

CEAC briefing paper

Author: Jessie Fieth

Email: jessie.fieth@southandvale.gov.uk

Head of Service: Tim Oruye

Date: 27 November 2023

Progress update – activities to encourage retrofitting

Purpose of paper

1. In January 2023, CEEAC/CEAC members were asked to provide a steer on actions the councils should take to upscale the retrofitting of buildings in the district. This paper is coming to CEEAC/CEAC for information and provides an update on the activities taken by the councils since then.

Corporate/strategic objectives

2. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are committed to accelerating the number of homes being retrofitted in the districts. Significant progress is needed in this area to meet the ambitions set out in our Corporate Plans:
 - South Oxfordshire - Achieve our own zero carbon target by 2025 and support others to achieve the district target of zero carbon by 2030.
 - South Oxfordshire – Support and encouragement for the retrofit of our existing housing stock for low-carbon performance and to eliminate fuel poverty (in homes and infrastructure that meets local needs theme).
 - The Vale of White Horse has committed to being a carbon neutral district by 2045, with a 75 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.
 - The Vale of White Horse – To work with local partners and Government to encourage retrofitting houses with sustainable energy schemes; help residents take advantage of schemes that come along to help with costs (in tackling the climate emergency theme).

Background

3. Retrofitting involves making changes to existing homes to improve energy efficiency, remove fossil fuel heat sources and replace with low carbon alternatives, and generate renewable energy onsite. Retrofitting is a critical part of achieving net zero and a major programme for retrofitting existing homes is required to reach net zero in our districts. Currently 28.9% of carbon emissions

in South Oxfordshire and 24.8% of carbon emissions in Vale of White Horse come from residential buildings.

4. At the CEEAC/CEAC meetings in January 2023 many different ideas were discussed, both quick wins and longer terms projects. Significant progress has been made in this area, with lots more to come.
5. The section below gives an update on the progress and activities that have been taken to upscale the retrofitting of both homes and community buildings within the district.

Main subject of report

6. Creating and promoting sources of information

- a. Information continues to be added to both council websites. We now have webpages on *retrofitting your home*, *improving the energy efficiency of your community building*, *what you can do as a community to help tackle climate change* and *what town and parish councils can do*, as well as many other pages on other environment-related topics.
- b. We have worked with colleagues across the county to add information about improving the energy efficiency of homes and businesses to the [Climate Action Oxfordshire website](#).
- c. The climate and biodiversity team have published a briefing on retrofitting homes and community buildings which summarises the retrofitting support and funding that is available to help district, town and parish councillors to promote energy efficiency and retrofitting advice in their areas. The guide is available on the [South](#) and [Vale](#) websites.

7. Support for community groups and town and parish councils

- a. The climate and biodiversity team hosted two webinars for town and parish councils and community groups. The first of these took place on 11 July 2023 and focused on improving the energy efficiency of community buildings. Recordings of the presentations are available [here](#) for South and [here](#) for Vale. The second took place on 14 November 2023 and focused on how groups can support and encourage retrofitting of homes in their areas. Recordings of the presentations are available [here](#) for South and [here](#) for Vale.
- b. The Didcot Garden Town team is organising an energy champion training session with the Low Carbon Hub – local community groups and organisations are being invited to train as energy champions. This will enable people to learn about how they can advise households on saving money on their energy bills with the added benefit of reducing their carbon footprint. The training is likely to take place in January 2024.
- c. As well as the engagement discussed above, the climate and biodiversity team launched an easy-to-use carbon calculator for town and parish councils to use to record and monitor the carbon emissions of their own operations. The tool has been developed by sustainability consultants, Anthesis, and adapted by climate officers to support South and Vale's town and parish councils to develop their own net zero plans.

- d. We actively promote the council grant schemes that local community groups, town and parish councils and organisations can apply to for funding for local retrofitting projects. The climate and biodiversity proactively work with the grants team to make sure that the grant conditions encourage action on climate change (most recently, for example, for the new food and warmth grants scheme).

8. Loaning thermal imaging cameras

- a. The councils have two thermal cameras that community groups and town and parish councils can borrow free of charge. Demand has continued to be high, with the cameras already reserved for most of the 2023/24 season.
- b. On 2 November 2023, a number of community groups and town and parish councils came together to learn about running a thermal imaging project in their communities, organised by the climate and biodiversity team. The highly informative session was led by Dale Hoyland from Oxfordshire County Council and covered how to use a thermal imaging camera, including the best conditions for getting the best images, and how to interpret the images.

9. Promoting green skills

- a. Both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse have prioritised 'E39 – green skills' in our UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plans. Each council has £100,000 to spend in 2024/25 for green skills courses to enable at least 50 residents to gain a green qualification or complete a relevant green skills course. The economic development team are currently exploring options, which may include working directly with local training providers.

10. Countywide collaboration, including FutureFit Oxfordshire funding bid

- a. The Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan was endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in March 2023. It sets out 14 actions to reach net zero, chosen as the ones which would be most effectively delivered through joint working between Oxfordshire local authorities and stakeholders. From these 14 actions, five have been identified for immediate priority and buildings decarbonisation is one of these.
- b. Oxfordshire County Council's Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 funding launched in April 2023 and supports energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating for low-income households without gas central heating. Both councils are consortium members in this scheme so we are actively promoting the scheme to eligible residents in our districts.
- c. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are partners in Oxford City Council's FutureFit Oxfordshire (FOx) funding bid to Innovate UK's Net Zero Pathfinder Places programme. The project will aim to create an 'enabling environment' for retrofitting one stop shops (such as Cosy Homes Oxfordshire and Energy Solutions Oxfordshire) to thrive and scale up activity. This will include exploring innovative financing mechanisms, including a salary sacrifice scheme, to facilitate householders to retrofit their homes. The district council's input will primarily be within the work packages focusing on governance and financing. The funding decision is expected in late November 2023, with an expected project start date in February 2024, ending in October 2025.

Financial Implications

11. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

12. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Climate and ecological impact implications

13. The climate and ecological impact implications are contained in the body of this report.

Equalities Implications

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

Risks

15. There are no risks arising from this report.

Recommendations

16. This report is for information only