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WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT  
**July – September 2025**

# Background

The Executive Action Plan was created to outline the steps needed to carry out the vision of the Executive after the new Council Plan was adopted in February 2023. In the Council Plan, the Executive looks to the district's future and establishes a vision for West Oxfordshire. In addition to updating the public on the status of each priority at regular meetings across the plan's four-year duration, a new performance framework has been created to offer timely updates for actions taken in relation to the priorities.



# Putting Residents First



## Actions we are taking

In early 2022, West Oxfordshire District Council conducted its first Youth Needs Assessment, engaging nearly 4,000 young people aged 11 to 25 through surveys and focus groups, alongside feedback from 177 parents. The assessment revealed significant challenges, including the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, social lives, and access to services.

Following a review of the findings in October 2023, the Council committed to strengthening youth engagement and approved the recruitment of a full-time Youth Development Officer in February 2024. Since taking up the role, the officer has engaged with over 29 community groups, four secondary schools, and multiple town and parish councils. Six thematic priorities have been identified: developing new youth provision, sustaining existing services, improving safety and wellbeing, supporting work and skills, promoting volunteering, and amplifying youth voice.

Key initiatives include:

- Supporting the revival of youth clubs in areas with limited provision, such as Eynsham and Stonesfield.
- Facilitating partnerships to address anti-social behaviour and mental health, including work with Witney Town Council and Thames Valley Police.
- Promoting youth-friendly employment and exploring a Youth Assembly to engage young people in climate action and local democracy.

To support youth-led innovation, the Council allocated £20,000 from its COMF budget to fund initiatives through Westhive, its civic crowdfunding platform. As of Spring 2025, 12 projects have been successfully funded, with over £412,000 pledged and a dedicated £20,000 ringfenced for youth-led ideas. The Council continues to pledge up to £12,000 per project, encouraging young residents to shape their communities.

The Council's commitment to youth and housing is also reflected in the 'Our House' project, launched in 2018 in partnership with Cottsway Housing and Aspire Oxfordshire. This initiative provides shared accommodation and tailored support for single individuals under 35 on out-of-work benefits. In July 2024, the Executive approved a two-year funding extension to continue the programme until October 2026, recognising its success in supporting young people into employment, education, and independent living.

In parallel with other strategic initiatives, the Council remains actively involved in shaping the future of local government through the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process. The government intends to replace the current two-tier system of district and county councils with new unitary authorities and has invited councils to submit proposals that meet national criteria.

In response, five councils, including West Oxfordshire, have collaborated on a proposal to create two new unitary authorities: Oxford and Shires Council and Ridgeway Council. Under this proposal:

- Oxford and Shires Council would include Cherwell, Oxford City, and West Oxfordshire.
- Ridgeway Council would encompass South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, and West Berkshire.

These names are working titles and may change. The aim is to establish financially sustainable, locally accountable councils that deliver high-quality services while maintaining strong community connections. The proposal also ensures continuity of key services—such as social care—by retaining existing arrangements from Oxfordshire County Council and West Berkshire Council, avoiding costly disaggregation.

The proposal focuses on improving service delivery, economic development, infrastructure, environmental protection, and addressing local priorities such as housing and flooding. A public engagement exercise ran from 4 June to 16 July 2025, with results expected in late November. Residents were invited to share their views via [twocouncils.org](https://twocouncils.org) and attend local events.

While this two-unitary model is one of three options under consideration, Oxfordshire County Council has submitted a competing proposal for a single countywide unitary authority, arguing it would offer stronger, simpler services and greater financial resilience. A third option proposes three unitary councils, including a standalone Greater Oxford authority.

The government is expected to make a final decision in 2026, with implementation likely in 2028.

# Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All



## Actions we are taking

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), introduced by the Government in 2008, ensures that new developments contribute fairly and transparently to vital infrastructure such as schools, roads, and community facilities. Following the commissioning of new viability evidence in March 2023 and an eight-week public consultation in August–September 2024, West Oxfordshire District Council formally submitted its updated CIL Charging Schedule for independent examination in March 2025. A public hearing was held on 10 June 2025.

The independent examiner approved the Draft Charging Schedule in July 2025, subject to one modification: a reduction in the proposed rate for larger residential developments (250+ homes) from £225 to £150 per square metre, excluding strategic development areas. The Council formally adopted the Charging Schedule on 1 October 2025, with implementation confirmed for 31 January 2026. From that date, CIL will apply as a fixed charge on certain types of new development — including new homes and extensions — calculated based on floor area. It will operate alongside existing Section 106 (S106) planning obligations to help fund essential infrastructure across the district. A proportion of CIL receipts will also be passed directly to the relevant town or parish council to support locally determined priorities.

The Salt Cross Garden Village continues to progress as a flagship sustainable development for West Oxfordshire. Designed to include schools, community facilities, employment opportunities, and 2,200 homes, the development is guided by the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP). A key component of the AAP is the Council's Net Zero Carbon Development policy, which aims to ensure that Salt Cross is net zero in operation.

The Council's revised Net Zero Carbon Development policy was found sound by the Planning Inspector in August 2025, subject to several modifications. A six-week public consultation on the proposed modifications opened on 3 October 2025, allowing stakeholders to comment before final adoption. It will close on 14 November 2025. The modifications aim to improve clarity and practicality, and once adopted, will position Salt Cross as a leading example of sustainable placemaking in the UK. The first homes are still expected around 2029–2030.

The Carterton Area Strategy remains a central focus of West Oxfordshire's Local Plan 2041. A key milestone was reached during the Executive on Tour event in Carterton, which featured a dedicated focus group session with residents. This session provided an important opportunity for early public engagement, helping to shape the direction of the emerging strategy and offering insights into local priorities and aspirations.

The event also marked the formal launch of the newly appointed Economic Regeneration Lead, who will play a pivotal role in driving the strategy forward. Working closely with Cllr Sumner, the Lead will ensure Carterton's growth is sustainable and aligned with broader district objectives. To build on this momentum, further consultation is planned to deepen community involvement and refine the strategic focus. An Outcomes Framework will be developed to guide implementation, track progress, and ensure the strategy delivers tangible benefits for the town.

Key themes identified for Carterton's future include:

- Enhancing the town centre and public realm.
- Supporting business growth and inward investment.
- Improving transport and connectivity.
- Aligning housing development with employment opportunities.
- Strengthening links with RAF Brize Norton and the wider industrial base.

A dedicated Carterton Area Strategy Officer is still expected to be appointed in early 2026, with a full strategic blueprint anticipated by 2028.

The Carterton and Surrounding Area LCWIP was formally approved by Oxfordshire County Council on 9 October 2025. The plan outlines a 10-year strategy to improve walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure, aiming to reduce car dependency and promote active travel. It was shaped by public consultation and will guide future funding bids and infrastructure delivery across Carterton and nearby communities.

Eynsham LCWIP entered public consultation on 29 September 2025, with the consultation closing on 27 October 2025. The draft plan proposes improvements to active travel routes and infrastructure, including traffic-free paths and heritage-sensitive wayfinding. Both LCWIPs support the Council's climate goals and ambitions for healthier, more connected communities.

The proposed upgrades to Witney High Street and Market Square — including resurfacing, new seating, tree planting, and better accessibility — are under review following the close of a statutory consultation on 17 October 2025. If objections were raised, a report will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Highway Management later this year.

One issue already flagged is the reduction in taxi rank spaces, which has prompted a closer look at the design to ensure it meets the needs of all users while supporting the town's regeneration goals. The Council is reviewing feedback to ensure the final design reflects the needs of all users and supports the town's long-term regeneration.

# Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife



## Actions we are taking

West Oxfordshire District Council has completed the Preferred Policy Options consultation for its emerging Local Plan 2041. This stage outlines the strategic direction for managing growth and development across the district, including updated objectives and preferred approaches to housing, transport, climate, economy, infrastructure, and wellbeing. It does not include specific site allocations; a separate consultation focused on development locations is expected later in 2025. The consultation ran from 26 June to 8 August 2025, hosted online via the Council's engagement platform, with hard copies available at Council offices and libraries. A series of public drop-in events were held across the district, alongside online sessions, enabling residents and stakeholders to engage directly with planning officers. Feedback gathered will inform the next stage of plan preparation.

The Council continues to develop its evidence base, including the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and Phase I Water Cycle Study, building on the Environment Agency's 'Spheres of Influence' pilot. Site assessments are underway, evaluating factors such as flood risk and foul water capacity to inform future allocations. Additional central government funding has been secured to support the Regulation 18 stage, and developer contributions are being captured through the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) to ensure infrastructure keeps pace with growth.

The Council is actively progressing its Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) strategy. A flagship initiative is the habitat bank at Pudlicote Farm, where low-productivity farmland is being restored to wildflower meadows, wetlands, and native woodlands. This project, developed in partnership with landowners and the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, will generate biodiversity units for developers and contribute to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Most Council-owned land is unsuitable for BNG delivery due to either small amenity grassland patches or existing high ecological value, so the focus is shifting to LNRS implementation.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy was endorsed by the Executive on 10 September 2025, making West Oxfordshire the first district council in Oxfordshire to do so. Publication by Oxfordshire County Council is expected in November 2025. The Council's Nature Recovery Team meets monthly with Communications officers to implement a new communications strategy. Two management workshops—on tree pruning and wildflower grassland management—are planned for early 2026, with a contingency training programme in place should funding not be fully spent by March.

Ecological consultants have surveyed five sites over the summer, with reports now under review. Recommendations for biodiversity enhancements and revised management practices will be implemented in 2026. The Council continues to explore investment in farmer-led woodland planting schemes to support carbon sequestration and climate resilience.

The Council is also supporting the Windrush in Witney project, a landscape-scale initiative to restore floodplains through grazing, floral enhancement, and willow pollarding. Although the initial funding bid scheduled for August was missed, the Council's nature recovery team continues to support the Wychwood Forest Trust, with a revised bid now planned for November 2025. A workshop day is being organised to finalise the application.

Other ongoing initiatives include the Coronation Community Orchard Scheme, which has funded 17 orchards to date and has been extended to March 2026, and the Deer Park South Access Project, which has delivered improved public access and environmental education. A habitat survey has been completed, and land management plans are being developed.

The Council continues to facilitate the Evenlode Catchment Partnership and is engaging with the Windrush Catchment Partnership to explore further collaboration. Climate resilience was discussed at the last quarterly meeting, and the Principal Ecologist now sits on the newly established steering group.

The Nature and Health Inequality project is ongoing, with officers running sessions in Witney and Chipping Norton. Collaborative working has enabled engagement with YouMove families, in partnership with the Community Physical Activity Officer, and with researchers from the University of Oxford.

Finally, Ubico has submitted a business case to compost material at the Station Lane depot, aiming to reduce the need for purchased compost. The Council is also reviewing its capacity to manage County-owned verges, with the aim of enhancing biodiversity through revised maintenance practices.



# Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency

## Actions we are taking

West Oxfordshire District Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in June 2019, committing to become a carbon-neutral council by 2030. This ambition is being delivered through the Climate Change Strategy 2025–2030, approved in July, alongside the Carbon Action Plan 2024–2030 and the West Oxfordshire Nature Recovery Plan. Together, these documents outline coordinated actions to reduce emissions, enhance biodiversity, and build climate resilience.

The Council has made significant progress in decarbonising its estate. Heat decarbonisation plans for Elmfield Council Offices, Welch Way, and the Old Court House were completed in March 2024. Solar PV installation at Elmfield is now operational, enabling tenants to benefit from renewable energy while allowing the Council to recover costs through recharges or power purchase agreements.

At Windrush Leisure Centre, the £1.6 million PSDS Phase 3c decarbonisation project is on target, with contractors on-site and construction progressing as planned. A change in project management has not affected programme or cost delivery.

However, the PSDS Phase 4 project for Chipping Norton Leisure Centre has been cancelled following a decision by SLT and Members not to utilise the £2.2 million grant funding. This will significantly impact the Council's ability to meet its 2030 carbon neutrality target. Similarly, the lack of grant funding for Carterton Leisure Centre (PSDS 3b) means that while solar PV has been installed, the centre continues to produce high levels of carbon emissions, limiting the effectiveness of decarbonisation efforts.

Energy efficiency measures at 3 Welch Way are progressing, with funding for low-carbon heating and solar PV to be included in the 2026/27 budget.

The Council continues to expand its electric vehicle charging infrastructure, with 76 EV charging points now operational across Council-owned car parks. Participation in the Oxfordshire Local EV Infrastructure (OxLEVI) programme is ongoing, with preferred suppliers appointed and plans to triple public EV provision by 2025.

A Waste Environmental Services Programme (WESP) business case is being drafted with partners. However, it currently lacks consideration of infrastructure needs such as net zero depots and fleet decarbonisation. A fleet review has been completed, and procurement is underway for four electric food waste vehicles, with further electrification planned for vehicles due for replacement.

The Council remains a key partner in CAPZero, a community energy plan covering eight parishes. Work continues to accelerate domestic and commercial retrofit, using Arup's preliminary retrofit report to identify priority actions. The Council is promoting ESOX assessments and grant funding for commercial retrofit.

The Greenlight online hub continues to support community-led climate action, with recent updates including a retrofit competition, funding information, and expanded resources. The Council is also engaging with town and parish councils, catchment partnerships, and external stakeholders to support climate mitigation and resilience. Youth networks are being identified to improve climate awareness and empower younger generations.

The Sustainability Impact Assessment Tool (SIAT) is now mandatory for all Council decisions, with staff and members trained to assess climate and nature impacts across projects and policies.

In the private housing sector, the Council is preparing to enforce Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for privately rented homes. Reported breaches will be investigated and enforced. A report was submitted to the Executive in April 2025 to secure funding for an Asset Management Strategy, which will include carbon efficiency assessments of tenanted buildings.

Through the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2), 15 homes received funding in Year 1 to improve energy efficiency. Eligibility has expanded to households with incomes up to £39,000 and EPC ratings of D or below. The Council is working with Welcome the Warmth and Oxfordshire County Council to deliver insulation, solar PV and low-carbon heating systems.

A countywide energy baseline and modelling exercise is nearing completion, with Executive approval granted to progress to a district-level Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP). Local Plan energy policies are under review ahead of the Regulation 19 submission.

West Oxfordshire was named the top-performing rural district in the UK in the 2025 Council Climate Action Scorecards, reflecting strong strategic planning and community engagement. Key initiatives contributing to this recognition include the Better Housing Better Health programme, Coronation Community Orchard Scheme, and ongoing carbon literacy training.

# Working Together for West Oxfordshire



## Actions we are taking

As West Oxfordshire District Council enters the final year of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) funding, its priority is to ensure a seamless transition and avoid a sudden drop-off in support for local communities and businesses. To sustain momentum, the Council is extending key projects into the 2025/26 funding year, with final allocations of £327,146 (UKSPF) and £214,829 (REPF) confirmed.

The Council has launched several new business support schemes, including the West Oxfordshire Business Boost Grant, offering up to £5,000 for capital investment projects that promote growth, innovation, and sustainability. This scheme complements existing grants such as:

- Shop Front Improvement Grants – up to £1,000
- Visitor Economy Grants – up to £10,000
- Rural Enterprise Growth Grants – up to £20,000

Applications for these closed in July 2025, and delivery partners remain on track. Six-month impact reporting begins in October.

The Westhive civic crowdfunding platform continues to be a flagship initiative. By the end of Round 4 (July 2025), 28 projects were supported with a combined value of £948,172. A detailed report is due to go to the Executive on 12 November 2025.

Recent highlights include:

- Youth Development Officer initiatives inspiring youth-led projects in Stonesfield, Freeland, and Eynsham.
- Youth Partnership established with Witney Town Council and Thames Valley Police, focusing on exploitation and inclusion.
- YouMove programme now supports over 500 families, offering free and low-cost access to leisure activities.
- Leisure Cards scheme under the GLL contract provides free access to leisure centres for participants experiencing poor mental health.

The Council continues to engage with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) through forums in major settlements and biannual Health and Wellbeing Alliance meetings. In 2024/25, £273,682 in UKSPF funding was distributed to VCS groups via Westhive.

New initiatives include:

- Recruitment of a Food Action Plan Officer to support delivery of the West Oxfordshire Food Action Plan.
- Launch of the Community Activity Grant (CAG) scheme, with decisions due in October 2025, offering £500–£1,000 for small-scale community action projects.
- Introduction of the Community Insight Profile Grant Scheme, funded by OCC Public Health, to support VCS groups in Witney Central. Decisions are expected in November 2025.

The Carbon Action Fund has performed strongly, supporting SMEs to reduce their carbon footprint. It has been submitted for consideration for an LGC Award. Meanwhile, the Tools for Tomorrow initiative is addressing gaps in local construction trade provision.

An additional £60,000 has been invested in the Westhive Community Infrastructure Fund, supporting projects focused on inclusion, mental health, and youth engagement.