



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PLAN ANNUAL STATEMENT  
**April 2021 - March 2022**

---

Our vision is to support West Oxfordshire to be fit for the future through:



**1. Climate Action**

Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.



**2. Healthy Towns and Villages**

Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone.



**3. A Vibrant District Economy**

Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy.



**4. Strong Local Communities**

Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities.



**5. Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population**

Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for the wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire.



**6. Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance**

Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

---

## Introduction

Two years have passed since the launch of the [West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2020 – 24](#) in January 2020 when the Council embarked on delivering the projects defined as a means of achieving the **Council Plan vision** to support West Oxfordshire to be fit for the future through delivery of the following priorities:

1. **Climate Action:** Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity
2. **Healthy Towns and Villages :** Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better well being for everyone
3. **A Vibrant District Economy :** Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy
4. **Strong Local Communities:** Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities
5. **Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population:** Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of households making their home in West Oxfordshire
6. **Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance:** Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council

During this period and in tandem with delivering the Council Plan, efforts initially pivoted towards responding to the sudden challenges posed by the pandemic, principally supporting West Oxfordshire residents, its business and economy, and community and voluntary sector and latterly to developing the West Oxfordshire Covid-19 Recovery Plan through cross-party engagement and delivering the Themes of this plan: Economy, Community, Climate and Council, Service Delivery & Finance.

This agility and ability to adapt to the unprecedented pandemic, reflects well on the Council and its staff and demonstrates that they have remained true to the vision in the Council Plan to be 'fit for the future'. The Covid-19 Recovery Fund invested by the Council to deliver the Covid-19 Recovery Plan has had the dual benefit of making a meaningful contribution to Council Plan delivery due to the close alignment of these Themes with the six Council Plan Priorities. The Covid-19 Recovery Plan has provided the Council with a helpful framework for ensuring that the wide ranging impacts of the pandemic have been mitigated against.

The Council undertook a wide range of activities, providing support to individuals, charities and communities throughout 2021-22 which included:

- Working closely with NHS colleagues to:
  - Host and resource 3 x 'walk in' vaccination centres based in the Welch Way Office, where boosters as well as 1st / 2nd Jabs were given to 12-15s & 16 plus. Just under 8,500 vaccinations were given
  - Set up and manage a community symptom free testing site in Carterton – just under 1800 test carried out and 800 kits handed
  - Facilitate the establishment and running of the Covid test site that was based in Woodford Way Car Park
  - Support the running of a vaccination centre in Elmfield for vulnerable children
  - Operate a Community Collect Scheme for test kits from the Welch Way Office– over 1,000 handed out

- Supporting the local Test and Trace scheme in Oxfordshire – Over 640 visits carried out as well as undertaking over 230 requests for desktop checks
- Co-ordinating the operation of the Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) in Carterton
- Provided a dedicated support Hub with Resident Support Workers in place to respond to calls from residents in need and provide complex support, help with food, signposting and referrals, conducting 844 Test and Trace support calls and 324 contact tracing visits
- Funding support:
  - Distribution of funding (£44,850) to all food groups in the District
  - Distributing food support through the Household support fund (£100,000) to residents in need through Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire.
  - Administration of the extended Winter Support Grant, working closely with Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire
  - Additional food support for those in temporary accommodation
  - Provision of additional food support to those receiving the Test and Trace payment
  - Securing £40,000 for a grants programme for West Oxfordshire community food projects administered by Good Food Oxfordshire
  - Securing and allocating Contain Outbreak Management funding (£103,450) towards:
    - APCAM and the Help Hub for Mental health services for young people and families
    - Volunteer Link Up for vaccination transport support
    - Citizens Advice for an additional debt and welfare adviser
    - Reducing the risk to provide domestic abuse training for community groups and professionals
- Offering free training to VCS including food groups, which covered topics such as governance, GDPR, vision writing, working with volunteers etc
- Provision of emergency food parcels to vulnerable families
- Actively supporting local community groups and helping to develop food groups.

This Annual Statement details progress against each of the 6 Council Plan priorities and achievements against the aims of the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. It should be read in conjunction with the [WODC Annual Monitoring Report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021](#). The AMR is structured around the 6 Council Plan priorities, setting out progress against the Local Plan as the strategic development framework for the District. By priority, an outline of the current district context in terms of background/contextual information and what has happened during the AMR period is provided. Facts and figures are used to illustrate the Council's progress/patterns of change against a number of indicators – such as carbon emission reductions, numbers of affordable homes delivered, visitor numbers to leisure centres, and local workforce structure.

## Climate Action: Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity

### Covid-19 Recovery Theme: Climate

The Council has been working on its commitment to proactively respond to the climate and ecological emergency as set out in its Carbon Action Plan (the Pathway to Achieving Carbon Neutral by 2030) and Climate Change Strategy through a wide ranging work programme. The work has been further supported by 3 fixed-term posts resourced through the Councils Covid-19 Recovery Fund: Carbon Action Plan Officer, Biodiversity and Countryside Land Management Officer and a Development Management Sustainability Officer. These posts have added capacity and expertise to complement existing capacity to take action towards addressing the climate and ecological emergency identified as a priority in the Council Plan and Recovery Plan. An overview of deliverables over the 2021-22 year are provided below.

- The [WODC Sustainability Standards Checklist](#) was launched in May 2021, providing a framework of standards for assessing planning applications against in terms of their sustainability on a range of criteria relating to water use and flood risk; biodiversity; green and active travel; aligning with net-zero carbon; sustainable construction; and materials and waste. From launch until 31 March 2022 66 major and 26 minor planning applications have been assessed against the criteria and a focus has been given to raising the sustainability of development proposed. To further embed the benefits of assessing planning applications against sustainability criteria, the Validation Checklist against which all planning applications are checked prior to registration and determination has been updated to require submission of a Sustainability Statement demonstrating how the sustainability measures are met.
- Landscape and biodiversity assessments of 12 key WODC owned sites has been undertaken, informing the production of five year [Land Management Plans](#) for each with a view to restoring and improving the existing natural habitats and biodiversity of the sites and/or creating new wildlife habitats to increase their ecological value. The LMP's are designed to achieve multiple benefits as a result of changes to the way the land is maintained, improving natural capital assets across the Council's estate including carbon storage, flood management and pollination.
- Delivery of two externally funded projects to improve energy efficiency in private rented properties, providing energy efficiency assessments and guidance to landlords to implement improvements to energy efficiency. In a further contribution towards improving energy efficiency of homes and those at risk of fuel poverty in the District, the Council continues to fund the Better Housing, Better Health service, providing low income households access to grants for energy efficiency improvements, and a further range of Fuel Poverty Grants for those on means tested benefits to make essential energy efficiency improvements. In the latter half of 2021 – 22 34 assessments were undertaken and 5 energy-efficiency installations were completed.
- In November 2021 the Royal Assent of the Environment Act mandated a Biodiversity Net Gain of 10%, with the aim of ensuring development, and/or land management leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. [The Interim Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance for Developers and Ecological Consultants](#) was updated in July 2021 providing guidance to developers to ensure that sufficient information is submitted to demonstrate Biodiversity Net Gain. Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre continues to support WODC to screen biodiversity metric calculations submitted to ensure that they achieve a Net Gain for Biodiversity. In the 2021 – 22 period 13 applications were submitted with Biodiversity Net Gain calculations. Of these, 2 secured a Biodiversity Net Gain on site and 1 offsite, with 9 pending a decision and one application being refused.

- WODC continued to play an active role on the [Oxfordshire Nature Partnership](#) which has the purpose 'to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire an exemplar county for people and nature to thrive'. This strategic forum exists to guide nature recovery in an integrated way to produce multiple benefits for local people, the economy and the environment. At a County level WODC also sits on the [Environment Advisory Group of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership](#) which exists to embed critical environmental thinking across the Future Oxfordshire Partnerships and to link closely with the Oxfordshire Nature Partnership. At a cross county level WODC sits on the [Cotswolds National Landscape Board](#) and [the Oxford to Cambridge Arc](#) to represent West Oxfordshire's environment in this wider strategic context.
- The Council commissioned the [Witney Flood Investigation Report \(January 2022\)](#) into the floods at Christmas 2020 to inform understanding of the event. WODC works collaboratively through an informal agency agreement with Oxfordshire County Council (as the Lead Local Flood Authority), undertaking flood investigations, enforcement and consent functions on behalf of the LLFA for West Oxfordshire. It has been confirmed that an updated flood risk model for the River Windrush and its tributaries through the town is to be carried out by the Environment Agency which will be informed, in part, by the findings of the Witney Flood Investigation Report.
- WODC continues to partner others through the Windrush and Evenlode Catchment Partnerships. This approach aims to build better functioning river catchments by:
  - Recognising catchments as interconnected systems
  - Working in partnership to tackle multiple challenges together
  - Harnessing natural processes wherever possible
  - Capitalising on opportunities for solutions on a catchment scale

Under the Thames Water Smarter Catchment Initiative, a £3million fund has been made for the [Evenlode Catchment Partnership](#) for delivery of projects between 2020-25 focussing on: water quality and advocacy; landscape, habitat and biodiversity; natural flood management; and education, access and recreation.

## Healthy Towns and Villages: Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone

### Recovery Theme: Communities

The value of adopting a 'Healthy Place Shaping' approach in new and existing developments is highlighted in the Council Plan. In February 2022 the Council further expressed their commitment to this by passing the motion that *'Each Member commits to being a champion for Healthy Place Shaping (HPS) utilising the core principles (and the tools available to them) to influence and underpin all aspects of their work. To recognise that within their role as Members, their commitment is crucial to the organisation of HPS. Actively encouraging/challenging one another, officers, Parish and Town Councils to use HPS approaches, to influence future decisions for council services, ensuring that they have the best possible outcomes for the health and wellbeing of all residents of West Oxfordshire.'*

Healthy Place Shaping activity falls under three branches:

- Community Activation – connecting local people and community groups, schools and businesses to enable them to enjoy healthier lifestyles and create activities, facilities and services which make their communities healthy, resilient and sustainable
- Built Environment – ensuring homes, streets and other buildings are healthier, people can easily access green spaces, and are enabled to cycle, walk and socially interact in order to improve health and wellbeing
- New Models of Care – re-shaping and developing local health, wellbeing and care services, and the infrastructure which supports people to achieve physical and/or mental health benefits.

Examples of the Healthy Place Shaping approach being put into action by the Council are:

- The Built Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy reached its final draft stage in March 2022, informed by an audit of current indoor leisure facilities stock across the District and Sport England modelling leisure facility need against projected population growth. Stakeholder consultation was also undertaken, including a Focus Group looking at the scope for a relocated Windrush Leisure Centre ('Windrush 2') and a residents' online survey to inform the required facility mix for any new Windrush 2. This activity has sought to address the current, latent and unmet need for built leisure facilities across West Oxfordshire. Following adoption of the Built Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy, an associated Action Plan will establish a programme of delivery for the Strategy.
- Consultants have produced a Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan for the District that provides robust justification for the provision of outdoor playing pitches and sport facilities that meet the needs of existing and future residents and visitors to West Oxfordshire. It also provides the evidence required to help protect playing fields to ensure sufficient land is available to meet existing and projected future pitch requirements. This important document will form part of the evidence base for the forthcoming Local Plan Review by ensuring that existing facilities are the most appropriate in terms of quantity, quality and location and gives consideration to how to best meet the additional needs generated by planned housing and economic growth. Furthermore, the Strategy identifies a number of sites for development to meet the District's need for Playing Pitches.

## **A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy**

### **Recovery Theme: Economy**

The economy of the district has been greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and a reframing of efforts to address recovery and renewal of the economy has been the focus over the last year, as set out in the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. This is in addition to making progress on the actions identified in the Council Plan, for example the roll out of the Electric Vehicle Charging Point programme and early consideration toward a Masterplan and Station Travel Plan for Hanborough Station. This dual approach to proactively addressing the short and long term challenges facing the local economy is described below.

The Council's Covid-19 Recovery Fund resourced 2 full time posts to increase capacity for supporting local businesses impacted negatively by the pandemic and associated restrictions, recognising the acute impact of these on town centres and employers. Specific initiatives to counter this impact include:-

- A Welcome Back Fund allocation of £195k has been invested across the District to support the safe return to the high streets and help build back better from the pandemic. A range of public realm improvements (e.g. better signage, amenity landscape and seating) and promotional activity and events benefitted Witney, Burford, Carterton, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Eynsham and Long Hanborough. These were delivered in partnership with local Town and Parish Councils, Wake up to Woodstock, Marriots and Woolgate Shopping Centres and local businesses.
- The Council used Welcome Back funding to procure the LoyalFree 'place promotion app' to support local businesses. The app is connected to a platform that any town centre retailer in the district can use to promote offers, discounts and loyalty schemes. The scheme has been promoted through the 'Love West Oxfordshire' campaign and helps footfall across town centres by encouraging repeat purchases, discounts and other offers as well as listing events and interactive trails to entice new visitors to West Oxfordshire. To date there are 3015 users of LoyalFree and the app has promoted 290 businesses.
- The Council has been working with other districts and Makespace Oxford on the Oxfordshire-wide [Meanwhile in Oxfordshire Project](#). The purpose of the project was to try and fill selected vacant units in our high streets with a variety of offerings to mitigate the negative impact of empty units. A number of premises were considered as part of this, but, positively and in a sign that the local economy was recovering, did not proceed because long term tenants were found. The Guildhall in Chipping Norton has been successfully taken on by the project and is filled partly by the [Chippy Larder](#), thus making a meaningful contribution to addressing the issue of food security in the town, with the remaining space available as a co-working space and small offices.
- In the fourth quarter of the 2021-22 year the Council distributed 1,252 one-off grants of up to £6,000 on behalf of government to businesses in the hospitality and leisure sectors to counter impacts of the Omicron variant of Covid-19. The total distributed was £1,325,051. The Council also used

part of its Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) allocation to run a 'Business Growth Support' scheme (BGS) which provided one to one advice sessions and cash grants to 86 businesses. The advice sessions were delivered by OxLEP.

The value of the provision of Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) was specified in the Council Plan as a means of improving public realm in our town centres and an action to be taken towards achieving a vibrant district economy. Under the roll out of the [Park and Charge Oxfordshire](#) project into West Oxfordshire, a total of 32 electric vehicle charging points serving 64 parking bays have been installed in five of the Council owned car parks at: Woodford Way in Witney; New Street in Chipping Norton; Black Bourton Road in Carterton; Hensington Road in Woodstock and Back Lane in Eynsham. This contributes to delivering Electric Vehicle Infrastructure at sites in Council ownership and also to meeting the ambitions of the Oxfordshire EV Infrastructure Strategy to reach a target of 7.5% of local authority managed car parks providing Electric Vehicle charged spaces by 2025. A 7.5% target is equivalent to 263 charged parking bays in Council owned car parks across the District. The 64 bays delivered under Park and Charge Oxfordshire represent 24% of this target. This, alongside public realm improvements, will enable town centres to evolve to meet the changing expectations of resident shoppers, businesses and visitors alike.

Hanborough Station was identified in the Council Plan as a focus for partnership effort to secure new and upgraded infrastructure to increase use of sustainable transport and improve connectivity. WODC and Oxfordshire County Council are now jointly commissioning the preparation of a Station Masterplan and Station Travel Plan (STP) in order to identify and deliver improvements to Hanborough Station, including consideration of accessibility improvements to the station. The bespoke STP will bring about a range of outputs including consideration of 'stewardship' issues, acting as a vehicle for change and planning a 'legacy'. The exercise will take a 'community led' approach to tap into local knowledge, enthusiasm and making use of local skills to help develop a robust rationale for investment. It is anticipated evidence will be gathered to understand:

- The profile of new developments and existing populations
- Stated preferences of travel
- Key routes and data of the locality/visitor patterns
- Scope for alternative travel such as cross promotion of the Liftshare scheme

Improved infrastructure at Hanborough Station will also benefit the 40 hectare Salt Cross Science and Technology Park allocated in the Local Plan which is in close proximity to the station. The delivery of the Salt Cross Science Park is a key ambition of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy and will make an unprecedented contribution to the economic development of West Oxfordshire.

Turning to broadband infrastructure, the Council's [broadband rollout project with Gigaclear](#) was formally completed in December 2021. WODC and HM Government each invested £1.6m in the project, contracting Gigaclear to connect 4,788 of the most rural premises in West Oxfordshire with Fibre to the Premises broadband. The Council's investment levered a further £6.7m funding from Gigaclear to extend the network resulting in access of a total of over 12,000 properties in the district to ultra-fast broadband as a result of the project.

## **Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities**

### **Recovery Theme: Communities**

Two years into the pandemic and the importance of the Council Plan 'Strong Local Communities' priority has not diminished. The dynamic and inspiring community sector response across West Oxfordshire to the challenges introduced by the pandemic has provided a strong foundation from which to further develop a range of approaches to support the district's communities. The Council committed in the West Oxfordshire Covid-19 Recovery Plan to taking an active role in improving the health and wellbeing of its communities, investing resources in two particular strands of activity:-

*Wellbeing Hubs:* research with 48 community organisations and statutory service providers has been undertaken to explore the scope of and potential model for hubs as a means of providing a mix of services in partnership with other service providers, including advice, housing and welfare support for the community either through networking or co-locating or embedding staff in a local area. This research has been complemented by an asset mapping exercise to understand fixed buildings and greenspaces available in primary settlements alongside people/community groups.

Three models have been identified: Model 1: A Building, Model 2: A Person or People and Model 3: A Connected Way of Working. A 12 month 'test and learn pilot' of Model 2 has been funded with the appointment of a 'Carterton Hub Worker', in partnership with Carterton Connects, who is based in the Carterton Family Centre to connect people with services and providing advice. Similarly, a 'Community Builder' has been put in post for Witney Central focussing on supporting the community on the Smiths Estate. Finally, the Council has implemented Model 3 by facilitating the Witney Forum, bringing together local organisations and statutory services in Witney to share information and network. 50 organisations are in contact through the forum. This meets the Council Plan aim to 'help build resilience in communities with more effective joint working and intelligence sharing.'

*Active Lives:* the Council identified the need for a focus on helping people, especially those who are alone or with long term health conditions, to improve levels of physical activity in light of severe restrictions on movement by the pandemic. This reduced mobility was identified as a risk factor leading to physical decline, the consequences of which could lead to additional burdens on the NHS and which the Council seeks to mitigate against. A dedicated person centred activity programme called 'Move Together' has been offered to all residents who have shielded during the pandemic. A targeted 'Go Active Get Healthy' project has also been offered to help people with diabetes manage their condition through greater levels of activity.

Beyond these two strands of activity, the Council's Response Hub, established at the outset of the pandemic in March 2020 has been able to extend its reach with the appointment of staff funded through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to provide direct support and signposting to those residents requiring assistance and a specialist outreach function to further develop relationships between the Council and neighbourhood response groups and other voluntary and community sector partners.

A Youth Needs Assessment is underway to develop a comprehensive understanding of the priorities of young people in order to ensure that future services and infrastructure provision meets their needs and that the significant impact on young people in terms of their education, employment options, development

opportunities and social skills can be mitigated against. 4,000 survey responses have been received by young people which are being categorised into themes. Focus Groups will be held to explore these themes further to provide a robust evidence base for the Youth Needs Assessment.

Moving to activity not emanating from the Covid-19 Recovery Plan, attention has been given to longer term planning for the District's communities and their infrastructure needs in the years ahead as the Strategic Development Areas identified in the Local Plan, and smaller sites, are delivered to ensure that existing and incoming residents benefit and that the approach promotes social integration and cohesion. The Council successfully bid to the government's PropTech fund for £125k to develop a new digital engagement platform that makes readily available information on community infrastructure and developer contributions that exist (or can be created) into a single, accessible and visually engaging repository.

The benefit of this platform is that it will enable communities to better understand and interrogate local community infrastructure priorities. It will present:

- What development is proposed for their local area
- What infrastructure improvements have already been provided or are proposed to be provided as a result of new development in their local area
- The overall process of developer contributions including how they are negotiated, the differences between Section 106 legal agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy
- How to put forward suggestions for infrastructure improvements needed locally (eg by being able to drop a pin on a map or plot out a new pedestrian or cycle route which would benefit the community)

A further commitment to working with partners to promote West Oxfordshire as a visitor attraction (whilst protecting its essential character) is made in the Council Plan. Given the significant contribution the visitor economy makes to West Oxfordshire communities, it is evident that there is a particularly acute need for support to recover and renew in the wake of the pandemic and the Cotswolds Tourism team have been working directly with tourism businesses to enable adaptation by improving their online capabilities. Partnership work with Wake up to Woodstock, the Witney Chamber of Trade and local businesses has focussed on enhancing destination marketing of Witney and Woodstock through [www.cotswolds.com/witney](http://www.cotswolds.com/witney) and [www.cotswolds.com/woodstock](http://www.cotswolds.com/woodstock)

Options for encouragement of sustainable tourism practices within the visitor economy have been investigated. The Sustainable Tourism Survey elicited 60 responses from local businesses and demonstrates a strong interest in improving the sustainability of their businesses.

The Council is also committed to supporting, through the distribution of grants, voluntary and community activity and partnership actions which help to progress delivery of the Council Plan and thereby benefiting West Oxfordshire communities. In the 2021 – 22 year £187,851 was granted to 15 organisations and/or projects and detail of these can be viewed on pages 279 – 298 of the [Cabinet Paper - March 2022](#).

## Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population: Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire

### Recovery Theme: Communities

In October 2021 the Council formally adopted the [West Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document](#) (AH SPD) which will steer the successful delivery of West Oxfordshire Local Plan Policy H3 'Affordable Housing' by providing detailed guidance on the delivery of affordable housing in West Oxfordshire for the Council, developers, housing providers and local communities. The AH SPD is now a material planning consideration.

Local Plan Policy H3 requires the provision of on-site affordable housing as part of larger market housing schemes of 11 or more units varying by location from 35% - 50%. In addition, smaller market housing schemes of 6-10 units within the Cotswolds AONB are required to make a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing within the District. The policy also addresses the issue of housing mix and the provision of affordable housing in rural areas including through rural exception sites. By providing additional guidance on the implementation of these requirements, the AH SPD seeks to set out a range of options and requirements to secure delivery of successful affordable housing schemes across the District that meet the housing needs of our changing population.

Options for delivery are presented including criteria for identifying qualifying sites; the size of affordable homes needed, the preferred tenure mix, rural exception sites and self and custom build schemes. Delivery is addressed through requirements relating to design criteria, accessibility and adaptability, space standards, zero carbon homes and modern methods of construction. Specific delivery mechanisms are articulated including housing options for the Armed Forces and also Key Workers and Community Led Housing.

In 2021-22, 378 new affordable homes have completed in the District, far greater than the Local Plan identified average annual need of 274. Of this total, 241 are affordable rent and 137 are shared ownership. These are located in Freeland, Minster Lovell, Chipping Norton, Carterton, Burford, Long Hanborough, Woodstock, Witney, North Leigh and Bampton. It is anticipated that this target will again be exceeded in 2022-23 with a non-binding forecast of 336 completions.

Schemes of particular note which meet the housing needs of our changing population, as required by this Council Plan priority include:

- Delivery in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, and with the use of Growth Deal Funding, of 80 extra care affordable homes in Chipping Norton.
- An award of £78k from the government's 'Brownfield Land Release Fund' has been made to the Council which will unlock a Council owned site in Chipping Norton for eight affordable net-zero carbon custom built homes. A planning application is forthcoming for the homes and associated sustainable amenities including e-vehicle club with car charging points.
- In partnership with Cottsway Housing and benefitting from Growth Deal Funding, the redevelopment of 49 units for affordable social rent which were no longer fit for purpose at two sites: 18 units at Lavender Place, Bampton and 31 units at Blenheim Court, Carterton.

- In partnership with Registered Provider Heylo Housing and the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, the Council has benefited from Heylo Housings ability to negotiate bulk purchase of new homes from developers for use as shared ownership housing. 43 properties have been secured with 32 of these sold and 11 in the process of completion.

The rollout of the 'Blenheim Approach' in partnership with Blenheim Estate continues apace. This innovative 'affordable rent' housing model seeks to deliver affordable housing available at between 60 – 80% of market rental costs. It is the intention of Blenheim Estate to retain ownership of the rental properties so they can be held in perpetuity for local people, especially those within the key worker categories. At the Park View development in Woodstock, 11 affordable homes have been delivered out of a total of 150, with completions set to increase substantially in 2022-23.

In addition to this the Council is exploring a range of housing products for existing and upcoming developments to broaden the range of Low Cost Home Ownership products on these. These include Rent to Buy, Build to Rent and Discount Market Sale and First Homes which are defined in the AH SPD on pages 14, 15 and 16 respectively. A number of Rent to Buy properties are scheduled to come forward at the Milestone Road site in Carterton and 4 properties as First Homes at Discount Market Sale are being developed in Long Hanborough. The [Pre-submission Area Action Plan for Salt Cross Garden Village](#) includes a Policy 24 'Build to Rent' (at page 174) in support of Build to Rent proposals coming forward at Salt Cross Garden Village.

Within the West Oxfordshire Local Plan there is a requirement for sites of over 100 homes to provide suitable self-build/custom finish plots. Self-build is also promoted through a Council maintained [self-build register](#) which can be accessed on the Council website and additional guidance is provided in the aforementioned Affordable Housing SPD. Policy 25 'Custom and Self-Build Housing' contained within the Pre-submission Area Action Plan for Salt Cross Garden Village supports delivery of this specialist type of housing within the site and demonstrates the Council's commitment to support this alternative type of housing as a means of meeting the housing needs of our changing population. A successful bid was made to Homes England for a 3 year Housing Development and Community Facilitator to enable housing delivery of Salt Cross Garden Village. The post-holder will focus on projects developing community led housing and self-build housing at the Garden Village.

The Council continues to pursue opportunities for working in partnership with legacy landowners to accelerate delivery of affordable housing in the district. The AH SPD invites those landowners (particularly in smaller rural settlements) who are considering development as part of their long term legacy planning to engage with the Council to explore the scope for delivering affordable housing through rural exception sites. Furthermore the Council is collaborating with Parish Councils, Registered Providers and developers to bring forward smaller schemes to help meet local need for affordable housing.

The Council is also working proactively to address the issue of rough sleeping and in mid-2021 purchased the Old Court House in Witney to provide safe, flexible accommodation for adults who are rough sleeping or at risk of it. The property contains 15 units of high quality, self-contained bedsits. By being able to offer homeless clients direct access to accommodation at the Old Court House it mitigates the need to fund more costly B&B accommodation which is often out of area. This approach is much more cost effective to the council and beneficial to the client as they are placed close to existing support networks. A partnership with employment charity and social enterprise [Aspire](#) provides bespoke onsite support to assist residents to move on successfully at the right

time into long term accommodation and provides one to one support to ensure access to services including health, mental health and addiction agencies as well as employment, training/education opportunities

## **Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council**

### **Recovery Theme: Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance**

Achievement of the aforementioned 5 Council Plan priorities are dependent on the Council having a sound financial footing. Previous budgetary constraints have been amplified by the pandemic (greater draw on Council services, extraordinary service costs and lost revenue streams) and so the challenge of matching delivery ambitions to the Council's revenue stream makes this final Council Plan priority of delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council a key priority.

The WODC Recovery [Investment Strategy](#) 2020 – 24 starts from a premise that there is a significant funding gap that needs to be closed and capital investment is a major tool available to the Council to achieve this so long as it covers the revenue implications of that investment and makes an appropriate return. Capital Investment provides a route to delivering the ambitious programme of the Council set out in the Council Plan, with 6 delivery themes in the Investment Strategy defined as: · The provision of adequate and affordable housing · Green Energy & Carbon Reduction; · Delivering Infrastructure for Jobs & Economic Growth; · Reinvigorating Commercial Centres to ensure our economic vibrancy; · Maximising existing and new income streams from service delivery; · Developing a commercial culture to our decision making whilst retaining a public service ethos.

A £2.4million acquisition has been completed in the 2021 – 22 year of a commercial building in Carterton currently occupied by The Garden Trading Centre and was an opportunity to consolidate the land and buildings into single ownership. Further investment will be made to substantially improve the asset with repairs to the roof. The return is in line with the requirement that any investment generates a return in the order of 3.5% above the borrowing cost and thus makes a contribution towards closing the revenue funding gap set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Further detail of activity under the Investment Strategy can be found in the [Investment Strategy Report 2022-23](#).

Two areas of particular focus are the Agile Working Project (Office Rationalisation) and the Environmental Services Innovation Programme. The Council has embarked on an office rationalisation exercise to look at ways of generating revenue from Council owned offices. New office layouts have been proposed which reduce the office footprints by 40%, enabling vacated areas to be tenanted. This has been made possible by the adoption of an 'Agile Working Strategy' which requires staff to become 'hybrid workers', mixing the remote working that was the 'norm' during the pandemic with in office working. Additional benefits to this approach are an estimated 40 – 50% reduction in carbon emissions from reduced staff mileage and opportunities for enhanced 'work/life balance' for staff.

The Environmental Services Innovation Programme was launched in June 2021 with a focus on delivering efficiency measures relating to three criteria: service cost, performance and climate (including carbon savings/biodiversity impact mitigation). In the early phase of the ESIP, 39 lower level projects have been delivered eg in-cab digital waste management system (Yotta), rationalisation of dog waste/litter bins, change to grounds maintenance practices to mitigate wildlife habitat loss. The next phase of the ESIP for West Oxfordshire is the Council's waste service review which will consider environmental and CO2 impacts. An options appraisal will explore opportunities which may be brought about by cross boundary working and/or the sharing of a depot with a

neighbouring waste collection authority. The options appraisal will in turn feed into waste vehicle replacement plans in readiness for the Council's current Waste and Recycling Collection Contract with Ubico ending in 2024, and which coincides with the majority of the current collection vehicles being 7 years old and at end of life. Ahead of this, an electric waste vehicle was added to the Council's Waste Vehicle Fleet in 2021.

Turning to modernisation of Council service delivery, provision of digital options for businesses and residents as a means of offering more choice for accessing services has continued to progress in this second year of the Council Plan. Customers can access Council services more conveniently via a range of online self-serve tools, whilst still having access to an advisor on the phone or face to face if preferred. In Witney, this can be at the relaunched Customer Service Centre on Welch Way where Customer Services, Housing and Benefits Officers are based. The launch of [OpenPortal](#) in 2022 enables 24/7 online self-service of Council Tax and Business Rates accounts and the claiming of Benefits.

Central to the digitalisation of Council services is the Salesforce platform which has further evolved to meet a variety of service needs:-

- Integration of Salesforce with a new digital Waste Management System (Yotta) to enable monitoring of bulky household, clinical and commercial waste as well as missed bin collections and replacement container requests. Ubico is able to access information updates via use of tablets in their service trucks on route.
- Platform enhancements to increase efficiencies through better transparency and case management, including the addition of high priority queues to expedite response rate to urgent queries
- Distribution of a variety of Covid-19 related business grants including: Additional (Covid-19) Restrictions Grant to previous applicants paid under the Restart:Strand 2 (Hospitality and Leisure) scheme, the WODC Business Growth Support Scheme and the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grants.

The aforementioned successful application for £125k of PropTech funding to establish a new digital engagement platform will enable the Council to greatly improve its digital engagement capacity through the establishment of a new digital engagement platform using software '[CommonPlace](#)'. This centralised, transparent and accessible web-based resource can also be downloaded as an app, enabling communities to better understand and interrogate local community infrastructure priorities and funding opportunities, as well as providing the means of submitting infrastructure priorities to the Council for their local area. The Council will benefit through improved engagement and knowledge sharing but via reduced resource burden as local communities will be enabled to 'self-serve' and establish information requirements themselves.