● We are a Grade 1 listed building and heritage visitor attraction which has secured stage 1 National Lottery Heritage Funding to renovate and enhance the buildings (and make them more energy efficient and sustainable in the process). Becoming energy efficient and sustainable is a key reason for undertaking the project. The most important contribution the Shared Prosperity Fund could make to us is a funding contribution to enable us to undertake this project ● Funding is a significant limiting factor to support resource, planning and capability ● We need finance. The business has no surplus cash and is not in a position to borrow money. We therefore need 100% funding, specifically for solar PV panels which could make a massive difference. Oxford Brookes has already conducted a study for us. It's all down to money ● grants to be able to pay for the standards required ● "Re Introduction of ""Green Deal"" type funding ie. Loans to property irrespective of owner in a simple
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	<p>format, charged to property, repaid via electric meter. Previous system was too complicated for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● getting a grant to fund purchase of electric or hybrid wheelchair accessible vehicle ● Cash ● Funding ● Financial support to afford recycling schemes within the hair and beauty industry. EG recycling waste such as foils and colour tubes ● A large grant! ● Grants and donations ● We are a sports club and are an officially registered charity. We are all volunteers and are always short of funds. We could do more on sustainability (eg install LED lighting, better insulation, more efficient heating, etc) but our main limitation is funding. If we had funding, we could employ contractors to undertake a variety of improvement works. But we don't, so we can't! ● "As a Charity we would need to raise funds to make changes ● We currently use Green Salon Collective. They're very expensive so a grant would be much appreciate <p>Thankyou</p>
<p>Tailored information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A micro-business toolkit - I've done some of the initial work using the Race to Zero site but the data is so generic I don't think it fully reflects my situation. e.g. carbon assessment tools don't take into account that I've chosen Net Zero suppliers for IT, or that all my subsistence claims are vegetarian, or that I am home based so any changes to heating and energy are both a personal and a business cost ● I think all the tools I've used have far over-estimated my carbon impact, as I've already made careful choices about suppliers. I've been working on reducing my carbon costs for over 10 years, starting with work done with Low Carbon Kent. I buy office furniture that has a long life span can be almost fully recycled, use public transport for almost all my site visits and numerous other steps but all the scoring systems put me above average, which seems unlikely for a home-based sole trader who has worked hard to reduce their impact ● Specialists who are able to guide and make recommendations based on the type of premises you operate from ● Sector specific advise



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would attend a one-day event or, even better, a zoom conference if I thought I could find out more about the possibility of electric vehicles for our business. At the moment, from the research we have done, we are under the impression that our payloads are too heavy to make electric vehicles suitable for us • Access to pro bono consultants and list of approved suppliers of renewable energy technology • Workshops explaining Governmental objectives
<p>General information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just guidance on what to do to to be able to reduce our emissions • Understanding how to realise opportunities, related regulations and then find the funds to deliver • Centralised sources of information and signposting Jargon busted / clear communication in the sustainability arena. Standardised levels of attainment • Just practical support from someone who isn't trying to sell you something • Identifying sources of support - financial or otherwise
<p>Case studies/Sharing examples</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies. Examples • Case studies of similar businesses and the action they have taken and how they have used it in their marketing to attract customers
<p>Sourcing sustainable suppliers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it would be helpful to all businesses in the region to create a database of who supplies what to aid people buying locally. We manufacture non-domestic seating and i found out my daughter's school in Oxford bought some of our chairs from a dealer in manchester. The chairs travelled from Thame to Manchester to Oxford and they paid 40% more than had they bought direct from us. Bonkers! • We are a paperless business that is primarily geared towards scientific/medical communications, hardware is always our biggest and most costly investment along with sourcing sustainable third party suppliers...so any guidance there would be helpful • Access to list of recommended suppliers of green solutions, eg insulation • I run a private vehicle hire company and there are not the options currently from vehicle manufacturers in terms of choice required for the business • Aaccess to pro bono consultants and list of approved suppliers of renewable energy technology



<p>Support for working with landlords on green issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help in persuading the landlord to put his hand in his pocket - he refuses to spend a penny on the building which is incredibly energy inefficient ● People to understand. Current owner approves for Loft Insulation, internal and external wall insulation, ground or air source heat pumps, Solar Panels, Floor insulation, controlled ventilation, double glazing, draft proofing, Gov long term commitment to scheme, practical application ● We are limited as we rent an office and so don't control energy supplier etc ● Guidance, support and a process from OCC, as our landlord, towards supporting sustainability action ● I work in a leased property in a Conservation Area. My biggest issue currently is that the 2nd floor is in the eaves and is very hot in the summer and cold in the winter. I have installed 'energy' blinds to help with cold and 'Heat deflective' blinds to reduce heat but the top floor needs to have a sustainable type of airconditioning unit installed in the roof and it is unaffordable for my small business. I am responsible for the inside repairs of the building. The landlady is not prepared to join hands in the cost. If I install anything through the roof, she wants me to sign responsibility for the whole of the roof should there be any repairs and I don't want to do this. The building may become unusable as a result in the future. I am sure there are many old buildings that need specialised renewable energy units of varying kinds to keep them usable ● We rent from a private landlord and are limited to the changes we can make to the building so some insulation measures we are not currently able to take. Not sure how we can get round this
<p>Transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We run Private Hire Wheelchair Accessible Transport. to be able to contribute to net zero, we need electric WAVs. these should be able to run smoothly for the day without having to charge them as this might affect bookings. also the price of these vehicles and we do not anticipate any profit from customer income ● I think for my personal self in my business would be my driving emissions, the deliveries and mileage we do is crazy and I feel that's the worse part about a bakery! ● Our biggest carbon footprint is caused by transport, which is why we now only work in a 30 mile radius of Thame, we would like more electric infrastructure to be



	<p>able to use electric vehicles. A grant to increase our premises to 125/3 phase from 40/1 amps would be helpful in making going electric viable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved public transport infrastructure to lower our need to use cars to get to our venues ● Encouragement from Local Council to the public to use electric mopeds and motorcycles
<p>VAT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convince the government to make taxis VAT exempt just like busses we are also public transport but no subsidies from ● Governments policy, such as charging VAT on insulation, seems very unhelpful. Some political support for green measures would be welcome
<p>Other (specific)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support from the planning system to encourage and facilitate traditional timber building projects using locally grown and supplied timber in the AONB ● Not lowering emissions as we don't have any emissions to speak of. We are a small charity enabling disabled and elderly people to opportunity to get out on the river Thames in the Wallingford area. We do need funding help by way of grants ● Support with technical and financial advice in diversifying the business ● To partner potentially with a solar panel manufacturer to install some of their product on our existing boats Pure Boating operates 13 electric boats for rental and charter some of which have canopies which could be adapted for solar ● To be more involved locally
<p>Other (generic comments)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We don't own our premises so we are limited on making changes to the building or structure. We already are a sustainable business, we don't really need to be told what to do, we are already well informed and motivated ● We have already done a number of actions in the past year which have reduced our carbon footprint including Not offering fireworks as part of the Extravaganza (Abingdon Lights Switch On event). This was a move we were scared about and thought we would get howls of protest online but actually it was not a real problem as far as we can tell. It is an interesting case to show other businesses that sometimes your customer is not as hooked on carbon as you might think they are! We dispensed with the use of a petrol generator at the Abingdon Traditional Craft Fair this year and again



	<p>were very nervous about customer reaction but all turned out ok (-ish!) in the end. We have found a re-purpose for gazebo roofs that are no longer suitable for use (when they start leaking badly) at our events. They are now taken by a farmer for covering dung and other heaps that need to rot down without getting too wet. Our main issue is that we have now run out of ideas. As I said above we have looked into electric vehicles and it looks like this is no good for us. We don't have a heated premises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We are a village Sports Association, combining Kingston Bagpuize Cricket Club and Kingston Colts Football Club. We have a long term Licence to use a Brand New Pavilion (opened in October 2022) which is 'owned' by the Parish Council on a 130 Year lease, and was built with funding from S106 finance. We have no employees and everything is run by volunteers giving their free time. Income is limited to some small sponsorships, grants whenever available, membership fees and bar income so very little is available for the things we would need to be come more eco friendly ● None that I can currently think of except encourage piano/voice students to spend less time on electronic items and more on non electrical musical instruments.? ● Council needs to lead by example and communicate what actions they are taking to be more efficient and cost effective (rather than just passing the cost onto Business Rates) ● Balance. Clarity on the negative impacts of net zero policies (grid stability, critical minerals sourcing etc). The role of nuclear. Honesty about human-derived impact on climate - unsettled science. Climatology science and policy-making: the relationship, the facts, the levels of misunderstanding out there
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Climate (and Ecological) Emergency Advisory Committees



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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To: Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

DATE: 16 July 2024

South Oxfordshire Cabinet member responsible: Cllr David Rouane

Email: david.rouane@southoxon.gov.uk

To: Climate and Ecological Emergency Advisory Committee

DATE: 10 June 2024

Local Area Energy Planning in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse

Recommendation

(a) For information only.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	No	No	Yes	No
Signing off officer			Jessie Fieth	Equalities team

Purpose of paper

1. To introduce Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) to members of the Climate (and Ecological) Emergency Advisory Committees. This will be an important area of work for the councils to support the reduction of district-wide greenhouse gas emissions.

What is Local Area Energy Planning?

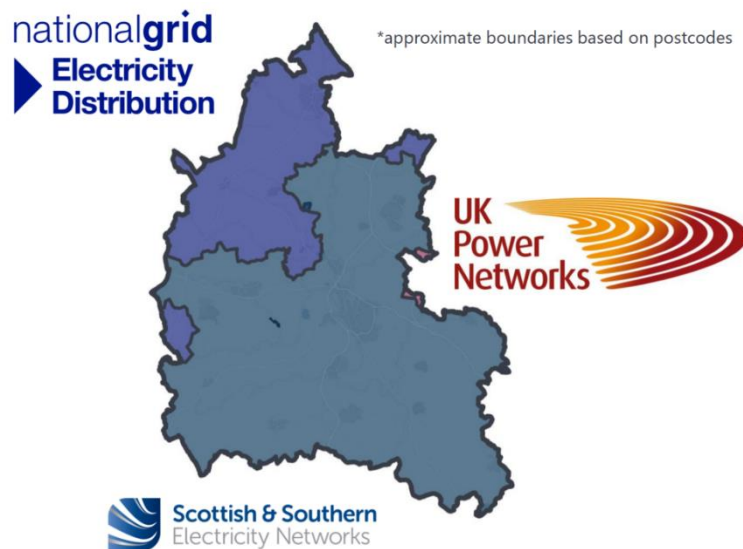
2. The decarbonisation of our districts will require substantial changes to the way that energy is generated, stored and distributed. We urgently need to phase out fossil fuels and transition to the electrification of heat and transport. This will increase electricity demand. At the same time, the output of renewable generation is more variable than traditional energy generation. We will move from a centralised energy system (with large-scale fossil fuel electricity generation sources) towards a distributed system with many smaller scale renewable energy schemes generating energy closer to where the energy is used.
3. The electricity grid does not have the capacity to cope with the increasing demand. The current process for investing in electricity grid infrastructure is not fit for purpose for transitioning to net zero. Increasingly, renewable energy projects and other developments are facing lengthy delays and high costs for getting an electricity grid connection.
4. A Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) is a spatial plan which maps all the existing energy infrastructure of an area, evaluates the current and future energy demand and the range of technologies and scenarios. It will consider electricity demand, heating demand, retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency and decarbonising heating, electric vehicle charging and how our energy might be supplied, managed and consumed in the future. It will cover electricity transmission networks, gas networks, district heat networks*, future potential for hydrogen, fabric of built environment, energy flexibility*, energy generation and storage* and providing energy to decarbonise transport.
5. A LAEP produces a plan of actions needed to deliver the transition described above, and the energy infrastructure needed to reach the district-wide carbon reduction target - it will detail what needs to happen, where, when and by whom. The actions set out in a LAEP could include:
 - a) Identifying zones that are most suitable for heat networks (more detailed feasibility studies would be needed before delivery of these heat networks).
 - b) Identifying urgently required upgrades to electricity transmission networks which will help with planning to reduce wait times for new grid connections for renewable energy projects or new housing. Specifically, it will help to make sure that the grid capacity is available for the delivery of the zero carbon building policies in our forthcoming Joint Local Plan¹.

¹ [Reading Borough Council](#) are currently facing the situation where new developments have to install gas boilers, despite the local plan requiring low carbon heating, because the necessary electricity network capacity is not available.

- c) Identifying ‘no-regret’ opportunities for immediate investment where future technologies are unlikely to be suitable and the risk of future back tracking is low, e.g. identifying projects where use of hydrogen would not be suitable even if it did become available.
- d) Identifying required upgrades to the transmission network that will enable the councils to achieve their net zero ambitions.

6. Producing a LAEP is a local authority led process, with significant input required from the District Network Operators (DNOs)*. There are two DNOs covering South and Vale; UK Power Networks, which covers a small area around Thame and Chinnor; and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, which covers the rest of the districts (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – DNOs covering Oxfordshire



7. Local Area Energy Planning is a relatively new process and many of the places that already have LAEPs in place are urban areas. This [example from York & North Yorkshire](#) is a useful example for a rural area with an overarching document for the whole area and four individual LAEPs aligned with local authority boundaries sitting underneath this.

Why should we have a Local Area Energy Plan?

8. Some of the benefits of having a LAEP are:
- Sets out a clear plan of actions and projects needed to transition an area’s energy system to net zero. This can then be the basis on which further feasibility work and project delivery and investment can be prioritised. This provides clarity for both local authorities and DNOs.
 - Can create a local supply chain capacity and capability for projects, and training and employment opportunities for residents.
 - Can identify alternative solutions, such as energy flexibility and renewable generation, for areas where there will not be sufficient electricity grid capacity to meet demand.
 - To improve the process to allow more targeted grid infrastructure investment by providing evidence of when and where additional grid capacity will be needed – this evidence can be used to unlock DNO, and other, investment. As well as giving the local authority a blueprint for action, they also provide all geographic stakeholders with a basis for taking forward activity and prioritising investments. DNOs are now permitted to invest ahead of need if they have sufficient high-quality evidence.

*see glossary

- Can save money in the long term due to planned energy infrastructure investment compared to unplanned and piecemeal delivery, despite the initial cost associated with commissioning a LAEP. This should avoid lengthy waits for grid connections (that we have experienced, for example, at Faringdon Leisure Centre).
 - The LAEP will help local authorities to create and monitor a project pipeline of energy projects to advance decarbonisation, economic growth, energy security and climate adaptation in alignment with local strategies and policies. It will also provide greater transparency in why pipeline projects represent the best way forward to achieve local authority priorities.
9. LAEPs sit within a wider emerging energy system transition framework. A new national body, the Future Systems Operator (FSO), will be established in 2024 to coordinate and ensure strategic planning across the energy sector to ensure energy supply remains robust even as the ways that energy is generated, stored and used changes significantly. They will also provide independent advice to government and Ofgem, the energy system regulator. Ofgem is seeking to introduce a new, supra-regional Energy System Planning Function, the RESP, but recognises that to coordinate local activity at the point of energy consumption and generation, much more local and specific energy planning is required. This coordination will require local authority involvement and LAEPs are the best tool currently for local authorities to engage in this process.
10. A LAEP will sit alongside the forthcoming South and Vale Joint Local Plan. The Joint Local Plan, including the evidence collected through the Net Zero Carbon Study, will inform the LAEP. This will help DNOs to understand projected energy consumption based on existing and emerging Joint Local Plan policies on where areas of renewable energy schemes, new housing and infrastructure will be (alongside the existing process, Distribution Future Energy Scenarios). The LAEP is estimated to be finalised in summer 2025 so will not be available before the Joint Local Plan is submitted and it will be up to the council to determine how much (if any) is made publicly available. However, it will be useful to the local planning authority in helping to create an environment in which the policies in the Joint Local Plan can be delivered (particularly by increasing certainty about grid connections). The LAEP will help to identify any areas of grid constraint early so that the DNO, the council and developers can work collaboratively to find a solution which delivers the councils ambitions set out in the Joint Local Plan.

The Oxfordshire approach

11. The Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan, which was endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) in March 2023, identified Local Area Energy Planning as a priority action that would be best delivered by all the Oxfordshire local authorities working together. Through Project LEO², Oxfordshire has already mapped the state of the existing energy system, which provides an understanding of the current assets and the geographical variations of energy capacity and constraints.

² Project LEO (Local Energy Oxfordshire) ran trials in Oxfordshire which looked to build a broad range of reliable evidence of the technological, market and social conditions needed for a greener, more flexible and fair electricity system.

12. The LAEP workstream is overseen by the FOP Infrastructure Advisory Group, which includes representatives from all the local authorities in Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire County Council's Climate Action Team is project managing the LAEP process and has established a governance structure with key stakeholders. Officers from South and Vale sit on both the Executive Steering Board and Energy Planning Working Group which have been established as part of the countywide governance structure.
13. The scope of the Oxfordshire LAEPs are still to be finalised, with the intention being to follow the [seven stages of a LAEP](#) set out by the Energy System Catapult. It is likely that stages 1-4 (broadly the data collecting process) will be undertaken at an Oxfordshire scale – this will allow economies of scale to reduce the overall cost of the LAEP process without limiting each district's autonomy to set its own scenarios in stages 5-7, which will be undertaken at a district scale.
14. Officers from South and Vale are closely involved in these discussions to determine the approach that will deliver the more useful, cost-effective options for our districts. In the proposed approach outlined in paragraph 15 above, officers from South and Vale would be closely involved in stages 1-4 and then would take a lead on working with the consultants for stages 5-7 to set the district-specific scenarios and produce the South and Vale LAEPs.
15. The intention is that any data outputs produced through the LAEP process will be owned by the Oxfordshire local authorities. This will make it easier for us to update and refresh the LAEPs in the future without having to commission expensive updates. It is likely that SSE's LENZA tool will play a critical role in the LAEP process and conversations are ongoing about the certainty of long-term access to this tool. The data from the LAEP process will sit within the LENZA platform but will also be held separately by the local authorities and could be integrated into each council's own GIS system. Officers are continuing to collaborate with OCC to make sure this requirement is met throughout the procurement process.
16. The Future Oxfordshire Partnership has already allocated £150K from the Oxfordshire Growth Capacity Fund to the LAEP process. A bid for an additional £450K from the same fund has been submitted, with a decision to be made at the FOP meeting on 25 June. This budget would be sufficient to procure district-level LAEPs for the whole of Oxfordshire. Early market engagement with the leading LAEP consultants has made it clear that it would be difficult to separate out procurement of the Oxfordshire wide work from the district-specific LAEPs. Oxfordshire County Council will be undertaking the procurement process for the entire Oxfordshire LAEP process.
17. The LAEP process will require a significant amount of South and Vale officer time over 24 months to develop the LAEP's. At this stage, there is no ask for any commitment beyond the 24 months. It has been suggested that the FOP Oxfordshire Growth Capacity Fund contribution may be able to support capacity or to bring in specialist skills to the district councils.

Timescales going forward

18. Table 1 below outlines the proposed key milestones for the procurement of the LAEPs.

Table 1 – LAEP key milestones		
	LAEP governance process	South and Vale internal process
May 2024	Climate officer approval of project scope and business case for additional budget (at EPWG meeting)	8 May - LAEP briefing paper to SMT
	Senior officer approval of project scope and business case for additional budget (at ESB meeting)	
June 2024	Early June - Infrastructure Advisory Group approval of business case for additional budget	3 and 10 June - LAEP briefing paper to CEAC/CEEAC
	25 June - Future Oxfordshire Partnership decision about additional budget	
July 2024	Early July - EPWG approval of procurement specification	
	Mid July - ESB approval of procurement specification	
	Mid July - Finalisation of procurement specification and go to market	

Financial Implications

19. No direct district council expenditure is proposed however, officer involvement in this work is likely to impact on officers’ ability to deliver other Corporate Plan commitments whilst the LAEP is being developed.

20. Once completed, each LAEP will contain a list of actions and energy infrastructure projects that will need to be funded and delivered. The certainty provided by the LAEP will help to secure the investment needed from the DSO’s and other external funding sources. Decisions about which projects (if any) may be supported and funded by the councils will be subject to democratic decisions within each council and be subject to the usual budget setting processes and cycles.

Legal Implications

21. There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

Climate and ecological impact implications

22. The climate implications and ecological impact implications are considered in the main body of the report.

Equalities implications

23. There are no equalities implications as a result of this report.

Risks

24. The partnership approach, led by Oxfordshire County Council, offers substantial opportunities for sharing knowledge, skills and resources for the LAEP process. However, this brings risks of project delays and breakdown if there are disagreements or differing levels of commitment amongst the partnership. The governance process (described above) which has been established will help to alleviate these risks.

Next steps

25. Officers from South and Vale will continue to work with colleagues from around the county to further refine the approach to the Oxfordshire LAEPs and ensure that the county-wide procurement process meets the needs of South and Vale.

Glossary

District heat networks – a heat network supplies heat from a central source to consumers, via a network of underground pipes carrying hot water. This avoids the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building.

Distribution Network Operator (DNOs) – these are licensed companies that own, operate and invest in improvements the network of cables, transformers and towers that bring electricity from the national transmission network to businesses and homes. The DNOs are regulated by Ofgem.

Energy storage – the capture of energy from renewables (such as wind turbines or solar panels) to be stored and then released when the power is needed most. The most common is battery energy storage systems.

Energy system flexibility – energy systems need to continuously match supply to demand (this is called energy balancing). Energy system flexibility is the ability to adjust supply and demand to achieve that energy balance. To meet net zero carbon targets, flexibility will become much more important as more renewable electricity is generated and as our heating, transport and other behaviour changes use more electricity. For example, in a flexible system, a large-scale battery could charge up where there is additional generation and discharge this energy onto the grid when demand is high

