

Oxfordshire County Council

Budget and Business Planning 2025/26

Overarching climate impact review of Conservative Independent Alliance 2025/26 budget amendments

Context & Background

1. This document provides an overview of the potential climate action impact of the Conservative Independent Alliance group's proposed budget amendments.
2. As many schemes are in early development, further climate assessment will be undertaken as more detailed business cases are developed through the revenue and capital governance process.

Revenue Proposals Climate Impact Review

3. A number of proposals are included in the budget that would negatively impact the delivery of the council's Climate Action commitments and its capacity to contribute to climate adaptation in Oxfordshire:

3.1 Refocus Climate Team: This proposal (2026CIA10) reduces by 50% funding to the Climate Action service of the council. This reduction in funding would significantly reduce the work the council can do to deliver its own estate carbon management plan, and to support reduction of emissions and adaptation to a changing climate in Oxfordshire. Reducing this resource would limit our engagement in the community to leverage climate action. Meeting zero-carbon council policy objectives and implementing adaptation interventions would need to be substantially owned by service directorates. There is a risk that investment would be uncoordinated and lacking in technical advice, increasing costs and putting at risk the council's ability to meet its targets. This proposal would also reduce the council's capacity to work with partners and communities, reduce resource to respond to planning applications, and reduce the council's work to support investment in a low carbon economy.

3.2 Remove the administration's Carbon Management Plan forward purchase of Carbon offsets to reduce impact of future offsetting costs: This proposal (2026CIA3) removes the administration's proposal to minimise the costs of carbon offsetting in 2030 by buying in-advance carbon offsets, starting in 2025/26 (2026EP4). The impact of not buying-in-advance carbon offsets is likely to be either failing to achieve of our carbon neutrality target in 2030 or achieving it at a higher cost of offsetting residual emissions.

3.3 Remove the administration's carbon sequestration ambitions: This proposal (2026CIA2) removes the administration's proposed investment (2026EP2) to accelerate the development of carbon sequestration. Without this investment Oxfordshire would not meet all its commitments in its Beyond Net Zero Policy which aims to take a leading role in promoting carbon capture to reduce carbon dioxide already in the environment, though promoting diversification of carbon capture technology.

4. Two revenue proposals are likely to affect negatively **the county's target to decarbonise the transport network by 2040.**

4.1 Remove the administration's one-off investment to leverage investment in rail: this amendment (2026CIA4) removes the administration's proposal to invest for promoting railway development and decarbonisation through strategic cases and masterplans (2026EP12). The removal of this proposal may hamper investment in rail in the county which could result in the continued use of personal car trips increasing congestion, local pollution, resident health and wellbeing impacts and failure of the council's aim to achieve a net zero transport network by 2040.

4.2 Not holding the price of a joint ticket at Park and Ride (P&R) car parks: Bus and parking operations are requiring an increase in price of joint tickets (parking and bus fare) of 20-25%. To retain and increase P&R usage the administration is proposing funds (2025EH40) to subsidise the price of joint tickets and therefore avoid passing the price increase to P&R users as a result of government changes to bus fares. This amendment (2026CIA1) is proposing to remove this additional investment and requiring the price of joint tickets to increase by £1 from the 1st of April 2025. The P&R schemes contribute to reducing congestion and emissions within Oxford helping to reduce the reliance on car journeys. Increasing the price of joint tickets could result in less usage of buses, promoting instead use of on-street and off-street city centre parking and therefore increasing both carbon emissions, local air pollution and traffic congestion impacting on the health and wellbeing of Oxfordshire residents.

Capital Proposals

5. Amendments have been made within the programme that have negative impacts in the council's commitment to **a net zero county by 2050 and particularly the objectives of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan:**

5.1 Remove one - off revenue funding for Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans: This amendment is proposing (2026 CIA7) to removal of funding (CORP113) to support the delivery of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), which focuses on smaller-scale, high-impact

"quick wins" in rural and market towns to rapidly enhance connectivity and accessibility. Removing this fund will result in the anticipated benefits of this proposal not being realised including significantly improved connectivity within and between settlements, expanded transportation options for underserved communities, and healthier lifestyles through increased walking and cycling possibilities. Whilst at this stage is difficult to estimate quantitative impacts it is very likely that removing this funding will also result in not realizing reduced greenhouse gas emissions and better air quality. Removal of this funding will impact on the development of LCWIPs and the ability to secure funding for delivery of infrastructure changes required for delivery of its transport and connectivity plan particularly the objectives of reducing/replacing one in four car journeys by 2030 and achieving a net zero transport network by 2040.

5.2 Remove funding for St. Giles' Public Realm improvements: this amendment proposes to reduce prudential borrowing (2026CIA9) to fund the administration's proposal to improve St. Giles public realm (included in CORP103). Not funding this proposal removes funding to improve the space for socialising and greening in St Giles and improving access for pedestrians and cyclists, improvements to air quality and new arrangements for buses and tourist coaches. Not funding this proposal would therefore remove this scheme's contribution to achieve reducing car reliance and reducing carbon emissions as established in the targets of OCC's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

5.3 Remove funding for Thame to Haddenham active travel link: this amendment (2026CIA9) proposes to defund the administration's proposal to continue to progress development of improved cycling infrastructure in rural communities. Defunding this proposal would result in failing to develop and progress the scheme required to secure funding and land to deliver the potential benefits of a proposed cycleway connecting Thame to Haddenham, which would facilitate the safe cycling travel to Haddenham and Thame Parkway Train Station. Whilst at this stage is difficult to estimate quantitative impacts it is very likely that removing this funding will also result in not realizing reduced greenhouse gas emissions and better air quality. Not funding this proposal would therefore remove this scheme's contribution to achieve reducing car reliance and reducing carbon emissions as established in the targets of OCC's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.