

John Howell OBE, M.P.
Member of Parliament for Henley
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

**Councillor Sue Cooper
Leader of the Council**

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Dear John,

I am writing on behalf of South Oxfordshire District Council regarding the Climate and Ecology Bill. Given the immediate nature of the climate and ecological emergencies facing our planet, we urge you to lend your support to the measures included when it comes before Parliament.

The consequences of humanity's behaviours on the natural environment can already be seen. The climate is changing, leading, not just to more frequent and extreme weather events, but also the destruction of natural habitats. Furthermore, these rapid and substantial changes are altering the natural cycles of life and upsetting the balances that help to support many species of flora and fauna.

In addition, in our pursuit of progress and development, we have often failed to appreciate the damage being caused to the natural environment. Within the UK, changes to farming practices, inappropriate and unnecessary development and pollution have degraded many habitats and forced many of our native animals and plants to the verge of destruction – a pattern being repeated around the world.

South Oxfordshire believes that we need to do as much as possible to address these threats and, therefore, on 11 February, the council approved (unopposed) the following motion:

“Council has adopted a new Corporate Plan that has as one of its main priorities: ‘Protect and Restore the Natural World’. In the consultation exercise on this Plan, this theme was ranked the most important by a high number of respondents. This Council has already, rightly, declared a climate emergency (April 2019).

Council acknowledges that:

- Our societies and economies are intimately linked with and depend on biodiversity and nature. The natural world is essential for the provision of nutritious food (with soil and pollinators having a vital role), clean water, clean*

air, medicines, and protection from extreme weather, as well as being our source of energy and raw materials

- *The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the relationship between people and nature. When we destroy and degrade habitats, we increase the risk of disease spill-over from wildlife to people*
- *The State of Nature 2019 report highlighted the critical decline in biodiversity in the UK. Changes in farming practices have had the biggest effect in recent decades and the impact of climate change is now increasing. 15% of UK species are classified as threatened with extinction and 2% are already extinct*
- *The [State of the World's Plants and Fungi 2020 report](#) from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew estimated that 39.4% of plants are now threatened with extinction. This is a jump from one in five plants thought to be at risk in Kew's 2016 report*
- *The Environment Bill will require the introduction of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Nature Recovery Networks*
- *Actions to restore nature and biodiversity, as well as being vital for their own sake, often have an important co-benefit of storing carbon, so help address climate change*
- *People's access to 'green spaces' to understand and appreciate biodiversity and a rich, natural world, private or public, is unequal*

Council resolves to:

1. *Declare an ecological emergency*
2. *Rename CEAC the Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee, to help Cabinet and council officers address these twin emergencies*
3. *Add ecological impact implications alongside those for climate and sustainability in committee and council reports.*
4. *Ensure that addressing the climate and ecological emergencies and nature recovery are considered as strategic priorities for planning policies and design guides for new development, including master-planning of sites, by identifying appropriate areas for habitat restoration and biodiversity net gain and ensuring that development limits impact on existing habitats in its process, whilst also working on the principle of increasing equality of access for people to natural, green spaces*
5. *Establish a Biodiversity Steering Group involving both key officers and members to oversee and develop the Councils approach to nature protection and recovery*
6. *Set measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, in both species and quantities, seeking also to increase community engagement*
7. *Work with our partners to establish a Local Nature Partnership for Oxfordshire as soon as possible, in keeping with the urgency of this declaration*
8. *Work with our partners to develop Nature Recovery Networks and Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire, again in keeping with the urgency of this declaration*
9. *Look for opportunities to work in partnership with local charities and environmental organisations to deliver nature recovery in South Oxfordshire*
10. *Develop a district wide Tree Planting Policy and Strategy, including having Member Tree Champions, to support nature protection and recovery and carbon sequestration*

11. *Build on the work of the Thames Champion to improve the ecology of the Thames and its banks and flood plains, a hugely important habitat in our District*
12. *Ensure the Strategic Property Review considers opportunities for biodiversity enhancements and tree planting on Council landholdings*
13. *Investigate new approaches to nature recovery such as habitat banking that deliver biodiversity objectives and provide new investment opportunities*
14. *Embed climate action and ecological initiatives within all council work areas, including COVID-19 recovery projects and programmes*
15. *Write to all South Oxfordshire's MPs urging them to support the Climate and Ecological Bill, a private member's bill, in keeping with the declarations of this Council."*

However, to help really address the twin global emergencies of climate change and ecological destruction, further significant action is needed at both a national and international level. As a Member of Parliament, you have the ability to drive these necessary changes and, therefore, South Oxfordshire was hoping to urge you to support the Climate and Ecology Bill when it comes before Parliament. I realise from our conversation that you do not think this bill is the best way to address the important issues involved. So please can you use your best efforts to help the country deal with the pressing needs highlighted by these global emergencies?

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Sue Cooper
Leader of the Council