

A DRAFT STRATEGY

Background

1. The current Charlbury Town Council (CTC) was elected in May 2021. That election was delayed by a year because of the pandemic so the council will serve a three-year rather than the normal four-year term. Of course, each new town council respects the policies and practices of the preceding town council, whilst also bringing fresh ideas to maintain and improve the town, and to respond to a changing political environment. New requirements and new opportunities arise.
2. Traditionally the powers and duties of town and parish councils have been limited. Where the council owns and manages assets, it has direct control over them. Councils have a duty to take account of biodiversity when making its decisions. They also have the power to influence other stakeholders – residents, local community organisations and businesses, nearby landowners and communities, and the district and county councils.
3. Charlbury Town Council enhanced its influence by preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and winning the community's approval to it in a referendum held in May 2021.
4. The appointment in November 2021 of a town clerk with the CiLCA¹ qualification means that the council is now able to use the General Power of Competence given to parish councils under the Localism Act 2011. This gives eligible parish councils “the power to do anything that individuals generally may do” as long as they do not break other laws. This better *enables them to take on their enhanced role and allow them to do the things they have previously been unable to do under their existing powers*” such as to provide cost-effective services and facilities in new ways to meet the needs of the local community.
5. The previous town council declared a climate emergency in 2019. As a result of that declaration the town council set up an Environment Working Group (EWG) whose membership included a number of councillors, and volunteers with particular interests and expertise who wanted to help with the development of policies that would deliver on key environmental objectives. (Some of those volunteers are now councillors). A thread that has emerged both from the EWG, but also in the wider community, is that the climate emergency cannot be divorced from the ecological emergency. The former town council therefore became a signatory to the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill being promoted in parliament and the protection and enhancement of land and nature is integrated into our strategy.
6. This understanding influenced our work from the outset, and the council's vision and mission statements incorporate the need for holistic thinking. For example, slowing traffic speeds improves safety and can encourage more walking and cycling, all of which reduce carbon emissions and improve health and wellbeing.
7. We have spent our first few months in office recruiting a new clerk, updating multiple policies and procedures, building a new website and working on developing this strategy. In the meantime, amongst other things, we have identified and started to enact maintenance and improvement programmes for Nine Acres, town benches and noticeboards, and the skate park; appointed a trustee to the newly-formed Corner House and Memorial Hall charity; received the initial results for mapping the carbon sequestration potential of the Mill Field and Wigwell Nature Reserve; are looking at the potential for a small hydro scheme at the sluice gate; and have organised the e-bike try-out scheme and are surveying the community's appetite for an electric car club.

¹ Certificate in Local Council Administration

8. The vision and mission

THE VISION: For Charlbury and the surrounding area to become a zero carbon community that is thriving, inclusive, beautiful, biodiverse and sustainable now and in the future.

THE MISSION:

- 1) Ensuring that Town Council services are delivered efficiently, sustainably and cost-effectively to meet the needs of Charlbury residents.
- 2) Delivering on our commitment to act on the climate and ecological emergencies by actively preparing Charlbury and its environment for a zero carbon, biodiverse and sustainable future.
- 3) Engaging all of the community by providing appropriate leadership, governance and inspiration in an open and transparent way.

Key considerations

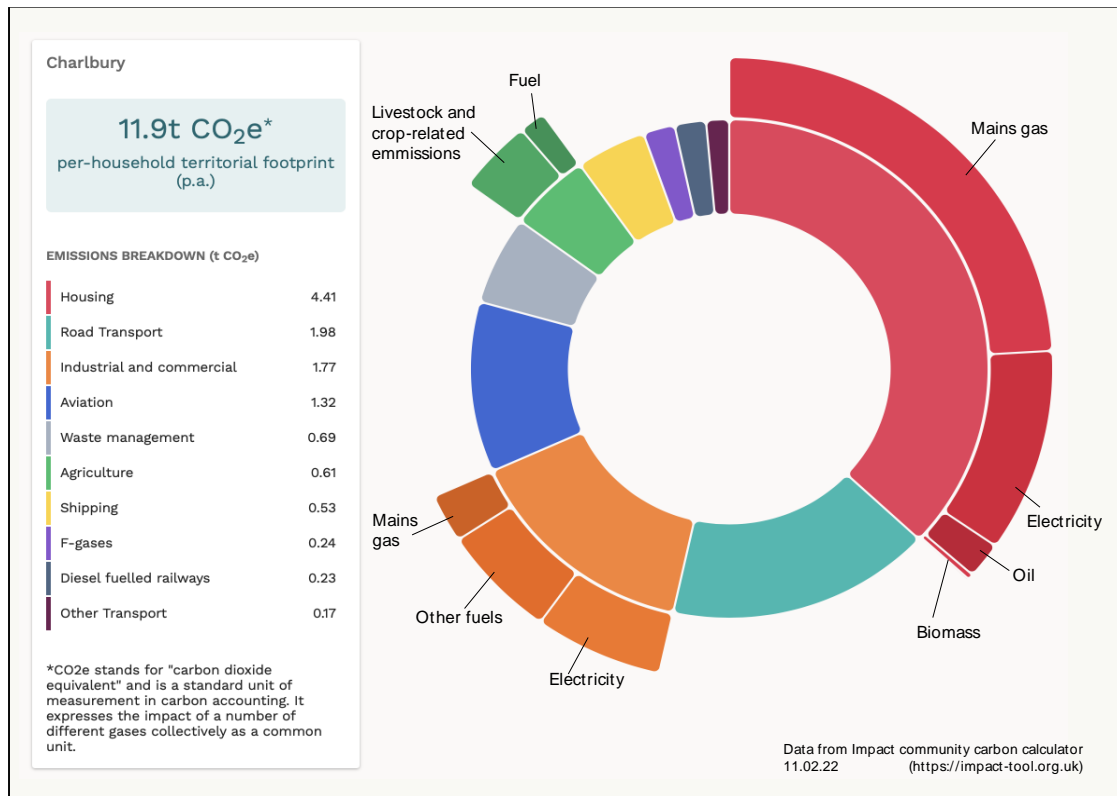
9. When considering the development of its strategy, the council has considered:

- Whether something relates to our duties or to a statutory responsibility such as highways
- The level of influence that the Council has over something such as where we own or manage land
- How we can build on our existing strengths to deliver quick wins
- Whether, when we provide funding, we might attach conditions to it which relate to our primary objectives such as reducing carbon emissions or improving biodiversity
- What capacity there is to develop new projects. Are there volunteers within the council or in community organisations willing and able to shape projects including estimating how much they might cost, making the case for town council funding, sourcing grants from other organisations, or engaging volunteers from the community in undertaking activities?
- How the council can leverage the enthusiasm, know-how and finances of other organisations with similar objectives to work in partnership with it
- How big an impact we can make if we take action rather than not
- Other drivers that exist, locally or nationally, that would allow Charlbury to showcase best practice, act as a test-bed for new initiatives or, engage and enable new ideas where there is a strategic gap in capacity.

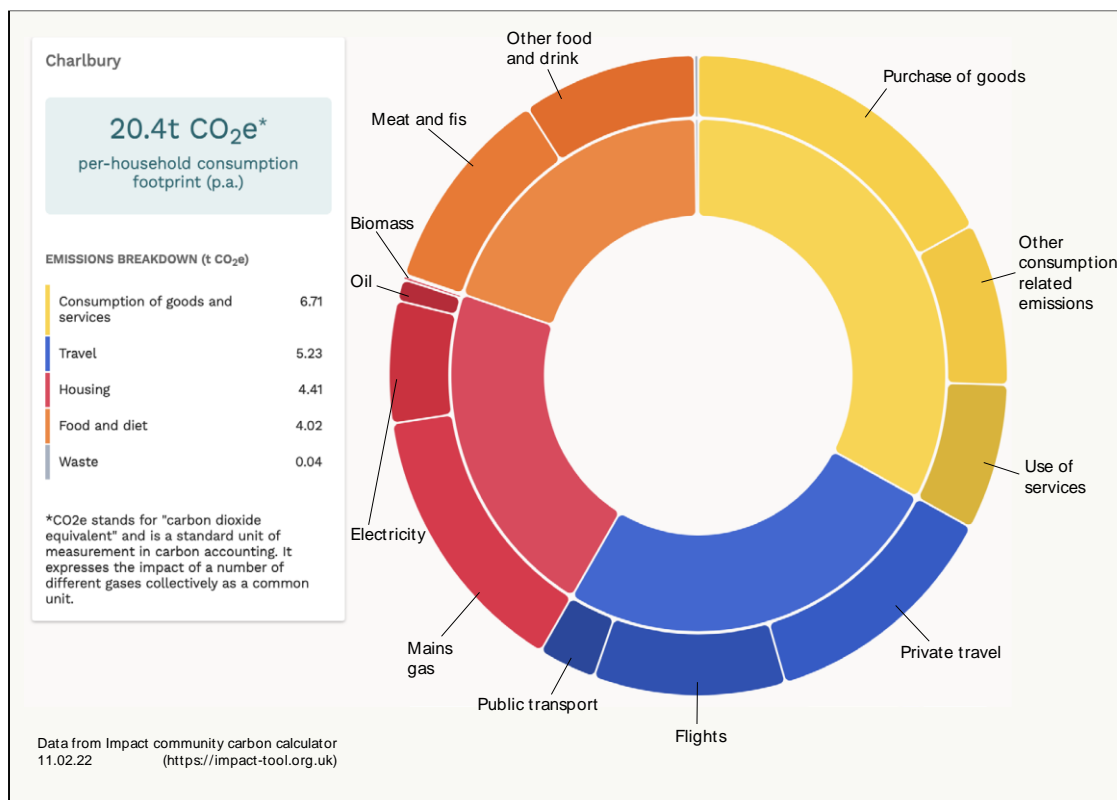
10. One of the council's first actions after declaring a climate emergency was to organise a community workshop. This agreed that a number of working groups would be set up to explore opportunities for action. These are: Land and Nature, Buildings, Journeys, Energy, Food and Stuff. These are action areas or workstreams which were seen as key to reducing carbon emissions around which groups of volunteers came together to work alongside the council to develop projects to create the transformative change that is required.

11. The community carbon calculator *Impact²* shows that the estimated average direct household emissions in Charlbury are 11.9 tonnes of CO₂e. The biggest emitters are housing 37%, road transport 17%, industrial and commercial (includes pubs, school, retail and so on) 15%, aviation 11%.

² Developed by the Centre for Sustainable Energy with Exeter University using government and other publicly available data (<https://impact-tool.org.uk>)



12. When emissions are included that relate to consumption – the stuff we buy – emissions total over 20 tonnes of CO₂e based on average household consumption.³ These include goods and services, travel, housing, food & diet and waste.



³ CO₂e stands for "carbon dioxide equivalent" and is a standard unit of measurement in carbon accounting. It expresses the impact of a number of different gases collectively as a common unit.

13. The workstreams set up at the community workshop are consistent with the sources of emissions identified in the graphs.
14. Initially a health & wellbeing working group was also set up but it became clear that health & wellbeing are integral to the outcomes that successful action to reduce carbon emissions would deliver – warmer and more comfortable homes with lower energy bills, more active travel, healthier food produced locally, and so on. It makes sense therefore to build health and wellbeing into each of the areas of activity. Similarly, the principles of inclusivity and establishing resilience in the face of climate threats need to be taken into account. Health & wellbeing, inclusivity and resilience are therefore considered as cross-cutting themes in the strategy.

Essential steps in planning

15. Charlbury already has a number of existing facilities and activities and the council is maintaining a register which records what we own, what we manage, where we are a statutory consultee, what we support through annual grants, and what other community organisations own and manage. We are also looking at priorities and initiatives being undertaken by the district and county councils which we might amplify or build on. This helps to establish the spheres and levels of influence that the town council can use.
16. The council will also maintain a register of grant-giving bodies to which we can apply for support for projects.
17. And whilst Charlbury will be the main focus of activity, there may be circumstances in which it makes sense to work with the nearby communities (such as Fawler, Finstock, Spelsbury, Chadlington, Taston, and Leafield) when thinking about, for example, sustainable journeys between them, working with landowners, or mapping hedgerows and biodiversity corridors.

Objectives

18. Using the above key considerations, the council has developed a comprehensive set of objectives that would deliver on our vision and mission statements. These are set out below.

Community

- To maintain a pleasant and well looked-after town that all can enjoy
- To increase opportunities for everyone to exercise, socialise and enjoy green spaces
- To provide support for and work with Charlbury's strong and active community

Land and nature

- To restore and connect habitats on council-owned and managed land, and support key species, and encourage residents to do the same on their own land
- To improve the capacity of local soils to sequester carbon

Buildings

- To encourage the high quality retrofit of local community buildings and homes to become low energy and zero carbon
- To engage with the planning system to maintain the town's character while helping it thrive and achieve net zero emissions

Energy

- To promote community-owned electricity generation
- To promote household energy generation (e.g. solar panels, heat pumps)

Journeys

- To make our streets safer by reducing traffic speeds and tackling danger areas
- To take proactive measures to promote and facilitate active travel
- To support and enable the shift to electric vehicles
- To improve and promote the use of public transport

Food

- To support and signpost local food producers
- To promote initiatives for community-food production and sharing
- To support climate-friendly diet initiatives
- To encourage reduction in food waste

Stuff

- To promote the purchasing of less stuff
- To encourage sharing and re-use
- To enable repair
- To promote low-carbon and eco-friendly purchases
- To encourage recycling

Engagement

- To engage with residents, community groups and organisations in order to understand and address the needs and concerns of the whole community and to work together to deliver our strategy.

Establishing priorities

19. We recognise that it is simply not possible to pursue all the objectives at once. We have therefore developed a scoring system to allow us to identify its short-, medium- and longer-term priorities for projects to pursue. Our first priorities have focused on projects which relate to the existing activities and responsibilities of the Town Council as this enables us to make more rapid and visible progress.

Priorities

20. To review land the Town Council owns, manages and leases to consider whether we could use it better for the community (e.g. for community activities, nature, carbon sequestration or income generation)

For example, Mill Field:

- Improve access for less-able residents and for buggies
- Enhance carbon sequestration and biodiversity through changes to grass-cutting schedules
- Encourage contractors to move to more efficient, electric-powered mowers

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- Explore opportunities to improve biodiversity including providing wildlife corridors (e.g. fish by-pass; community involvement in wildlife surveys and conservation measures for, e.g. bats and water voles.)
- Explore feasibility of renewable energy generation through a hydro-electric plant at the sluice gate
- Advocate for measures to reduce sewage pollution and improve water quality

(Proposals also being developed and prioritised for Allotments, Nine Acres, Cemetery, Ticknell Piece & Centenary Wood, Playing Close, as well as Town-Council maintained noticeboards, benches and verges (– see *project scoring spreadsheet*))

21. To prepare a local walking and infrastructure plan to improve safety and promote and enable active travel
22. To implement the Neighbourhood Plan by taking an active role on planning applications and representing the town's views to WODC and OCC
23. In partnership with WODC to promote its new sustainability checklist and assist Charlbury residents with meeting the conditions attached
24. To use our Community Grant Scheme to support community groups (especially those supporting vulnerable people) and important cultural events (like Riverside and the Charlbury Festival)
25. To invite and prioritise grant applications which align with our Mission and will provide greatest impact.
26. To lead and catalyse wider transformative change, particularly in the areas of:
 - Buildings energy efficiency – identified as a strategic gap in capacity both nationally and locally, with some local expertise
 - Low carbon journeys -
 - Nature recovery in Charlbury and surrounding area – recognising that nature recovery needs to take place at landscape scale (not just in pockets of TC-managed land), and capitalising on local expertise and strong engagement from the community/volunteers

Engaging the community

27. Clearly the rate of progress with the strategy will rely on how successfully the council focuses on enabling, educating and supporting the energy and ideas of the community.
28. Charlbury has a wealth of talent both in the number and dynamism of its many community groups and organisations, as well as the enthusiasm and energy of many individuals working within and outside existing groups. If our strategy is to be successful, it needs to ensure that its engagement processes reach out to, and draw into the council's action network as many of these as possible. The council can also inspire change without having to be closely involved in project development or delivery.
29. So, the council needs to define its role in supporting and harnessing that local energy and in driving change where it can have the most impact. Addressing the extensive range of existing actions and new ideas, we want to prioritise our time and energy and demonstrate – to each other, to the community we serve and to the wider Oxfordshire area – where we can best add value.
30. In prioritising, we do not want to demotivate or sideline wider or existing initiatives – the wider work of the community and individual personal choices will make the real difference to the impact of the overall strategy. But we do want to articulate and agree –

with each other and the community – where we should focus the limited resources of time and funding.

31. At the moment, the town council has working groups which are required to have councillors as members, as well as volunteers. There has been lack of clarity about quite how these should work. In the context of the climate action plan being delivered through a multiplicity of community activities, the role of the working groups should be one of liaising with and enabling community groups and volunteers.
32. Our goal is to have a network which operates across the different workstreams. The town council would operate within this network as an enabler, giving agency to others to act where appropriate, and providing financial and other support where a need is identified.
33. Town council-led projects will be delivered by town council-appointed project teams. Community-led projects will be delivered by external groups and networks. Current town council working groups will become liaison groups which facilitate community input to town council-led projects. They should also provide town council input to, and enablement for, community-led projects.

Appendix 1

Estimated carbon footprint of Town Council activities

The council's direct emissions – related to its own limited assets and activities - are very low.

The Council has completed its GHG emissions account for year ending 2020/2021 which is referred to within this Plan as the Council's baseline.

During 2020/2021, emissions totalled **14,400 kg CO₂e**.

(Based on a number derived from various sources, including the assumed environmental cost for grass-cutting in terms of fuel used (petrol or diesel) per acre of grass per annum is between circa 600 kgs and 1000kg CO₂e. The assumed average of 800kg CO₂e per acre per year has been used in this instance.

The council currently cuts around 17.45 acres of grass, the majority being made up of Millfield 5.4 acres, Nine Acres 4.5 acres, Ticknell Piece 5 acres, Cemetery 1.62 acres and the rest at 1.03 acres approximately.

The CO₂e from grass cutting activity is therefore 17.55 acres x 800kgs = 14,040 kg CO₂e.

An allowance has been made for an additional 360kg CO₂e for heating, lighting, website etc which is roughly equivalent to 1/10th of an average UK household use per year. This does not include items such as grant money spent on cutting the playing close at 0.5 acre.)

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Appendix 2

Project proposal review template

Charlbury Town Council Project Proposal Review Template

Project name:

Proposed by:

Date:

Brief description of project (<500 words):

Type of support sought from Town Council (please tick all that apply):

Council to lead project	
Council to provide funding	
Council to bid for external funding	
Council to convene stakeholders	
Council to endorse / provide communications support	
Other (please specify):	

Alignment with Town Council priorities:

How does this project support the Council's Vision and Mission and what level of impact will it have?

Vision / mission statement	How will the project support this?	What impact will it have?
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Charlbury Town Council

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MISSION 1: Ensuring that Town Council services are delivered efficiently, sustainably and cost-effectively to meet the needs of Charlbury residents.		
MISSION 2: Delivering on our commitment to act on the climate and ecological emergencies by actively preparing Charlbury and its environment for a zero carbon, bio-diverse and sustainable future.		
MISSION 3: Engaging all of the community by providing appropriate leadership, governance and inspiration in an open and transparent way.		

Feasibility

What level of influence does the Council have over the project scope / activities?

Council owns or manages land	Y / N
Falls under Council's existing responsibilities (e.g. as consultee on planning & highways; cemetery plots)	Y / N
Council has an official role in Governance (e.g. Nine Acres Management, Corner House)	Y / N
Council provides grant funding	Y / N
Other (please give details):	

What capacity is there to develop and implement this project?

Are there volunteers within the council or in community organisations willing and able to shape the project, including sourcing external funding if required?	
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Are there volunteers or paid staff who will be able to deliver the project?	
What support and expertise is available within other organisations (either local or elsewhere) and how will this be leveraged?	

What funding is required?

From the Town Council	
From other sources (please give information on potential funding sources/availability)	

Further supporting information (optional):

Reviewer's name & role:

Impact score (1-5):

Feasibility score (1-5):

Date:

[Final decisions on whether to proceed will be made by Full Council]

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Appendix 3

Project scoring table (illustration)

TC responsibility	Project ideas	Which Missions does it support (1, 2, 3)	Impact score	Feasibility score	Mechanism of support (lead, facilitate, encourage)	Timeframe
Millfield	weir repair					
	fish pass etc					
	hydro project					
	mowing	1; 2			lead	
	tree management					
Ticknell Piece land	skate park improvement					
	access					
	mowing/nature					
	display board					
Nine Acres	playground					
	margins					
	access					
	benches etc					
Community centre	photovoltaics					
Cemetery	biodiversity					
	benches					