

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 25 February 2026**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Coles (Chair), Carl Rylett (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Lidia Arciszewska, Thomas Ashby, Hugo Ashton, Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Adam Clements, Rachel Crouch, Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Roger Faulkner, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, David Jackson, Edward James, Natalie King, Nick Leverton, Paul Marsh, Martin McBride, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Sarah Veasey, Liam Walker, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance and Regulatory Services), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer), Georgina Dyer (Head of Finance), Kathryn Dowell (HR Business Partner), Andrew Thomson (Planning Policy Manager) and Michael Rich (Regeneration Lead for the Carterton Area Strategy)

Other Councillors in attendance:

CL.75 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors:

- David Cooper
- Julian Cooper
- Sandra Cosier
- Steve Cosier
- Phil Godfrey
- Liz Leffman
- Dan Levy
- Andrew Lyon
- Tim Sumner

CL.76 Declarations of Interest

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:

Council

25/February2026

The Chair drew Members' attention to Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Any Members in Council Tax arrears of two or more months must declare this and cannot vote on the budget or Council Tax items.

There were no declarations of interest received.

CL.77 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Councillor Thomas Ashby noted he had not received a response to his supplementary questions.

Councillor Andy Graham proposed accepting the minutes, these were seconded and voted on.

Voting Record – 38 For, 3 Abstentions, 1 Against

CL.78 Receipt of Announcements

The Chair thanked members that had attended his recent charity coffee morning and bake sale held in Witney. The Chair advised that nearly £500 had been raised at the event.

The Chair also advised that his charity quiz night was on 20 March 2026 and all members were welcome to attend.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, announced that he had taken on the role of Armed Forces Champion for the Council. Councillor Graham stated that he felt that the Leader should hold this role in recognition of the large armed forces community in West Oxfordshire. The role was to act as an advocate for the armed forces community and raise any areas of concern to ensure action was taken to support them. Councillor Graham would work to ensure the needs and contributions of military personnel and veterans were recognised, valued and supported.

Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment, drew members' attention to a recent docudrama "Dirty Business". This docudrama had been produced in collaboration with a local campaigner's group Windrush Against Sewerage Pollution (WASP). Councillor Arciszewska suggested that the programme laid bare the improper actions of Thames Water and the shortcomings of regulators with regard to sewerage. Councillor Arciszewska expressed her gratitude to Peter Hammond, Ashley Smith and WASP for their action on the national scandal of sewerage pollution in particular in the district.

Council

25/February2026

Councillor Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery, advised that the Council's nature recovery work would be showcased following the Executive on tour in Charlbury on Wednesday 11 March. The officer presentation at the event would include projects on restoration of rivers, strengthening habitats and protecting wildlife. The Evenlode Catchment Partnership and Charlbury Land and Nature Group would also be joining the event.

The Chief Executive welcomed Michael Rich who had been appointed Regeneration Lead for the Carterton Area Strategy. Mr Rich had extensive experience and was envisaged to play a key role in the regeneration of Carterton

CL.79 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

CL.80 Questions by Members

Questions by Members, as listed on the agenda, and the responses to those questions, which were circulated in advance, were taken as read.

The Chair invited the questioner to ask a supplementary question if they wished and then invited the relevant Executive Members to respond.

The Written Question, Written Answer, Verbal Supplementary Question and Verbal Supplementary Answer are detailed in a separate document appended to the Minutes of the Meeting.

CL.81 Report of the Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of the budget estimates, adequacy of the Council's reserves and risk 2026/27

The Leader introduced the report, the purpose of which was to note the report and have regard to it in light of the subsequent item on the Council's Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Leader proposed accepting the recommendation to note the report.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the recommendation. Councillor Smith encouraged members to vote in approval of the recommendation. He stated that the budget process had continued to operate effectively, supported by the diligent work of staff across service areas. A comprehensive report had been produced for the upcoming financial year, reflecting robust analysis and early engagement consistent with the organisation's established budget-setting timeline. Following discussion with the Executive, there was collective agreement and comfort

Council

25/February2026

with the conclusions reached, ensuring the Council was well-placed to proceed confidently into the next stage of financial planning.

Council resolved to:

1. Note the report and has regard to it when making its decisions about budget and Council Tax for 2026/27.

Voting Record – 39 For, 0 Abstentions, 0 Against

CL.82 Budget 2026/27 & medium term financial strategy

In introducing the item, the Chair reminded members that they would not be able to leave partway through the item.

The purpose of the item was to provide the proposed budget for 2026/27, whilst also seeking approval for:

1. The Draft Base Budget for 2026/27
2. The Council's Capital Programme for 2026/27 to 2030/31
3. The level of Council Tax for 2026/27
4. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2026/27 to 2030/31
5. The Capital Strategy 2026/27
6. The Investment Strategy 2026/27
7. The Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27
8. The Council's Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

The Leader introduced the item, and in doing so thanked the Council's finance team and officers generally. The Leader stated that the Executive had proposed a prudent budget which allowed the Council to maintain essential functions. The Leader also stated that the Executive had made strong progress against the Council's priorities, referencing the following projects;

- Growth in Marriott's Walk and strong market attendance, with over 32,000 visitors to the Christmas market.
- Significant progress on the Local Plan, supported by over 2,200 consultation responses.
- Establishment of the first Habitat Bank at Pudlicote Farm and advancement of the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (net-zero development).
- Ongoing work on the Carterton Area Strategy and the appointment of a regeneration lead.

Council

25/February2026

- Continued lobbying on sewage treatment investment and the Carterton–Oxford rail link, and submission of a comprehensive response to the Botley West solar farm proposal.
- Environmental initiatives including EV investment and solar/low-carbon upgrades at leisure centres.
- Adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy and delivery of 321 new affordable and social rented homes, as well as progress on the Woodford Way housing scheme.
- Successful support to vulnerable residents through the Low-Income Family Tracker programme.
- Submission of an Oxfordshire local government reorganisation proposal with partner councils.
- Over £1m raised through the community grants scheme, with a refreshed platform due.
- Development of a new services partnership for waste, grounds maintenance and local services

The Leader highlighted the key elements of the 2026-27 budget:

- Investment in homelessness services, including 29 new emergency accommodation bed spaces, reducing reliance on temporary accommodation and generating estimated savings of £350,000 annually.
- Strengthened Healthy Communities and Community Funding teams to support local programmes and partnerships.
- Further investment in nature recovery and enforcement capacity for fly-tipping.
- Introduction of real-time footfall monitoring in Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton to support economic growth.
- Continued strong income from the Council's investment property portfolio (over £3m), with additional savings from the sale of Knights Court.
- Funding set aside for Local Government Reorganisation.
- Freeze on garden waste charges and a £5 increase for Band D council tax to protect services while remaining one of the lowest district rates nationally.

Councillor Michele Mead, the Leader of the Opposition, then spoke on the Executive's proposed budget. Councillor Mead put forward an amendment to the budget, giving the following reasons;

- Every pound matters to residents, and the Council should aim to ease the burden on residents wherever possible.
- Fly tipping was an issue in the District, and the amendment was to provide funding for two enforcement officers (an additional officer compared to the Executive's budget).

Council

25/February2026

- The amendment would provide funding for improved parking capacity and investment into youth sports.
- The opposition's amendment was fully funded, reallocating funds from the Council's reserves, member's allowances and the works on Guildenford Car Park.

The opposition's amendment read as follows;

- "The Conservative Group is proposing a responsible and community-focused amendment to the 2026/27 budget. Our approach prioritises residents, frontline services, and cost discipline, while ensuring value for money.
- We propose removing the following allocations:
 - £411,726 currently allocated to reserves.
 - £100,000 for the Guildford Car Park lighting project. We believe this project should be reconsidered through proper scrutiny due to concerns regarding overall costs and scope, with a view to potentially delivering it from next year's budget if justified.
 - £14,009 increase to member allowances*.
- This reflects our belief that residents should come first, and that discretionary spending and internal increases should be carefully controlled during financially challenging times.
- We propose reinvesting these funds into the following priorities:
 - £353,803 – Council Tax Freeze (2026/27)
- Delivering a council tax freeze to support households facing ongoing cost-of-living pressures.
 - £48,433 – Strengthening Fly-Tipping Enforcement
- Increasing the proposal from one to two enforcement officers, increasing capacity further to tackle environmental crime and protect our rural communities.
 - £50,000 – Station Parking Feasibility Study
- Supporting commuters, reducing inappropriate parking in residential areas, and strengthening sustainable transport links. Funding towards a feasibility study into expanding parking at:
 - o Charlbury Station
 - o Kingham Station
 - o Hanborough Station
- £70,000 – Youth Sport Grant Scheme
- Launching a new grant programme, administered by the Community Funding Officer, to support grassroots youth sport across West Oxfordshire to promote better health, opportunities, and community engagement"

Council

25/February2026

There was one question of clarity over the number of fly tipping officers. The Leader of the opposition stated that the number of fly tipping officers being proposed by the opposition was two, one additional officer compared to the Executive's budget.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Liam Walker,

The proposed budget and the opposition's amendment to it were then debated.

Members of the Administration and the controlling Alliance raised the following points;

- West Oxfordshire had thriving market towns, and in particular members made reference to Witney. This was evidence that the Council's work in this area was successful.
- The budget was prudent and progressive, and members commended the continued delivery of socially rented homes within it.
- The administration's prudent financial management had allowed the Council to resource key areas, such as youth development.
- Members commended the work of the waste and recycling team, and referred to the amendment, stating that there was no need for additional resources based on the fly tipping numbers.
- Members commended the Council's treasury management strategy.
- It was a collaborative budget built on Alliance projects including nature recovery, the Carterton area strategy, expanded social rent and emergency housing, youth services, planning capacity, and climate change work.
- There was a need for caution in regard to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as levels of inflation remained high, and reserves were needed to safeguard the Council's budget. Members felt this was not sufficiently addressed within the amendment.
- The local plan review was being taken forward by the administration as a key project and the Council had introduced the Community Infrastructure Levy on developments.
- Members referenced the work that had been done in refurbishing the Chipping Norton market.
- Members stated that the lighting work at the Guildenford Car Park was necessary for improving Public Safety.
- The Freezing of Council Tax (as proposed in the amendment) would have knock on effects for funding in future years and therefore compromise services. While the Council would not exist after Local Government Reorganisation, the services provided would need to continue. It was important to safeguard these services for the future.
- That the worst-off residents, who might be expected to benefit most from the freeze in Council Tax, would likely be in receipt of Council Tax reduction already.
- The increase was £5 per year for a band D property, which would not make a substantial difference to most households' budgets.

Members of the opposition raised the following points;

- The amendment was fully costed and checked by the finance team. In particular, they stated that the Council had a lot of reserves, and that therefore these could be utilised to ease the financial pressure on residents.
- The Council's MTFS was to 2031, which was longer than the duration of the Council.
- The amendment provided valuable sports provision.
- The administration's progress on projects was overshadowed by significant delays, for instance on 3G pitches.
- The Opposition's amendment prioritised resident wellbeing.
- The Opposition legitimately held the belief that the amendment would improve the budget and was sensible.
- Train station parking at Kingham was difficult, and it was very hard to get a parking space. There was a hope that the amendment would enable a feasibility study to enable further growth and progress.
- The grant scheme would provide growth and support for small groups.
- There was evidence of organised fly-tipping, which justified the need for additional resource.
- The Alliance had, in the past, criticised the opposition for not putting forward an amendment.
- The Council's responsibility was to its residents. £5 a year was a lot of money to a lot of people, and the reduction was also about the public messaging, and sending a message of support to these residents.

Councillor Alaric Smith, in reserving right to speak as the seconder of the budget, highlighted the following;

- Several of the Council's recent achievements.
- Investment continued in pollution management.
- Criticised the opposition amendments, describing them as political posturing and lacking substance.
- The leisure contract had previously been at risk; work with officers had increased footfall and stabilised income.
- The Council had made substantial investment in its wider investment portfolio, supported by pre-emptive maintenance.
- The proposed budget was described as strong and building on investments already made, including at Salt Cross and in services for young people, as well as through the use of Grampian conditions.
- The Administration argued that the Opposition's amendment would reduce the Council's future revenue base.

Council

25/February2026

- The proposed increase in Band D council tax amounted to only 11p per week.
- It was stated that the Opposition's approach would put the Council's finances at risk for the sake of virtue signalling.
- The Administration emphasised that delivering services required a legally balanced budget.
- The proposed budget would provide an appropriate financial buffer.
- Overall, the budget was presented as one that built on strong foundations.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Michele Mead, summed up the amendment and:

- Stated that Marriott's Walk was costing the Council £600,000 per year.
- Made reference to investment providing a boost to sports provision.
- Argued that some of the housing being claimed by the Liberal Democrats had in fact been delivered by the previous Conservative administration.
- Raised concerns that green waste charges were too expensive.
- Highlighted Burford car park flooding, with the view that the Council should be focusing on fixing existing issues.
- Suggested that a Carterton area strategy would be unnecessary if the administration were not pursuing current levels of housebuilding.
- Noted that the amendment had been submitted the previous week in accordance with the constitution.

Stated that consideration should be given to other sports and facilities, not only football pitches

In summing up the Leader stated that the message sent to residents was important, but there was support available in other way. He expressed support for the proposed budget and rejected the amendment, arguing it was submitted at the last minute, had not been developed through the established six-month consultation and scrutiny process, and lacked seriousness. He stated that signalling without action is ineffective and that the amendment would lead to a significant financial shortfall. He highlighted the budget's focus on supporting residents, including funding for community larders. They also challenged comments made by the opposition regarding market support and the financial position of Marriott's, pointing to figures in the papers. The Leader added that existing feasibility work on rail issues is already underway with local partners. They concluded by commending the budget and recommending the amendment be rejected.

Before the Chair proceeded to the vote the Chief Finance Officer stated that there were alternate mechanisms for dealing with some of the requests that the Opposition had made but that the Council Tax freeze would only make a difference of £5 a year in a Band D property.

Council

25/February2026

Council resolved to approve:

1. The General Fund Revenue Budget 2026/27 as Summarised in Annex A.
2. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2026/27 to 2030/31 in Annex B.
3. The Capital Programme for 2026/27 to 2030/31 as set out in Annex C.
4. The Council's Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex I.
5. The Council's Capital Strategy as set out in Annex J.
6. The Council's Investment Strategy as set out in Annex K.

The Council's Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Annex

Opposition Amendment (Amendment)		
For	Councillor Thomas Ashby, Councillor Andrew Beaney, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Roger Faulkner, Councillor Natalie King, Councillor Nick Leverton, Councillor Martin McBride, Councillor Michele Mead, Councillor Sarah Veasey, Councillor Liam Walker and Councillor Adrian Walsh	11
Against	Councillor Joy Aitman, Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Councillor Hugo Ashton, Councillor Mike Baggaley, Councillor Michael Brooker, Councillor Adam Clements, Councillor Andrew Coles, Councillor Rachel Crouch, Councillor Genny Early, Councillor Duncan Enright, Councillor Andy Goodwin, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor David Jackson, Councillor Paul Marsh, Councillor Stuart McCarroll, Councillor David Melvin, Councillor Rosie Pearson, Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, Councillor Andrew Prosser, Councillor Nigel Ridpath, Councillor Carl Rylett, Councillor Geoff Saul, Councillor Sandra Simpson, Councillor Alaric Smith, Councillor Ruth Smith, Councillor Mark Walker and Councillor Alistair Wray	27
Conflict Of Interests	None	0
Abstain	None	0
Rejected		

Budget recommendations as tabled (Resolution)		
For	Councillor Joy Aitman, Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Councillor Hugo Ashton, Councillor Mike Baggaley, Councillor Michael Brooker, Councillor Adam Clements, Councillor Andrew Coles, Councillor Rachel Crouch, Councillor Genny Early, Councillor Duncan Enright, Councillor Andy Goodwin, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor David Jackson, Councillor Paul Marsh, Councillor Stuart McCarroll, Councillor David Melvin, Councillor Rosie Pearson, Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, Councillor Andrew Prosser, Councillor Nigel Ridpath, Councillor Carl Rylett, Councillor Geoff Saul, Councillor Sandra Simpson, Councillor Alaric Smith, Councillor Ruth	27

Council

25/February2026

	Smith, Councillor Mark Walker and Councillor Alistair Wray	
Against	Councillor Thomas Ashby, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Edward James, Councillor Natalie King, Councillor Nick Leverton, Councillor Martin McBride and Councillor Adrian Walsh	7
Conflict Of Interests	None	0
Abstain	Councillor Andrew Beaney, Councillor Roger Faulkner, Councillor Michele Mead, Councillor Sarah Veasey, Councillor Liam Walker and Councillor Alex Wilson	6
Carried		

CL.83 Council tax 2026/27

Councillors Natalie King and David Jackson left the room.

Councillor Andy Graham introduced the item, the purpose of which was to enable West Oxfordshire District Council ('the Council') to calculate and set the Council Tax for 2026/27.

Councillor Alaric Smith seconded the recommendations which were put to the vote and agreed by Council

Council Resolved to:

Recommendations for the Council Tax Resolution 2026/27 The Council Resolves to:

1) Note that for the purpose of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 Section 35(2), there are no special expenses for the District Council in 2026/27;

2) Note that at its meeting held on 14 January 2026 the Executive acknowledged the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2026/27: a) b) for the whole Council area as 49,561.59 [item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the "Act")]; and for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a Parish Precept relates as in the attached Schedule I.

3) Agree that the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2026/27 (excluding Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) is £134.38

4) Agree that the following amounts be calculated for the year 2026/27 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act: a) b) c) d) e) f) g) h) £57,406,989 being the aggregate of the

Council

25/February2026

amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act, taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils and any additional special expenses. £44,427,124 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. £12,979,865 being the amount by which the aggregate at 4(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 4(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act). £261.89 being the amount at 4(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish Precepts and Special Expenses); £6,319,779 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish Precepts and Special Expenses) referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act as per the attached Schedule 2. £134.38 being the amount at 4(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 4(e) above by Item T(2(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish Precept or special item relates; the amounts shown in Schedule 2 being the amounts given by adding to the amount at 4(f) above, the amounts of the special item or items relating to dwellings in those parts of the Council's area shown in Schedule 2 divided in each case by the amount at 2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act, as the basic amounts of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which one or more special items relate; the amounts shown in Schedule 3 being the amounts given by multiplying the amounts at 4(f) and 4(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation Band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;

5) Note that for the year 2026/27 the Oxfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley have issued precepts to the Council, in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated below: Valuation Band Oxfordshire County Council £ A £1,337.85 Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley £ £198.85 B £1,560.83 £232.00 C £1,783.80 £265.14 D £2,006.78 £298.28 E £2,452.73 £364.56 F £2,898.68 £430.85 G £3,344.63 £497.13 H £4,013.56 £596.56

6) Agree that the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts shown in Schedule 4 as the amounts of Council Tax for the year 2026/27 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.

7) Agree that the Council's basic amount of Council Tax for 2026/27 is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB Local Government Finance Act 1992.

8) Agree the following Council/Public Officers: Director of Finance, Executive Director – Operations & Resident Services, Head of Legal, Lead Lawyers, Lawyers, Paralegals. Business Manager – Welfare & Revenue Service, Revenues Manager, Revenues Lead and Court Officer

Council

25/February2026

be authorised to: a) b) collect and recover any National Non-Domestic Rates and Council Tax, and prosecute or defend on the Council's behalf or to appear on its behalf in proceedings before a magistrate's court in respect of unpaid National Non Domestic Rates and Council Tax.

Council Tax Recommendations (Resolution)		
For	Councillor Joy Aitman, Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Councillor Hugo Ashton, Councillor Mike Baggaley, Councillor Andrew Beaney, Councillor Michael Brooker, Councillor Adam Clements, Councillor Andrew Coles, Councillor Rachel Crouch, Councillor Genny Early, Councillor Duncan Enright, Councillor Andy Goodwin, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor David Jackson, Councillor Paul Marsh, Councillor Stuart McCarroll, Councillor David Melvin, Councillor Rosie Pearson, Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt, Councillor Andrew Prosser, Councillor Nigel Ridpath, Councillor Carl Rylett, Councillor Geoff Saul, Councillor Sandra Simpson, Councillor Alaric Smith, Councillor Ruth Smith, Councillor Mark Walker and Councillor Alistair Wray	28
Against	Councillor Thomas Ashby, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Roger Faulkner, Councillor Edward James, Councillor Nick Leverton, Councillor Martin McBride, Councillor Michele Mead, Councillor Sarah Veasey and Councillor Liam Walker	9
Conflict Of Interests	None	0
Abstain	Councillor Adrian Walsh and Councillor Alex Wilson	2
Carried		

CL.84 Salt Cross Area Action Plan

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning, presented the item, the purpose of which was to consider the formal adoption of the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP).

Prior to his presentation, Councillor Ashton expressed his gratitude to all of those involved in bringing the AAP to the adoption stage. Councillor Ashton specifically credited the community of Eynsham, Rights Community Action, West Oxfordshire District Council's Planning Team and the various consultants involved in the process that included Etude, Currie and Brown, Aspinall Verdi and LUC.

Councillor Ashton then moved onto the main presentation and made the following points:

- Salt Cross Garden Village was the anchor of the Council's growth strategy in the current and emerging Local Plans.

Council

25/February2026

- The adoption of the AAP would allow the promotor to complete the outline planning application and planners to progress to development of the strategic site.
- Councillor Ashton outlined the timeline that had led to the proposed AAP. The process had begun in 2018. Following an initial round of consultation, the Inspector's initial report in May 2022 had found the AAP capable of being sound subject to modifications. Rights Community Action had subsequently challenged the Inspector in respect of Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon. Following this the High Court had quashed the Inspector's report in respect of Policy 2. The revised Policy 2 put forward by the Council had the been found to be legally compliant, consistent with national policy and capable of being made sound through modifications by a second Inspector, when she published her report which outlined the required Main Modifications in January 2026.
- Annex A showed the Main Modifications that were required for the AAP to be found sound from the initial Inspectors report, which remained valid (except with regard to Policy 2).
- Annex B showed the Main Modifications specific to Policy 2.
- Annexes A and B set out the entirety of the Main Modifications that were needed for the AAP to be found sound and formally adopted.
- Annex C was a schedule of minor additional modifications.
- A composite version of the AAP was contained in Annex D.
- The recommendations were binding on the Council and would be either accepted in whole or not at all.

In the discussion Members made the following points:

- Members echoed Councillor Ashton's gratitude to communities, officers and the consultants involved in the process.
- The AAP and Salt Cross Garden Village was a project of national significance and would be an exemplar in the district.
- The Net Zero Carbon Policy was an important aspect of the AAP, and its inclusion was a great achievement.
- It was hoped the low-density aim of the garden village would be retained.
- The position of the A40 between Eynsham and Salt Cross remained a challenge and potentially a flaw in the AAP. Integration of the two communities would need further work. Traffic would increase on the A40, Eynsham would be used as a rat-run and the requirements of children to cross this road for school would be dangerous.
- Previously proposed upgrades to the A40 had been scrapped and it was hoped that with Salt Cross being passed the required upgrades would be brought forward, including the use of the Eynsham Park and Ride which would be important for this site. A transport link from the Park and Ride to the nearby Hanborough Station could be considered.

Council

25/February2026

- Members noted that the County Council was responsible for improvements to the A40 and the Park and Ride at Eynsham. Members requested that County Council set out timelines for the delivery of these improvements and works.
- It was noted that the decision for new housing on the site was made under a previous administration.
- The AAP would contribute to the Council's housing requirements as imposed by national government.
- The developer was now required to bring forward detailed plans in line with the AAP.
- Solar on roofs at the time of building was considered preferable to retrofitting properties and to solar farms on fields.
- The delay in delivery of the AAP and Salt Cross, which was a major part of the Local Plan, had led to development in other areas of the district.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, seconded the proposal and reiterated the contribution of the residents of Eynsham to achieving the AAP with the Net Zero Carbon Policy in place. Councillor Graham considered the final AAP to be better than that originally planned and stated that it would deliver sustainable living in the district. Councillor Graham noted that as a rural district the Council would need to support sustainable growth and a holistic approach to this was required to ensure existing communities did not feel marginalised.

The recommendations were put to the vote as follows:

For 38, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

The Council resolved to:

1. Accept the Inspectors' recommendations regarding the Main Modifications required to make the AAP sound as set out at Annex A and Annex B;
2. Agree the incorporation of the additional modifications as set out at Annex C;
3. Adopt the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) attached at Annex D as a development plan document, incorporating all of the Main Modifications recommended by the Inspectors at Annex A and Annex B, together with the additional modifications at Annex C, in accordance with Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012;
4. Authorise the Head of Planning in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, prior to the publication of the adopted Salt Cross AAP, to correct any minor spelling, grammatical or typographical errors together with any improvements from a presentational perspective including paragraph and policy numbering;
5. Note that the adoption of the Salt Cross AAP will supersede certain aspects of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 insofar as they relate to Salt Cross with immediate effect, specifically; Figure 3.2 of the AAP updates Figure 9.5e of the Local Plan, AAP

Council

25/February2026

Policy 16 supersedes Local Plan Policy T4 in respect of car parking standards and AAP
Policy 25 supersedes Local Plan Policy H5 in respect of custom and self-build housing.

CL.85 Chief Executive Recruitment

The Chair advised Council that he had used his discretion to enable the item to be considered notwithstanding the late circulation of the report on the basis that this would allow the stability the Council required and would enable the quick recruitment of a Director of Place.

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council, presented the item, the purpose of which was to present the outcome of the recruitment process for the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) role and seek Full Council's approval of the Selection Panel's recommendation to appoint Phillip Martin with a secondment to be the Council's next Chief Executive from 1 June 2026 until 31 March 2028, to fit in with the expected Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Vesting Day.

Councillor Graham proposed the recommendations and noted that, with the retirement of the current Chief Executive, the Council was required to ensure continuity and stability in the Council's senior leadership. An internal recruitment process had been undertaken which the Performance and Appointments Committee had delegated to a cross-party Selection Panel, with an interview process on 17 February. The process was in accordance with the Council's Constitution and relevant statutory provisions. The Panel had wished to take forward Phillip Martin as the preferred candidate.

Councillor Michele Mead seconded the proposal.

A Member expressed a hope that on the appointment the new Chief Executive would continue to work closely with Members.

The recommendations were put to the vote as follows:

For, 37 Against 0, Abstentions 0.

The Council resolved to:

Approve the appointment and salary of Phillip Martin as Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) of West Oxfordshire District Council from 1 June 2026 until the 31 March 2028, to fit in with the expected Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Vesting Day.

Council

25/February2026

CL.86 Motions on Notice

There were no motions tabled for the meeting.

The Meeting closed at 4.48 pm

CHAIR