



**Cabinet
Tuesday, 21 February 2023**

**ADDENDA
Verge and Vegetation Policy – Annex 4**

10. Verge and Vegetation Policy (Pages 1 - 8)

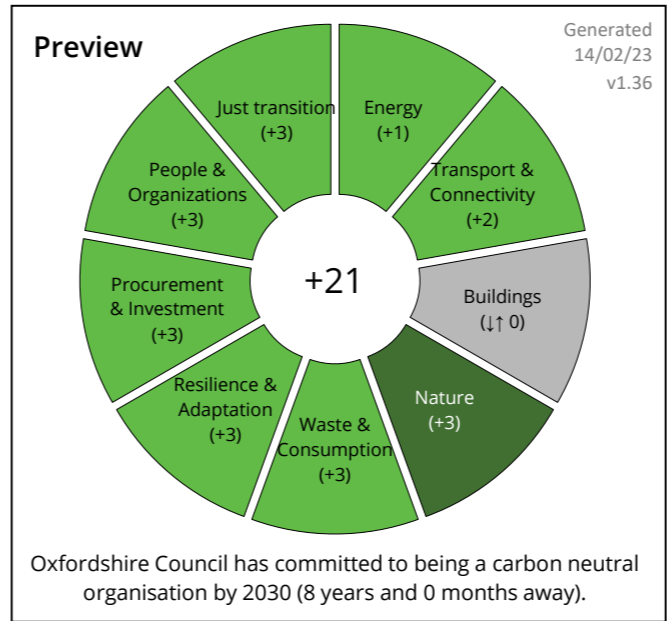
Annex 4 attached

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Climate Impact Assessment

Summary

Directorate and Service Area	Highways and Operations - Highway Maintenance
What is being assessed	Verge and Vegetation Management Policy
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	Existing Function
Summary of assessment	The County Council has had a long-standing verge maintenance policy setting out the key elements of highway verge maintenance, however, to improve alignment with the current Council's key priorities, it is necessary to amend the policy to include improved references to the management of roadside nature reserves and support for areas of local community managed biodiversity.
Completed by	Paul Wilson
Climate action sign off by	
Director sign off by	
Assessment date	



Detail of proposal

Context / Background	<p>The proposed updated and refocussed policy better aligns with the current Strategic Plan and supports the delivery of action to ameliorate the Climate and biodiversity Emergency and sustainable transport network in particular.</p>
Proposal	<p>The proposed updated and refocussed policy better aligns with the current Strategic Plan and supports the delivery of action to ameliorate the Climate and biodiversity Emergency and sustainable transport network in particular.</p>
Evidence / Intelligence	<p>The Local Transport and Connectivity Plan was recently adopted, and this updated policy will support the ambition and commitments made in respect of active travel by ensuring footpaths and cycle paths are kept accessible and not restricted by grass and vegetation growth. It will also contribute to the value of Green Infrastructure by protecting and enhancing green areas of the highway. The new Climate and Natural Environment Policy Statement (the Policy Statement) supports and strengthens the ambition to include a policy focus on environmental resilience and nature recovery, by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier County</p> <p>No formal consultation has been undertaken on the proposed Policy, but engagement and input during its development has taken place with some members, local interest groups and research bodies such as university of Oxford and Plantlife.</p>
Alternatives considered / rejected	<p>Further work on management and biodiversity information on our verges and vegetation is needed to provide full confidence they are being managed in an effective and efficient way from both a highway and environmental perspective. If this further work enables / identifies opportunities to further enhance the proposed policy, then this will be updated at the appropriate time.</p>

Category	Impact criteria	Score (-3 to +3)	Description of impact	Actions or mitigations to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timeline and monitoring arrangements
Energy	Increases energy efficiency	1	Focussing revenue spending to not only undertake essential maintenance functions , but to also promote and encourage more biodiversity and carbon reduction - This would result in reduce amount of cutting with petrol based plant thus reducing carbon emmissions	Further encouragement and promotion of biodiversity to local communities	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Energy	Promotes a switch to low-carbon or renewable energy	N/A				
Energy	Promotes resilient, local, smart energy systems	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Reduces need to travel and/or the need for private car ownership	N/A			Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Transport & Connectivity	Supports active travel		The promoted approach should see an improvement in condition and safety of the active travel network, by prioritising investment to support walking and cycling.	Increase overall investment in maintenance of vegetation at footway and cycleway and parts of the network which have high active travel use, not just prioritise from existing maintenance budgets.	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Transport & Connectivity	Increases use of public transport		The promoted approach should see an improvement in condition and safety of the active travel network, by prioritising investment to support the use of public transport	Improved highway roadside vegetation management and notification and enforcement of private vegetation where its affecting the safe passage by highway users	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Transport & Connectivity	Accelerates electrification of transport	N/A				
Buildings	Promotes net zero new builds and developments	N/A				
Buildings	Accelerates retrofitting of existing buildings	N/A				

Nature	Protects, restores or enhances biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems	Highway maintenance by its very nature will maintain an existing asset, we have taken steps to improve biodiversity in verge assets for example by planting of wildflower verges. In addition it is proposed that all schemes which affect the soft estate would deliver biodiversity net gain. More could be achieved if further resources were made available	With verge and vegetation management care is taken not to damage to the natural environment. This should be seen as an opportunity for OCC and local communities to enhance biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems, also by changing the specification for developments for areas of what would have grass verge	Sean Rooney Hannah Battey	2023 - 2027
Nature	Develops blue and green infrastructure	Improved verge maintenance will improve rural highway non piped drainage systems. With regard to new developments increase use of open drainage systems such as swales , provide more opportunity for nature based solutions. This could also be enhanced by OCC making a requirement for developers to provide more wild flower planting on existion soil types rather than the importing of topsoil and just 'grassing' verges		Sean Rooney Hannah Battey	2023 - 2027
Nature	Improves access to nature and green spaces	Highway maintenance by its very nature will maintain an existing asset, we have taken steps to improve biodiversity in verge assets for example by planting of wildflower verges. In addition it is proposed that all schemes which affect the soft estate would deliver biodiversity net gain	Increase overall investment in maintenance of vegetation at footway and cycleway and parts of the network which have high active travel use, not just prioritise from existing maintenance budgets.	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Waste & Consumption	Reduces overall consumption	Encouragement to Local communities to maintain areas of highway verge and vegetation reduces our requirement for the number of plant hours	linked to key performance indicators, to reduce consumption of fuel, energy and material usage.	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027

Waste & Consumption	Supports waste prevention and drive reuse and recycling	1 Oxfordshire Highways have three trial sites on Roadside verge Nature reserves where we have adopted a cut and collect approach to grass cuttings, these are then used for composting, vegetation cuttings are also chipped back onto the highway verges, with increased funding more RSVNs could be treated in this way to encourage more biodiversity	Exploring other opportunities for further locations to be treated in this way, should additional funding be available	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to flooding	1 With improved verge maintenance and hence improvements to rural drainage systems this should improve flooding resilience in certain cases. Similarly with improved notification and enforcement of third party vegetation, this will promote resilience and encourage growth of and improved habitat for wild flower and encourage improved wildlife habitation	We will consider how we can reduce surface water run-off and flooding incidents through engineered and nature-based solutions	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to other extreme weather events (e.g., storms, cold snaps, heatwaves, droughts)	1 With improved verge maintenance and hence improvements to rural drainage systems this should improve flooding resilience in certain cases. Similarly with improved notification and enforcement of third party vegetation	We will consider how we can reduce surface water run-off and flooding incidents through engineered and nature-based solutions	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience of council services, communities, energy systems, transport infrastructure and/or supply chains	1 We will prioritise the management and maintenance of verge and vegetation assets on our defined "Resilient Network" which will minimise the impact of climate change, protect supply corridors and strategic routes, which are vital for transport and commerce.	Regularly review and stress test the defined resilient network to ensure it is current, effective and relevant	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027

Procurement & Investment	Procurement practices prioritise low-carbon options, circular economy and sustainability	We have developed and agreed to a Carbon Reduction Action Plan with our tier one highways contractor that will focus on; the top works activities, supply chain partners and materials to deliver the most significant carbon and cost savings.	In time this should be applied to all areas of the Highways maintenance service including verge and vegetation management	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
Procurement & Investment	Investment being considered supports climate action/ is consistent with path to net zero	Our Highway Asset Infrastructure Management Strategy sets out a clear intent; to re-imagine how our services are delivered and to increase the relative levels of investment in key assets and infrastructure to contribute to an improved environmental condition and a more sustainable network offering. Our contractor and supply-chain have also made commitments to net-zero. We have entered into a framework agreement with our contractor which has carbon reduction performance measures for them and their supply chain. More could be undertaken with greater investment in this area	With the proposed amendments to the verge and vegetation management policy we are required to promote more biodiversity with local communities	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
People & Organizations	Drives behavioural change to address the climate and ecological emergency	The updated verge and vegetation management policy drives and encourages behavioural change by delivering a service that positively contributes towards, enables, and facilitates the achievement of the county council's corporate priorities on economic, societal and environmental matters	Monitor and report further behavioural changes , i.e. more communities undertaking their own vegetation management	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027
People & Organizations	Drives organizational and systemic change to address the climate and ecological emergency	The updated verge and vegetation management policy drives and encourages behavioural change by delivering a service that positively contributes towards, enables, and facilitates the achievement of the county council's corporate priorities on economic, societal and environmental matters	Adopting alternative service aims with regard to verge and vegetation management	Sean Rooney	2023 - 2027

Just transition	Promotes green innovation and job creation	<p>Encouragement to Local communities to maintain areas of highway verge and vegetation encourages innovation towards planting schemes and the use of volunteer groups. Further promotion to local communities will follow, however this could be increased should additional resources be available</p>	
Just transition	Promotes health and wellbeing	<p>The updated highways infrastructure asset management documents promote the health and wellbeing of Oxfordshire's residents by giving an increasingly greater priority to those assets and parts of the network where more active and sustainable modes of transport can be supported to offer a realistic alternative to, and a lower dependency on private car use / ownership. In particular footways, cycleways (on and off carriageway) and the facilities that better allow all network users to share the space available.</p>	
Just transition	Reduces poverty and inequality	<p>The promoted approach should see an improvement in condition and safety of the active travel network, by prioritising investment to support walking and cycling.</p>	<p>Will see an improved footway and cycle network being in a condition that will be attractive for all people to use</p> <p>Sean Rooney 2023 - 2027</p>

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