

## **West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023 – 2027**

### **Introduction from the Leader**

West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023-2027 reflects the key aims of a listening Council which has a drive to be aspirational, innovative and bold so that we can fulfil our ambition for the District. The Council Plan presents five priorities that seek to shape our approach to addressing a range of strategic issues facing West Oxfordshire in the time frame of this Council Plan and beyond.

At the heart of producing this Council Plan is a motivation by the Council to support those who chose to live in the District to enjoy an excellent quality of life with equal access to opportunity for all and in so doing address the challenges of maintaining and growing a vibrant economy, tackling the climate emergency, while delivering housing and infrastructure that meets people's diverse needs and encourages community cohesion. All of this needs to be within a healthy environment – where wildlife thrives, air and water are clean and support that wildlife, and that will enable us to adapt to climate change and the more extreme weather conditions that will result from this. The five priorities for the West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023-2027 are:-

1. Putting Residents First
2. A Good Quality of Life for All
3. A Better Environment for People and Wildlife
4. Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency
5. Working Together for West Oxfordshire

In writing these priorities, the Council recognises that whilst our District is relatively prosperous, with much to celebrate by way of beautiful countryside and attractive towns and villages, inequalities remain within our communities. These inequalities were amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic and continue as we face the immediate cost of living crisis. In addition to this, climate change poses a challenge to ensure that as well as doing our utmost to reduce our own impacts, we prepare for the impact this will have on our communities and that our communities are supported to adapt equally. We do not want climate change to further exacerbate inequalities.

We are an outward facing Council and it is in this spirit that the Council Plan has been produced. We would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who contributed hundreds of responses to the 'Your Voice Counts' consultation which led to the creation of this Council Plan. We cannot make progress on addressing these challenges facing West Oxfordshire as a Council standing alone, so we welcome continued partnership working with other organisations in every part of the District. This Council Plan sets the framework for this activity. Following the adoption of the Council Plan, an annual Action Plan for West Oxfordshire will be produced giving details of projects to be undertaken that will address the Council Plan priorities. It will be produced annually to give us the flexibility to respond to changing local circumstances and shifting or changing national policy demands. These will be accompanied by clear measures of success that will be reported on annually to demonstrate that progress is being made.

The publication of this Council Plan is the start of a process and we look forward to taking steps to address the complex issues and challenges facing West Oxfordshire so that all residents can enjoy a good quality of life in an environment which has been protected, restored and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

### **Vision for West Oxfordshire**

Shaping West Oxfordshire as a District which offers a fulfilling and meaningful quality of life for our residents with opportunities for all to flourish, a thriving and prosperous place for entrepreneurs and businesses, where local people and visitors can enjoy the beauty and heritage of our landscape, built and natural environment.

### **You Said:**

*'Tackling the big issues around providing housing for all, local jobs, dealing with inequalities, the climate and ecological crisis, lack of key infrastructure such as medical facilities, public transport, care homes, schools, parks, nature reserves, community centres and sports areas to name but a few need to be prioritised. Sustainable development is about helping to support and grow existing and new communities...'*

## Priority – Putting Residents First

### *Putting Residents, Young and Old, at the Heart of What We Do*

- The Council will listen and act in the best interests of residents by:
  - Being an outward facing, accessible and open Council, improving our use of technology to increase understanding and access to what we do, how we work and the decisions we take.
  - Providing easy to use platforms for public consultations that are effective, accessible and timely so that the voice of residents can be heard in planning and other Council decisions.
  - Positively engaging with and listening to locally elected representatives on Town and Parish Councils.
  - Actively seeking the voice of the seldom heard, including those of young people, to understand their particular needs and ensure that the Council is taking decisions that meet these needs.
- The Council will act with outstanding levels of transparency and accountability, with high standards of governance and trustworthiness.
- The Council will actively manage Council budgets, delivering good levels of service through the wise and efficient use of funds available as well as enabling those budgets to grow so that the Council can take action towards the priorities of this Council Plan.
- The Council will seek to attract inward investment in our towns, villages and rural areas so that they can flourish and be sustained with new jobs and housing and infrastructure that are designed to meet the needs and aspirations of our residents.

### You said:

*'The Council should always be open to us, the citizens of the area, more interaction and opinions from the electorate will always improve the service provided to us.'*

*'Where the Council has a statutory duty it must focus on delivery in a cost effective and transparent manner. Where the Council has 'powers to act' it should do so in a way that balances local opinion with national and local guidance/policies. Where the Council has neither powers nor duties it should still seek to engage and facilitate on issues but without undue influence.'*

*'Good communications are very important to reflect the Council's ideas and actions. This should be coupled with taking others along in decision making reviews – to effect change bring the community with you.'*

*'I think it is personally hugely important for people within our community, especially those who struggle for physical/mental/emotional reasons, to find their voice + feel above all their concerns are listened to and validated.'*

## **Priority – A Good Quality of Life for All**

*The Council will be a hive of activity to help build and support thriving towns and villages that provide residents with a high quality of life by supporting a vibrant local economy, homes that meet people's needs, excellent health and wellbeing and ensuring equal access to opportunity for all.*

Focus for Action in West Oxfordshire:-

- Ensure the timely provision of built, blue and green infrastructure which meets the needs of existing and incoming residents and that encourages physical and mental well-being, community cohesion and delivers a high quality of life.
- Explore the scope for alternative means of delivering the range of homes in the District that meet the diverse needs of our communities, such as investment in tenures and sizes of homes that the market does not currently deliver enough of.
- Work with partners to support a vibrant local economy which gives residents the opportunity to prosper and fulfil their ambitions through secure jobs and exciting careers, entrepreneurship and developing new skills to participate in and contribute to the local economy.
- Support the retention of existing and development of new services and facilities that contribute to the local economy, community wellbeing and cohesion.
- Work with Oxfordshire County Council and others to increase the opportunity for residents to travel around and beyond the District on foot or by bike, or on public transport, to reduce car dependence and benefit from the health and economic benefits of doing so.

### You said:

*'The huge economic and environmental challenges we all face mean we need to involve as many people and organisations as possible in order to find solutions. All decisions need to be open to scrutiny, challenge & constant review'*

*'Thriving communities are the beating heart of West Oxfordshire & this was demonstrated strongly through the pandemic. We need this vibrancy to continue & the District Council has a major role to play in supporting this. Accessibility is another important issue, especially in rural areas. Public transport needs to be supported & enhanced together with extensions to safe walking & cycling routes & the promotion of active travel.'*

*'The Council's primary focus should be on strengthening and supporting communities, community spaces, skills & public spaces. Moving towards a 'donut' economy, one which prioritises wellbeing whether or not it is economically growing is key. Economic growth & business growth shouldn't be a key priority, or if it must be a priority, social & environmental wellbeing should have equal weighting in decisions'*

*'To maintain our communities, we need housing affordable for key workers including teachers, health & care workers ... those who work in shops, leisure centres & the hospitality sector, now & in the future. All options including local authority build & self build must be considered.'*

## **Priority – A Better Environment for People and Wildlife**

*The Council will be a progressive custodian of our environmental resources, supporting a healthy natural landscape which is rich in wildlife and habitats that are enjoyed by and benefit all.*

Focus for Action in West Oxfordshire:-

- Work with others to ensure that land, air and water support biodiverse habitats, reduce pollution and bring about nature recovery to the District, putting it at the forefront of local decision making.
- Recognise and support the vital role of farming in natural ecosystem conservation and economic resilience, and the role that environmentally sustainable farming can play in achieving this.
- Help people to connect with nature by improving understanding of and public access to greenspaces and the countryside.
- Be an active participant in the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and contribute to the production of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy to establish priorities and map proposals for action to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits specific to West Oxfordshire.
- Work with others to facilitate environmentally sensitive flood management of our river catchments.

### You said:

*'Nature recovery is vitally important but not well understood by most people. Local councils, communities, landowners and others have an important role to play to engage with the public as part of nature recovery planning.'*

*'Although it is easy to get distracted by more 'immediate' issues such as Covid-19, the state of the environment is just as urgent, if not more so, despite its perception. As such, solutions to resolve climate change and loss of biodiversity should always remain top of the agenda despite any concurrent issues.'*

*'Most of West Oxfordshire's countryside is intensively farmed and inaccessible to the public, with few significant open access areas. Efforts should be made to extend the few commons that exist (for example at North Leigh) to create more opportunities for public access to the countryside.'*

*'The protection and restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity within towns and villages and in the wider landscape is essential. The ongoing pollution of rivers and other waterways is a disgrace that needs tackling. We need far more resilience in our water system in the face of the rapidly changing environment.'*

*'High value agricultural land does need protection, but the agricultural system needs a radical overhaul if we want to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.'*

## **Priority – Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency**

*The Council will be a community leader in responding to the challenges of climate change, including rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing the District and its communities for the impacts of climate change to ensure a fair transition for all to a future that will be defined by climate change.*

Focus for Action in West Oxfordshire:-

- Drive down carbon emissions from Council operations including leisure, waste and street cleansing and running of the Council's estate, and in so doing lead by example to inspire others to take action to collectively reduce the overall carbon emissions of the District.
- Encourage the use of natural processes to sequester carbon and combat the risks arising from climate change at a river catchment scale, such as restoration of meadows and trees to reduce flooding.
- Work with partner organisations and residents to facilitate the retrofit of carbon reduction measures in homes and businesses and pursue a drive to net zero carbon buildings in new developments through planning policy.
- Encourage renewable energy generation at appropriate sites in the District, improving local energy and economic resilience and supporting the community benefits that this resilience will bring.
- Work with Oxfordshire County Council to deliver on our joint commitment to active travel, including through improved walking and cycling infrastructure and public transport.

### You said:

*'...local communities and local government have a key role to play to enable individuals to take effective action on smart retrofitting covering insulation, energy generation, storage and timely energy use. Many people want to do the right thing but need support and advice to do it.'*

*(I most value living in West Oxfordshire because) it is a friendly, well-linked community with a sense of environmental awareness and a desire to improve opportunities for people and nature'*

*(One change that would improve West Oxfordshire) would be a Local Authority that was more pro-active in promoting ... more infrastructure to encourage active travel.'*

*'There are a number of co-benefits to things like that retrofit that should be factored into council decision making and long-term thinking should be prioritised, particularly where projects don't seem profitable in the short term but have long term social and environmental benefits.'*

## **Priority – Working Together for West Oxfordshire**

The Council recognises that to deliver on our aspirations and the priorities in this Council Plan for West Oxfordshire, working collaboratively with others will be essential. We therefore pledge to:

- Target available Council grant budgets to proposals by others that will deliver on Council priorities
- Work with existing businesses and new start-ups to access support available to enable their success
- Support Town and Parish Councils to represent their communities energetically and take action on issues important to their locality
- Support the Voluntary and Community Sector to continue to undertake activity which serves the needs of residents including established organisations and more informal groups working to address particular needs such as access to food, youth support and cultural provision.
- Make a dedicated effort to further understand and meet the needs of our young people, including children, teenagers and young adults leaving school, entering the world of work and/or seeking to set up home in the District.
- Look to invest in the building of homes that meet the diverse housing needs of our residents at all stages of their lives, including for those seeking to downsize or affordable social housing.

### You said:

*'The cost of living crisis is affecting all families so working closely with them to ensure that safe, healthy, nurturing environments are being created for young children to ensure the best start for them (should be a priority)'*

*'Engage and consult with your Parish Councils as these are the people who face the challenges first-hand'*

*'I think it is very important that the Council works with other organisations in the District, without being biased in any one particular direction. The villages are as important, if not more so being on the fringe of and in the Cotswold's as the urban areas, and their voice needs to be heard, particularly on environmental, planning and rural issues.'*