

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee

Held in the Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28
INB at 2.00 pm on **Tuesday, 27 May 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Goodwin (Chair), Michael Brooker (Vice-Chair), Julian Cooper, Phil Godfrey, Nick Leverton, Andrew Lyon, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Sarah Veasey, Alistair Wray, Ruth Smith, Paul Marsh and Sandra Simpson,

Officers: James Nelson (Principal Planner), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Mat Taylor (Democratic Services Officer) and Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer).

Other Councillors in attendance: None.

12 Election of Chair

Councillor Michael Brooker, Vice-Chair of Development Control Committee opened the meeting and asked for nominations for the Chair of Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee.

Councillor Brooker proposed that Councillor Andy Goodwin be elected as Chair of the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2025 – 2026. This was seconded by Councillor David Melvin.

With no other nominations made, the proposal was put to the vote and was unanimously agreed by the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Elect Councillor Andy Goodwin as the Chair of Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2025-2026.

13 Appointment of Vice-Chair

Councillor Alistair Wray proposed that Councillor Michael Brooker be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2025-2026. This was seconded by Councillor Phil Godfrey. With no other nominations made, the proposal was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Appoint Councillor Michael Brooker as Vice-Chair of the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2025-2026.

Councillor Julian Cooper addressed the Sub-Committee and paid tribute to the memory of Councillor Brenda Smith who had previously Vice-Chaired the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee from 1992 to 1994 and 2007 to 2010. Councillor Brenda Smith was a member of the Council from 1986 to 2010.

14 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rachel Crouch, Andrew Prosser, Adrian Walsh and Steve Cosier.

Councillor Ruth Smith Substituted for Councillor Crouch

Councillor Sandra Simpson Substituted for Councillor Prosser.

Councillor Paul Marsh Substituted for Councillor Cosier.

15 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of interest were received from

Councillor Paul Marsh declared that the application was in his ward, however he had not predetermined it.

Councillor Sarah Veasey declared that the proposed route would run through her ward but she had not predetermined it.

16 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Sarah Veasey proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 7 April 2025 be agreed by the Sub-Committee as a true and accurate record. This was seconded by Councillor Alistair Wray, was put to the vote and was agreed unanimously by the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 7 April 2025 as a true and accurate record.

17 Applications for Development

The Chair advised the Sub-Committee that the application for Rainbow Farm, Buckland Road, Bampton had been withdrawn.

18 University Farm, Witney Road, Hailey

James Nelson, Principal Planner, presented the application for the installation and operation of a renewable energy generating station comprising of ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with switchgear container, inverter/transformer units, site access, internal tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure and landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

The Principal Planner explained that the application had come before the Sub-Committee on Monday 7 April and the application had been deferred for consultation with Oxfordshire County Council Highways, who had indicated that the route was an issue, and proposed an alternative route via B4022 to be required in the CTMP.

The Principal Planner's presentation addressed the following points:

- The application was deferred at April's meeting to allow for further consideration to be given to the proposed construction access route.

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- The application sought permission for the installation and operation of a renewable energy generating station with site access and ancillary infrastructure.
- The site would be split into 3 parts Northeast of Witney, East of Hailey and Poffley End and Southwest of New Yatt and North Leigh covering 99.68 ha.
- The Hailey Conservation Area, with several listed buildings was west of the site, including Swan Hall Farm. A public right of way to the north of the site and bridleways to the south and east of the site.
- There had been objections raised by Ramsden Parish Council regarding the suggestion of routing traffic through the village.
- Changes from the previous application included: significant reduction of panels in field 1; significant reduction in the north of field 3; western side of field 4 in the Swan Field Farm conservation area the panels would be set back from hedgerows; and an increase in the buffer zone from New Yatt Road.
- Enhancement measures included significant areas of planting at the north boundary of the public right of way; significant enhancements to the west of field 4 to mitigate views across the conservation area. The height of fencing and ancillary infrastructure was clarified.
- Various construction access routes; Route 1 A4095 from North Leigh, would access the site at New Yatt Road; Route 2 From A44 at Enstone, through Charlbury, Finstock and Ramsden; Route 3 Via the double round-a-bout at Witney and north towards the site.

Robert Gunn, North Leigh Council, addressed the Sub-Committee in objection to the application which raised the following points: Highlighted the transportation of vehicles; the number of journeys to and from the site, the width of the roads, routes 1 and 3 would not have passing places; there would be multiple traffic lights in North Leigh which would cause increased traffic problems and delays.

Bente Kleine, RWE, Development Project Manager, addressed the Sub-Committee in support of the application which raised the following points: The project would achieve climate and energy targets and provide electricity to 15,000 houses within Oxfordshire, result in a 104% biodiversity net gain, provision of a community benefit fund of up to £462k and a community orchard. She confirmed that the route via A4095 would be the shortest route with no objections from Oxfordshire County Council highways.

The members asked for clarification from the speaker on the following points:

- Time limits for transportation to and from sites at peak times – time limits would be from 8am-9am and then 5pm- 6pm.
- The community benefit fund of £462k would be for the Hailey Parish.
- Access via farms was not possible as the land was not under ownership of University Farm.

The Principal Planner's presentation addressed the following points:

- The Principal Planner drew the Sub-Committees' attention to the additional representation report which included the response from OCC transport.
- Policy EH6 supported renewable energy to minimise adverse impacts. The updated NPPF has strengthen support for renewable energy.
- There would be reinstatement of historic hedgerows and an increased buffer to heritage assets compared to the previous application.
- There were no objections from the Conservation Officer as concerns raised in the previous application were overcome.
- Changes made included the reduction of panels in field 1, removal of panels in field 4 and increased landscaping around the woodland boundary.
- Each route to the site had been fully appraised and route 1 was found to be the most suitable. There were no objections from OCC highways.
- The application was recommended for provisional approval subject to 106 agreement to secure biodiversity monitoring costs.

The Chair then invited the Sub-Committee to discuss the application, which raised the following points:

- Each route had been fully considered with additional documentation and recommendations for the least impactful route had been made.
- The impacts of the various routes to residents and road uses and how these could be mitigated.
- Concerns about safety for road users and pedestrians on the New Yatt Road where there are no pavements. Also concerns about how emergency vehicles would access the roads.
- The use of traffic lights would restrict trade, and delay residents trying to get to and from work or school.
- Queried land ownership and the possibility of using farm tracks. The access was not possible due to land rights and would not be a more suitable option.

Councillor Sarah Veasey proposed that the Sub-Committee resolve to grant approval subject to the signing of a 106 agreement with amendments to Condition 13 to include reference to a construction traffic route route as described in paragraph 5.57 of the report:

- Charlbury to the A44 via the B4437 as an alternative to further north on the A44 at Neat Enstone.
- By passing Ramsden by continuing south on the B4022 to Poffley End (effectively joining route 3).

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This was seconded by Councillor Michele Mead and put to the vote.

Voting Record – 11 for the proposal, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

The Sub-Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Grant approval subject to the signing of a 106 agreement with amendments to Condition 13 to include reference to a construction traffic route as described in paragraph 5.57 of the report:
 - Charlbury to the A44 via the B4437 as an alternative to further north on the A44 at Neat Enstone
 - By passing Ramsden by continuing south on the B4022 to Poffley End (effectively joining route 3).

19 Rainbow Farm, Buckland Road, Bampton

Application was withdrawn.

20 Applications Determined under Delegated Powers

The report giving details of the applications determined under Delegated Powers was received, explained by the officers and noted by the Sub-Committee.

21 Appeal Decisions

The report giving details of the appeals was received, explained by the officers and noted by the Sub-Committee.

The Meeting closed at 3.31pm.

CHAIR