

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee



Report of Acting Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations

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To: Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

DATE: 19 April 2021

AGENDA ITEM

Climate Action and Biodiversity 2021/22 Work Programme

Recommendation(s)

(a) Committee to note the progress and process to date, including the activity commissioned within the 2020/21 budget, in respect of providing a strategic response to the Council's climate emergency declaration and adopted carbon neutral targets for the Council and the District.

(b) Committee to review the proposed 2021/22 climate action and biodiversity work programmes, in respect of providing a strategic response to the Corporate Plan 2020-24, which will provide a base for the Vale of White Horse District Council Climate Action Plan and proposed Biodiversity Action Plan.

(c) Committee to approve the submission of the proposed 2021/22 climate action and biodiversity work programmes to Cabinet.

(d) Committee to recommend to Cabinet that the proposed quarterly Corporate Plan 2020-24 performance reports are brought forward to the CEAC, in order for them to check, challenge and provide advice on project progress to Cabinet, against the projects included in this work programme for 2021/22.

Purpose of Report

1. This report outlines a proposed programme in 2021/22 that the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) could recommend to Cabinet as a strategic response to the Corporate Plan together with the climate emergency declaration and adopted carbon neutral targets for the council and the district.

2. The items put forward for inclusion in the 2021/22 work programme have been defined by the Corporate Plan projects that have been agreed by Council members for delivery in 21/22. They are complemented by projects from the 2020/21 CEAC Year One Work Programme that have been carried forward (principally due to the delays arising from the Covid-19 pandemic). This report also outlines the climate and biodiversity items considered business as usual for council officers. It further indicates new proposed areas of work so reflects the totality of action that the Council is taking in respect of the climate and ecological emergencies
3. Officers have categorised the work programme into four key headings: foundational projects, council projects, district projects and county-wide partnerships and projects.
4. With the new priority accorded to protecting and restoring the natural world in the Corporate Plan there are distinct work programmes presented for Biodiversity and Climate Action respectively.
5. The report indicates those projects which we are currently able to take forward within allocated budgets (in colour) and those which require further scoping and funding (greyed out).

Strategic Objectives

6. This work is supported by both the Council's carbon neutral targets and the new Vale Corporate Plan 2020-24 vision: *"to help build and support thriving local communities, where everyone can enjoy the opportunity to live a happy and fulfilling life. We will do all we can to contribute to making that a reality in the Vale, within the ecological constraints of our physical environment. We will ensure that our council and our district play their part in tackling the Climate Emergency"*.

Background

7. A climate emergency was declared by Vale of White Horse District Council administration at Full Council in February 2019. The motion outlined the intention for the council to consider adopting an early carbon neutral target.
8. To support a response to the climate emergency, the council established the committee to develop and recommend mitigating actions and advise Cabinet on matters relating to climate change.
9. The Year One Work Programme for 2020/21 was recommended by the committee and approved by Cabinet in January 2020. Despite the restrictions occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic considerable progress has been made in delivering the programme.
10. Much of the work completed has been foundational and will provide the basis on which the council can determine the priority actions to take in order to progress towards the achievement of the carbon neutral targets. Baselines have been completed for both the Council and the district and the next step of modelling different scenarios for how the targets may be achieved is due to be completed and presented to all Councillors and SMT in May 2021. These scenarios will be key to the development of a Climate Action Strategy and Plan and specifically a Carbon Management Plan that will define the pathway to becoming carbon neutral.

Annual Summary 2020/21

Given the prominence of the Climate Emergency in the Corporate Plan 2020-24 a decision was made to appoint a Cabinet member with a specific portfolio for Climate and Environment.

While the Covid-19 pandemic created many challenges in 2020/21 that impacted the delivery of the Year One Work Programme, there were also some positive outcomes, including a reduction in the Council's carbon emissions. The table below shows the key operational areas in which emissions reductions were made in the first three quarters.

Vale of White Horse CO ₂ emissions (tonnes) Quarter 1 to Quarter 3				
	2019/20	2020/21	Change on 2019/20	% change on 2019/20
Leisure Centres	1,125	450	-675	-60.00%
Council Offices	67	50	-17	-25.37%
Beacon	45	28	-17	-37.78%
Staff Mileage	24	11	-13	-54.17%
Total	1261	539	-722	-57.26%

The Leisure Centre reductions can be attributed exclusive to closures due to Covid-19 related closures and restricted access. Sustained reductions will only be achieved through the implementation of decarbonisation projects.

For office and staff related emissions there is an opportunity to consolidate some of the emissions reductions into longer term adjustments to working arrangements.

The key activities that have been completed or progressed in 2020/21 from the Year One Work Programme are:

- Baseline carbon emissions data reports for district compiled by Aether and presented to Councillors.
- Distinct climate and nature themes embedded in the new Corporate Plan 2020-24 with climate action and sustainability integrated throughout the plan. Significant input from the CEAC into the development of the plan.
- Recruitment of two Climate Action leads (from Nov 2020 and Jan 2021)
- Five CEAC meetings held
- Task & Finish groups covering: Year One Work Programme prioritisation, scoping and development, staff conference design, joint design guide and biodiversity.
- Membership of Oxfordshire Greentech
- Climate and ecological implications added to formal democratic report templates. Each decision and report will now be presented with detail on the

climate and ecological implications so that members are fully cognisant of the impact of any formal decisions.

- Commissioning Anthesis to conduct a district climate action scenario modelling report and Town and Parish Council mapping.
- Securing grant of £361,746 from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for Faringdon Leisure Centre to replace gas boiler with air source heat pumps and install solar PV.
- Completion of the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (OEVIS) 2020-25.
- CEAC review held to assess the Committee’s effectiveness to date and to identify recommendations for improving effectiveness and alignment to the corporate plan going forward.

Prioritisation for 2021/22

11. The priority items have been drawn from the new Corporate Plan. Some of these projects were included in the budget approved by Council in February (in colour) and some are subject to future discretionary growth (greyed out). Should the opportunity arise during the year to consider funding further corporate plan activities, these could be brought forward for consideration as supplementary estimates.
12. This has been complemented by a review of the Year One Work programme and identification of projects which need to be carried forward, including some which have been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some projects have been deprioritised due to the changing work patterns with staff predominantly working from home.
13. This process has involved review and scoping meetings with the CEAC Chair, and the Cabinet Lead for Climate and Environment and officers from Insight & Policy.
14. The focus for 2021/22 is to move from policy development into the delivery phase and make progress towards achieving the carbon neutral targets for the Council’s own operations. This will be reinforced with the development of a three-year Climate Action Plan for 2021-2024.

Corporate Plan Climate Action Items

15. The greyed-out items in the table below have not been included in the Council budget for 2021/22 as approved by Full Council in February 2021. The Lead column identifies the SMT member responsible for ensuring delivery together with the Insight & Policy team member advising on delivery.

NEW CORPORATE PLAN CLIMATE ACTION PROJECTS				
Project		Description	Lead	Notes
PHPN1.3	Sustainable Housing	Explore how the council can provide low-cost sustainable housing. Include working with developers, registered providers, community trusts, as well as new partnerships. Include	Suzanne Malcolm;	

		council owned housing. Include a definition of affordability relative to ability to pay, not to market value, and social rent definitions		
PHPN1.7	Garden Communities	Use Garden Villages and Towns designation as a mechanism to introduce innovative housing to meet our needs for high quality, low energy, zero-carbon homes	Suzanne Malcolm;	
PHPN2.1	Sustainable Policies for Homes	Adopt a policy framework that ensures those homes could be delivered in a way that supports the environment and people living healthy lives	Suzanne Malcolm;	
PHPN2.3	CIL strategy	Update the CIL spending strategy and associated procedures to accelerate the delivery of local infrastructural improvements for our communities both in line with our corporate objectives and, where appropriate, to support current spending on existing infrastructure	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	
PHPN2.4	Low-carbon Construction	Consider ways we can encourage lower-carbon construction in Vale	Suzanne Malcolm	Base budget
PHPN2.10	Active Travel Network	Work with partners to produce an Active Travel Network map of current and required coverage across the Vale to include commercial and community buses, cycle paths and storage facilities, pavements and footpaths, green and blue infrastructure, and local taxi firms. Encourage systems that increase use of the Active Travel Network	Suzanne Malcolm	
TCE1.1	Climate Emergency Strategy	Develop a Climate Emergency Strategy for the Council, setting out how we will reach Zero Carbon for all Vale assets by 2030. Identify energy saving opportunities in council-owned buildings and fleets	Suzanne Malcolm; Climate Action Team	Base budget Will be included in the Climate Action Plan
TCE1.2	Year One Climate Action Plan	Complete the CEAC Year One Climate Action Plan and plan for future years	Suzanne Malcolm; Climate Action Team	Base budget
TCE2.5	Climate Emergency Plan	Develop a year two plan with CEAC for meeting our Climate Emergency goals	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	Base budget
TCE3.1	CEAC Year One Action Plan	Complete the CEAC Year One Action Plan and plan for future years	Suzanne Malcolm Michelle Wells	Base budget
COUNCIL PROJECTS				

TCE3.2	Waste Reduction Scheme	Work with partners to define a waste reduction scheme: including ways to reduce bulky waste headed to landfill and reduce recycling contamination	Liz Hayden; Elizabeth Kingdom	
TCE3.5	EV Charging	Work with partners to provide electric charging points in Vale car parks and at our buildings, and increase charging infrastructure across Oxfordshire	Liz Hayden; Andy Egan	
DISTRICT PROJECTS				
TCE2.1	Carbon Reduction	Complete those tasks in Year one Climate Action Plan that have to do with reducing carbon in the wider district	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	Base budget
TCE2.2	Zero Carbon Construction Policies	Introduce policies for zero carbon construction requirements	Suzanne Malcolm;	
TCE2.3	Local Plan	Introduce sustainable growth and environmental policies to our Local Plan	Suzanne Malcolm;	
TCE2.4	Local Plan policies for carbon zero building	Ensure our Local Plan contains polices to make new buildings carbon zero to build and to live/work in	Suzanne Malcolm;	
TCE2.6	Air Quality Measure	Improve how we measure air quality. Explore particulate measurement in our sensitive areas. Explore ways to publish AQ measurements in live time, so people can make decisions on whether it's healthy outside for them today	Liz Hayden;	Base budget
TCE2.7	Air Quality Action Plan	Update the Air Quality Action Plans for our AQMAs	Liz Hayden;	
TCE3.8	Retrofit	Work with local partners and Government on funding, policies and programmes to encourage retrofitting houses with sustainable energy schemes, and to help residents to take advantage of schemes that support this work	Liz Hayden; Elizabeth Kingdom	
TCE3.6	Oxford-Cambridge Arc	Take an active role in the Oxford-Cambridge arc to influence the inclusion of sustainable growth and environmental policies	Suzanne Malcolm; Michelle Wells; Andy Egan	
TCE3.7	Growth Deal	Take an active role in the Growth Deal and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 to influence the inclusion of sustainable growth and environmental policies	Michelle Wells Andy Egan	Base budget
BHC1.4	Active Travel	Work with partners to promote Active Travel and to support the development of Local	Suzanne Malcolm;	

		Cycling and Walking Infrastructure, helping to shape new developments that link homes to work, recreation and social spaces within communities		
BHC1.6	Air Quality Management Plan	Update the Air Quality Management Action Plans for the Vale's air pollution hotspots; Work with Oxfordshire County Council to improve how we measure and report air pollution and how we will work with schools and community groups to raise awareness of our clean air campaigns	Liz Hayden;	
BSF2.1	Ethical Procurement Policy	Develop a comprehensive and ethical Procurement Policy that reflects our corporate goals and aims		Base budget
WIP2.5	Community grants and lottery	Refresh our community grants scheme and introduce a Community Lottery to raise funds for groups to develop in line with our corporate objectives	Elizabeth Kingdom	Base budget
WIOI3.2		Council reporting and decision-making templates to include impact on the climate emergency	Adrianna Partridge Elizabeth Kingdom	Base budget

New Priority Climate Action Items

16. In addition to the Corporate Plan projects a number of other projects have been identified as priorities to take forward over the coming year. These are being delivered within current staffing resources.

NEW PRIORITY CLIMATE ACTION ITEMS				
Project	Action	Lead	Notes	
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS				
	Climate Action Plan 2021-24	Develop a three-year Climate Action Plan including the establishment of internal governance and engagement structures. This will be supported by a Communications and Engagement Plan.	Suzanne Malcolm; James Carpenter Andy Egan; Elizabeth Kingdom	See separate paper
	Officer training	Implement training for officers on South Oxfordshire' target and work to address the climate emergency	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	eLearning module(s). Investigate options
COUNCIL PROJECTS				
	Low Carbon Council Estate	Prepare site decarbonisation plans for council buildings including heating and renewable energy options appraisals. Compile data in preparation for external funding applications.	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	
COUNTY WIDE POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS				
	Oxfordshire Growth Board	Advise on Zero Carbon Economy Study and Environmental Advisory Group development	Suzanne Malcolm;	

			Michelle Wells; Andy Egan	
	Ox-Cam Arc	Advise on climate action and environmental principles and seek to ensure the Arc makes a positive contribution to achieving the Council's carbon neutral and nature recovery objectives	Suzanne Malcolm; Michelle Wells; Andy Egan	
	COP26	Participate in the Oxfordshire COP26 Alliance	Michelle Wells; Elizabeth Kingdom	

Climate Action Items Already Commissioned

17. The following projects are either continuing or being carried forward from the previous Year One Work Programme and were budgeted for 2020/21.

CARRY FORWARD AND ONGOING CLIMATE ACTION PROJECTS				
Project	Action	Lead	Notes	
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS				
	Council emissions baseline	Create a 'glidepath' tool that tracks the contribution of delivered and planned projects and external factors towards achieving a carbon neutral council	Suzanne Malcolm Heather Saunders	
	Scenario Modelling	Develop a model to demonstrate the detailed scope and size of actions needed by all stakeholders to achieve a pathway towards a carbon neutral district	Michelle Wells; Andy Egan; Heather Saunders	
	Town Energy Mapping	Provide baseline energy and carbon emissions data and maps for our market towns	Michelle Wells; Elizabeth Kingdom; Heather Saunders	
	Climate Action Briefing	Session for Councillors and staff on the council's Climate Action Plan	Andy Egan; Elizabeth Kingdom	
	Intranet	Internal staff intranet (Jarvis) page on the climate emergency	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	Currently in development
COUNCIL PROJECTS				
	Solar energy	Identify opportunities to invest in solar energy off site and offset the council's own emissions. Research the investment and partnership options available	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	

	Planning Design Guide	Support the development of policies in the Joint South and Vale Design Guide that will contribute towards a carbon neutral district	Adrian Duffield; Heather Saunders	
	Green Travel Plan	Implement a green travel plan for officers and members	Suzanne Malcolm; Elizabeth Kingdom	
	EV fleet	Support teams in preparing a business case for leasing or purchasing electric vehicles for the council's fleet	Suzanne Malcolm; Heather Saunders	
DISTRICT PROJECTS				
	Town Councils Workshops	Work with town councils across the districts and facilitate a workshop to understand theirs and their parishes' local needs in respect of the climate emergency.	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	Town and Parish Council Forum in May 2021
	Grants Programme	Work with the community enablement team to support community led initiatives which address climate change	James Carpenter Elizabeth Kingdom	
	EV Hire Scheme	Initial feasibility study into an electric vehicle hire facility for residents/staff	Adrianna Partridge; Elizabeth Kingdom	
COUNTY WIDE POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS				
	Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy	Work with partners to increase EV charging infrastructure across Oxfordshire.	Liz Hayden; Andy Egan	
	Park and Charge	Work with partners to provide electric charging points in Council car parks.	Liz Hayden; Andy Egan	External funding secured

Corporate Plan Biodiversity Items

18. The greyed-out items were not included in the Council budget for 2021/22.

CORPORATE PLAN BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS				
Project	Description		Lead	Notes
Theme 2: Tackling the Climate Emergency				
COUNCIL PROJECTS				
TCE1.3	Open Space / Land Use Strategy	Include in Councils Open Space Strategy opportunities to increase biodiversity, increase tree cover, and (other things we want to do on Council's open spaces)		
DISTRICT PROJECTS				
TCE3.3	Tree Planting Strategy	Develop a tree-planting strategy and work with partners to plant more trees across the district	Suzanne Malcolm;	

			Dominic Lamb; Andy Egan	
TCE3.4	Biodiversity Net Gain Strategy	Develop a Biodiversity Net Gain Targeting Strategy and contribute to a Nature Recovery Network for Oxfordshire	Adrian Duffield; Dominic Lamb; Andy Egan	Ongoing project. From Planning budget. Part of the Environment Bill and expected to become a statutory duty for local authorities
TCE2.8	Habitat Bank	Explore setting up a Habitat Bank to deliver biodiversity offsetting requirements and facilitate tree planting	Suzanne Malcolm; Dominic Lamb; Andy Egan	Base budget This will cover the exploration (feasibility) phase only.

New Priority Biodiversity Items

19. In addition to the Corporate Plan projects a number of other projects have been identified as priorities to take forward over the coming year. Some of these are being delivered within current staffing resources. Those that are greyed-out require additional resources and will be subject to future discretionary growth.

NEW PRIORITY BIODIVERSITY PROJECTS				
Project	Description		Lead	Notes
FOUNDATIONAL PROJECTS				
	Biodiversity Steering Group	Set up a South and Vale Biodiversity Steering Group to advise and help shape the delivery of the Councils' Corporate Plan biodiversity, nature protection and nature recovery objectives.	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	See separate paper
	Biodiversity Plan	Develop a 10-year biodiversity plan for how the Council will lead on nature protection and recovery.	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	
	Tree Policy	Develop a new tree policy and a tree strategy for South and Vale that covers council owned land, private land and community land.	Suzanne Malcolm; Andy Egan	A new tree policy to be developed as the priority
DISTRICT PROJECTS				
	Tree Planting Programme	Establish a district wide tree planting programme	TBC; Andy Egan	Requires new

				capacity and resources
		Develop proposal for at least one Tiny Forest in partnership with Earthwatch	TBC; Andy Egan	Potential to secure CiL funding
COUNTY WIDE POLICY AND PARTNERSHIPS				
	Local Nature Partnership	Call for the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership (LNP) for Oxfordshire to promote an ambitious nature recovery programme, including tree and meadow planting, rewilding and providing habitats for wildlife including wildlife corridors	Adrian Duffield; Dominic Lamb	Requires ongoing revenue funding. Part of the Environment Bill and expected to become a statutory duty for local authorities.
	Nature Recovery Strategy	Contribution to a county wide strategy to be produced by the Local Nature Partnership (LNP)	Adrian Duffield; Dominic Lamb	Requires a funding contribution from Vale.

Items Considered Business As Usual

20. Climate Action Plan: For the Council to meet the Climate Emergency declaration and Corporate Plan targets, we need a robust strategy and policy framework, that will include a Climate Action Strategy and Plan. This plan will be informed by the Corporate Plan, carbon neutral targets, learning from the year one work programme and critical data from the Council and district baseline data and forthcoming carbon neutral scenario modelling due for completion in May 2021.
21. CEAC support and co-ordination: In order to facilitate the effective running of the CEAC a significant proportion of officer time will be spent liaising with the Chair and CEAC members on agenda and forward plan management and report preparation. This will also be in close liaison with the Cabinet Lead for Climate and Environment projects in the Corporate Plan.
22. Governance: Across the Council we will formalise climate action within our internal governance so that it becomes embedded within business as usual activity. One essential element of this is to establish senior officer engagement in developing and ensuring effective delivery of the Climate Action Plan. This has recently been progressed with the establishment of a Climate Action Steering Group. Other important aspects are procurement and major contract renewal and includes early preparation for the specification of the new leisure facilities and waste management contracts in 2024, ongoing leisure centre maintenance and refurbishment and grounds maintenance. It is important that when other policies are developed or reviewed, they are informed and guided by climate and biodiversity considerations. A policy and strategy guidance document will soon be in place as part of the council's Corporate Delivery Framework. This will provide staff with the tools they need to develop robust fully rounded policy.

23. Engagement: In order to achieve this transformation in the way we do business we need to encourage and support a change in culture so that climate action is embedded at the heart of the organisation. We will engage with staff to ensure that there is a deep understanding of both the climate and ecological emergencies. This will help to build an assured commitment of staff across the organisation. An organisation wide staff and member climate conference will be organised once the Climate Action Plan is approved. This will be followed by staff training in areas such as carbon literacy. We are also proposing to establish a Climate Action Delivery Group of key officers and a network of Green Champions drawn from across the Council staff.
24. Partnership: We will continue to work in partnership to progress our climate action goals. We will collaborate to develop external funding bids in order to deliver agreed targets and commitments. Where appropriate we will adopt a joint South and Vale approach and work with other districts and Oxfordshire County Council, as well as relevant charitable and community organisations. We will actively monitor or participate in projects by trusted partners as resources allow. There may be specific projects that directly contribute to the target that is set which could be funded by the Vale and delivered by outside partners who have an established track record and expertise with the work.
25. Influencing and lobbying: We will continue to seek to positively influence central government policy in relation to the climate and ecological emergencies. We will respond to relevant consultations to make the case for effective central government legislation, policies and funding for local authority climate and nature protection and recovery action.

Climate and ecological implications

26. The implementation of the Council's climate emergency work programme is explicitly designed to achieve positive climate and ecological outcomes. It is understood that embedding consideration of climate and ecological impacts across all Council decision making and project development is an important step towards reducing carbon emissions and making meaningful progress in protecting and restoring the natural world in the Vale.
27. Sustaining and increasing staffing capacity and project funding to implement projects that will reduce council and district carbon emissions and protect and restore nature will be essential in ensuring that the 2021/22 work programme delivers positive impacts.
28. Consideration should be given to the creation of a Biodiversity Lead role that could provide leadership and co-ordination, given the level of commitment in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24 and the recent declaration of an ecological emergency.

Financial Implications

29. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the council's overarching financial position. For Vale, the position reflected in the council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full Council in February 2021 showed that the council is due to receive £2.6 million

less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2021/22 (with the balance coming from reserves including unallocated New Homes Bonus).

30. This funding gap is predicted to increase to over £5 million by 2025/26. As there remains no certainty on future local government funding, following the announcement of a one-year spending review by government, and as the long-term financial consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic remain unknown, this gap could increase further. Every financial decision made needs to be cognisance of the need to eliminate this funding gap in future years.
31. It was noted last year that many items included within the proposed year one programme of work were feasibility studies and it was acknowledged that there would be significant resource implications and additional budget required beyond year one of the programme. This has been reinforced by the agreement of the new Corporate Plan 2020-24. A further key element of the transformation required to embed climate action and nature recovery work across the Council, is that in addition to identifying new resources, existing resources will need to be redirected or reallocated to support commitments in the Corporate Plan 2020-24.
32. The district scenario modelling and Climate Action Plan will inform and help to scope the climate and nature projects that will be tabled for consideration in any future discretionary growth bids, that would be considered as part of a future supplementary estimate.
33. It is equally clear that we cannot as a Council fund and undertake all of the work that is required to achieve the carbon neutral targets for the district. Additional sources of funding and resourcing will be needed in addition to any new budget allocation. This could include government grants, investment by businesses, households, town and parish councils and contributions by environmental charities and community action groups. What we do need to ensure as a Council is that we have the capacity to position ourselves to secure climate action funding made available by central government and other bodies.
34. The Council has allocated funding to employ two Climate Action Lead officers for 12 months until September and December 2021 respectively. This cost has been shared on a 50:50 basis with South Oxfordshire District Council. However, given the breadth and depth of the work programme for 2021-22 and central emphasis of this area in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24 consideration should be given to the longer-term management and delivery of projects in this area.

Legal Implications

35. Carbon neutrality itself is not a legal requirement and consequently there is no legal duty for the Council to undertake actions and activities to achieve this.
36. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. Legal implications may arise in respect of individual projects included within the subsequent work programme as they are scoped, approved by Cabinet and implemented. These will be subject to identification and appropriate action as required.

Risks

37. Climate action is not currently a statutory function for district councils; however local authorities have a statutory duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making (Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) Many of the projects/activities detailed within this report require a funding stream and have resource implications, including implications arising from redirecting current resource from areas across the Council to this agenda if this is the approach the Cabinet decide to take.
38. Moreover, due to the current financial position, it may not be possible to deliver on the full climate and ecological emergency aspirations declared by the Council.
39. The Vale of White Horse District Council is in partnership with the South Oxfordshire District Council and any items implemented in relation to council operations could lead to complexities, due to shared resources and offices at 135 Milton Park.

Conclusion

41. This report describes the process by which projects were identified for the coming year. It further details which projects have been prioritised from the Corporate Plan 2020-24 and included in the budget approved by Council in February 2021. The report further sets out the Corporate Plan projects that may be brought forward in as part of future discretionary growth.
42. The report also sets out the ongoing projects the Council is already involved in to address the climate and ecological emergencies, and detailed items considered business as usual for council officers as well as items which have already been commissioned within the existing 2020/21 budget to support meeting the climate emergency targets.