

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Development Control Committee**

Held in the Committee Rooms 1 & 2, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire
OX28 1NB at 2.00 pm on **Monday, 2 June 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Goodwin (Chair), Michael Brooker (Vice-Chair), Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Julian Cooper, Adam Clements, Rachel Crouch, Genny Early, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, David Jackson, Nick Leverton, Andrew Lyon, David Melvin, Elizabeth Poskitt, Sarah Veasey and Alistair Wray

Officers: Phil Shaw (Planning Services Transformation Lead) and Andrew Thomson (Planning Policy Manager), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Mat Taylor (Democratic Services Officer) and Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: Councillor Andy Graham and Councillor Hugo Ashton.

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Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Geoff Saul, Steve Cosier, Andrew Prosser, Lidia Arciszewska, Michele Mead and Mike Baggaley.

Councillor Alaric Smith substituted for Councillor Arciszewska.

Councillor Rosie Pearson substituted for Councillor Prosser.

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Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received as follows;

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt declared that she was a founding member of Sustainable Woodstock, had attended some Stop Botley West meetings and was a member of Woodstock Town Council and attended meetings to discuss how financial benefits would be used however Councillor Poskitt was not predetermined.

Councillor Andy Goodwin declared that had attended Stop Botley West meetings about a year ago but was not predetermined.

Councillor Sarah Veasey declared that she had previously attended community benefits group but was no longer and member and was not predetermined.

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Minutes of Previous Meeting

Page 8 - Councillor Beaney highlighted that the members of the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee was incorrectly recorded and Councillors Early and Saul were members of Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee. The officer had already corrected the list.

Councillor Julian Cooper asked that the wording "Council resolved to" be changed to "Development Control Committee resolved to" for Items 1 and 2.

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Councillor Michael Brooker proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 21 May 2025 be agreed by the Committee as a true and accurate record. This was seconded by Councillor Sarah Veasey, was put to the vote and was agreed by the Committee.

The Development Control Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 21 May 2025 as a true and accurate record.

10 Botley West Examination - Submission of Written Representation and Local Impact Report

Andrew Thomson, Planning Policy Manager started the presentation with an explanation of the purpose of the meeting covered in the following four points:

- To note to the Executive summary of the Draft Joint Local Impact Report.
- To endorse the draft Written Representation, subject to any amendments as agreed at the Development Control Committee.
- To delegate to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the Executive Member for Planning, the responsibility to make any necessary amendments to the Written Representation and Joint Local Impact Report prior to the submission to the Examining Authority.
- That the Planning Policy Manager be authorised to issue the Written Representation and full Local Impact report (as may be amended) to the Examining Authority, before the deadline for response.

The Planning Policy Officer explained that it would not be possible for the Development Control Committee to meet if any further information was requested by the Planning Inspector and therefore requested the approval of the committee to add another recommendation, this was due to the logistics of organising committee meetings and the timing of the examination deadlines. The additional recommendation was read out to the committee.

- To delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager in consultation with the Chair of DC Committee and the Planning Portfolio Holder, to submit any further representations to the Examining Authority during the Examination period, by specified deadlines.

The Chair asked if the committee had any questions of clarification on the additional recommendation. The Chair explained the purpose of the recommendation again for clarity. Councillor Nick Leverton proposed that the additional recommendation to delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager in consultation with the Chair of DC Committee and the Planning Portfolio Holder, to submit any further representations to the Examining Authority during the Examination period, by specified deadlines be added to the agenda. This was seconded by councillor Alaric Smith and was unanimously agreed.

The Development Control Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree to add the additional recommendation to the agenda to delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager in consultation with the Chair of DC Committee and the Planning Portfolio Holder, to submit any further representations to the Examining Authority during the Examination period, by specified deadlines.

The Planning Policy Manager continued with his presentation which included the following points:

- A recap of the proposal to develop a solar farm in West Oxfordshire if approved.
- The proposal would cover a large area across three district councils, including Vale of White Horse, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire with the majority of the proposed development in West Oxfordshire of approximately 1400 hectares.
- The area would be split into 3 areas made up of a northern area, a central area and a southern area.
- The process had comprised of 6 stages. West Oxfordshire had engaged with and responded to requests for information, submitted representations to consultation during the pre-application period, reflected on the adequacy of the consultation at acceptance stage and submitted a relevant representation to the Planning Inspector at the Pre-Examination stage.
- The process was at the Examination stage where verbal representations had been made by the Planning Policy Officer, but the examination was primarily a written process. The deadline for submissions from West Oxfordshire District Council was 4 June 2025 where a Local Impact Report and written submissions would be submitted.
- The Planning Policy Officer reminded the Committee that West Oxfordshire District Council was not the decision-making authority on the application, the application would be for the Secretary of State for Development to consent to.

The Planning Policy Manager gave a summary of comments made through representations to the examination and examination authority which included the following:

- Impacts on the landscape and greenbelt land to be excluded to minimise harm.
- Increased buffer zones around heritage and ecological assets to minimise impacts on best and most versatile agricultural land.
- It was accepted that reduced scale of the project would help minimise the magnitude and significant of impacts on sensitive environments.

The Chair invited public speakers to address the committee.

Rosemary Lewis, represented the Stop Botley West group. She

- Acknowledged the Planning Policy Manager and team's hard work with the amount of information complied and submitted.
- Stop Botley West agreed with the key points of impact in the written submissions and asked that the committee endorse the Local Impact Report and written representations.

Jonathan Ford spoke in support for the application and raised the following points:

- The serious challenge that climate change represents to all generations,

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- Supporting the application would aid climate change mitigation.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council addressed the committee and raised the following points: thanked the officers for all their hard work on the reports and submissions, the detailed look at the pros and cons of the Local Impact Report which gave West Oxfordshire District Council the opportunity to put residents' concerns forward, acknowledged suggestions were not taken forward by the applicant, confirmed that as Leader of the Council he would make a request to speak at the examination.

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning addressed the committee and raised the following points: thanked the officers for all their work getting to the stage of the examination process, asked the committee to support the officer's recommendations going forwards, acknowledged the need for renewable energy but within schemes that work on a local scale.

Members asked if there were any speakers for the applicant, the Planning Policy Manager confirmed there were none.

The Planning Policy Manager presented a series of slides to show the thematic elements of the Local Impact Report and explained the assessment undertaken and the conclusions in the written representation including:

- The National Policy Statement provided a framework within which the Examination and authority made their recommendations to the Secretary of State and were relevant to decision making.
- The Local Impact Report detailed the likely impacts of the proposed development in the local area.
- Land parcels and impact on the greenbelt.
- Heritage and surrounding settings would be harmful to monuments, graded listed buildings and tourism to the Blenheim Palace World Heritage site and surrounding areas.
- Landscape and views would be impacted by hedgerows blocking wider views and would result in developed areas.
- Ecology and nature - mitigation would be of limited benefits and conflict with nature recovery.
- Flood risk would result in potential increased surface water, the worse of the impact would be seen north of Cassington.
- Ground Conditions and minerals would experience a negative impact.
- Highway and public rights of way – a Construction Traffic Management Plan would have to be carried forwards. Public rights of way would be negatively impacted over the lifetime of the project.
- Noise impact would affect users of the public rights of way.
- Climate change impacts would be neutral with maintenance of the site over the lifetime of the project.
- Social and economic benefits would be over the period of construction and removal of the site which would provide employment, however work opportunities in agricultural

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would be reduced due to the change of use of the land. The best and most versatile agricultural land would be lost to solar panels and sub-stations.

- Concerns by the Council on how the volume and disposal of waste would be managed and the adequacy of the plan. A Dust management plan would be implemented to control dust emissions.
- London Oxford airport located immediately to the East of the site has raised the following impacts, emergency landing site, take-off glint and glare and heat induced turbulence.

In summary the Planning Policy Manager explained that the impacts included in the written representation would result a revised proposal. The Committee was asked to consider whether the Local Impact report identified all issues relevant to the Botley West Solar Farm proposal and if these issues were adequately reflected in the Local Impact Report and written representation.

The Chair then invited the committee members to discuss the Written Representations topic by topic and to ask any questions or for admissions or additions where needed.

- When using terms within the written representations or reports could one term be used throughout the report such as West Oxfordshire District Council or WODC. Not use the terms intermittently throughout the documents.
- Other solar panel schemes had been brought forward in the district as West Oxfordshire District Council supported renewable energy in the district, however it would not be at any cost. Emphasis on wording supporting renewable energy but it be made clear that the proposal was not suitable due to scale and impacts.
- The use of the term Soil Resources rather than agriculture as it would cover a wider use of soils.
- Maps to illustrate where the solar panel schemes are already in place this would demonstrate with the proposed development what the further impacts would be. In percentage terms the request for reduction of the scale of the project would be 50%.
- Change of wording from “may cause substantial harm” to “will cause substantial harm”.
- Clarification was sought on strong wording for the wider settings in and around the World Heritage Site in Woodstock.
- Stronger wording for the impacts on the landscape and visual impacts of views due to fields being obstructed by hedgerows which would hide any equipment and thus could not be classed as mitigation. Clarification on what would happen to the hedgerows after the lifetime of the project as the negative impact could last generations into the future.
- Include more broad range of wildlife animals and use of native wildflowers locally which would strengthen mitigating measures with buffer zones. To also use the opportunity to work with conservation organisations.
- The impacts on other animals both agricultural and wild such as foxes and deer where the fencing would limit their ability to freely roam.

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- For the buffer zone of 50 metres could it be changed to minimum of 50 metres to strengthen the emphasis.
- Emphasis on the need to carry out inspection and maintenance of the site due to the risks of floods rather than should be included in any operational plans.
- Loss of agricultural land and where best and versatile land would be available to food growing areas.
- Clarification on figures of how many hectares and megawatts would be involved as well as showing the information on maps.
- With the explanation of the impacts on waste, tourism and employment could examples be quoted alongside this information.
- Community benefits paragraph to be included due to the structure and size of the project and confirmation from the officers that the paragraph would be included. It was discussed as to the best way to make the point without adding a monetary value initially.
- Parcels of land within the project area to be identified and use of the word detrimental rather than transformative for point 52.
- The members thanked the officers for their work putting together the Joint Local Impact Report, Written Representations and all supporting evidence.

The Chair asked the Committee to consider the final topics to be covered which included the following points; economic impacts with employment in farming, wellbeing and health with access to the countryside, environmental enhancement and biodiversity net-gain when considering impacts and positives through mitigation of climate change on the greenbelt, staggered impacts on traffic and transport during certain phases of the project.

Phil Shaw, the Planning Services Transformation Lead gave a summary of the meeting, clarified and read back the points discussed with suggested amendments by members, including the additional recommendation that had been agreed by the Committee at the beginning of the meeting. The points raised would be taken into consideration when the report and written representation was finalised and submitted.

The Chair read the recommendations for clarification and asked for a proposer and seconder. Councillor Michael Brooker proposed that the Development Control Committee resolved to:

1. To note the executive summary of the Draft Joint Local Impact Report
2. To endorse the Written Representation, subject to any amendments as may be agreed at the Development Control Committee
3. To delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Chair of the Development Control Committee and the Executive Member for Planning to make any necessary amendments to the Written Representation and Joint Local Impact Report prior to submission to the Examining Authority.

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4. To delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager to issue the Written Representation and full Local Impact (as maybe amended) to the Examining Authority, before the deadline for response.
5. To delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager in consultation with the Chair of DC Committee and the Planning Portfolio Holder, to submit any further representations to the Examining Authority during the Examination period

This was seconded by Councillor Nick Leverton and put to the vote.

Voting Record – The vote was Unanimous.

The Development Control Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Note the executive summary of the Draft Joint Local Impact Report
2. Endorse the Written Representation, subject to any amendments as may be agreed at the Development Control Committee
3. Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Chair of the Development Control Committee and the Executive Member for Planning to make any necessary amendments to the Written Representation and Joint Local Impact Report prior to submission to the Examining Authority.
4. Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager to issue the Written Representation and full Local Impact (as maybe amended) to the Examining Authority, before the deadline for response.
5. Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager in consultation with the Chair of DC Committee and the Planning Portfolio Holder, to submit any further representations to the Examining Authority during the Examination period.

Councillor Beaney suggested a Development Control Working group formed for councillors and officers to contribute to ensure there is an understanding of why certain things are done, and to support the Chair. The Chair suggested this could be discussed with officers when the meeting ended.

The Chair thanked the members of the committee, officers, speakers and members of the public for their contributions and attending and closed the meeting.

The Meeting closed at 4.10 pm

CHAIR