

To: Cabinet

Date: 11 December 2024

Report of: Climate and Environment Panel

Title of Report: High-level challenges and constraints impacting on the deliverability of solar opportunities at Council car parks

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Panel of the Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Emily Kerr, Chair of the Climate and Environment Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Anna Railton, Deputy Leader (Non-Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford
Corporate Priority:	Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2024-28
Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. The Climate and Environment Panel met on 20 November 2024 to consider a report on solar opportunities at Council car parks. The report provides a high-level overview of challenges and constraints impacting on the deliverability of the project.
2. The Panel was grateful to Councillor Anna Railton (Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford) and Alice Jones (Carbon Reduction Project Manager) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Alice Jones, Carbon Reduction Project Manager introduced the report providing a high-level overview of the challenges involved in delivering solar canopies at Council-owned car parks. The report highlighted engagement with the Low Carbon Hub and outlined that the project was still at an early stage, with options for the offtake yet to be fully explored. Key challenges included the significantly higher cost

of installing solar canopies, which was estimated to be two to three times more expensive than rooftop installations of similar size, and the potential for additional costs related to other needs of the car parks.

4. The Panel acknowledged the merit of the initiative and discussed the challenges and costs associated with the project. Clarification was sought about which car parks were owned or managed by the City Council and were large enough to meet the criteria of the scheme. It was noted that the City Council owned the Redbridge and Seacourt Park and Ride, while others, such as Peartree, were leased or managed on behalf of the County Council. The Panel agreed that the report should be updated to include a comprehensive list of Council-owned car parks meeting the viability criteria for the scheme.

Recommendation 1: That Officers update the report to include a comprehensive list of Council-owned car parks that are large enough to meet the viability requirements for the solar canopy scheme.

5. The Panel highlighted the importance of exploring alternative uses for car parks as part of the feasibility assessment. The Panel noted examples such as Redbridge, which already hosts an EV charging hub, and discussed how some sites, such as Oxpens, were being repurposed for redevelopment. The Panel supported progressing with the feasibility assessment, including engagement with the Greater South East Net Zero Hub to identify alternative revenue-generating opportunities and ensure alignment with the Council’s wider sustainability goals.

Recommendation 2: That Cabinet proceeds with the feasibility assessment by engaging with the Greater South East Net Zero Hub, focusing on exploring other viable uses for car parks, including potential revenue-generating opportunities, to ensure the most effective and sustainable outcomes.

6. The Panel also discussed collaborating with the County Council, particularly car parks owned by County but are managed by the City Council. It was suggested that the City Council pursues engagement with the County Council, leveraging its influence in managing these sites to explore joint projects for County-owned car parks, with the aim of maximising opportunities and ensuring alignment with shared sustainability objectives.

Recommendation 3: That Cabinet pursues engagement with the County Council to explore the potential for joint schemes for car parks owned by Oxfordshire County Council but managed by Oxford City Council; efforts should be made to influence and advocate for collaborative projects that maximise opportunities and ensure alignment with sustainability objectives.

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