

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 10 March 2021  
**Report of:** Transition Director  
**Title of Report:** Report back on Zero Carbon Summit

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To report back to Council on the outcomes of the Zero Carbon Oxford Summit, recommend formal adoption of the Zero Carbon Oxford Charter signed by major Oxford partners and employers, and to set out the next steps on Oxford's sprint to become a Zero Carbon City by 2040 or sooner.
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Tom Hayes. Deputy Leader; Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford.
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<b>Recommendations:</b> That Cabinet resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Note</b> the outcomes of the Zero Carbon Summit held in February 2021;</li> <li>2. <b>Formally adopt the Zero Carbon Oxford Charter</b>, including the target date for Oxford to become a Zero Carbon city by 2040; and</li> <li>3. <b>Note</b> the next steps to be taken to set out Oxford's sprint to become a Zero Carbon City by 2040 or sooner.</li> </ol>	

<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1	Advice from Scientific Advisor
Appendix 2	Zero Carbon Oxford Charter
Appendix 3	Summit attendees
Appendix 4	Risk Register

## Introduction and background

1. In common with many local authorities across the country, Oxford City Council declared a climate emergency at the start of 2019. As part of its commitment to tackle this, the Council decided to act quickly and become the first local authority in the country to call a Citizens' Assembly. As a result, Oxford became the first city in the country to hold a Citizens' Assembly to address the issue of climate change and consider the measures that could be taken here and the implications for the city, communities and individuals.
2. Assembly Members were very aware of the scale of the problem and the need for change. Both the scale and the need for change were greater than they had anticipated before the Assembly, yet what they heard – from experts and from fellow Assembly Members – encouraged them that change was possible.
3. In mid-2019 the UK legislated to cut emissions to net zero by 2050. The previous target of a reduction of 80% by 2050 in the 2008 Climate Change Act, has been amended to net-zero emissions by 2050. This Council operates within this new framework established by the UK Parliament.
4. The majority of Assembly Members (90%) felt that Oxford should aim to achieve 'net zero' sooner than 2050. Even among those who agreed with this, there was little consensus on when Oxford should aim to reach 'net zero' instead. Instead, Assembly Members felt that rapid action was required, that the speed of action depended on the area under consideration, and that interim targets would help measure progress.
5. When imagining a 'net zero' Oxford, Assembly Members envisioned Oxford having become a leader in tackling the climate crisis. They were perturbed by the extent to which the burden of change was - in their eyes - being placed on individuals. They sought to know what businesses and government were doing to change their ways.
6. In the December 2019 Cabinet response to the Citizens' Assembly, the view was established that "The existing Low Carbon Partnership has served the city well, contributing to the city meeting the existing target of a 40% reduction in greenhouse emissions across the city by 2020. However, the widespread recognition of the Climate Emergency signals a need to reinvent and reinvigorate that partnership, to agree interim carbon budget targets for the city and to galvanise action across large scale emitters to achieve them."
7. In response to Oxford's Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change, the Council set out its commitment to become "net zero carbon", while developing detailed plans "for further projects to accelerate the reduction in the Council's underlying emissions to achieve the status of being a Zero Carbon Council by 2030 or sooner".<sup>1</sup>
8. Accordingly, the City Council has sought to (1) develop a route to Zero Carbon for the city; (2) identify methods to assess and understand progress; (3) identify

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Paper 19 December 2019

methods to share responsibility for Oxford becoming zero carbon among citizens, neighbourhoods, community groups, businesses, organisations, and local and national government; (4) establish a robust and credible scientific basis for a Zero Carbon Oxford plan; and (5) develop detailed plans for the City Council to be net zero and zero carbon emissions, both to meet the climate emergency and show leadership to partners to do the same.

### **Target date for Zero Carbon Oxford**

9. Since the Citizens' Assembly, the City Council has been working to identify an evidence-based target for becoming a Zero Carbon Oxford sooner than the national legal target of 2050. That work has involved the development of emissions inventories, possible pathways, and, crucially, creating the new role of Scientific Advisor to advise on this important and highly complex issue.
10. In 2020 the Council appointed Professor Nick Eyre, Professor of Energy and Climate Policy at the Environmental Change Institute of the University of Oxford, as Scientific Advisor, with cross-party backing. Professor Eyre's advice has been central to identification of the earliest reasonable date that the city could aspire to become net zero carbon. A summary of Professor Eyre's advice is included in the appendix. The target date identified is 2040.

### **Zero Carbon Council and Leadership**

11. The Council's carbon emissions are around 1% of the total for the city, but the Council has an important role to play in leading by example across the city and further afield, and working together with others, sharing approaches to decarbonisation.
12. Significant progress has been made towards zero carbon status, with an average 5.4% per year reduction in underlying emissions over a five-year period to 31 March 2020. The Council has been exceeding its ongoing target of implementing measures to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 5% of its previous year's emissions.
13. The Council has recently approved a Zero Carbon Council plan (the Council's 4th Carbon Management Plan for 2021/22 to 2029/30). This plan outlines the intensification of the Council's decarbonisation ambition, with the Council aiming to achieve an average annual (absolute) emission cut of 10% (approximately 530tCO<sub>2</sub>e) every year until 2030 – doubling its current business as usual rate of reduction of a 5% year on year reduction target.
14. In its proposed Budget for 2021/2022, the Council will become "net zero carbon" for its direct activities by 2021 - where it pays the energy bills – through offsetting. The goal of Zero Carbon by 2030 will see the acceleration of existing and new programmes to reduce the Council's underlying emissions.
15. The decarbonisation of the Council's estate by 2030 or sooner will demonstrate bold leadership within the city on climate change and underpin our establishment of a Zero Carbon Oxford partnership to achieve a Zero Carbon Oxford by 2040.

## **Zero Carbon Oxford Charter and Partnership**

16. Discussions have been held with organisations that are influential in the city about the formation of a Zero Carbon Oxford partnership. The result of these discussions was a summit and the development of a Charter (included in the appendix).
17. On 4<sup>th</sup> February leaders from City and County Councils, both universities, both hospital trusts, major businesses including BMW, Unipart and LandSec, anchored institutions, and other organisations that are strategically important to achieving a net zero city by 2040 joined together at the Zero Carbon Oxford summit, which met virtually. A full list of attendees is listed in the appendices.
18. Coordinated by Oxford City Council, the Summit provided 21 representatives of major organisations with the opportunity to showcase their climate plans and action, facilitate conversation about a collective vision, and establish a formal partnership and approach to tackling the climate crisis together.
19. The Council's Scientific Adviser addressed the Summit to confirm that the 2040 net zero date was technically achievable but ambitious for the city.
20. The closing of the summit was marked by the reading of the Zero Carbon Oxford Charter, and the creation of a new Zero Carbon Oxford partnership for the city. The new partnership involves those gathered at the Summit as well as enabling a wider range of stakeholders to play their part in cutting Oxford's carbon footprint to zero.
21. The new partnership replaces the Low Carbon Oxford partnership which was established a decade ago with an aim to reduce carbon emissions in Oxford by 40% by 2020, by members managing their own carbon footprints - which the city is on course to achieve. The Partnership changes the focus from organisations managing their own estates, towards collaborative action and using each member's sphere of influence and knowledge to achieve shared goals and initiatives across the City.
22. The joint ambition to become a net zero city by 2040—ten years earlier than the national legal target set by the Government—is a strong sign of the pace and ambition required. It also marks another case of the Council honouring the recommendations of our Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change and taking appropriate action and leadership in line with our climate emergency declaration.

## **Next Steps**

23. By agreeing to join the partnership, organisations will be supporting an ambition of achieving net zero carbon emissions as a city by 2040.

The new partnership will provide:

- a collaborative approach to implementing carbon reduction measures
- enable partners to share their examples of best practice and learn from each other

- develop funding bids and attract financial support for the ambitious and innovative projects which will allow the city to go further and faster in its journey to net zero carbon
  - lobby the UK Government for powers, policy, and funding
  - engage customers, citizens and communities in shared climate action
24. The Partnership will be governed by a Steering Group to provide high level governance for the partnership, comprised of key organisations who are strategically important to reducing emissions in the city of Oxford. The Council's portfolio holder will chair the Steering Group of the new Partnership.
25. The first Steering Group meeting will take place in April to decide administrative matters of the partnership. The administrative support and convening the Steering Group meeting will be undertaken by Oxford City Council in the role of Secretariat in the first year. Future year support will be decided by the Steering group.
26. A wider briefing will be held in July 2021, by which point it is anticipated that significant progress will have been made with the preliminary roadmap.
27. The Secretariat will assist with the following:
- a. Coordinating multi-partner bids to secure funding (especially governmental) for large scale projects.
  - b. Coordinating proactive and reactive lobbying efforts on behalf of the Partnership.
  - c. Reviewing and developing city-wide roadmaps, action plans and other documents that will guide the city to net zero.
  - d. Preparing an annual report on the progress of Zero Carbon Oxford as well as collating and analysing city emissions data (potentially by a reputable third party).
  - e. Coordination of staff, customer and community engagement campaigns, including website development and maintenance, design work and digital promotion (including social media).
  - f. Essential administrative tasks of the Partnership: coordinating communications; scheduling meetings of the partnership, steering group and sprint groups; partnership services; etc.
  - g. Co-ordinating communications on behalf of the partnership.
  - h. Annual Partnership events and meetings.
  - i. Seed funding for Zero Carbon Oxford Sprint group projects where appropriate.
  - j. Networking events, potentially including a Zero Carbon Oxford award to recognise individual achievements to meeting net zero.
  - k. Procuring external consultancy or expert advice and facilitation.
28. The Steering Group will establish the new Partnership's first "Sprint Groups" who will work collaboratively on key areas where rapid progress is necessary to turn the shared ambition of net zero emissions by 2040 into reality. It is currently proposed that buildings and transport will be initial areas of focus for Sprint groups based on initial information from the report produced by consultancy Anthesis which scoped Oxford's emissions, but these groups are to be confirmed by the Steering Group. It is advised that a small number of sprint

groups are convened to test the format, ensure it can be resourced and produces the desired output, prior to further groups being established.

29. The City Council's Climate Emergency Strategy Support report found that 81% of the total emissions in Oxford comes from buildings. Residential buildings are the largest contributor to emissions at 29% of Oxford's total emissions and institutional buildings are the second largest contributor to carbon emissions in Oxford at 26% of total emissions. Industrial buildings which are involved in the manufacturing of products in Oxford are responsible for 17% of Oxford's total carbon emissions. Commercial buildings and facilities are responsible for 9% of Oxford's total carbon emissions.
30. The City Council's Climate Emergency Strategy Support report found that transport accounts for 17% of Oxford's total emissions. This is broken into two subcategories, on-road and rail emissions. In 2011 there were over 100,000 average daily commuter trips, as reported in the Oxford Transport Strategy, with subcategories published by the Office for National Statistics. Upwards of 190 buses and coaches enter the city per hour at peak times. Emissions from rail are significantly lower, yet In 2017/18 there were a total of around 8 million rail passengers through Oxford Railway Station.
31. The Council, on behalf of the partnership has commissioned work to draft a plan that will guide the new Partnership's work and enable the city to achieve the 2040 target, identifying areas for collaboration, what needs to be achieved and by when for the partnership to map out plans and measure their progress against.
32. The City Council is also finalising a Zero Carbon Oxford Action Plan to outline areas where the City Council will take action to reduce emissions across the city beyond its own estate and operations (the focus of a newly agreed 4th Carbon Management Plan for 2021/22 to 2029/30). This Action Plan will underpin the role of the City Council in the Partnership, with an emphasis on how the City Council plans to strengthen its leadership role in reducing the city's emissions in areas where it has powers to do so or strong influence to act.

### **Monitoring, Reporting, and Scrutiny**

33. Akin to the reports from other partnerships, such as the Community Safety Partnership, it is proposed to bring an annual report to Council.

### **Financial implications**

34. The financial implications to support the partnership were captured in the recently approved budget. A key issue for the Steering group is the question of partner contributions to supporting the partnership as it develops. The financial implications of the council's own plans are covered in the individual plans such as the carbon management and asset management plans.
35. The implications for the city are significant in terms of investment necessary to make the switch to a zero carbon economy. However, the future cost savings, opportunities for growth and co-benefits lead the ICC to conclude a marginal if not positive impact of national and international GDP are the most likely outcome. The partners to the zero carbon Oxford plan appear to support that view and are already investing in the changes necessary.

36. At the city council level there is the same challenge around investment for future benefits. The recently approved Carbon management Plan estimated a £30m funding gap, just in respect of the council's operational buildings. Opportunities will need to be taken to invest at the same time as buildings are improved to marginalise costs and external funding will be sought. It is likely that legislative standards will require improvements over time, and that fiscal measures will support investment. The ICC points to the rapidly falling costs of low carbon alternatives most notably the cost of off shore wind power and that low carbon choices as markets develop will become more cost effective.

### **Legal issues**

37. The Climate Change Act requires the UK government to set legally-binding 'carbon budgets' which act as stepping stones towards the nationally adopted 2050 target. A carbon budget is a cap on the amount of greenhouse gases emitted in the UK over a five-year period. Budgets must be set at least 12 years in advance to allow policy-makers, businesses and individuals enough time to prepare. This does and will have implications for the city council.

38. There is no obligation on the city council to set an earlier target date or adopt more demanding carbon budgets. As such the partnership is a non-binding collaboration, has no official status and the Charter makes no legally binding obligations.

### **Level of risk**

39. Attach your completed Risk Register as an appendix. Add any detailed discussion here.

### **Equalities impact**

40. There is evidence that climate change has international, intergenerational and social economic equalities impacts. These were exposed and debated at the citizen's assembly and were a motivator for many members of the citizen's assembly to support stronger local action than the nationally adopted targets. The adoption of the charter and the formation of the partnership is a first step towards addressing these equalities impacts which will require more detailed assessments of policy proposals as they are developed.

### **Conclusion**

41. In declaring a climate emergency, the city council was cautious not to simply adopt a tokenistic and speculative date for the city to achieve being zero carbon that had no basis in science or realistic plan for achievement. The formation of the partnership, adoption of the charter by key stakeholders and the agreement of the target date of 2040 is the culmination of months of careful work and a highly significant step on the road to the city of Oxford becoming a net zero carbon city in a fair and equitable way.

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**Background Papers:** None



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