

***An open letter to the leaders of Oxfordshire councils***

22nd Sept. 2021

Dear *Council Leader*

I am writing on behalf of Oxfordshire Zero Carbon Homes partnership with regard to issues raised by the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan consultation – a plan that will impact all our Oxfordshire councils. We are very glad to see that Policy 1 (preferred option) supports the objective of ‘net zero whole life carbon for both residential and non-residential’ buildings.

However this Plan will not come into effect until 2023 at the earliest. We would hope that some real progress can be made on this issue before then. We have been pleased to see the growing support for the idea of a county-level standard. We therefore hope to see further development and to ensure that this issue is not parked for two years.

We suggest that there is a need to consider how this policy can be put into practice. There are a number of issues:

**The planning system**

Crucially we need to capitalise on the centrality of the planning system. The County, City and District councils are able to set more demanding local building regulations, which go beyond the national building regulations and eventual Future Homes Standard. We feel that it is vital that the councils establish their own local standards as a matter of urgency, and that they are embedded as a fundamental feature of the planning system. So we ask that the councils cooperate and work together to establish a common set of local standards – so as to avoid presenting a fragmented approach to the sector, and to architects, developers & builders in particular. Starting work on this now would send a clear message and set the scene for the 2050 Plan when agreed.

**An agreed Zero Carbon definition**

The Plan highlights the need for a clear definition (para 85 and subsequent) and quotes different sources. This is a welcome drawing together of key information and we would suggest that work to agree a definition for use in Oxfordshire (based on these sources) should move forward now. Working with stakeholders would help to build support on this and we would offer any assistance that we can. We have growing interest in our work and a council-led initiative would (we are sure) bring in more.

**Impact of planned new homes on the achievability of Oxfordshire Local Authorities’ carbon budgets**

The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has published the carbon budgets for each Local Authority in the UK. If we add up the budgets for the five Local Authorities within Oxfordshire, we arrive at a budget of 26.3MT of allowable emissions (up to 2100).

* Cherwell District Council                                                                   7.3MT
* West Oxfordshire District Council                                                  3.7MT
* South Oxfordshire District Council                                                5.6MT
* Vale of the White Horse District Council                                     5.2MT
* Oxford City Council                                                                            4.5MT

There are up to 100,000 new houses planned for Oxfordshire in the next 10 years. Each new house built in the traditional way to meet current Building Regulations will be responsible for around 200T of emissions. Thus some 80% of Oxfordshire’s carbon budget may be squandered by building un-sustainable houses that will need to be upgraded to future standards before too long.

There are now embryonic plans for a proposed amendment to the Building Regulations - "Part Z" (available at [www.part-z.uk](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=http%3a%2f%2fwww.part-z.uk&c=E,1,s_VBBeA82ZLy8cPO7BVoJjr_UiuPktHwtMb2riXtXRc5JjFJe6kUs27rvVWrZEQcFgHGsIzJ3rxiheNTIWkiBNo0yv5Q8g8Jpb4a2o7cKAMH5UiNRpQL&typo=1)) - to mandate the reporting of whole life carbon and set limits for up-front embodied carbon. We would urge you as an Oxfordshire council in the light of the carbon budget figures above to join many other organosations in signing up to the Part Z proposal.

**Oxfordshire Zero Carbon Innovation Zone**

We have suggested that there should be an Innovation Zone set up within Oxfordshire to focus on tackling the obstacles that exist. Among these is the issue of skills development and training, along with more support for councils to start their own processes and ensure staff and councillors are fully on board. There is also a need to promote leading-edge practice and to support action to speed up the use of MMC (Modern Methods of Construction). Setting up such an Innovation Zone would provide a clear focal point for this work.

We would welcome your views on this and the opportunity to discuss with you and others how we might collaborate to take things forward.

With best wishes

Ian Pritchett, Greencore Construction
Harry Tuke, Jessop & Cook
Simon Chung, Sowspace
Alex Towler, Transition by Design

Lewis Knight, Bioregional
Chris Church, Oxfordshire Friends of the Earth
Craig Ash, Oxfordshire Friends of the Earth