

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 1 October 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Carl Rylett, Lidia Arciszewska, Hugo Ashton, Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Adam Clements, David Cooper, Julian Cooper, Sandra Cosier, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Natalie King, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker and Alistair Wray

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Councillors in attendance:

CL.29 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Joy Aitman, Thomas Ashby, Andrew Coles, Liz Leffman, David Melvin, Martin McBride, Adrian Walsh, Alex Wilson.

As Councillor Coles had sent apologies for the meeting, the Vice-Chair, Councillor Carl Rylett, chaired the meeting in his absence.

CL.30 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:

Councillor Dan Levy – Item 8, Options for Disposal Property in Witney, declared an interest as the site was vacant due to a County Council decision, which as the Cabinet Member for Finance at the County Council, he was responsible for. However, he stated he did not have a conflict of interest.

Councillor Ruth Smith – Motion C: Boosting Workplaces and Young People by Supporting Work Experience in the District – Declared that she proposed the motion but was also a teacher at Henry Box School. The motion would directly benefit the students she taught but she did not have a conflict of interest.

Councillor Steve Cosier also stated he was a teacher at a local school.

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Councillor Andrew Beaney stated he was also a teacher at a local school and would leave the room when Motion C was being decided.

Councillor Phil Godfrey stated that Zara Godfrey, one of the public speakers, was his daughter in law.

CL.31 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the minutes of the previous meeting, Councillor Duncan Enright seconded this.

Voting record - For 39, against 0, abstain 1

Council resolved to: Approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July as an accurate record of the meeting.

CL.32 Receipt of Announcements

The Vice-Chair, in the Chair made the following announcements;

On behalf of the Council, the Vice-Chair expressed condolences to Councillor Joy Aitman following the sudden passing of her husband, Mark Aitman.

The Vice-Chair made the following announcements on behalf of the Chair, who had sent apologies for the meeting. This was a summary of the events that the Chair attended and organised;

- The 80th anniversary of the VJ day commemoration
- Hosted a coffee morning and bake sale, raising £391.23.
- An upcoming Chair's Civic dinner at Curry Paradise in Witney on 20 November, to which all members of the Council had been invited.

The Vice-Chair also made the following announcements;

- Stated that there had been errors in earlier printed versions of the agenda, and that this had been corrected.
- Encouraged completion of the learning and development survey.
- Listed upcoming member briefings.
 - 9 October, 5.30pm - Local Plan Spatial Options (in person)
 - 16 October, 5.30pm - Net Zero (Teams)
 - 23 October, 5.30pm - Cyber Security (in person)

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- 6 November, 5.30pm - Community Wellbeing (Teams)
- 20 November, 5.30pm - Devolution and Mayoral Strategic Authorities (in person)
- 4 December, 5.30pm - Ubico (Teams)
- Gave an overview of his own civic engagements which included attending the Bicester Civic Service and Parade and the AGM of the West Oxfordshire Scouts.

Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development, made the following announcements;

- Promoted refreshed charter markets in Witney and Chipping Norton.
- Announced upcoming Food & Craft Fair and Christmas Market.
- Highlighted the new Chipping Norton town map and potential for wider distribution.

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, announced a new loan scheme in partnership with Lendology CIC to bring empty homes back into use.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska Executive Member for Environment announced that a Waterways Fair would be taking place on 25 October 2025 at the Corn Exchange, Witney.

Councillor Rachel Crouch Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing, made the following announcements;

- Shared that a mental health services booklet titled *Be Kind to Your Mind* is now available on the Council website.
- Mentioned ongoing visits to local facilities with Councillor Wilson.

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Carterton Area Strategy, announced recruitment for an Economic Regeneration Lead for the Carterton area, for which the closing date was 6 October 2025.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change, congratulated the Nature Recovery Network (Katrina Bass & Kevin Martin) for winning the Oxford Climate Award for Biodiversity and Ecology.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, announced a new planning enforcement process allowing public and councillors to track progress of reported breaches online.

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Three members of the public had registered to speak and address Council on Motion E: Israel – Palestine;

- Charlie Maynard MP spoke in support of the motion, as the MP for Witney and in a personal capacity. He highlighted his work on the Business and Trade Select Committee, which is responsible for scrutinising the UK's arms exports. He highlighted private meetings with the Defence Minister and Minister for Trade and argued that the UK was breaching Article 7 of the Arms Trade Treaty.
- Zara Godfrey spoke as someone who was from Gaza and had been directly affected by the war as well as a law graduate. She appealed to Councillors to support the motion on humanitarian grounds, highlighting the personal losses she had suffered as a consequence of the war. She further condemned the Israeli Government's refusal to allow independent journalists into Gaza.
- Sharone Parnes, a Councillor for Woodstock Town Council, who was not speaking in that capacity addressed the Council, stating that the motion was not in the Council's responsibilities and that it was timed on the eve of Yom Kippur, which made it difficult for Jewish residents to attend.

CL.34 Questions by Members

Questions by Members, as listed on the agenda, and the responses to those questions, which were circulated in advance, were taken as read.

The Chair invited the questioners to ask a supplementary question if they wished and then invited the relevant Executive Members to respond.

The Written Questions, Written Answers, Verbal Supplementary Questions and Verbal Supplementary Answers are detailed in a separate document appended to the Minutes of the Meeting.

CL.35 Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule

Cllr Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, introduced the item. Cllr Ashton addressed the following points;

- That advantages of CIL were that the levy could be used on smaller developments and part of the levy could be transferred to the local Town or Parish Council.
- CIL would be introduced for all liable applications that were made after the introductory date of 31 January 2026.
- The Council was asked to delegate authority to the Head of Planning to further progress work on the draft CIL Implementation Plan, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning.

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Members discussed the report. The following points and questions for clarification were raised;

- Whether stage payments would be possible. The Executive Member confirmed that it would be.
- That the monies would go to good community causes.
- There were some comments that the previous administration had also attempted to introduce CIL.

Cllr Alaric Smith seconded the proposal and stated that the adoption of CIL would be a significant step forward in securing funding for local infrastructure, by complementing Section 106 agreements to raise funding from smaller developments.

Resolved: That Council

1. Approved the Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule attached at Annex B with an effective date of 31 January 2026 in accordance with Section 213 of the Planning Act 2008.
2. Delegated authority to the Head of Planning to further progress work on the draft CIL Implementation Plan, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning.

Voting record – 40 for, 0 abstentions, 0 against.

CL.36 Options for Out of District Investment Property

Councillor Alaric Smith, the Executive Member for Finance, introduced the item and proposed approving the recommendation. He explained that the site was Knight's Court, which was previously occupied by Oxfordshire County Council. The property team had been working with the commercial real estate company CBRE but limited commercial viability had been identified. Oxford City Council had offered to purchase the site with the view to redeveloping it for affordable housing. The Council was therefore recommended to dispose of the site. The sale would reduce the Council's revenue costs and generate a capital receipt, which could be used for work such as purchasing temporary accommodation within the district.

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, seconded the recommendation.

Voting record – 40 for, 0 abstentions, 0 against.

Resolved: That Council

1. Approved the property disposal on the terms detailed in the report.
Delegated authority to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance, to approve the final terms of sale including the sale price.

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CL.37 Recommendations from the Constitution Working Group

Councillor Alaric Smith, the Executive Member for Finance and the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, introduced the report. The purpose of the item was to present technical updates to the Constitution, including:

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- Asset delegations
- Planning enforcement delegations
- New public speaking rules for planning committees

Councillor Smith stated that he considered the updates routine and noncontroversial.

Members asked the following question;

- The new rules required speakers to be registered objectors. Some members questioned whether by disqualifying some members of the public the change would open the Council up to legal challenge. The Director of Governance and Regulatory Services explained that there was no risk of this, as there was no right to speak for members of the public. It was also explained that members of the public would be able to make representations through late submissions and that this practice happened at other councils.

Councillor Michelle Mead seconded the proposal.

Voting record – For 40, against 0, abstentions 0

Resolved: That Council

1. Approved the updated Part 4G: Other Miscellaneous Functions (Annex A)
2. Approved the updated Part 4F: Functions in relation to Planning
3. Approved the updated rules for taking part in planning committees.

CL.38 Appointments to Working Groups

Councillor Andy Graham introduced the item and explained that a correction had been issued to the agenda. The correct version read “that Councillor David Melvin has replaced Councillor Lidia Arciszewska on the Local Government Reorganisation Working Group” (not vice versa).

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the recommendation to note the appointments to working groups, which was agreed by Council.

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Voting record – For 40, against 0, abstentions 0

Resolved: That Council

1. Noted that Councillor Sarah Veasey has replaced Councillor Adrian Walsh on the Local Plan Working Group
2. Noted that Councillor David Melvin has replaced Councillor Lidia Arciszewska on the Local Government Reorganisation Working Group

CL.39 Motion E: Israel-Palestine - Proposed by Councillor Andy Goodwin, seconded by Councillor Rosie Pearson

The Chair proposed suspending the Council's standing orders in respect to Rule 13.2, in order to move the order of the motions and deal with Motion E first,

This was seconded and voted on.

Voting record - 34 for, 4 against, 2 abstentions.

Councillor Andy Goodwin proposed the motion. He thanked public speakers and stated that the motion was not about politics, but about the people affected. He stated that Hamas and the Israeli government had committed war crimes.

Councillor Goodwin read out his motion as follows;

Many residents and community groups of West Oxfordshire have raised concerns about the humanitarian crisis in Israel/Palestine. Some residents are directly affected by the situation with family there.

The situation in Israel / Palestine is appalling. The background is long and complex. Hamas's massacre of innocent Israeli people in October 2023 was heinous. Since 2001, the UK government has imposed comprehensive sanctions on Hamas and its leaders. The UK Government has been proscribed Hamas as a terrorist organisation, it is a crime to belong to or invite support of Hamas. The remaining Israeli hostages must be returned.

The current actions of the Israeli government are unacceptable:

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- The UN indicates that the IDF may have systematically violated the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack – fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.
- The UN Human rights office says that the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem amount to a war crime.
- The IPC (Integrated Food Security phase classification) says more than 500,000 people in the Gaza Strip are facing starvation destitution and death.

The UK government has been critical of recent events, restored funding to UNWRA, committed more aid to Gaza, suspended more arms licences to Israel, and added sanctions on several Israeli ministers and two “illegal settler outposts” in the West Bank.

We ask the Leader of WODC to write to local MPs and the secretary of state to draw their attention to the concerns raised by residents, asking:

- Call for Hamas to end all acts of terrorism and war crimes, to return all Israeli hostages immediately and unconditionally.
- Confirm the UK would execute ICC arrest warrants against those accused of crimes in the conflict if they visited the UK.
- Introduce an arms embargo on Israel, including component parts of military equipment delivered via third parties and apply economic sanctions on all leaders of the Israeli government.
- Stop trade with Israeli settlements in occupied territories, call for the Israeli government to protect citizens of the West Bank from the increased levels of violence and not allow new Israeli settlements in occupied territories.
- Call for the Israeli government to allow international journalists access to Gaza.
- Call for the Israeli government to end their war crimes against Palestinians including: disproportionate use of force in Gaza; planned military operations in Gaza city; restricting aid organisations in delivery of humanitarian aid into Gaza; and demolition of infrastructure in Gaza.
- Set up an evacuation scheme for the seriously injured and malnourished, similar to that instigated by the Italian government

This Council:

- Endorses the right of citizens to peaceful protest, including vigils, in the UK and welcomes the ability of communities to challenge and scrutinise decisions taken by elected representatives.
- Requests the Portfolio Holder for Finance to undertake a review of the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy and where no contrary legal requirement exists, to avoid investing in authorities, institutions or groups that participate in, enable, profit from or legitimise violations of human rights and international law.

Councillor Rosie Pearson seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak. Councillor Pearson stated that the Council was right to express an opinion on this, even if some members did not believe that it was an issue which affected the residents of West Oxfordshire. She stated that many in the District had written to express concern and some had families which were directly affected. Moreover, she stated that the Council's own financial investments were directly within the Council's remit.

- Members debated the motion and thanked the speakers for their emotive and important contributions.

The following points were raised for why the Council should support the motion;

- Members highlighted that the situation in Gaza was a humanitarian one, having met the threshold for famine, and criticised that aid was being blocked by Israel.
- One member made reference to family in Israel and stated that there had been displacement on both sides, and stated that many Jewish people did not agree with the Israeli Government's actions.
- Stated that Israel's actions in retaliation were out of proportion.
- Highlighted that 20,000 children had been killed and the arrests of 309 medical staff according to the UN and WHO.
- At the Labour conference there had been an successful motion accepting a UN finding that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza and urging the British Government to act to prevent it.
- Journalists had been denied entry into Gaza.

The following arguments against supporting the motion were raised;

- That the remit of the motion exceeded the Council's responsibilities. While the points raised, including by the speakers were considered valid, the motion itself was criticised for relevance.
- One member stated that they did not object to the letter itself but did not support it influencing the Council's treasury management strategy.

The motion was put to a vote as follows;

For 33, Against 2, Abstentions 5

Resolved: The Council

- 1) Endorsed the right of citizens to peaceful protest, including vigils, in the UK and welcomed the ability of communities to challenge and scrutinise decisions taken by elected representatives.
- 2) Requested the Portfolio Holder for Finance to undertake a review of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and where no contrary legal requirement exists, to avoid investing in authorities, institutions or groups that participate in, enable, profit from or legitimise violations of human rights and international law.

CL.40 Motion B: Tackling the Illegal and Unsafe Use of E-Bikes in West Oxfordshire- Proposed by Councillor Liam Walker, Seconded by Councillor Jane Doughty

Councillor Liam Walker introduced the motion, and read it out as follows;

“West Oxfordshire District Council notes that the number of e-bikes and e-scooters being used illegally across Witney and the wider district has increased significantly in recent months. Residents, schools, businesses, and community groups have raised concerns about dangerous riding, use of e-bikes on pavements, the lack of helmets, and underage riders. Illegal and unsafe e-bike use poses risks to pedestrians, other road users, and to the riders themselves.

The Council also recognises that whilst some successful enforcement has already taken place by Thames Valley Police, local authorities have an important role to play in prevention, awareness, and partnership working to address this issue.

Council resolves to:

1. Work with Thames Valley Police and Oxfordshire County Council to explore options for joint enforcement and awareness campaigns targeting unsafe and illegal e-bike use.
2. Launch a district-wide public awareness campaign to inform residents—especially young people and parents—about the rules around e-bikes, the risks of illegal use, and safe cycling practices.
3. Request the Executive to explore opportunities for funding community safety initiatives such as cycle safety workshops, signage, and school engagement projects.
4. Ask the Leader to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley urging greater prioritisation of enforcement against dangerous and illegal e-bike use in West Oxfordshire.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Jane Doughty.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Geoff Saul. This was to amend the second recommendation to read “To ask the County Council and Thames Valley Police to launch public awareness campaign to inform residents—especially young people and parents—about the rules around e-bikes, the risks of illegal use, and safe cycling practices”

This was accepted by the proposer and seconder of the original motion.

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The following points were raised in debate:

- Some councillors noted the need for more positive measures (like subsidised helmets, training, and education) and better data/statistics on incidents.
- There was emphasis that legal e-bikes were beneficial for sustainable transport, and the focus should be on illegal or modified e-bikes.
- Suggestions were made included involving schools, community groups, and using existing programmes (like Bikeability) to educate and improve safety.
- The amendment was welcomed as it emphasised the responsibility of the County Council and Thames Valley police.

The amended motion was voted on and agreed as follows;

For 38, Against 0, Abstentions 1

Council resolved to:

1. Work with Thames Valley Police and Oxfordshire County Council to explore options for joint enforcement and awareness campaigns targeting unsafe and illegal e-bike use.
2. Ask the County Council and Thames Valley Police to launch public awareness campaign to inform residents—especially young people and parents—about the rules around e-bikes, the risks of illegal use, and safe cycling practices.
3. Request the Executive to explore opportunities for funding community safety initiatives such as cycle safety workshops, signage, and school engagement projects.
4. Ask the Leader to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley urging greater prioritisation of enforcement against dangerous and illegal e-bike use in West Oxfordshire.

At this point, the meeting was due to extend past the three hour time limit, the Chair proposed extending the time by suspending Rule 10 in the Council Procedure Rules.

This was voted on as follows;

For 34, Against 4, Abstentions 2.

RESOLVED: To suspend Rule 10 of the Council's constitution in order to extend the meeting past the three hour time limit.

CL.41 Motion C: Boosting Workplaces and Young People by Supporting Work Experience in the District - Proposed by Councillor Ruth Smith, Seconded by Councillor Rachel Crouch

Councillors Andrew Beaney and David Cooper left the meeting at this point. Councillor Beaney left the Chamber as he had declared an interest in the motion.

Cllr Ruth Smith introduced the motion, and read it out as follows;

Council asks the Executive Committee to work with officers and members to develop a simple but effective system for West Oxfordshire employers to be kept aware of the work experience dates for schools in the district, and for employers to be able to indicate willingness to offer work experience places, so that the process is more equitable for young people.

This is an initiative that can outlast Local Government Reorganisation as a valuable piece of local implementation of goals that fall under a wider authority.

Work Experience forms part of careers education at Key Stages 4 and 5 (year 10-11 and 12-13).

Gatsby Benchmark 6, within Statutory Guidance updated in May 2025 [1], states:

Every learner should have first-hand experiences of workplaces to help their exploration of career opportunities and expand their networks [by the ages of 16 and 18].

In West Oxfordshire, this means that schools release their students for one week of work experience in Year 10 or 11 and in Year 12.

But despite the things the County Council and schools do, families and students still find it hard to know what local opportunities there are with employers.

Many school students find placements with friends and family. Whilst convenient, this is not a level playing field and doesn't necessarily match a student's interests. Schools use their contacts for students who seem to have the most trouble finding their own placement.

Schools have a lead member of staff, trained through the Oxfordshire Careers Hub, run by Oxfordshire Enterprise (Oxfordshire County Council). Each school does things its own way to build relationships with local companies.

West Oxfordshire has the West Oxfordshire Schools Careers Partnership, with well-trained staff at each school and attempts to publicise work experience dates for each school to employers. WOSCP has no web presence of its own; it is cited by schools on their own sites.

We can improve the situation in West Oxfordshire.

This motion seeks, as part of WODC's business-facing responsibilities, in line with its funding commitments to skills training (e.g. WODC's allocation of the UKSPF) and its investment in a Youth Development officer, to help residents find employers in West Oxfordshire employers that offer placements - with a web page that:

- Informs West Oxfordshire employers of all the schools' work experience dates
- Allows expression of interest or pledges of placements to be offered

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- Provides a way for employers to promote their participation and how to contact them appropriately
- Retains the autonomy of companies to select their own candidates, but from a platform that signals willingness to engage, and equal opportunity.
- Signposts to and integrates with the initiatives of Oxfordshire Enterprise and the Careers Hub without duplication

Success will be if a placements are found more easily and if employers report a boost to their community profile.

Officers may wish to work with schools, WOSCP and the Oxfordshire Careers Hub to shape the most effective format for this project.

Councillor Smith stated that the idea behind this was to have a simple platform that hooked employers and made it easier for students.

Councillor Rachel Crouch seconded the motion, stating that the existing system was too based on connections.

The motion was debated with the following points raised;

- It would make the system more equitable, for students being currently based on family and friend connections.
- It would help and encourage employers to find work experience students.
- The Local Skills Boards and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Boards were also working in the area.

The Motion was voted on and agreed unanimously.

Council resolved that:

Council asked the Executive Committee to work with officers and members to develop a simple but effective system for West Oxfordshire employers to be kept aware of the work experience dates for schools in the district, and for employers to be able to indicate willingness to offer work experience places, so that the process is more equitable for young people.

CL.42 Motion D: The Impact of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill on Local Planning and Environmental Protection - Proposed by Councillor Genny Early, Seconded by Councillor Andrew Prosser

Councillor Liam Walker left the meeting before this item was discussed.

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Councillor Genny Early proposed the motion. The motion was read as follows;

Council Notes:

1. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill proposes new systems like Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) and a Nature Restoration Levy (NRL), which would affect how Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) handle development whilst protecting nature.
2. Under the Bill, Natural England will prepare EDPs , with decisions signed off by the Secretary of State for Housing rather than the SoS for the Environment. This takes away local council input , could ignore Local knowledge about wildlife /habitats, end the onsite mitigation and delivery of compensation within the district.
3. The Bill suggests EDPs could replace the need for on-site ecological surveys/ impact assessments, which ensure development doesn't harm protected species or habitats.
4. Since 2024, councils are responsible for ensuring new developments achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG),which requires developers to carry out habitat surveys, improve biodiversity by > 10%, and manage those improvements for 30 years. The Bill does not replace/remove BNG, but introduces extra layers without explaining how they will work together, risking confusion, duplication, and extra workload for councils.
5. The Government says the Bill will make planning decisions faster for developers, but centralising key decisions, involving the Secretary of State and multiple national bodies like Natural England, and still needing to consult councils, could increase complexity and time.

Council Believes:

1. The Bill should specify how the mitigation hierarchy will be applied so avoidance of harm to nature is always the first priority, closing loopholes that could make compensation the default.
2. Local councils/ communities should continue to play a key role in planning for biodiversity, using local knowledge. Pre-applications enable Local Planning Authorities to work collaboratively with developers to make planning applications and BNG proposals better quality.
3. Removing local control of environmental planning, relying instead on national agencies, could lead to worse outcomes for wildlife, and less accountability. Whilst landscape-scale conservation is needed, the EDP/NRL approach could lead to localised declines in biodiversity.
4. Without on-site ecological surveys/impact assessments, which ensure new developments follow the law and protect nature , information about the loss of locally important populations would not be recorded and national declines in species may be missed or inadequately compensated.
5. Any new environmental systems must be joined up with existing BNG requirements. Councils must get resources to manage them.
6. Species are rarely "blockers" to development - few developments are refused for ecological reasons in West Oxfordshire. However, EDPs could be beneficial if applied to diffuse environmental impacts such as air and water quality, recreational pressure and nutrient neutrality.

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Council Resolves:

To request that the Leader of the Council writes to the relevant Ministers/local MPs, outlining the Council's concerns, calling for changes to better protect wildlife while enhancing local democracy and planning accountability:

- Adopt the amendment proposals from CIEEM;
- Keep on-site ecological surveys/impact assessment as a key part of planning;
- Ensure councils are involved in EDPs, to reflect local knowledge and Local Nature Recovery Strategies;
- Explain how EDPs, the NRL and BNG will work together;
- Provide councils with support/funding to do this well.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Prosser, who stated that there was still opportunity to influence the bill and that the local nature connection was important.

Members debated the motion and raised the following points;

- That the Council wished to see houses being built but this could not be at the expense of the natural environment. Some believed that the Planning and Infrastructure bill had many flaws.
- The Council had responded to many consultations on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.
- The motion highlighted the loss of local input on the assessment of ecology loss, and that there were concerns over whether centrally developed environmental delivery plans would protect these.
- It was felt that the Bill undermined the work on developing a County Wide Nature Recovery Strategy.
- The Bill reduced the Council's voice on planning matters.
- Once they were gone, natural habitats would be irreplaceable, and that local knowledge was essential to protect these.
- Natural protection was one of the lowest reasons for planning applications being refused.
- Amendments to the Bill had also been put forward by MPs across all parties.
- However, others welcomed the motion but highlighted the need for the housing crisis to be addressed, and that there would be other ways of feeding back on the Bill so would not be supporting the motion.

Voting record - For 26, abstentions 9, against 0

Council resolved:

- I. To request that the Leader of the Council writes to the relevant Ministers/local MPs, outlining the Council's concerns, calling for changes to better protect wildlife while enhancing local democracy and planning accountability:
 - Adopt the amendment proposals from CIEEM;
 - Keep on-site ecological surveys/impact assessment as a key part of planning;
 - Ensure councils are involved in EDPs, to reflect local knowledge and Local Nature Recovery Strategies;
 - Explain how EDPs, the NRL and BNG will work together;
 - Provide councils with support/funding to do this well.

CL.43 Motion A: Asylum Seeker Community and Council Support - Proposed by Councillor Andy Graham, Seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright

As Council had agreed to re-order the motions to take Motion E first, Motion A was taken last to maintain the rotation between political groups on the advice of the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services.

Cllr Graham introduced the motion, reading it out as follows;

West Oxfordshire District Council reaffirms

- a) its pride and appreciation in the way our local community has and have come together to support asylum seekers. Local organisations, voluntary groups and our officers have shown professionalism and empathy to the plight of the families staying in the hotel in Witney for short periods while their asylum applications are processed. It has been a good collaborative effort across public sector partners to support the hotel and make sure those staying there are supported as well as local communities. We have seen our communities donate clothes, bicycles and other items to help the predominantly families housed in the hotel. The empathy and compassion shown is a true testament to the strong, inclusive communities we have here in West Oxfordshire.

This Council reaffirms

- b) that there is no room for those who wish to divide our communities by raising fear through misinformation and heightened rhetoric. We believe hotels are not the best form of accommodation in the long term for those seeking asylum and we expect the government will continue to look at alternatives in a pragmatic and measured way to reduce their use. We will continue to work with partners to ensure the hotel is well managed while it remains in its current use.

This Council believes

- c) As it currently stands the Council have no intention of pursuing any planning enforcement against the hotel in Witney as we do not believe there are any planning or other grounds to take enforcement action

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Councillor Graham introduced the motion, stating that people had fled their homes through no fault of their own and the Council stood to support them. He stated that the motion was about expressing community values and solidarity with people who had faced displacement. He also criticised those who he deemed sought to spread fear and dishonesty.

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the motion.

The motion was debated, and the following points were raised;

- It was an emotive issue, particularly as many asylum seekers were children.
- Officers were thanked for their work
- It was important to spread compassion and tolerance
- Diversity was welcomed.
- Many stated that the asylum seekers housed in the hotel wished to integrate in the community and learn English, and that there had been a lot of community support within the broader community.
- Those seeking asylum had a right to be properly assessed on this, and criticised statements that asylum seekers should be deported without being assessed.
- Stated that refugees were welcome in West Oxfordshire.
- It was important to provide hope for refugees, as they had faced difficult circumstances.

In summing up, Councillor Graham expressed how welcome it was to have unanimous support across the chamber.

The motion was voted on and agreed as follows;

Voting record - For 31 for Against 0, Abstentions 0

Council resolved:

That the Council:

1. Reaffirmed its pride and appreciation in the way our local community has and have come together to support asylum seekers.

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2. Reaffirmed that there is no room for those who wish to divide our communities by raising fear through misinformation and heightened rhetoric. We believe hotels are not the best form of accommodation in the long term for those seeking asylum and we expect the government will continue to look at alternatives in a pragmatic and measured way to reduce their use. We will continue to work with partners to ensure the hotel is well managed while it remains in its current use.

3. Believed as it currently stands the it had no intention of pursuing any planning enforcement against the hotel in Witney and did not believe there are any planning or other grounds to take enforcement action

There was some further wording here but looks like we don't consider that to be part of the resolution as it was more explanation.

CL.44 Date of Next Meeting

The Chair stated that the following meetings would take place in order to discuss local government reorganisation (LGR), and this would mean moving the Extraordinary Council meeting scheduled for 5 November.

Tue 11 November – O&S, 5.30pm

Wed 12 November – full Council, 2.00pm

Wed 12 November – Executive, on the rising of full Council

This was seconded by Councillor Graham and put to a vote, it was agreed unanimously.

CL.45 Exclusion of Public and Press

The Council did not exclude the press and public.

CL.46 Exempt Annex C for item 8: Out of district investment property

This was not discussed.

The Meeting closed at Time Not Specified

CHAIR