

# Climate Emergency Advisory Committee



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## Review of the District net-zero carbon target

### Recommendation(s)

- (a) That CEAC formally recognises that the interim aspirational target of achieving a 75 per cent reduction in district carbon emissions by 2030 cannot be met.
- (b) That CEAC recommends that Cabinet re-affirms its commitment to accelerating progress towards achieving an ambitious 2045 target to be a net zero carbon district.

### Purpose of paper

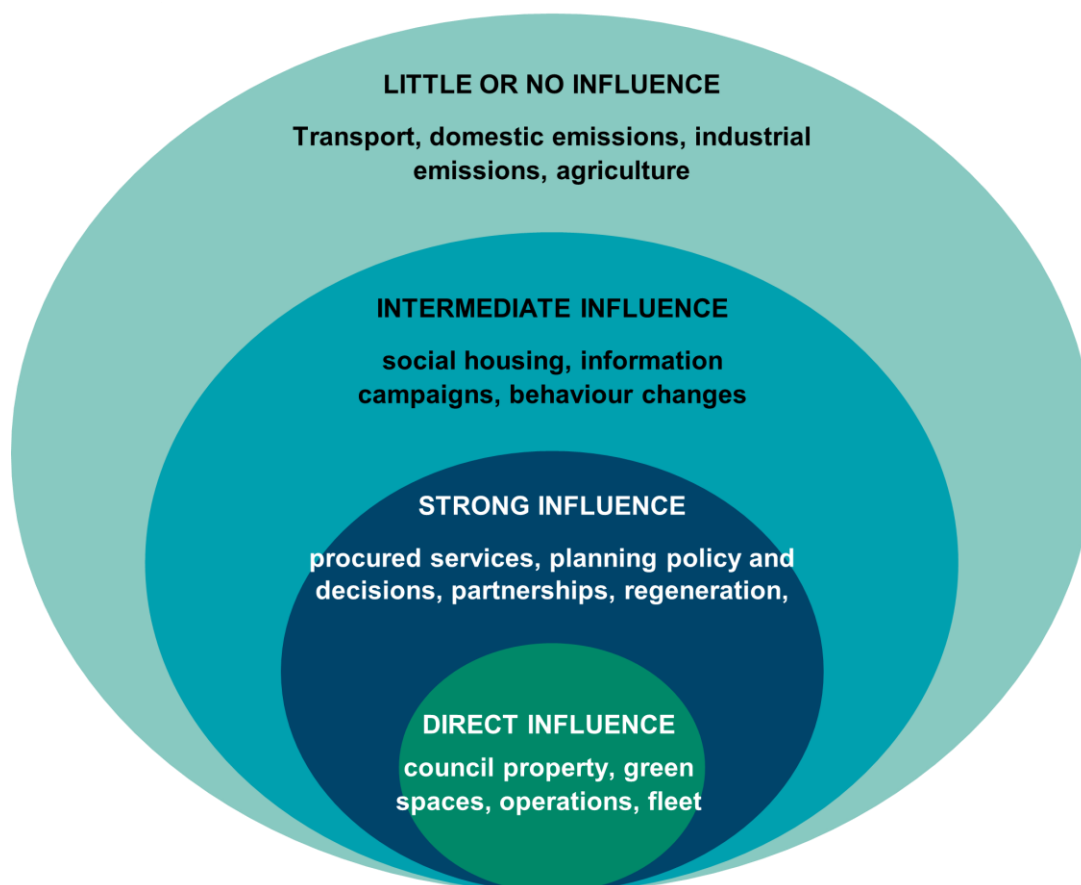
1. This paper reviews the progress towards meeting Vale of White Horse's target to be a net-zero carbon district by 2045, and the interim target to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030. It presents the latest data (2021) on emissions in Vale of White Horse published by the Department for Energy Security 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 interim target is highly unlikely to be met. The paper recommends that Vale of White Horse should drop the 75 per cent interim target, whilst retaining the headline target to be a net-zero carbon district by 2045.

### Background

3. In 2019, Vale of White Horse declared a Climate Emergency. The Climate Emergency Advisory Committee recommended that Vale of White Horse should become a carbon neutral district by 2045, with a 75 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. This target was adopted by Cabinet on 6 December 2019. The UK and Oxfordshire-wide target is 2050.
4. Vale of White Horse 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). The 14 actions to reduce the county's emissions were identified through an extensive consultation process and were chosen as the actions which would be most effectively delivered through joint working across the county.

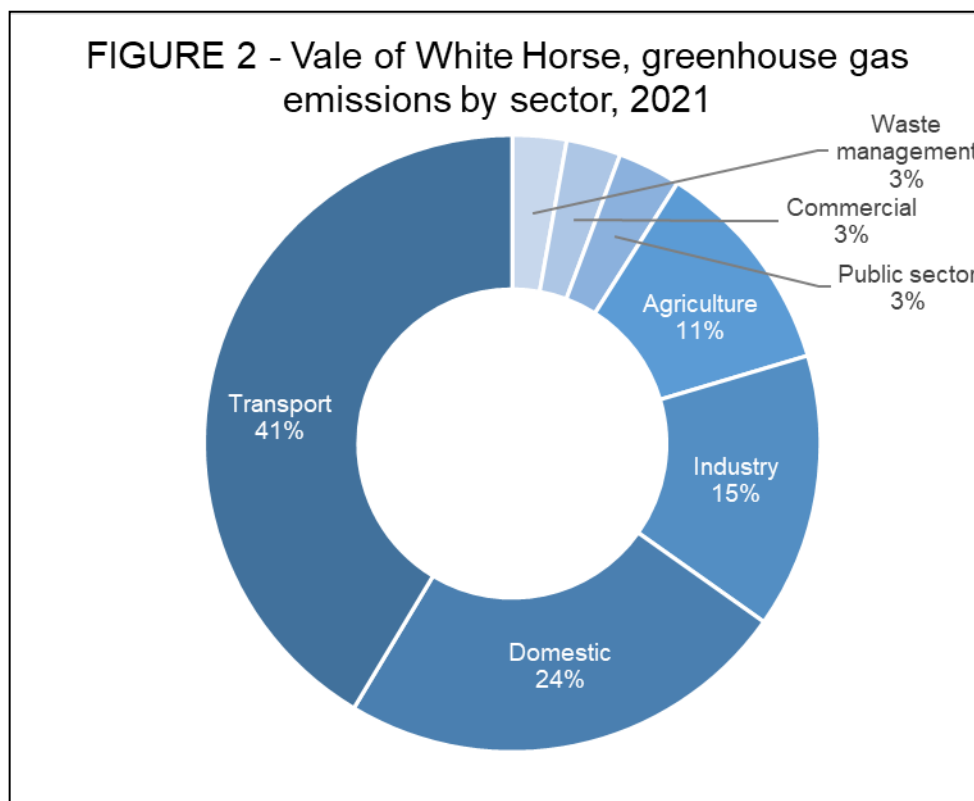
**FIGURE 1 – the district council's sphere of influence**



5. Recent policy changes by national government will make reaching the district net zero by 2045 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 (DESNZ) 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. Please see Appendix 1 for background on calculating the district-wide emissions for Vale of White Horse.

## What progress have we made so far?

7. The latest greenhouse gas emissions data published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero<sup>1</sup> shows that 880.2 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e were emitted from sources in Vale of White Horse during 2021<sup>2</sup>, equivalent to 6.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>e per person. This emissions per person is above the average across England (5.5 tCO<sub>2</sub>e) and the southeast region (4.7 tCO<sub>2</sub>e). A breakdown of emissions by broad sector is provided in Figure 2.

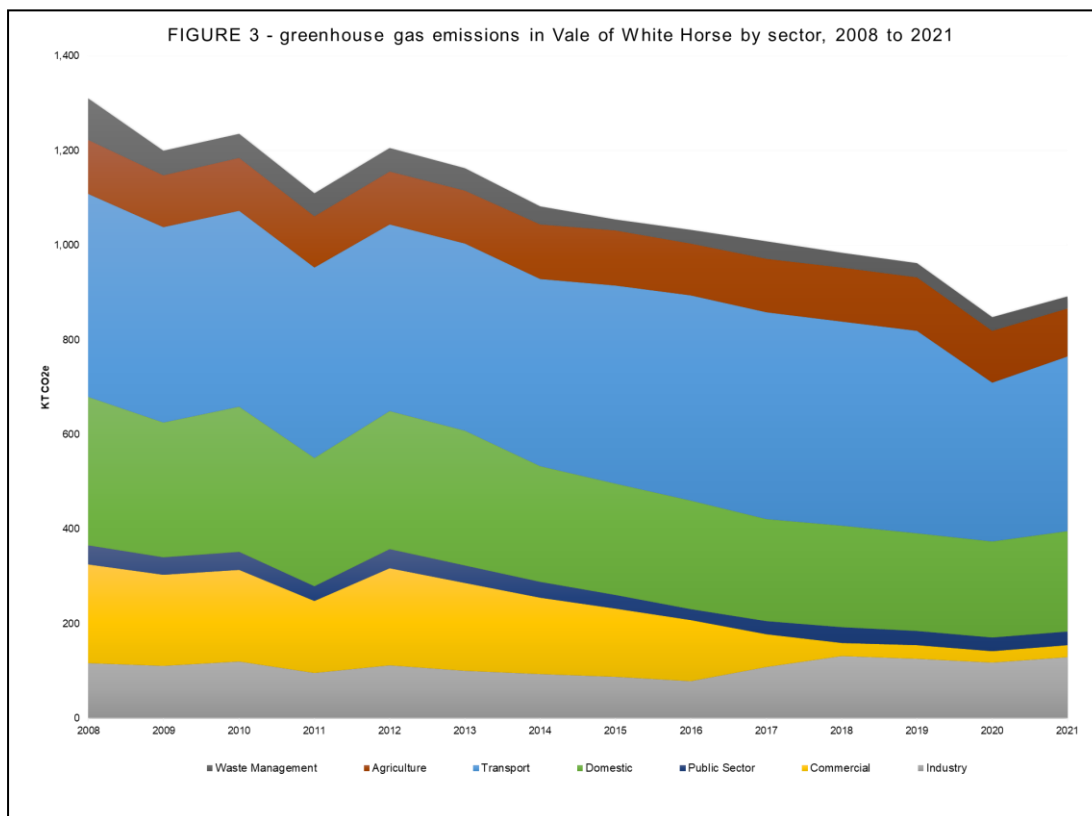


8. Total emissions in 2021 were 5.3% higher than in 2020 (871.9 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e compared with 817.0 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e in 2020), although 7.4% lower than in 2019 (Figure 2). The figure for 2020 was clearly hugely influenced by the disruption caused by the pandemic and it is highly likely that the 2021 data reported here is similarly distorted. Total emissions in Vale of White Horse fell by nearly a third (35%) between the 2008 baseline year<sup>3</sup> and 2021 (see Figure 3). If this rate of progress continues unchanged, in 2030 total emissions will have fallen by around 55% compared to the 2008 baseline - this is significantly off the target to reduce district emissions by 75% by 2030.

<sup>1</sup> 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

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

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1 for explanation of baseline.



9. Through the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan work, a five-yearly countywide carbon budget<sup>4</sup> 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 Vale of White Horse interim target to reduce carbon emissions by 75 per cent 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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

- Green Finance

## **Options**

12. CEAC could recommend that Cabinet chooses to retain the current target, which is for Vale of White to be a carbon neutral district by 2045 and to retain the interim target of a 75 per cent reduction by 2030.
13. CEAC could recommend that Cabinet chooses to retain the current target, which is for Vale of White to be a carbon neutral district by 2045, but no longer retains an interim target. 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**

20. Although progress is being made, the council does not have control over a large proportion of district-wide emissions which significantly restricts our ability to guarantee the 2045 and 2030 interim targets are met. With the publication of a new Corporate Plan later this year, there is an opportunity now to review the targets and to be seen to re-commit to accelerating progress towards achieving a net zero district by 2045.
21. This paper recommends that Vale of White Horse drops the interim target of reducing carbon emissions by 75 per cent by 2030 but retains the headline target of being a net-zero carbon district by 2045. 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 Oxfordshire Net Zero Routemap and Action Plan.

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

# **Appendix 1 – district-wide greenhouse gas emissions methodology and baseline**

In 2020 the consultants Aether were commissioned to produce a baseline of Vale of White Horse district-wide emissions. This was based on 2017 figures (the latest data available at the time) and established a methodology for reporting annual district-wide greenhouse gas emissions.

A baseline year is needed to track progress against the Vale of White Horse target to reduce district-wide emissions by 75% by 2030. At the Cabinet meeting on 10 July 2020, it was agreed to use the 2017 baseline for district-wide emissions set out in the Aether report.

However, recent work by officers to replicate the Aether methodology has identified problems which mean that it is not possible to replicate the work done by Aether for subsequent years.

Since the Aether work was completed in 2020, the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan has been published and Oxfordshire-wide greenhouse gas emissions are now reported on an annual basis. Council officers have free access to the methodology used for this and can use it to calculate district-wide emissions (as presented in this paper). More importantly, this methodology is consistent across Oxfordshire and all Districts, the City and County can use the same baseline to track progress of our collective efforts to reduce emissions.

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