

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 14 JANUARY 2026
Subject	WOODFORD WAY UPDATE
Wards affected	WITNEY
Accountable member	Cllr Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care Email: Geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Phil Martin, Director of Place Email: phil.martin@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Michael David, Housing Delivery Programme Manager Email: Michael.david@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	This report will provide an update on the Woodford Way project, engagement with Registered Providers and a proposed way forward in regard to parking.
Annexes	Annex A – Block Plan design Annex B – illustrative timeline
Recommendation(s)	<p>That the Executive resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the update on progress with the Woodford Way project 2. Endorse the proposed approach to the residential development of the Woodford Way site and car parking (subject to planning permission)
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Development Management Planning Team Car parking Team

	<p>Conservation & design Registered Providers Homes England Ward Councillors</p>
--	--

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.1 The Council has made housing a key priority, and in response to this has been looking at different ways where it can take meaningful and positive action to address the lack of social rented accommodation in the district.

I.2 Existing data on the demand for affordable housing & location preference, demonstrates that the Woodford Way site in Witney is a prime opportunity to deliver against its priority by helping to meet demand. The executive meeting on the 9th July 2025 mandated that Officers work-up plans to deliver a residential scheme with an appropriate parking solution and sufficient commercial considerations to deliver a viable scheme.

I.3 The benefits of such a scheme needed to include:

- Effective use of Council owned land to deliver corporate priorities
- Positive intervention in the local housing market to deliver social rented accommodation
- Opportunities to deliver high-quality, Net Zero accommodation
- Increased footfall and trade to local businesses

I.4 Initial designs and plans for the Woodford Way scheme include building on approximately 50% of the site area to allow for physical constraints such as adequate aisle width to allow cars to pass each other safely, bin storage and refuse vehicle turning circles etc. This is anticipated to displace approximately 125 car parking spaces. These 125 spaces can easily be accommodated within the nearby Marriotts car park during the day.

I.5 Officers anticipate that a total of 90 car park spaces will remain on-site at Woodford Way following the construction of two residential blocks and associated requirements. 70 of these car parking spaces will be allocated for residents of the apartments, and 20 of them will be un-allocated & available for general use by the public during the day.

I.6 The requirement for overnight parking will be accommodated through the use of a permit system at the nearby Marriotts car park as required.

I.7 Up to 70 dwellings are envisaged across two residential blocks on the site, however further architectural designs, commercial and operational discussions will determine the final unit numbers.

I.8 The positive discussions with a Registered Provider (RP) and Homes England indicate that the scheme is viable and deliverable.

I.9 Next steps include:

- Completing the detailed design work by April 2026
- Test the viability and commercial considerations by April 2026
- Pre-Application planning discussions May 2026
- Full planning application submitted around July 2026
- Public engagement June/July 2026

- Homes England & stakeholder engagement July 2026
- Development management planning committee September 2026
- Full financial commitment from RP September 2026

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) is a Housing Authority and therefore responsible for providing and managing council housing, also known as social housing, for people in housing need within their area as well as providing temporary / emergency housing.

2.2 The Council faces a pressing housing need with 2,300 people on the waiting list for affordable housing (as of 17/12/2025).

2.3 Within these statistics, 90 households are consistently in some form of emergency accommodation; a large proportion of which are placed in expensive nightly paid B&B's or out of area placements. The costs of these emergency placements are a significant expense to the Council and are simply not sustainable in the long-term.

2.4 A key factor in meeting this housing demand is how the Council increases the supply of truly affordable, move-on homes in key locations within the district. Whilst the availability of affordable housing is increasing with 197 affordable homes delivered during 2024/25 (101 or 51% of which are social rented), anecdotal evidence is beginning to show that households are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the costs of affordable rented accommodation as property prices continue to rise across the district. For this reason, the council has been committed to delivering even more social rented accommodation to ensure that families can afford housing costs.

2.5 The demand from the waiting list also shows the location preference of where residents want new affordable housing supply. Larger settlements with good transport links and local amenities tend to be desired so the key towns of preference include Witney.

2.6 The Council takes its responsibility to deliver the homes which residents need, in sustainable locations and at a rent which is truly affordable for its residents very seriously and have made this a priority. This is why officers have been working to increase the supply of social rented homes, particularly on land which the Council already owns.

2.7 The report to the Executive on the 9th July 2025 highlighted that the Woodford Way project represented an opportunity for the Council to utilise its land asset to deliver 100% affordable housing. This built upon the fact that the land at Woodford Way Car Park is allocated in the Local Plan 2031 for approximately 50 new homes, either as a wholly residential scheme or as part of a mixed-use development incorporating other compatible town centre uses. The report to executive also provided an initial assessment of the number of units, the costings and associated risks with the project.

2.8 The Executive also approved a new Parking Strategy at the July meeting, which provided detailed information on the occupancy rates at each of the Council owned car parks across the district and this has been used to help inform how alternative parking can be provided.

2.9 This report will provide an update to the Executive on the discussions with Registered Providers (RPs), work undertaken in regards car parking options, initial designs and next steps to bring forward affordable housing on Woodford Way Car Park in Witney.

3. POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED SCHEME

3.1 The Council's decision to adopt a more interventionist position in the housing market by directly commissioning residential development on its own land, will not only make a positive impact in regards the increased number of social rented homes in Witney that are badly needed but in other key areas as well.

3.2 As the Council owns the land, this helps to ensure the project is both financially viability and deliverability, so ensuring all the accommodation is at social rented rates making them truly affordable for all.

3.3 The central location of the development will also have a positive impact on local businesses as this will potentially increase footfall as a result of the new residents being able to walk into the town centre.

3.4 The central location will also help promote more sustainable forms of travel, with residents not only being able to access local facilities and shops on foot / bicycle but also public transport easily as well.

3.5 The Council ambition to delivery high quality, Net Zero accommodation will also benefit the new residents in reduced running costs as their homes will be more energy efficient, which also makes them more environmentally sustainable.

4. CAR PARKING

4.1 The recently approved Car Parking Strategy provides evidence that there is 57% capacity at the Marriotts multistorey car park, primarily on levels 4, 5 and 6. This equates to approximately 355 spare spaces in Marriotts car park.

4.2 As part of the modelling work undertaken, officers factored in the likely displacement of car parking spaces as a result of the development of residential dwellings on the Woodford Way site. It was identified that approx. 125 cars would be displaced by construction of the homes, so an alternative parking solution needed to be found during the day within the town center.

4.3 The 355-space capacity at Marriotts is more than sufficient to accommodate the 125 displaced vehicles from Woodford Way during the day.

4.4 A survey was conducted to establish overnight parking requirements, which identified that 75 car parking spaces would be required.

4.5 Under the current block plan design, approximately 20 unallocated spaces would be available on-site for general/overnight use. However, as additional parking spaces are required overnight, officers have identified a cost-effective solution whereby car parking permits for the Marriotts multistorey car park could be issued using the same solution that is in place for residents living above the retail units.

4.6 The car park permit operator, Mapp, has confirmed it can produce additional physical access key fobs, and the cost for 10 access cards is £76 plus an additional 10% booking fee. This

solution would require further investigation with the car park operator before it can be formally introduced.

- 4.7** Council Officers have contacted Witney Community Hospital to ascertain how many of their staff use Woodford Way car park. It is estimated that approximately 30 to 35 staff currently use the existing Woodford Way car park. This is a rough estimate as the hospital operates two rota systems during the day, and there are also various meetings and hot-desking that take place. For these reasons, this estimate may vary significantly according to the day, time and various meetings which take place at the hospital.
- 4.8** The use of the physical access system would benefit key healthcare workers who may work night shifts at the nearby community hospital as this would provide them with safe and secure parking.

5. INITIAL SCHEME DESIGN

- 5.1** A number of block plan drawings have been produced to date in order to get a better understanding of the potential for the site in terms of housing and car parking spaces to enable discussions with colleagues in the planning team and Registered Providers (RPs)
- 5.2** Attached is a layout which optimizes the number of parking spaces (90) whilst meeting the design brief particularly well, as it achieves the balanced sustainable development which was envisaged.
- 5.3** The scheme proposes a total of up to 70 units across two residential blocks. The units will be 100% affordable housing and will be 1 and 2 bed homes in line with housing demand from the waiting list.
- 5.4** This design accommodates the 70 allocated car parking spaces required for the residents of the newly constructed apartments, and the remaining 20 spaces will be unallocated for general use.
- 5.5** It is envisaged that one block will be a maximum of 2.5 storey dwellings to be in-keeping with the surrounding development and to reduce visual impact. The 2nd block will be up to a maximum of 4 storey development as it will be adjacent to the Witney community hospital which sets a precedent of 4 storey development. Planners' informal view is that these storey heights tend to work with the surrounding built form and the sloping topography of the site.
- 5.6** Both Residential blocks will ensure that sufficient distance is maintained from any of the existing built form surrounding the site.
- 5.7** The flood zone to the South of the site is a constraint to residential development so planners have informally suggested that we maintain the row of car parking to the southern boundary.
- 5.8** The planner's guiding principle was to design the dwellings as close to the street as possible to give a continuous feel to the street scene.
- 5.9** These principles will be written into a brief to commission architects to create design options which build upon the block plan drawings, respond to these criteria and also deliver a practically viable scheme; we expect to see outputs from this commission in March 2026.
- 5.10** Officers will only be able to accurately confirm the number of residential dwellings on-site and subsequent parking capacity after this architectural work, detailed studies and pre-app

discussions have taken place. Ultimately the scheme design is determined by the grant of planning permission.

6. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1** Discussions have been progressing particularly well with a local Registered Provider (RP) who has been very helpful in scoping the project and understanding some of the housing management priorities around the residential concept.
- 6.2** Further detailed investigatory, financial and commercial modelling will continue to produce sufficient detail for their board to consider, approximately in September 2026.
- 6.3** In order to get a wider view of the opportunities the Woodford Way site offers, Council Officers have also had discussions with 2 other local RP's to compare views and approaches, but no detailed work has been carried out at this stage with them. However, if a formal commitment pending board approval and planning permission cannot be secured with the lead RP by July 2026 then discussions with the other 2 RPs will focus on their ability to deliver the project, timescales and the required financial modelling required to do so.
- 6.4** The Council have been involved in detailed discussions with Homes England regarding the new, national funding programme, grant rates available, specific grant rates achievable for local priorities like Woodford Way Site and estimated timescales.
- 6.5** Homes England are very supportive of Council-led development with such a strong local fit as they describe it. The assumptions within the financial modelling of the local RP appears to be acceptable to Homes England and within their broad financial parameters. It is encouraging and very positive to have indicative support for the scheme from Homes England from the outset of the project. We will continue meetings with Homes England as a key funding partner to the scheme in conjunction with RPs.

7. VIABILITY

- 7.1** Based on the design of 70 units cited above, the RP has made some core assumptions including all 70 dwellings as social rent, all dwelling space sizes to comply with Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS), increased build costs, contingency on works costs, grant funding from Homes England and a financial contribution from the Council.
- 7.2** These assumptions excluded design fees, preliminary investigatory works, ground condition and statutory services works. It is anticipated that The Council will commission these from the already earmarked funding from the Executive committee in July 2025.
- 7.3** The local RP we have been working closely with estimates that this project would be a 2-year build-out based on all of these assumptions. However, this estimate does not account for how long this project may take to go through the various stages of obtaining planning permission.
- 7.4** On this basis, the scheme is viable and a deliverable prospect which has been tested with real operational assumptions. Financial modelling via the RP's appraisal software has arrived at this conclusion and we can re-model if any of the inputs change during the course of the project.

8. NEXT STEPS

8.1 Although broad unit numbers and viability have been confirmed, further detailed work will continue on the fine balance between residential dwellings, car parking, community views tenure considerations and Homes England Grant rates.

8.2 The next steps in progressing the scheme are as follows:

- 8.2..1 Continue working with the architects to finalise detailed designs, in terms of the unit numbers, specific house types and precise locations of development. This will confirm that all of the physical requirements are met in line with planners' guiding principles, also that the resulting design is practically deliverable as a well-considered scheme. The detailed design work is planned to be completed by April 2026.
- 8.2..2 Work with our lead RP partner who will continually stress-test the viability and commercial considerations as the iterations of the scheme evolves. This phase of work is anticipated to take place by March / April 2026.
- 8.2..3 A formal Pre-Application discussion will commence with the Council planner team in May 2026. The primary benefit of pre-application engagement is to help shape proposals at an early stage, thereby increasing the likelihood of a positive outcome at the formal planning application stage.
- 8.2..4 An engagement exercise with the public will begin from June 2026 for the statutory period to share the more formal designs and we will ensure that we listen to the views of residents and stakeholders. WODC's formal public engagement takes place at the planning application stage.
- 8.2..5 Further engagement with Homes England will continue, but with a focus on confirming Woodford Way as a pipeline scheme, i.e. A prospect for development and a good candidate for Social Affordable Housing Programme (SAHP) funding. However, this engagement will intensify once we are further progressed with planning and stakeholder engagement.
- 8.2..6 Once a full planning application is submitted around July 2026, the normal planning process will proceed in line with statutory timescales. Ultimately, this will lead to consideration by the development management planning committee which is estimated to be in September 2026.

8.3 We will support the lead RP to be in a good position to formally approach their board for full financial commitment around September 2026.

8.4 A detailed timeline and project overview plan is being developed to ensure the steps outlined, meet the timeframe set out. However, a summary of the next steps can be seen at annex 3.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

9.1 The Council could choose to work with a commercial developer to deliver the scheme, however this would not attract grant and therefore likely be un-viable. In terms of unit numbers, this would only deliver a policy compliant level of social affordable homes which is in opposition to the mandate of the Executive given on the 9th July.

9.2 The Council could also choose not to progress the scheme at all, but this does then lose the opportunity to delivery badly needed social housing in the district.

10. CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1** The current approach to the Woodford Way scheme has examined parking solutions, commercial arrangements, funding prospects and initial design parameters. The outcome of all these considerations demonstrates that a scheme at Woodford Way is both viable and deliverable.
- 10.2** This position is based on a scheme which delivers up to 70 dwellings and 90 car parking spaces. Use of the spare capacity at the nearby Marriotts multi-storey car park will accommodate any displaced vehicles, with the added benefit of potential parking permits for out of hours use.
- 10.3** Further detailed work will be undertaken to confirm precise unit numbers and refine scheme design; however, this report updates the executive on the current position and seeks endorsement of the current approach.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1** The Council has already earmarked £215,000 as part of the resolution granted at the executive committee meeting on the 9th July 2025 to support the provision of social housing in Witney.
- 11.2** A further briefing will be brought to the senior management when the financial costs associated with the final detailed scheme design & associated planning fees are known.
- 11.3** The estimated costs of providing additional overflow parking options for night workers who are eligible for a parking permit, will be factored into the overall scheme costs and reported back accordingly.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1** The structure of the legal agreement with a partner RP will need to be drafted to protect the Council's interests and enable the delivery of the project.
- 12.2** Provisions will need to be drafted to govern how the council deals with the land value considerations. Procurement rules will apply to commercial activity with an RP partner.

13. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 13.1** The overall scheme is reliant on grant from HE to ensure viability, however this risk has been mitigated by regular engagement and email correspondence, with HE on the assumptions around grant rates. These discussions ensure that the grant assumptions within the collective viability modelling, are reasonable and within Homes England's guidelines. The overall viability of the scheme will continue to be re-calibrated with the RP, incorporating the guidelines on grant rates.
- 13.2** This financial risk will continue to be monitored on the project risk register with key milestone checkpoints to re-engage with Homes England as we produce further iterations of the scheme.
- 13.3** There is also a risk that the recommended design option is not optimal and will require refinement and further iteration. However, the processes regarding managing financial risk,

planning guidance and stakeholder engagement, will help the council to arrive at the best option for practical delivery and operational management.

- 13.4** The timings of the scheme overlap with the reorganisation of Local Government across Oxfordshire / West Berkshire, which could present a risk to the project, however as key decisions will be made during 2026, with the actual building work starting before the new Local Authority is established in 2028 the impact has been mitigated down.
- 13.5** Officers will continue to closely monitor and re-evaluate identified risks and will provide regular updates on the direction of travel.

EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 13.6** An EIA is not required in this instance.

14. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1** A Sustainability Impact Assessment will be published at a later date when the scheme has progressed.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1** None