



Climate Action

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

18 March 2025

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Executive Summary & Recommendations

The Climate Action Scrutiny Inquiry was established by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a further year in 2024-2025 to review the implementation and development of the Council's Climate Action strategy and action plan in pursuit of the corporate net zero targets. This includes reducing the District Council's own greenhouse gas emissions, as well as reducing the area of the district greenhouse gas emissions as a whole.

Members of the Scrutiny Working Group

Councillor Grace Conway-Murray – Chairman
Councillor John Broad - Vice-Chairman
Councillor Barry Wood
Councillor Isabel Creed
Councillor Les Sibley

Aims and Objectives

- i). Examine the work of Cherwell Council's Climate Team and other teams in pursuit of the corporate net zero targets
- ii). Monitor progress on reducing Cherwell Council's greenhouse gas emissions
- iii). Monitor progress of reducing the district's greenhouse gas emissions
- iv). Provide guidance on the strategic direction of Cherwell Council's climate action.

Cherwell Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, and as part of this committed to ensure its own operations and activities are carbon net zero by 2030 do its part to support the district as a whole to become carbon net zero.

To achieve this, the Council has published a [Climate Action Framework](#) and an associated [Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2024](#).

Witnesses to the Inquiry

The Scrutiny Working Group has considered evidence from the Executive Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities, Councillor Tom Becket and the Council's lead officers for Climate Change; Jo Miskin - Climate Action Manager, Environmental Services and Hitesh Mahawar - Climate Change Programme Manager, as well as expert witnesses during its inquiry.

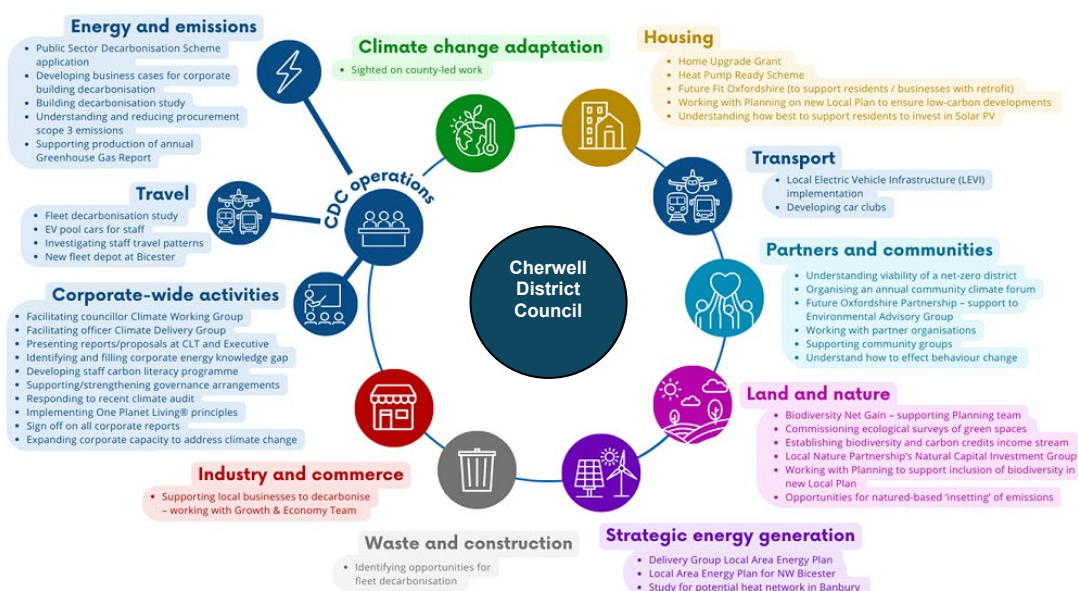
We have also received evidence from Mona Walsh Assistant Director of Property and Christina Cherry - Planning Policy, Conservation & Design Manager at Cherwell Council.

In addition, we have received evidence from external expert witnesses Dr Marco Raugei - Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow in Mechanical Engineering, Oxford Brooks University and Andy Wainwright MSc CEng FIET - Whole System Manager, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks.

In evidence the Scrutiny Working Group considered the context to the Climate Change Programme and key elements for the Climate strategy in Cherwell, including:

- Governance Arrangements
- Strategy and Action Plan
- Cherwell Council and District Emissions
- Recent Achievements
- Challenges in Reaching Net Zero
- Next Steps.

The Working Group has considered the climate impact of local plans and how they contribute to the Climate Action Plan, as well as the solar strategy for the district. Officers from the planning department discussed the climate impact of planning applications.



Cherwell Council's approach requires new relationships with its stakeholders, new expectations and engagement with its supply chain, and a review of where it is best placed to support others to take action.

The Council reports against its climate action framework in order to inform future corporate planning in the council. The Council also reports on its carbon emissions over time to help monitor, evaluate, review and communicate progress.

The Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group met throughout the 2022-2024 municipal years and reviewed progress on climate action as well as supporting the development of the Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2024.

On 15 October 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that this Scrutiny Working Group continue its work through the 2024-2025 municipal

year. At the completion of its work for 2024-25, the Scrutiny Working Group agreed on eight recommendations to the Council's Executive, made through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendations

In recognition to Cherwell Council's 2030 Net Zero target, we recommend the following to be approved by Executive and implemented.

A New Council Climate Action Strategy

Recommendation 1

That a new Council Climate Action Strategy be prepared for agreement by the Executive and full Council, with clear strategies, ambitious yet realistic objectives to deliver year on year reductions in the Council's carbon emissions, strategies, and targets to reduce District area emissions, to be agreed by full Council in 2025.

Corporate Priorities

Climate action needs to sit as a higher corporate priority than is currently the case, given that the required progress is not being made.

Recommendation 2

That Climate Action be made a higher key corporate priority, reflected in the Council key priorities (be agreed by Council), to be reflected in the Council's Corporate Plan, service delivery plans, and its annual and quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports, with ambitious but realistic measurable targets and performance measures.

Environmental Impact Assessments

Recommendation 3

That the Council request that more detailed Environmental Impact Assessments be included in reports to the Planning Committee.

Recommendation 4

That an evaluation and feasibility assessment of interim options and measures to replace the Council fleet of vehicles with alternatives for less CO2 emissions.

Buildings Emissions

We recognise, in the light of the increase in Cherwell Council's emissions in 2023 - 2024, the need for much greater focus on reducing buildings emissions to achieve 2030 Net Zero target.

Recommendation 5

That the Council agree much greater focus, plans and targets, for reducing buildings emissions to achieve 2030 Net Zero targets, with clearly assessed deliverable measures to be put in place over the next five years, with clear objectives, milestones, and implementation dates.

Recommendation 6

That Council buildings be refurbished with space heating systems replace gas powered radiators and insulation for energy conservation.

Recommendation 7

That the feasibility of introducing air-to-air heat pumps in buildings throughout the entire Council estate.

Investment in Renewable Energy

We acknowledge that investment is needed in Cherwell Council's corporate capacity to manage and optimise renewable energy and new technologies.

Recommendation 8

That the Council agree hypothecated investment in Cherwell Council District corporate capacity to manage and optimise renewable energy and new technologies.

1 Introduction

1.1. In July 2019 Cherwell Council resolved to call on the Leader to declare a 'Climate Emergency'¹ and pledge to make Cherwell District Council carbon net zero by 2030.

1.2. The Council also asked the Leader to:

- Call on the government to provide the powers and resources to make the 2030 target possible;
- Continue to work with partners across the Cherwell and region to deliver this new goal through all relevant strategies;
- Endorse the cross party position taken by Local Government Association (LGA), in particular to call on the Government to explore supporting domestic implementation of Sustainable Development Goals through funded partnership roles within each local authority area.



Biodiversity at [Bloxham Slade Nature Reserve](#)

Since then, the Cherwell District Council has confirmed the declaration of a Climate Emergency, and committed to ensure the Council's own operations and activities are carbon net zero by 2030 and do its part to support the district to become carbon net zero. To carry this out the Council has agreed a Climate Action Framework and Climate Action Plan 2023-2024, which is now revised for November 2024 to April 2026.

1.3. The Climate Action Strategies and initiatives are managed and coordinated by the Council's Climate Team. The Council's Climate Team is made up of a Climate Action Manager, a Climate Change Programme Manager, Climate and Natural Environment Officer and Sustainable Business Development Officer.

Governance Arrangements

1.4. The Climate Strategies themselves are corporately owned and led by the full Council, the Council's Executive, the Corporate Leadership Team and Council departments.

1.5. The SRO reports through the Council's Strategic Programme Board and Corporate Management Team, as well as to the Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities, the Leader and the Council Executive, with oversight from the Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group and the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

¹ <https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/documents/g3238/Public%20minutes%20Monday%2022-Jul-2019%2018.30%20Council.pdf?T=11>

- 1.6. All reports that go to Executive and Corporate Leadership Team to continue to include an Environmental Impact section.
- 1.7. The Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group has reviewed overall progress of Action Plan.
- 1.8. It was noted that in the Climate Action Plan it states that the Executive and officers will report twice a year to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on climate change progress, so this is something to ensure happens in the 2025-2026 committee cycle and Scrutiny Work Programme.

Cherwell Council Spheres of Influence

- 1.9. Cherwell District Council, as a substantial organisation within the area, as a major provider of local public services and also as a local planning authority, has varying degrees of influence over climate action and carbon reduction, working with partner organisations within the area where it can on its own have less direct influence.
- 1.10. The main direct influence we have is over our own building estate, operations, and fleet of vehicles. After that, the Council can have significant influence through its Local Plan and local planning decisions, as well as over partner organisations and services that are provided by the Council. The Council also seeks to influence as a community leader through its own campaigns.



Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- 1.11. During this inquiry the Scrutiny Working Group has considered Cherwell Council's Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Cherwell District Council's emissions have gradually been reducing over time but became stagnant in the past five years and has now slightly increased in the latest 2023-2024 reporting year.

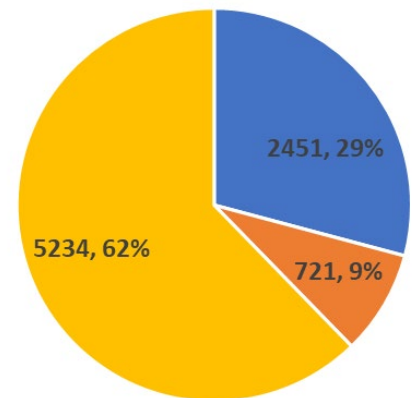
2. Climate Action Strategies and Action Plan

2.1. Of the total emissions in the District, the Council has limited control over the majority of emissions but could still do a lot more to reduce its own emissions.

2.2. The Transforming Cherwell Action Plan 2023-2024 sets out the activities needed over the 12 months until October 2024, to reduce the emissions of both the Council and the Cherwell district. Emissions are categorised into 'scopes', in particular, Scopes 1, 2 and 3.

- Scope 1 – includes direct emissions from the burning of fuels, e.g., gas/petrol/diesel
- Scope 2 – includes indirect emissions from the generation of electricity
- Scope 3 – includes indirect emissions from an organisation's supply chain.

CDC's GHG Emissions by Scope



■ Scope 1 ■ Scope 2 ■ Scope 3

2.3. The target for Cherwell Council is to be carbon net zero by 2030. This relates only to Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, where the Council has a strong degree of influence.

Cherwell's Climate Action Plan

2.4. Within the Action Plan there are also actions which relate to Scope 3 emissions, which need to be better understood in order to plan for reductions, (e.g., by working closely with the supply chain).

2.5. The Scrutiny Working Group reviewed the Cherwell District Council Climate Action Plan This plan was revised during the autumn of 2024, in close consultation with all services of Cherwell District Council.

2.6. This built on the previous Climate Action Plan 2023-24, which was based upon Climate Change Framework 2020, which sets the Council's ambitions for both the council and the wider district to become carbon net zero.

2.7. The plan reflects several initiatives which are taking place across the county in which Cherwell District Council is a participant, in particular the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PaZCO) report and plan, which has been endorsed by Cherwell Council.

2.8. PaZCO is overseen by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, whose officer and councillor Environment groups have representation from Cherwell District Council.



- 2.9. The Climate Action Plan takes into account the following documents:
- Cherwell Council Climate Action Plan 2023-24
 - Cherwell Council Climate Action Framework 2020
 - Cherwell Council Carbon Management Plan 2022
 - Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan
 - One Planet Living – Gap Analysis of Cherwell Council's Policies.
- 2.10. The actions on the natural environment have also been reviewed and supported by Oxfordshire's Local Nature Partnership, of which the Council is a member. Biodiversity enhancement has a significant part to play in helping us with our climate change response.
- 2.11. The Action Plan includes the activities needed to reduce the emissions of both the Council and the Cherwell district until April 2026. Over 125 actions have been identified.

A New Council Climate Action Strategy

- 2.12. During the inquiry, the Scrutiny Working Group heard that it was time to refresh and review the Council Climate Action Strategy and we have considered options and emphasis for the new strategy, taking into account the Council's current business pressures, climate action performance and current prospects and ambitions for climate action locally and nationally.
- 2.13. In view of this, we are recommending the development of a new Council Climate Action Strategy for Cherwell, with clear strategies, ambitious yet realistic objectives to deliver year on year reductions in the Council's carbon emissions, strategies, and targets to reduce District area emissions.
- 2.14. This needs to be developed in the near future and set new ambitious yet realistic targets for carbon emission reduction both for the Council and the District as whole. As the plan affects the organisations across the departments and corporately it will need to be subject to cross departmental consultation and agreed corporately but also agreed by the Executive. Such a plan should also ideally be brought to full Council for agreement and form part of the Council's Policy Framework.

Recommendation 1

That a new Council Climate Action Strategy be prepared for agreement by the Executive and full Council, with clear strategies, ambitious yet realistic objectives to deliver year on year reductions in the Council's carbon emissions, strategies, and targets to reduce District area emissions, to be agreed by full Council in 2025.

Corporate Priorities

- 2.15. The Council is ageing a new Corporate Plan and Priorities. We believe that Climate action needs to sit as a higher corporate priority than is currently the case, given that the required progress is not being made. We are therefore recommending that Climate Action be formally agreed by the Executive, the

corporate Leadership Team and by the Council as one of the key corporate priorities, reflected in the Council service delivery plans, and its annual and quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports, with ambitious but realistic measurable targets and performance measures.

- 2.16. In this way it is hoped that climate action will be better integrated into the services delivery plans and the Council's budget setting.

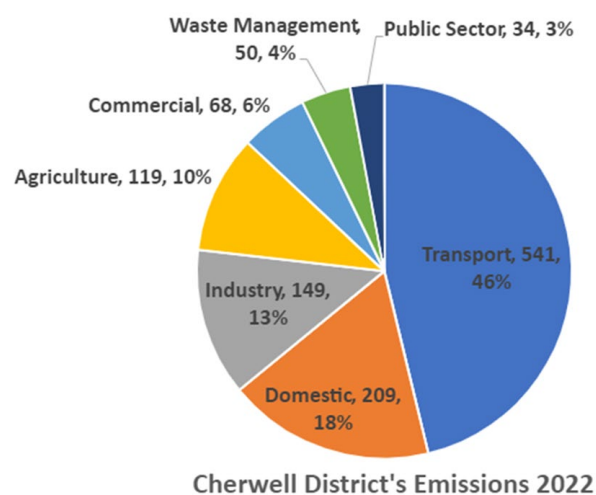
Recommendation 2

That Climate Action be made a higher key corporate priority, reflected in the Council key priorities (be agreed by Council), to be reflected in the Council's Corporate Plan, service delivery plans, and its annual and quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports, with ambitious but realistic measurable targets and performance measures.

3 Cherwell District Area

- 3.1. Looking at the sectors that contribute most to climate change proportionately provides a view on the areas that need to adapt most to meet our Districts carbon reduction objectives.

- 3.2. The Council can only Directly control a part of this and other areas it can exercise influence, especially working with in partnership with other local organisations.



- 3.3. During the inquiry we have considered the Council's influence over carbon emissions in the District area. Apart from control over its own emissions as a significant local organisation, the Council has inference over carbon emissions as the Local Planning Authority and through its Local Plan.

Cherwell's Local Plan

- 3.4. The Local Plan is a document that sets out a vision and a framework for the future development of the District area as a whole, including interrelated policies and strategies for land development use and specifications for development controls. Including issues such as housing, employment, and business and they identifies where development should take place and areas where development should be restricted.
- 3.5. It is prepared by Cherwell Council as the Local Planning Authority in consultation with the wider community and is reviewed at least every five years. Once in place, Local



Plans become part of the statutory development plan, which is the starting point for determining local planning applications.

- 3.6. Cherwell's Local Plan includes a Strategic Objective Theme "*Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change and Ensuring Sustainable Development*", which sets out the principles that underpin the local planning approach.
- 3.7. These include promoting net-zero carbon new developments, through sustainable construction standards, nature-based solutions and low embodied carbon to ensure new developments deliver the highest viable energy efficiency, including the use of decentralised energy and support a local zero-carbon energy system that reduces Cherwell's reliance on global fossil fuels and prioritises community energy.
- 3.8. The Council's Local Plan aims to deliver developments that efficiently use local natural resources that minimise and are resilient to the impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events such as flooding, drought and heatwaves and prioritising active travel and increase opportunities for public transport, high standards of connectivity and Reducing dependency on the private car as a mode of travel, facilitating the creation of a net-zero-carbon transport network.

Renewable Energy Farms

- 3.9. One of the issues that was considered is the extent to which the Council can set aside land for renewable provision, such as "wind farms" for wind electricity generation or "solar farms" for solar electricity generation. The Scrutiny Working Group heard in evidence that Cherwell's Local Plan does not allocate any land for renewable energy in the district. There are, however, several sites that have been granted planning permission, but we do not include them in the Local Plan.
- 3.10. A "wind farm" or wind power plant is a group of wind turbines in the same location used to produce electricity. Wind farms vary in size from a small number of turbines to several hundred wind turbines covering an extensive area.
- 3.11. "Solar farms" or rather *photovoltaic power stations*, are large-scale grid-connected photovoltaic power system (PV system) designed for the supply of electrical power onto the grid. They are different from most building-mounted and other decentralised solar power because they supply power at the utility level, rather than to a local user or users.

The Botley West Solar Farm

- 3.12. A significant local development application, which impinges on Cherwell area, is the proposed [Botley West photovoltaic power plant](#). Botley West is a proposed £800m solar farm, covering about 1,000 hectares (2,471 acres) of Oxfordshire countryside, with 90% of it owned by Blenheim Estates. The project is considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, meaning

the application must be considered by the government, not local councils, although as part of the planning process, relevant parties, including the local authorities in which the development sits, can submit their response to the plans.

- 3.13. The Botley West application is a National Strategic Infrastructure Project (NSIP). NSIPs include significant developments like wind farms. They are decided by the [Planning Inspectorate](#)², with Cherwell District Council as a consultee as the local authority.
- 3.14. During the scrutiny inquiry we received oral evidence from expert witness Dr Marco Raugei - Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow in Mechanical Engineering, Oxford Brooks University. Dr Marco Raugei provided a brief introduction to his research on renewable energy, photovoltaics and energy transition scenarios and answered questions on the committee.
- 3.15. The Scrutiny Working Group put questions to Dr Marco Raugei on various interrelated to the Cherwell Climate Action strategy and plans and considering the technical feasibility of options and alternatives being considered. This included the feasibility of domestic solar panels, generation, and storage of solar energy, as well as network infrastructure and technology.
- 3.16. A key consideration is how to overcome constrained electrical grid capacity and difficulties in securing connections, an issue that is already posing a challenge for housing and commercial developments across Oxfordshire.
- 3.17. The Scrutiny Working Group also received oral evidence from Andy Wainwright - Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks – (SSEN). Andy Wainwright gave a presentation covering the role and work Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) carries out as an energy supplier within Cherwell and their goals for decarbonization and Net Zero.
- 3.18. The Scrutiny Working Group put questions to Andy Wainwright on the involvement of energy companies within Local Plan development, the infrastructure delivery plan, and the Capacity of the network versus demand brought by speculative development.
- 3.19. The Scrutiny Working Group have reviewed Cherwell's new Draft Solar Strategy and on 10 March 2025 considered a presentation from the Council's consultants, *Local Partnerships*, with an opportunity to ask questions.

² The Planning Inspectorate is an executive agency of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government with responsibility for making decisions and providing recommendations and advice on a range of land use planning-related issues across England. The Planning Inspectorate deals with planning appeals, nationally significant infrastructure projects, planning permission, examinations of Local Plans and other planning-related and specialist casework.

Environmental Impact Assessments

- 3.20. During the scrutiny inquiry we received oral evidence from Christina Cherry, the Council's Planning Policy, the Council's Conservation and Design Manager, on planning policy and Cherwell District Councils Climate goals. The Scrutiny Working Group put questions to Christina Cherry on the inclusion of climate and environmental impacts within planning applications as well as the integration of climate actions within the Local Plan, NPPF and Development Plan.
- 3.21. In considering the process of assessing local planning applications, Members felt that greater clarity might help to improve the local planning decision making, especially when the Councils climate priorities have been included in the Local Plan. It was felt that when reports come before the Planning Committee, it was not always as clear as it could be what the climate considerations might be on weighing up a planning application.
- 3.22. The Conservation and Design Manager was able to offer some advice on this, although also cautionary advice, as the planning process can be quite a technical area, and the Planning Committee is a quasi-judicial process that can only consider planning applications against criteria allowed legally and within the agreed Local Plan specifications and policies.
- 3.23. Members felt that greater detail in the reports might help identify relevant considerations on climate considerations allowed and in view of that the Scrutiny Working Group is recommending that the Executive and Council consider requesting that more detailed Environmental Impact Assessments be included in reports to the Planning Committee.

Recommendation 3
That the Council request that more detailed Environmental Impact Assessments be included in reports to the Planning Committee.

Oxfordshire LEAP

- 3.24. The Local Area Energy Plans are important for identifying the local activities and projects needed to manage the transition to cleaner energy in a fair and equal way.
- 3.25. Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council and West Oxfordshire, Cherwell, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils have joined together, under the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, to deliver pioneering local area energy plans (LAEPs) for Oxfordshire, to address climate change and secure cleaner, more affordable energy for the county. The six Oxfordshire councils are working together to develop Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) for Oxfordshire. Ove Arup & Partners have been appointed as experienced lead consultants in the development of the Local Area Energy Plans.

- 3.26. On 18 February 2025 Members of the Scrutiny Working Group attended an Oxfordshire Local Area Energy Planning (LEAP) online briefing for members and senior officers from all Oxfordshire local authorities. (You can read more about this Partnership [here](#).)
- 3.27. This was an opportunity to learn about the Oxfordshire local area energy planning process and how it is critical to reaching net zero in Oxfordshire, and to hear about how and when you will be able to input into the work, as well as the local area energy planning process in Oxfordshire, including the reasons for doing it, what the process is, the role of the councils and what the outputs and next steps will be.

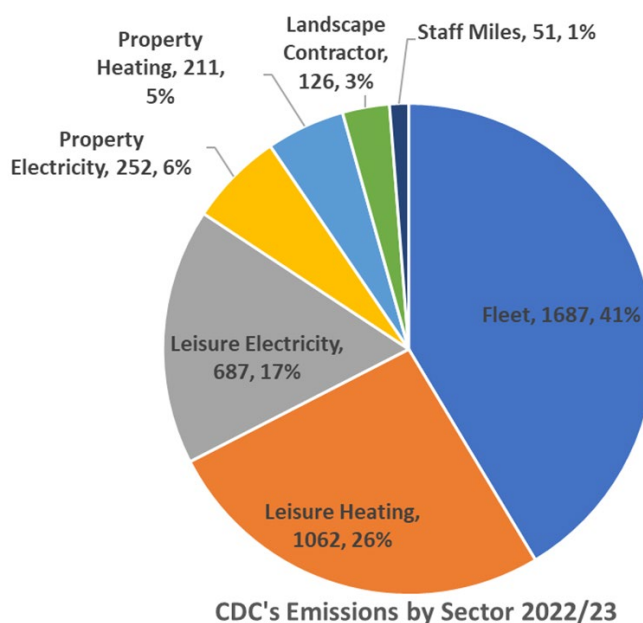
4. Cherwell's Council Emissions

- 4.1. We have reviewed Cherwell Council's own Greenhouse gas emission and looked at this broken down by category. Considering emissions by sector, it can be seen that the majority of the Council's carbon emissions are from buildings (54% if we include Property and Leisure) the fleet (41%).

- 4.2. Since 2008-2009, Cherwell Council's greenhouse gas emissions have reduced by 40%.

- 4.3. In 2022/23 Cherwell Council's annual emissions were down 3% from the previous year to 4077 tonnes of CO₂, with:

- 42.9% from leisure centres' electricity and heating
- 41.4% from the fleet
- 11.4% from corporate buildings electricity and heating
- 3 per cent from landscape maintenance
- 1.3 per cent from business mileage.³



- 4.4. The Council's [greenhouse gas report](#) show how the Council is reducing the carbon emissions of its estate and operations⁴, however it should be noted that the rate of progress is slower than that required to reach 2030.

³ 2020 Climate Action Framework "Transforming Cherwell", Cherwell District Council.

⁴ <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/69/pollution/942/greenhouse-gas-report>

Cherwell Council's Offsetting

- 4.5. During the inquiry we also considered carbon offsetting as part of the Council's strategy for achieving net zero. Carbon offsetting is a carbon trading mechanism that enables entities to compensate for offset greenhouse gas emissions by investing in projects that reduce, avoid, or remove emissions elsewhere.
- 4.6. When carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere, its climate impact can be cancelled out by absorbing equal amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. Organisations and individuals can thus compensate for the climate impact of their greenhouse gas emissions by supporting projects that reduce or store carbon emissions.

The Council's Fleet

- 4.7. During the inquiry we have also considered the options for the renewal of the Council's fleet of vehicles to less carbon intensive technologies, including the financial impact versus the environmental impact. officers advised that a study into electric vehicles was in progress. It was noted that recommendations from the CAWG could feed into that report to be presented in the 2025/26 municipal year.
- 4.8. The Council's fleet of vehicles is a significant contributor to the Council's own carbon emissions. This includes the Council's fleet of refuse collection vehicles. We have heard, however, that the cost of replacing the Council's fleet is currently prohibitive, with estimates of £500,000 per vehicle. This will likely make replacing these vehicles a longer-term ambition.
- 4.9. In consideration of the fact that these vehicles are a significant contributor to the Council's carbon emissions, we are however, recommending that the Executive carry out an evaluation and feasibility assessment of interim options and measures to replace the Council fleet of vehicles with alternatives for less CO2 emissions.



A Cherwell District Council Electric Van with Kevin Busby - Fleet Supervisor, behind the wheel

Recommendation 4

That an evaluation and feasibility assessment of interim options and measures to replace the Council fleet of vehicles with alternatives for less CO2 emissions.

Buildings Emissions

- 4.10. During the inquiry the Scrutiny Working Group considered the carbon emission from the Council's own estate, including leisure centres and Council buildings. During this the Council is just now planning a move of its main offices from Bodicote House in Bodicote to Castle Quay in Banbury. This is an opportunity to reduce the Council's own carbon emission on its estate, as the new building is likely to be much more energy efficient.
- 4.11. Overall, however, reducing the Council's own carbon emissions to reach its targets remains challenging and recent data has shown a recent increase in emissions. We recognise, in the light of the increase in Cherwell Council's emissions in 2023 - 2024, the need for much greater focus on reducing buildings emissions to achieve 2030 Net Zero target. In view of this, we are recommending that the Council agree much greater focus for reducing buildings emissions to achieve 2030 Net Zero targets, with clearly assessed deliverable measures to be put in place over the next five years.

Buildings Emissions Targets

- 4.12. The Council does not currently have any KPIs for decarbonisation of its own estate and given that this should be a priority issue for the Council, as we have recommended, these need to be developed.
- 4.13. The new KPIs should be carefully considered so that they effectively measure implementation of these priorities, with careful consideration across several settings/situations and reflecting the varying degrees of control that the Council has.

Recommendation 5

That the Council agree much greater focus, plans and targets, for reducing buildings emissions to achieve 2030 Net Zero targets, with clearly assessed deliverable measures to be put in place over the next five years, with clear objectives, milestones, and implementation dates.
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- 4.14. Cherwell Council only has direct responsibility and control of some buildings and others are leased to third parties and they as tenants have responsibility for the day to day operation of the buildings. The Council's targets and KPIs will have to reflect this, and we will need to work with third parties to achieving shared objectives.

Castle Quay

- 4.15. The new Council main offices at Castle Quay centre have not been assessed or audited for carbon footprints, although the Council has already concluded this move. Furthermore, there is no date at present for when this will happen, or result be available.
- 4.16. Specific data on carbon emissions for move to Castle Quay offices is therefore not yet available. The working assumption, as confirmed in the business case for the move, is that the smaller floor area and more efficient systems will use less energy. The new offices will have an EPC B rating whereas Bodicote House is an EPC E rating.
- 4.17. Although we expect that the new Council offices would likely be an improvement in energy efficiency and carbon emissions, as they are a more modern build, we would assume that such an assessment should be included in the near future. This would need to be procured.

Decarbonising the Future

- 4.18. We have considered what further specific measures could be put in place to take decarbonisation of Cherwell Council's buildings forward in the future. One of the main ways we can do this is by Reducing heat loss from Cherwell Council building stock by improving fabric of the buildings, both thermal and airtightness, to minimise heat loss/energy use. This may however be costly and require staff and resources.
- 4.19. It should also be possible change lights fittings in building to LED and introduce controls that minimise the time that the lights are on. This is, potentially, much less costly and a "quick easy win".
- 4.20. The Council could also Improve ventilation with heat recovery where possible and provide controls that manage ventilation rates according to occupancy numbers (CO2 sensors) variable speed control on fans. This may, however, also be costly and require staff and resources.
- 4.21. During the scrutiny inquiry the Scrutiny Working Group was able to receive evidence and put questions to Assistant Director of Property on measures is the Council putting in place de-carbonisation of Cherwell Council's buildings.
- 4.22. We asked the Assistant Director of Property what measures the Council is putting in place decarbonisation of Cherwell Council's buildings. She told us that Salix grant applications for heat pump installation and solar panel



A Solar Car Port at Bicester Leisure Centre

installations have been undertaken at some leisure centres and community buildings, although outputs are still to be verified and recorded due to problems in commissioning and operation of the equipment.

- 4.23. A photovoltaic study on Cherwell Council's properties for potential photovoltaic installation and possible outputs with economic was undertaken in 2023/24. Photovoltaic installations are currently being considered on eight Cherwell Council buildings, contingent on viability and feasibility assessment that are currently being carried out.
- 4.24. The Scrutiny Working Group heard in evidence that several completed schemes are not delivering the expected benefits because installed systems were not properly understood, training and maintenance regimes not understood or implemented. This is an important area for learning to improve future developments.
- 4.25. We also heard that the Resources and Transformation (Property) department do not always have capacity or capability in regard to the installation and ongoing maintenance. Work must be planned and scheduled without the assumption that Property department has all resources required.

Heating Our Buildings

- 4.26. One of the more technical options and alternatives we have considered during the inquiry is the way in which the Council buildings are heated, with leisure centres using more advanced systems, such as air to air heating systems. Other alternatives are space heating systems, which are more efficient in heating particular areas as needed with less heat wasted. A "Space Heater" is a heater used to warm the air in an enclosed area, such as a room or office. We discussed this with the departmental officers and with our expert witness.
- 4.27. We are commending that the Executive consider making Council buildings refurnished with space heating systems replace gas powered radiators and insulation for energy conservation.

Recommendation 6
That Council buildings be refurnished with space heating systems replace gas powered radiators and insulation for energy conservation.

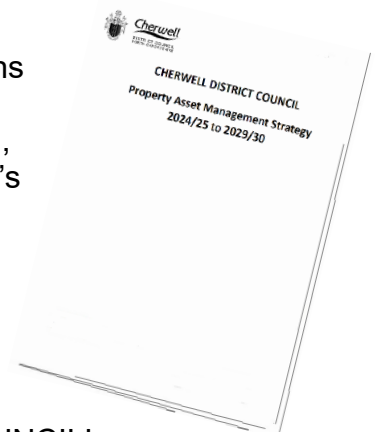
- 4.28. An air source heat pump (ASHP) is a heat pump that can absorb heat from air outside a building and release it inside. It uses a similar process as an air conditioner, but in the opposite direction. ASHPs are the most common type of heat pump usually tend to be used to heat individual houses or flats rather than blocks, districts or industrial processes.
- 4.29. We are recommending that the Executive consider the feasibility of introducing air-to-air heat pumps in buildings throughout the entire Council estate.

Recommendation 7

That the feasibility of introducing air-to-air heat pumps in buildings throughout the entire Council estate.

Assessment and Feasibility

- 4.30. It is essential that options and decisions about decarbonising the Council's estate are properly assessed and considered. Full and proper early engagement and coordination with the Council's Property (Resources and Transformation) department is necessary.
- 4.31. As a minimum this should include:
- the scheme design,
 - the appropriateness of scheme, legal implications, (including procurement etc).
 - the budget implications and allocations for installation and ongoing maintenance,
 - value for money assessments,
 - the Council's capacity to deliver and capacity to manage post installation.
- 4.32. Meeting the challenge of reducing the Council's carbon emissions on its own estate necessarily requires corporate leadership and coordination between departments across the Council, including, crucially Environmental Services, which coordinates the Council's Climate Action Strategies and Resources and Transformation, which manage the Council's estate and property portfolio assets, in line with the Council's [Asset Management Plan](#).



Investment in Renewable Energy

- 4.33. We acknowledge that investment is needed in CHERWELL COUNCIL's corporate capacity to manage and optimise renewable energy and new technologies.

Recommendation 8

That the Council agree hypothecated investment in Cherwell District Council corporate capacity to manage and optimise renewable energy and new technologies.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1. During this scrutiny inquiry we have considered some of the main issues facing the Council in its ambitions to, both as a community leader and local planning authority. Weve considered the two main strategic dimensions; the strategy for reducing carbon emissions for the District and the strategy and

objectives for reducing carbon emissions for the Council estate and housing the Council can control.

5.2. Across the inquiry we have considered six main themes: -

1. Decarbonisation of Cherwell Council's buildings (Property)
2. Decarbonisation of Cherwell Council's fleet (Environmental Services)
3. Offsetting of residual emissions (Environmental Services)
4. Finance/funding for climate projects (Financial Services and Environmental Services)
5. Council's performance on reducing emissions (Environmental Services)
6. Energy Infrastructure - Planning and Land allocation (Planning Policy).

Recent Achievements

5.3. The Scrutiny Working Group noted the following key achievements:

- £6 million invested in Cherwell District Council buildings
- Over 10% of the fleet is electric
- Further energy efficiency actions in our buildings
- EV pool car
- £20k for Solar PV at our Leisure Centres.

Challenges to Reaching Net Zero

5.4. The Scrutiny Working Group also noted the following Challenges in Reaching Net Zero:

- Cost
- Technology
- Behaviour change
- Impacts on our communities
- Internal collaboration
- Resources
- Scale of Issues and Influence

Key Observations

5.5. In addition to the scrutiny recommendations and observations made throughout this scrutiny report, Member of the Scrutiny Working Group made the following key observations:

- The hold ups are not technical although new technology is appearing rapidly and needs to be incorporated when practical.
- The difficulties are financial and require innovative methods to allow residents and businesses to take advantage of low carbon systems

- as in all cases doing so does reduce the running costs for everyone whilst also reducing the carbon being produced.
- There is a danger that large low carbon electricity systems such as solar PV power stations on hectares of countryside are approved but do little or nothing to help residents and businesses in the Cherwell District with reducing their costs or carbon production every day.
- Invest today and make huge savings in future as energy costs increase from the grid or invest in solar “farms” for the country but live with the massive rises in the costs of energy for each resident and business.

Next Steps for Cherwell

- 5.6. We have considered the next steps for Cherwell Council, which will form part of the development of the future strategy. This includes, the completion of new climate Studies Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) applications (Government funding through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, for sustainable, low-carbon adaptation), Financing Cherwell Council’s decarbonisation plans, improving organisational knowledge of Scope 3 carbon emissions and reducing them) and LAEP, LEVI, Adaptation, Natural Capital, Business Emissions

Lessons Learnt

- 5.7. With regards to the development of the Council’s own carbon reduction initiatives, such as fitting a retrofitting sustainable energy systems, we believe it is vital to consider lessons learnt before proceeding with future projects.
- 5.8. It is essential that options and decisions about decarbonising the Council’s estate are properly assessed and considered. Full and proper early engagement and coordination with the Council’s Property (Resources and Transformation) department is necessary.
- 5.9. Some key observations for lessons learnt include:
 - a) Several completed schemes are not delivering the expected benefits because installed systems were not properly understood, training and maintenance regimes not understood or implemented.
 - b) Property do not always have capacity or capability in regard to the installation and ongoing maintenance. Work must be planned and scheduled without the assumption that Property has all resources required. The service comprises a small team and is working at high capacity.
 - c) Options and decisions should be aligned with the Asset Management Strategy (Property Strategy).

- d) An adequate budget for “whole” project needs to be built in, with feasibility, consultants/advisors, fees, additional works needed to install kit and/or adapt for installation.
- e) Ongoing maintenance and integration into existing systems etc – needs to be built in
- f) Need for a robust project plan and Business Case
- g) Occupier engagement/consent is needed – as Cherwell Council do not actively manage all sites.
- h) There is a need to check all sites are suitable for the installations proposed structural, location, setting.
- i) Full advance consideration of integrated procurement issues is important.
- j) Benefits to Cherwell Council – over and above carbon/net zero – should also be quantified and built into the project scheme.
- k) Budget, whether grant, in house or a combination must be sufficient to cover pre, during and post installation. Property do not have resources to take on management of additional work/kit without adequate resources.

The Scrutiny Process and Next Steps

- 5.10. The EDI Scrutiny Working Group was established to carry out this inquiry and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which it is hoped will adopt the report and recommendations. Once the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have agreed the Scrutiny Report and Recommendations, these will be referred to the Executive for consideration and an Executive Response.
- 5.11. There is a two month period within which the Executive should agree its response to the scrutiny report and recommendations. The Executive may agree, reject or amend the scrutiny recommendations made.
- 5.12. The agreed scrutiny recommendations (Executive decisions) made can then be implemented by the Resources and Transformation department and other Council departments as necessary.
- 5.13. After a suitable period of time, the Overview and Scrutiny should request an update on the progress of implementing the Executive Response and decisions made. This is likely to be around one year from when the scrutiny report was agreed, (or whenever might be an appropriate time to review if sooner).

- 5.14. We hope that this scrutiny inquiry has been able to make some constructive contribution to the oversight and development of the Council's challenge to tackle climate change.

Acknowledgements

We would like to say thank you to all of those members and officers who have contributed evidence to the Scrutiny Working Group Inquiry, with particular thanks the expert witnesses who have given their time to contribute their valued expertise.

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The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is appointed by Cherwell District Council to carry out the local authority scrutiny functions.

Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Chairman)
Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor John Broad
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Barry Wood

Formal Minutes

Minutes of proceedings are available to view or download from the Council website at <https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=116>

Committee Staff

The current staff of the committee are:
Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

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Cherwell District Council

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