

Tuesday, 17 March 2026

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COUNCIL

You are summoned to a meeting of the Council which will be held in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Wednesday, 25 March 2026 at 2.00 pm.**



Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Council

Councillors: Andrew Coles (Chair), Carl Rylett (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, 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, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Martin McBride, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Executive, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted. By participating in this meeting, you are consenting to be filmed.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Democratic Services officers know prior to the start of the meeting.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**
To receive any apologies for absence.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations from Members of Council on any items to be considered at the meeting.
3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 13 - 30)**
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2026.
4. **Receipt of Announcements**
To receive any announcements from The Chair, Leader, Members of the Executive, Head of Paid Service, Director of Finance or Director of Governance and Regulatory Services.
5. **Participation of the Public**
To receive any submissions from members of the public, in accordance with the Council's [Public Participation Rules](#).

The deadline for submission is 2.00pm, two clear working days before the meeting.

6. **Questions by Members**
The following questions have been submitted by Members of Council to Members of the Executive, in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules (Constitution Part 5A, Rule 12).

Written responses will be circulated to Members and published on the Council's website at least one working day prior to the meeting. A Member submitting a question is entitled to ask one supplementary question at the meeting which must arise directly from the question or the response to it.

The supplementary questions and answers will be detailed in the minutes of the meeting.

Question 1: From Councillor Ruth Smith to Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance:

Residents on Madley Park are concerned about the algae and perceived overgrowth of reeds in the balancing ponds. People wonder who manages the ponds.

I have been in contact with a council ecologist via the Estates team, who was very helpful and will take the matter forward in due course. In the meantime, please can the Executive Member

- a) confirm whether or not site visits are regular or merely responsive and;
- b) work with the communications team to inform residents that WODC is responsible for the balancing ponds and acts to manage issues when ecologists deem necessary. That way residents will have peace of mind and will know who to contact when concerns arise.

Question 2: From Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery

Data from the House of Commons Library suggests that around 10,600 households in the Witney area are not connected to the gas grid and instead rely on heating oil or LPG, leaving many rural residents particularly exposed to rising global fuel prices. Given the scale of this issue in West Oxfordshire, what assessment has the administration made of the impact of rising off-grid heating costs on residents, and will the Council advocate for targeted support such as a rural heating support payment for affected households?

Question 3: From Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care

There is a growing issue across England of unadopted amenities on privately managed housing estates, where infrastructure such as roads, green spaces and drainage systems are maintained by private management companies rather than being adopted by local authorities. With a number of new developments being built across West Oxfordshire, this can leave residents facing ongoing estate management charges while still paying full council tax.

Did the District Council submit a response to the Government's recent consultation on this issue, and if so, what position did West Oxfordshire District Council take in relation to protecting residents from unfair or excessive estate management fees on new housing estates?

Question 4: From Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council:

As Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council you also have the responsibility for emergency planning. Can the Leader therefore outline what role he personally played during the recent water outage which left thousands of homes across parts of West Oxfordshire without water for an extended period? In particular, when were you first informed of the situation and what actions did you take to coordinate the Council's response and support affected residents?

Question 5: From Councillor Cllr Liam Walker to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council:

In circumstances where a councillor facing serious allegations related to domestic abuse is allowed to rejoin a political group at West Oxfordshire District Council, does the Leader accept that this could risk sending the wrong message to residents who have experienced domestic abuse? What guidance or standards does the Council expect political groups to follow in such situations to maintain public confidence and demonstrate support for victims?

Question 6: From Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment:

Can the Executive member confirm the recorded number of fly-tipping incidents for the months of November 2025, December 2025, then January, February, and March

(recorded so far) of this year?

Question 7: From Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning

Given over 4000 residents have now signed a petition calling for Woodford Way car park in Witney to not be built, will he now listen to residents and accept that within the allocation of 18,000 homes planned for West Oxfordshire there will already be a large percentage of social housing, therefore this key car park should remain?

Question 8: From Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment

In the West Oxfordshire District Council parking strategy report the document only shows the average occupancy for the Woodford Way car park. Can the council publish the actual data that was collected in order to ascertain these averages?

Question 9: From Councillor Liam Walker to Councillor Duncan Enright - Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development

Many businesses in Witney are concerned about the impact of the District Council building on the Woodford Way car park. Are you concerned about the impact this could have on the local economy and visitors to Witney?

Question 10: From Councillor Michele Mead to Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council

Please can you confirm how many times the Chamber and committee rooms have been hired out for 25/26?

Question 11: From Councillor Cllr Jane Doughty to Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment

I would like to request data regarding parking enforcement outcomes within the Witney town boundary. There are ongoing concerns regarding persistent parking issues on Corn Street and Welch Way, which are expected to escalate following the impending closure of Woodford Way.

To assess the impact of the transition in enforcement authority from West Oxfordshire District Council to Oxfordshire County Council in 2021, please provide the annual number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued for the three years immediately preceding the transfer.

For a clear comparison of historical and current trends, please provide the data categorised by:

* On-street PCNs (Roadside enforcement)

* Off-street PCNs (Council-managed car parks)

This information is vital for understanding how the change in enforcement powers has influenced parking compliance in the town centre ahead of significant local infrastructure changes.

Question 12: From Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment

Over the last couple of years, you have been asked time and time again about when the Tree Management Policy is going to be reviewed. It should have been last year, and it didn't happen....

We are now in the nesting season, which means any tree works will happen, few and far between.

Please can I be provided a clear breakdown of all the work / maintenance that is going to take place from April 2026 - April 2027 on the District Council owned green spaces in: Deer Park, Ducklington and Curbridge. A meeting with an Officer about such work would also be useful.

Question 13: From Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance

Please can you state the plans for the over £300,000 in S106 money from the Spring Meadow development in Witney that is due to be spent by late this year? Witney Town Council sent some suggestions, so I would be keen to understand what options you are looking to explore.

Question 14: From Councillor Thomas Ashby to Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment

Garden waste licenses - Please can you provide the figures for the number of licenses purchased in the 25/26 financial year?

7. Recommendations from the Constitution Working Group (Pages 31 - 80)

Purpose

To present recommendations from the Constitution Working Group related to delegations for regulatory matters, a review of the planning committee process and Member Questions.

Recommendations

That Council resolves to:

1. Approve the updates to Part 4E: Functions in Relation to Regulatory Matters, as shown in Annex A.
2. Agree to rename the Development Control Committee to "Strategic Planning Committee", with effect from the start of the 2026/27 civic year.
3. Agree to combine the two area planning sub-committees (Lowlands and Uplands) into a single, district-wide 12-Member "Development Management Sub-

- Committee” (quorum 3), with effect from the start of the 2026/27 civic year.
4. Agree to amend Part 3C: Committee Functions, as shown in Annex C, from the start of the 2026/27 civic year to give effect to recommendations 2 and 3.
 5. Agree that the new Development Management Sub-Committee will meet on the Lowlands meeting dates in 2026/27, with the Uplands dates held for overspill meetings, should the sub-committee need to adjourn and reconvene.
 6. Request that the Council’s Independent Remuneration Panel meets to consider the implications of changing the planning committee structure for the Members’ Allowances Scheme 2023-27 and formally report back to the May Council meeting with any recommendations.
 7. Agree that the Process for Determining Planning Applications (Annex D) and Roles and Responsibilities on Planning Committees (Annex E) be included in the Constitution as appendices to Part 6Q: Members Planning Code of Good Practice.
 8. Agree to amend the rules for Member Questions, as shown in Annex F, Part 5A Council Procedure Rules to:
 - a) Introduce a word limit of 250 words on Member Questions.
 - b) Introduce a time limit of 1 minute for supplementary Member Questions.
 - c) Rotate the order of Member Questions by political group, in the same way that Motions rotate.

Motions on Notice

8. Motion A - Response to the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework Proposed by Councillor Andy Goodwin, Seconded by Councillor Early

West Oxfordshire District Council has responded to a Government consultation on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), backing some elements of the reforms but urging Ministers to rethink proposals that could weaken local planning powers.

The consultation proposes a number of fundamental changes to the current NPPF. West Oxfordshire District Council supports the changes in the new draft framework, that create a clearer structure and bring together guidance that currently sits in several different places. This should simplify the process for Councils to prepare local plans, reducing costs and speeding up the process.

However, the response also highlights several significant concerns:

- Nature recovery and climate resilience are treated as secondary considerations rather than fundamental planning principles.
- The proposal to move more policy detail from local plans into nationally set planning rules. This is a step too far and local plans must continue to play a strong role in shaping development at the local level, reflecting the unique needs and circumstances of individual areas.
- Reduced evidential requirements could hamper the ability of local planning authorities to robustly scrutinise applications and make well-informed, legally sound decisions. Ensuring proportionate but adequate supporting information is critical to maintaining confidence in the planning process.
- The lack of transitional arrangements for the decision-making policies, which are proposed to take effect immediately upon publication of the final Framework. This approach risks rendering certain adopted local plan policies - including

relatively recently adopted policies - out of date or subject to significantly reduced weight in decision-making. Such an outcome would undermine plan-led decision-making and create uncertainty for local authorities, applicants and communities.

- The serious implication this has for policies such as the recently adopted net-zero carbon requirements set out in the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan (Written Ministerial Statement Planning – Local Energy Efficiency Standards Update (13 December 2023)), because locally set energy standards would not be allowed for in the new draft national planning rules.
- The proposals for an overly permissive approach towards new development within and outside towns and villages and in locations near well-served railway stations, without reflecting the special conditions arising in a National Landscape.
- The unsustainable further upward pressure on housing targets that will already be extremely challenging to deliver, as well as reduced local control over major energy and digital infrastructure projects.
- The proposal that ‘medium-scale’ developments of up to 50 homes could avoid on-site affordable housing requirements and other established planning requirements.

The Council resolves:

1. To request the Leader of the Council to write the Rt Hon Matthew Pennycook, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning), and our West Oxfordshire Members of Parliament to highlight the concerns raised above.

9. **Motion B - Protecting Historical Figures in Banknotes Proposed by Councillor Liam Walker**

The Bank of England has announced plans for the next series of banknotes to feature British wildlife rather than notable historical figures such as Sir Winston Churchill, Jane Austen, J. M.W. Turner and Alan Turing.

Sir Winston Churchill, whose portrait currently appears on the £5 note, played a decisive role in leading the United Kingdom during the Second World War and remains one of the most widely recognised symbols of Britain’s resilience and democratic values. He was born at Blenheim Palace in Woodstock, and his life and legacy are deeply embedded in the history and identity of our district including where he was laid to rest in Bladon.

Blenheim Palace is one of the most significant historic landmarks in the United Kingdom and continues to celebrate Churchill’s legacy and attracts visitors from across the world, contributing to the cultural pride and economic vitality of West Oxfordshire.

Currency is not merely a medium of exchange but also a powerful national symbol reflecting the heritage, achievements and shared history of the United Kingdom.

Council believes that:

The removal of historical figures from banknotes risks diminishing the recognition of individuals who made profound contributions to the nation. Given West Oxfordshire’s unique and direct connection to Sir Winston Churchill through his birthplace at Blenheim Palace, the district has a particular responsibility to advocate for the preservation of his legacy in national life.

Celebrating British wildlife is valuable and worthwhile, but this should not come at the expense of honouring the individuals who helped shape Britain’s history and freedoms.

National institutions should ensure that Britain's cultural and historical legacy remains visible in public life, including on currency that is handled daily by millions of people.

Retaining Churchill on banknotes is not only a matter of national importance but also of local pride for communities such as ours, where his story began.

Council therefore resolves to:

1. Write to the Governor of the Bank of England expressing our concern about the proposed removal of such historic figures, including Sir Winston Churchill, from future banknotes.
2. Urge the Bank of England to reconsider the proposal and retain the tradition of featuring notable figures from British history on currency.
3. Request that any redesign of banknotes continues to recognise the achievements of individuals who have contributed significantly to the United Kingdom's history, culture and democratic traditions.
4. Ask the Leader of the Council to share this motion with local Members of Parliament and neighbouring authorities in Oxfordshire to encourage wider support for preserving Britain's historical representation on banknotes.

10. **Motion C - Discretionary Business Rate Local Discount and Engagement Proposed by Councillor Ruth Smith, Seconded by Councillor Michael Brooker**

2026 has seen the introduction of a new Business Rates system, with updated rateable values and changes to sector-specific rate relief.

Councillors have been hearing from town centre businesses that the increases are a shock and a threat to the viability of their businesses. There are reports that it is hard to speak to council advisors about the changes.

This Council would like the Executive members and CEO to consider adopting a Local Discounts and Incentives policy to safeguard the prosperity of West Oxfordshire's high streets, local jobs and to promote growth within and relocation to the district, in the post 2026 rates landscape.

In addition, assurances are sought that small businesses eligible for the Supporting Small Business Relief scheme can access clear information about how their rates will vary year on year until the full new rate is reached.

Council notes:

- The finance team perform their business rates functions excellently every year, as evidenced by External Audit and internal audit.
- Business Rates are set by national government. WODC is responsible for collection.
- The powers for granting discretionary rate relief by Councils are provided in Sections 44a, 47 and 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which was amended by the Localism Act 2011 to incorporate wider powers to grant relief under discretions.
- The Council website has the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy at the bottom of the Rate Relief page. This policy lists Local Discounts and Incentives as a category under its powers, but does not contain a section indicating any policy for that category of relief.

<https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/business-rates-and-rate-relief/rate->

relief/

Council resolves to:

1. Agree that the Executive and CEO should consider whether a Local Discount and Incentives policy could enhance the economic objectives and wellbeing of the District.
2. Agree that communications with small businesses and all residents be reviewed and improved to ensure they all understand the 2026-27 £800 cap and how that will vary during transition to their new rates in the coming years.

11. **Motion D - Bring Thames Water back into public ownership Proposed by Councillor Early, Seconded by Councillor Arciszewska**

This Council notes:

- The Recent Channel 4 docudrama 'Dirty Business' was shown in February 2026 and featured pollution of rivers in West Oxfordshire.
- The River Windrush was polluted by sewage discharges from Burford Sewage Treatment Works (STW) for a total discharge duration of 338 hours in 2024, which equates to around 14 days. (Estimates based on Thames Water data, <https://top-of-the-poops.org/waterway/thames-water/river-windrush>; accessed 16 March 2026).
- Five STWs in the Evenlode catchment each discharged untreated sewage for over 2000 hours in 2024, which equates to more than 83 days. Data from Thames Water STW 'Event Duration Monitors (<https://earthwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Water-Quality-in-the-Evenlode-Catchment-2024.pdf>; accessed 16 March 2026).
- During a cross-party EFRA Committee hearing in September 2025, Emma Hardy (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Water and Flooding in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)) clarified the high threshold for special administration, stating: "If it comes to special administration... it's if a company can't perform its basic duty, so if your water doesn't come out your taps and your sewage isn't being taken away". Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Tuesday 9 September 2025.
- There was a serious interruption to water supply in the OX7 and OX29 postcodes due to a burst water main in March 2026 that caused severe water supply interruptions (low pressure or no water) for thousands of residents and businesses in Oxfordshire. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq6qp0146ggo>; accessed 16 March 2026).

This Council further notes:

- Raw sewage contains dangerous pathogens, including E. coli, hepatitis A, and parasites, which pose severe risks through direct contact or ingestion. Exposure causes gastrointestinal infections (vomiting, diarrhoea), skin/eye/ear infections, and respiratory issues. It is a major cause of waterborne diseases like cholera and dysentery.
- Thames Water are responsible for 72 billion litres of sewage discharged into rivers since 2020, with 2024 data indicating a 50% increase in raw effluent dumped.
- Thames Water have paid out £7.2bn to shareholders since 1989, including

£158.3m in 2024.

This Council believes:

- Thames Water should be brought into special administration and then back into public ownership.

This Council resolves:

- To request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Prime Minister calling for Thames water to be brought into public ownership.
- To request that the letter to the Prime Minister also asks that in the meantime no dividends should be made to Thames Water Shareholders, nor bonuses to Thames Water Management until all rivers in the region meet all clean water standards.
- To request that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regularly invites Thames Water to report on how much raw sewage has been pumped into West Oxfordshire rivers and the progress towards preventing this.

12. **Motion E - Protecting precious habitats in West Oxfordshire Proposed by Councillor Arciszewska, seconded by Councillor Pearson**

This Council notes:

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world; with only about 50% of its biodiversity remaining, it ranks in the bottom 10% globally. It is therefore of utmost importance that the remaining areas of high ecological value are preserved, as they may serve as nucleation sites for the wider nature recovery.

This is also a matter of urgency. The new Planning and Infrastructure Bill has been created to fast-track the delivery of the government's ambition to build 1.5 million homes by the end of this parliament. This bill allows developers to meet their environmental obligations by making payments to the Nature Restoration Fund to promote nature restoration elsewhere.

Environmental organisations and campaigners are deeply concerned that this new strategy will encourage developers to damage the environment locally and simply 'make up for it miles away'. According to legal analysis of the legislation, more than 5,000 of England's most sensitive and rare natural habitats are at high risk.

SSSIs are areas of exceptional ecological or geological value that have legal protection. Their designation is one of the most important tools available for protecting the UK's most valuable habitats and species. Designation and management of SSSIs is one of Natural England's key statutory duties, which the Agency seems to be failing to fulfil. The rate of SSSI designations has slowed dramatically in recent years; the average time it takes to designate sites is getting longer. According to experts familiar with the matter, it takes up to 10 years to obtain an SSSI status. Moreover, it now appears that the Agency has suspended processing further designations altogether.

We have some sites with extraordinary habitats, such as floodplain meadows and ancient woodlands in West Oxfordshire. They require legal protection. The Council has a legal duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity, and one of our priorities is to "create a

better environment for people and wildlife”.

Given the rapid pace of housing development and the current shortcomings of the Natural England watchdog, the Council should stand up for the local environment and demand answers and actions from the Agency.

The Council resolves to:

Ask the Leader of the Council to write to Tony Juniper, the head of Natural England, to ask:

- a) Why the SSSI designation process has been suspended
- b) When the SSSI designation will be reinstated
- c) Request that Natural England adopts a temporary approach to commenting on planning applications, which takes into account available local environmental evidence to protect the sites that would otherwise have been designated as SSSIs if the designation process worked as intended.
- d) Request that Natural England uses this approach until the backlog in the SSSI designation is cleared.

13. **Motion F - The impact of the new restrictions imposed at the Household Waste and Recycling Centres in Oxfordshire on the residents of West Oxfordshire, proposed by Councillor Roger Faulkner, seconded by Councillor Sarah Veasey.**

For eleven consecutive years, under a variety of political leaderships, Oxfordshire County Council was the top performing County Council Waste Disposal Authority. In the County Council's own Satisfaction Ratings of Services Survey in 2025 it showed that 72% of residents were satisfied with the Household Waste and Recycling Centres, with only 16% being dissatisfied. This success reflects both the hard work of staff and the responsible behaviour of Oxfordshire residents.

Despite this positive record, the County Council has introduced new rules for the recycling centres including a mandatory booking system and the requirement to provide proof of address on arrival.

This Council notes that:

1. These rules place additional bureaucratic barriers for residents wishing to access the recycling centres.
2. Reduced access to recycling centres risks diverting waste into District Council collection services and to an increase in fly-tipping, both of which place additional practical and financial burdens on the District Council.
3. These changes risk undermining both Oxfordshire's high recycling rates in recent years and the public's satisfaction with waste and recycling services.
4. This Council therefore resolves to request that the Executive Member for the Environment writes to the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet asking them to reconsider these restrictions, assess their impact on District waste and recycling services and work with all local authorities to ensure that waste and recycling centre policies continue to provide an accessible and effective service for the

residents of Oxfordshire.

14. **Motion G - Policy into Action, Proposed by Councillor Michael Brooker, seconded by Councillor Ruth Smith**

This council wishes to put policy into action. Our towns and roads have been kept waiting for implementation of decisions already made by Oxfordshire County Council, to the detriment of businesses and to residents' town centre experience and their travel and movement options across the District.

High Street

To revive our main town, we call on the County Council to prioritise work on Witney High Street, in close contact with traders and the Town and District Council, and start immediately to avoid works at key trading times. This includes the installation of the ANPR enforcement of the traffic restriction, that was approved months ago.

Footpaths

We also ask the County Council to begin work immediately on footpath resurfacing in West and East Witney as "walk and talk" minor works rather than expensive projects, with the more detailed items like lighting sorted out later.

Potholes

In the same vein, we urge the County Council to spend the government pothole uplift straight away and devote some of the nearly £300 million capital hoarded from development, including in West Oxfordshire, on longer lasting resurfacing projects starting with the worst surfaces and busiest roads.

Council resolves that:

1. The Leader writes to the County Council to request immediate start to Witney High Street works and installation of ANPR, after unacceptable delay demoralising businesses and residents.
2. The Leader writes to the County Council to demand immediate commencement of the stalled footpath works at East and West Witney.
3. The Leader writes to the County Council to request that West Oxfordshire roads are scheduled for full resurfacing, using unspent funds, and that in the meantime West Oxfordshire potholes are repaired with the best methods available using the pothole uplift funding.

(END)