

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the  
**Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB  
at 2.00 pm on **Monday, 7 April 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Michael Brooker (Chair), Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Phil Godfrey, Nick Leverton, Andrew Lyon, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Andrew Prosser, Sarah Veasey, Adrian Walsh, Alistair Wray and Dan Levy

Officers: Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), James Nelson (Principal Planner), Joshua McFarland (Assistant Planner), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer)

**112 Apologies for Absence.**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor Andy Goodwin and Councillor Rachel Crouch.

Councillor Dan Levy substituted for Councillor Andy Goodwin.

Councillor Joy Aitman was to substitute for Councillor Rachel Crouch but did not attend.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer commenced the meeting by advising that The Chair, Councillor Michael Brooker, was unable to be present at the start of the meeting and Councillor Andy Goodwin, Vice Chair, was also absent. It was noted that in such circumstances the Sub-Committee was required to elect a substitute to Chair the meeting.

Councillor Michele Mead proposed that Councillor Julian Cooper temporarily chaired the Sub-Committee. Councillor Steve Cosier seconded the proposal.

**Voting record** – 12 for the proposal, 0 against, 0 abstentions.

The Sub-Committee Resolved that:

1. Councillor Julian Cooper Chair the meeting until the arrival of Councillor Michael Brooker.

Councillor Michael Brooker arrived at the meeting at 2:15pm. Councillor Brooker did not participate in discussion or voting on application 24/01565/FUL University Farm.

**113 Declarations of Interest**

24/01565/FUL University Farm, Witney Road, Hailey

Councillor Sarah Veasey declared that the application was in the bordering District to her Ward of North Leigh, and the traffic for the application was proposed to go through her Ward. Councillor Veasey advised that she was not pre-determined on the application.

24/02033FUL Bridge House, Bridge Street, Shilton

None.

24/03269/ADV Unit 11b, Marriots Walk, Witney

Councillor Andrew Prosser declared that he was an Executive Member and would not vote on the application but would remain in the Chamber.

Councillor Andrew Lyon declared that the application was within his Ward. Councillor Lyon advised that he was not pre-determined on the application.

25/00289/CND, 3 Church View, Bampton - Application determined under delegated powers

Councillor Alistair Wray declared that item 48 in the Report on applications determined under delegated powers was his property.

**114 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Councillor Adrian Walsh proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 10 March 2025 be agreed by the Sub-Committee as a true and accurate record. This was seconded by Councillor Sarah Veasey, was put to the vote and was agreed unanimously by the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

Agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 10 March 2025 as a true and accurate record.

**115 Applications for Development**

**116 24/01565/FUL University Farm, Witney Road, Hailey**

James Nelson, Principal Planner presented the application for the installation and operation of a renewable energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with switchgear container, inverter/transformer units, site access, internal tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

The Principal Planner's presentation addressed the following points:

- The site was split over three parcels. The westernmost and largest comprised most of the panels, the central parcel contained further panels, and the easternmost parcel of the site had no panels proposed.
- The site was north of Witney, with Hailey to the west.
- The land was undeveloped agricultural land.
- Constraints on the site included: Hailey Conservation Area to the west, Listed Buildings associated with Swanhall Farm and public rights of way.
- The main site access was on New Yatt Road.
- The Landscape Strategy showed a significant reduction in panels in Field 1 and 3 from the previous application. Field 4 included a buffer and structural landscaping to screen the site from Listed Buildings and Heritage Assets. Increased screening had also been placed adjacent to New Yatt Road to the west of Field 10. Two eastern fields were reserved for skylark mitigation.
- The panels had a maximum height of 3 metres. Battery inverter stations had an approximate height of 3 metres. Fencing and gates were timber post and wire and were approximately 2 metres in height. DNO and mast heights were a maximum of 5 metres.
- The construction compound was in the northern portion of Field 10 for the duration of construction.

Robert Gunn, North Leigh Parish Council, addressed the Sub-Committee in objection to the application which raised the following points:

- There had been no changes to the proposed construction traffic route from the previous application.
- The proposed route for construction traffic was via the A4095 Common Road, Park Road and New Yatt Road.
- The route proposed for construction traffic provided unacceptable risk to road users. The route included passing houses in close proximity to roads, pinch points, a lack of footpaths and would further damage the carriageways.

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- The impact on views from New Yatt Road were impacted by the site.
- The biodiversity concerns had been addressed in a superficial way.

The Sub-Committee sought clarity from the speaker on the figures provided for traffic near misses and construction traffic road movements, confirmed that the concerns raised by the speaker were for the construction phase only, and clarified the position of the speaker that biodiversity had been addressed superficially.

Bente Klein, Development Project Manager for RWE, addressed the Sub-Committee in support of the application which raised the following points:

- Following the tangible changes made to the proposal put to the Sub-Committee in 2023 the Officer had put the current proposal forward for approval.
- Projects such as the proposal were crucial due to accelerating climate change and the Governments pledge to create a carbon neutral electricity grid by 2035 and to reach net zero by 2050.
- The proposal would meet the electricity needs of 15,000 Oxfordshire homes.
- Ecological enhancements on the site had resulted in a 104% biodiversity net gain for habitat.
- The proposal included two permissive paths, community orchard and community benefit fund of up to £462k.
- Tangible changes from the previous application were: additional landscape mitigation which had meant that the Conservation Officer no longer objected to the proposal, reinstatement of historic field boundaries and increased panelled areas on the public right of way.
- The Highways Authority had provided no objections to the development.
- All reasons for previous refusal had been addressed.

The Committee sought clarity on the following points from the speaker:

- The community benefit fund of £462k was over the lifetime of the project of 40 years. Conversations with Hailey Parish Council as the host Parish were ongoing as to how this fund would be split between up-front and annual payments. The community would decide on the use of the funds.
- The size of area within the development that related to solar panels, and a comparison for this to the previous application. The site was 98 hectares in total, 17 hectares was for skylark mitigation, otherwise providing a split of the site in this way was a complex process.
- Electricity would go to the National Grid with no tariff reduction for local communities.

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- The site was low grade soil and there was an intention for sheep farming to take place on the site following development.
- Shared equity with residents had been considered. However, in order for a PPA to take place, demand had not been reached in West Oxfordshire.
- Time limitations for construction traffic were put forward as part of the proposal. Construction was limited between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday, and 8am and 1pm on Saturday. Deliveries would be batched during these construction times.
- The site was chosen by the applicant as there was grid capacity available in Witney. The site was chosen with consideration to planning constraints and finding landowners willing to sell.
- The Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) covered cabling to Witney. The cabling would need to be new.
- The application had been given a connection date. The grid queue was currently being reordered with an outcome expected by the end of the year.

The Principal Planner's presentation addressed the following points:

- Policy EH6 of the Local Plan supported the principle of renewable energy developments however such developments would be located and designed to minimise adverse impacts, with particular regard to conserving high valued landscape and the historic environment.
- The NPPF had been updated since the application was submitted, strengthening support for renewable energy developments.
- The July 2024 Written Ministerial Statement and the 2024 Clean Power Strategy 2030 Action Plan stated that solar energy played a key role in the transition to renewables.
- The proposal would provide electricity for 17,000 homes and offset 44,000 tonnes of CO2 per year.
- The principle of development was supportable and significant weight proportionate to the scale of the scheme must be awarded in favour of granting consent.
- The application follows a refusal at the December 2023 meeting of the Sub-Committee. The application had overcome the three reasons for refusal at that meeting; landscape and visual impact, heritage and biodiversity.
  - Heritage: Changes in the proposal included the reinstatement of historic hedgerows, reduction in extent of panels, increased tree-belts to provide buffers to heritage assets, increased undeveloped offsets. The changes had successfully mitigated the level of harm previously identified and the Conservation Officer and County Archaeologist had raised no objections on heritage grounds.
  - Biodiversity: The scheme would provide 105.18% increase in area habitat units, 28.6% increase in hedgerow units and 23.85% increase in water course units.

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The Biodiversity Officer had raised no objections subject to securing BNG monitoring costs via s.106.

- Landscape and visual impact: an independent review of the submission was commissioned and had endorsed the findings of the submitted LVA. The layout and landscape changes had significantly reduced the extent of built form.
- The impacts of the scheme would be contained to a site and localised level and the proposal sought to mitigate impacts in accordance with policy EH6.
- Construction traffic operational limitations had been given. However, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) had stated the times should be amended to avoid school pick up times in North Leigh. Further traffic management had been required. OCC are satisfied requirements could be secured by an updated CTMP by condition.
- Extensive benefits were considered sufficient to justify approval of the application. Therefore, the application was recommended for provisional approval subject to s.106 agreement covering BNG monitoring costs.

The Chair then invited the Sub-committee to discuss the application, which raised the following points:

- An updated CTMP was required by OCC, and OCC were satisfied that this could be managed through condition. West Oxfordshire District Council would have the ability to enforce the CTMP. Requests for contributions towards traffic management through s.106 were not normally made.
- It was noted that the updated CTMP included access routes and showed clearly which roads would be impacted by construction traffic. Smaller routes would not be impacted by HGV movement.
- The route of the construction traffic in the CTMP was discussed with reference to North Leigh. The factors raised were: the number of trips for construction traffic, the location and suitability of the proposed temporary traffic lights, the existing and future housing development in North Leigh as a contributor to traffic, the lack of pavement and tight junctions. The dangers of these factors were highlighted.
- It was noted that the reasons for refusal on the previous application had not included highways.
- The Swept Path Analysis had been undertaken at the entrance to the construction site only.
- The option of an alternative route, particularly for HGV vehicles, was discussed. The B4022 through Hailey was suggested. It was noted that condition 13 required an updated CTMP to be submitted, and re-routing could be considered under the discharge of that condition. The possibility of adding an informative comment to the condition was discussed. It was noted however that there was no mention of re-routing in the response from OCC Highways.

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- S.106 agreements could cover the cabling that was required to run under the road into Witney. Government guidelines for compensation for overhead cabling was cited as an example.
- In terms of the biodiversity monitoring condition, it was noted that this needed to be a reasonable annual fee over the lifetime of the project. It was noted that the fee was to cover the cost of officer time and had been calculated by the Principal Ecologist. It was discussed that money should be sought through the s.106 agreement to cover this.
- The Council had declared a climate emergency, the scheme was important in tackling this.

Councillor Dan Levy proposed to defer the application, in order to consult OCC Highways indicating that the route was an issue and proposing an alternative route via B4022. This was seconded by Councillor Steve Cosier and put to the vote.

**Voting record** – 12 for the proposal, 0 against, 0 abstentions. I did not vote.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

Defer the application in order to consult with Oxfordshire County Council Highways and indicate that an alternative route for construction traffic via the B4022 would be required in the CTMP.

#### **117 24/02033/FUL Bridge House, Bridge Street, Shilton**

Councillor Michael Brooker assumed the Chair of the Sub-Committee.

James Nelson, Principal Planner presented the application for photovoltaic solar panel installation which comprised 42 panels on the roof of the spa building (amended plans and description).

The Principal Planner's presentation addressed the following points:

- The application followed the previous months application to the Sub-Committee.
- The applicant had amended the application rather than proceed to refusal which had been proposed by the Sub-Committee on the grounds of heritage impact in respect of the ground mounted panels.
- The ground mounted panels had been removed from the previous application. All other details of the application were unchanged, with only the roof mounted panels on the spa building remaining.
- The amendment to the original application had been allowed as the ground and roof mounted panels were easily separable.

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Councillor Michele Mead proposed to approve the application in line with the officer's recommendations. Councillor Nick Leverton seconded the proposal, and it was put to the vote.

**Voting record** – 12 for the proposal, 1 against, 0 abstentions.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

Approve the application in line with officer recommendations.

**118 24/03269/ADV Unit 11b Marriotts Walk, Witney**

Joshua McFarland, Planning Officer presented the application for the erection of a fascia sign and a projecting sign (retrospective).

The Planning Officer presentation addressed the following points:

- The site was a retail unit in the main shopping area of Witney.
- The site was in the Witney and Cogges Conservation Area.
- The main considerations were the impact on public amenity and the Conservation Area.
- The site was on Council owned land.
- During the course of the application, it had come to light that the works had been carried out.
- Amended plans showing smaller lettering had been submitted. The amendments were considered a minor change and reduced the visual impact.
- The sign was considered congruent with the local vicinity and in keeping with the location.
- There was no impact on visual amenity, the sign was acceptable in design terms and there were no public safety concerns.

The Chair then invited the Sub-committee to discuss the application, which raised the following points:

- It was noted that the application had come to the Sub-Committee as set out in the Scheme of Delegation for reasons of transparency. One member suggested that the Constitution Working Group may wish to review this at a future point if the Committee were getting large amounts of these sorts of applications.



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Councillor Dan Levy proposed approving the application in line with the officer recommendations. Councillor Nick Leverton seconded the proposal, and it was put to the vote.

**Voting record** – 12 for the proposal, 0 against, 1 abstention.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

Approve the application in line with officer recommendations.

#### **119 Applications Determined under Delegated Powers**

The report giving details of the applications determined under Delegated Powers was received, explained by the officers and noted by the Sub-committee.

#### **120 Appeal Decisions**

James Nelson, Principal Planner presented the report giving details of the appeal decisions making the following points:

- There were five appeal decisions to report.
- Two of the appeals had been allowed by the Inspector. Those allowed were Item 1 – The Bridge House, and Item 5 – Muchmeats Ltd Abattoir. Item 1 had been refused by the Sub-Committee on the basis of objections from the Heritage Officer. However, the Inspector had found that the impact was supportable. For Item 5 the Inspector viewed that there was commercial grounds to allow onsite accommodation provision.
- Items, 2, 3 and 4 were upheld by the Inspector.

The Chair then invited the Sub-Committee to discuss the report, which raised the following points:

- It was noted that there were no costs incurred by the Council on the appeals allowed by the Inspector.
- With regard to Item 5, a query was raised as to if the Inspector had noted the quality of the accommodation, which was a concern of the Sub-Committee. It was noted that this was a second appeal of this nature that had been allowed by the Inspector, and the Councils position should be strengthened in the new Local Plan to prevent this pattern continuing.

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

The Sub-Committee thanked Officers for all their work during the Council year.

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The Meeting closed at 3.16 pm

CHAIR