

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

Executive

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 23 April 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham, Duncan Enright, Lidia Arciszewska, Hugo Ashton, Rachel Crouch, Andrew Prosser, Geoff Saul, Alaric Smith and Tim Sumner

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Andrew Thomson (Planning Policy Manager), Lucy Empson, Martha Holland and Emma Tarry

325 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

326 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

327 Minutes of Previous Meetings

There were no amendments to the minutes of the previous meetings held on 12 March 2025 and 19 March 2025.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council. Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader, seconded the proposal.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the previous meetings held on 12 March 2025 and 19 March 2025.

328 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, announced the appointment of Lucy Empson as Community Funding Officer. The Officer would be working on the Council's Westhive grant funding project.

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Councillor Andy Graham announced the appointment of Emma Tarry as Communications Officer.

329 Participation of the Public

Dr Alan Hearne, a public participant, gave background to the Executive of the context in which his question had arisen before asking the following questions of the Executive:

1. Would the Council agree to review whether the use of Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site for a wide range of commercial and leisure uses was appropriate within the existing Certificate of Lawfulness or whether planning permission and/or other permissions were needed in respect of those activities?
2. Would the Council establish whether the commercial camping scheduled for September at Blenheim required planning or any other type of permission?

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, thanked Dr Hearne for his questions. Councillor Ashton advised that he would request that the Planning Enforcement Team investigate the matter and respond to Councillor Ashton and Dr Hearne in due course.

330 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 16 April 2025 and made no recommendations to Executive.

Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 4 December 2024, and Executive responses, were addressed under Agenda item 8 – Ubico Business Plan 2025-26.

331 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee

There were no matters raised by the Audit and Governance Committee.

332 Ubico Business Plan 2025-26

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, introduced the item the purpose of which was to consider the Ubico Business Plan 2025-26, which had been produced by Ubico in consultation with the Directors and Shareholders, and to recommend that the Leader (as Shareholder Representative) approve the plan. It was noted that the plan had been to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 December 2024 which had made the following recommendations:

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1. That the Council asked that Ubico reviewed its policy on the use of pesticides and herbicides.
2. That the Council asked that Ubico reviewed the content of the HVO (hydrogenated vegetable oil) fuel and assessed whether it contained palm oil.
3. That the Council asked that Ubico reviewed flood support and emergency plans in areas with frequent flooding to address provisions for missed bin collections in the instance of flooding.
4. That the Council considered how it communicated with its residents on how to recycle glass, for instance by including this information in the council tax leaflet.

Councillor Graham summarised the Executive's response to the recommendations, which had been circulated at the meeting, as follows:

1. This recommendation was agreed. It was noted that Ubico had reviewed its policy on the use of pesticides and herbicides. Ubico had considered alternative methods of weed control and to include products such as New Way and Finalsant. However, officers had completed extensive research on the options and associated costs, and had established that locally the quantities applied on Council owned land had been reduced to 12 litres per season at a cost of £200. Changing to alternatives like New Way and Finalsant would have cost between £7-10k a year. Treatments only took place in public car parks, Depots, and at Woodgreen and not in playgrounds or open spaces.
2. This recommendation was not agreed. It was noted that Ubico did not use hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) in any council vehicles.
3. This recommendation was agreed. It was noted that this review was done as part of Ubico's Business Continuity Planning. There was a business continuity plan in place between West Oxfordshire District Council through the Emergency Contingency, and Flooding Teams and Ubico. This detailed how Ubico would respond to meet the Council's needs, and how waste and recycling would be collected should adverse weather impact on the daily services.
4. This recommendation was agreed. The council had an annual communications plan and this included key messages about waste and recycling which was distributed through various communications channels. The Council regularly communicated with residents via the web site, bin hangers and stickers, as well as publicity on vehicles, social media, direct mailing, and via e-newsletters

Councillor Graham proposed the Executive's response to the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Ubico Business Plan 2025-26 be agreed.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, seconded the recommendation.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

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RESOLVED: To agree the Executive's response to the recommendation put forward by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Graham then proposed accepting the recommendations in the report regarding the Ubico Business Plan 2025-26.

Councillor Arciszewska seconded the recommendation.

This were voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the Ubico Business Plan 2025-26; and
2. Noted that, subject to feedback from the Executive, the Leader of the Council, as Shareholder Representative, would sign the written resolution to approve the Ubico Business Plan 2025-2026 in due course.

333 Witney Community Insight Profile

Councillor Rachel Crouch, Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities, introduced the item and summarised the detailed report as follows:

- In September 2024 Community First Oxfordshire was commissioned by West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council Public Health to undertake a community insight research project with the aim of capturing the opinions of the community in relation to local strengths and challenges to health and wellbeing.
- The collection of views gave a better understanding of how improvements could be made.
- The report was published and should be read alongside the Witney Central Data Report.
- These documents had led to the Witney Central Community Insight Report.
- In 2019 ten wards were identified by Oxfordshire Public Health as having the greatest number of areas listed in the 20% most deprived in England. Following this, a further group fell within the 30-40% most deprived nationally. Witney Central Ward was amongst these.
- The public engagement had focused on housing, transport, social and community infrastructure, anti-social behaviour, keeping healthy and challenges such as the cost of living.
- The report helped the Council understand the experiences of the people in this ward.

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- The report had no financial implications. Oxfordshire County Council had provided funding, including a one-off payment of £25,000, to support taking the recommendations of the report. The grant disbursement programme for these finds would commence in May 2025.
- An Action Plan was being created to take forward the recommendations.
- The report could also be used to help other areas of deprivation in West Oxfordshire.

Councillor Crouch thanked the Officers for the report and proposed accepting the recommendations.

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, seconded the recommendations.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the content of the Witney Central Community Insight Profile, its three reports and appendices

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Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, introduced the item the purpose of which was to consider and endorse the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030.

Councillor Ashton summarised the report and management plan stating that:

- One third of the district fell within the Cotswold National Landscape.
- It was a legal requirement for a National Landscape to have a management plan which was to be reviewed every five years or sooner.
- The new plan had been prepared by the Cotswolds National Landscape Board who now sought formal endorsement from the district.
- The success of the delivery of the plan was dependent on a wide variety of stakeholders including West Oxfordshire District Council.
- It was a legal requirement to seek to preserve and enhance the Cotswold National Landscape.
- The structure of the plan comprised four main components: a vision, key issues, special qualities and outcomes and policies. The vision had been drawn in relation to climate

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emergency, nature's decline and health and societal changes. The special qualities focused on what made the Cotswold National Landscape distinctive and valuable. There were fourteen outcomes specified which the Council could be fully aligned with.

- With regard to policies, distinctions between the management plan policies and West Oxfordshire Local Plan policies were clear. The Local Plan formed the statutory plan for the district and the management plan was not part of this and thus did not carry the same weight as the Local Plan. However, Councillor Ashton suggested that the management plan was a material consideration for planning which would continue in the new Local Plan currently under development. Where policies of the Council and Cotswold National Landscape Board did not align the management plan acknowledged this and recognised that its own policies were aspirational.

Councillor Ashton concluded that the next step would be to draft a letter to the Cotswold National Landscape Management Board based on the Officer recommendation.

In the discussion it was noted that the special quality of the Cotswold National Landscape could also be defined by the continuous human settlement over many generations, and its farming and management. It was hoped that this would continue to be supported. The new West Oxfordshire Local Plan would encourage appropriate development, in particular rural exception sites. West Oxfordshire had an outside representative who attended the Cotswold National Landscape Board including their activities and events.

Councillor Ashton proposed accepting the recommendations of the report with the addition of a further recommendation as follows:

“Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to draft a letter to the Cotswold National Landscape (CNL) Board confirming the Council's endorsement of the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030”.

Councillor Andrew Prosser seconded the recommendations.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Noted the content of the report; and
2. Formally endorsed the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030 attached at Annex A.
3. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to draft a letter to the Cotswold National Landscape (CNL) Board confirming the Council's endorsement of the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030.

335 Decision taken under emergency powers: Sports England funding SPSF phase 2 (Carterton Leisure Centre)

Councillor Tim Sumner, Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects, introduced the item the purpose of which was to report to the Executive on a decision taken by the Chief Executive Officer under urgency powers in relation to SPSF funding phase 2 at Carterton Leisure Centre. Councillor Sumner stated that several Executive Members had been involved in the matter which related to funding for Solar PV. Councillor Sumner commented that the Council had acted quickly to look after leisure centres in this case.

Councillor Sumner proposed accepting the recommendations.

Councillor Aleric Smith, Executive Member for Finance, seconded the recommendation.

This was voted on and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

- I. Noted the decision taken as set out in Annex A

The Meeting closed at 2.31 pm

CHAIR