

# ***Climate Change? Climate Emergency? What can we do in Oxford?***

## **Conference report**



This conference took place on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019. It was organised by Oxford Friends of the Earth at the Oxford Environmental Change Institute.

This report includes:

- Summary points and key messages from the day
- Reports from discussions and workshops
- Contacts for relevant organisations

### **Summary points and key messages from the day**

It should be absolutely clear to any organisation or individual engaging with future developments that the need to reduce carbon emissions rapidly and significantly must be at the centre of all plans and strategies.

The 2018 IPCC report, the UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC) report in early May, and the cross-party support for the parliamentary motion at that time make it clear that questions now must be ‘how do we do this?’ and ‘how fast do we do it?’ (to which the answer must be ‘as fast as technically possible’ and that technical innovation must accelerate as well).

#### ***Policy Issues***

**Tackling Oxford’s transport policies and associated planning processes are going to be central to delivering meaningful emissions reductions across the county in the near / medium term.**

Urgent issues for the next few months focus on changing direction on issues where we are clearly going in the wrong direction (e.g. the Expressway). These were stressed in the final sessions.

The key issues include:

- The Oxfordshire 2050 (Ox2050) plan which has been heavily criticised for its failure to take climate change seriously. Any emerging ‘zero carbon coalition’ may wish to push for this to be rewritten from first principles. This would link to calls for a ‘clean development strategy’ and the ‘green new deal’ being discussed nationally.
- Ox 2050 was planned to be about ‘where do the jobs and homes go?’. This ‘business as usual’ stance is now overtaken by new concerns. The answer from the conference to that question is very clearly that future jobs and homes should be collocated as far as possible with cycle and pedestrian access as the first mobility choice.

- National infrastructure issues will also be important, and the key local one is the Expressway. The loss of enthusiasm for this project is notable, and a review is essential in the light of the CCC report.
- Another key planning issue will be the move towards zero carbon buildings. Various legal challenges have confirmed that councils can push for higher buildings standards (and if the new CCC report is taken seriously this seems inevitable). A goal for an immediate 40% improvement in standards, with all new buildings zero carbon from a date in the near future (Manchester has set a date of 2028), is likely to be heavily pushed.
- Local Transport Plan 5 (being developed by the County by early 2020) will also be a crucial document. This, along with Ox 2050, can be the route map to a zero- carbon economy for Oxford. To do that LTP 5 must move beyond ‘aspirations’ that characterise previous plans and provide a deliverable and fundable programme for CO2 cuts, pollution and safe streets for cyclists and pedestrians. A ‘business as usual’ development / growth process for business, university and tourism will put intolerable strains on transport infrastructure around the city
- The new Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) being developed at County level could be an important building block for this work. There are ways to progress but we first need to stop the work that is taking us in exactly the wrong direction.

### ***Projects and infrastructure***

It needs to be easy and straight forward for people to make the right choices. We need:

- Much better cycle routes across the city and linking to nearby towns .
- Home insulation and retrofit programmes are essential as a way of reducing emissions from house new programs such as that developed by the Low Carbon Hub and Retrofit Works are welcome but will need to be scaled up.
- An expansion of the opportunities for local food growing and for more tree planting, which will benefit the environment and get more people engaged in local activity.

### ***Engagement***

Building engagement across the County is critical to success. When key decisions are to be made there needs to be public support. We should also encourage involvement at every level: parish councils exist across the County and are in some cases taking a more active role on environmental issues. People should look to engage with their parish council and possibly get co-opted onto the council (many have vacancies).

We need to see a more diverse climate movement in Oxfordshire. The session on creating this highlighted the need for action and for existing environmental groups to review how they engage with all parts of the community.

## Actions arising from the day

Many ideas and suggestions for actions emerged from the day. Some of the key points are here:

### Actions by our local councils

- Call for an urgent review of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan to ensure that creating a 'net zero county' is a central objective.
- Ensure that LTP5 (Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 5) leads the way to decarbonising our transport system, includes well-developed and costed proposals to reduce car journeys, and opposes destructive plans such as the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway.
- Develop a clear plan across all services that the council manages for progressive reduction of carbon emissions with a clear zero target.
- Promote the climate plan (as above) and link this to public engagement work around the need for change and the benefits that will result.
- Offer training to councillors and staff on climate-related issues and ensure that key committees such as Planning are fully aware of the commitment to reduce emissions in every possible way.
- Work with local environmental organisations to plan for a major increase in public engagement and to enable people to take action within their communities.

### Actions for central government

- Bring into law new Climate and Environment legislation and make a clear and positive response to the Committee on Climate Change report.
- End the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030.
- Urgently review investment in public transport, cycling and walking to develop a new national programme.
- Set a target of 2025 for all new homes and buildings to be zero carbon.
- Set a national programme for home retrofit to save energy and end fuel poverty.
- Remove barriers to the expansion of clean energy and set a clear target for 100%
- Double tree cover and let wildlife thrive.
- Infrastructure: Stop backing projects that fuel climate change, like airport expansion and the Expressway.

### Actions for local zero / low carbon groups

- Discuss how they can take advantage of increased public interest to build local engagement
- Build good links with local councillors and encourage them to play a lead role on climate change
- Look to engage more with the diverse communities in their neighbourhoods
- Work with other local groups to increase their voice and impact
- Support, publicise and take part in school strikes and other actions

### Actions for individuals

Behaviour change by everyone remains an important aspect of wider change. As people seek to change so the services they need respond, as is being shown by rapid moves towards vegetarianism and eating less meat, but lobbying and activism is also part of this personal change. The Oxford Together on Climate Change website – [www.change4climate.uk](http://www.change4climate.uk) – provides a wealth of support for individual action.

## Reports from discussions and workshops

### Opening session: Climate Change - Where are we now and what must we do – globally and locally?

**Prof. Nick Eyre**, who leads the UK Centre for Research on Energy Demand, gave a concise introduction to the key issues around climate change and energy use. His presentation is here: <https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/2019/05/15/cimate-action-conference-main-presentation-by-prof-nick-eyre/>

He stressed that we need to build a better energy system, using renewables and energy efficiency, so we can keep fossil fuels in the ground. There are many issues where action is needed now:

- All new buildings to be zero carbon
- A major national programme to insulate our buildings
- Big increases in wind and solar energy production
- Stop expanding fossil fuel production
- Develop action plans for more difficult problems such as aviation, food and farming, and industrial processes.

We should also recognise the benefits for health and employment that will come from the low-carbon transition.

**Laura Mckenzie** of Friends of the Earth (FoE) set out the key goals for FoE's new national Climate Action programme – see: <https://takeclimateaction.uk/>. This calls on the UK government to commit by the end of 2020 to act on:

- Transport: Stop the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030. Increase investment in public transport, cycling and walking everywhere.
- Power: Stop making electricity from dirty fuels and ban fracking. Aim for 100% clean energy from the wind, sun and sea.
- Buildings: Fund a massive insulation scheme and shift to eco-friendly heating.
- Agriculture and Land Use: Double tree cover and let wildlife thrive.
- Infrastructure: Stop backing projects that fuel climate change such as airport expansion.
- International Justice: Stop funding fossil fuels. Pay a fair share to support more-vulnerable countries to cut carbon and deal with the impacts of climate change.

**Councillor Tom Hayes** of Oxford City Council set out the challenges facing local government and raised the need for cross-sector cooperation and wider engagement. He later headed a discussion session (see 3 below).

### Discussions sessions and workshops

The conference included 15 sessions. Some focused on policies and development, others considered how people could get involved in local action. This report sums up conclusions from a number of the workshops. Contacts for organisations leading sessions are at the end.

#### Reports from discussions below:

1. A 'Zero-Carbon Oxford': what does this look like, how do we get there?
2. Changing our transport systems. How can local action deliver long-term change?
3. 'Climate and the City' – a discussion on what the City Council is doing

4. Plastics and climate change – local action linking these issues
5. Trees, nature and climate – making the links and delivering change
6. Creating a diverse climate movement in Oxford
7. Divestment campaigning for a ‘Fossil-Free Oxford’
8. How can adults support the youth strikes?

## 1. A ‘Zero-Carbon Oxford’: what does this look like, and how do we get there?

This session set the scene with inputs from County Cllr. Suzanne Bartington (Cons.), Cllr. Damian Haywood (Lab.) and Cllr. Craig Simmons (Green)

### ***Suzanne’s key points:***

- County Council spent £7M on energy last financial year; projected to increase to £9M in financial year ahead. Work is needed at county level on more efficient purchasing, a concerted move towards renewables, and work to reduce greenhouse emissions.
- The Oxfordshire 2050 Strategic Plan (bringing together individual Local Plans) will be a key document to shape future activity.
- Climate action needs to have a champion at the highest level in local government – there is currently little / no responsibility in the county around sustainability.
- Transport is a vital issue. Rural use of public transport is low – looking at on-demand services to address this. There is a risk that the older, polluting buses may be redeployed elsewhere in the city e.g. schools.

### ***Damian Haywood said that:***

- It is difficult to know what is going on across all councils.
- Politicians are lacking political will: worried about losing their jobs if they introduce policies that upset voters, but need to be brave.
- There is awareness work to be done. People don’t know what they want in terms of environmental objectives or what the risks are of them not changing their habits.
- Jobs and houses are being built in different areas. This must change. Need sustainable transport systems to get people from home to work without the need for long commute times.
- Need to get rid of the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway.
- Oxford City has set a vision to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- County Council investment in fossil fuels is being discussed at Audit & Governance (currently 6% of funds are invested in fossil fuels).

**Craig Simmons presented a range of issues - his slides are here:** <https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/oxford-friends-of-the-earth/climate-change/>

- Emissions in Oxford have reduced by 30% over last 10 years but this is still average for the rest of UK. However could get to zero carbon by 2040 if continue on this path.
- Key messages for the future are:
  - **Realign:** if we don’t stop making things worse, we have no hope of reaching zero carbon targets
  - **Reduce:** need to change behaviours - e.g. increase food recycling
  - **Replace:** introduce low or zero carbon alternatives - e.g. more onshore wind and solar generation
  - **Replenish:** e.g. increased planting of new trees
  - **Rapidly:** need to take action now

- Funding for investment is not a cash problem, it's a cash flow problem. Investing in a lower carbon future is the best investment that can be made.
- Jobs need to be created near where the houses are to reduce travel.
- Must not undermine local public transport by introducing ways that encourage people to drive more (e.g. expansion of Park & Ride).

Other points raised in this session included:

- We need structured programmes to encourage more cycling, more local food production, particularly organic, action by schools to be "greener"
- Councils need to use all the powers they have to cut emissions across the county, including work with schools (and end recycling charges for schools)
- The Oxfordshire Growth Board and the Local Economic Partnership need to wake to the climate change challenge. The Growth Board should be renamed and given a brief of genuinely sustainable development.
- Councils at every level matter: people can get themselves elected or co-opted on to their Parish Council to push environmental issues
- Businesses can help reduce travel congestion by promoting more homeworking

## 2. Changing our transport systems. How can local action deliver long-term change?

Transport in Oxfordshire is the largest source of emissions – c.40% of CO<sub>2</sub>. It is also the cause of most air pollution which is leading to serious public health issues.

The issues are set to get worse unless we change course. Growth in housing (100,000 new homes are being planned) and employment may put intolerable strains on systems. By 2031 on current plans Oxford city could expect 26,000 additional trips, 13,000 more commuter trips and 2500 more HGV trips every day. Major increases in tourism are also expected, with more bus trips and rail use putting public transport under severe strain.

Planning needs to recognise the different needs of different travellers at different times of the day and get smarter. The value of public transport must also be recognised in helping people get to where they work, study or spend money – all of this benefits the economy.

### **The County Council is now developing LTCP5 – its' next Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.**

This must take on decarbonisation of our transport systems as a priority. The County is also working on Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs): these have eight 'pillars of change' where work is needed as a priority.

1. Comprehensive Cycle Network (27 routes improvements)
2. City Centre 'Cells' where traffic flows are controlled
3. City Centre Public Realm improvement
4. 'Low Traffic Neighbourhoods' – such as those in Waltham Forest
5. Speed reduction – 20mph as standard extensions
6. Controlled Parking Zones and enforcement (remove cars from footways)
7. Work with schools (school exclusion zones and routes)
8. Road User Charging or Workplace Levy Charge?

Some key targets emerged from discussion:

- Invest in infrastructure for walking and cycling – segregated cycle routes in the city and linking to nearby towns will be important.
- Actively encourage ‘modal shift’ get people to travel without cars (bus, train, walking, cycling)
- Innovate in public transport:
  - Expand the rail network;
  - Develop the ‘pick me up’ bus service and develop similar ideas for rural areas;
  - Discuss how buses can be made free (this is happening in 100+ cities - bus services are already subsidised and increasing this would be an efficient way to get people out of cars)
  - Rapid transit systems need to be developed in certain areas.
  - New ideas such as cable cars (in use in a growing number of cities) should also be assessed (e.g. for a link from the bypass to the JR Hospital)

### **3. ‘Climate and the City’ – a discussion on what the City Council is doing**

Topics raised and responses from Cllr. Tom Hayes (unless otherwise attributed).

#### **Council needs to start taking action as soon as possible.**

City Council has a good track record on tackling environmental issues but agreed that it needs to do more. It is critical to balance the need to act quickly with the need to ensure that plans have been carefully thought through first.

#### **All new-build properties should be zero carbon.**

Agreed; the Council is looking at how this can be achieved but it will be more expensive to build this type of property so there will have to be a trade-off with other areas of Council expenditure. Need to invest in developing the skills of all trades involved in the building process to ensure that the new houses really are carbon neutral when finished (Nick Eyre).

#### **Put solar panels on all buildings across the city.**

The Council is already mapping locations across the city where it would be possible to site new solar panel installations.

#### **City Council’s access to funding and the processes involved.**

All councils are in a difficult financial situation currently and need to think creatively about where funding will come from to invest in future environmental-related projects. In each case, will need to think about what the ambitions are, what’s involved and what the trade-off is. Councils already have access to low-cost borrowing, the cost of which is lower than the returns on investments like solar panels. The City Council already makes use of long-term (e.g. 50 year) loans (Craig Simmons).

#### **How the Council works with the University to tackle environmental issues.**

Council already has active engagement with Oxford Brookes but less so with the University. Tom believes there needs to be greater internal and external pressure on encouraging a more environmental and sustainable approach – e.g. University should consider whether it really needs to build new properties rather than make better use of existing ones.

#### **The Oxford Citizens Assembly: an overview**

- Benefits:
  - Raises awareness and education across all areas of society

- There is a need for proper constitutional reform at a national level; this is a good way to start
- Climate change is a controversial issue that needs to be done deliberatively and collaboratively through mechanisms like this.
- It will be independent, cross-party, with a wide representation across business, industry, youth etc. to ensure that it has credibility and “teeth”.
- It will be run across a minimum of two weekends but the designers will determine the most effective format.
- Councillors will have the final say.

#### 4. **Plastics and climate change**

What’s the link between plastics and climate change? Fossil fuels – 99% of plastic is made from petrochemicals (oil and gas), and plastics manufacturing is forecast to grow significantly over the next 30 years. Plastics is a major contributor to climate change, both in manufacturing and waste (e.g. methane produced from degrading plastics).

Compared to the amount of plastic produced, very little is recycled. Only 9% of all plastic produced globally since 1950 has been recycled (2015 statistic)! Staggeringly little. We have a major global plastic pollution problem with micro- and macro-plastics apparently everywhere in the environment – aquatic and land.

There are many different types of plastics which is a challenge in recycling – some plastic (e.g. PET and HDPE) is recyclable, but others (e.g. mixed polymers such as in food packaging) are not. Bottle deposit schemes are not yet operational in the UK. They are in other countries, such as Norway (e.g. with reverse vending machines)

People want to recycle more plastic, but it’s not clear what can and can’t be recycled. If we are to recycle more in Oxfordshire information must improve.

What can we do?

- Put pressure on national government to urgently tackle plastic pollution – Friends of the Earth and the Women’s Institute have drafted a bill (Phase-out of Plastic Pollution) which is gaining cross-part support. Lobby your MP to support.
- Fundamentally, we need to stop buying/using ‘stuff’ made of needless plastic!
- Improve public awareness – there is no ‘away’ in throw away! Plastic waste and pollution have detrimental effects in seas, rivers and on land. Also, hidden plastics – public are unaware of products containing hidden plastics e.g. wet wipes, some teabags, clothing etc.
- We need more public pressure on improving waste management at local level – where is it going and what happens to it? Contact your councillors and ask how this is being improved.
- Refill and zero waste shops/pop-ups (e.g. SESI, Refill Oxford, Co-Cup) are providing alternatives to single use plastic packaging so support these.
- Put pressure on supermarkets to reduce plastic packaging and bags – speak with store managers and write letters to management. Tell them what you do want to see stocked, as some manufacturers are making changes to introduce sustainable packaging.
- Put pressure on manufacturers of brands with single-use plastic/plastic packaging – write to them!

- Get involved in local discussions and action e.g. Plastic Proaction Café hosted by Oxford Hub on 14 June, 6 pm at Oxford Martin School, Broad St, Oxford, and Zero Waste Festival at the Oxford Town Hall on 16 June, 12 pm – both part of Oxford Green Week 2019.
- Set up a plastic-free community/movement e.g. Surfers Against Sewage initiatives.
- Find local repair cafes and ‘Library of Things’ – to repair items and share, preventing need for purchasing and waste. If there isn’t one in your community, set one up!
- Expand the three ‘Rs’ to five for items: Refuse, Restore, Reduce, Re-use, Recycle (think clothes, electronics, tools, furniture etc.). And add another R: Rethink...!

Further reading:

- Friends of the Earth website – briefings, articles, practical tips, petition – [www.oxfoe.co.uk](http://www.oxfoe.co.uk)
- Guardian article ‘Single-use plastics a serious climate change hazard, study warns’ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/15/single-use-plastics-a-serious-climate-change-hazard-study-warns>
- Surfers Against Sewage website

## 5. Trees, Nature and Climate

FoE stress the need to double tree cover across the UK as a way to ‘soak up’ Co2 emissions. This could be a valuable way to engage many communities in practical and positive action. The discussion raised some key points to consider:

- We will need to plant the right trees in the right place in terms of biodiversity
- Will new trees planted be at risk of being ‘in the way’ and at risk of being taken down in the future/surface disturbance
- Management of newly planted trees and woodlands will be important to ensure positive impacts.
- Other ‘nature’ issues include improving wetlands for wildlife and reducing carbon emissions and to act as flood relief systems. Better soil management is also extremely important

The benefits of woodlands and green space go beyond carbon uptake and biodiversity. Work on gardening/tree planting has extremely positive effects on mental health and wellbeing. The NHS Forest (<https://nhsforest.org/>) is planting 1 tree for 1 member of the NHS!

We should plan now for tree planting this winter, and learn from previous planting projects (e.g. Florence Park where there are maintenance issues and Cutteslowe Park where the ‘community woodland’ is developing well). Millennium tree planting project in Eynsham where locals chose to plant fruit and nut trees is helping bats and other wildlife thrive.

The workshop recognised that growth pressures are taking some areas in the wrong direction (e.g. housing in Bicester is set to double by 2030 and developers aren’t fully understanding the importance of woodlands, flowers meadows etc.)

We should also consider twinning with other countries with re-forestation projects.

There are a wide range of organisations and resources that can help with this work – see the Nature page on the OxFoE website: [www.oxfoe.co.uk](http://www.oxfoe.co.uk)

## 6. Creating a diverse climate movement in Oxford

Mujahid and Nigel from Oxford Green and Black Alliance opened the workshop with a short presentation addressing the question - *‘Why do we want a more diverse climate movement?’* Discussing **what’s happening now** Mujahid highlighted how the 2019 Oxford Eid Extravaganza (June 9<sup>th</sup>) has chosen *‘Protecting the Environment’* has its theme with an aim to act as a springboard for developing greater inclusion of diverse Black, Asian and Minority ethnic (BAME) communities in Oxford’s environmental initiatives. Nigel and Mujahid stressed that we can learn from existing good practice such as the *Green and Black Ambassador Project* in Bristol which has sought to make the structures of Bristol’s sustainability movement more inclusive.

**Oxford Green and Black Alliance** - Mujahid and Nigel informed participants of a local initiative begun by East Oxford United (a multi-ethnic grassroots- community based football team), the Diversity Football League and Oxford Eid Extravaganza to develop a collaborative partnership with the Ideas Festival, Oxfordshire CAGs, Oxford Friends of the Earth, Oxford City Council, OCVA, and Bioregional - One Planet Oxfordshire to facilitate Oxford developing a project on the lines of Bristol’s Green and Black Ambassadors geared to creating a more diverse environmental community.

### Key Points from discussion

- **“Hard to Reach”** – Participants discussed ways of moving beyond the perception of ‘hard to reach’ groups by going to where people meet – and developing /maintaining ongoing dialogue with less seldom heard voices.
- **Existing green / climate groups** – these groups do not reflect the diversity of Oxford. Such groups may wish to consider (as a first step) how they can develop with BAMER groups in their neighbourhoods.
- **‘Race and Class’ issues** – one participant highlighted his lived experience as a white working class male of being dismissed, excluded and talked down to at meetings on environment /Climate Change issues. Oxford has a diverse **multi-ethnic working class** and there was discussion of linking social inequality issues / campaigns to Climate / Sustainability campaigns. One [possibility may be to work with diverse socio-economic user groups that meet in various Oxford City Community Centres.
- **Working with Faith Networks** – it will be important to engage with Oxford’s Faith Communities through bodies such as the **Oxford Council of Faiths** which convenes the annual **Interfaith Friendship Walk** to get climate change on the agenda.
- **Local and Global Diaspora Communities** - Oxford’s diverse local multi-ethnic communities have global diaspora links with extended families/communities at the sharp end of negative climate change impacts.

As the workshop concluded a number of people requested post-workshop follow-up meetings. An idea was put forward of creating a **nucleus group** for developing a more diverse climate movement in Oxford. Oxford FoE is supporting this work.

## 7. Divestment campaigning for a ‘Fossil-Free Oxford’

This session was run by Fossil Free Oxfordshire who have been campaigning to get local government in Oxfordshire to divest from fossil fuels for about 5 years, particularly focussed on the Oxfordshire Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), which is administered by the County Council. The session produced a lively discussion and some great ideas for taking the campaign

forward. A number of people also signed up to take part in the campaign, including some with valuable financial expertise.

Any individual or group can support the campaign by getting in touch with Fossil Free Oxfordshire at [fossilfreeoxon@gmail.com](mailto:fossilfreeoxon@gmail.com). We are particularly looking for help with social media, members of the LGPS, people who are willing to get in touch with their County Councillor, and people to join the core group. To find out more, see [fossilfreeoxon.wordpress.com](http://fossilfreeoxon.wordpress.com) or connect with us on Facebook ([fossilfreeoxon](https://www.facebook.com/fossilfreeoxon)) or Twitter ([@FossilFreeOx](https://twitter.com/FossilFreeOx)).

## 8. How can adults support the youth strikes?

This session was run by Parents for Future <https://www.parentsforfuture.org.uk/>  
It looked at ways for adults to help support youth engagement in the next school strike – 24th May. These include:

- Chaperone group of younger children if needed
- Pay bus fares
- Work with schools
- Help sign making
- Publicise the event and talk to other parents
- Help with stewarding

Further ideas are at: <https://mothersriseup.org.uk/about-us/>

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### Thanks!

Many of the workshops and discussion sessions were run or facilitated by different organisations. Our thanks to:

- Fossil Free Oxford - <https://www.facebook.com/fossilfreeoxon>
- Oxford Youth Climate Action - <https://www.facebook.com/OxfordClimateAction/>
- Extinction Rebellion Oxford - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/XROxford/>
- Oxford Climate Lobby
- Oxford Black and Green Network
- Parents for Future <https://www.parentsforfuture.org.uk/>

This report and linked documents are on the Oxford Friends of the Earth website: [www.oxfoe.co.uk](http://www.oxfoe.co.uk).

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