

Cabinet report

Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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Wards affected: All

Vale Cabinet member responsible: Cllr Bethia Thomas

To: CABINET

Date: 27 September 2024

Review of the District net-zero carbon target

Recommendation(s)

- (a) That Cabinet re-affirms its commitment to accelerating progress towards achieving an ambitious 2045 target to be a net zero carbon district.
- (b) That the need for an interim target is reviewed as part of the development of the forthcoming Corporate Plan.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Signing off officer	Anna Winship	Vivien Williams	Dominic Lamb	Equalities Team

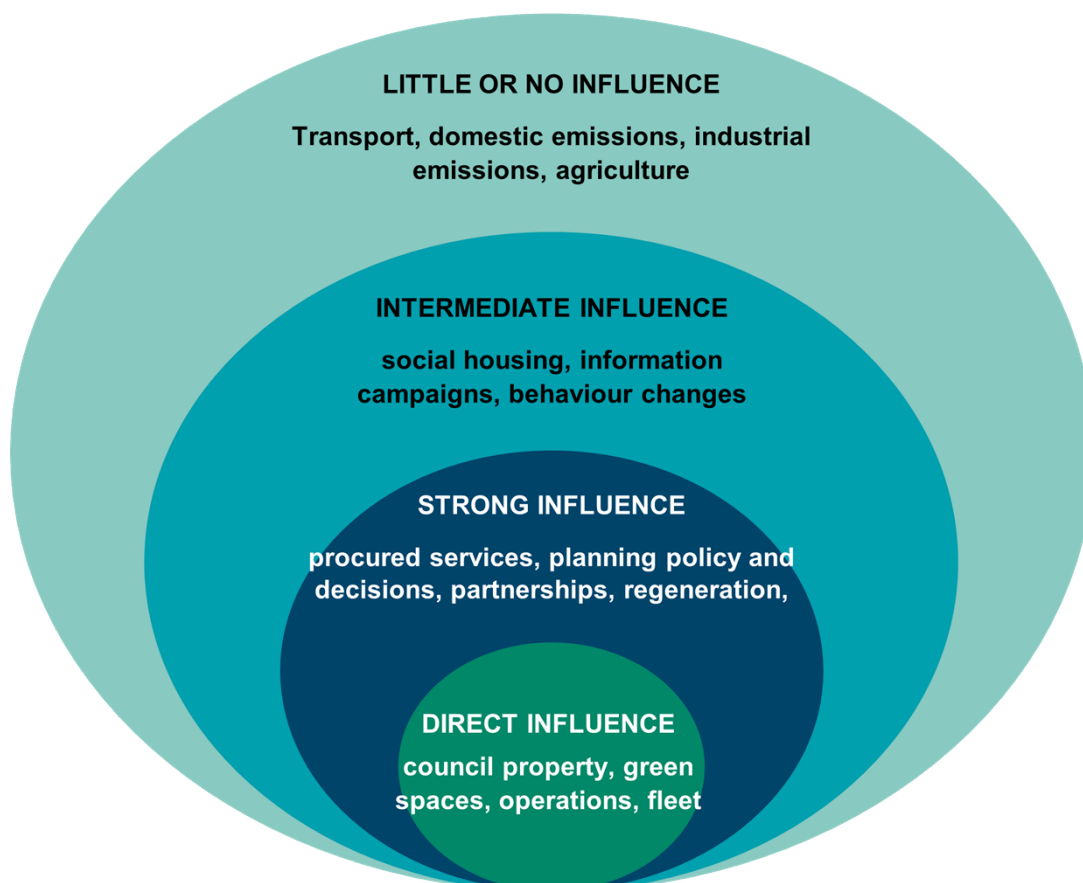
Purpose of paper

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 (2022) on emissions in Vale of White Horse published by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) in June 2024 and recognises that the aspirational interim 2030 target date will not be met.
2. This paper sets out the progress that has been made towards the district-wide net zero carbon target.

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 the council's 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. The council's 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



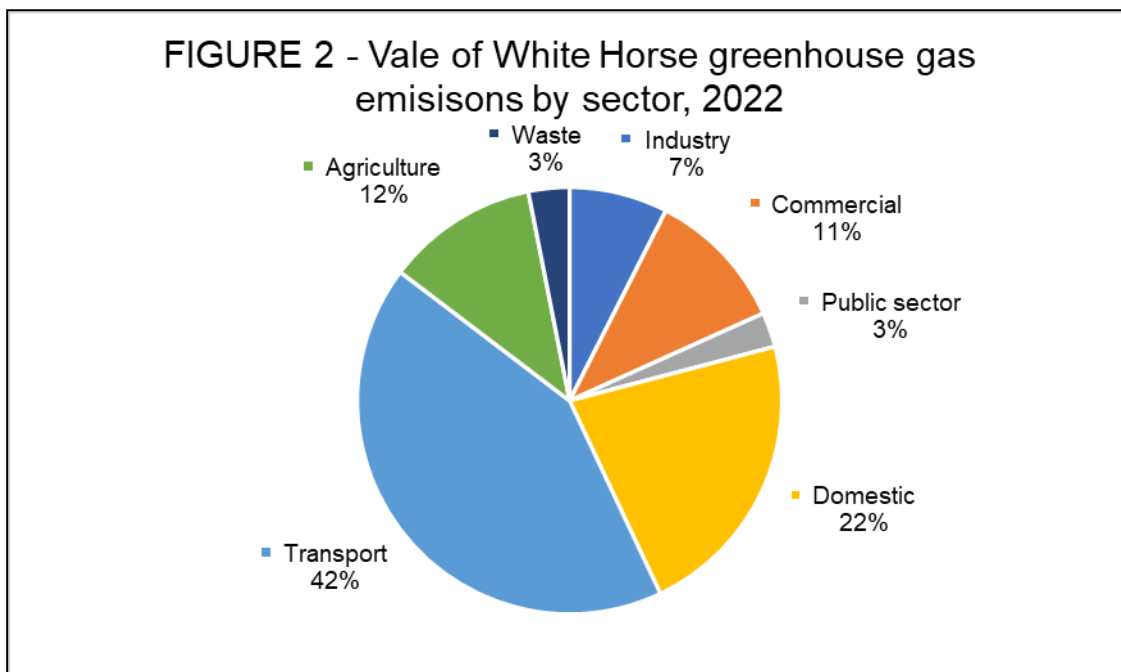
5. Recent policy changes by national government will make reaching the district net zero by 2045 target more challenging, for example:
 - phase out of gas boilers now aiming for 80% phase out rather than complete phase out by 2035

- 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 2022 calendar year, which was published by the DESNZ in June 2024. 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?

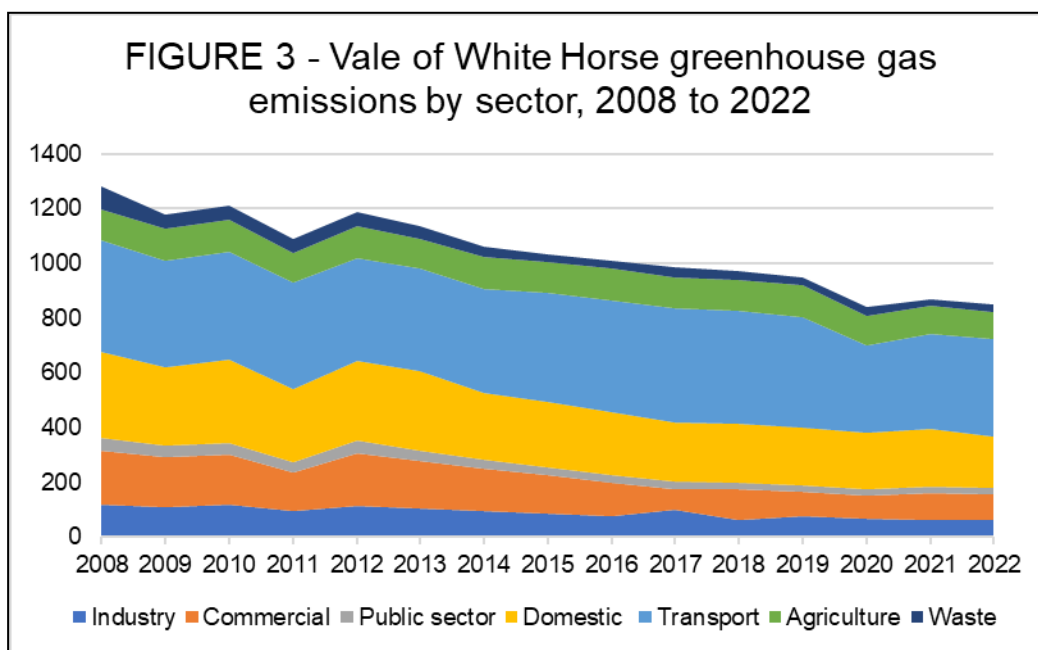
7. The latest greenhouse gas emissions data published by DESNZ¹ shows that 851.3 ktCO₂e were emitted from sources in Vale of White Horse during 2022², equivalent to 6.0 tCO₂e per person. This emissions per person is above the average across the South East (4.4 tCO₂e). A breakdown of emissions by broad sector is provided in Figure 2.



8. Total emissions in 2022 (851.3 ktCO₂e) were 2.4% lower than 2021 (872.1 ktCO₂e) and 33.8% lower than 2008 (1285.9 ktCO₂e) (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 2022 \(published June 2024\)](#) unless otherwise stated.

² Due to a lag in reporting, 2022 is the most recently published dataset.



9. Through the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan work, a five-yearly countywide carbon budget³ 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. However, in reality there has been an annual average reduction in carbon emissions of 2.8% over the last 5 years (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 its ability to meet the target as a large proportion of district-wide emissions are outside of the council's influence.
11. The council is committed to accelerating and supporting progress across the district and has invested significantly in building up the council's in-house capacity through the expansion of the climate and biodiversity team. The council also provides support to other organisations in the district to reduce their emissions, for example through the Climate Action Fund grant scheme.
12. 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

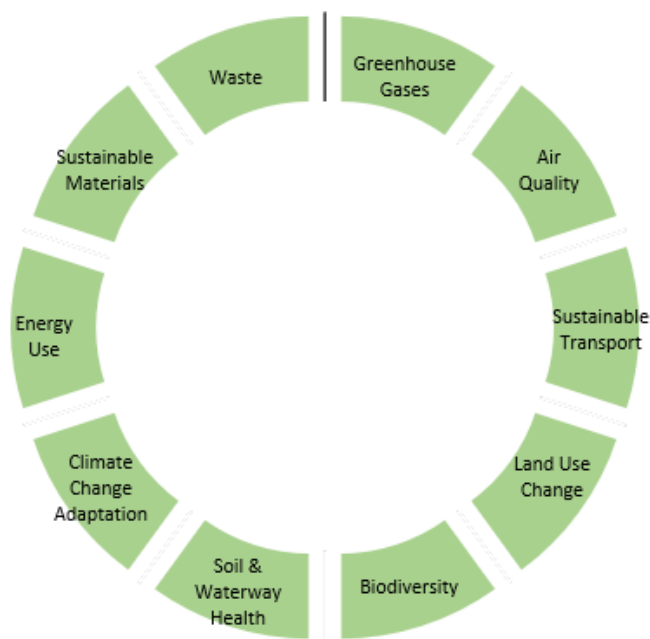
³ Carbon budgets are the maximum quantity of cumulative emissions which can be emitted within the five-year period that will not exceed the projected pathway.

Options

13. 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.
14. That Cabinet chooses to align with the national target to be carbon neutral by 2050.
15. That Cabinet chooses to retain the current target, which is for Vale of White to be a carbon neutral district by 2045 and review the need for an interim target as part of the development of the forthcoming Corporate Plan. This is the recommendation of this report.

Climate and ecological impact implications

16. The full details of climate implications of this work are contained within the body of the report and are summarised in the climate impact assessment tool outputs below. The council's district-wide net zero target and the annual reporting of progress that target will not directly have any environmental impacts but will be important for planning and managing the council's work in these areas.



Financial Implications

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

Legal Implications

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

Procurement Implications

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

Equalities Implications

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

Conclusions

21. Although progress is being made, the council does not have control over a large proportion of district-wide emissions which significantly restricts the council's ability to guarantee the existing 2030 interim target is met. There is an opportunity now to review the targets and to re-commit to accelerating progress towards achieving a net zero district by 2045.
22. This paper recommends that but the council retains the headline target of being a net zero carbon district by 2045 and that the need for an interim target is reviewed as part of the development of the forthcoming Corporate Plan. It is important to recognise that this will not result in any slowing down of the council's efforts to reduce district-wide carbon emissions.
23. 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.
24. Going forward the district-wide carbon emissions will be reported on an annual basis.
25. Cabinet is recommended to re-affirm its commitment to accelerating progress towards achieving an ambitious 2045 target to be a net zero carbon district and that the need for an interim target is reviewed as part of the development of the forthcoming Corporate Plan.

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.
