



**South Oxfordshire District Council**

# Corporate plan 2020-2024

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**Protect and  
restore our  
natural world**

**02**

**Openness and  
accountability**

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Climate  
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**Improved  
economic and  
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**Homes and  
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# Foreword

Welcome to our Corporate Plan for 2020-2024, which sets out what we hope to achieve for South Oxfordshire over the next four years and explains why we have chosen these six strategic themes. The Plan has been developed during the Coronavirus pandemic and reflects the need to focus on a sustainable recovery that prioritises community well-being and resilience as well as economic prosperity.

We would like to thank the many individuals and groups who helped to create this plan, including councillors, staff and those who live or work here. We are particularly grateful to the many people who responded to the consultation on the draft plan. It was reassuring to know that all of the themes were rated as important and the feedback you provided helps to prioritise our work and budgets. This means we can target scarce resources appropriately and staff can understand how they can help the whole organisation achieve its objectives.

South Oxfordshire is a largely rural district with four thriving towns – Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford. We are lucky to be situated in an area of natural beauty and character. However, we cannot ignore the loss of biodiversity and wildlife which our district has suffered in recent decades, nor the Climate Emergency. These two themes feature strongly in this plan, and we know from our public consultation that

they are also important to our residents. The need to address climate change affects many, if not all, areas of our work and it sits at the heart of our vision for South Oxfordshire. This council declared a Climate Emergency in April 2019, and the plan sets out how we will take action so that future generations do not pay the price for our lack of action.

We know that living in such an attractive part of the country can be expensive, and that homes have become less affordable for many local people. We also know that many are worried by the amount of house-building planned for South Oxfordshire in the coming years, but also that there is a serious shortage of affordable social housing and a long waiting list. We will address this by seeking to provide social housing ourselves, and by ensuring that the houses that are built conform to strict environmental standards and form more sustainable and resilient communities.

At the time of writing, there is much uncertainty about the future of local government, both in terms of its structure and its financing. We will work with a wide range of local, regional and national partners to ensure that, whatever happens, we put the needs of our residents first and represent their interests in discussions. This plan, and its delivery, will improve openness and accountability about what we do, the

services we deliver and the choices we have to make. There will be annual reports to demonstrate how we are turning our plans into reality, and to reflect any changes.

We hope you enjoy reading about our plans for the future and we will do our best to keep you informed about how we are progressing.



**Cllr Sue Cooper,**  
Leader, South  
Oxfordshire District  
Council

# The district at a glance



There has been a population  
increase of

**17.2%**

(that's 20,500 extra people)  
in the last 30 years.



**67,848**  
hectares



of which is  
natural land

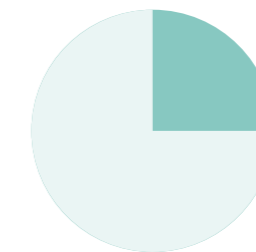
Carbon neutral  
council by  
**2025**



and carbon neutral  
district by  
**2030**



**8,210**  
enterprises



¼ of  
Oxfordshire's  
total



The council has **80 sites** of  
open space, including parks



**72,000**  
jobs



# 1. Protect and restore our natural world

## Why?

South Oxfordshire is a largely rural district, including parts of two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Oxford Green Belt, as well as a long stretch of the River Thames. The natural world is proven to provide benefits to both mental and physical health, as well as having its own intrinsic value, and it needs our protection.

## So:

We will respect and protect our natural environment, especially our Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and other nature rich areas. We will champion the opportunity to restore our natural world in both biodiverse and bio-depleted areas through nature recovery networks and other means. We will connect urban communities to their local green spaces and restore nature to urban environments.

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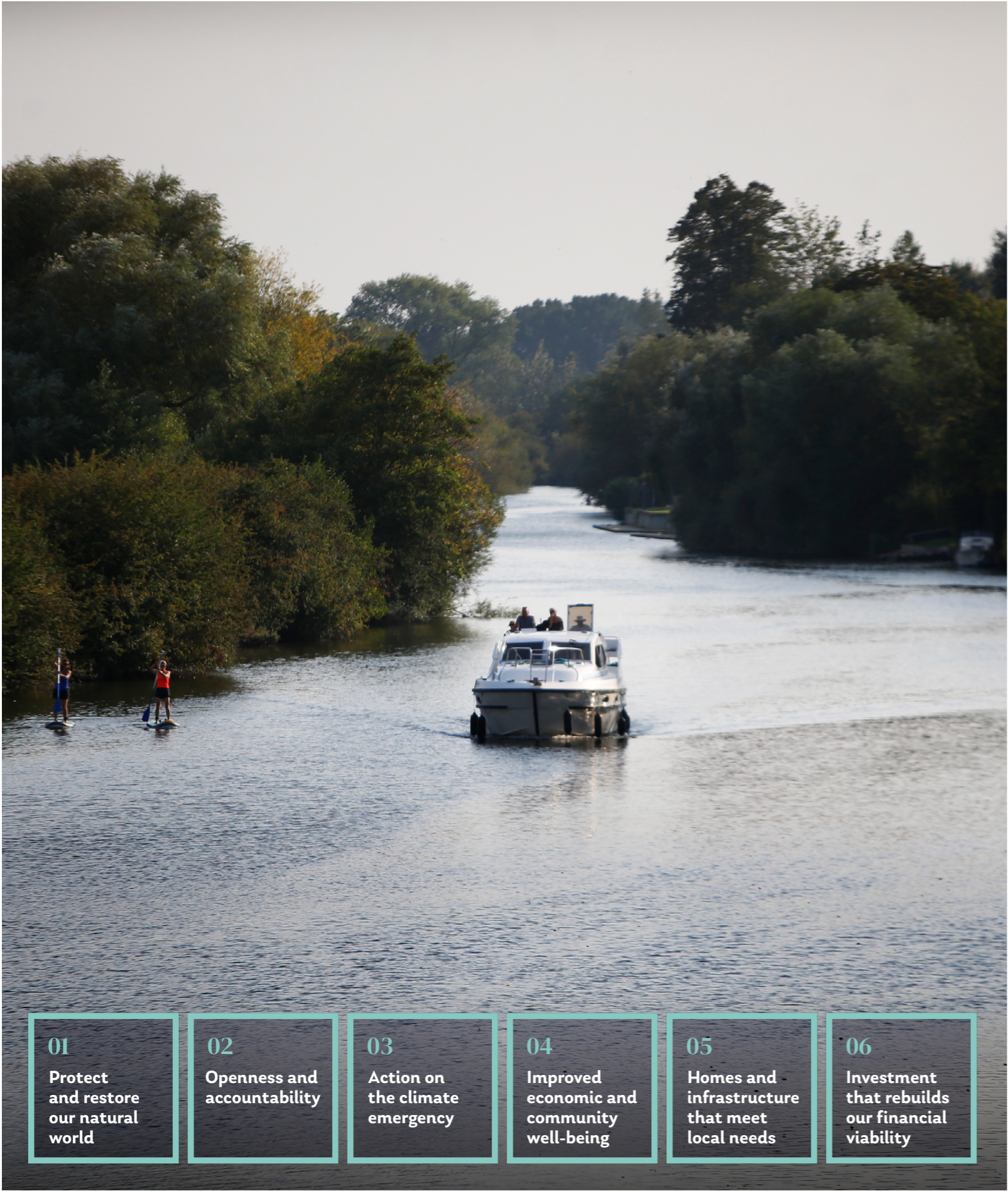
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# 1. Protect and restore our natural world

## Projects:

With partners, promote in depth mapping and surveying of ecosystems across the district, planning for restoration of the natural world and working closely with landowners and specialist agencies.

Celebrate, protect and enhance our natural assets, including the River Thames and the AONBs and their setting, promoting our rural district for tourism, leisure and well-being.

Encourage the use of natural processes to combat risks arising from climate change, such as meadows and trees to reduce flooding.

Recognise and support the vital role of farming in economic and ecosystem resilience, local food provision and the recovery of soils and natural processes.

Call for the establishment of a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire to promote an ambitious nature recovery programme, including tree and meadow planting, rewilding and providing habitats for wildlife including wildlife corridors.

Work in partnership with the Earth Trust, Chilterns Conservation Board, North Wessex Downs AONB, the Environment Agency and others to improve access to green spaces in and around our towns, reinforcing access to nature as a priority for community well-being.

# 1. Protect and restore our natural world

## How we plan to measure success against this theme:

- The area, number, and condition of 'natural' habitats
- Area, number and condition of habitats by ownership and protected status
- Biodiversity and bioabundance metrics measured via species level surveys of the state of nature in each habitat
- Action plans and collaborative groups in place with their status (newly set up, in process, completed)

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## 2. Openness and accountability

### Why?

The complexity of modern society and local government structures can be hard to navigate. Many services are delivered as part of external partnerships, so it can be hard for residents to see what we do and how we do it. There are some groups within our district with whom we have little engagement or interaction, so the diversity of our district is not always recognised and supported.

### So:

We will maintain and improve high levels of satisfaction with the services we provide and will reach out to all sectors and age groups to foster a culture of openness, participation and representation. We will use our influence to champion inclusion, diversity and transparency across all elected and unelected bodies in our region. We will empower and invest in our staff and conduct our operations with the highest level of integrity and accountability.

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## 2. Openness and accountability

### Projects:

Enhance trust and accountability in democratic decision making, including live streaming and recording of meetings, ensuring full accessibility of facilities and monitoring progress in an open and transparent way.

Ensure that council departments work collaboratively to deliver best outcomes for residents.

Embed an organisational culture that celebrates diversity, inclusion and respect.

Apply good governance and transparency in all our working and decision making, exploring optimal structures and mechanisms for best practice in local government.

Engage effectively with residents, parish and town councils and other community organisations, using plain English in our communications and using appropriate methods and technologies to ensure equal and fair access for all.

### How we plan to measure success against this theme:

- Increased public participation in council meetings and access to digital services through the website
- Broader engagement in consultations, particularly from under represented groups like youth and BAME communities
- Improved two way communication between the council and all stakeholders
- Staff turnover and diversity
- Improved residents' satisfaction with South Oxfordshire as a place to live
- More regular and effective town and parish council forums



## 3. Action on the Climate Emergency

### Why?

The greatest challenge we face as a society is the Climate Emergency and our ability to adapt our lives and our behaviours to ensure a safe and resilient future. While statements and targets are welcome, the challenge for our district is to take action, transform our operations and inspire our residents and businesses to do the same. Aspects of our lives will need to change, but we have a duty to make this transition fair for all parts of society.

### So:

We will show leadership by developing and implementing a climate change programme to make the council net carbon neutral by 2025. We will help our communities to plan a fair transition to a future that will be defined by climate change.

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### 3. Action on the Climate Emergency

**Projects:**

Achieve our own zero carbon target by 2025 and support others to achieve the district target of zero carbon by 2030.

Develop an annually approved Climate Emergency programme and adequately finance it.

Deliver council owned net zero homes and use grants, planning policy and advocacy to ensure the same standards throughout the district.

Promote and encourage behavioural change with informational campaigns and leading by example.

Take positive action on single use plastics, air quality improvement measures and sustainable transport.

Mitigate climate change through planning and land use, enhancing biodiversity on our own land and strengthening the planning system to enforce environmental standards.

Promote the circular economy (reduce, reuse and recycle), including in our waste management contracts.

Support and encourage local businesses to respond to climate change and nature recovery.

Promote waste minimisation initiatives such as repair cafés.

Work with Oxfordshire County Council to build on our commitment to active travel including walking, public transport and cycling infrastructure.

### 3. Action on the Climate Emergency

#### How we plan to measure success against this theme:

- Carbon emissions baseline for the district/council and sources of emissions from different sectors
- Residual waste to landfill
- Recycling rate
- Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points installed/expressed as a proportion of the number of homes delivered on a development
- Number of road miles by petrol and diesel vehicles, by EV, by public transport
- Air quality in our Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs)
- Action Plans and Collaborative Groups in place with their status (newly set up, in process, completed)
- Community engagement by council

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## 4. Improved economic and community well-being

### Why?

South Oxfordshire has a large number of small and micro businesses, and is well placed to adapt to changes in the economy, but support will be needed for it to remain a healthy and vibrant place to live and work. The Coronavirus pandemic has shown the strength of the community but there are areas of isolation and deprivation in our district, and the benefits of access to culture, leisure and community for all has been made clear.

### So:

We will reimagine our high streets, helping independent small businesses to thrive and to encourage cultural well-being for all. We will encourage clean local economic development and support our business hubs, centres of scientific excellence and our educational establishments to become leaders in sustainable technology, innovation and enterprise . We will help our community groups to strengthen cohesion, reduce social isolation and tackle areas of deprivation.

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## 4. Improved economic and community well-being

### Projects:

Partner with regional agencies to ensure economic recovery, quality employment, thriving businesses and vibrant communities, avoiding the blight of “dormitory towns”.

Provide advice on access to grants, training and diversification programmes, helping local businesses to build agility and resilience.

Plan for communities connected by walking & cycling networks, with sustainable, accessible and affordable public transport and reliable broadband, learning the lessons from the Covid-19 experience and enabling more home working.

Launch a new community well-being strategy to encourage and support culture, leisure and the arts.

Use our planning powers to preserve our valuable green spaces, particularly in urban areas.

Work with our communities to maximise Community Infrastructure Levy funds and to allocate these to achieve best outcomes for residents in the district.

Take enforcement action on fly tipping and dog fouling.

Work with local partners to introduce civil parking enforcement as a district responsibility.



## 4. Improved economic and community well-being

### How we plan to measure success against this theme:

- Monitoring progress of newly incorporated businesses
- Unemployment rate
- Monitoring the trajectory of overall employment growth
- Percentage of working age population in employment
- Average earnings in South Oxfordshire
- Number of businesses supported by economic development and success of direct interventions through the council and its partners
- Commuting patterns in and out of the area
- Monitoring the performance of high street businesses
- Success in working with further and higher education in improving the skills base
- Access/participation in art, cultural and social activities
- Percentage of people experiencing loneliness and isolation
- Physical activity against nationally recommended targets

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## 5. Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs

### Why?

The average price of a home is many times higher than the average salary, particularly for the young, and renting is also expensive. The pressure to build new homes in our district sometimes outweighs local wishes. Infrastructure like roads, schools and GP surgeries have not kept up with housing development. Too many houses being built today are not fit for a low carbon future.

### So:

We will strive to ensure that new homes and infrastructure in South Oxfordshire meet local needs, are sustainable, zero carbon in their build and operation and high quality in design. We will provide homes that people can afford to live in. New developments will be accessible with walking, cycling and public transport a priority. Neighbourhood plans and local participation will sit at the heart of our planning process. We will work with partners to ensure that development is appropriate for our communities.

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## 5. Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs

### Projects:

Working constructively with local, regional and national partners we will shape and influence programmes to deliver appropriate homes and infrastructure, including:

- Didcot Garden Town priority projects as identified by the Advisory Board, specifically a sustainable plan to redevelop the Didcot Gateway site, a public transport and active walking and cycling network, community facilities and accessible green spaces for Didcot residents
- The transformation of Berinsfield into a thriving Garden Village with improved facilities that are developed in line with the community's needs and aspirations
- New council owned homes with a focus on quality of design, affordability and local requirements
- Support and encouragement for the retrofit of our existing housing stock

for low carbon performance and to eliminate fuel poverty

- Elimination of homelessness in our district
- Bringing empty properties back into use
- Ensuring that our teams are ready to access or signpost to any Government schemes or funding that is made available

We will use the local plan policy development process and controls to ensure that:

- New homes are future proofed, meeting the highest environmental standards and enhancing nature through sensitive, high quality design
- Spatial planning embeds public health, well-being and sustainability

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## 5. Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs

- Changes over time in our stock of homes meet local needs
- Sustainable transport solutions prioritise walking, cycling and public transport to reduce car dependency and air pollution

- Monitor the wider impacts of development within our communities, both new and existing, including walking/cycling times to key services and public transport hubs (20 minute neighbourhoods), diversity and inclusion
- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) collected and spent
- Monitor appropriate indicators on housing costs in South Oxfordshire (private and social rental not just home ownership), especially for lower incomes

### How we plan to measure success against this theme:

- Monitor mix of current delivery through planning permissions granted and identify gaps in provision in the local housing market
- Homelessness and temporary accommodation numbers and length of stay, effectiveness of interventions
- Affordable homes delivered and type/mix

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# 6. Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability

## Why?

Coronavirus has cost, and lost, the council money. Many years of austerity before that, as well as a failure to increase council tax in line with growing costs, makes it hard to balance the books. The future funding picture for councils from Government remains unclear. In order to deliver a progressive and ambitious agenda, we need to reduce the gap between income and expenditure in our Medium Term Financial Plan.

## So:

We will invest to save and act responsibly and ethically with our financial resources. We will work with other councils for fair funding and will investigate new viable sources of revenue in order to maintain and improve vital services. We will ensure all financial operations and reporting support effective decision making and strong, ethical governance.



## 6. Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability

### Projects:

Develop and implement an innovative Transformation Strategy to diversify our revenue streams, improve our effectiveness and secure our ongoing viability

“Invest to save” for the district, including the delivery of sustainable new council offices on time and within budget to realise future operational efficiencies

Exercise strong stewardship of all council assets including property and financial investments, optimising their performance for the benefit of our residents

Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and to enrich our leisure, sporting and community activities

Invest responsibly and ethically with the Climate Emergency at the heart of what we do

### How we plan to measure success against this theme:

- Identify viable improved net revenue streams from development of existing service areas and assets
- Enhance investment % returns, whilst firmly managing portfolio risks
- Continue the full range of measures over financial operations and balances to maintain high standards
- Maximise funding opportunities including from planning and infrastructure levies and from growing and diversified utilisation of facilities to deliver better services and facilities for residents with better viability
- Quantify return on investment from new office development project and monitor the annual savings once completed



# Thank you

We hope that our Corporate Plan outlines our commitment to working with residents, businesses and partners to continue to improve our district. We welcome your feedback.

**To find out more email** [insightandpolicy@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:insightandpolicy@southandvale.gov.uk)

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