

Scrutiny Committee Comments on the Draft West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023 – 2027

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.

Comment: Include 'of our landscape, build, farmed and natural environment'

General Comments:

- How this plan differed from the previous plan?.
- It felt as though the pack had been shuffled with no new ideas being included.
- Could the priorities be presented in a circular fashion rather than linear to make it clear that there is no hierarchy
- It is disappointing that there is no innovation in the Plan
- There is too much 'Council Speak'
- Is there to be a separate version for the public?
- More clarity is needed about whether the document sets out actions, aspirations or values. As drafted the priorities are a mixture of all three.
- It is an attractive document which clearer sets out the Council's aspirations.

Priority – Putting Residents First

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

Comment: Welcome the emphasis of putting residents first but queried whether in the current economic conditions the Plan should concentrate on the provision of core services.

Comment: Are residents indeed being put first? Has there been a full consultation with the public?

- 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.

Comment: Insert 'being an outward facing, accessible, *inclusive* and open Council ...'

- 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.

Comment: The extent to which Town and Parish Councils are consulted; buses and bins were quoted as examples where consultation is inadequate.

- 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.

Comment: Insert 'to meet the needs and aspirations of our *current and future* residents.'

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.

Comment: Clarify what you mean by 'excellent health and wellbeing'

Comment: Give greater prominence/emphasis to the delivery of built infrastructure within this priority.

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.

Comment: provide clarification of the term 'blue infrastructure'

- 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 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'

Comment: Remove this quote.

Officer recommendation – replace with:

'I fully support the idea of helping local businesses and local people to find local employment. I also fully support the promotion and recovery of town centres. I would say though that any new employment development sites should meet the strict criteria of other development sites and the impacts on local communities, local infrastructure and climate change must be fully taken into account.'

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.

Comment: Expand to include sewage over flow and recognise the role of the Council as Local Planning Authority in ensuring adequate sewage services are provided.

- 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.

Comment: Food production should be referenced – in terms of access to local food and reducing food miles

- Help people to connect with nature by improving understanding of and public access to greenspaces and the countryside.

Comment: Edit greenspaces to be two separate words

- 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.

Comment: Make specific reference to Biodiversity Net Gain within this Focus for Action

- Work with others to facilitate environmentally sensitive flood management of our river catchments.

Comment: Include more on ecology and biodiversity

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.

Comment: Reword final bullet point to read: 'Work with Oxfordshire County Council to deliver on our joint commitment to active travel and public transport through improved walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure and better public transport services.'

Comment: Flooding should be given further emphasis.

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

Comment: Clarify this pledge.

- 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.

Comment: Why the specific reference to young people and not others?

Comment: Young peoples' mental health requires support.

- 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.

Comments on the West Oxfordshire Portrait Infographic

- Foodbank statistics should be for the whole District not just Witney. Noted that Witney Food Bank is part of the Trussell Trust which monitors usage whereas other food banks across the District are more informal and do not provide such data.
- Safety – edit to state that there were 1,080 reported victims of domestic abuse.
- References are illegible (require larger font).