Environment Partnership - 20 January 2012

Oxfordshire 2030 targets – update on current situation

Introduction and overview

1. In summer 2011 the Oxfordshire Partnership initiated a refresh of Oxfordshire 2030 priorities for the medium term - up to 2014. Following a short consultation with Partnership members, the Environment and Waste Partnerships approved the following revised priorities at its meeting in June 2011 (see template in Appendix 2):

   Priority 1 : Manage the risk and effects of flooding.
   Priority 2 : Ensure Oxfordshire organisations and communities are preparing for the impacts of climate change in the longer term.
   Priority 3: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Oxfordshire.
   Priority 4: Protect and enhance the biodiversity of the county.

2. This report illustrates how the work towards proposed targets in the priority areas is being delivered, and suggests some amendments or additions to reflect current developments. Below is a brief assessment of the current situation under each priority. The key activities for each priority are summarised against success measures in the table in Appendix 1.

Priority 1: Manage the effect and risks of flooding

3. Flooding work is led by the Oxfordshire Strategic Flooding group, supported by an officer group which was formed last year. It was agreed in the refresh that flooding should remain a strategic priority. A target relating to Suds (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) was included, but since then a timescale has been agreed for the development of a Flood Risk Management Strategy for Oxfordshire, which is required under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council has been published at http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/oxfordshire-preliminary-flood-risk-assessment-pfra . We suggest that implementation of the Flood Risk Strategy should be included within the Flooding priority, and that progress on this should be reported both to SPIP and the Environment Partnership.

4. A key measure of success is the implementation of Suds in particular in new developments. It will be necessary to both to provide an accurate assessment of the rate of progress against the success measure, and to share examples of the good practice that is already evident in this area. We propose that progress on Suds is presented during 2012 both to the Environment and Waste Partnerships and Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership (SPIP).

5. The important role of local communities in responding to flood risk, and the work by local authorities to support local flooding groups and community emergency plans also needs to be acknowledged.

6. Recommended additions and amendments:

a) Include implementation of Flood Risk Management Strategy as a 2030 deliverable;
b) Measure and report progress on Suds implementation and promote good practice;
c) Recognise importance of local communities in developing resilience to flooding;
d) Report on progress to the Environment Partnership and/or SPIP.

Priority 2: Ensure Oxfordshire organisations and communities are preparing for the impacts of climate change in the longer term.

7. The Oxfordshire 2030 plan emphasises the need for Oxfordshire organisations and local communities to be prepared for the impacts of climate and weather. We reported to the last meeting on a range of activities by local authorities to improve their climate resilience including Local Climate Impact Profiles, risk assessments, adaptation action plans, and inclusion of adaptation and resilience in procurement processes and contracts. UKCIP and Oxfordshire County Council worked with local business in Oxford in 2009 to develop climate resilience; we are now working with the business advice and support service promoted by the LEP to signpost businesses to guidance on risk management and resilience.

8. Local communities can play a part in developing their resilience to weather and climate in various ways, through for example local community woodlands, allotments and local food growing projects, local renewables projects as well as through their community led plans or community emergency plans.

Challenges

9. With the withdrawal of a specific national reporting requirement for climate change adaptation, the OWEP has a key role to play in maintaining strategic support for this process, and helping to ensure that Oxfordshire continues to develop climate resilience. Promoting good practice and assessment tools currently being piloted in Oxfordshire will help to maintain the profile of this work, and it is proposed that these can be presented to the Partnership.

10. This priority proposes that vulnerabilities, risks and opportunities for Oxfordshire are identified. Resources for this exercise will be limited, and a first step will be to work with organisations such as the Environment Agency and local authorities to identify the information which is already held. To ensure climate resilience is fully integrated into the local planning process, weather and climate risks should be accounted for in local plans and policies and an assessment of climate related risks and opportunities required as part of the decision making process.

11. Recommended additions and amendments:
a) Provide advice to local business on risk assessment and resilience planning through LAs and Local Enterprise support programme.
b) Promote pilot assessment tools/share good practice.
c) Work with Environment Agency to map risks and vulnerabilities.

Priority 3:   Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Oxfordshire

12. We reported at the last meeting the 7% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by Oxfordshire local authorities over the two year LAA2 reporting period and also a reported 14% reduction in per capita CO_2 emissions across the county between 2005-2009. The Oxfordshire 2030 CO_2 reduction target is to reduce CO_2 emissions by 50% by 2030 against a 2008 baseline. This amounts to an annual reduction of 3%, to which local authorities have also committed in the refresh of priorities to 2014. Local authority activity is reported regularly to the partnership and is the subject of a separate paper.

13. A comprehensive list of activities across Oxfordshire to reduce CO_2 emissions was presented to the partnership in March 2011. Since then, the number of communities active in carbon reduction work has increased, and the Low Carbon Hub was launched in December with the support of Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Council to provide a single point of contact and support for local organisations. Oxfordshire County Council is working with the Community Action Groups to update the Climate Change Handbook produced by Climate Xchange, and make it more accessible for users, with practical advice and signposting for example to the Affordable Warmth network.

14. Oxfordshire Local Authorities are continuing to support the affordable warmth work by USEA in the current financial year, but future funding for this programme is not secure. A working group has been convened by Oxford City Council with the United Sustainable Energy Agency (USEA) to consider the implications of the Green Deal and how this will be rolled out in the city. It is proposed to bring this to the Environment Partnership in March 2012.

Challenges

15. Since a target was set in the refresh to increase the proportion of local authority energy generated from on-site renewables to 5% by 2015, the Government has announced its plans to reduce the solar PV Feed-In Tariff rates by more than 50%, coming into effect on 12 December 2011. The new rates are subject to public consultation, and currently subject to legal challenge, so the actual level of reduction is not yet confirmed. This proposal to reduce rates early and deeply has had a very serious effect on the uptake of schemes and local renewable energy businesses. It may also affect the capacity of local authorities to meet the target by 2015.

16. It is well understood that the target to reduce our CO_2 emissions by 50% by 2030 (in line with national targets) poses us with an immense challenge, at a time when resources are tighter than ever. Whether or not the target can be achieved, the challenge is with local organisations to address the opportunities to invest in low carbon technologies and energy saving measures, assisting job creation, and helping local householders save money and energy by insulating and retrofitting homes.

17. Summary of proposed amendments/additions:
    a) Review target for local authority energy from on-site renewables.
    b) Monitor opportunities to promote the Green Deal and Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)

Priority 4: Protect and enhance the biodiversity of the county

18. The Government published its **Natural Environment White Paper & Biodiversity 2020** White Paper in June 2011. The paper outlines the government's vision for the natural environment in England for the next 50 years. As it is the first White Paper in this sector since 1990, it will have an impact on policy direction for local authorities, and may lead to changes in legislation. Some of the key challenges include:

- **Local Nature Partnerships:** Funding has been provided by DEFRA to help Oxfordshire develop a Local Nature Partnership. This will be led by the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum. The government wants to see better engagement between sectors such as health, economic development and nature conservation to encourage action on green growth, health, access and biodiversity.

- **Biodiversity – 'more, bigger, better and joined':** The paper recognises that our ecological networks are not coherent or robust enough to conserve biodiversity, and places increased emphasis on a spatial approach, seeking to link, join and increase ecological habitats. Oxfordshire's existing approach is therefore supported by the paper - our Biodiversity Action Plan is already spatial. Conservation Target Areas - where biodiversity action should be focused, have been developed, but more could be done to implement it.

- **Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs)**
  DEFRA announced a £7.5 million funding pot for 12 Nature Improvement Areas, for partnerships to bid for, with the aim of creating ecological restoration zones to demonstrate how the maxims of 'more bigger better joined' can be put into practice. Oxfordshire's partnerships submitted two NIAs based on our Conservation Target Areas – focused on the Upper Thames Tributaries and Chilterns Chalk Scarps, but neither bid was successful. Both partnerships are looking for alternative funding.

- **Growing a green economy:** The natural environment plays an essential role in our economy. Oxfordshire County Council will need to ensure it captures the value, and takes account of, the natural environment in its growth and infrastructure plans & strategies, and to demonstrate how strategies will promote green innovation and skills. Activities outlined below such as a Green Infrastructure Framework will help to do this.

19. Many of Oxfordshire's woodlands are neglected and unmanaged, which decreases their biodiversity value, and also reduces CO_2 uptake. The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment has developed a £300,000 TOE Community Woodfuels project, for which it is seeking funding. The aim is to help develop the woodfuel market in Oxfordshire via community education and potentially woodfuel cooperatives which will provide stimulus for increased woodland management.

Challenges

20. Funding to achieve practical action on the ground remains a challenge; due to the White Paper and reductions to the level of agri-environment funding available, it

has become increasingly difficult to find methods of funding biodiversity change, which will make attainment of BAP targets a challenge. Oxfordshire is largely dependent on partnership work and fundraising efforts by the charitable sector. One suggestion by DEFRA is for local authorities to develop biodiversity offsetting, whereby money from development is used outside the development area, but the practical application of this through existing s106 and CIL mechanisms remains difficult.

21. Work on developing an effective Local Nature Partnership across the different sectors in Oxfordshire is progressing, but it will take time to develop common ground between the sectors and practical outcomes.

Recommendation

22. The Environment Partnership is **RECOMMENDED** to note the activities outlined in this report, and agree additions and/or amendments as proposed in paragraphs 3, 4, 6, 11 and 17.

Contact Officer: Susie Ohlenschlager   Tel: (01865 810148)
Email: susie.ohlenschlager@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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Appendix 1   Oxfordshire 2030 priorities: 2012 programme summary

Priority	Success measures	Activity	Lead contact (s)	Report to
Flooding	Adoption of Flood Risk Management Strategy for Oxfordshire	Consultation process under way.	Chris Brown	EP/SPIP 2012 tbc
	SUDs in new developments	Evaluation of progress on SUDS implementation.	Gordon Hunt	EP/SPIP 2012 tbc
Climate resilience	Local organisations assess risks and opportunities/ develop resilience plans	Local business advice provided through LAs and LEP support programme.	Susie Ohlenschlager	EP 2012
	Local communities increase resilience/ introduce adaptive measures where need identified.	Local authorities working with community infrastructure organisations (eg ORCC, and TOE2) to support local community groups	Susie Ohlenschlager Linda Watson	EP 2012
	Weather and climate risks accounted for in local plans and policies	LAs to assess risks and incorporate in policy-making and planning.	Susie Ohlenschlager	EP 2012
	Risks and opportunities for Oxfordshire identified	Work with Environment Agency to identify vulnerabilities. Promote pilot assessment tools/share good practice	Susie Ohlenschlager	EP/SPIP 2013
Reduce Carbon emissions	Increase in community group engagement	Support local community engagement through Low Carbon hub/CAGs/TOE2 etc	Susie Ohlenschlager	EP 2012
	Annual increase in no. homes and buildings insulated/ retrofitted. *	Support Affordable Warmth programme and plan for rollout of Green Deal.	Nick King	EP 2012
	3% annual reduction in CO_2 emissions	Local authorities carbon reduction programmes. Support for/extend Low Carbon Oxford.	Nick King	EP 2012 (2 pa)
	Increase in local renewable energy generation. *	Rollout of solar and woodfuel projects/ support for community projects/	Nick King	EP 2012
Biodiversity	Increase in sites in positive conservation management		Vicky Fletcher (NI 197)	2012
	Increase in priority habitats		Dominic Lamb	2012
	Green infrastructure framework	Brief to be developed	Vicky Fletcher	2012

subject to availability of data

Appendix 2:   Oxfordshire 2030 Refresh: Proposals from Environment Partnership

Name of thematic partnership: **Environment and Waste Partnership**	Chairman:
	OCC Cabinet Member:

Contact officer details: Susie Ohlenschlager	

Key Priorities for medium term 2011 -14 (preferably kept to a maximum of <u>4</u>)	**Lead Officer**
1 priority Manage the risk and effects of flooding **2 priority** Ensure Oxfordshire organisations and communities are preparing for the impacts of climate change in the longer term **3 priority.** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Oxfordshire **4 priority:** Protect and enhance the biodiversity of the county	Chris Brown Susie Ohlenschlager Nick King Dominic Lamb (Oxfordshire BAP Partnership)

For each of the key priorities please provide*
Context – *for each priority :* • *references to existing/emerging policies and strategies underpinning each priority* • *link to longer term 2030 objectives* • *references to relevant business plan[s] in terms of financial planning*   *Deliverables* – *List of what will be delivered and by when?*   *Measures of success* – *success measures corresponding to each of the deliverables - how will we know the outcome is a success?*

Priority 1   Manage the risk and effects of flooding
Context: Flooding : As Lead Local Flooding Authority, Oxfordshire County Council is required to meet the statutory requirements of the new flooding legislation set out in the Flood and Water Management Act, which came into effect on April 2011. LLFA responsibilities are set out in letter of 8 March 2011 from minister Richard Benyon MP. Suds adoption part of the Act is not taking effect until 2012. Under the Flood and water Management Act all flooding events have to be investigated. This is where older estates will show up as problems. These flooding problems will then be added to the Highway Drainage program in order of severity. In Oxfordshire we are actively promoting and offering adoption of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) on all developments which fall under the act to encourage take-up. On all OCC developments/redevelopments SUDs are used to show we are leading by example.
Deliverables Use of sustainable drainage systems promoted on all new developments in the county.

Measures of success

All new developments incorporate SUDS within their design to reduce water discharge from the sites to on average 25% less than greenfield runoff.

Priority 2: Ensure Oxfordshire organisations and communities are preparing for the long term impacts of climate change (adaptation)

Context:

Report of the Independent Adaptation Sub-committee on climate change, (which was set up under Climate Change Act 2008) "How well prepared is the UK for Climate Change?" (September 2010); timely adaptation measures "may reduce damages from climate change by roughly half for moderate amounts of warming".

Letter from Defra Nov 2010 confirms that reporting of NI 188 will cease, but that the Government's Adapting to Climate Change Programme will continue, through organisations such as LRAP and Regional Climate Change Partnerships.

The Environment Minister Caroline Spelman MP announced, in 22 March 2011, a new role for the Environment Agency as the Government's delivery body for advice on climate change adaptation.

Weather will continue to have an impact on council services and infrastructure, with associated consequences and costs. This emphasises the need to take a risk-based approach - preparing for a range of possible impacts and scenarios.

Oxfordshire County Council has recently published a Severe Weather Plan and is promoting community resilience plans.

The Thames Valley Resilience Forum has issued a booklet to all Oxfordshire residents – "Are you Ready?"

Deliverables

Likely impact of climate change on Oxfordshire 2030 objectives recognised and accounted for in revised 2030 delivery plan.

Local authorities leading by example by continuing to monitor risk assessments including weather related risks.
Increased number of Community resilience plans developed by local communities.
Assessment of risks and opportunities for Oxfordshire undertaken by March 2013.

Measures of success:
Relevant local organisations have undertaken risk assessments including weather related risks, and developed resilience plans.
LAs engaging with community infrastructure organisations to support local climate change and low carbon community groups.
Adaptive measures introduced and local community resilience increased where need is identified.
Weather and climate related risks are taken into account in relevant local plans, policies and assessments.
Vulnerabilities, risks and opportunities identified for Oxfordshire are used to inform future developments and plans for the county.

Priority 3: Reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions in Oxfordshire (mitigation)

Context:
- National/EU target is to reduce GHG emissions by 80% by 2050. This is enshrined in Climate Change Act 2008 and replaces the current long-term target in the delivery plan (60% by 2050)
- Green deal – local householders will be given financial incentives to reduce energy in their homes from 2012.
- Feed-in-Tariffs are encouraging development of private and local renewable energy generation
- Big Society offering opportunities for greater involvement for local communities in development of low-carbon solutions
- Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership programme – vision for a high-tech low carbon economy.
- Guidance has been issued by government about future emissions reporting requirements to replace NI 185, in line with the Greenhouse Gas Protocol. LGA and DECC have issued a Climate Change Agreement (MOU): www.lga.gov.uk
- Detailed plans are set out in Local Authority Carbon Reduction Plans/energy strategies.
- Council greenhouse gas reduction targets will be confirmed later this year.

Deliverables:

a) Increase in number of community groups engaged on climate change mitigation and low carbon initiatives – percentage tbc.
b) Annual increase in number homes and buildings being insulated/retrofitted and increased energy and carbon emissions savings
c) All local authorities, and organisations supporting Low Carbon Oxford Charter, reducing CO$_2$ emissions by 3% every year

d) Increase in proportion of local authority energy generated from on-site renewables to 5% by 2015 - tbc

Measures of success:
- Reductions in energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions

- Cost savings for businesses and local residents, and reduction in fuel poverty

- Recorded improvements in air quality

- Increase in proportion of locally generated renewable energy

This priority meets Oxfordshire Partnership objective of Public Service Cost Reduction (asset management

Priority 4:   Protect and enhance the biodiversity of the county

Context:

- Priority 2 and priority 4 are interlinked, and actually priority 4 is helping to delivering priority 2. Climate change is and will continue to affect habitats and species in Oxfordshire, and one of the key things we are trying to do as a county is to maintain existing habitats, reverse fragmentation and enhance/recreate habitats to try and improve resilience to climate change.
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan sets national targets for Biodiversity action
- The Oxfordshire BAP is delivered through the Conservation Target Areas Approach and targets for all habitats have been set with a delivery date of 2015
- Former NI 197 now an OCC target relates to the Local Sites target

Deliverables:

Increase in proportion of Local Sites in positive conservation management

Increase in area of UKBAP priority habitats within the Conservation Target Areas to achieve the Oxfordshire BAP 2015 targets

 Development of a county wide Green Infrastructure framework by 2012

Longer term:

Maintain and enhance the status of priority habitats and species within Oxfordshire.

Implement the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Measures of success:
Environmental benefits including the enhancement of biodiversity as a result of delivering the county wide green Infrastructure strategy.

Enhanced habitats which help reduce the vulnerability of the natural environment to climate changed.

Review of your partnership's pledges in the current 2030 Delivery Plan

Which pledges have already been met? What is the current strategic relevance of the remaining pledges?

All of the pledges remain strategically relevant as they relate to the long –term sustainability of the county in terms of resource use, resilience to climate change and protection of biodiversity. However they can be reduced and simplified as proposed.

Pledge 16: Reduce carbon emissions and improve energy and water efficiency by public sector organisations, and encourage residents and businesses to do the same. Progress
Work on LAA2 targets is complete; all local authorities are implementing carbon reduction plans, and data will be reported in July 2011.
Pledge is still of strategic relevance. Work by local authorities should focus on reducing carbon emissions internally and therefore reducing energy costs.

Pledge 18: Minimise the effects and risk of flooding
Oxfordshire has increased its Drainage Budget by 40% to alleviate the risk of flooding in the more vulnerable areas.
We have also increased the Drainage Asset Management collection to locate additional vulnerable areas.
Flooding work continues to be of strategic importance. It is suggested that flooding should remain as a separate pledge and be first in order of priority. Another option would be to consider whether flooding issues should be reported to the Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership

Pledge 20:   Support individuals, communities and businesses to respond to climate change and to improve efficiency in their use of energy and water. Progress
Low carbon communities programme funded by LAA1 grant, reported in regular newsletters.
A wide range of work has been undertaken by District Councils - with LSPs, to reduce CO2 emissions in the local area – reported to OWEP as work on NI 186 (ref).
The pledge is of strategic importance but duplicates pledge 16, (which also covers work in the wider community). It should therefore be deleted.

Pledge 22: Protect and enhance the biodiversity of the county
 Pledge is still of strategic relevance, and should be retained with no change.