

<b>This report is public</b>	
<b>Researching Solar Energy Requirements</b>	
<b>Committee</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee</b>	05 February 2024
<b>Portfolio Holder presenting the report</b>	Portfolio Holder for Clean and Green, Councillor Andrew McHugh
<b>Date Portfolio Holder agreed report</b>	22 January 2024
<b>Report of</b>	Corporate Director Communities Ian Boll

## Purpose of report

To seek funding support for the 2024/25 budget to provide resource and budget to better understand the requirements for solar energy within Cherwell District

## 1. Recommendations

The Executive recommends:

- 1.1 To plan in the 2024/25 budget for the undertaking of research into the requirements for solar energy within Cherwell.

## 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Following the December 2023 Council meeting at which unanimous support was given to researching solar energy generation in Cherwell District and better understanding the environment impacts of different generation options, this report provides further detail and recommends options for taking forward the research.

## Implications & Impact Assessments

<b>Implications</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Finance</b>	Funding of £20k has been built into the 2024/25 budget (for one year only) that Executive is recommended to recommend to Council elsewhere on the agenda. Michael Furness, Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer), 16.01.24
<b>Legal</b>	When reviewing whether solar energy is viable in Cherwell regard will need to be had as to what will be permitted development on existing and new property/land and what schemes/grants may be available

	Alison Coles, Legal Services Operations Manager, Solicitor, 16.01.24			
<b>Risk Management</b>	There are no risks arising directly from this report. If any risks are identified later on, they will be managed by the service operational risk and escalated to the Leadership Risk Register as and when deemed necessary. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team Leader, 16.01.24			
<b>Impact Assessments</b>	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
<b>Equality Impact</b>		X		There are no equality implications arising directly as a consequence of this report. All changes to priorities, policies and delivery activity will be subject to complete an Equalities Impact Assessment in line with the Council's EDI guidelines.
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		N/A
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		N/A
<b>Climate &amp; Environmental Impact</b>		X		N/A
<b>ICT &amp; Digital Impact</b>		X		N/A
<b>Data Impact</b>		X		N/A
<b>Procurement &amp; subsidy</b>		X		N/A
<b>Council Priorities</b>	Through effective coordination and prioritisation of infrastructure and community assets, this strategy will support the achievement of the following Council priorities:  Supporting environmental sustainability			
<b>Human Resources</b>	It is proposed this work will be covered by existing workforce so no further HR implications to note. Claire Cox, Assistant Director Human Resources, 23.01.24			

<b>Property</b>	N/A
<b>Consultation &amp; Engagement</b>	Ongoing engagement and the establishment of a delivery oversight board will be part of the approach to monitoring delivery of the strategy. Details will be confirmed in a subsequent update to Executive.

## Supporting Information

### 3. Background

- 3.1 At the December Council meeting, the following Motion was tabled and unanimously agreed:

“Increasing our renewable energy production by wind or solar is vital – yet there is an inconsistency of approach in Cherwell. While wind projects and their suitability for Cherwell’s environment and community needs was independently researched in 2019 for the Local Plan Review, no equivalent independent research was undertaken for solar projects.

The pathway to the increase in solar generation is unclear. Requirements for solar panels on new domestic and commercial buildings are limited and there is no programme for the widespread retrofitting of photovoltaics on public, commercial and domestic properties, nor is there a comprehensive solar power plan integrating all means of solar power generation, only an apparent reliance on the emergence of commercial solar farm proposals. There has been a proliferation of solar farm projects in the district, and we currently face the potential construction (mainly in West Oxfordshire and partially in Cherwell) of the largest solar farm in Europe - and one of the largest in the world.

We ask the Executive to consider commissioning a robust, research-based strategy for solar electricity production in Cherwell, in order to achieve the optimum balance of power generation by solar farms, by roof panels on new commercial and residential developments, and, crucially, their retrofitting on existing public, business and domestic buildings. Two key criteria underpinning this solar power strategy should be environmental impacts and domestic food production needs.”

- 3.2 Cherwell District Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and set target for the council to achieve net zero carbon emissions across its operations and estate by 2030. In addition it committed to supporting the district at large to achieving net zero by 2030 as so far as is possible.
- 3.3 CDC as part of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Environment Advisory Working Group endorsed the Pathways to Net Zero Oxfordshire (PAZCO) report and action plan.

- 3.4 Cherwell District Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and set target for the council to achieve net zero carbon emissions across its operations and estate by 2030. In addition it committed to supporting the district at large to achieving net zero by 2030 as so far as is possible.
- 3.5 CDC as part of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Environment Advisory Working Group endorsed the Pathways to Net Zero Oxfordshire (PAZCO) report and action plan.

## **4. Details**

- 4.1 Council supported the Motion unanimously and this paper presents the costs of committing to the development of a strategy committed to the development of a holistic strategy for the Cherwell area at the Full Council meeting December 2023.
- 4.2 This follows work undertaken to better understand wider energy issues across Oxfordshire and the need for close working with the Distribution System Operators (DSO) to produce Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs), and energy studies for Bicester working with the Energy Systems Catapult.
- 4.3 The County Council will be commissioning work to bring forward Local Area Energy Plans starting in 2024. Bicester, along with other areas in the South East, has energy supply issues which could potentially negatively impact the delivery of growth across the town. Already certain projects are not able to secure the full requirement for energy for their schemes (e.g. TVP Forensic Centre).
- 4.4 An energy study for Bicester would be phased into 2 elements; firstly considering the existing supply and demand issues working closely with National Grid and DSOs to evaluate whether there is still spare capacity within the system and secondly to consider Bicester in relation to a pilot LAEP assessing the technologies which would help to make the town and specifically NW Bicester Eco Town True Zero Carbon.
- 4.5 An opportunity exists to run this Solar Energy Research study alongside the work on Bicester' energy needs and the LAEP work at the County level to achieve added value.
- 4.6 From a planning perspective, the Government revised permitted development rights in November 2023 to make it easier for homes and businesses to install rooftop solar panels more easily without the need for an application for planning permission.
- 4.7 Work on a new Local Plan is ongoing and presents the opportunity for a criteria-based policy to support solar energy development in appropriate locations.
- 4.8 Officer resource – 0.2 FTE officer to develop and lead the research phase, to coordinate with other energy related activity across the council and partners, and to develop and present a strategy for consideration by Executive, with oversight from the Climate Action Working Group.
- 4.9 Budget to commission development of the strategy and necessary studies to support better understanding of solar energy, its contribution towards net zero

targets, environmental considerations, domestic food production impact through land use change and biodiversity.

Year	Description	Budget (£)
2024/5	Officer Resource (Grade J)	Already allocated in climate support officer role as per MTFP
	Commissioning budget	20,000
	HE capacity funding (BGT)	Existing work in commission to develop an energy strategy for Bicester Garden Town Programme will support this.
Total		20,000

## 5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Do Nothing. Under this option, there would be limited understanding of the impact of solar energy generation across the District.

## 6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is amended to include the allocation of resource and budget to support the development of a research paper on solar energy generation for Cherwell and the environmental impacts of solar generation options.

### Decision Information

<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Subject to Call in</b>	Yes
<b>If not, why not subject to call in</b>	N/A
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	All

### Document Information

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	N/A

<b>Background Papers</b>	N/A
<b>Reference Papers</b>	N/A
<b>Report Author</b>	Corporate Director Communities Ian Boll
<b>Report Author contact details</b>	ian.boll@cherwell-dc.gov.uk 0 1295 221628