

Minutes

of a meeting of the

Climate

Emergency

Advisory Committee



held on Monday, 9 December 2024 at 6.00 pm
this was a virtual meeting

Open to the public, including the press

In attendance:

Councillors: Hayleigh Gascoigne (Chair), Eric De La Harpe (Vice-chair), Sarah James, Scott Houghton, Robert Clegg

Officers: Dominic Lamb (Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader), Kimberley Hall, Jessie Fieth and Chloe Bunting (Senior Climate Action Officers), Roselle Chapman (Nature Recovery Officer), Tim Oruye (Head of Policy and Programmes), Suzanne Malcolm (Deputy Chief Executive – Place), Candida Basilio (Democratic Services Officer)

Guests: Cabinet member Councillor Bethia Thomas

79. Chair's announcements

The chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. The chair ran through virtual meeting procedure.

The chair mentioned the Food Strategy Action Plan, and that it was in final stages of development (with Good Food Oxfordshire) and committee should be able to comment on a draft next year. This work ties in with priorities in our council plan.

80. Apologies for absence

None.

81. Minutes of the last meeting

Resolved:

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 16 July 2024, were agreed as a correct record.

82. Declaration of interests

Councillor James declared that she works for National Energy Foundation, in relation to item 21 on the draft Nature and Climate Action Plan (NCAP). This was noted but would not impact Councillor James participating at this stage.

83. Urgent business

None.

84. Public participation

None

85. Update from the Cabinet Member for climate action, nature recovery and strategic partnerships

Councillor Thomas, Cabinet member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, updated committee on recent activity:

- Committee were thanked for their work on CEAC and valuable comments given on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, via the task and finish group. This fed into the council consultation response. Councillor Thomas was looking forward to this developing and the benefits that it will bring.
- The climate team had been working hard to get projects running. This included the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP), with work starting in January 2025 once we appoint contractors over the next week. The project will start as county-wide strategic scale, before coming to district level involving our officers working with contractors.
- The Climate Impact Assessment Toll has been rolled out to reporting templates after a successful trial.
- The Cabinet member was pleased to see a fantastic response to the Climate Action Fund.

86. Draft Nature and Climate Action Plan

Officer Chloe Bunting updated committee on progress of the NCAP.

Members provided their views on the final draft.

The draft had been through consultation and there would be further refinement of the plan and reordering of actions before finalising. Reporting on this plan would align with the Council Plan reporting.

Members provided comments on this current form of the plan.

- Members were glad to see targets split out with relevant headings, and the development of SMART targets which committee had previously suggested
- Number 34 of the actions: minimum energy efficiency standards. How was this tracked - are tenants aware they can report energy efficiency breach and potential reprisals? It was responded that the private sector housing team helped with targets and the officer would send this comment back to them. It was enforceable and reports would be investigated.
- Can we add indicative impact ratings? Can we prioritise based on this? Officers would conduct a prioritisation exercise.
- Concern over longer targets in relation to the council's operational target date. The team leader considered that the actions were indicative and often reliant on government funding (e.g. building decarbonisation projects), another example was currently unknown developments in electrifying the waste collection fleet. The longer targets were justified due to some unknown factors.
- Item 40 on carbon sequestration: Innovate UK Net Zero Living Project delivery. The team leader explained that Innovate UK was a government funding body, and last year the team attracted funding. A partnership was formed with South Oxfordshire and two other local districts. The Local Nature Partnership was working on this, with reporting

in late June 2025. Having an updateable plan helps the team to identify next steps on what we can implement.

- Point 36: active travel initiatives. How much more can we do to measure when it was County / Highways responsibility. Partnership work. The reporting officer replied that it had to be in partnership. For example, can we host car clubs in our car parks. Other teams were working on strategic cycle routes.
- A request to add column headings to each page.
- Discussion about sustainable financing options and spend to save projects, rather than relying on successful funding bids. The team leader directed members to action item 16 which supports investigation into such project activity.
- Departmental training was viewed positively by a member
- Action item 17: decarbonisation plans – as this plan was for both South and Vale, how does the new office building (Didcot Gateway) factor in for SODC. The team leader confirmed that the building would be carbon zero from the beginning in its build, therefore a decarbonisation plan was not required.
- Who was leading on retrofit strategy? Can local councils help with economies of scale, housing type etc. It was responded that the strategy was still being scoped. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) would lead with their retrofitting team but with district council involvement – officers can report back feedback to the OCC team.

Thanks were given to the team for the work involved in producing this plan.

87. Biodiversity Audit Update

The Nature Recovery Officer updated committee on the survey work she conducted this year on council land, with the aim of putting nature recovery at the heart of our grounds maintenance. The PowerPoint presentation will be attached to this set of minutes. The officer had assessed areas where the management should continue, and areas that could be improved and how. The officer was aware that grounds maintenance did need better equipment to assist with management. Picking up grass cuttings / arisings was needed, as the arisings can block out light that wildflowers need to flourish. The relationship with grounds maintenance was key and to support their work. Members made comments and asked questions:

- Issues of herbicide use. Members were signposted to item 37 in the NCAP. The aim was to reduce use where possible.
- New estates management of green space – a member asked how we manage land whilst waiting for land to come back the council. The team leader explained that areas that were allocated as meadows need to be managed as such. It was responded that officers were reliant on members of the public to report mismanagement and enforcement can then take place.
- Discussed methods for removing arisings. The officer explained that arisings need removing and this needs planning ahead. Composting does need proper management. We will work with grounds maintenance to identify the right action.
- A member asked that where there is divided responsibility land, can we work together to manage rather than separately. The officer explained that the district had taken on some verges from OCC, as an example. Grounds maintenance would be working towards creating these kinds of efficiencies.

Thanks were given to the officer for her work.

88. Carbon Offsetting Workshop

Officers Kim Hall and Jessie Fieth ran a workshop on carbon offsetting options. Officers wanted to discuss whether carbon offsetting/ buying carbon credits was a worthwhile activity to meet council targets. What were committee's views on the approach, if used at all?

Use of carbon credits would cost £15-20,000 a year. There were issues around overseas projects and whether it was an ethical method environmentally and socially, with negative press on international carbon credits. Government has been advised not to use international credits. Officers explained that there were high integrity UK offsetting projects such as woodland carbon code and peat carbon codes, but they take time to set up with limited credits to purchase. There is potential for pending issuance units to be delivered in future, but requires planning and budgeting in advance. To meet targets, local opportunities may not suffice. There is current activity in developing carbon credit opportunities in Oxfordshire, but this was in very early stages. Officers welcomed committee to make suggestions on a broad set of principles to carry forward in offsetting activities.

1. Should the council be considering investing in offsetting to reach our net zero target?
2. If yes, what should the council's approach to offsetting be?

Discussion:

- A member suggested that taxpayer funds should not be spent on carbon offsetting. In particular, spend should not be outside of the district. Suggestion given of solar panels for resident's housing in the district or local farmland. An officer added that City council had a project on decarbonising businesses, which officers could bring details of in future.
- Another member considered the spend was justified, but locally makes most sense, following the recommendation given to government to not use offshore credits.
- Members felt that realistically, some offsetting was required to meet targets
- Discussed sequestering carbon and the ongoing yearly volumes and how tricky it was to solve – longevity issues.
- Members were agreed on prioritising local schemes
- Retrofit as offsetting. Can we look at options that have co-benefits for residents and businesses?
- A member suggested that if we had to choose between further decarbonisation activities and offsetting (if financially there had to be a choice), we should choose decarbonisation work to continue to lower carbon emissions.

Overall view – members felt that local offsetting should be the priority and acknowledged that some carbon credits may be necessary to meet the council's targets, but we should do what we can to reduce emissions rather than rely on buying credits.

89. Update on Task and Finish groups and future items

A task and Finish group on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy was held and chair was glad that the committee were able to input into this.

The NCAP task and finish group was also held.

Future items

1. LAEP – this would come forward in the new year.
2. Oxfordshire Retrofit Strategy was suggested

Thanks were given to the officers involved in climate work and for providing reports and plans for committee to consider.

The meeting closed at 7.28 pm

Signed by the Chair:

Date:

Biodiversity Audit of Council Land

CEAC December Meeting

Why a Biodiversity Audit?

Nature Recovery is a key emerging priority for the council:

- **A Draft NCAP action** is to “Undertake biodiversity audit of corporate land and develop proposals to put nature recovery at the heart of our grounds maintenance operations.”

- **Draft NCAP Measures** include:

1. Complete biodiversity audits of Vale of White Horse corporate land
2. Develop options for nature recovery on council owned land and seek approval for implementation.



The Biodiversity Audit

The purpose is to record what we have and what condition it is in to identify options for nature recovery.

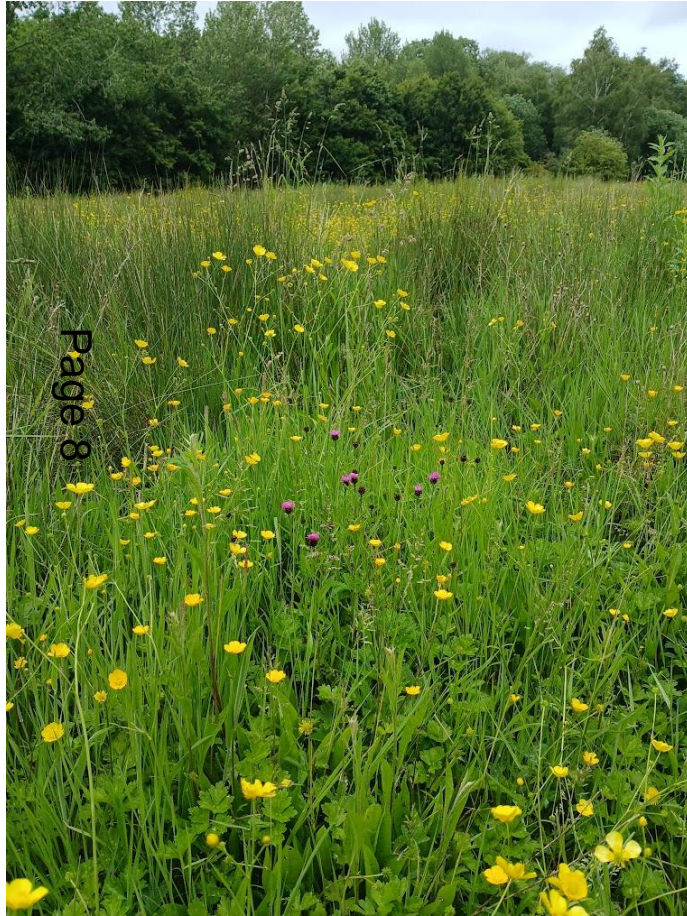
- All amenity land subject to basic initial survey (64 sites)
- 22 areas currently managed as meadow covering 103,998m² were surveyed using 'Rapid Assessment for Grasslands' method.

The survey will form the baseline from which we will develop our plans to restore nature across our estate over the years to come.



Highlights include

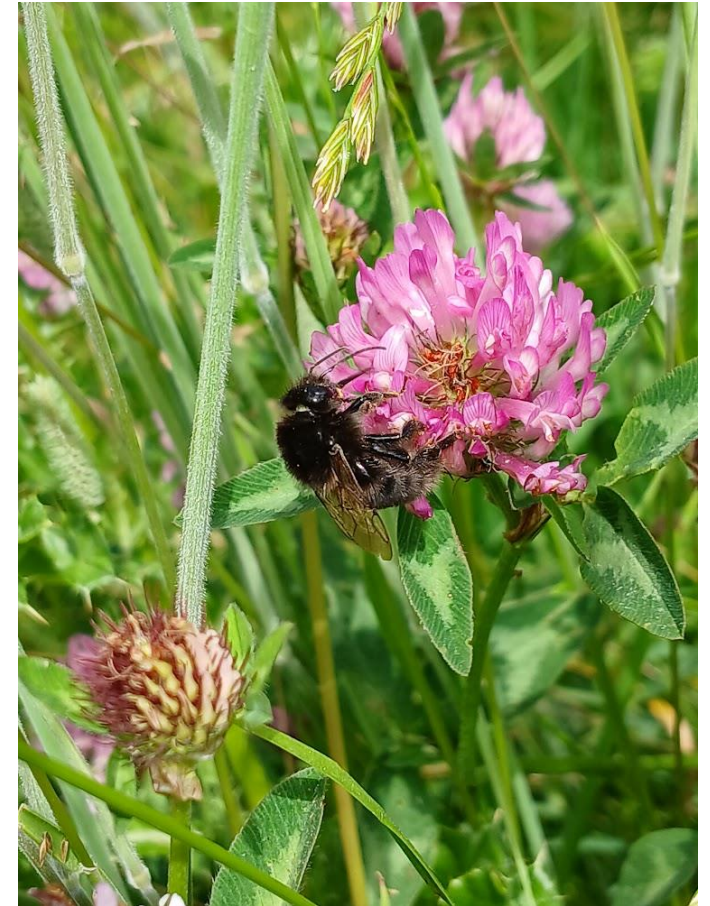
Wet Grassland Folly Park
Faringdon



A Cluster of Pyramidal Orchids
Wantage



Rare Ruderal Bumblebee
Wantage



Opportunities for nature friendly management

The Glebe
Cumnor



Page 9

Mably Grove
Wantage



Key Findings.

Of the 22 areas under meadow management in 2024:

- 14 sites are good and should continue to be managed as they are.
- 7 worked well and could be extended to cover a larger area
- 1 site is more suited being planted with berry-rich trees and shrubs

Page 10

7 new sites were identified that could potentially be brought into meadow management in future



Challenge 1. – Cut & Collect Equipment

Our in-house Grounds Maintenance Team do not currently have the cut & collect equipment to manage our land for nature's recovery.

- Cutting and collecting the arisings delivers the twin objectives of keeping the grass neat and creating conditions that will allow more wildflowers to thrive.
- Over time, this will reduce soil fertility by limiting the nutrients that are otherwise recycled in the soil
- With time, fewer cuts will be needed, and more wildflowers will be able to thrive.



Challenge 2. – Disposal of arisings

- There is currently limited facility to efficiently and cost effectively dispose of the arisings
- The in-house production of compost could help the Council to eliminate the use of peat in grounds maintenance and help deliver NCAP Action 38 “The Councils to eliminate the use of peat in grounds maintenance on our land by year 2025/26”.



Next Steps

We are working with the Grounds Maintenance Team to:

- develop proposals for 2025
- understand resource requirements
- identify the most suitable equipment
- bring forward solutions to managing arisings efficiently
- monitor progress
- align future actions with measures identified in LNRS when published in Summer 2025

