

Oxfordshire County Council
Budget and Business Planning 2026/27
Overarching climate impact review of
2026/27 budget proposals

Context & Background

1. This document provides an overview of the potential climate action impact of proposed changes to the budget.
2. As many schemes are in early development, further climate assessment will be undertaken as more detailed business cases are developed through the capital governance process.
3. On 4th November 2025, Council approved the [Strategic Plan 2025-2028 \(pdf format, 5.6 MB\)](#). This builds on the 2022-2025 plan and retains the overarching vision of a greener, fairer and healthier Oxfordshire. This is centred around strong and connected communities, healthy places to live, and a thriving local economy that benefits everyone. This commitment is strengthened further by the Councils' priority to 'put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work'. The council's adopted climate action framework also commits the council to:
 - Being carbon neutral in its operations by 2030
 - Enabling a zero-carbon Oxfordshire well ahead of 2050

In addition, aligned climate action targets and commitments have been included in Oxfordshire's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan:

- Achieving a net zero transport network by 2040
 - Take into account embodied, operational and user emissions when assessing a potential infrastructure project and its contribution to Oxfordshire's carbon budget and to a net-zero transport network by 2040
 - Use PAS 2080 to assess, manage and minimise carbon emissions in transport infrastructure projects throughout the project lifecycle, including maintenance.
4. The council has a cross-organisational work programme to deliver on these commitments. The latest report on this programme can be found at [Decision - Climate Action Programme Six Month Update | Oxfordshire County Council](#)
 5. In July 2024 a new government took power proposing new policies for the delivery of the national Net Zero target by 2050. This is outside the scope of this report, but central government funding will be a key factor in enabling the delivery of local climate objectives. Decisions made by central government in this context will also influence private sector investment in this area.

Revenue Proposals Climate Impact Review

6. A number of proposals are included in the budget that impact positively the delivery of the council's Climate Action commitments **whilst promoting cost savings including:**

- **Utility cost savings.** Partially as of energy efficiency measures (item RES106) adopted in OCC properties, both cost and carbon reductions will continue to be delivered in 2026/27.
- **Investment in procurement for cost reduction which will also favour carbon reduction.** Procurement service is proposing to invest to enhance its department's capacity and capabilities to develop savings in 2026/27 (item RES102). This investment will allow the procurement service to deliver savings whilst implementing the recently approved Ethical Procurement Policy which includes climate requirements aligned the previous supply chain carbon emissions policy and the adoption of principles of carbon governance in procurement such as PAS2080. PAS2080 is a governance standard in infrastructure that has shown that both cost and carbon reduction can be achieved in infrastructure projects.
- **Children's Home to School Transport improvement programme.** the council has been working on optimising the children's home to school transport operation through the use of the council's own fleets, optimising school routes, promoting the use of bus and rail transport and promoting the use of shared taxis, among other measures. These measures will have a positive impact in reducing carbon emissions, reducing traffic congestion and improving air quality. An important part of this programme is to build capabilities and confidence in children (including those requiring assistance) so they become more independent in their journeys.

7. A number of proposals are included in the budget that impact positively the delivery of the council's Climate Action commitments **whilst improving air quality across Oxfordshire including:**

- **Investment in improved bus services,** the Council has invested in real time passenger information assets across the bus network as part of Bus Service Improvement Plans. In 2026/27 the Council is further investing in properly maintaining such assets (2026E&H5) so they continue enhancing the bus service across Oxfordshire and therefore improve bus adoption an objective in OCC's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan which in turn will contribute to achieving the council's LTCP target for a Net Zero transport network by 2040.
- **Keeping as much as possible the subsidy for P&R ride joint ticket.** The council currently subsidises the park and ride joint ticket which has been very successful. Nevertheless, the level of success has been larger than anticipated and the council is proposing to allocate more funds for subsidizing this joint

ticket. If approved this additional funding will contribute to reducing car dependence, improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions, all of these objectives included in the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

- **Energy from waste to be included in UK's Emissions Trading Scheme.** Energy from waste incineration will be brought into the UK Emissions Trading Scheme from 2028 to incentivise decarbonisation of the sector. It is expected that the costs of carbon trading arising from the fossil carbon element of residual waste delivered to Ardley Energy Recovery Facility, such as plastic waste, will be passed to the council. The council is proposing provisions to prepare a strategy for this change in policy (item 2026 EH&9). There remain uncertainties about how the scheme will be implemented, although central government has recognised the need for supporting local government and may partially cover the costs. Ways of mitigating the additional cost by bringing down waste are being considered with the contractor, including working in partnership with the district councils to reduce residual waste through more recycling, the contribution that might be made by implementation of national waste policy changes.
- **Reducing air pollution from waste burning emissions:** the council is investing in reducing air quality emissions (NOx) resulting from burning the residual waste delivered to Ardley Energy Recovery Facility as a result of a new law requiring limiting air pollution (2026E&H3). This investment will improve local air quality in Oxfordshire improving health of its citizens and given that NOx emissions also contribute to global warming, this initiative will also have positive impacts in mitigating climate change.

8. A number of proposals are included in the budget that impact positively the delivery of the council's Climate Action commitments **whilst promoting Oxfordshire's biodiversity:**

- **Dealing with tree ash dieback disease in Oxfordshire:** Ash species make up 12% of OCC's Highway tree stock (~400000 trees total) which aligns with data advising 13% of Oxfordshire's treescape is ash species. Ash Dieback (ADB) is a fungal disease that is airborne and once trees become infected, there is no known cure. As the disease progresses, action must be taken to prune or fell them. ADB has become more prevalent across Oxfordshire in the last 18-24 months with ash trees exhibiting signs of decline. Through initial assessment, we have seen an increasing presence of the disease across the county. The broader impact will provide a large landscape-scale loss which will change the amenity and visual landscape of Oxfordshire. This project aims to address the emerging issue as a proactive programme of assessment, inspection and intervention.

- **Increased funding for the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategy:** the council contributes to fund an external partner to manage 200+ Local Wildlife Sites. The existing funding is insufficient, and the nature sites manager have asked all partners for additional funding. This is part of delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and our Biodiversity Action Framework and the percentage of LWS in active management is a Corporate KPI.
9. One proposal entails further collaboration with contractors to understand the magnitude of the potential climate impact in **OCC 2030 carbon neutrality target and net zero target well ahead of 2050:**
- **Investment in Microsoft CoPilot licenses:** the council is investing in Microsoft CoPilot licenses in 2026/27 (RES101). The emergence of AI and the increasing energy demands, and further environmental pressures of data centres require a responsible approach to manage the potential climate and environmental impacts of this emerging technology. OCC has identified the need for a sustainability policy and/or framework based on the precautionary principle that can guide the responsible use of AI. For this purpose, in 2026/27 the council will build upon the UK's Royal College of Engineering "[Foundations for Environmentally Sustainable AI](#)" to develop a policy framework for the responsible use of AI and guide decision making around this technology.
10. One proposal reduces the council's ability to deliver 'beyond carbon neutrality ambition' and may reduce the council's ability to meet the principles of its offsetting policy [Offsetting Policy](#) (buying local credits):
- **Cease market making activity for local carbon credits:** The council is proposing to cut the budget allocated to the "Beyond Carbon Neutrality" policy to incentivise the development of the carbon removal market. By cancelling the funding to incentivise a local carbon removal market, the council may be unable to meet its "Beyond Carbon Neutrality" ambition and may experience additional challenge in meeting the principles of purchasing local, high quality offset set-out within Oxfordshire approved in the Offsetting Policy for the council's carbon neutrality by 2030 target. There is a known pressure in 29/30 for funding offset for the 2030 target. Removal of this budget may add to this pressure.

Capital Proposals Climate Impact Review

11. Proposals have been made within the programme that support OCC's target to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 **whilst supporting community services.**

- **Expansion of Bicester Community Support Services:** This investment will deliver an extension and internal refurbishment works to expand capacity and enhance the functionality of Bicester Community Support Service. This will improve service delivery, accessibility, and overall user experience for the local community.
- **Works to the Forum, Kidlington:** This project will deliver agile workspaces for Oxfordshire County Council partners at the Forum, Kidlington. It will also provide welcoming facilities for families and children visiting social services.
- **Expansion of Didcot Library:** Investment into Didcot Library will deliver expanded capacity and will improve facilities. This will create a more accessible, modern space that supports a wider range of services and community needs.
- **Works to Wantage Library:** The investment in Wantage Library will create a flexible, accessible space that supports a wider range of activities and resources. The improvements aim to enhance facilities and capacity, promoting learning, engagement, and inclusion while delivering a modern library experience for all users.
- **Works to Goring Library:** Improvement works to Goring Library will enable the service to expand its offering and better meet the needs of the local community. The project will deliver a more flexible and accessible space, supporting a wider range of activities and resources. This will promote learning, engagement and inclusion, providing a modern library experience for all users.
- **Additional Community Facilities in Libraries:** This fund will support investment into a number of libraries enabling improved community facilities and spaces, including meeting rooms, small pods, charging spaces and study spaces. These interventions will support greater community engagement, cultural activities and access to services across the County.
- **Replacement of Woodeaton School:** The proposed investment, which is in addition to other funding, will fund the relocation of Woodeaton Manor Special School into a modern, purpose-built facility, providing improved learning environments and enhanced accessibility to better support pupils' educational and wellbeing needs.

12. Proposals have been made within the programme that have clear potential to support the **adaptation to climate change impacts.**

- **Investment into Drainage Infrastructure:** This investment will deliver highway drainage system repairs to ensure that the increased gully emptying regime delivers the expected benefits. The new gully emptying programme has identified a number of new issues that were not previously known.

13. Proposals have been made in this budget to **enabling a net zero county by 2050 and promote nature recovery:**
- **Ash Die Back tree stock replacement:** This project will deliver a proactive approach to managing Ash Dieback, which has been increasingly prevalent across Oxfordshire, with trees showing significant decline. The proposed investment is to replace the Council's highway tree stock as the programme to assess and respond to infected trees is initiated.
 - **Oxfordshire Tree Project:** This investment will establish a sustainable tree propagation unit in central Oxfordshire to supply locally sourced trees for public projects and will become a hub for community-led satellite nurseries. This initiative will deliver environmental, societal and educational benefits, whilst supporting long-term sustainability. It will also enable the Council to replenish trees lost to Ash Dieback by utilising its own stock, thereby delivering cost benefits by avoiding external sourcing.
14. Proposals have been made that contribute **to better manage waste** whilst reducing carbon emissions:
- **New Bicester HWRC:** The project will deliver a modern Household Waste and Recycling Centre in Bicester, replacing Ardley Fields, to improve access, increase capacity, and support sustainable waste management for the growing community.
 - **HWRC Capital Site Maintenance:** The Council plans to carry out essential repair and maintenance works across several Household Waste and Recycling Centre sites over the next two years. These improvements will ensure the facilities remain safe, functional, and fit for purpose for both Oxfordshire residents and the site operatives who manage day-to-day operations.
15. Proposals have been made within the programme that have clear potential to **impact positively to the county's capacity to achieve a net zero transport network by 2040.**
- **Investment to deliver Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs):** The investment will deliver schemes that will promote active travelling. Therefore this investment will contribute to reduce car trips in alignment with targets in the council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.
 - **Quiet Lanes Programme.** The Quiet Lanes programme aims to pilot a range of interventions to make minor roads safer and more comfortable for walking, cycling and horse-riding. This initiative seeks to enhance local and county-wide connectivity for non-motorised users whilst promoting sustainable travel options.

- **The Rights of Way Bridges Capital Programme** ensures Oxfordshire's 2,970 footpath bridges are maintained, refurbished, or replaced to meet safety standards and accessibility principles. This investment ensures that this ongoing work to keep the network connected, safe, and fit for purpose. It will also ensure that there is the flexibility to respond to urgent repairs and unforeseen events.
- **Heavy Goods Vehicles Pilot Interventions:** This programme will deliver targeted improvements based on the findings of the 2024/25 High Goods Vehicle (HGV) studies, aiming to enhance road safety, reduce congestion, and support sustainable freight movement across Oxfordshire.
- **Abbey Meadows Bridge:** The bridge between Abbey Meadows and Barton Fields in Abingdon is overdue a replacement as the structure is made from timber and has gradients that do not comply with the Equalities Act. Works have begun with M-Group to design the bridge in accordance with the Equalities Act to achieve gradients of 1:20 minimum to allow all users to access the bridge and the green spaces it connects to. M-Group is a PAS2080 certified contractor with Science Based Carbon reduction targets.

16. Proposals have been made within the programme that have potential **to improve the public realms whilst promoting active travelling** and therefore reduce emissions:

- **Public Realm Improvements:** This additional funding will enable a greater level of maintenance to take place in our Towns and City targeted at public realm assets which will sustain and strengthen their appeal as vibrant destinations for local communities, visitors, and inward investment.
- **Wantage Market Place:** This investment will progress design and construction for Phase 1 of the Wantage Market Place project, focusing on the West End. Building on previous design work and consultation, the scheme will replace the tarmac surface with paving in keeping with the historic town centre, creating a safe, traffic-free space with step-free access. The project will enhance the local environment, support businesses, and provide an attractive setting for markets, events, and community activity.
- **Oxford City Centre Regeneration:** Regeneration and public realm improvements in Oxford city centre will benefit both businesses, residents and visitors, creating vibrant streets and beautiful spaces that reflect Oxford's international reputation for quality and excellence, supporting the thriving local retail and hospitality enterprises.

17. Proposals have been made within the programme that have potential to impact the council's commitment in its Local Transport and Connectivity Plan of achieving **a net zero transport network by 2040 and will require follow up to address remaining aspects:**

- **Didcot Central Corridor.** Didcot Central Corridor is a programme of work to combine transport improvements with urban design to create a more accessible environment, through walking, wheeling and cycling opportunities, a more attractive central space for markets, events and community activity and therefore supporting local businesses. The proposed investment will progress the programme of work to deliver a short list of options to progress. Whilst the scheme will likely reduce car use and therefore reduce greenhouse emissions, it also needs to aim to minimize emissions released during its construction (whole life carbon emission approach). For such purpose it should adopt the carbon governance standard PAS2080 following Policy 27 of Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.
18. One proposal entails further collaboration with contractors to understand the magnitude of the potential climate impact in **OCC 2030 carbon neutrality target** and **net zero target well ahead of 2050**:
- **IT Strategy:** This programme will modernise the council's technology estate to improve security, digital inclusion, and service delivery, while supporting collaboration and innovation ahead of local government reorganisation. The emergence of AI and the increasing energy demands, and further environmental pressures of data centres require a responsible approach to manage the potential climate and environmental impacts of this emerging technology. OCC has identified the need for a sustainability policy and/or framework based on the precautionary principle that can guide the responsible use of AI. For this purpose, in 2026/27 the council will build upon the UK's Royal College of Engineering "[Foundations for Environmentally Sustainable AI](#)" to develop a policy framework for the responsible use of AI and guide decision making around this technology.