

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 August 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To submit the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee for Cabinet's consideration.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	A Well-Run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet:
1. Considers and responds to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Overview and Summary

- The Scrutiny Committee met on 5 August 2025 and reviewed the following items:
 - Oxpens River Bridge Update

- Working Group meetings were also held to consider a range of reports:

Climate and Environment Working Group on 22 July 2025

- Net Zero Tracker

- Local Plan 2042 Climate Change and Resilience
 - Annual Air Quality Status Report
3. Following the meetings, Cabinet Members, in consultation with the relevant Officers were asked to agree, agree in-part, or disagree with the recommendations.
 4. The tables below detail the recommendations made by the Committee and its Working Groups for each report, which Cabinet will consider at their meeting on 13 August 2025. Cabinet has provided a commentary on each recommendation to inform the Committee of the rationale behind its decision. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were suggested.
 5. Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting on 5 August 2025 is available [here](#).
 6. The Committee and its Working Groups would like to note on record:
 - In its consideration of the Oxpens River Bridge update, the Committee asked a number of important questions, including: the implications of expanding the capital envelope on the wider capital programme; the risks if external funding is not secured; whether the project is at risk of falling into cost fallacy and whether budget slippages are in addition to the optimism bias already built into the programme. They also explored whether Council has adequately accounted for the likelihood of further legal proceedings or delays and raised concerns that a further judicial review hearing could significantly impact the project timeline and budget furthermore.
 - Having considered details of the report, the Committee acknowledged its limitations in making formal recommendations to Cabinet but strongly urged that all decision relating to the Oxpens River Bridge be carefully thought of and made by Cabinet itself, rather than delegated to officers.
 - More broadly, the Committee highlighted the issue of inequalities in access to justice, such as through the judicial review process, and encouraged the Council to consider these more explicitly in the delivery of future projects, particularly in areas where communities are more likely to mount legal challenges.
 - The Committee heard and acknowledged the points made by Mr Glazebrook (Friends of Grandpont Nature Park) and Councillor Lois Muddiman who both made an address to the Committee and wish to thank them for their contributions.
 - In relation to Local Plan 2042 Climate Change and Resilience, the Climate and Environment Working Group underscored the importance of incorporating building cooling, particularly in public buildings, as an integral part of design. The Group suggested that, if not already included, the design checklist should feature examples of various cooling measures, including passive solutions, to help guide future development proposals.
 7. The Scrutiny Committee would like to especially thank Cabinet Members Cllr Alex Hollingsworth (Planning and Culture) and Cllr Anna Railton (Deputy Leader – Zero Carbon Oxford) for their contributions. Scrutiny is also grateful to Jenny Barker (Regeneration and Development Lead), Tina Mould (Environmental Sustainability

Business Lead), Dan Young (Principal Planner – Spatial & Economic Development) and Pedro Abreu (Principal Air Quality Officer) for their participation in presenting reports and responding to questions during the recent meetings.

Financial implications

8. Financial implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
9. Where appropriate, any further financial implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Legal issues

10. Legal implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
11. Where appropriate, any further legal implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Level of risk

12. Risk Registers, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
13. Where appropriate, the risk register was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Equalities impact

14. Equalities Impact Assessments, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
15. Where appropriate, the Equalities Impact Assessments was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

16. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
17. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

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**Table 1 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Oxpens River Bridge Update**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 5 August 2025 concerning the Oxpens River Bridge Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That Cabinet undertake high-level remodelling and assess potential impact of the judicial review appeal progressing to a hearing, particularly around timescales and future costings, to ensure the Council is better prepared and has a more informed basis for decision-making.	Yes	The discussion at the Scrutiny Committee raised this recommendation having heard that it is difficult to fully estimate the costs that would be incurred if there was another delay to the project caused by the Judicial Review process and an appeal against the original rejection of the JR. That is because those costs will be based on the length of the delay, which is outside the control of the City Council. It is likely that a delay due to Judicial Review beyond Autumn 2025 would result in the delivery of the project being pushed from 2026 to 2027, to avoid construction over the period of highest flood risk. The high-level cost of such a delay will be reported verbally at the meeting.

**Table 2 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group –
Local Plan 2042 Climate Change and Resilience**

The table below sets out the draft Cabinet response to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group Working Group on 22 July 2025, endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5 August 2025. The Cabinet is asked to amend or agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Local Plan 2042 include clearer support for renewable energy schemes, particularly the potential for solar panel installations on terraced houses through community-led energy schemes.	Agree	The new Local Plan will set out clear support for renewable energy generation, as is the case in the first draft plan that is currently subject to consultation, as we agree this is important. However, it is crucial that flexibility is retained in relation to what format this generation takes – i.e. not specifying rigidly that generation come from a particular technology. This will allow proposals to respond to particular characteristics of each site, and help future-proof the policies (e.g. should new technologies become suitable in future). We will consider how best to respond to proposals for community-led energy schemes, and whether the currently proposed policies can suitably cover this, or whether additional wording is needed and incorporate if necessary (potentially through supporting text).
2) That there is greater robustness demonstrated in the Local Plan 2042 supporting text acknowledging the urgency of climate action when balancing the need to address climate emergency through retrofitting heritage buildings to support decarbonisation against the need to minimise harm to heritage assets.	In-part	The proposed draft policies in the current Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 consultation strongly respond to the need for both mitigating impacts on climate change and adapting to it. Whilst the supporting text to the policies is yet to be drafted, we will also ensure that this message comes through strongly here.

		The new Local Plan 2042 proposes policy on retro-fitting of existing buildings, including historic buildings, in order to support applicants in making the best possible application. This is a new policy compared with the adopted Local Plan as we agree it is a key challenge we need to help applicants respond to. As the plan develops, we will continue to set out that, wherever possible, these applications will be supported, however, it should be noted that we also have a statutory duty towards protecting the historic environment which we must balance in preparing a legally compliant Local Plan. Whilst the vast majority of buildings in Oxford do not have a heritage designation, we are clear that heritage designations do not need to be a barrier to retro-fit but do necessitate additional care and consideration in designing such projects which the policy seeks to address. Having previously sought advice on this issue, there are limitations in how much further Local Plan policy can go, however, we will consider how we can further support such projects, whether this is through additional messaging in supporting text, or through other associated guidance (e.g. Technical Advice Notes) as we agree it is an important objective for the city.
3) That the Plan explicitly references the potential use of energy offsetting funds from developers for retrofit improvements to schools and community buildings, recognising the wider public benefit of public buildings rather than individual residential buildings, and criteria applied to the allocation of these funds prioritises maximum community impact.	In-part	Firstly, it should be noted that the proposed policy is clear that use of offsetting should be a last resort and that the preference is for net zero carbon to be achieved onsite first. Where offset funds are collected, it will be important that these funds are spent on projects that are identified through a fair and transparent methodology and that the funding is utilised for delivering true offsetting. We would agree that these would ideally be securing additional benefits for wider communities wherever possible – such as focusing on

		community buildings and/or social housing – but there may also be other important criteria. The methodology for administering these funds, including identifying suitable projects, is a work in progress that will continue to be developed as the Local Plan progresses, though separately to the Local Plan itself. We will look for ways to reference in the Local Plan examples of how we would wish to utilise funds generated from offsetting going forward, including that they can secure wider benefits for the community wherever possible. We will also factor the recommendation into the considerations of the wider process of creating the fund and its ongoing governance, which will ultimately need to be approved separately at an appropriate time (e.g. once the overarching policy approach has been tested at examination).
4) That there is specific language acknowledging the potential for loss and damage associated with new and existing properties in areas of high flood risk, and that local plan policies ensure applicants take account of these potential impacts in future planning and climate resilience design features to minimise possible damage (e.g. positioning of plugs, use of specific materials on the ground floor that can cope with flood damage).	Agree	The term “loss and damage” is a broad concept typically used internationally to refer to the consequences of climate change that go beyond what people can adapt to. In the Oxford context, the Local Plan 2042 is focused on adaption and mitigation that can be secured through the development process, whilst avoiding/mitigating risks now and in future wherever possible. To that end, the Local Plan includes a specific draft policy (Draft Policy G9) which is proposed to ensure that new development is designed in a way that is resilient to future climate change, including appropriate adaptation measures that can address a range of climate hazards like flooding and overheating where necessary. We agree that the Local Plan also has a role in highlighting the key risks in the city, such as flood risk and risk from overheating, at least at a high level, and will ensure this is a part of the supporting text.

		Proposed policy G9 also includes language that seeks to ensure applicants take these risks into account in designing their development and this will be expanded on in supporting text as it is drafted. The priority for the policies is to ensure that a strong framework is put in place setting out the key considerations which we want applicants to respond to where it is within their power. This can then provide a hook for additional supporting guidance (e.g. Technical Advice Notes) which can provide further detail and specific examples of resilience measures which might be suitable to meet the policy's requirements.
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Table 3 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group – Annual Air Quality Status Report

The table below sets out the draft Cabinet response to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group Working Group on 22 July 2025, endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 5 August 2025. The Cabinet is asked to amend or agree a formal response as appropriate

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Air Quality Action Plan incorporates specific measures addressing the use of diesel generators associated with street trading, construction and similar activities, reflecting the Council's regulatory responsibilities in relation to street trading and seek to reduce air quality impacts.	In-part	We acknowledge the importance of addressing air quality impacts associated with diesel generator use in street trading, construction, and similar activities. As part of the development of the city's new Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), we commit to exploring this issue further. However, at this stage, we are unable to commit to specific measures in detail, as the AQAP is still subject to internal review(s) and will also undergo a full public consultation process. This will ensure that any proposed actions in the final document are informed by stakeholder input and reflect a balanced, realistic, and evidence-based approach.

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