

Climate and Ecological Emergency Advisory Committee



Listening Learning Leading

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Review of the District net-zero carbon target

Recommendation(s)

- (a) That CEEAC formally recognises that the aspirational target of being a net zero carbon district by 2030 cannot be met.
- (b) That CEEAC recommends that Cabinet commits to a new but still ambitious target of 2045 for reaching net zero carbon for the district.

Purpose of briefing paper

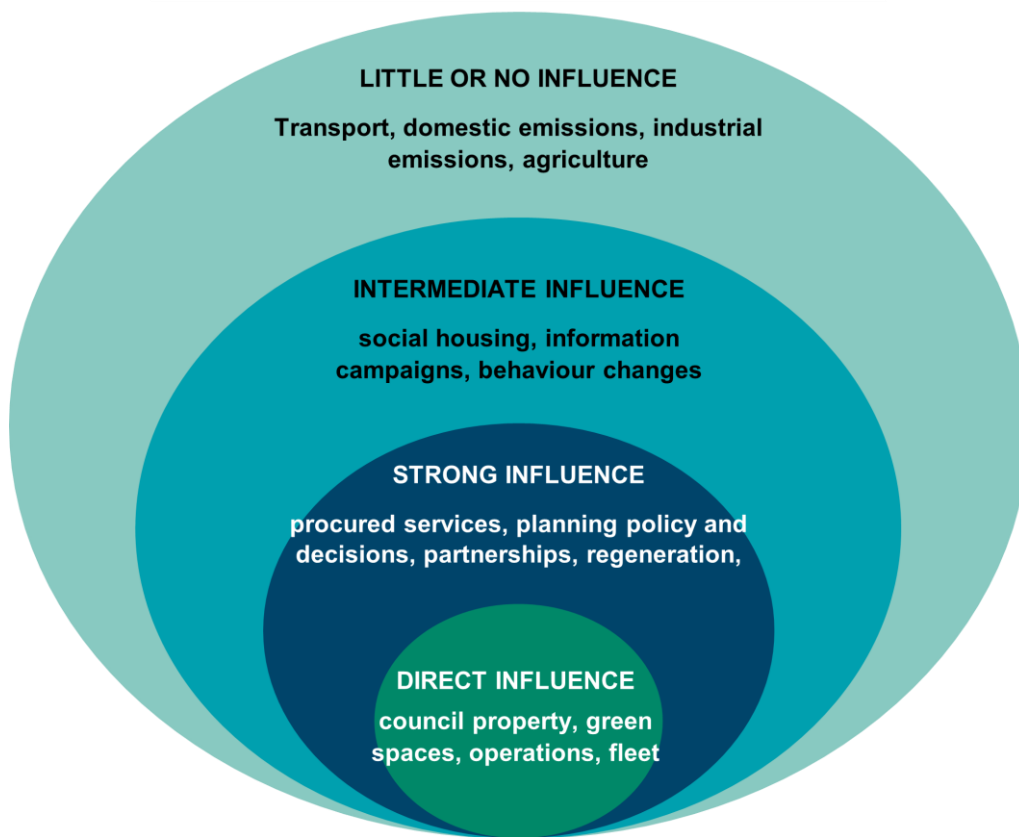
1. This paper reviews the progress towards meeting South Oxfordshire's target to be a net-zero carbon district by 2030. It presents the latest data (2021) on emissions in South Oxfordshire published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero in July 2023.
2. This paper sets out the progress that has been made towards the district-wide net-zero carbon target and recognises that the aspirational 2030 date will not be achieved. The paper recommends that South Oxfordshire should set a new target to be a net-zero carbon district by 2045.

Background

3. In 2019, South Oxfordshire declared a Climate Emergency. The Climate Emergency Advisory Committee recommended that South Oxfordshire should become a carbon neutral district by 2030. This target was endorsed by Full Council on 10 October 2019. This target is amongst the most ambitious in the country. The Oxfordshire-wide target is 2050.

4. South Oxfordshire District Council is well placed to influence emissions reduction in the district, but the majority of emissions are not within our direct control (see Figure 1). Some of the actions in the council’s Climate Action Plan 2022-2024 do start to address district-wide emissions but it predominantly focuses on the council’s own emissions. Our activity to reduce district-wide emissions is focused on working in partnership with our neighbouring councils. This collaborative approach is set out in the [Oxfordshire Net Zero Routemap and Action Plan](#), which was endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in March 2023. This sets out a pathway for the county to achieve net zero by 2050 (the Oxfordshire-wide target) and 14 actions to reduce the county’s emissions were set through an extensive consultation process and were chosen as the actions which would be most effectively delivered through joint working across the county.

FIGURE 1 – the district council’s sphere of influence

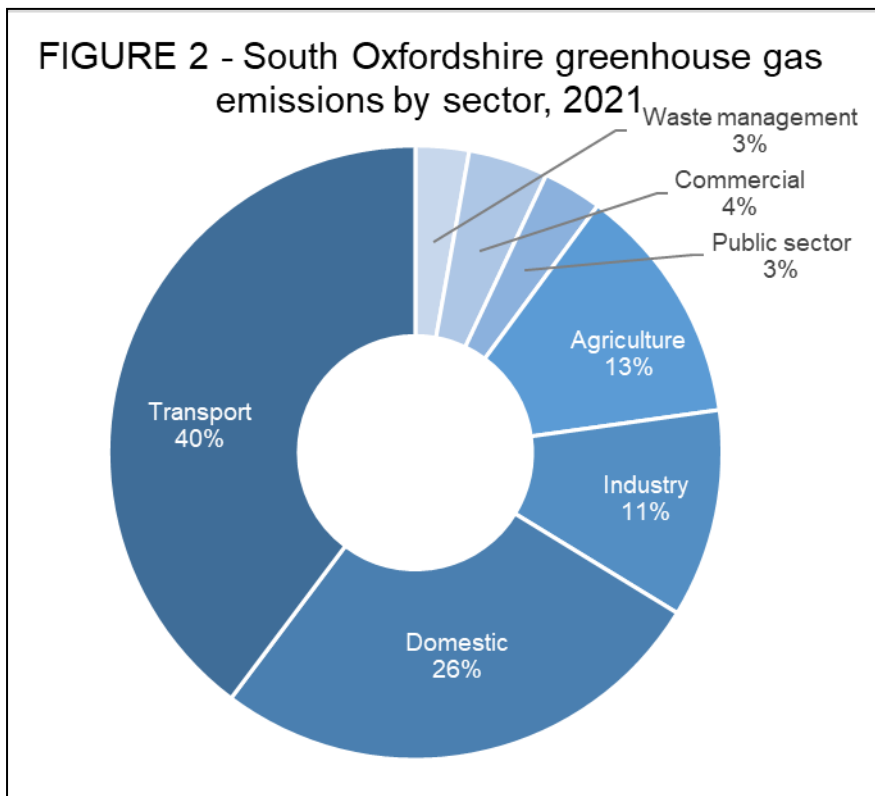


5. Recent policy changes by national government will make reaching the district net zero by 2030 target more challenging, for example:
- phase out of gas boilers now aiming for 80% phase out rather than complete phase out by 2035
 - ban on off-grid oil boilers delayed to 2035, again with an 80% phase out target by that date
 - ban on sale of new cars with combustion engines moved from 2030 to 2035.

6. The data presented in this report is for the 2021 calendar year, which was published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero in 2023. Despite this 18-month time-lag, this is the most accurate and up-to-date readily available data and is what all local authorities who reported their area-wide emissions use.

What progress have we made so far?

7. The latest greenhouse gas emissions data published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero¹ shows that 872.2 ktCO₂e were emitted from sources in South Oxfordshire during 2021², equivalent to 5.81 tCO₂e per person. This emissions per person is above the average across England (5.5 tCO₂e) and the southeast region (4.7 tCO₂e). A breakdown of emissions by broad sector is provided in Figure 2.

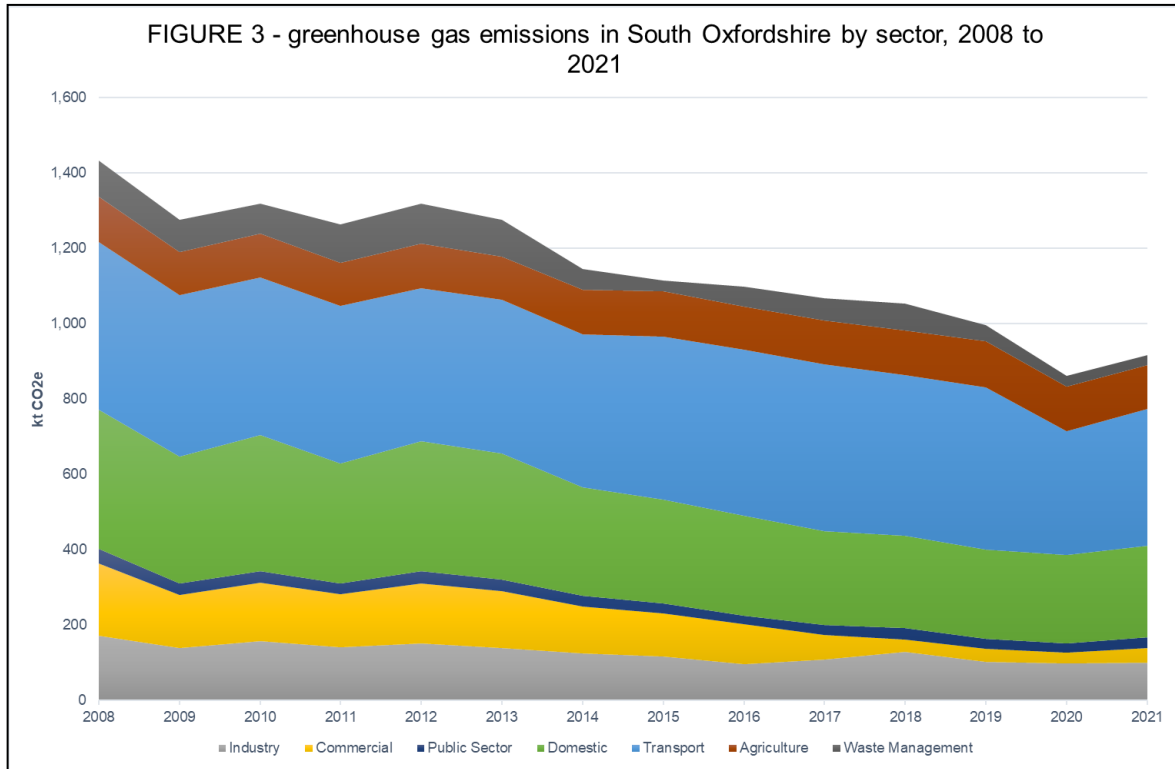


8. Total emissions in 2021 were 7% higher than in 2020 (872.2 ktCO₂e compared with 817.2 ktCO₂e in 2020), although 8% lower than in 2019 (Figure 2). The figure for 2020 was clearly hugely influenced by the disruption caused by the pandemic and it is highly likely that the 2021 data reported here is similarly distorted. Total emissions in South Oxfordshire fell by more than one third (37%) between the 2008 baseline year³ and 2021 (see Figure 3).

¹ All data and figures in this report are sourced from the [UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions national statistics, 2005 to 2021 \(published July 2023\)](#) unless otherwise stated

² Due to a lag in reporting, 2021 is the most recently published dataset.

³ The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy set the objective to halve emissions by 2030 from 2008 levels. 2008 is therefore used as the baseline year here.



9. Through the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan work, a five-yearly countywide carbon budget⁴ for the Oxfordshire-wide 2050 target was set. This indicated that an annual average reduction in carbon emissions of 9% is needed between 2021 and 2025 to stay within the 5 year cumulative budget. The actual progress made between 2019 and 2021 was roughly only half of what was needed (and that includes the additional savings in the pandemic).

10. Although progress is being made, the South Oxfordshire target to be a net-zero carbon district by 2030 is not going to be reached. The council is limited in our ability to meet the target as a large proportion of district-wide emissions are outside of our influence.

11. However, the council is committed to accelerating and supporting progress across the district and has invested significantly in building up our in-house capacity through the expansion of the climate and biodiversity team. Working collaboratively with the other Oxfordshire authorities will maximise the impact of the council's activities to reduce district-wide emissions as officer resources, expertise and funding can be pooled, particularly for areas like transport which are outside of the district council's direct sphere of influence. Work has started on five of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan actions which were identified as immediate priorities, which officers are closely involved in:

- Buildings decarbonisation
- Net Zero Local Area Energy Planning
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure
- Land-based carbon sequestration
- Green Finance

⁴ Carbon budgets are the maximum quantity of cumulative emissions which can be emitted within the five-year period that will not exceed the projected pathway.

Options

12. CEAC could recommend that Cabinet chooses to retain the current target, which is for South Oxfordshire to be a carbon neutral district by 2030.
13. CEAC could recommend that Cabinet chooses to amend the target to be carbon neutral by 2045. This is the recommendation of this report.
14. CEAC could recommend that Cabinet chooses to align with the national target to be carbon neutral by 2050.

Climate and ecological impact implications

15. The climate implications of this work are contained within the body of the report.

Financial Implications

16. No financial implications are anticipated as result of this report.

Legal Implications

17. No legal implications are anticipated as result of this report.

Procurement Implications

18. No procurement implications are anticipated as a result of this report.

Equalities Implications

19. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Conclusions and recommendations

20. Although progress is being made, the council does not have control of a large proportion of district-wide emissions which significantly restricts our ability to meet the 2030 target. With the publication of a new Corporate Plan later this year, there is an opportunity now to review and re-set the target to a more realistic, yet still ambitious, date.
21. This paper recommends that South Oxfordshire adopts the target of being a net-zero carbon district by 2045, bringing it into line with the Vale of White Horse District Council target. This still reflects an ambition to move faster than the UK 2050 target but offers a more realistic date to work towards. There will be no slowing down of our efforts to reduce district-wide carbon emissions.
22. Much of the council's current work in this area is being carried out in partnership with the other Oxfordshire authorities. The Oxfordshire-wide partnership target for reaching net zero is 2050 which is based on the 'Oxfordshire leading the way' pathway set out in the Pathways to a zero carbon Oxfordshire report. The best course of action is to fully commit to, and accelerate where possible, the

collective efforts to achieve the pathways as set out in the Net Zero Routemap and Action Plan.

23. Going forward the district-wide carbon emissions will be reported on an annual basis.

