



West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041

Draft Preferred Policy Options Paper

June 2025



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Foreword

We're delighted to be sharing this next step in shaping the future of West Oxfordshire and to be asking for your views on what matters most.

This stage of the Local Plan 2041 sets out a range of preferred policy options on the big issues that affect us all - tackling climate change, improving health and wellbeing, delivering genuinely affordable homes, supporting jobs and skills, and protecting our natural environment and heritage.

It's not a final set of policies just yet, but it's an important milestone, and your feedback will help us shape the full draft we plan to publish for consultation later this year. We know this is all happening at a particularly challenging time. National planning policy has changed recently, which means we now need to plan for a much higher number of new homes. At the same time, our local infrastructure - roads, education, healthcare - is already under pressure. The A40 continues to be a real pinch point, and many of our sewage treatment works are either at or near capacity. These are serious issues, and they can't be ignored.

West Oxfordshire is a largely rural district with a very special character, and we know how important it is to local people that we protect what makes this place unique. But we also need to think about the future - about how we support our communities, our young people, and our local economy. Getting that balance right is what this new plan is all about.

Our goal is to be ambitious but realistic. We want this new Local Plan to mark a real step change from the one we adopted in 2018. That means putting the climate emergency at the heart of everything we do. It means being more forward-thinking when it comes to infrastructure, health, and wellbeing. It means delivering new homes that are truly affordable and built to be net-zero in operation.

We're also looking to protect the potential for a rail link to provide a service between Carterton, Witney, Eynsham and Oxford - something that could make a huge difference to how people travel across the district. But ambition only works if it's grounded in reality. Our plan's policies need to be achievable - capable of being delivered without making development unviable or putting too much strain on what we already have.

So, we're asking for your views. What do you think about our preferred policy options? What's missing? What should we do differently? This is your chance to help shape a better future for West Oxfordshire, and we're looking forward to hearing what you have to say.



Cllr Andy Graham
Leader of the Council



Cllr Hugo Ashton
Executive Member for Planning

I. Introduction

- I.1 The District Council is developing a new Local Plan to guide West Oxfordshire's growth and development in the period up to 2041.
- I.2 The Local Plan plays a key role in shaping the future of the District. It sets out a vision and policy framework that determines how much development takes place, where it should be located, and how it can be delivered in a way that benefits local communities and enhances well-being.
- I.3 The new Local Plan is currently at the Regulation 18 'plan preparation' stage, where the Council identifies local priorities and explores different policy options.

Consultation to date

- I.4 So far, the Council has carried out two main phases of public consultation in **2022 and 2023**.
- I.5 The **first consultation** sought early feedback on the potential scope of the plan, structured around six broad themes. The **second consultation** built on this by presenting draft objectives and exploring possible development patterns for the period up to 2041.
- I.6 This second phase also included a **call for sites and ideas**, inviting suggestions on how land in the District could be used in the future - for housing, employment, renewable energy, open spaces, and more.

Purpose of this preferred policy options paper

- I.7 Building on the previous consultations, this **Preferred Policy Options Paper** sets out the Council's emerging approach, including:
 - 1) A **draft vision** of West Oxfordshire in 2041
 - 2) **Revised objectives** for the Local Plan
 - 3) **Preferred policy options**, covering:
 - a) Core policies
 - b) Place-based policies
 - c) Settlement strategies
 - d) Development management policies
- I.8 This document is not a full draft of the Local Plan. Instead, it outlines the Council's current thinking on the plan's overall structure and direction. It will be followed by a focused consultation on potential development sites building on the overall spatial strategy outlined in this document.

Have your say

- 1.9 The Council is inviting feedback on:
- The overall structure and content of the emerging Local Plan
 - The proposed vision and objectives
 - The preferred policy options
- 1.10 All comments will be carefully considered, alongside further evidence and analysis to help inform the next steps towards a full draft plan.

2. Background Context

- 2.1 Local Plans are essential planning documents that guide development within a local authority area. All local planning authorities are legally required to prepare and maintain an up-to-date Local Plan, reviewing it at least every five years to ensure it remains relevant, responsive, and effective.
- 2.2 The primary purpose of a Local Plan is to guide the delivery of sustainable development by setting out a strategic framework for growth, identifying the types and locations of development that are needed, and ensuring that these are supported by the necessary infrastructure. This includes everything from homes and jobs to transport, schools, green spaces, and health facilities.
- 2.3 A Local Plan achieves this by establishing a clear set of policies against which planning applications are assessed. Where appropriate, it also allocates specific sites for development. While there is no single required format for a Local Plan, the expectation is that they are focused, accessible, and proportionate to the needs and characteristics of the local area.

The Current West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031

- 2.4 The current West Oxfordshire Local Plan was adopted in September 2018 and covers the 20-year period from 2011 to 2031. It has helped shape development across the district, with many of the sites allocated in the plan either already built out, granted planning permission, or actively under construction.
- 2.5 Key infrastructure projects identified in the current plan have also progressed well, including the completed A40 Down's Road junction and the forthcoming Shores Green junction improvements. Housing delivery has remained strong, with 7,719 new homes completed between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2024, just 356 short of the total requirement for that period.
- 2.6 However, despite this progress, there have been delays in bringing forward some larger strategic sites, which has impacted the district's future housing land supply and increased the pressure from speculative 'windfall' development. This shortfall highlights the need to look ahead and plan proactively to ensure that future development needs can be met in a timely and coordinated manner.

- 2.7 The new Local Plan offers an opportunity to reset the housing requirement and identify additional, suitable sites for future development. It also enables the Council to refresh and strengthen local planning policies, taking account of key priorities such as tackling the climate and ecological emergency, improving health and wellbeing, promoting nature recovery, and accelerating housing delivery.
- 2.8 A formal review of the existing Local Plan in September 2023 concluded that while many policies remain aligned with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), there is a clear need for an updated plan to respond to changing local and national circumstances.

Key Drivers and Influences

- 2.9 As it takes shape, the new Local Plan is being influenced by a range of strategic and local factors.
- 2.10 At the national level, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), most recently updated in December 2024, provides the overarching policy framework for plan-making and decision-taking. It is centred around the presumption in favour of sustainable development - placing a responsibility on local authorities to meet identified needs for housing, jobs, and infrastructure while protecting and enhancing the natural, built, and historic environment.
- 2.11 The new West Oxfordshire Local Plan will set out how this principle will be applied locally, ensuring that development contributes positively to the long-term wellbeing of communities, the economy, and the environment.
- 2.12 More locally, the Local Plan draws on the [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision](#) which is a collective vision agreed by all of the Oxfordshire local authorities through the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP).
- 2.13 This shared vision looks to 2050 and is based on nine ambitious outcomes, including:
1. *Our natural environment will be in a better state than that in which we found it.*
 2. *We will already be carbon neutral and accelerating towards a carbon negative future.*
 3. *Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved.*
 4. *Our local economy will be globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive.*
 5. *Our community will be a more equal, fair and inclusive place for everyone.*
 6. *Our vibrant historic and cultural offer will be rich, diverse and enhanced.*
 7. *We will have energy efficient and affordable homes in the right number, location and tenure.*
 8. *Our county's connectivity will be transformed in ways that enhance wellbeing.*
 9. *Our diverse and vibrant communities will thrive with a strong sense of identity.*

- 2.14 The vision provides an important long-term framework for shaping strategic priorities across Oxfordshire, which the West Oxfordshire Local Plan will support and help deliver.
- 2.15 Another major influence is [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#) (LTCP5) which sets out a bold and ambitious strategy for creating a net-zero transport system by 2040. The LTCP5 aims to reduce one in four car journeys by 2030, prioritise active and shared travel, and eliminate road deaths or serious injuries by 2050. It supports development that reduces the need to travel and encourages walking, cycling, public transport, and other low-carbon transport options.
- 2.16 Locally, the new plan is being shaped by the [West Oxfordshire Council Plan](#) which articulates a clear vision and key priorities for the district:

Vision

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, farmed and natural environment.

Key Priorities

1. Putting Residents First
 2. Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All
 3. Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife
 4. Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency
 5. Working Together for West Oxfordshire
- 2.17 Each of these priorities is embedded in the emerging Local Plan, which will help turn these ambitions into practical outcomes on the ground.

A Plan for the Future

- 2.18 In summary, the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan will guide growth and change in the district through to 2041. It provides a critical opportunity to address current challenges, respond to future needs, and ensure that development happens in the right place, at the right time, and in the right way.
- 2.19 By aligning with national policy and local priorities, the plan will help deliver a more sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous future for West Oxfordshire.

3. Challenges and Opportunities

- 3.1 Below is a thematic overview of West Oxfordshire, offering a 'snapshot' of the District as a place to live, work and visit. Building on this we then identify the key challenges that the new Local Plan must address in the period up to 2041 and the opportunities these present. This provides the context for the draft vision and objectives that follow in Section 4.

District Profile

West Oxfordshire is a district in the southeast of England, within the County of Oxfordshire. It shares borders with Gloucestershire to the west and Warwickshire to the north. The district is situated to the west of Oxford, separated from the city by a Green Belt which is home to the historic rural communities, of Bladon and Cassington.

Geographically positioned between the M4 and M40 motorways, the district remains relatively isolated from the strategic road network yet enjoys good transport connectivity to the wider Southeast and Midlands particularly for communities on or in close proximity to the rail network. The district's landscape is characterised by farmland and country estates, rolling countryside, river valleys, and protected natural habitats, contributing to its strong sense of place and local identity. As one of the least densely populated areas in the Southeast, it comprises 6 towns and many villages, and hamlets, with Witney, Carterton, and Chipping Norton serving as its principal towns. A mix of historic and modern housing, attractive villages, and access to green spaces make it a highly desirable place to live.

As of 2023, West Oxfordshire had an estimated population of approximately 119,300, with projections suggesting an increase to 123,900 by 2031. The district has a relatively balanced age range, though some areas, such as Charlbury, have a higher proportion of residents aged 65 and older, whereas Carterton has a younger demographic. The population is aging, with the number of people aged 65+ increasing by 21.6% between 2011 and 2021, and the median age rising from 42 to 44. Household structures have also evolved, with a decrease in couples with dependent children and a slight increase in couples with non-dependent children. The district remains predominantly white (95.2%), with a higher proportion of English first-language speakers than the national average.

West Oxfordshire has committed to sustainability, with the District Council declaring a climate and ecological emergency in 2019 and pledging to achieve carbon neutrality in its operations by 2030. A Carbon Action Plan published in 2024 outlines strategies to reduce emissions across buildings, transport, and services. Between 2005 and 2019, total carbon emissions steadily declined, with a significant 16% reduction between 2018 and 2019. Transport and housing remain the largest contributors to carbon emissions. In 2021, renewable energy installations generated 77,443 MWh of electricity, covering about 15% of the district's energy needs. The Southill Solar Community Project exemplifies the role of local initiatives in promoting sustainable energy.

Housing in West Oxfordshire has seen strong growth, with 7,719 new homes built between 2011 and 2024, bringing the total number of households to 48,000. However, housing affordability remains a challenge, with an average house price of £387,000 in November 2024 and a housing affordability ratio of 11.4 in 2023, indicating that average house prices are over 11 times average annual earnings. Around 3,000 households are on the affordable housing waiting list, despite the construction of over 1,000 affordable homes since 2018. Additionally, 1,128 properties are registered as long-term empty, and there is a growing trend of homes being converted into short-term holiday lets. The housing stock is predominantly made up of detached and semi-detached properties, with a relative shortage of smaller terraced homes and flats.

Economically, the district remains resilient, with high employment levels, a skilled workforce, and strong business activity. As of January 2024, only 1.83% of the working-age population claimed unemployment-related benefits, and 90.4% of residents aged 16-64 were employed, placing West Oxfordshire among the top 10% of English local authorities for employment rates. The district has approximately 47,000 jobs, with key industries including manufacturing, construction, retail, and tourism. While agriculture dominates the landscape, it employs only a small percentage of the population. Most businesses (97.8%) are small or micro-sized, with only 0.2% classified as large enterprises.

Education in West Oxfordshire is well-regarded, with 53 primary schools serving 9,525 students in the 2023/24 school year. The district has 12 secondary schools, with 81.7% of students achieving a GCSE in English and Maths. A high proportion (96.6%) of young people remain in education or training.

Apprenticeships remain popular, with 580 starts in the 2021/22 academic year. Abingdon and Witney College offers a range of part-time and full-time courses. Early years education in communication, literacy, and maths outperforms national averages.

Healthcare in the district is strong, with health indicators often exceeding national averages. In 2021, 52.2% of residents described their health as "very good," up from 50.9% in 2011. Life expectancy is above the national average, with females living an average of 84.8 years and males 81.5 years. In terms of healthcare, the district is served by eight GP practices, as well as a number of public and private dental practices. In terms of secondary care, there are community hospitals in Witney and Chipping Norton. Although deprivation decreased between 2015 and 2019, access to housing and services remains a concern, particularly in parts of Chipping Norton, Witney Central, and Witney East.

Transport infrastructure in West Oxfordshire is predominantly car-dependent, with 80% of journeys made by private vehicles. Rail connections provide access to London and Birmingham, with the Cotswold Line linking rural communities to Oxford and Hereford. While frequent bus services operate between Witney, Carterton, and Oxford, other areas are less well served. Cycling and pedestrian routes are concentrated in main towns, with limited options in rural areas. Oxfordshire County Council is undertaking major improvements to the A40 corridor and to address congestion along key routes such as the A40, A44, and A415. Air quality concerns exist in Chipping Norton and Witney due to traffic emissions.

West Oxfordshire offers a wealth of recreational opportunities. The district is home to four Council-owned leisure centres, floodlit astroturf pitches, and two outdoor heated swimming pools. Parks and open spaces, including Kilkenny Lane Country Park, provide residents with green spaces for leisure. High-quality walking, cycling, and water-based activities are available, particularly in the Lower Windrush Valley, which also supports nature conservation efforts. Despite high adult participation in physical activity, child participation rates are lower than the national average. The district's natural and historic environment is diverse and well-preserved. About 34% of West Oxfordshire lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The Oxford Green Belt covers parts of the eastern district, and several designated conservation sites protect local biodiversity. The District includes 29 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, four National Nature Reserves, and the internationally significant Cassington Meadows Special Area of Conservation. The Wychwood Forest, the least developed area in Oxfordshire, is a notable feature of the district's 6,584 hectares of woodland. The Windrush Valley plays a vital role in terms of natural flood management and has significant historical and cultural value as well as providing important recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

West Oxfordshire also boasts a rich historic heritage, with Blenheim Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as its most famous landmark. The district contains approximately 3,200 listed structures, including Kelmscott Manor and Bliss Mill. It is home to 51 conservation areas and 149 Scheduled Monuments, covering prehistoric, Roman, and medieval sites. Additionally, 16 historic parks and gardens, such as Rousham House and Gardens, highlight the district's landscape heritage. Wychwood Forest, an ancient royal forest, remains a site of historical and ecological significance.

With its mix of natural beauty, rich history, and strong community ties, West Oxfordshire continues to be a sought-after place to live, work, and explore.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Local Plan 2041

The local plan must navigate a complex set of challenges while balancing economic growth, environmental protection, and community well-being. A key focus will be the interconnection between West Oxfordshire and surrounding areas, including Oxford, ensuring that development supports economic ties, infrastructure improvements, and sustainable growth.

A major challenge involves maintaining the integrity of the Oxford Green Belt while identifying opportunities for positive environmental enhancements. The plan must also carefully balance the need for new housing and commercial development with the protection of the district's landscapes, biodiversity, and historic assets, including the Cotswolds National Landscape and Blenheim Palace.

Sustainable development requires a thoughtful distribution of growth, ensuring that both principal towns and rural communities benefit without overburdening sensitive areas. Housing policies must address affordability, support a range of household needs including downsizing for an aging population and family-friendly housing and provide a mix of tenures to ensure social and economic diversity. In addition, the plan must mitigate the impact of short-term holiday lets on local communities and explore innovative housing solutions, such as community-led initiatives and build-to-rent models.

Infrastructure investment is of critical importance, particularly in water treatment and electricity generation capacity, which are key to supporting goals for environmental protection and reduction of carbon emissions. Enhancement of public transport, cycling, and pedestrian networks is also key to reducing car dependency and lower carbon emissions. Prioritising sustainable transport solutions, including enhanced bus services, improved rail connectivity, and EV charging infrastructure will be key to fostering a more connected and environmentally responsible district. Investment in utilities infrastructure is also of significant importance, to expand and improve water treatment capacity.

The local economy must be strengthened by supporting small businesses, expanding workforce development programs, and aligning education and training initiatives with emerging sectors such as green energy and technology. Ensuring a sufficient supply of affordable housing for workers will also be essential to sustaining economic growth.

Health and well-being are central to the plan, requiring improved healthcare access, expanded leisure facilities, and policies that promote physical activity and social cohesion. Investments in digital infrastructure, community centres, and local services will further enhance the quality of life for residents.

Environmental sustainability will guide future development, with strict energy efficiency standards for new buildings, retrofitting initiatives, and expanded local renewable energy projects. Climate adaptation measures, including natural flood management and increased tree planting, will help mitigate future risks. Additionally, the protection of biodiversity, green spaces, and agricultural land must remain a priority to ensure long-term environmental resilience.

Preserving West Oxfordshire's rich heritage is another key focus, requiring careful planning to maintain historic sites while supporting their adaptive reuse. The impact of climate change on heritage assets must also be considered, integrating conservation efforts with broader environmental strategies.

Ultimately, the plan must foster an inclusive, thriving, and sustainable future for West Oxfordshire by balancing development with the needs of communities, the economy, and the natural environment.

4. Draft Vision and Plan Objectives

Our Draft Vision of West Oxfordshire in 2041

- 4.1 It is essential that the Local Plan is underpinned by a clear and collective vision of where we want West Oxfordshire to be as a place to live, work and visit by 2041.
- 4.2 Once agreed, the vision will represent a common goal and commitment and will form the basis of the plan objectives and policies that flow from it.
- 4.3 Local Plan visions tend to vary, with some being very short and concise and others going into much more detail about how different places are expected to change.
- 4.4 The draft vision set out below aims to strike a middle ground, being punchy and concise, whilst clearly articulating how we are looking for West Oxfordshire to evolve in the period to 2041.
- 4.5 It has been purposefully drafted on a 'district-wide' basis, with further detail on how particular locations are expected to change set out in the policies that follow.
- 4.6 It has an economic, social and environmental dimension in line with the definition of sustainable development embedded in national policy and also reflects the six main themes which have underpinned our local plan consultation to date:
 - Tackling the climate and ecological emergency
 - Healthy, safe, strong and inclusive communities
 - An enhanced natural and built environment
 - Attractive, accessible and thriving places
 - Meeting the housing needs of all
 - A vibrant, resilient and diverse local economy

West Oxfordshire in 2041 – Our Vision

In 2041, West Oxfordshire stands as a beacon of sustainable development and community well-being. Our District has embraced a transformative vision, shaping a future that balances environmental stewardship, economic vitality, and social equity. We not only meet the needs of our residents but inspire others to follow our lead in creating a sustainable and inclusive future.

The District is powered entirely by renewable energy sources and innovative green technologies. Energy-efficient buildings, both residential and commercial have become the norm, with retrofitted historic structures showcasing advanced insulation and energy systems. Public transport is carbon-neutral, including electric buses, bike-sharing schemes, and extensive pedestrian zones. Green roofs and vertical gardens are commonplace, contributing to urban cooling and biodiversity.

Communities are thriving, inclusive, and resilient. Health and well-being are prioritised through extensive green spaces, recreational facilities, and community gardens. Access to high-quality healthcare and mental health services is seamless, with integrated community health hubs providing comprehensive care. Social inclusivity is strengthened by community centres that offer programs for all ages, fostering intergenerational connections and support networks. Streets and public spaces are designed for safety and accessibility, ensuring everyone can participate in community life.

Our natural landscapes and historic buildings are meticulously preserved and enhanced. Conservation efforts ensure that biodiversity is restored, protected and thrives in rural and urban areas with urban spaces integrating nature through parks, green corridors, and wildlife-friendly initiatives. Historic buildings are not only preserved but also adapted for modern use, blending heritage with innovation and carbon neutrality. This harmonious integration of the old and new attracts tourists and enriches the cultural fabric of the District.

Urban and rural areas are vibrant and welcoming. Town centres are pedestrian-friendly, featuring a mix of local shops, cafes, cultural venues, and public art. Smart technologies ensure efficient public services, supported by digital infrastructure. Public transport is efficient, affordable, and well-connected, making it easy for residents to move around the District and beyond.

West Oxfordshire's housing market is inclusive and dynamic. A mix of housing types, from single-family homes to co-housing communities offers a diverse range of options and ensures that everyone from young professionals to retirees can find suitable accommodation. New affordable housing mean that all residents have access to safe and comfortable homes. New developments adhere to the highest standards of sustainability, with green building practices ensuring minimal environmental impact.

The economy is robust and diverse, characterised by innovation and sustainability. Local businesses thrive alongside global enterprises, with a strong emphasis on green industries, technology, and creative sectors. The District is a hub for green technology startups, research, and development, supported by partnerships with local universities and research institutions. A focus on skills development and lifelong learning ensures the workforce is adaptable and prepared for the future. Farmers markets, artisanal shops, and local producers are integral to the economy, promoting local produce and craftsmanship.

In 2041, West Oxfordshire is not just a place to live, but a thriving, interconnected community where people enjoy a high quality of life, economic opportunities abound, and the natural and historic environment is cherished and protected. Together, we have created a future that is sustainable, inclusive, and inspiring for generations to come.

- 4.7 Views on the draft vision are welcome as part of the consultation so that it can be refined and finalised as we look to work up the full draft version of the Local Plan.

Revised Draft Plan Objectives

- 4.8 Set out below is a series of draft local plan objectives. These are important because they help to articulate the vision and guide the overall content of the plan. They also provide a benchmark against which progress can be measured.
- 4.9 In 2023 we consulted on a series of initial draft objectives (30 in total) and whilst the feedback was generally positive, many respondents felt there were too many, that they lacked focus and precision and had a degree of repetition.
- 4.10 Reflecting on this, the draft plan objectives have been re-worked and are outlined below.

Objective 1 – To take local action and tackle the climate and ecological emergency ‘head-on’ for the benefit of current and future generations by:

- Significantly reducing West Oxfordshire’s carbon emissions across all sectors, with a particular focus on carbon intensive activities including transport, housing and industry.
- Enabling the deployment of new and retrospective renewable and low-carbon energy solutions at various scales, maximising the potential benefits, whilst minimising the impacts.
- Building resilience to, and reversing the impacts of climate change, supporting adaptation and nature's recovery.
- Maximising the efficient use of land and buildings, favouring their retention where possible and adaptive re-use and making prudent use of natural resources, ensuring that waste is treated as a resource through the adoption of ‘circular economy’ principles.

Objective 2 – To foster healthier and happier communities across West Oxfordshire, by:

- Creating well-designed, safe, inclusive, and accessible environments that encourage community integration and promote strong mental and physical health.
- Enabling the adoption of healthier lifestyles by promoting physical activity through walking, cycling and public transport and the provision of convenient access to high quality green space, sports and leisure.
- Establishing a healthier food environment by enabling better food choices and encouraging local growth, distribution and consumption of healthy food.
- Ensuring that timely investment is made in the infrastructure needed to support development and that it is managed and maintained effectively over the longer-term.

Objective 3 - To protect, support and enhance the quality and resilience of West Oxfordshire's built, historic and natural environments by:

- Conserving and enhancing the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the historic and cultural environment, recognising their contributions to quality of life, social and economic well-being, and enabling sensitive adaptation to climate change.
- Promoting Nature Recovery by supporting resilient and connected habitats and ecosystems, investing in natural capital, and achieving measurable net gains in biodiversity in accordance with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire.
- Adopting an integrated, holistic approach to the management of all aspects of the water environment.
- Protecting the District's environmental assets by preventing pollution and minimising its impacts on local amenity, health, landscape character, soil resources and biodiversity.

Objective 4 – To allow West Oxfordshire's resident communities and businesses to thrive within a network of attractive, vibrant, and well-connected market towns and villages by:

- Ensuring that all new developments adhere to high-quality, innovative, and inclusive design standards.
- Creating safe, welcoming, and accessible town and village centres that are able to effectively adapt to changing trends and remain destinations of choice.
- Ensuring that everyone can access the essential services and facilities that they need, in turn, helping to achieve greater equality and inclusivity.
- Empowering local communities to actively shape and influence the future of their area from the grassroots level.

Objective 5 – To make sure that all of our residents are able to meet their housing needs by:

- Maximising the efficient use of the District's existing housing stock including empty homes and leveraging the opportunities presented by the re-use of previously developed land and buildings. Enabling the delivery of a continuous supply of high quality and sustainable new homes to meet identified housing needs over the period 2025 – 2041.
- Meeting the needs of those who are not able to access market housing by providing new homes that are genuinely affordable in the context of West Oxfordshire both in the short and long-term.
- Ensuring that the right type, size and tenure of new accommodation comes forward to meet a variety of other housing needs and engendering a greater sense of community cohesion and well-being.

Objective 6 – To foster a thriving, diverse, and resilient economy in West Oxfordshire, leveraging its strengths and future growth potential by:

- Providing a balanced portfolio of high-quality employment land to meet diverse needs including large and smaller businesses and to ensure flexibility.
- Supporting existing and future economic assets with the necessary infrastructure, land, and premises, while protecting important economic, social, and environmental roles.
- Adapting to future trends and technological changes to support evolving working practices, including remote, hybrid, and co-working models.
- Ensuring all residents benefit from improved education, training, and skills opportunities, enhancing economic and social well-being and supporting small and start-up businesses.
- Celebrating and sustainably growing the rural economy, supporting farmers, rural businesses, and the visitor economy.

4.11 Views on these are welcome as part of the consultation and as with the draft vision, any comments received will be taken into account as the full draft plan is prepared.

5. Core Policies

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- 5.1 This section presents a series of core policies designed to apply across the entire District. These policies address the most critical strategic issues facing West Oxfordshire in the period up to 2041.
- 5.2 The first policy focuses on climate change, demonstrating the District Council's commitment to addressing this vital, global issue by ensuring that all new development contributes to mitigating its impacts and is resilient to change.
- 5.3 The remaining core policies address other important strategic issues including the amount of development required, the areas where it should be focused and essential considerations related to infrastructure, health, water, design, the historic and natural environment.
- 5.4 These core policies establish the overarching framework for the place-based, settlement strategies and development management policies that follow.

Core Policy I – Climate Change

What will this policy do?

- 5.5 This policy will outline requirements for new development to reduce carbon emissions, increase energy efficiency, and adapt to the anticipated effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures, flooding, and extreme weather events.
- 5.6 By implementing these measures, West Oxfordshire will support the transition to a low-carbon economy and ensure a sustainable and resilient future for its communities.

Why is it needed?

- 5.7 With rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and biodiversity loss, it is critical to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance climate resilience, and minimise resource consumption.
- 5.8 By integrating energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainable construction practices, this policy supports the transition to net zero by 2050 and helps safeguard communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems against climate-related risks.
- 5.9 Without such proactive measures, future development could exacerbate environmental degradation, increase vulnerability, and undermine long-term sustainability goals.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.10 Our preferred approach is to adopt a holistic, pro-active approach that integrates both mitigation and adaptation measures in a way that contributes to better mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.11 We propose to do this by adopting the transition to net zero as a core principle of new development along with compliance with the energy hierarchy, aiming to reduce energy demand in the first instance, improve building efficiency with low-carbon solutions and maximise the use of renewable energy.

5.12 In line with national policy, our approach aims to ensure that priority is given to resource efficiency, including the re-use of existing buildings where possible and that full account is taken of all potential impacts of climate change both now and in the future.

5.13 An initial draft policy is provided below.

CP1: Climate Change

Supporting the Transition to Net Zero

All new development will be expected to contribute to the UK's legally binding net zero target by:

- Reducing operational and embodied carbon emissions.
- Promoting low-carbon construction methods and materials.
- Integrating energy-efficient technologies and designs.

Compliance with the Energy Hierarchy

New development must adhere to the energy hierarchy:

- **Lean:** Prioritise energy efficiency and reduce energy demand in the first instance.
- **Clean:** Enhance building efficiency through low-carbon energy solutions.
- **Green:** Maximise the use of renewable energy generation on-site.

Re-use and Resource Efficiency

To reduce environmental impact, new development must:

- **Prioritise** the reuse and refurbishment of existing buildings where possible.
- **Adopt** circular economy principles in construction and material sourcing.

Renewable and Low Carbon Energy

New developments should support and facilitate:

- On-site renewable energy generation such as solar panels, heat pumps, and district heating schemes.
- Integration of low carbon energy infrastructure to future-proof developments against changing energy demands.

Climate-Responsive Design and Layout

All new development must consider:

- Landform and site-specific environmental conditions to maximise energy efficiency.
- Building orientation, massing, and landscaping to minimise energy consumption and enhance microclimate benefits.
- Sustainable transport links and active travel infrastructure to reduce reliance on fossil fuel-based transport.
- Designing for future climate conditions, ensuring long-term adaptability and resilience.

Adaptation Measures

New development must be designed to be resilient to the anticipated impacts of climate change including flood resilience, climate resilient landscaping, heat mitigation and water efficiency measures.

Nature Based Solutions

New development should prioritise nature-based solutions to address climate change by enhancing biodiversity, improving water management, and increasing carbon sequestration.

Climate Impact Assessment (CIA)

Major developments must be accompanied by a climate impact assessment (CIA) that:

- Demonstrates consideration of the full range of climate impacts, including:
 - Thermal comfort and overheating risk reduction.
 - Sustainable water management to address water scarcity.
 - Adaptation strategies for extreme weather events, including flooding and storms.
- Identifies the potential climate risks associated with the proposed development, including the risks of flooding, heatwaves, drought, and other extreme weather events.
- Assesses the effectiveness of mitigation and adaptation measures proposed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase climate resilience.
- Assesses the long-term implications of climate change on the development and its surrounding environment, including the potential impacts on infrastructure, natural resources, and local communities.
- Demonstrates how the development aligns with the Council's climate action plan and broader regional and national climate targets.
- Aligns with the Ecological Impact Assessment and Biodiversity Net Gain proposals by incorporating nature-based solutions and enhancing the development's biodiversity value in a practical and achievable way.

Core Policy 2 – Settlement Hierarchy

What will this policy do?

- 5.14 The purpose of this policy will be to establish a clear settlement hierarchy for the District by classifying West Oxfordshire's towns and villages according to their size and function.
- 5.15 In simple terms, the more sustainable towns and villages which offer a broader range of services and facilities will be ranked as higher tiered settlements with those towns and villages offering fewer services and facilities being ranked lower.
- 5.16 The anticipated role of each settlement tier will then be set out in the overall spatial strategy (see Core Policy 3 – Spatial Strategy) and other policies that follow.

Why is it needed?

- 5.17 National policy requires all local plans to promote a sustainable pattern of development. As this will differ by area, having a defined settlement hierarchy for West Oxfordshire will help to provide clarity on where future growth will be focused and what development will be allowed to take place and where.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.18 The current West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 already includes a settlement hierarchy based on the following categories of towns and villages:
- **Main service centres** (Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton)
 - **Rural service centres** (Bampton, Burford, Charlbury, Eynsham, Long Hanborough, Woodstock and the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village – now referred to as Salt Cross Garden Village)
 - **Villages** (for example, Aston, Brize Norton, Curbridge, Freeland, North Leigh).
 - **Small villages, hamlets and open countryside** (all other villages and settlements not listed in the other categories plus the open countryside)
- 5.19 The existing hierarchy is well-used and generally accepted in terms of how the different towns and villages are ranked or classified. Our preferred approach is therefore to roll forward and update the current settlement hierarchy rather than re-working it.
- 5.20 The following definitions will therefore apply.

Tier 1 - Principal Towns

The District's largest settlements, offering a comprehensive range of services and facilities including public transport and employment opportunities. Functioning as the District's primary service centres, supporting a large number of other towns, villages and rural areas.

Tier 2 - Service Centres

Medium-sized settlements providing a broad range of services and facilities but at a smaller scale than Tier 1 settlements. Functioning as important local service centres for surrounding areas providing for most day-to-day needs.

Tier 3 - Villages

Larger villages acting as important local hubs for nearby smaller villages and hamlets, providing for some essential day-to-day needs.

Tier 4 - Small Villages, Hamlets and Open Countryside

The District's smallest settlements with very limited services and infrastructure and typically with a strong rural character. Also includes areas of open countryside.

5.21 An initial draft policy is provided below.

CP2 – Settlement Hierarchy

The proposed settlement hierarchy for West Oxfordshire is as follows:

Tier 1 – Principal Towns

Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton

Tier 2 – Service Centres

Bampton, Burford, Charlbury Eynsham, Long Hanborough, Woodstock, Salt Cross Garden Village (new)

Tier 3 – Villages

Alvescot, Ascott under Wychwood, Aston, Bladon, Brize Norton, Cassington, Chadlington, Churchill, Clanfield, Combe, Curbridge, Ducklington, Enstone, Filkins & Broughton Poggs, Finstock, Freeland, Fulbrook, Great Rollright, Hailey, Kingham, Langford, Leafield, Middle Barton, Milton under Wychwood, Minster Lovell (South of Burford Road), North Leigh, Over Norton, Shipton under Wychwood, Standlake, Stanton Harcourt, Stonesfield, Tackley, Wootton

Tier 4 – Small Villages, Hamlets and Open Countryside

All other villages and settlements not listed above plus open countryside.

Core Policy 3 – Spatial Strategy

What will this policy do?

- 5.22 The spatial strategy will sit at the heart of the new Local Plan, setting out the expected pattern of growth that is expected to take place in the period up to 2041. It will link to Core Policy 2 - Settlement Hierarchy to provide clarity for all parties on where the primary focus of future development is expected to be.
- 5.23 It will also provide the overarching context for the other policies that follow.

Why is it needed?

- 5.24 In preparing the local plan, national policy requires the Council to promote a 'sustainable pattern of development' that seeks to:
- Meet the development needs of the area;
 - Align growth and infrastructure;
 - Improve the environment;
 - Mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects;
- 5.25 Strategic policies are expected to set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places and the spatial strategy lies at the heart of this, seeking to articulate in geographic terms how West Oxfordshire is expected to evolve in the period up to 2041.
- 5.26 Establishing a clear spatial strategy will help to provide certainty and enable change to happen in a co-ordinated, planned manner.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.27 Previously, we sought views on 8 different development 'scenarios'. These were essentially alternative approaches for how we might look to focus future growth to 2041 beyond that which is already committed (i.e. current permissions and allocations).
- 5.28 The 8 scenarios are briefly summarised below in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 – Alternative Development Scenarios to 2041

Scenario	Description
Scenario 1 - Hierarchal approach	Roll forward the adopted Local Plan 2031 spatial strategy. This is based on an 'hierarchal' approach whereby most new development will be focused at Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton, with additional growth at rural service centres, in particular Eynsham and Woodstock and more limited development in the villages. At small villages, hamlets and in the open countryside, development will be restricted to that which requires and is appropriate for a rural location.

Scenario	Description
Scenario 2 - Main Service Centre Focus	The majority of future development to be focused more specifically at Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton, with proportionately less development then expected to take place at the rural service centres and villages. Development elsewhere would continue to be restricted to that which requires a rural location.
Scenario 3 – Witney Focus	Most future development to be focused at Witney as the District's largest town.
Scenario 4 – Carterton Focus	Most future development to be focused at Carterton as the District's second largest town.
Scenario 5 – Dispersed Growth	A 'dispersed' approach to future planned growth whereby some additional growth would take place at Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton and the rural service centres, but there would be a much stronger emphasis on small to medium-scale development taking place in the larger villages.
Scenario 6 – Village Clusters	Similar to Scenario 5 in taking a more dispersed approach to growth but with villages being considered collectively in small groups or 'clusters' based on the services and facilities they are able to cumulatively offer.
Scenario 7 – New Settlement	Future growth to be focused primarily at a large, purpose-built new settlement somewhere in the District.
Scenario 8 – Public Transport Focus	Future growth to be focused along key public transport corridors and around public transport hubs e.g. rail stations.

- 5.29 The consultation emphasised the fact that these options are not mutually exclusive and that depending on stakeholder feedback and further evidence of need and opportunity, a combination of different approaches may be identified as the preferred option.
- 5.30 Notably, the consultation response generated strong support for Scenarios 1, 2, 4 and 8 suggesting that many respondents could see merit in focusing growth at the District's larger, more sustainable settlements and at locations that benefit from good existing or potential public transport opportunities.
- 5.31 Less support was expressed for Scenarios 3, 5, 6 and 7 suggesting that respondents were concerned about the cumulative impacts of dispersing growth more evenly, delivering another new settlement beyond Salt Cross Garden Village which is yet to begin construction and continuing to focus new development at Witney which has already absorbed significant growth in recent years.
- 5.32 Taking account of the consultation feedback received and emerging evidence, including in relation to future development needs and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) our preferred approach is outlined in Core Policy 3 – Spatial Strategy below.

- 5.33 The preferred approach is based on a combination of the scenarios consulted on at the previous stage and reflects the updated approach and terminology outlined in draft Core Policy 2 – Settlement Hierarchy.
- 5.34 It is also informed by the draft plan objectives outlined in Section 4 including, for example, the need to reduce carbon emissions and maximise the use of previously developed (brownfield) land.
- 5.35 In relation to future residential development, for the purpose of the spatial strategy, small-scale development is proposed to be classed as between 1 – 10 units, medium-scale development between 11 – 300 units and strategic-scale development as more than 300 units.

CP3 – Spatial Strategy

The spatial strategy for West Oxfordshire to 2041 is underpinned by a commitment to delivering a sustainable pattern of development that:

- Meets identified housing, economic and community needs;
- Aligns growth with existing and planned infrastructure;
- Supports climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- Enhances the environment and recovers nature;
- Sustains the vitality of local communities;
- Protects the unique identity and character of West Oxfordshire’s towns, villages and countryside.

To achieve this, the strategy will:

1. Adopt a hierarchical approach to growth aligned with the settlement hierarchy:

- a. Principal Towns (Tier 1) – *Witney, Carterton and, to a lesser extent, Chipping Norton* will be the primary focus for growth, reflecting their existing roles, services and infrastructure. In relation to future residential development, this is anticipated to include a combination of small, medium and strategic-scale sites.

Growth in these locations will support regeneration, make best use of previously developed land and under-used sites, and deliver transformational opportunities, particularly in Carterton, where scalable new communities within the rural fringe will complement investment in the town and unlock its economic and social potential including its relationship with RAF Brize Norton.

- b. Service Centres (Tier 2) – *Bampton, Burford, Charlbury, Eynsham, Long Hanborough, and Woodstock* will accommodate a proportionate level of growth appropriate to the size of each settlement and to support their local service function. A particular focus will be placed on ensuring good public transport accessibility and active travel opportunities (both existing and proposed).

In relation to future residential development, this is anticipated to include a combination of small and medium-scale sites, with additional strategic-scale development (beyond that which is already committed through existing permissions and allocations) only taking place by exception and where necessary to meet identified development needs.

Due to their location within the Cotswolds National Landscape, the scale and extent of development at Burford and Charlbury will be limited in accordance with national policy.

Development at Salt Cross Garden Village will be guided by the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) and other relevant Local Plan policies.

- c. Villages (Tier 3) – A smaller scale of growth will be supported in villages that have a reasonable level of services and facilities, helping to sustain local communities and support local needs.

In relation to future residential development, this is anticipated to include a combination of small and medium-scale sites only and will be more limited in scale than at Tier 2 – Service Centres, guided by the existing size and relative sustainability of each settlement in terms of their available service and facilities.

As with Tier 2 – Service Centres, there will be a particular focus on locations which benefit from existing or proposed public transport and active travel opportunities and the scale and extent of development within the Cotswolds National Landscape will be limited in accordance with national policy.

- d. Small Villages, Hamlets and Open Countryside (Tier 4) – A more restrictive approach will apply, with development limited to that which requires a rural location.

Any residential proposals will be expected to be small-scale (minor) development and will only be permitted in limited circumstances as set out in Policy DM26.

2. Focus growth along key strategic corridors, notably:

- a. The A40 Corridor – A central growth area, particularly around *Eynsham*, *Witney* and *Carterton*, facilitating existing commitments and enabling new sustainable communities through strategic-scale growth. This includes supporting the aspiration for a rail connection from *Carterton* to *Oxford* via *Witney* and *Eynsham*, helping reduce car dependency and improve regional connectivity.
- b. A44 Corridor – Strategic-scale growth at *Chipping Norton* and medium-scale growth at *Woodstock*, enabling the delivery of committed development and supporting local infrastructure and services.

3. Prioritise sustainable travel and infrastructure alignment:

- a. Reduce the need to travel, particularly by private car, by focusing growth in accessible locations
- b. Encourage a modal shift toward walking, cycling, and public transport;
- c. Maximise use of existing public transport infrastructure, including but not limited to, *Hanborough* and *Tackley* rail stations;

- d. Align growth with existing and planned infrastructure, including transport, schools and utilities.
- e. Make effective use of land and address climate change:
- f. Prioritise the re-use of brownfield and under-utilised land;
- g. Promote compact, walkable communities;
- h. Avoid areas of flood risk, taking full account of climate change projections.

4. Protect environmental and landscape assets:

- a. Conserve and enhance the Cotswolds National Landscape, with great weight given to landscape and scenic beauty, and a limit on the scale and extent of development;
- b. Protect the Oxford Green Belt in accordance with national policy;
- c. Support the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, embedding opportunities to protect, restore, create and enhance biodiversity and ecological networks as part of development proposals.
- d. Support the integrated management of the natural and historic environment where practicable, and recognise the positive contribution heritage can make in effective place-shaping.

Core Policy 4 – Delivering New Homes

What will this policy do?

- 5.36 The purpose of this policy is to set out the number of new homes to be provided in the period 2025 to 2041 and to explain how these will be delivered (i.e. the various sources). This is known as the overall ‘housing requirement’.
- 5.37 In setting out the overall housing requirement, Core Policy 4 will provide the overall framework from which a number of other policies will flow, including those relating to the type and mix of new homes that are needed and sites that are proposed to be allocated for new housing.

Why is it needed?

- 5.38 Nationally, the Government is committed to boosting the supply of new homes that are available to people, with the overall aim being to deliver 1.5 million new homes over the next 5-years.
- 5.39 Rates of housing delivery in West Oxfordshire have been strong in recent years. Previous housing needs evidence¹ identified an overall housing need for West Oxfordshire of 660 homes per year, or 13,200 in total across the 20-year period 1st April 2011 – 31st March 2031.
- 5.40 In the period up to 31st March 2024, a total of 7,719 new homes were built, equating to an average of almost 600 homes per year. Whilst this falls slightly below the previously identified level of need, it aligns very closely with the housing requirement of the adopted Local Plan which is based on a ‘stepped’ trajectory – gradually increasing over time to allow for the longer-term delivery of larger strategic sites.

¹ Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment – SHMA (2014)

- 5.41 The new West Oxfordshire Local Plan has a key role to play in setting a new housing requirement for the period up to 2041, taking account of the latest evidence of housing need.
- 5.42 Setting a housing requirement provides certainty on the number of homes that are expected to come forward and helps to ensure that these are delivered in a sustainable, plan-led manner, taking account of relevant considerations, including the provision of supporting infrastructure.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.43 There are two key considerations for the emerging Local Plan relating to identified housing needs – the needs of West Oxfordshire District itself and the ‘unmet’ housing needs of Oxford City.

West Oxfordshire’s Housing Need

- 5.44 In order to determine the minimum number of homes needed, national policy requires the local plan to be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the Government’s ‘standard method’.
- 5.45 A new standard method was introduced through the updated NPPF in December 2024 and uses a formula based on a baseline of local housing stock which is then adjusted upwards to reflect local affordability pressures to identify an unconstrained assessment of the minimum number of homes needed in a particular area.
- 5.46 Paragraph 234 of the December 2024 NPPF confirms that the policies contained within it, apply to plan-making with effect from 12 March 2025.
- 5.47 The District Council have appointed consultants ORS to prepare a housing need assessment for West Oxfordshire using the new standard method. This confirms that the level of housing need for West Oxfordshire is **905 new homes** per year in the period 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2041 or **14,480 new homes** in total².
- 5.48 The purpose of the Local Plan is to set a housing requirement based on the extent to which this level of housing need can be accommodated. In the case of West Oxfordshire, although it will be very challenging, the Council considers that as a large rural district, with relatively few constraints compared to some areas, that West Oxfordshire’s identified housing need to 2041 should be met in full.
- 5.49 It is also proposed that an additional 10% buffer be applied to the planned level of supply, to take account of potential slippages in expected delivery on some sites. This will help to provide a greater degree of resilience and minimise any reliance being placed on speculative ‘windfall’ development.

² 905 per year x 16 years

Oxford's Unmet Housing Need

- 5.50 Previous housing needs evidence³ for Oxford City identified the level of need as being in the range of 1,200 – 1,600 homes per year. For the purposes of plan-making it was collectively agreed that the mid-point of 1,400 homes per year should be used.
- 5.51 Based on assumed capacity within Oxford, it was agreed via the Oxfordshire Growth Board that 15,000 homes represented a reasonable 'working assumption' regarding the level of Oxford's unmet housing need to be planned for in adjoining Districts.
- 5.52 Table 5.2 below shows how this was incorporated into the adopted local plans of each District.

Table 5.2 – Currently Agreed Apportionment of Unmet Housing Need from Oxford City

Local Authority	Number of additional homes identified in adopted Local Plans to accommodate Oxford's unmet housing need
Cherwell	4,400
South Oxfordshire	4,950
Vale of White Horse	2,200
West Oxfordshire	2,750

- 5.53 The adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 identifies two sites as contributing to West Oxfordshire's agreed apportionment of 2,750 homes including 2,200 homes at Salt Cross Garden Village (formerly known as the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village) and 550 homes at the West Eynsham SDA (out of a total of 1,000 homes).
- 5.54 Only part of the West Eynsham SDA (237 homes) has come forward to date.
- 5.55 In terms of how the issue of unmet need is addressed in the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan, there is currently a great deal of uncertainty following the recent withdrawal of the Oxford City Local Plan 2040.
- 5.56 Our understanding is that the City Council intends to progress a new Local Plan covering the period to 2042 and in terms of housing need, will align the plan with the new standard method (currently 1,087 homes per year for Oxford).
- 5.57 Assuming this applies from 1st April 2025 onwards⁴ and extends to 31st March 2042, the total level of housing need for Oxford would be 18,479 homes. Applying previous capacity assumptions of around 10,000 homes, the level of unmet need in the period 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2042 would therefore be around 8,500 homes.

³ Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment – SHMA (2014)

⁴ Reflecting the fact that the provisions of the new NPPF apply to plan-making with effect from 12 March 2025

- 5.58 This is a much lower level of unmet need than previously identified – largely a consequence of Oxford’s housing need under the standard method being much lower than the level of need previously identified in the Oxfordshire SHMA 2014 (1,087 homes per year compared to the SHMA mid-point of 1,400 homes per year).
- 5.59 Further discussions are clearly needed between the Oxfordshire local authorities on this issue but for the purpose of this preferred policy option consultation paper, we are assuming that a proportion of the new homes at Salt Cross Garden Village and the West Eynsham SDA will continue to be made available for the purposes of meeting Oxford’s unmet need once it has been further quantified.

Housing Supply

- 5.60 Looking forward from 1st April 2025, for the purpose of this preferred policy options paper, we are assuming that the future supply of new homes in West Oxfordshire will come from the following sources:
- Large existing residential commitments (planning permissions of 10 or more units as of 1st April 2025);
 - Small existing residential commitments (planning permissions of less than 10 units as of 1st April 2025);
 - Windfall allowance (assumed to be 150 homes per year); and
 - Local Plan allocated sites (current and new)

- 5.61 Breaking this down in more detail:

Large Existing Residential Commitments (10 or more units)

- 5.62 This includes all large existing residential commitments of 10 more units including sites with planning permission (detailed and outline) and resolution to grant planning permission subject to a legal agreement. As of 1st April 2025, this equates to a total of **2,262** dwellings.
- 5.63 It should be noted that a number of these sites (e.g. Land north of Hill Rise, Woodstock and land south of Milestone Road, Carterton) are allocated in the current 2031 Local Plan, adopted in September 2018.

Small existing residential commitments (planning permissions of less than 10 units as of 1st April 2025;

- 5.64 This includes all small existing residential commitments of less than 10 units. As of 1st April 2025, this equates to a total of **327** dwellings.

Windfall Allowance (150 homes per year)

- 5.65 Windfall sites are those which come forward speculatively through planning applications and are not specifically identified in the Local Plan. Based on past trends, a conservative estimate is that at least 150 new homes will come forward this way each year.

- 5.66 We intend to apply this allowance to the period 1st April 2028 – 31st March 2041 to ensure we are not ‘double-counting’ any sites with existing planning permission. This equates to a total of 1,950 homes over a 13-year period.

Allocated Sites

- 5.67 The current Local Plan 2031 was adopted in 2018 and identifies a number of ‘strategic’ and ‘non-strategic’ housing allocations. A number of these sites have now been completed (e.g. Stanton Harcourt Airfield, Oliver’s Garage, Long Hanborough). Others have planning permission (e.g. East Witney SDA, land at Hill Rise, Woodstock and land north of Banbury Road, Woodstock).
- 5.68 There are seven allocated sites that do not yet have planning permission in whole. This includes:
- Salt Cross Garden Village (formerly referred to as the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village)
 - North Witney SDA
 - East Chipping Norton SDA
 - West Eynsham SDA
 - REEMA North and Central, Carterton
 - Land at Myrtle Farm, Long Hanborough
 - Woodford Way Car Park, Witney
- 5.69 With the exception of land at Myrtle Farm, Long Hanborough, active progress is being made bringing all of these seven sites forward. Further information on each is set out where relevant in Section 7 – Settlement Strategies.
- 5.70 Collectively, we consider it reasonable to assume delivery of around 5,200 homes from these seven allocated sites in the period 2025 – 2041.
- 5.71 An initial draft policy reflecting this overall approach is provided below.

CP4 – Delivering New Homes

Housing Requirement

Based on the level of identified housing need for West Oxfordshire in the period 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2041, the overall local plan housing requirement will be 14,480 new homes, equating to an annual delivery of 905 dwellings.

This figure will be used to calculate the Council’s five-year housing land supply position and forms the baseline for future housing provision.

Subject to further discussions and quantification on any unmet need arising from Oxford City, the housing requirement may be adjusted accordingly. Any additional requirement included for Oxford City will be treated separately for the purposes of calculating the Council’s 5-year housing land supply position.

Housing Supply and Buffer

To ensure the housing requirement for West Oxfordshire is not only met but exceeded where possible, the planned level of housing supply in the period 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2041 will include a 10% buffer. Total planned supply over this period will therefore be 16,000 homes⁵.

This buffer allows for flexibility and contingencies, ensuring a robust response to any unforeseen shortfalls in delivery. The additional supply seeks to ensure that the District can meet its growth needs while maintaining resilience.

Subject to further discussions and quantification on any unmet need arising from Oxford City, the overall housing supply assumptions may be further adjusted upwards.

Sources of Housing Supply

The overall housing requirement will be met through a combination of existing commitments, site allocations and a reasonable windfall allowance. The current working assumption is as follows:

Large existing planning permissions (>10 dwellings) at 1 st April 2025	2,036 ⁶
Small existing planning permissions (<10 dwellings)	294 ⁷
Allocated sites ⁸	11,700
Windfall allowance (150 per year from 2028 – 2041)	1,950
Total	16,000

Exceeding the Minimum Requirement

While the housing requirement represents the minimum number of homes to be delivered, this policy ensures a proactive approach by planning for more than the baseline need, with a total planned supply of 16,000 homes - above the required figure, providing capacity to support future growth and ensure flexibility in delivery.

Allocated Sites

Site allocations will ensure that development is strategically focused on key growth locations in accordance with the overall spatial strategy set out in Core Policy 3 – Spatial Strategy.

Windfall Allowance

A windfall allowance of 150 homes per year from 2028 to 2041 is also factored in, providing for housing development on sites not specifically allocated in the Local Plan. This allows for flexibility and acknowledges the potential for smaller, unplanned sites to contribute to the overall housing supply.

⁵ 15,980 homes rounded up to 16,000

⁶ Applies a 10% discount for potential lapses

⁷ Applies a 10% discount for potential lapses

⁸ Assumes delivery of 5,200 homes from remaining Local Plan 2031 allocations and 6,500 homes from new Local Plan 2041 allocations

Core Policy 5 – Supporting Economic Growth and Local Prosperity

What will this policy do?

- 5.72 This policy will help to support economic growth by ensuring a sufficient supply of high-quality employment land and floorspace, fostering business expansion, job creation, and vibrant commercial areas across the District.
- 5.73 Similar in nature to Core Policy 4, Core Policy 5 will set out the amount of employment and commercial floorspace which is anticipated over the plan period.
- 5.74 Like Core Policy 4, it will provide an overarching framework from which other policies will flow including those relating to the type and mix of new employment and commercial space needed, the protection and improvement of existing employment sites as well as proposed site allocations.

Why is it needed?

- 5.75 National policy is clear that the overall purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development, and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner.
- 5.76 Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives – economic, social and environmental. These are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways.
- 5.77 With particular regard to the economic dimension of sustainable development, it is essential that the local plan helps to build a strong and responsive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity.
- 5.78 At a local level, these aspirations are reflected in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision which aims to ensure that by 2050, Oxfordshire is a globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive economy, generating high-quality, productive and knowledge-based employment.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.79 To help inform the local plan, we have commissioned an economic needs assessment (ENA) through consultants AECOM. The primary purpose of the ENA is to help establish a clear economic vision and strategy for West Oxfordshire based on an understanding of existing and future business needs which can then be reflected in the policies and proposals of the local plan.
- 5.80 The ENA focuses on relevant uses within planning Use Class E including office, R&D and light industrial as well as Use Class B2 – general industrial and Use Class B8 – storage and distribution.

5.81 In considering the amount of land and floorspace to plan for, the ENA considers three main scenarios:

- Labour demand (based on forecast job growth)
- Labour supply (based on population and housing growth projections)
- Past take-up (a trend-based scenario based on a continuation of historical take-up rates)

5.82 The modelling which has been undertaken has helped to inform our approach to the total amount of employment land and floorspace to be provided in the period to 2041 as set out in Core Policy 5 below.

CP5 – Supporting Economic Growth and Local Prosperity

Employment and Floorspace Provision (2024 – 2041)

The Council will make provision for the necessary employment land and floorspace to support economic growth, ensuring a diverse range of job opportunities across Planning Use Classes E (Office, Research & Development, and Light Industrial), B2 (General Industrial), and B8 (Storage and Distribution).

These figures are indicative and provide flexibility for economic development, without being considered an absolute requirement or maximum cap. They reflect the evolving nature of economic demand and the need for flexibility in planning.

Use Class	Lower Range	Upper Range
E – Office & R&D	0.9ha	6.4ha
Industrial – B2 & B8	3.5ha	25ha

Sources of Employment Provision

These indicative employment floorspace and land requirements will be sourced from:

- Existing planning permissions, contributing to both current and future employment opportunities.
- Site allocations, focusing on delivering new employment opportunities in accordance with the overall spatial strategy outlined in Core Policy 3 and in response to evolving market demands and technological advancements.

Flexibility and Adaptability in Employment Provision

The employment land and floorspace figures are indicative and will be treated with a degree of flexibility to respond to changing economic circumstances, market conditions, and emerging growth sectors. The Council will actively monitor this policy to ensure that West Oxfordshire remains responsive to new opportunities and challenges in employment and economic development.

Core Policy 6 - Delivering Infrastructure In-Step with New Development

What will this policy do?

- 5.83 Core Policy 6 will help to ensure that when new development comes forward, it is only able to do so, when the right supporting infrastructure is in place or proposed to be in place in a timely manner.
- 5.84 This is essential for ensuring that our existing infrastructure (roads, schools, health care, sewage capacity etc.) is not placed under unreasonable pressure and can successfully accommodate any additional requirements associated with future planned growth.

Why is it needed?

- 5.85 In defining sustainable development, national policy emphasises the importance of identifying and co-ordinating the provision of infrastructure. This is a key factor in deciding the most appropriate pattern of development – the logic being that future growth should be steered towards locations that are well-served by existing infrastructure and/or capable of being well-served in the future.
- 5.86 This is reflected in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision which emphasises the importance of high-quality development which is properly supported by necessary infrastructure including excellent digital connectivity.
- 5.87 Ensuring that new development is supported by appropriate investment in supporting infrastructure has also been a recurring theme raised by stakeholders through consultation on the emerging local plan to date, with particular concerns raised around the capacity of local sewage treatment works to accommodate further growth along with the ability of the A40 to absorb additional traffic.
- 5.88 It is for these reasons that the provision of supporting infrastructure has been identified as a strategically important issue for the new local plan to highlight and respond to effectively.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.89 National policy requires local plans to set out the contributions expected from development relating to infrastructure such as that needed for education, health, transport, flood and water management, green and digital infrastructure.
- 5.90 In this respect, to help inform the emerging Local Plan, the Council has commissioned an independent Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) through consultants Capita. The primary purpose of the IDP is twofold – firstly a baseline assessment of current infrastructure provision based on committed growth to help identify any particular ‘pinch-points’ (i.e. lack of capacity) and secondly, to help identify what additional and improved infrastructure is needed to accommodate any further planned growth in the period up to 2041.
- 5.91 The IDP is being prepared on a District-wide basis and provides a solid, overarching understanding of the infrastructure improvements which are needed to support future growth.

- 5.92 Drawing on the information set out in the District-level IDP, specific infrastructure requirements linked to proposed site allocations will be highlighted in site-specific policies as appropriate. However, inevitably as developments come forward, circumstances may change, or more detail may become available which, in some instances, may mean that these requirements need to be revisited.
- 5.93 Similarly, where windfall developments come forward and haven't been considered through the preparation of the District-level IDP, it will be necessary to consider any infrastructure requirements afresh.
- 5.94 It is for this reason that under Core Policy 6, a site-specific Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) will be required for all major development⁹ including allocated and unallocated (windfall) sites.
- 5.95 For minor developments, whilst a site-specific IDP will not be required, all planning applications will need to demonstrate that due regard has been had to the provision of supporting infrastructure (e.g. as part of an overall supporting planning statement or design and access statement).
- 5.96 In addition to identifying initial infrastructure requirements, the Local Plan plays a crucial role in ensuring that new or upgraded infrastructure is supported by sustainable long-term management and maintenance arrangements.
- 5.97 This is particularly important for larger developments that provide a variety of on-site infrastructure, such as open spaces, play areas, and public rights of way. Effective and cost-efficient upkeep is essential to benefit both developers and residents.
- 5.98 It is for this reason that the site-specific IDP required under Core Policy 6 must address long-term management and maintenance arrangements.
- 5.99 Notwithstanding the requirements for a site-specific IDP outlined above, it must be recognised that in some instances, it may not always be possible to ensure that all necessary supporting infrastructure is in place when needed. In such instances the Council may seek to use appropriate mechanisms to limit the occupancy of a new development until such time as the required infrastructure improvements have been put into place.
- 5.100 This will include the use of 'Grampian' planning conditions which restrict the commencement or occupation of a development until such time as the necessary infrastructure improvements are complete.

⁹ Major development being defined as all residential schemes of 10 or more units or non-residential development where the floorspace to be created is 1,000 sqm or greater.

CP6 - Delivering Infrastructure In-Step with New Development Infrastructure Investment Requirement

All new development proposals must be supported by timely and effective investment in new or enhanced infrastructure to meet the needs arising from the development. This includes, but is not limited to, transport, utilities, education, healthcare, open spaces, and community facilities. The delivery of infrastructure must be aligned with the development's progression to ensure it is in place when required by future occupants or users.

Infrastructure Delivery Plans for Major Developments

All major developments, including those on allocated sites, must be accompanied by a comprehensive, site-specific Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). The IDP should complement and draw information from the Council's district-wide IDP, clearly identify the range of infrastructure necessary to support the development and must:

- Detail the phasing of infrastructure delivery in alignment with the development's implementation.
- Provide a full and robust assessment of long-term management and maintenance arrangements for on-site infrastructure.
- Identify responsible parties for management and maintenance, ensuring cost-effective and sustainable arrangements that benefit both developers and future residents.

Ensuring Infrastructure Delivery through Planning Controls

To ensure that development is adequately supported by necessary infrastructure, the Council will use planning mechanisms such as Grampian conditions or planning obligations. These mechanisms will ensure that:

- Development does not commence or, where appropriate, is not occupied until required infrastructure improvements have been identified, secured, and scheduled for delivery.
- Infrastructure provision is phased and delivered in a timely manner to avoid undue pressure on existing local services or amenities.
- Developers will be required to demonstrate that there is acceptable wastewater capacity and surface drainage both on and off the site to protect new and existing residents.

The Council will closely monitor compliance with this policy and work with developers, infrastructure providers, and other stakeholders to ensure that infrastructure delivery aligns with local needs and statutory requirements.

Core Policy 7 – Water Environment

What will this policy do?

- 5.101 This policy seeks to ensure that all development in the District promotes sustainable water management practices, contributing to water security, environmental enhancement, and climate resilience.
- 5.102 It looks to do this by requiring new developments to adopt an integrated approach to the water environment such that different aspects including flood risk, sustainable drainage, water supply and disposal and the provision of blue infrastructure are treated holistically, leading to improved outcomes.
- 5.103 A simple example of this would be considering sustainable drainage opportunities alongside potential biodiversity enhancements rather than treating them separately.

Why is it needed?

- 5.104 Effective water management is critical for supporting sustainable development in West Oxfordshire, ensuring the District's long-term resilience to climate change, flood risk, and pressure on water resources.

Flood risk management - West Oxfordshire is particularly vulnerable to flood risks due to its river network, including the River Windrush, Evenlode, and Thames, and the district's low-lying areas. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, including heavy rainfall and flooding. An integrated water management policy will ensure that new developments are designed with robust flood mitigation measures, including the use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and water-sensitive design. This will help to minimize the impact of development on floodplains and reduce the risk of flooding to both new and existing communities.

Water Scarcity and Supply - The region is already experiencing increasing pressure on water resources, and future population growth is expected to exacerbate this challenge. A policy that promotes water efficiency and conservation measures, such as limiting water use to no more than 90 litres per person per day, will help address water scarcity. By incorporating water-saving technologies and systems like rainwater harvesting and greywater recycling, new developments can significantly reduce their demand on water supplies and contribute to more sustainable water consumption across the District.

Green Infrastructure and Environmental Enhancement - West Oxfordshire's rich natural environment, including its rivers, wetlands, and green spaces, is a vital asset. A comprehensive approach to water management will help to protect and enhance the district's biodiversity and natural habitats through the integration of green infrastructure. This approach supports the creation of multifunctional spaces that provide flood mitigation, water filtration, recreational opportunities, and wildlife corridors, contributing to both environmental sustainability and community well-being.

Water Quality and Wastewater Management - Ensuring the protection of water quality is essential to safeguarding public health and the district's natural ecosystems. Development can lead to water pollution through surface runoff, construction activities, and increased pressure on wastewater treatment facilities. A policy that requires developments to consider wastewater treatment and water quality at the local level will prevent deterioration of water bodies, ensuring compliance with the Water Framework Directive and supporting the health of local rivers and watercourses.

Resilience to Climate Change - Climate change presents a long-term challenge to West Oxfordshire, affecting both water availability and flood risk. Core Policy 7 will help ensure that new developments are resilient to these impacts. By prioritizing climate-responsive designs, such as SuDS, flood-resistant infrastructure, new/restored wetland habitats and adaptive water management strategies, the District can reduce vulnerability to climate extremes and protect both people and property from the adverse effects of climate change.

Alignment with National Policy - National planning policy, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), emphasises the importance of managing flood risk, water resources, and the natural environment. Core Policy 7 will ensure that West Oxfordshire's approach aligns with national objectives, while also reflecting the district's specific challenges and opportunities. This policy will also encourage best practices in sustainable urban drainage, water conservation, and blue-green infrastructure, setting a standard for environmentally conscious development.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.105 Given its significance to West Oxfordshire and the inter-relationship between different aspects of the water environment, our preferred approach is to require all new development to address the issue in an integrated, holistic manner, as this is considered more likely to lead to effective outcomes than different aspects such as flood risk and water supply being treated in isolation.
- 5.106 An initial draft policy is provided below.

CP7 – Water Environment

Integrated Water Management

All new development proposals must adopt a sustainable and integrated approach to water management. This includes the management of flood risk from all sources, the provision of blue infrastructure, water-sensitive design, and the implementation of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). Developments must be designed to mitigate water-related risks, including relevant consideration of the height of the water table, enhance water quality, and promote water conservation in line with the environmental objectives of the District.

Flood Risk and Water-Sensitive Design

Development must actively manage flood risk, taking into account the latest flood risk assessments and climate change predictions. Proposals must:

- Address flood risk from all potential sources, including surface water, groundwater, fluvial, and sewer flooding.
- Incorporate water-sensitive design principles, ensuring that water is treated as a valuable resource within the landscape. This may include permeable surfaces, rainwater harvesting, green roofs, and other innovative design solutions.
- Demonstrate how blue infrastructure - such as rivers, ponds, wetlands, and other water features - has been integrated into the design to enhance biodiversity, water storage, and recreational opportunities.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

SuDS must be incorporated into all developments to manage surface water runoff in a sustainable manner. Systems should:

- Mimic natural hydrological processes, providing multiple benefits such as reducing flood risk, improving water quality, and supporting biodiversity.
- Be designed to be multifunctional, creating aesthetically pleasing and ecologically rich landscapes while also providing recreational and educational value where appropriate.
- Be accompanied by robust long-term maintenance plans to ensure their continued function and effectiveness.
- Consider any off-site enhancements that may be necessary

Water Supply and Efficiency

All new developments must incorporate suitable measures that address both water supply and demand to increase efficiency and build resilience for future demand. Proposals for new dwellings must meet a target of no more than 90 litres per person per day of water use. This can be achieved through:

- The installation of water-efficient fixtures and fittings, such as low-flow taps, dual-flush toilets, and efficient showerheads.
- The inclusion of water recycling systems, such as greywater reuse and rainwater harvesting.
- Demonstrate compliance with a water efficiency assessment.

Wastewater and Water Quality

All proposals must demonstrate full consideration of wastewater management and water quality, ensuring that development does not adversely impact water bodies or aquatic ecosystems. A focused local strategy must be submitted with major development applications, outlining:

- How wastewater will be managed, including the treatment and discharge process.
- Measures to ensure compliance with water quality standards set out by local and national regulations.
- Any necessary infrastructure improvements to accommodate increased demand on wastewater treatment facilities.
- Strategies to prevent water pollution during and after construction, safeguarding local rivers, streams, and groundwater.

Local Water Management Strategy

Major developments must be accompanied by a site-specific water management strategy that outlines the integrated measures being taken to address water use, flood risk, water efficiency, and water quality. This strategy should also detail how long-term maintenance and monitoring of water infrastructure, including impacts on the water table will be managed, ensuring its resilience and effectiveness.

Core Policy 8 – High Quality and Sustainable Design

What will this policy do?

- 5.107 This policy seeks to ensure that all development enhances the built, historic and natural environment, respects the distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire, and contributes to the District's long-term sustainability and quality of life for residents.

Why is it needed?

- 5.108 A local plan policy on high-quality and sustainable design is essential for West Oxfordshire to ensure that development in the district aligns with its unique character, environmental needs, and long-term resilience. The district, which includes areas of significant natural beauty such as the Cotswolds National Landscape, requires careful design guidelines to protect and enhance its landscapes, heritage, and local architecture. Without such a policy, new developments could undermine the distinctiveness of the area, leading to visually inconsistent, environmentally damaging, or poorly integrated projects.
- 5.109 Moreover, a focus on sustainable design is crucial to address the growing challenges of climate change, ensuring that new developments are energy-efficient, low-carbon, and climate-resilient. This is especially important in West Oxfordshire, where the rural and semi-rural environment makes it essential to incorporate green infrastructure, renewable energy, and sustainable transport solutions. By promoting inclusivity, accessibility, and long-term durability, the local plan can help to ensure that new developments meet the diverse needs of the community, creating spaces that are adaptable to future needs and support social well-being.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.110 Our preferred approach emphasises the need for high-quality, sustainable design in all development proposals across West Oxfordshire, ensuring that new developments enhance the District's character while adhering to both local and national design standards.
- 5.111 It advocates for designs that are sensitive to local context, incorporating elements such as landscape integration, architectural quality, and the protection of important views, especially within the Cotswolds National Landscape and Blenheim World Heritage Site (WHS).
- 5.112 Key principles include sustainability, with a focus on energy efficiency and climate resilience, and inclusivity, promoting accessible and socially engaging environments. The preferred policy approach encourages the use of renewable energy, sustainable transport, and long-lasting, adaptable materials.
- 5.113 Developers are required to align their proposals with the West Oxfordshire Design Guide and the National Design Guide, providing detailed explanations through design and access statements. In some cases, proposals will be reviewed by design panels to ensure the highest standards are met.

CP8 – High Quality and Sustainable Design

Design Excellence and Sustainability

All development proposals in West Oxfordshire must deliver high-quality, sustainable design that enhances the character and distinctiveness of the district. Development should be guided by the principles outlined in the *West Oxfordshire Design Guide* and the *National Design Guide*, ensuring that it is responsive to both local context and national design standards.

Proposals should demonstrate how they contribute positively to the built and natural environment, prioritising sustainability, inclusivity, and long-term resilience.

Key Design Principles for West Oxfordshire

To ensure development respects and enhances the unique character of West Oxfordshire, the following design principles must be incorporated into all proposals:

- **Sustainability and Climate Responsiveness:** All designs must prioritise energy efficiency, low-carbon building methods, and climate resilience. Developments should incorporate renewable energy technologies, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), and provisions for sustainable transport, such as walking and cycling and electric vehicle infrastructure.
- **Inclusive Design:** Buildings and spaces must be accessible and inclusive to all users, creating environments that promote health, well-being, and social interaction. Public spaces should be well-connected, safe, and functional for diverse community needs.
- **Contextual Sensitivity:** New development must reflect and respect the local character, heritage, and landscape of West Oxfordshire, considering the scale, form, and materials of surrounding buildings and natural features.
- **Landscape and Views:** Development should protect and enhance the area's natural beauty, integrating landscaping that reflects local biodiversity and preserves important views, particularly in the Cotswolds National Landscape and in the area surrounding the Blenheim World Heritage Site.
- **Design Quality:** Proposals must achieve high architectural quality and craftsmanship, using materials and detailing appropriate to the local vernacular while encouraging contemporary innovation that complements the area's identity.
- **Long-Term Durability:** Design should consider the longevity of materials and the adaptability of spaces to future needs, promoting robust, low-maintenance solutions.

Alignment with Design Guidance

Proposals must demonstrate alignment with both the *West Oxfordshire Design Guide* and the *National Design Guide*. Applicants must provide design and access statements that clearly explain how their proposal reflects these guides and complies with the specific design principles set out for West Oxfordshire.

Design Review Process

Where appropriate, development proposals, particularly for major sites, may be subject to design review panels to ensure adherence to the highest standards of design quality and sustainability. The Council will expect applicants to engage early in the planning process to refine designs in line with these expectations.

Core Policy 9 – Healthy Place Shaping

What will this policy do?

- 5.114 The policy will ensure that all new development in West Oxfordshire promotes health, well-being, and active lifestyles for its residents by adhering to the principles of healthy place shaping. It seeks to embed health and well-being into the planning process, improving both physical and mental health outcomes for communities.

Why is it needed?

- 5.115 A policy on healthy place shaping in West Oxfordshire is needed to address the growing recognition that the built and natural environment plays a crucial role in shaping the health and well-being of our communities.
- 5.116 As development continues across the District, it is essential that new projects not only provide homes and infrastructure but also create environments that actively promote physical activity, mental well-being, social interaction and access to essential services. This is particularly important in a District like West Oxfordshire, which includes both rural and urban areas, each with unique health challenges and opportunities.
- 5.117 The policy is also needed to ensure that all new developments align with the Oxfordshire-wide principles of healthy place shaping, which aim to reduce health inequalities, foster healthier lifestyles, and improve access to green spaces, active transport options, and community facilities. With rising health concerns such as obesity, mental health issues, and social isolation, the policy provides a proactive framework to integrate health considerations into planning decisions, making sure that development contributes positively to long-term public health outcomes.
- 5.118 Additionally, with the growing impacts of climate change, a healthy place-shaping policy ensures that developments are designed to be resilient, promoting environments that support both physical and mental well-being through sustainable infrastructure, green spaces, and nature-based solutions.
- 5.119 By requiring Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) for major developments, the policy ensures that health impacts are assessed, monitored, and addressed from the outset, fostering a more holistic and health-conscious approach to development in the district.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.120 Our preferred approach focuses on integrating health and well-being into the planning and development process. All development will be required to adhere to the Oxfordshire-wide principles of healthy place shaping, promoting physical activity, social inclusion, access to green spaces, and overall well-being.
- 5.121 Biophilic design should be encouraged ensure the integration of natural elements into built environments that enhance the connection between people and nature, including light, air, water, plants, animals, natural landscapes, natural materials, colours and shapes. The aim of this is to enhance well-being, health and productivity by fulfilling our innate connection to nature.

- 5.122 For major developments, a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is required to evaluate the potential health effects, prepared using the Oxfordshire Health Impact Assessment Toolkit. The policy also requires an implementation plan for health-promoting features and ongoing monitoring to ensure long-term health benefits, encouraging early engagement with health stakeholders. This approach ensures that new developments actively contribute to healthier, more inclusive communities.

CP9 – Healthy Place Shaping

Healthy Place Shaping Principles

All development proposals in West Oxfordshire must adhere to the agreed Oxfordshire-wide principles of healthy place shaping. These principles aim to create environments that support health and well-being by:

- Encouraging physical activity through the provision of accessible open spaces, active travel infrastructure, and recreational facilities.
- Promoting social interaction by designing inclusive public spaces that foster community cohesion and engagement.
- Supporting access to healthy food options, the provision of new and enhanced healthcare, and essential services.
- Ensuring the development enhances mental well-being through the creation of safe environments, natural green spaces and biophilic design,
- Reducing health inequalities by ensuring equitable access to healthy, safe, and sustainable environments for all residents, particularly vulnerable groups.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

All major development proposals must be accompanied by a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). The HIA will assess the likely health impacts of the development on the local population, identifying both positive contributions to health and any potential negative impacts. The assessment should address issues such as air quality, active travel, access to services, green infrastructure, social inclusion, and housing quality.

The HIA must be prepared in accordance with the Oxfordshire Health Impact Assessment Toolkit, which outlines a comprehensive approach to identifying, assessing, and mitigating health impacts. The toolkit provides a structured framework for developers to ensure that their proposals contribute positively to public health goals, while identifying areas where improvements can be made.

Implementation and Monitoring

To ensure the effective implementation of this policy, the following measures will be put in place:

- **Implementation Plan:** For major developments, the HIA must include an implementation plan detailing how health-promoting features will be integrated into the design, construction, and management phases of the development.
- **Post-Development Review:** A post-development review may be required, particularly for strategic-scale developments, to assess the actual health impacts compared to those predicted in the HIA. This review will help refine future planning policies and improve health outcomes across the district.

Engagement with Health and Well-being Stakeholders

Developers must engage early in the planning process with health and well-being stakeholders, including the local public health team, healthcare providers, and community representatives, to ensure that health considerations are fully integrated into the design and delivery of the development.

Core Policy 10 – Sustainable Transport

What will this policy do?

- 5.123 West Oxfordshire is committed to promoting sustainable transport choices, reducing the reliance on the private car, and increasing the use of walking, cycling, and public transport.
- 5.124 This policy aims to reduce congestion, improve air quality, reduce carbon emissions, and support healthier, more sustainable communities. The shift toward sustainable transport options is central to achieving the district’s wider environmental, health, nature recovery and climate change goals and enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.
- 5.125 Key objectives of the policy are to:
- Promote and prioritise walking, cycling, and public transport as the primary modes of transport within new developments and across the District.
 - Reduce reliance on the private car by improving infrastructure and accessibility for alternative modes of transport.
 - Encourage sustainable and low-carbon transport options to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and reduce carbon emissions.
 - Integrate transport planning with land use planning to create well-connected, accessible, biodiverse and liveable communities.
 - Improve the safety, convenience, and comfort of walking, cycling, and public transport, particularly for vulnerable users such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

Why is it needed?

- 5.126 As West Oxfordshire continues to grow, it is essential that our transport policies evolve to support more sustainable, accessible, and environmentally friendly ways of moving around the district.
- 5.127 Transport is a major contributor to carbon emissions and air pollution. Encouraging sustainable travel modes will help West Oxfordshire meet its climate change commitments, improve air quality, and create healthier communities.
- 5.128 Walking and cycling provide significant physical and mental health benefits. A policy that prioritises active travel will help reduce rates of obesity, heart disease, and stress while promoting a healthier, more active lifestyle for residents.

- 5.129 Investing in sustainable transport options will help ease traffic pressures, improve journey reliability, and make it easier for people to access employment, education, and services. A well-connected transport network also ensures that rural areas remain accessible and vibrant.
- 5.130 Prioritising infrastructure for walking and cycling, such as safe crossings and dedicated cycle lanes, will help create safer streets, particularly for children, older adults, and people with mobility challenges.

- 5.131 By embedding sustainable transport at the heart of local planning, West Oxfordshire can create a greener, healthier, and more connected future for all residents.

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.132 Our preferred approach focuses on prioritising sustainable, inclusive, and low-carbon transport solutions in all new developments across West Oxfordshire. It looks to promote a hierarchy of transport modes, giving precedence to walking and cycling, followed by public transport, and discouraging reliance on private vehicles.
- 5.133 In line with national policy and LTCP5, it also incorporates a vision-led approach, ensuring that transport strategies are tailored to a site's location and scale while integrating sustainable solutions from the outset. Developments must minimise the need to travel and provide a genuine choice of transport options, supported by early transport planning, travel plans, and community engagement.
- 5.134 Our approach also emphasises the importance of inclusive transport design, ensuring accessibility for all users, particularly those with disabilities or reduced mobility. Additionally, it seeks to support low-carbon transport infrastructure, such as electric vehicle charging points and parking strategies that do not encourage excessive car use.
- 5.135 High-quality street and public space design is another key aspect, promoting pedestrian-friendly layouts, secure cycle parking, and green infrastructure to enhance environmental benefits.
- 5.136 Developments must also assess and mitigate potential transport network impacts, addressing congestion and safety while integrating emerging transport technologies.
- 5.137 The overarching goal is to reduce environmental harm, improve public health, and create more sustainable, connected communities in West Oxfordshire.
- 5.138 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

CP10 – Sustainable Transport

Prioritising Sustainable Transport Modes

New developments must be designed to:

- Give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and in connecting to neighbouring areas.
- Facilitate high-quality public transport access as the secondary priority.
- Discourage reliance on private vehicles through site layout, infrastructure, and design measures.
- Support a shift towards active and low-carbon travel modes and align with any relevant Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).

A Vision-Led Approach

The transport strategy for each development must reflect the site's vision, location, and scale, prioritising sustainability. Safe and suitable access must be provided for all users, integrating sustainable transport solutions from the outset.

Any significant impacts on the transport network must be cost-effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree through a vision-led approach.

Integration of Transport Planning in Development Proposals

All developments generating significant movement must be accompanied by a travel plan and a vision-led transport statement or transport assessment.

Transport considerations must be an integral part of early community engagement and master planning.

Development proposals must demonstrate how they minimise the need to travel and offer a genuine choice of transport modes including the integration of multi-modes of travel.

Accessibility and Inclusive Transport

All development proposals must provide for the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility. Designs must adhere to inclusive transport principles, ensuring barrier-free access for all users.

Supporting Low-Carbon Transport Infrastructure

Developments must provide green mobility solutions including safe, accessible, and convenient locations for charging plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles.

Parking strategies must align with sustainable travel priorities, ensuring car parking does not dominate site layouts.

High-Quality Design for Streets and Public Spaces

Streets, parking areas, and transport elements must be designed in accordance with the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.

Public spaces must integrate pedestrian-friendly layouts, secure cycle parking, and active travel infrastructure.

Development layouts should incorporate green infrastructure to enhance air quality, biodiversity and provide wider environmental benefits.

Transport Network Impact and Mitigation

Developments must assess and address potential impacts on existing transport networks, including congestion, capacity, and highway safety.

Proposals should identify opportunities to enhance existing or proposed transport infrastructure and respond to evolving transport technologies.

Promoting Environmental and Public Health Benefits

Transport infrastructure should be designed to minimise environmental impacts, including noise, air pollution, and ecological disruption. Developments should include appropriate mitigation measures for any adverse effects and aim for net environmental gains.

Core Policy 11 – Historic Environment

What will this policy do?

- 5.139 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that development in West Oxfordshire conserves and enhances the District's historic character. It prioritises the protection of designated heritage assets, including Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Registered Parks and Gardens and nationally important archaeological sites, while also recognising the value of locally significant, non-designated assets.
- 5.140 Development proposals will be required to assess and minimise any impact on heritage assets, with harm only justified if clear public benefits outweigh it. Where loss is unavoidable and justified, appropriate recording and mitigation will be required.
- 5.141 In summary, the policy will help to balance growth with the long-term preservation of West Oxfordshire's rich historic environment.

Why is it needed?

- 5.142 West Oxfordshire has a rich and distinctive historic environment that shapes the identity, character, and sense of place of its towns, villages, and landscapes. From the globally significant Blenheim Palace to the district's numerous Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, and archaeological sites, the historic environment is a key part of what makes West Oxfordshire unique.
- 5.143 Including a strong policy on the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets in the new Local Plan is essential to ensuring their long-term protection and sustainable management.

5.144 A clear and robust historic environment policy will:

- Protect Cultural and Architectural Heritage – Ensuring that development respects and enhances heritage assets, preserving their significance for future generations.
- Support Sustainable Growth – Guiding development in a way that balances modern needs with the conservation of historic sites, allowing for sensitive adaptation and reuse where appropriate.
- Enhance Local Character and Distinctiveness – Recognising the contribution of historic buildings, landscapes, and townscapes to the district’s identity, tourism economy, and community pride.
- Align with national legislation and guidance, ensuring that decision-making is clear, consistent, and legally sound.
- Promote environmental, social, and economic Benefits – protecting heritage assets not only safeguards the past but also enhances quality of life, supports the local economy, and contributes to sustainable placemaking.

5.145 By embedding heritage conservation in the Local Plan, West Oxfordshire can ensure that future development respects and reinforces the historic environment, maintaining the District’s unique sense of place while allowing for appropriate and sustainable change.

What is our preferred approach?

5.146 The preferred approach underpinning Core Policy 11 – Historic Environment is to ensure that all development in West Oxfordshire conserves and enhances the district’s historic assets while allowing for sustainable and sensitive change.

5.147 The policy prioritises the protection of designated heritage assets, including Blenheim Palace, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, and archaeological sites, recognising their cultural, architectural, and historical significance. It also acknowledges the value of non-designated assets, such as vernacular buildings and historic landscapes, that contribute to local character and identity.

5.148 The policy requires development proposals to assess potential impacts on heritage assets through Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) and take a hierarchical approach to impact mitigation, first avoiding harm, then minimising it, and finally justifying and mitigating any unavoidable loss.

5.149 Proposals that cause harm to designated heritage assets will only be permitted if there is clear and convincing justification with significant public benefits. Where harm or loss occurs, appropriate recording and dissemination of findings are required. This approach balances conservation with responsible development, ensuring West Oxfordshire’s historic environment remains a valued and protected part of the District’s future growth.

5.150 An initial draft policy is provided below.

CP 11 – Historic Environment

In addition to fulfilling its statutory obligations, West Oxfordshire District Council will:

- a) Prepare, update and adopt conservation area appraisals and management plans, prioritising those areas at greatest risk from development pressure or where the conservation area is most sensitive to change;
- b) Pursue opportunities for heritage-led regeneration where appropriate;
- c) Preserve, enhance and promote appreciation of the District's archaeological resources; and
- d) Develop a positive strategy towards assets that are considered to be 'at risk', including the creation of a local register.

All development proposals in West Oxfordshire should seek to conserve and/or enhance the special character, appearance, and distinctiveness of the District's historic environment. This includes the significance of heritage assets, their historic character, and their viability for sustainable uses consistent with their conservation. Development must adhere to national legislation, policies, and guidance for the historic environment.

In determining planning applications, great weight will be placed on conserving and/or enhancing the significance of designated heritage assets (the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This includes:

- The Outstanding Universal Value and significance of Blenheim Palace and Park, designated as a World Heritage Site (WHS), in accordance with its WHS Management Plan.
- The architectural and historic interest of Listed Buildings, particularly their character, fabric, and settings.
- The character and/or appearance of the District's Conservation Areas and their settings, considering the contribution of their surroundings to their historical and visual significance.
- The archaeological and historic interest of nationally important monuments (whether Scheduled or not), with emphasis on their fabric and settings.
- The cultural, architectural, and historic interest of Registered Parks and Gardens, taking into account the contribution of their surroundings to their significance.

In addition, significant weight will be given to the value of non-designated heritage assets, including vernacular buildings (e.g., traditional agricultural buildings, chapels, mills) and archaeological remains (above and below ground) that contribute meaningfully to the District's historic environment.

For all development proposals that affect, or have the potential to affect, heritage assets, the following requirements apply:

Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA): Applications must provide a detailed assessment of the heritage asset's significance, its setting, and historic landscape context, using appropriate expertise and recognised methodologies. The level of detail should be proportionate to the importance of the asset and the potential impact of the proposal. This assessment should be sufficient to understand the effect of the proposal on the asset's historic, architectural, artistic and archaeological interests.

Minimising Impact: Proposals must demonstrate, in order of preference:

- Avoidance of adverse impacts on the significance of the heritage asset(s) (including those arising from changes to their settings), and where possible, enhancements that reveal or better reveal the asset's significance.
- Minimisation of unavoidable harm, where justified by public benefits (including heritage benefits) through appropriate mitigation strategies in line with the significance of the asset and the nature of the impact. Any changes to or loss of physical fabric, features, or remains should be investigated, recorded, and the results made publicly available to support heritage education and conservation efforts.

Record and Advance Understanding: Where development results in substantial harm or loss to the significance of a heritage asset, developers will be required to record and advance understanding of that asset's significance.

This should be done in a manner suitable to the asset's importance and the impact of the development. The results of such studies must be published and made publicly accessible in order to enhance awareness and understanding. The ability to mitigate the loss of significance through investigation and recording will not contribute to the balancing judgment of whether such a loss is justifiable under this policy.

In cases where the loss of part or all of a heritage asset is unavoidable and justified, a reasonable and agreed timetable must be established to ensure necessary safeguarding and recording of fabric and remains, with contingencies for unexpected discoveries.

Core Policy 12 – Natural Environment

What will this policy do?

- 5.151 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all new development in West Oxfordshire actively contributes to the protection, enhancement, and recovery of the District's natural environment.
- 5.152 It aims to align development with the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy by promoting biodiversity, creating ecological networks, restoring and creating habitats and increasing species populations.
- 5.153 The policy also emphasises the need for development to integrate nature-based solutions and sustainable land use practices, ensuring that the district's ecosystems remain resilient and capable of supporting biodiversity for future generations.

Why is it needed?

- 5.154 A core policy that prioritises the protection, enhancement, and recovery of the district's natural environment is essential for several reasons. Firstly, West Oxfordshire is home to diverse ecosystems including woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands, that provide important services including carbon sequestration, flood management, recreation and biodiversity.

- 5.155 As development pressures increase, these ecosystems are at risk of degradation, potentially diminishing their ability to support biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and maintain the area's overall environmental health. The proposed policy will help to ensure that future developments are in harmony with nature and contribute positively to the natural environment.
- 5.156 Ensuring that new developments contribute to environmental sustainability is also vital for the District's long-term resilience. Climate change is a growing concern and West Oxfordshire, like many other areas, faces challenges such as extreme weather events, flooding, and changes in biodiversity.
- 5.157 A policy that focuses on the recovery and enhancement of the natural environment also aligns with growing public awareness, demand for environmentally responsible development and benefits for the local economy.

Extract from The Economics of Biodiversity – the Dasgupta Review (2021)¹⁰

“We are part of Nature, not separate from it. We rely on Nature to provide us with food, water and shelter; regulate our climate and disease; maintain nutrient cycles and oxygen production; and provide us with spiritual fulfilment and opportunities for recreation and recuperation, which can enhance our health and well-being. We also use the planet as a sink for our waste products, such as carbon dioxide, plastics and other forms of waste, including pollution. Nature is therefore an asset, just as produced capital (roads, buildings and factories) and human capital (health, knowledge and skills) are assets. Like education and health, however, Nature is more than an economic good: many value its very existence and recognise its intrinsic worth too. Biodiversity enables Nature to be productive, resilient and adaptable. Just as diversity within a portfolio of financial assets reduces risk and uncertainty, so diversity within a portfolio of natural assets increases Nature’s resilience to shocks, reducing the risks to Nature’s services. Reduce biodiversity, and Nature and humanity suffer.”

What is our preferred approach?

- 5.158 Our preferred approach is to ensure that all new development within West Oxfordshire contributes to the overarching goal of restoring and enhancing the natural environment.
- 5.159 By integrating the principles of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy into development proposals, we can support nature’s recovery, foster biodiversity, and create a district that thrives in balance with its natural surroundings.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review>

5.160 Key aims of the policy are to:

- Ensure that new development contributes positively to biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Integrate nature recovery principles in all planning decisions to enhance habitat connectivity and ecosystem health.
- Promote the restoration and creation of natural habitats, particularly those identified in the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and the protection of designated sites, especially Local Wildlife Sites.
- Support the reduction of biodiversity loss and facilitate the recovery of nature across the district.
- Encourage effective and integrated management of the natural and historic environment.
- Improve the quality of habitats that are created and enhanced as part of Biodiversity Net Gain proposals within developments, particularly in the local context.
- Ensure that development contributes towards the restoration of priority species populations.

5.161 An initial draft policy is provided below.

CP12 - Natural Environment

In line with the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and the District's commitment to sustainability, climate resilience, biodiversity and nature recovery, all new development in West Oxfordshire will be required to contribute to the protection, enhancement, and recovery of the natural environment.

Proposals are encouraged to take an integrated approach to the management of the natural and historic environment, where practicable.

Requirements for new development

All major development proposals will be required to demonstrate that they:

- Prevent harm to important habitats, species, and ecological networks, including those identified as part of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Enhance biodiversity by incorporating measures such as habitat creation and restoration and the inclusion of native landscaping and biophilic design that support local wildlife in the local context.
- Establish ecological corridors and/or networks that re-connect fragmented habitats, allowing wildlife to move freely between important sites and habitats, both within the development and extending beyond to the surrounding landscape.
- Support nature recovery by implementing specific measures to restore biodiversity in areas of ecological decline, including but not limited to planting native wildflower meadows, establishing woodlands and hedgerows and creating wetlands.
- Implement sustainable management practices for continuous natural areas, such as ongoing maintenance, monitoring, and adaptive management, to ensure long-term benefits for biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Integration with the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

In order to align with the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), development proposals should:

- Support the LNRS to ensure that projects are aligned with the District's priority areas for nature recovery.
- Expand and develop existing and new ecological networks by creating and restoring natural habitats and improving connectivity for species listed in the LNRS.
- Use the opportunities included in the LNRS to inform proposals for Biodiversity Net Gain, green infrastructure and sustainable design.
- Where appropriate, reflect the results of collaboration with local conservation groups, landowners, and stakeholders to support nature-based solutions.

Protection of Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)

- Development will avoid loss, deterioration or harm to locally important wildlife and geological sites.

Ecological Impact Assessment and Mitigation

All major developments must be accompanied by a comprehensive Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) that evaluates the potential impacts of the development on local biodiversity and ecosystems. The EclA must clearly confirm how negative impacts will be mitigated or compensated and how the natural environment will be enhanced.

In cases where significant impacts on biodiversity cannot be avoided, the development must implement an effective mitigation or compensation strategy consistent with best practice guidelines and the principles of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Monitoring and Reporting

All major developments will be required to submit a post-development management and monitoring plan detailing how biodiversity enhancements will be monitored and maintained over time. Developers will be expected to submit progress reports on the success of their ecological mitigation, compensation and enhancements and any necessary short-term remediation measures and long-term adjustments to the management plan based on findings from regular monitoring.

6. Place-Based Policies

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- 6.1 In this section of the paper, we set out a series of ‘place-based’ policies. Unlike the core policies outlined in Section 6, the place-based policies are not intended to apply on a District-wide basis but rather are intended to apply to smaller, geographically specific areas and will therefore only be of relevance to development proposals within or affecting those areas.
- 6.2 For example, draft Policy PL1 which applies to the Cotswolds National Landscape will be of relevance to development proposals located within the Cotswolds National Landscape or where a proposal might affect its setting.
- 6.3 We would welcome views on the overall scope of these policies as well as the preferred approach which is proposed under each. We would also welcome views on whether there are any additional place-based policies that should be included in the new Local Plan.

Policy PL1 – Cotswolds National Landscape

What will this policy do?

- 6.4 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that development within and around the Cotswolds National Landscape conserves and enhances its natural beauty, special qualities, and scenic and cultural heritage, while safeguarding and enhancing its biodiversity and tranquillity.
- 6.5 The policy is intended to serve as a vital tool for balancing sustainable development with the need to protect and enhance the unique character of the Cotswolds National Landscape for future generations.

Why is it needed?

- 6.6 The policy on the Cotswolds National Landscape is a critical inclusion in the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan to ensure the long-term protection and enhancement of one of the area’s most valued natural and cultural assets. West Oxfordshire District Council has a duty to ‘seek to further’ the statutory purposes of the Cotswold National Landscape. The Cotswolds National Landscape, designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), holds significant environmental, cultural, and economic value, contributing to biodiversity, heritage, and the overall quality of life for residents and visitors. As a nationally protected landscape, it is imperative to maintain its special qualities, scenic beauty, and tranquillity, particularly in the light of growing development pressures.
- 6.7 Such pressures risk undermining the integrity of the National Landscape if not carefully managed. This policy is intended to provide clear guidance to ensure that any new development within or near the Cotswolds National Landscape is sensitively located and designed to avoid harm and to contribute positively to its conservation. Without this policy, there is a risk that poorly planned development could lead to adverse impacts such as loss of biodiversity, harm to the landscape’s visual character, and erosion of tranquillity, all of which are central to the area's designation and appeal.

- 6.8 By encouraging alignment with the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and relevant conservation frameworks (including the Cotswolds Nature Recovery Plan), the policy reinforces collaboration between stakeholders and ensures that developments contribute to wider environmental and community goals.
- 6.9 The policy is also important for addressing the broader challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, as the Cotswolds National Landscape plays a key role in creating, restoring and enhancing natural habitats, sequestering carbon, and maintaining ecological networks. It seeks to ensure that development not only avoids harm but actively enhances the landscape's ability to adapt to and mitigate these challenges.

What is our preferred approach?

- 6.10 Our preferred approach seeks to prioritise the conservation and enhancement of the area's natural beauty, special qualities, and scenic and cultural heritage. It emphasises sustainable and sensitive development that avoids adverse impacts and minimises unavoidable harm while taking proactive steps to contribute positively to the landscape.
- 6.11 The approach is aligned with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), ensuring that development proposals are carefully assessed for their potential effects on the protected landscape and adhere to the principle that major development within the area should only occur in exceptional circumstances and in the public interest.
- 6.12 Our approach also seeks to limit the scale and extent of development to maintain the character of settlements within the National Landscape, while encouraging alignment with the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and relevant conservation targets.
- 6.13 By giving great weight to conserving and enhancing the area's beauty, the policy is intended to provide a robust framework to manage development pressures and protect the landscape's ecological, cultural, and visual integrity.
- 6.14 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

PL1 - Cotswolds National Landscape

Development proposals within the Cotswolds National Landscape and its setting will be required to:

Conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape, including its special qualities, landscape and scenic beauty, cultural heritage (including the historic environment), natural heritage (including biodiversity), and relative tranquillity.

Be sensitively located and designed to:

- 1) Avoid adverse impacts on the natural beauty of the National Landscape.
- 2) Minimise and mitigate any unavoidable impacts.

Demonstrate proactive conservation and enhancement, showing that all reasonably practicable steps have been taken to go beyond mere avoidance and mitigation of harm, actively contributing to the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

Align with the objectives and policies of the Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan and Nature Recovery Plan and contribute to their delivery.

Development proposals within the Cotswolds National Landscape must also:

Assess whether the development constitutes major development under paragraph 183 of the National Planning Policy Framework. If it is deemed major, in line with national policy, applicants must demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist, and that the development is in the public interest.

Limit the scale and extent of development, ensuring it remains proportionate to the settlement in which it is proposed.

Contribute to relevant targets within the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework, as they apply to the Cotswolds National Landscape.

In determining proposals, great weight will be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape. This will include consideration of development outside the National Landscape where such development may harm its natural beauty, for instance, through impacts on views from within the National Landscape.

Policy PL2 – Oxford Green Belt

What will this policy do?

- 6.15 The purpose of this policy is to augment national policy and articulate how development proposals within the Oxford Green Belt will be considered in a West Oxfordshire context. The policy is intended to adopt a positive approach, encouraging suitable forms of development, in particular the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land and other 'grey belt' land, whilst protecting the fundamental purposes of the Green Belt designation.

Why is it needed?

- 6.16 The policy is needed to provide a clear and robust framework for managing development in this highly sensitive area, balancing the competing pressures of growth and environmental preservation. The Oxford Green Belt plays a crucial role in preventing urban sprawl, protecting the unique setting and historic character of Oxford and surrounding towns, and maintaining the openness and distinct identity of settlements. Without a tailored policy, the Green Belt could be at risk from inappropriate and uncoordinated development, potentially leading to the loss of its critical environmental, social, and cultural benefits.
- 6.17 This policy is particularly important in West Oxfordshire, where housing and infrastructure demands continue to grow. It ensures that development is steered towards previously developed (brownfield) and 'grey belt' land first, minimising unnecessary encroachment on greenfield sites.

- 6.18 Grey belt land is defined in national policy as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of the following green belt purposes:
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; and
 - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- 6.19 By setting clear priorities and safeguards, the policy helps protect the Green Belt's integrity and supports sustainable, well-planned development that benefits local communities and the environment.
- What is our preferred approach?***
- 6.20 Our preferred approach focuses on safeguarding the fundamental purposes of the Oxford Green Belt while accommodating necessary development in a controlled and sustainable manner. It adopts a sequential approach to development, prioritising the reuse of previously developed (brownfield) land and grey belt land that does not significantly contribute to relevant Green Belt purposes.
- 6.21 This approach will help to ensure that the Green Belt is protected from unnecessary urban sprawl and helps maintain the distinct separation between settlements, preserving the area's openness, scenic beauty, and cultural heritage.
- 6.22 Our preferred approach also seeks to positively encourage development that enhances the Green Belt's beneficial use, such as improving public access, recreation, and biodiversity, while addressing any derelict or damaged land.
- 6.23 It emphasises that any inappropriate development in the Green Belt should only be approved in very special circumstances and requires major developments to contribute to key public benefits, including affordable housing and infrastructure improvements in line with national planning policy, helping ensure that growth is balanced with the long-term protection of the Green Belt's fundamental purposes.
- 6.24 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

PL2 - Oxford Green Belt

The Oxford Green Belt is a vital environmental and planning designation that seeks to protect the openness, character, and purposes of the Green Belt while supporting sustainable development where appropriate.

Development proposals within the Oxford Green Belt will be assessed in accordance with the following principles:

I. Sequential Approach to Development

Development within the Green Belt must follow a sequential approach:

Priority 1: Previously Developed (Brownfield) Land – Proposals must, wherever possible, prioritise the redevelopment of previously developed land.

Priority 2: Grey Belt Land – Development may occur on Grey Belt land, defined as land within the Green Belt that comprises previously developed land and/or other land that does not strongly contribute to any of the following Green Belt purposes:

- Checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- Preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another.
- Preserving the setting and special character of historic towns.

Priority 3: Other Green Belt Locations – Proposals for other locations in the Green Belt will only be considered after opportunities for development on brownfield and grey belt land have been fully explored and justified and subject to the considerations outlined below.

2. Beneficial Use of the Green Belt

Development proposals that positively contribute to the beneficial use of the Green Belt will be supported, provided they do not conflict with its purposes or harm its openness. Such benefits may include:

- Enhancing public access to the Green Belt.
- Providing opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation.
- Retaining and improving landscapes, visual amenity, and biodiversity.
- Addressing and improving damaged or derelict land.

3. Assessment of Harm and Very Special Circumstances

Substantial weight will be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development, as defined by national policy, will not be approved except in very special circumstances, where the potential benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

4. Definition of Appropriate Development

Appropriate development will be defined in accordance with paragraphs 154 and 155 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) or subsequent updates. This includes specified exceptions such as limited infilling, affordable housing in identified areas, and certain forms of infrastructure where they preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

5. Major Development Contributions

Where major development involving the provision of housing is proposed, it must comply with the 'Golden Rules' set out in paragraph 156 of the NPPF, including:

- The provision of new affordable homes.
- Necessary improvements to local or national infrastructure.
- The creation or enhancement of green spaces accessible to the public.

6. Weight for Compliance with the Golden Rules

In line with national policy, development proposals that comply with the Golden Rules will be given significant weight in favour of the grant of planning permission.

Policy PL3 - Conservation and Management of the Windrush Valley

What will this policy do?

- 6.25 The purpose of this policy is to guide development proposals and land management within the Windrush Valley.
- 6.26 The Windrush Valley is defined by the meandering River Windrush, which originates near Taddington in Gloucestershire and flows eastward through a number of West Oxfordshire towns including Burford, Witney and on toward the Thames at Newbridge.

Why is it needed?

- 6.27 The area is historically and culturally significant being renowned for its rolling countryside, unspoiled views, and quintessentially Cotswold charm.
- 6.28 The River Windrush and its surrounding habitats support diverse biodiversity, including riparian habitats such as floodplain meadows and rare and protected species such as otters and water voles. If not properly managed, there is a risk that development could fragment habitats, disrupt ecological networks and contribute to the loss of biodiversity.
- 6.29 The valley also plays a role in natural flood management by absorbing and slowing water flow from the River Windrush. Unless properly managed, there is a risk that development could reduce natural floodplains, increase surface runoff, and exacerbate flood risks downstream, including in Witney and surrounding areas.
- 6.30 The valley has significant historical and cultural value and provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Tourism is a key economic driver for West Oxfordshire, particularly in picturesque areas such as the Windrush Valley. Protecting it from harmful development will help maintain its draw for visitors, support local businesses and the broader economy.
- 6.31 The River Windrush already faces pollution challenges, with agricultural runoff, sewage discharges, and other pressures affecting its health. Additional development could worsen these issues, leading to greater strain on local ecosystems and public enjoyment of the river.

What is our preferred approach?

- 6.32 Our preferred approach focuses on sustainable conservation and management, using nature-based solutions to reduce flood risks, restore habitats, and enhance biodiversity.
- 6.33 It emphasises protecting the valley's landscape, heritage, and water quality, particularly the River Windrush, while aligning with the objectives of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 6.34 Collaboration with stakeholders and long-term adaptive management are central to ensuring the valley's ecological and cultural assets are preserved and enhanced for future generations.
- 6.35 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

PL3 – Conservation and Management of the Windrush Valley

Upper Windrush Valley

Development and land management proposals in the Upper Windrush Valley must:

- a) Incorporate natural flood management techniques, such as rewilding, wetland creation, and re-meandering of watercourses, and the restoration of floodplain meadows to reduce flood risk downstream.
- b) Maintain and restore natural hydrological processes, ensuring that interventions enhance water quality, reduce surface water runoff, and protect the ecological health of watercourses, including the River Windrush and its tributaries.
- c) Prioritise projects that align with catchment-wide flood mitigation strategies and provide multiple environmental benefits, including biodiversity enhancement, carbon sequestration, and alignment with the aims and objectives of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Windrush in Witney Project Area

Proposals within the Windrush in Witney Project Area must:

- a) Conserve and enhance the area's unique landscape character, incorporating natural processes to restore and manage historic water meadows, hedgerows, and riparian habitats.
- b) Protect and integrate heritage features, including mills, bridges, and archaeological assets, ensuring they are preserved within their natural and historic context.
- c) Support community-driven conservation efforts and green infrastructure improvements, including access enhancements that promote sustainable enjoyment of the area.
- d) Demonstrate alignment with the aims and objectives of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Lower Windrush Valley

Proposals for development in the Lower Windrush Valley must:

- a) Deliver comprehensive ecological enhancements that prioritise the creation of a mosaic of ponds, reedbeds, and grasslands and other habitats to benefit local species.
- b) Enhance public access and recreational opportunities where appropriate, balancing ecological sensitivity with community needs through an appropriate green infrastructure approach, including the creation of new access routes.
- c) Ensure that new habitats and species enhancements are managed and monitored in the long-term, ensuring ecological outcomes are sustained and adapted to evolving environmental conditions.
- d) Demonstrate alignment with the aims and objectives of the Lower Windrush Valley Project Strategy and the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

An Integrated Approach

All proposals across the Windrush Valley must:

- a) Demonstrate how they contribute to the strategic objectives of natural flood management, heritage conservation, biodiversity enhancement, and the aims and objectives of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- b) Avoid harm to the valley's ecological and visual integrity, incorporating mitigation measures where necessary to safeguard the quality of watercourses, including the River Windrush and its tributaries.
- c) Engage with stakeholders, including local communities, conservation organizations, and water management authorities, to ensure alignment with local priorities, including access.
- d) Address the cumulative impact of development or land-use changes, ensuring the valley's environmental and cultural assets are enhanced in perpetuity.

Policy PL4 – Wychwood Forest

What will this policy do?

- 6.36 This policy seeks to ensure that development within the Wychwood Forest area in West Oxfordshire contributes to the restoration and protection of habitats, enhancement of local biodiversity and alignment with the broader objectives of conserving the ecological and historical significance of this unique landscape. It also emphasises the importance of protecting and enhancing nature reserves within the Wychwood Forest area to strengthen ecological resilience and preserve valuable natural assets within this historic landscape.
- 6.37 The former Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood is an area of exceptional ecological and historical value, home to diverse habitats and species, including rare and protected species.
- 6.38 It includes a number of designated nature reserves including the Wychwood National Nature Reserve which is one of the largest areas of ancient semi-natural oak and ash broadleaved woodland in Oxfordshire, with large herds of fallow deer and notable flora including early purple orchid and less common plants such as Herb Paris and Autumn crocus.
- 6.39 This policy will help to ensure that development within the area enhances biodiversity, restores damaged ecosystems, and contributes to the long-term health of the landscape. It aligns with national and local conservation goals, ensuring that development in the Wychwood Forest area supports the goals of the Wychwood Forest Trust including the restoration of landscape character and mix of habitats and the promotion of community well-being.

What is our preferred approach?

- 6.40 Our preferred approach focuses on safeguarding and enhancing the ecological integrity of the Wychwood Forest area through sustainable development practices. It emphasises the restoration and protection of key habitats, the delivery of measurable biodiversity net gains, and the integration of green infrastructure to promote habitat connectivity and resilience. A core element of this approach is ensuring that development actively contributes to the conservation and enhancement of local nature reserves, recognising their critical role as biodiversity hotspots.
- 6.41 This approach aligns development with broader conservation objectives while addressing potential impacts through ecological assessments and sustainable land management practices.
- 6.42 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

PL4 – Wychwood Forest

Protection and Enhancement of Habitats

Development within or adjacent to the Wychwood Forest area must prioritise the protection, restoration, and enhancement of key habitats, including ancient woodlands, heathlands, grasslands, and wetlands.

Proposals should:

- a) Conserve existing habitats and protect them from fragmentation or degradation.
- b) Create new and restored habitats that increase ecological connectivity, with a particular emphasis on the recovery of semi-natural habitats and the aims and objectives of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- c) Implement measures to prevent pollution or disturbance to sensitive habitats, particularly ancient woodlands and ecologically valuable areas.
- d) Contribute, where appropriate, to the protection and enhancement of existing nature reserves within the Wychwood Forest area, ensuring they remain vital hotspots for biodiversity.

Landscape and Ecological Assessment

Development proposals must be supported by comprehensive ecological and landscape impact assessments, demonstrating:

- a) The potential impacts of the development on local biodiversity, key habitats, and species.
- b) Mitigation measures to address any negative effects on biodiversity and the wider landscape.
- c) How the proposal integrates with broader conservation strategies, including the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Network and the management objectives of local nature reserves.

Integration with Green Infrastructure

Proposals for new development must:

- a) Contribute to the enhancement and expansion of green infrastructure, including the creation of wildlife corridors and ecological linkages to support movement of species across the landscape.
- b) Integrate natural habitats and features such as ponds, woodlands, scrub and hedgerows, green spaces and native planting within the development to improve biodiversity outcomes.
- c) Ensure sustainable water management, including measures to protect water quality and promote wetland creation and restoration where appropriate.
- d) Support the ecological integrity of nearby nature reserves by maintaining buffer zones and minimising potential impacts such as light, noise, and pollution.

Sustainable Land Management

Proposals must support sustainable land management practices that:

- a) Protect soil health, reduce herbicide and pesticide use, and promote regenerative agricultural practices where applicable.
- b) Support local wildlife through sensitive management of farmland, woodlands and other natural habitats in the Wychwood Forest area.
- c) Enhance the role of nature reserves as centres for habitat restoration and nature recovery by ensuring surrounding land management practices are compatible with their objectives.

Policy PL5 – Carterton – Witney – Oxford Rail Corridor (CWORC)

What will this policy do?

- 6.43 The policy seeks to safeguard a broad corridor of land from Carterton to Yarnton for the delivery of a rail service to Oxford.
- 6.44 It ensures that new developments within the corridor do not obstruct or undermine the rail project and require contributions towards its delivery.
- 6.45 The policy also identifies potential broad locations for new mobility hubs at Carterton, Witney, and Eynsham, subject to further detailed site analysis.
- 6.46 Overall, it aims to facilitate strategic transport planning while supporting sustainable development in the District.

Why is it needed?

- 6.47 The policy is needed to address two critical challenges facing West Oxfordshire; severe traffic congestion along the A40 and the urgent need for more sustainable, environmentally friendly transport solutions in response to the climate emergency. It is also needed to provide long-term flexibility and future proofing of our local transport infrastructure.

Reducing traffic congestion on the A40

- 6.48 The A40 is a vital transport corridor but suffers from chronic congestion due to high levels of car dependency and volumes of traffic. Without significant improvements to alternative transport options, planned housing and employment growth will exacerbate this issue, leading to further delays, economic inefficiencies, and reduced quality of life for residents. Developing a rail solution provides a viable alternative to car travel, helping to ease the burden on the A40 and improve overall traffic flow.

Promoting Environmentally Friendly Transport

- 6.49 In the context of the climate emergency, it is essential to shift away from car-dominated transport systems that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and poor air quality. Rail transport offers a low-carbon, sustainable alternative that aligns with local, national, and global goals to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change. By prioritising investment in public transport infrastructure, the policy supports a transition towards greener, more sustainable mobility.

Future-Proofing the District's Transport Infrastructure

- 6.50 The policy is also needed to ensure that land critical for delivering a rail solution is safeguarded, preventing short-term development decisions from obstructing longer-term transport goals. This forward-thinking approach is essential to creating a resilient and sustainable transport system capable of accommodating future growth while reducing environmental impacts.
- 6.51 In summary, the policy is vital for reducing congestion on the A40, promoting environmentally friendly transport, and future-proofing West Oxfordshire's infrastructure to support sustainable growth in light of the climate emergency.

What is our preferred approach?

- 6.52 Our preferred approach is to proactively safeguard a strategic land corridor from Carterton to Yarnton for a rail solution, ensuring that future development within this corridor does not obstruct its delivery.
- 6.53 This approach emphasises integrating sustainable transport planning with land use decisions, requiring new developments to contribute to the rail project while supporting strategic goals to reduce congestion on the A40 and promote environmentally friendly transport.
- 6.54 It also broadly identifies potential station locations at Carterton, Witney, and Eynsham to enhance connectivity and guide further feasibility work.
- 6.55 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

PL5 – Carterton – Witney – Oxford Rail Corridor (CWORC)

Purpose of the Corridor

A corridor of land is identified extending from Carterton to Yarnton to safeguard the future delivery of a long-term rail solution for West Oxfordshire. This corridor is intended to support sustainable transport infrastructure and improve connectivity across the region.

Safeguarding the Corridor

Within the identified corridor, proposals for new development must demonstrate that they will not hinder or prejudice the delivery of the rail solution, including associated infrastructure.

Development Contributions

Development within the identified corridor will be required to make proportionate financial and/or in-kind contributions towards the delivery of the rail solution, including but not limited to feasibility studies, infrastructure works, and station facilities.

Potential Station Locations

Subject to further detailed site analysis, the plan identifies the potential for new railway stations to be located in broad locational terms at:

- **Carterton**, serving the town and surrounding areas.
- **Witney**, as a central hub for residents and businesses.
- **Eynsham**, to enhance connectivity and reduce reliance on car-based travel.

Monitoring and Review

The identified corridor and potential station locations will be reviewed periodically to account for changes in transport needs, technological advancements, and the results of detailed feasibility assessments.

Supporting Evidence and Engagement

The Council will work with key stakeholders, including Network Rail, transport authorities, developers, and local communities, to refine the alignment of the corridor and station locations as part of the ongoing planning process.

This policy seeks to balance strategic transport aspirations with sustainable development, ensuring that future growth supports and aligns with infrastructure objectives.

Policy PL6 – Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS)

What will this policy do?

- 6.56 The purpose of this policy is to ensure the long-term protection, conservation, and enhancement of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site and its setting, by placing strong controls on development that may harm its cultural, historic, and landscape significance.
- 6.57 It seeks to prevent inappropriate or harmful development, particularly in the context of increasing pressure from large-scale proposals, while promoting high-quality, sensitive design and ensuring that any proposals affecting the Site or its setting are rigorously assessed, justified, and aligned with the Blenheim Palace WHS Management Plan.

Why is it needed?

- 6.58 Blenheim Palace is of global cultural significance and its World Heritage Site status carries international obligations for its protection. Its significance is rooted not only in the quality of its architecture and landscape design but also in the integrity of its setting, which frames and reinforces its value.
- 6.59 Given the increasing development pressures in the surrounding area, including large-scale housing and energy infrastructure, this policy reinforces the critical importance of safeguarding both the WHS and its wider landscape context.
- 6.60 It ensures that development is both sustainable and fully aligned with heritage protection, while enabling opportunities to enhance the WHS's long-term legacy.

What is our preferred approach?

- 6.61 Our preferred approach is to adopt a robust and proactive stance that gives the highest priority to the protection, conservation, and enhancement of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and significance of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (including its setting).
- 6.62 This means ensuring that all development proposals, whether within or beyond the boundary of the WHS, are subject to rigorous scrutiny in line with national and international heritage policies, and that the cumulative impact of existing, committed, and future development is fully assessed and addressed.
- 6.63 Our approach seeks to safeguarding the integrity, authenticity, and visual setting of the WHS, recognising that its significance is derived not only from its architectural and historic features, but also from its designed landscape, long-distance views, and broader environmental context.
- 6.64 To support this, we propose to ensure that development proposals are required to clearly demonstrate how they conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the OUV of the WHS.
- 6.65 Our approach places particular emphasis on the importance of the WHS Management Plan as a guiding framework and material consideration in decision-making.

6.66 We propose to encourage early and meaningful engagement with stakeholders and demand exceptional justification for any development that risks causing harm. In doing so, we aim to balance the need for sustainable development with the international responsibility to protect Blenheim Palace as a unique and irreplaceable cultural asset for future generations.

6.67 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

PL6 – Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS)

1) Strategic Objective

The exceptional cultural significance and Outstanding Universal Value of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site (WHS) shall be protected, conserved, and enhanced for current and future generations. Development proposals must demonstrate a clear commitment to sustaining the WHS's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), including its authenticity, integrity, architectural grandeur, historic significance, and designed landscape.

2) Protection of Outstanding Universal Value

- a) All proposals within or affecting the WHS must conserve and, where possible, enhance the attributes that contribute to its OUV as defined in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value and the WHS Management Plan.
- b) Great weight will be given to the conservation of the WHS and the avoidance of harm. Any harm to its significance must be clearly and convincingly justified, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- c) Development leading to substantial harm or total loss of attributes of OUV will only be permitted in wholly exceptional circumstances, where it can be demonstrated that the harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that significantly outweigh that harm.
- d) Where proposals would cause less than substantial harm, such harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the development and only accepted where mitigation and enhancement measures are clearly demonstrated.

3) Protection of the Setting

- a) Development within and affecting the setting of the WHS must preserve and enhance the landscape character, key views, vistas, skylines, and the spatial and visual relationships that contribute to the WHS's OUV and significance. Proposals must demonstrate a detailed understanding of the contribution made by the site to the setting of the WHS.
- b) Proposals must avoid visual intrusion, inappropriate scale or form, cumulative landscape harm, noise, and light pollution that could erode the experience or understanding of the WHS.
- c) Development proposals must give special consideration to the areas identified in the WHS Management Plan as having heightened sensitivity or value for long-distance views to and from the Site.
- d) The design, materials, layout, and scale of development must be fully sympathetic to the historic and natural character of the WHS and its setting.

4) Assessment Requirements

- a) Development proposals that could impact the WHS or its setting must be accompanied by a robust Heritage Impact Assessment and Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, prepared in accordance with international best practice and in consultation with relevant heritage bodies

- b) Assessments must clearly identify the specific attributes of OUV affected, potential direct and indirect impacts, and propose mitigation and enhancement measures
- c) Where appropriate, proposals should contribute positively to the conservation of the WHS, including through improved access, interpretation, and landscape restoration.

5) Major and Cumulative Development

- a) Proposals for major development within or affecting the setting of the WHS (including large-scale residential schemes or infrastructure such as solar farms) will only be supported in exceptional circumstances, where:
 - i) The development is demonstrably necessary and cannot reasonably be located elsewhere;
 - ii) The public benefits clearly and substantially outweigh the harm to the WHS or its setting
 - iii) All practicable steps have been taken to minimise, mitigate, and offset harm; and
 - iv) Proposals include a clear strategy to deliver long-term enhancements to the WHS or its setting.
 - v) The cumulative impacts of existing, committed, and proposed development will be carefully considered, particularly where there is a risk of incremental degradation of the WHS setting.

6) Stakeholder Engagement

Developers must engage early and proactively with the District Council, Historic England, the WHS Management Committee and local communities to ensure alignment with the WHS's protection objectives, and to inform the design, scale, and layout of proposals.

7) Blenheim Palace WHS Management Plan

The Blenheim Palace WHS Management Plan is a material planning consideration. Development proposals should support its aims and objectives and demonstrate clear consistency with its policies and guidance.

7. Settlement Strategies

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Overview

- 7.1.1 This section sets out a series of initial draft settlement strategies, each designed to guide how specific towns and villages across West Oxfordshire evolve over the plan period to 2041.
- 7.1.2 These strategies aim to provide a locally tailored policy framework that reflects the unique characteristics, opportunities, and challenges of each settlement, while supporting the overall vision and objectives of the emerging draft local plan and any existing neighbourhood plans.

Tier 1 and Tier 2 Settlements

- 7.1.3 Individual strategies are proposed for each Tier 1 Principal Town and the Tier 2 Service Centres:

Tier 1 – Principal Towns

Witney
Carterton
Chipping Norton

Tier 2 – Service Centres

Bampton
Burford
Charlbury
Eynsham
Long Hanborough
Salt Cross Garden Village
Woodstock

- 7.1.4 With the exception of Salt Cross Garden Village, an individual vision and strategy has been developed for each, tailored to the specific characteristics, opportunities, and challenges of each location.
- 7.1.5 These are intended to be consistent with Neighbourhood Plans that are already in place at Chipping Norton, Charlbury, Eynsham and Woodstock and provide a framework for new and updated Neighbourhood Plans that may come forward in the future.
- 7.1.6 For Salt Cross, reference is made to the draft Area Action Plan (AAP), which already establishes a comprehensive vision, set of objectives, and a strategic planning framework to guide the long-term development of the site.

Town Centre Policies

- 7.1.7 Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Burford, and Woodstock each have defined town centre boundaries and so we have drafted specific town centre policies for those towns. These focus on supporting the vitality, resilience, and sustainable growth of these key commercial and community hubs.

Rural Area Strategy

- 7.1.8 Beyond the principal towns and service centres, there are too many individual villages for the local plan to address each individually. As such, we propose a broader, high-level 'rural area' strategy to cover:
- Tier 3 – Villages, and
 - Tier 4 – Small Villages, Hamlets and Open Countryside
- 7.1.9 The rural area strategy provides an overarching approach for managing development and change in the more dispersed parts of the District, recognising their varied needs, environmental sensitivity, and infrastructure constraints.

Development Locations

- 7.1.10 Where relevant, the settlement strategies explain the current position regarding existing Local Plan 2031 site allocations that have not yet secured planning permission and how many homes they are expected to deliver in the period up to 2041.
- 7.1.11 Future, preferred development areas that have the potential to become site allocations in the new Local Plan 2041 will be the subject of a further, focused Regulation 18 consultation in autumn 2025.

Witney Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Witney

- 7.2.1 As the District's largest town and main service centre, Witney has a key role to play in accommodating future growth in the period up to 2041.
- 7.2.2 Below, we have prepared a brief profile of the town and developed a vision of what it might look like in 2041. From this, we have drawn out some strategic objectives and adapted those into a draft settlement strategy policy.
- 7.2.3 This policy is set within the overall context of the draft vision and policies of the emerging local plan, including the overall housing requirement of 905 homes per year.

Witney in 2025

- 7.2.4 Witney is West Oxfordshire's largest town and the district's main economic and service centre. With a population now approaching 30,000, it has seen significant expansion over recent decades, more than doubling in size since the 1980s through major urban extensions such as Madley Park, Deer Park and more recently, Windrush Place. Today, Witney continues to be a key focus for housing and employment growth within the District.
- 7.2.5 The town has a rich heritage rooted in the blanket-making industry, which shaped its historic core, riverfront, and architectural character. This legacy remains visible in its attractive streetscape and former mill buildings, many of which have been sensitively converted. The River Windrush, running through the heart of Witney, provides a vital green and ecological corridor but also brings challenges related to flood risk, especially in light of past flood events.
- 7.2.6 Witney has developed into a well-rounded town offering a wide range of services, facilities, and infrastructure. It has a vibrant town centre that blends national retailers with independent shops, cafés and community facilities, including the historic Market Square, Marriott's Walk, and Woolgate Centre. The availability of free car parking helps sustain footfall, though capacity is under increasing pressure. The town also benefits from a leisure centre, museum, health services including Witney Community Hospital, and a variety of schools and green spaces.
- 7.2.7 The town is the largest employment hub in West Oxfordshire, accounting for around 35% of the district's jobs. Its economy is diverse, combining manufacturing, technology, retail, and services. Business parks on the town's western and southern edges support a strong SME base, including high-tech industries linked to the Oxfordshire science and innovation network.

- 7.2.8 Despite its strengths, Witney faces several pressing challenges. Chief among them is traffic congestion, particularly at Bridge Street, the town's only river crossing, which creates a bottleneck. Although improvements have been made to key junctions, delays and poor air quality persist reflected in the designated Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). Access to the A40, a vital east-west route, is also currently limited and frequently congested, affecting both journey times and inward investment potential.
- 7.2.9 Witney is not served by rail, and while it enjoys frequent bus connections to Oxford, travel times are poor in the peak, with car travel times predicted to be at least 30 minutes longer by 2031. Walking and cycling infrastructure is reasonably well-developed within the town, but connectivity gaps, wayfinding, and cycle parking are areas in need of improvement. The potential for enhanced active travel links, including between Witney and Carterton, has been identified by the County Council.
- 7.2.10 Housing need remains significant. The town contains the largest housing stock in the district, with around 12,000 dwellings, and continues to be a preferred location for many on the housing waiting list. While opportunities for development within the existing built-up area are now more limited, the fringes of the town offer potential for carefully planned expansion. This must be sensitively balanced against flood risk, landscape constraints, and the need to preserve the separate identity of nearby villages.
- 7.2.11 Witney's setting is defined by the surrounding valley landscape, ridgelines, and ancient forest remnants, especially to the north and east. These contribute to the town's distinct character and demand thoughtful integration of new development. The nearby Windrush Valley and Lower Windrush Valley Project Area are valued ecological and recreational assets, playing a key role in both conservation and public wellbeing.
- 7.2.12 The town remains well-placed to continue as the principal hub for housing, employment, retail, and services in West Oxfordshire, while building on its rich heritage and vibrant community life. Looking ahead, future growth will need to be closely aligned with infrastructure investment, particularly in transport, waste-water, flood resilience, green infrastructure and health provision.

Witney in 2041 – A Draft Vision

By 2041, Witney will be a model for sustainable market town living - a thriving, inclusive, and well-connected community that embraces innovation while cherishing its historic character and natural setting.

Resilient Infrastructure and High-Quality Housing

The town will provide an enhanced range of services and facilities, underpinned by resilient infrastructure and a strong sense of local identity. New development will be of exceptional design quality, climate-resilient, and energy-efficient, with a diverse mix of housing to meet lifetime needs, including genuinely affordable homes and specialist accommodation.

A Vibrant, Inclusive and Evolving Town Centre

Witney's town centre will be a vibrant and accessible hub for commerce, leisure, and culture, offering a wide range of independent shops, flexible workspaces, public spaces, and events that strengthen the local economy and foster community spirit. It will be pedestrian-friendly, digitally connected, and safe for all users, with high-quality walking and cycling links and frequent zero-carbon public transport options.

Enhanced Green and Blue Infrastructure

The town's green and blue infrastructure will be enhanced and protected, with new and improved parks, riverside walks, market gardens/growing spaces and enhanced biodiversity corridors that connect neighbourhoods with the surrounding countryside and support health, well-being, and nature recovery.

A Diverse and Future-Facing Local Economy

A diverse local economy will flourish, powered by innovation, green technologies, creative industries, and local enterprise. High-quality employment opportunities will reduce the need to commute, while smart working hubs and digital infrastructure will support flexible, modern working practices.

Low-Carbon Transport and Infrastructure Investment

With investment in low-carbon transport, modern infrastructure including a restored rail link to Oxford, and accessible services, Witney will reduce its dependency on car travel, easing congestion and improving air quality. Growth will be shaped sensitively around the town's landscape and heritage, ensuring the character of both Witney and surrounding villages is respected.

A National Example of Modern Market Town Living

Community well-being, economic opportunity, and environmental sustainability will sit at the heart of a dynamic settlement strategy that helps Witney thrive as a leading example of a 21st-century market town.

Heritage, Character and Climate Leadership

Witney will continue to honour its heritage, landscape, and role as West Oxfordshire's principal town, while taking bold steps to meet the challenges of the climate and ecological emergency - making it not just a great place to live, but a leader in sustainable, forward-thinking community development.

Strategic Objectives for Witney

7.2.13 Drawing on the profile and draft vision we have identified number of strategic objectives.

1. Sustainable and Well-Managed Growth

- Prioritise the re-use of previously developed land and other suitable land within the built-up area, while ensuring that expansion onto greenfield sites respects the setting of the town, the River Windrush, Conservation Areas, and surrounding countryside.
- Where major development beyond the built area is required, this must respect the town's landscape character and protect the setting and identity of nearby villages.

2. Tackling Climate Change and Promoting Green Infrastructure

- Invest in sustainable transport modes, including safe and connected cycling and walking networks, and enhanced public transport options linking Witney to Oxford and surrounding towns.
- Promote zero - and low-carbon building design and retrofit programmes, including for historic buildings, to meet net-zero targets
- Enhance green corridors including the Windrush Valley to serve both biodiversity and recreational needs, while managing flood risks through integrated water management.

3. Addressing Congestion and Improving Connectivity

- Reduce traffic congestion through strategic infrastructure investments including the West End Link and rail and road improvements to the A40 corridor.
- Support demand-responsive and low-emission public transport options, making movement within and beyond Witney efficient, affordable, and sustainable.
- Support the restoration of the railway line to Oxford

4. Enhancing Community Wellbeing and Social Infrastructure

- Ensure that new development contributes to expanded health, education, youth and leisure provision, including the modernisation/replacement of the Windrush Leisure Centre and creation of health and community hubs.
- Deliver a strong network of community facilities and accessible green spaces to support mental and physical well-being.

5. Protecting and Celebrating Heritage and Character

- Conserve and sensitively adapt Witney's historic assets, particularly its blanket industry legacy and riverside setting, integrating heritage into modern town life.
- Safeguard the distinctive character and identity of surrounding villages, ensuring development does not lead to coalescence or urban sprawl.

6. Inclusive Housing and Stronger Communities

- Deliver a range of housing options that meet identified local needs, including affordable homes, specialist accommodation for older residents and those with support needs, and homes for young families and key workers.
- Promote mixed and tenure-blind communities that support social cohesion and enable residents to remain in the area throughout all stages of life.

7. Economic Vitality and Innovation

- Strengthen Witney's role as West Oxfordshire's economic centre by supporting the growth of modern industry, high-tech and green businesses, and start-ups through new and expanded employment opportunities.
- Maintain and enhance the vitality of the town centre, balancing national retailers with independent businesses, and fostering a strong visitor and leisure economy through cultural events, markets, and hospitality.
- Improve public transport links (particularly rail) to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

A Strategy for Witney

7.2.14 Drawing on the draft vision and objectives above, we have drafted a settlement strategy policy, the purpose of which is to provide an overarching policy framework against which development proposals at Witney will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan. It also provides a framework for any future Neighbourhood Plan.

WIT1 – A Strategy for Witney

- I. Witney will continue to fulfil its role as West Oxfordshire’s principal service centre, providing a focus for housing, employment, retail, leisure, health, education, and cultural activities. Development will be directed to locations that promote sustainable patterns of growth, enhance the town’s character and setting, and contribute positively to addressing climate change and improving quality of life for all residents.

In managing future change, the Council will support development proposals that contribute to the following overarching aims:

- a. Delivering sustainable patterns of development by:
 - i. Prioritising the re-use of previously developed and under-utilised land within the built-up area;
 - ii. Supporting well-designed urban extensions and new communities where required, integrating effectively with the existing town and its infrastructure, and respecting the landscape setting and identity of neighbouring villages.
- b. Protecting and enhancing the town’s heritage and natural assets, including:
 - i. The conservation and sensitive adaptation of designated and non-designated heritage assets, including the historic core of the town;
 - ii. The setting of the River Windrush and associated green infrastructure corridors;
 - iii. Avoiding the coalescence of Witney with surrounding settlements and preserving local distinctiveness.
- c. Addressing climate change and air quality through:
 - i. Supporting proposals that contribute to improved air quality and reduced emissions;
 - ii. Enabling the delivery of strategic infrastructure, including the West End Link and enhanced east–west connectivity;
 - iii. Promoting a shift away from private car use through the integration of active and sustainable transport infrastructure.
- d. Enhancing sustainable transport connectivity by:
 - i. Aligning with the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and Witney’s Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)
 - ii. Facilitating the delivery of strategic walking and cycling routes, mobility hubs, and secure cycle parking;
 - iii. Supporting enhancements to public transport, including the provision of zero-emission buses and improved links to Oxford and key destinations and re-building the railway line to Oxford
 - iv. Enabling the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and support for shared mobility solutions.
- e. Meeting housing needs through:
 - i. Delivering a range of housing types, tenures, and sizes to support a diverse and inclusive community;
 - ii. Providing a significant proportion of genuinely affordable homes, including social rented homes;

- iii. Supporting specialist and supported accommodation, particularly for older people and those with care needs;
 - iv. Promoting the regeneration and intensification of underused housing land, where appropriate.
- f. Enhancing infrastructure, health and community services by:
 - i. Ensuring new development is supported by proportionate investment in health, education, leisure, youth facilities, cultural and food growing opportunities;
 - ii. Facilitating the delivery of integrated health and community hubs, exploring the development of the community hospital; on Welch Way to widen services available;
 - iii. Supporting public realm improvements that promote accessibility, inclusivity, and well-being.
 - iv. Restoring the railway line to Oxford
- g. Supporting the local economy and employment opportunities by:
 - i. Encouraging the intensification, renewal, or diversification of existing employment areas;
 - ii. Promoting green technologies, low-carbon business sectors, and artisan or knowledge-based industries;
 - iii. Enabling modern working practices through the delivery of digital infrastructure and co-working environments.
- h. Protecting and enhancing green and blue infrastructure by:
 - i. Retaining and enhancing existing green spaces, parks, and rights of way;
 - ii. Strengthening ecological corridors, particularly along the Windrush Valley and through the urban fabric;
 - iii. Delivering biodiversity net gain and climate adaptation through nature-based solutions, urban greening, and flood mitigation.
- i. Celebrating local identity and town character by:
 - i. Conserving key views, gateways, and the landscape setting of the town;
 - ii. Maintaining the relationship between the historic town centre and its surrounding countryside;
 - iii. Supporting placemaking initiatives, including public art and cultural programming that reinforce Witney's distinct and evolving identity.

Witney Town Centre

Context

- 7.2.15 Witney Town Centre is the largest and most vibrant commercial centre in West Oxfordshire, strategically located and historically rich. Its blend of heritage assets, modern retail facilities, outdoor markets and hospitality offer makes it both a functional town centre and an attractive visitor destination.

Need for a Refreshed Approach

- 7.2.16 While Witney continues to outperform many national benchmarks in terms of vacancy and mix, emerging trends such as the growth of online retail, the decline in footfall and competition from nearby centres (e.g. Oxford and Bicester) underline the need for adaptability. Additionally, underused spaces and vacant units present clear opportunities for innovation and placemaking.

Investment and Opportunity

- 7.2.17 Recent public realm investments, including the £1.98m Active Travel Fund project, aim to improve pedestrian experience and support local businesses through better connectivity and quality of space. Witney's public spaces must now be repositioned as flexible, people-centred assets that support events, leisure, and culture as much as retail.

Heritage and Identity

- 7.2.18 The plan recognises the distinctiveness of Witney, with its links to the wool trade, historic buildings, and unique architectural fabric. These characteristics will be protected and celebrated through high-quality design and sensitive regeneration that enhances the market town feel.

A More Flexible, Mixed-Use Future

- 7.2.19 We need to support diversification, allowing for the creative re-use of vacant buildings and enabling a mix of uses that reflect how people live, shop, work and socialise in modern town centres. Cultural activities, co-working spaces, and residential development (where appropriate) will help reinforce vitality and address underuse.

Promoting a vibrant night-time economy

- 7.2.20 A key ambition is to promote a safer, more inclusive and better-coordinated evening economy through cultural programming, lighting, improved transport, and a diversity of uses into the evening. Aspirations toward Purple Flag accreditation reflect this goal.

Accessibility and Infrastructure

- 7.2.21 Parking, cycling infrastructure, EV charging, bus connections, and the potential for a visitor centre will all support a resilient, inclusive and sustainable town centre experience.

A Potential Strategy for Witney Town Centre

- 7.2.22 The purpose of our draft strategy is to:
- Support Witney's role as the principal town centre in the District, reaffirming its status as the hub for commercial, community, leisure, and cultural activity.
 - Ensure Witney remains vibrant and competitive by adapting to shifting economic, retail, and social trends.
 - Preserve and enhance its historic character and public spaces, while promoting sustainable and inclusive growth.
 - Promote Witney as a destination, capitalising on its heritage, location near the Cotswolds, and attractive town centre offer.

- Revitalise key spaces like Market Square and High Street to increase footfall, activity, and dwell time.

Why is a Town Centre Strategy needed?

7.2.23 The strategy is needed for a number of reasons:

- Retail challenges: Rising vacancy rates, the growth of online shopping, and strong competition from centres like Oxford and Bicester Village.
- Shifting consumer habits: A decline in footfall and demand for mixed-use, experiential environments.
- Infrastructure pressures: Traffic congestion, accessibility issues, and public realm shortcomings.
- Opportunities for growth: Strong existing offer (cinema, national brands, independent stores), active markets, and ongoing public investment.
- Community feedback: Stakeholder concerns highlight the need for better promotion, active management, and infrastructure improvements.

Preferred Approach

7.2.24 Our preferred approach takes a place-based, adaptive, and partnership-led approach, focusing on:

1. Placemaking and Public Realm Enhancements

- Invest in the **High Street and Market Square** (with £1.98m Active Travel Fund support) to improve walkability, cycling, and pedestrian experience.
- Enhance green infrastructure and public spaces for social use, events, and tourism.

2. Mixed-Use and Flexible Development

- Encourage a broader mix of uses (e.g. retail, housing, community hubs) to activate vacant units and support town centre living.
- Promote pop-ups, co-working spaces, and creative uses of underused space.

3. Heritage-Led Promotion and Tourism

- Leverage Witney's rich history (e.g. blanket production) and proximity to the Cotswolds to boost visitor numbers.
- Position the town as a cultural and historic destination within and beyond the District.

4. Evening Economy and Events

- Improve dining, entertainment, and evening offers; work towards Purple Flag status (recognition for safe and vibrant night-time economies).
- Activate public spaces through seasonal markets, cultural events, and promotions.

5. Connectivity and Accessibility

- Improve cycling and walking routes, public transport links, and parking management.
- Address traffic and signage issues to make the centre more welcoming and navigable.

6. District-Wide Coordination and Promotion

- Collaborate on marketing strategies across West Oxfordshire to enhance awareness of Witney's offer.
- Balance Witney's development with support for smaller towns and rural settlements.

7.2.25 This approach is reflected in the initial draft policy below.

WIT2: Witney Town Centre

Witney Town Centre will be maintained and enhanced as the principal retail, leisure, cultural and visitor destination in West Oxfordshire. Development will support a diverse and resilient town centre economy, promote high-quality placemaking, and enhance accessibility and the appreciation of heritage significance.

Proposals will be expected to:

1. Support a strong and diverse retail and service offer, with an emphasis on the High Street as the primary pedestrian spine linking the Woolgate Centre and Marriotts Walk, including protection of the defined *Primary Shopping Area* for active town centre uses. Loss of retail in these areas will be resisted unless fully justified in accordance with Policy DM20.
2. Promote the vitality of secondary areas such as Market Square, Corn Street and Welch Way by supporting a broad mix of retail, leisure, hospitality, community and cultural uses. Proposals leading to harmful concentrations of single uses or loss of active ground floor frontages will be resisted.
3. Encourage flexible and adaptive reuse of vacant units to respond to market trends and changing consumer behaviours, including the potential for mixed-use schemes (e.g., co-working, community, healthcare, residential, pop-ups, youth facilities or cultural uses) where consistent with town centre function and amenity.
4. Enhance Market Square as a multi-functional civic space and cultural heart of the town, supporting regular markets, seasonal events, performance and community activities and reflecting the diversity of the community.
5. Support sensitive and appropriately scaled redevelopment opportunities, including development along Welch Way, provided they maintain or improve pedestrian permeability, reinforce key frontages, and respect historic context.
6. Conserve and enhance Witney's historic character, particularly the Witney Conservation Area and listed buildings, through high-quality design, materials, and heritage-led placemaking.

7. Invest in the public realm, including decluttering of signage, improvements to surfacing, seating, greenery and lighting, and enhanced pedestrian/cycle accessibility, particularly in and around the High Street, Market Square and Corn Street.
8. Promote active and sustainable travel, including public transport, supported by public realm investment and the implementation of the Oxfordshire County Council-funded High Street and Market Square improvement scheme.
9. Ensure accessible town centre infrastructure, including safe walking and cycling routes, car parking provision, electric vehicle charging, improved bus interchange and visitor facilities such as a coach drop-off and a future visitor centre.
10. Support a vibrant and inclusive evening economy, including initiatives that improve safety, diversity of uses and extended hours of operation, in pursuit of Purple Flag accreditation.
11. Protect the distinct historic character of the Buttercross/Church Green area. Proposals for intensified commercial or retail activity in this area will be resisted unless incidental to the main permitted use.
12. Enable climate resilience and sustainability, including the incorporation of greening, sustainable drainage, and low-carbon development measures into town centre schemes.

Witney - Future Development Locations

- 7.2.26 Future development at Witney will comprise a combination of existing commitments (i.e. sites with planning permission) speculative 'windfall' development and allocated sites.
- 7.2.27 In terms of currently allocated sites, the adopted Local Plan 2031 includes three sites – East Witney SDA, North Witney SDA and Woodford Way Car Park.
- 7.2.28 The East Witney SDA now has outline planning permission and will therefore be counted as an existing commitment for the purposes of the new local plan. Officers are confident that all 450 homes will be delivered well before 2041.
- 7.2.29 Progress with the North Witney SDA has been slower – however, a comprehensive outline planning application has been submitted (24/00482/OUT) which covers the majority of the site and includes an illustrative masterplan for the whole site.
- 7.2.30 The application is for a residential-led, mixed-use development accommodating up to 1,250 new homes.
- 7.2.31 Without prejudice to the current outline application which is pending determination, for the purposes of this preferred options paper it has been assumed for now that 1,250 new homes will be provided at North Witney in the period up to 2041. This is in order to help identify the assumed 'residual' number of new homes that will need to be met through new site allocations (c. 6,500).

- 7.2.32 Land at Woodford Way Car Park is also allocated for development in the adopted Local Plan – albeit for a much smaller quantum (50 homes). The District Council remains committed to bringing a residential scheme forward on this site and intends to come forward with a planning application in the next 12-24 months. Initial feasibility work suggests that the capacity of the site could be increased from 50 to 75 units.
- 7.2.33 In terms of future potential site allocations, in accordance with the proposed spatial strategy (Core Policy 3) we anticipate that a number of new site allocations will be made at Witney both within the built area (maximising the opportunity for the redevelopment of brownfield land) and outside the built area in the form of sustainable new communities.
- 7.2.34 A number of strategic-scale sites have been put forward and are currently being assessed in terms of their suitability and deliverability.
- 7.2.35 The intention is that preferred development areas will be the subject of a further, focused public consultation in autumn 2025.

Carterton Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Carterton

- 7.3.1 As the District's second largest town and main service centre, Carterton has a key role to play in accommodating future growth in the period up to 2041. The overall spatial strategy outlined in Core Policy 3 envisages transformational growth in order to unlock the town's economic and social potential, including its relationship with RAF Brize Norton.
- 7.3.2 In this context, as with Witney, we have outlined below our initial thoughts on a potential strategy for the town, a focused strategy for the town centre and how we propose to take forward current site allocations and look to identify new ones.

Carterton in 2025

- 7.3.3 Carterton has transformed over the last century from a patchwork of agricultural smallholdings into a dynamic and growing community of around 16,000 residents. Nestled on the edge of the Thames Valley and close to the Cotswolds National Landscape, Carterton offers a unique blend of military heritage, modern amenities, and untapped potential.
- 7.3.4 Carterton is a town shaped by its people - an active, family-friendly community with deep ties to RAF Brize Norton, the UK's main RAF transport base. Much of the town's recent growth has been driven by military and civilian demand, with housing developments like Shilton Park and Brize Meadows, in the adjoining parish of Brize Norton, expanding the offer of modern homes.
- 7.3.5 Housing in Carterton is more affordable than in neighbouring towns like Witney and Chipping Norton, providing an accessible entry point for first-time buyers, service families, and those looking for value. However, redevelopment of older, low-density MOD housing (particularly around REEMA Central and REEMA North) remains a priority, offering the opportunity to create well-designed, higher-density housing that revitalises the town's image and boosts its housing supply.
- 7.3.6 The town is compact and walkable, with a good pedestrian and cycling network and increasing infrastructure investment. Local schools, including Carterton Community College, community hubs, parks, and sports facilities such as the Carterton Leisure Centre contribute to a high quality of life and a strong sense of belonging.
- 7.3.7 While RAF Brize Norton dominates local employment - providing over 7,000 military, civilian, and contractor jobs - Carterton's wider economy is in transition. The town has historically had fewer jobs than workers, resulting in high levels of out-commuting, particularly to Witney and Oxford. Addressing this imbalance is now a local priority.

- 7.3.8 In 2025, the town is increasingly being positioned as a base for enterprise and innovation. Sites like Ventura Park and the West Oxfordshire Business Park offer room for growing businesses, while strategic ambitions aim to increase employment land availability. There is a particular focus on attracting logistics, creative industries, and tech services that complement the area's skilled workforce.
- 7.3.9 Improved transport links, particularly a long-awaited A-road connection between Carterton and the A40, and a rail link are critical to unlocking the town's economic potential. Enhanced access would reduce commute times, increase inward investment, and support RAF operations.
- 7.3.10 Restoring the railway link to Witney and Oxford represents a major opportunity to revitalise the town, linking Carterton with Oxford in just over 20 minutes. This would allow cutting edge science and business parks to locate in the town, connecting the universities' brainpower with Carterton's aviation expertise.
- 7.3.11 Bus services remain strong - especially the premium S1 and S2 routes to Oxford - while new cycling connections to Witney remain an important local aspiration and aligns with sustainability goals and changing travel habits.
- 7.3.12 While Carterton is not traditionally known as a tourist hub, it offers a surprising and evolving visitor experience. Carterton's Country Park and open green spaces are well-used by families, and the offering presented by its enhanced leisure centre are strong.
- 7.3.13 The town centre, anchored by a number of supermarkets and essential services, is functional but underperforming for a settlement of its size. Enhancing its non-supermarket shopping, leisure, and dining offer could help reverse trade leakage to Witney and Oxford and create a more vibrant, attractive civic core.
- 7.3.14 With RAF Brize Norton nearby, there's also growing interest in celebrating the town's military heritage - something that could develop into a tourism asset in the years ahead, particularly through events, education, and cultural programming tied to the town's history. Carterton's strong food and horticultural heritage presents another potential tourism opportunity for the town and surrounding area.
- 7.3.15 Carterton in 2025 stands at a turning point. Strategic development priorities including the regeneration of MOD housing, expanding employment land, and improving road access all have the potential to significantly enhance its economic self-sufficiency and attractiveness as a place to invest.
- 7.3.16 With sustained local leadership and investment, Carterton is well placed to emerge as a more balanced, sustainable, and vibrant town for decades to come.

Carterton in 2041 - A Draft Vision

By 2041, Carterton will have evolved into a confident, connected, and resilient town - a place defined by its strong community spirit, distinctive identity, and dynamic partnership with RAF Brize Norton. It will be a town that embraces its military and horticultural heritage while confidently stepping into a bold future shaped by sustainability, innovation, and inclusive growth.

A Thriving, Balanced and Resilient Community

Carterton will be a vibrant service centre meeting the daily needs of a diverse and growing population. Its housing offer will be inclusive and adaptable, with new and regenerated neighbourhoods offering high-quality homes for everyone from young families and key workers to older residents looking for downsized or lifetime-ready options.

Outdated MOD housing areas will have been sensitively redeveloped into vibrant, well-connected urban communities, contributing to a more integrated and attractive townscape.

A Hub for Innovation and Enterprise

A strategic shift towards a stronger local economy will have taken root. Investment in high-quality employment land, enhanced digital infrastructure, and improved transport connectivity - especially road access to the A40 and rail access to Oxford - will have helped attract a wider mix of employers, including clean tech, creative industries, logistics, health services and market gardens.

While RAF Brize Norton will remain a major employer and source of pride, Carterton will no longer be seen as solely a 'garrison town,' but as a regional economic player, supporting entrepreneurship, skills development and inclusive employment.

A Town Shaped by Sustainability and Nature

Carterton will be known for its green character and environmental leadership. A bold programme of net-zero development will have transformed the town's energy use, mobility, and building standards. New and retrofitted homes and businesses will be energy efficient and resilient to climate change.

A network of green corridors and active travel routes will thread through the town - connecting neighbourhoods, schools, the town centre and surrounding countryside. Cycling and walking will dominate short trips, supported by safe routes, greenways, and attractive public spaces.

Carterton's country park and green spaces will remain defining features - protecting the setting of nearby villages while providing opportunities for recreation, wellbeing, and biodiversity.

A Healthier, Happier Town for All Ages

Carterton's young and growing population will be central to its future. Investment in education, including Carterton Community College and SEND provision, youth services, leisure and culture will ensure young people thrive and choose to stay or return to the town.

A strong emphasis on health and wellbeing - including expanded sports, leisure and healthcare facilities, as well as accessible green spaces and resilient local food networks - will support residents of all ages to live healthy, active lives.

A Connected Carterton – Within and Beyond

Better road infrastructure - including a strategic link to the A40 - will unlock Carterton's accessibility and potential. Public transport opportunities will be greatly enhanced including bus services and the delivery of a new rail connection towards Oxford. Enhanced cycle connections to Witney, Oxford and beyond will promote low-carbon commuting and tourism.

Digital connectivity will be a priority, with high-speed broadband and smart infrastructure enabling flexible working, online education and access to services, particularly important in supporting rural and remote residents.

Strategic Objectives for Carterton

7.3.17 Drawing on the profile and draft vision we have identified a number of strategic objectives.

1. Sustainable and Well-Managed Growth

- Focus new development in accessible locations including the reuse of previously developed land and the sensitive regeneration of outdated MOD housing areas to deliver high-quality new neighbourhoods.
- Ensure that any expansion onto greenfield sites supports and is well-related to the existing built area, protects the identity of surrounding villages, and contributes to the delivery of necessary infrastructure, services, and community facilities.
- Deliver a diverse mix of housing, including affordable and adaptable homes, to meet the lifetime needs of a growing and diverse population, particularly families, young people, and service personnel.

2. Tackling Climate Change and Enhancing Green Infrastructure

- Support Carterton's transition to net-zero through energy-efficient design, renewable energy generation, and the use of sustainable construction methods.
- Expand and enhance a green and blue infrastructure network that connects parks, greenways, and open spaces across the town and into the wider countryside, supporting biodiversity, active travel, flood resilience, access to nature and a resilient local food system.
- Promote modal shift away from car dependency by investing improved public and shared transport options including the future delivery of a new rail connection towards Oxford, alongside active travel infrastructure and green corridors.

3. A Stronger Local Economy and a More Resilient Town Centre

- Promote Carterton's role as a key local service and employment centre through the provision of modern business space, support for start-ups and small enterprises, and strategic employment land opportunities linked to improved access to the A40 and to the Oxford/Cambridge Arc via a restored railway.
- Diversify the town's economic base beyond its military association, attracting new investment in innovation, clean technology, creative and food sectors while continuing to support RAF Brize Norton as a valued asset.
- Regenerate and reimagine Carterton's town centre as a thriving civic, cultural, and commercial heart of the town, with an improved retail and leisure offer, better public spaces, and a strong evening economy.

4. Connected, Inclusive and Healthy Communities

- Promote inclusive, mixed-use neighbourhoods that offer access to schools, health care, green space, local shops and community services within walking or cycling distance of homes.
- Invest in local health, leisure, education and youth services to support Carterton's young and growing population and to encourage healthy, active lifestyles for all age groups.
- Address social and economic inequalities by ensuring that new development contributes to community infrastructure and enhances overall quality of life for existing and future residents.

5. Respecting Local Character and Strengthening Place Identity

- Celebrate and reinforce Carterton's unique character as a forward-looking town with strong military ties and a growing civic identity, through high-quality, locally distinctive design and placemaking.
- Protect and enhance key views, green spaces and landscape settings that contribute to the identity of Carterton and its relationship with neighbouring villages and open countryside.
- Involve the community in shaping future development, ensuring that growth is place-led and reflects local aspirations for a greener, better-connected and more liveable town.

A Strategy for Carterton

7.3.18 Drawing on the vision and strategic objectives, we have drafted a settlement strategy policy for Carterton. The purpose of this is to provide an overarching strategic policy framework against which development proposals at Carterton will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan. It also provides a framework for any future Neighbourhood Plan.

CA1 – A Strategy for Carterton

- I) Carterton will continue to play a vital role in supporting the economic and social wellbeing of West Oxfordshire, including its strategic association with RAF Brize Norton. The Council will support proposals which reinforce Carterton's role as a service and employment centre, promote sustainable patterns of development, and deliver high-quality, inclusive places in line with the settlement vision and objectives.

Development proposals will be supported where they:

a) Reinforce Carterton's role as a key service and employment centre by:

- i) Enhancing the vitality, viability and diversity of the town centre through a broader retail, leisure and cultural offer, with particular support for proposals that strengthen the evening economy and encourage mixed-use development;
- ii) Providing new and upgraded employment land and premises to support enterprise, including in sectors complementary to RAF Brize Norton and emerging low-carbon, digital and agro-ecological food production and distribution industries;

- iii) Enabling the continued operation and long-term future of RAF Brize Norton, celebrating its military heritage and recognising its national importance and integral role within the local economy and community.
- iv) Linking to the national rail system through the restoration of a Carterton-Oxford railway.

b) Deliver sustainable and well-managed growth through:

- i) New development within the existing built-up area, including the re-use of previously developed land infill development,
- ii) Facilitating the comprehensive redevelopment of poor-quality or underutilised MOD housing stock at appropriate densities and design standards;
- iii) Strategic-scale development on the urban fringe of the town through scalable new communities that complement and support the town and adjoining villages whilst protecting their distinct identities;
- iv) Providing a balanced mix of housing types and tenures, including affordable and adaptable homes to meet the needs of a growing and diverse population.

c) Protect and enhance the town's landscape setting and green infrastructure by:

- i) Safeguarding the identity and separate character of Carterton and surrounding villages;
- ii) Delivering new and enhanced green infrastructure within and around the town, linking neighbourhoods to each other, the town centre, and the wider countryside;
- iii) Supporting the provision of high-quality public open space, biodiversity enhancements, community growing spaces and accessible natural green space in conjunction with new development.

d) Support the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient settlement by:

- i) Requiring high standards of sustainable design and construction in new development, including energy and water efficiency, integrated renewable energy, and climate-resilient landscaping;
- ii) Promoting active and sustainable modes of travel, including improved provision for walking, cycling and public transport, particularly in relation to the town centre, employment areas and RAF Brize Norton;
- iii) Supporting strategic transport improvements, including enhanced access to the A40 and re-building the rail connection towards Oxford, to unlock economic potential, improve connectivity, and reduce unsustainable commuting patterns.

e) Deliver inclusive and connected communities by:

- i) Ensuring that new development is supported by timely provision of infrastructure, including education, healthcare, open space, and leisure facilities, in accordance with identified needs;
- ii) Facilitating high-quality, well-connected neighbourhoods that promote social interaction, safety and wellbeing;
- iii) Supporting the revitalisation of the town centre and underutilised areas through comprehensive and design-led regeneration.

- f) The Council will work proactively with landowners, the Ministry of Defence, Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), and other partners to deliver coordinated and sustainable growth in Carterton in accordance with this strategy

Carterton Town Centre

Context

- 7.3.19 At the heart of Carterton lies a compact but strategically important town centre, which provides essential everyday services to the town's population and surrounding villages. Geographically, the town centre is focused around the intersection of Burford Road, Black Bourton Road, Alvescot Road, and Brize Norton Road, where the key civic, commercial and transport functions converge.

Retail and Services Offer

- 7.3.20 The town centre plays a primarily convenience and service role, anchored by three national supermarket chains - Asda, Aldi, and Morrisons - all located in close proximity to the central area. These outlets underpin Carterton's strong convenience goods offer, which is a primary reason for visits for over half of surveyed customers. The presence of both multiple and independent retailers within the centre reflects a reasonable mix, but the balance is heavily tilted toward convenience retailing.
- 7.3.21 Despite this strong base, the centre suffers from a limited range of non-food and comparison retail outlets, leading to leakage of expenditure to larger centres such as nearby Witney. The town centre also lacks depth in its evening economy, with only a handful of pubs, restaurants, and a cocktail bar providing evening options, and is perceived to be dominated by fast food and takeaway outlets.

Townscape and Built Environment

- 7.3.22 In contrast to the historic cores of Witney, Chipping Norton, Burford and Woodstock, Carterton Town Centre has developed more recently and does not possess a traditional high street character. However, this relative modernity also means it is less physically constrained, offering greater scope for redevelopment, infill, and public realm enhancement.
- 7.3.23 The centre is well-maintained, with clean frontages and functional urban infrastructure, but is often described as having a 'hard' and 'uninspiring' built environment, with limited greenery, architectural variety or visual charm. Efforts to address this have included the creation of the Sensory Garden in Market Square and the St John's Garden Project, both designed to provide relaxing, inclusive spaces for families and community gatherings.

Footfall, Vacancy and Business Activity

- 7.3.24 Carterton boasts a notably low vacancy rate of 1.6%, significantly better than the national average of 14.1%, indicating that most commercial units are in active use. However, despite this occupancy, the town has seen a decline in footfall—down by approximately 16% when comparing 2023 to 2024 figures (January–August). High business operating costs and competition from online retail are ongoing threats to physical retail activity.

- 7.3.25 The centre contains 63 retail and service units, with a total commercial floorspace of approximately 16,420 sqm, marginally larger than nearby Chipping Norton. The dominance of large-scale food retail contributes significantly to this figure.

Recent and Planned Improvements

- 7.3.26 Recent efforts to improve Carterton Town Centre have increasingly focused on diversifying its offer and enhancing its public realm. Both the Town Council and District Council have acknowledged the need to elevate the centre from a purely functional space to a vibrant civic and commercial hub.
- 7.3.27 Recent evidence prepared in the support of the emerging Local Plan reinforces the potential for Carterton to transform into a more attractive destination, with a broader mix of leisure, food & drink, youth, cultural and community uses, as well as integrated mobility solutions such as a mobility hub pilot.

Role in the Wider District

- 7.3.28 Carterton Town Centre functions as a primary town centre in the district's retail hierarchy, second only to Witney. While it currently lacks the same level of destination appeal or variety, its relatively modern infrastructure, central location within the southern district, and connection to a large military community position it well for strategic investment and regeneration.
- 7.3.29 It also benefits from regular bus services linking it to Witney, Oxford, and surrounding settlements. These links enhance its role as a service centre for nearby villages and the RAF base.
- 7.3.30 However, there are indications that Carterton's current town centre footprint is too small to meet the needs of its population, which continues to grow. This has prompted a shared aspiration to expand, enhance, and reposition Carterton Town Centre as a more resilient and inclusive focal point for the town and wider catchment.

A Potential Strategy for Carterton Town Centre

- 7.3.31 The purpose of our draft strategy is to:
- Support Carterton's role as a key service, reinforcing its importance to the local residential and military communities as a hub for shopping, community, leisure, and day-to-day needs.
 - Strengthen and diversify the town centre offer to better meet the needs of Carterton's growing population, reduce leakage to other centres such as Witney, and respond to ongoing changes in the retail, leisure, and service sectors.
 - Transform Carterton Town Centre into a more vibrant, welcoming, and attractive destination, by improving public spaces, encouraging a greater mix of uses, and investing in evening economy, youth and community facilities.

- Capitalise on Carterton’s physical capacity and modern layout to accommodate well-designed new development and create a more cohesive and distinctive town centre environment.
- Revitalise key areas such as the main crossroads, Market Square, and surrounding streets to increase footfall, activity, and dwell time, while improving the quality and usability of streets and public spaces for all users.
- Promote Carterton as a forward-looking, inclusive town centre with improved access, greener streets, community events, and integrated mobility options that support healthy, sustainable movement.

Why is a Town Centre Strategy needed?

7.3.32 The strategy is needed for a number of reasons:

- To address underperformance: Despite its size and retail footprint, Carterton’s centre is considered too small for its population and is losing trade to surrounding centres.
- To build on strengths: Carterton has low vacancy rates, strong convenience retail, good accessibility and space for physical growth.
- To reverse trends: Footfall has declined (-16% year-on-year), and the centre lacks evening vitality and non-supermarket retail options.
- To support community needs: The RAF community and growing residential population need more diverse leisure, social, and service offers within the town centre.
- To ensure resilience: As retail and leisure sectors evolve, Carterton needs a flexible and future-proof strategy to remain competitive and sustainable.

Preferred Approach

7.3.33 Our preferred approach takes a place-based, adaptive, and partnership-led approach to guide the future of Carterton Town Centre, focusing on:

1. Placemaking and Public Realm Enhancements

- **Enhance the physical environment of key town centre spaces**, including the crossroads, Market Square, and main streets, to create a more attractive, accessible, and unified sense of place.
- **Improve walkability, cycling infrastructure, and connectivity** to and across the town centre, integrating active travel routes and supporting the mobility hub concept.
- Introduce **more greenery, tree planting, and quality street furniture** to soften the hard environment and encourage social interaction and dwell time.
- Activate **public spaces through community-led events, markets, festivals, and art**, creating a vibrant and inclusive atmosphere.

2. Mixed-Use and Flexible Development

- Encourage a **broader mix of town centre uses**, including new retail, food and drink, leisure, community, health, and residential opportunities to diversify the offer and enhance vitality throughout the day and into the evening.
- **Support the redevelopment of identified opportunity sites**, such as land off Alvescot Road and Burford Road, for well-designed, mixed-use schemes with active frontages and strong integration into the existing town centre.
- **Promote flexible formats** such as co-working hubs, incubator spaces, pop-ups, and temporary uses to support small businesses, start-ups, and local enterprise.

3. Improved Accessibility and Legibility

- **Enhance movement into, out of, and within the town centre**, with improved pedestrian crossings, signage, wayfinding, and safer routes for cyclists and walkers.
- Ensure **sufficient and well-located car parking remains available**, while exploring opportunities for rationalisation and multi-functional space (e.g., events, flexible markets).
- **Open up and better connect the Recreation Ground** to the town centre as a valuable green asset and community space.

4. Sustainable Growth and Community Activation

- **Develop a rolling programme of promotional activity**, including branding, events, and campaigns that position Carterton as a distinctive and welcoming destination.
- **Work collaboratively with Carterton Town Council, community groups, local businesses, and the RAF**, to deliver shared priorities for the town centre's future.
- **Promote Carterton as a growing, inclusive and forward-thinking town centre**, capable of adapting to changing trends while better meeting the needs of its diverse and expanding population.

7.3.34 This approach is reflected in the initial draft policy below.

CA2 – Carterton Town Centre

- I) The Council will support development proposals that contribute to the regeneration, diversification and enhancement of Carterton Town Centre, including proposals that:
 - a) Strengthen the vitality and viability of the town centre, including:
 - i) diversifying the retail, leisure, cultural, and food and beverage offer to broaden the town centre's appeal;
 - ii) supporting mixed-use development, including upper-floor workspace and ancillary residential use;
 - iii) encouraging the establishment of community hubs and youth facilities.

- b)** Promote sustainable patterns of development, making effective use of key redevelopment and infill sites including land along Burford Road, Black Bourton Road, and Alvescot Road to deliver active frontages and a more coherent urban grain.
 - c)** Enhance the quality of the public realm and green infrastructure, including:
 - i) creating attractive, safe, and uncluttered streetscapes with high-quality materials and street furniture;
 - ii) introducing street trees, urban greening and 'green avenue' planting along main thoroughfares;
 - iii) improving links between the town centre and the Recreation Ground and other key public spaces.
 - d)** Improve accessibility and connectivity, including:
 - i) enhancing pedestrian and cycle movement within and to/from the town centre;
 - ii) supporting the implementation of a local mobility hub with integrated public transport and active travel facilities;
 - iii) delivering secure cycle parking, electric vehicle charging points, and appropriate levels of car parking.
 - e)** Support a vibrant and inclusive town centre economy, including:
 - i) flexible and temporary space to support start-ups, creative industries and small businesses;
 - ii) provision of premises suitable for cafés, restaurants, and evening economy uses;
 - iii) animation of key public spaces through festivals, markets, events, public art and performance areas.
 - f)** Protect and reinforce the character and identity of the town centre, including:
 - i) maintaining continuity of built frontages to create a strong sense of place;
 - ii) celebrating Carterton's civic and military heritage through interpretation, signage and public realm features;
 - iii) ensuring new development responds positively to local context and contributes to a cohesive townscape.
- 2)** The Council will work in partnership with Carterton Town Council and other stakeholders to deliver town centre improvements, including:
- a)** improvement works to the central crossroads for all modes of travel;
 - b)** place-marketing initiatives and a coordinated branding strategy
 - c)** delivery of new wayfinding and orientation features.
- 3)** Development proposals within Carterton Town Centre will be expected to contribute towards delivery of public realm and infrastructure enhancements, through developer contributions and other appropriate mechanisms.

Carterton - Future Development Locations

- 7.3.35 Future development at Carterton will comprise a combination of existing commitments (i.e. sites with planning permission) speculative ‘windfall’ development and allocated sites.
- 7.3.36 In terms of currently allocated sites, the adopted Local Plan 2031 includes three sites – Milestone Road, Land at Swinbrook Road and REEMA North and Central.
- 7.3.37 Milestone Road now has planning permission and is under construction and the land at Swinbrook Road has now been completed.
- 7.3.38 REEMA North and Central has been part-implemented with 81 dwellings (net gain) having now been completed at REEMA Central.
- 7.3.39 A further application for an additional 82 dwellings at REEMA Central is currently pending determination (24/01835/OUT) and the DIO and its development partner Taylor Wimpey have been in pre-application discussions with the District Council regarding a revised scheme for REEMA North.
- 7.3.40 In this context, Officers consider it reasonable to assume that the 300 new homes envisaged in the adopted Local Plan will come forward well before 2041 (in addition to the 81 homes at REEMA Central already counted in past completions).
- 7.3.41 In terms of future potential site allocations, in accordance with the proposed spatial strategy (Core Policy 3) we anticipate that a number of new site allocations will be made at Carterton. Where possible, this will include previously developed land within the built area but the anticipated level of ‘transformational’ growth envisaged under the spatial strategy would necessitate large-scale strategic growth within the rural fringe of the town.
- 7.3.42 As with Witney, a large number of strategic-scale development opportunities have been put forward by landowners and developers which are currently being assessed.
- 7.3.43 Officers recognise that development in these locations is extremely sensitive by virtue of the fact that they lie in adjoining parishes including Brize Norton, Shilton and Alvescot. Shilton and Brize Norton both have neighbourhood plans which emphasise the importance of protecting the setting, character and identity of those villages and the same principles apply equally to Alvescot.
- 7.3.44 Preferred development areas at Carterton and the surrounding area, will be the subject of a further, focused public consultation in autumn 2025.

Chipping Norton Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Chipping Norton

- 7.4.1 As the District's third largest town and main service centre, Chipping Norton clearly has an important role to play in accommodating future growth in the period up to 2041.
- 7.4.2 As a location for future growth, it is however more constrained than Witney and Carterton because much of the town falls within the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) where the scale and extent of development is expected to be limited in line with national policy.
- 7.4.3 Within this context, we have outlined below our initial thoughts on a potential strategy for the town, a focused strategy for the town centre and how we propose to take forward the current site allocation and look to identify any new ones.

Chipping Norton in 2025

- 7.4.4 Chipping Norton is an historic hilltop market town located on the eastern edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB). With a population of around 7,300, it is the third-largest town in West Oxfordshire, serving as a key service centre for the northern part of the district and surrounding rural communities. The town is widely recognised for its striking landscape setting, historic architecture, and strong sense of community identity.
- 7.4.5 Positioned along the A44 and A361, Chipping Norton offers expansive views over the Evenlode Valley and the surrounding countryside. The town's topography -ranging between 183m and 213m above sea level- gives it a prominent landscape character, with distinctive approach routes lined with mature trees, particularly along Banbury and London Roads.
- 7.4.6 The town lies entirely within or adjacent to the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) which brings with it both protections and sensitivities.
- 7.4.7 Chipping Norton's identity is deeply rooted in its market town heritage and its history as a hub for the wool and tweed industries. The iconic Bliss Mill, now converted into apartments, remains a visual landmark, particularly from the western approaches.
- 7.4.8 The town centre and much of the surrounding built area are protected by a Conservation Area, encompassing 126 listed buildings, several pre-dating the 18th century. Notable heritage assets include the Motte and Bailey Castle and Fishpond, a Scheduled Monument near St Mary's Church and the Scheduled Monument (a former Roman settlement and Iron Age remains) east of the town. The town's built environment is characterised by honey-coloured Cotswold stone, a rich variety of architectural styles, and a distinct historic townscape that blends civic, commercial, and residential functions.
- 7.4.9 Chipping Norton has a modestly growing and aging population. The proportion of residents aged over 65 continues to rise, projected to increase by over 36% between 2011 and 2026. The town has a higher-than-average percentage of single-person households (over 30%), including many older residents, reflecting changing demographic needs.

- 7.4.10 There is a high proportion of social housing (17.3%) relative to other parts of the District, though demand remains strong. Affordability remains a key issue, particularly for young people and concealed households, over 80% of whom are unable to afford even a one-bedroom flat without assistance.
- 7.4.11 Chipping Norton is proud of its identity as a working town, historically rooted in the wool and tweed industries. Employment today is concentrated in skilled trades, personal services, and healthcare, with many local businesses still located within three established employment estates to the west and a modern business park on the eastern edge.
- 7.4.12 Despite this, the proportion of residents both living and working in the town has fallen significantly, from over 50% in 2001 to just 36% by 2011, with many commuting elsewhere. However, home working is above average, with 35% of residents working from home, a trend which has likely increased post-pandemic.
- 7.4.13 Chipping Norton's town centre remains compact, historic, and well-used, with a traditional market square at its heart and a mix of independent retailers, small multiples, cafés, pubs, and professional services. It benefits from a local customer base, with over two-thirds of residents' convenience shopping conducted within the town.
- 7.4.14 However, parking constraints and traffic congestion, especially at peak times, limit its accessibility and appeal. The Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) around Horsefair and Banbury Road remains in place due to persistent emissions, primarily from HGVs.
- 7.4.15 7.4.15 There is a recognised need for improved public realm, accessibility and wayfinding, and potential exists for the town to develop more flexible workspace and co-working facilities in response to increased home and hybrid working patterns.
- 7.4.16 Chipping Norton is not served by rail, with the nearest stations located at Kingham and Charlbury. The town is accessible via key strategic routes (A44 and A361), but suffers from congestion and heavy HGV traffic, which adversely impacts the environment, health, and character of the town centre.
- 7.4.17 Car use dominates, with over 65% of residents commuting by private vehicle, while nearly 20% walk to work. Cycling levels remain low, although a network of public footpaths and bridleways provides access to the surrounding countryside.
- 7.4.18 Public transport is limited, though there are bus connections to nearby towns such as Banbury and Oxford. Parking availability in the town centre remains a longstanding concern for both residents and businesses.
- 7.4.19 The town is richly endowed with natural assets, including access to the Evenlode Valley, Glyme and Dorn Conservation Target Area, and several sites of ecological interest, including an SSSI to the east of the town.

- 7.4.20 Its elevated position means it is largely free from fluvial flooding, though localised surface water runoff and spring line issues are a concern during periods of heavy rain. The surrounding countryside includes a diverse mix of valley sides, farmland slopes and plateau areas, and is home to important wildlife corridors and semi-natural habitats.
- 7.4.21 Chipping Norton is known for its vibrant and close-knit community. The town supports a range of cultural and community assets, including the Chipping Norton Theatre, leisure centre with indoor pool, the outdoor community-run pool, youth centre, sports clubs, and numerous local societies.
- 7.4.22 Health services are anchored by the War Memorial Community Hospital, which supports both primary and some secondary care services. Residents benefit from strong community infrastructure, though an aging population and rising health and mobility needs place increased pressure on local services.

Chipping Norton in 2041 – A Draft Vision

By 2041, Chipping Norton will be a beacon of sustainable rural living – a working Cotswold town that is thriving, inclusive, and well-connected. It will maintain its distinctive character and landscape setting while embracing innovation.

Resilient Growth and High-Quality Housing

Chipping Norton will grow in a balanced and sustainable way, meeting local needs while protecting its environmental and historic setting. New homes will be climate-resilient, energy-efficient, and designed to reflect the town's character. A diverse mix of housing will support residents at every stage of life – including affordable homes, accessible designs, and downsizing options for older people.

Development will be focused where it can be best accommodated, avoiding sensitive landscapes including the Cotswolds National Landscape, and helping to reduce pressure on infrastructure. The town's setting, views, and historic character will be conserved and enhanced.

A Working, Walkable and Welcoming Town Centre

The town centre will remain a lively and attractive focal point for daily life – a place for people to shop, meet, work, and enjoy local culture. Independent shops, cafés, co-working spaces, and cultural venues will sit alongside essential services and community assets, all within walking distance for most residents.

Chipping Norton will be easy to get around, with better pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, improved accessibility for all ages and abilities, and enhanced public transport links. Measures to reduce congestion and improve air quality – especially around the A44 and A361 – will make the town centre cleaner, greener, and safer.

Enhanced Green Spaces and Environmental Stewardship

The town's surrounding countryside, green corridors, and iconic landscapes will be protected and celebrated, recognising not only their natural capital but also their heritage significance. Chipping Norton will be a gateway to nature and the Cotswolds National Landscape, with improved access to public footpaths, natural play spaces, and wildlife-rich habitats.

Watercourses and flood-prone areas will be safeguarded, while green and blue infrastructure will be expanded to support nature recovery, climate resilience, and community wellbeing. The dark skies at Rollright Stones will be preserved as a symbol of the town's commitment to environmental care.

A Diverse and Digitally Connected Local Economy

Chipping Norton will continue its evolution as a resilient rural economy – driven by small businesses, the creative sector, remote working, and local enterprise. Modern digital infrastructure will support flexible and hybrid working, reducing the need to commute and unlocking new economic opportunities.

The town will champion sustainable tourism, green technologies, and new business space in appropriate locations – supporting jobs, apprenticeships, and local wealth-building. New and existing employment sites will evolve to meet the needs of future generations, supported by skills training and educational partnerships.

Health, Learning and Community Wellbeing

Chipping Norton will be a healthy and inclusive place to live, with a strong sense of community and a high quality of life. Local health services will be expanded and well-integrated, including strengthened links to the War Memorial Community Hospital, GP practices, and wellbeing hubs. Youth provision, learning opportunities, and intergenerational initiatives will ensure that young people are supported and inspired to stay, study, and build futures in the town. Meanwhile, active aging and independent living will be supported through design, services, and local networks.

A Modern Rural Town with Strong Identity and Values

Chipping Norton's unique character – as a working town with deep roots and a bold outlook – will be celebrated and sustained. Its built heritage, historic townscape, and rural identity will be enhanced by high-quality design, sensitive planning, and a commitment to place.

Strategic Objectives for Chipping Norton

7.4.23 Drawing on the profile and draft vision we have identified a series of strategic objectives.

1. Sustainable and Sensitive Growth

- Focus new development within or adjacent to the existing built-up area, making the best use of brownfield land and under-utilised sites, while maintaining the town's compact and walkable character.
- Ensure that any expansion beyond the current town boundaries respects the landscape sensitivity of the Cotswolds National Landscape, avoids coalescence with nearby villages, and protects key views and the rural setting of the town.
- Deliver a balanced mix of housing to meet the needs of all residents, including affordable homes, smaller units for downsizing, and adaptable homes for older and disabled people.

2. Tackling Climate Change and Enhancing Natural Capital

- Embed high environmental standards into all new development, including zero and low-carbon building design, retrofitting of existing homes, and integrated renewable energy solutions.
- Enhance green and blue infrastructure networks, linking the town to the wider countryside and AONB, while supporting biodiversity, improving flood resilience, and strengthening access to nature.
- Support active travel and public transport as alternatives to car use, reducing emissions and congestion, particularly along the A44 and A361 corridors.

3. Supporting a Vibrant, Inclusive Town Centre

- Reinforce the role of the town centre as the social, economic and cultural heart of Chipping Norton, with a strong mix of independent retail, local services, flexible workspace, and community venues.
- Promote public realm improvements, pedestrian and cycle connectivity, and a welcoming environment for all users, including families, older people, and those with limited mobility.
- Encourage meanwhile uses, local events, and creative initiatives to maintain vitality and provide space for community-led activity and innovation.

4. Enabling Local Enterprise and a Resilient Economy

- Support the diversification of the local economy, including digital industries, the creative sector, green technologies, and small-scale manufacturing.
- Promote high-quality business space in appropriate locations, including town centre hubs and well-integrated employment areas such as Worcester Road and Station Road.
- Ensure that digital infrastructure, skills development, and access to education and training are in place to support local enterprise and provide employment opportunities for all ages.

5. Delivering Infrastructure and Services to Meet Local Needs

- Secure investment in essential infrastructure including healthcare, education, water and energy networks, and community facilities to support sustainable growth.
- Work with partners to expand the role of Chipping Norton War Memorial Community Hospital and improve access to integrated health and wellbeing services.
- Strengthen youth provision, early years and lifelong learning opportunities, and improve inclusive access to recreation, arts and cultural activities.

6. Celebrating Character, Heritage and Place

- Conserve and enhance the historic fabric of the town, including its Conservation Area, key buildings, and distinctive Cotswold vernacular architecture.
- Promote high-quality design that respects local character while responding to contemporary needs, including sustainability, accessibility and climate adaptation.
- Protect the town's rural identity, landscape setting and dark skies, recognising their importance to local identity, health, and visitor appeal.

A Strategy for Chipping Norton

7.4.24 Using the objectives outlined above we have drafted a settlement strategy policy for Chipping Norton below. The purpose of this policy is to provide an overarching strategic policy framework against which development proposals at Chipping Norton will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan.

7.4.25 It is intended to complement the existing Chipping Norton Neighbourhood Plan and provide a framework for any future update.

Policy CN1 – A Strategy for Chipping Norton

- I) Chipping Norton will continue to serve as a key service centre for northern West Oxfordshire and the wider rural hinterland, providing a sustainable and inclusive hub for housing, employment, retail, education, healthcare, culture, and community life. Development will be directed to locations that reinforce the town's distinct character and compact form, promote social and environmental wellbeing, and contribute to addressing the climate and ecological emergency

In managing future change, the Council will support development proposals that contribute to the following overarching aims:

- a) Delivering sustainable patterns of growth by:
 - i) Prioritising the re-use of previously developed land and appropriate infill sites within or adjacent to the built-up area, especially where this supports regeneration and better use of under-utilised assets;
 - ii) Supporting modest, well-integrated extensions to the town where needed, ensuring they are landscape-led, respect the setting of the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) and protect the separate identity of nearby villages;
 - iii) Requiring all development to be climate-resilient, resource-efficient, and of high design quality, with a mix of housing that reflects identified needs across tenures, sizes, and ages.
- b) Strengthening local infrastructure and services by:
 - i) Coordinating investment in physical, social, and green infrastructure to support sustainable growth, including improved healthcare, education, utilities, digital connectivity, and community facilities;
 - ii) Working with partners to improve access to health and wellbeing services, expand youth provision, and strengthen early years and lifelong learning opportunities;
 - iii) Securing developer contributions and funding to deliver infrastructure upgrades and active travel improvements in step with new development.
- c) Supporting a diverse, future-facing economy by:
 - i) Retaining and enhancing key employment areas such as Worcester Road and Station Road, while encouraging sensitive intensification and diversification of uses;
 - ii) Facilitating the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, creative and cultural industries, green tech businesses, and remote working opportunities through provision of flexible, modern workspace and new residential properties designed with home and hybrid working in mind;

- iii) Promoting tourism and the visitor economy by conserving the historic core, celebrating local heritage, and enhancing access to the surrounding countryside and cultural assets.
- d) Protecting and enhancing landscape, heritage and natural capital by:
 - i) Ensuring that all development respects the town's landscape setting, key views, dark skies, and the special qualities of the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB)
 - ii) Conserving the town's historic environment, including its distinctive streetscape, Conservation Area, and significant heritage assets, through sensitive and context-led design and, where possible, promoting access and appreciation of their significance;
 - iii) Enhancing the town's network of green and blue infrastructure to support biodiversity, access to nature, health, and recreation, while managing flood risk through integrated water management.

The Council will work proactively with the Town Council, landowners and other partners to deliver coordinated and sustainable growth in Chipping Norton in accordance with this strategy.

Chipping Norton Town Centre

Context

- 7.4.26 Chipping Norton town centre serves as the primary retail, leisure, and service hub for the northern part of West Oxfordshire, playing a vital role in supporting the town itself and a wider rural catchment. Rich in heritage and architectural charm, the centre's historic character and compact form contribute significantly to its distinctive sense of place and local identity.

Retail, Services and Function

- 7.4.27 The town centre accommodates a strong and diverse mix of retail and service uses, including a healthy balance of national multiples and independent businesses. Anchored by key convenience retailers such as Sainsburys and Your Co-op Food Market, and complemented by WH Smith and Boots, the centre offers a solid comparison and convenience retail offer for a town of its size. Independent shops, including antique stores, bookshops, and fashion boutiques, provide a unique and attractive draw, helping differentiate Chipping Norton from larger centres and out-of-town retail parks.
- 7.4.28 The centre also benefits from a weekly market, which contributes to local vibrancy and footfall. The High Street and Market Place fall within the primary shopping area where the protection of retail uses is a strategic priority to safeguard the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Leisure, Culture and Community Offer

- 7.4.29 Chipping Norton has a distinctive cultural and leisure presence that enhances its attractiveness to both residents and visitors. The Chipping Norton Theatre, located in a former Salvation Army citadel, operates as a multi-purpose arts venue offering theatre, film, music, and gallery space. Its diverse programme provides a focal point for community and regional cultural life.
- 7.4.30 This offer has been further bolstered by the opening of the two-screen Living Room Cinema in 2023 - a boutique venue with a licensed bar that has helped broaden the town's evening economy and cement its reputation as a cultural destination.

Accessibility and Movement

- 7.4.31 The A44, which bisects the town centre along High Street and West Street, provides strategic vehicular access but also presents challenges to pedestrian permeability and environmental quality. The traffic flow, combined with the town's natural gradient, creates a degree of fragmentation and hinders movement - particularly for less mobile users. While pavements are generally well-maintained, improvements to pedestrian crossings and the creation of new public spaces have been identified as key opportunities for enhancing the experience of the town centre.

Town Centre Floorspace and Performance

- 7.4.32 With around 16,370 sqm of commercial floorspace, Chipping Norton is the third-largest town centre in the District after Witney and Carterton. Comparison retail remains the most common use by outlet count, although leisure services occupy the most floorspace overall. However, the town has an above-average vacancy rate of 17.6% - notable both in outlet and floorspace terms - which has increased since the last monitoring period and now exceeds the national average (14.1%). Footfall has also declined by 14% between January and August 2024, reflecting wider trends in town centre challenges.

Environmental Quality and Heritage

- 7.4.33 Despite pressures from traffic and changing retail dynamics, the overall quality of the town centre's environment remains high. Historic architecture, including well-preserved shopfronts and landmark buildings like Bliss Mill on the edge of the town, contributes to a strong visual identity and sense of continuity. The historic burgage plots, especially around the High Street and Market Place, require sensitive treatment to maintain their spatial character and legibility.

A Potential Strategy for Chipping Norton Town Centre

7.4.34 The purpose of our draft strategy is to:

- Support Chipping Norton's role as a key service, retail, leisure, and cultural hub for northern West Oxfordshire.
- Enhance the vitality, viability, and resilience of the town centre, while promoting it as a visitor destination and rural economic hub.
- Preserve and promote a balanced mix of independent and national retailers to maintain the market town character.
- Encourage flexible re-use of vacant or under-utilised buildings for uses such as pop-ups, co-working, healthcare, and education.
- Strengthen the town's market offer and develop a family-friendly, inclusive evening economy.
- Improve pedestrian, cycling, and public transport accessibility, especially across the A44 and wider town centre.
- Deliver high-quality public realm improvements and create attractive, social spaces for residents and visitors.
- Respect and enhance the historic environment, including burgage plots, heritage assets, and shopfronts.
- Promote Chipping Norton as a distinctive cultural and heritage-based visitor destination.
- Support the growth of cultural venues and events to diversify programming and strengthen the town's cultural identity.
- Coordinate tourism promotion with other town centres across West Oxfordshire to create a cohesive district-wide offer.

Why is a Town Centre Strategy needed?

7.4.35 The strategy is needed for a number of reasons:

- To address rising vacancy and shifting trends: Despite its strong retail offer and cultural assets, Chipping Norton's town centre has a vacancy rate significantly above the national average (17.6% vs. 14.1%) and has experienced a 14% decline in footfall over the past year. Without intervention, the centre risks further decline in vitality and appeal.
- To build on existing strengths: Chipping Norton benefits from a rich historic environment, a strong independent retail presence, two cultural anchors (The Theatre and The Living Room Cinema), and a popular weekly market. These assets offer a solid foundation for renewal and growth.
- To overcome structural and accessibility challenges: The town's topography and the A44 running through the centre create barriers to movement and cohesion, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. Improvements in connectivity, safety, and public realm are needed to unlock the town centre's full potential.

- To support future resilience and flexibility: With changing shopping habits, the rise of online retail, and pressure from out-of-centre development, Chipping Norton needs to support creative reuse of space, encourage a more flexible business environment, and diversify its offer to remain competitive and adaptable.
- To strengthen Chipping Norton's role as a cultural and visitor destination: As the primary town in the north of the District and a gateway to the Cotswolds, Chipping Norton is well-placed to play a more prominent role in the area's visitor economy.
- To meet the needs of residents and surrounding communities: As a rural service hub, Chipping Norton must provide inclusive spaces, services, and experiences that cater not just to visitors, but to its growing and diverse resident population, including families, older people, and young professionals.

Preferred Approach

7.4.36 Our preferred approach for Chipping Norton is place-based community-focused, and delivery-driven, aiming to reinforce the town's role as a vibrant rural hub and cultural gateway to the Cotswolds. It focuses on:

1. Placemaking, Public Realm and Connectivity Enhancements

- Improve the quality, cohesion, and character of key streets and spaces including High Street, Market Place, and West Street through new planting, public seating, surface improvements, and heritage-led design.
- Reduce the dominance of vehicular traffic by enhancing pedestrian crossings, exploring further traffic calming, and improving accessibility across gradients and pinch points.
- Deliver high-quality, inclusive public spaces that enable social interaction, community events, and a more welcoming experience for visitors.
- Strengthen signage and wayfinding to connect the town centre with nearby attractions, green spaces, and active travel routes.

2. Mixed-Use Development and Adaptive Reuse

- Encourage the reuse of vacant and underused buildings for flexible, mixed-use purposes including residential, cultural, educational, or health and wellbeing uses.
- Promote temporary and 'meanwhile' uses such as pop-ups, maker spaces, and creative hubs to test ideas and support local enterprise.
- Support upper floor conversions and mixed-use schemes that contribute to a vibrant town centre and broaden the resident base.

3. Cultural Programming and Market Activation

- Reinforce the role of the Theatre and Living Room Cinema as cultural anchors and promote a family-friendly evening economy.
- Enhance and better promote the weekly market, exploring new themes, formats, and links with local producers and festivals.
- Encourage coordinated cultural events and visitor experiences, working with local groups, heritage bodies, and neighbouring towns.

4. Local Enterprise and Visitor Economy

- Provide space and support for entrepreneurs, independent businesses, and creative industries through co-working, incubation spaces, and adaptable retail units.
- Strengthen Chipping Norton's identity as a cultural and heritage destination through promotion, coordinated branding, and digital presence.
- Collaborate with partners to enhance the town's role as part of a wider visitor circuit across West Oxfordshire and the Cotswolds.

7.4.37 This approach is reflected in the initial draft policy below.

CN2: Chipping Norton Town Centre

- 1) Chipping Norton Town Centre will continue to serve as a key service, retail, leisure, and cultural hub for northern West Oxfordshire, building on its historic character, strong independent retail offer, and vibrant cultural scene.

The Council will support development that enhances the vitality, viability, and resilience of the town centre while promoting its role as a visitor destination and rural economic hub.

- 2) In managing change, development proposals will be supported where they contribute to the following overarching aims:
 - a) Enhancing vitality and viability by:
 - i) Protecting and promoting a balanced mix of independent and national retailers and resisting the loss of retail uses within the Primary Shopping Area to preserve the market town character and core retail function.
 - ii) Supporting the re-use of vacant or under-utilised buildings for flexible uses including pop-ups, co-working spaces, studios, healthcare, and education.
 - iii) Upgrading and promoting the weekly market as a distinctive and high-quality feature of the town centre offer.
 - iv) Encouraging family-friendly evening economy uses and activities that support safe, vibrant, and inclusive nightlife.
 - v) Enabling temporary and adaptable spaces to support entrepreneurs, start-ups, creatives, and small businesses.
 - b) Improving accessibility, safety, and movement by:
 - i) Enhancing pedestrian safety and accessibility through upgraded crossing points, traffic calming measures, and improved connectivity across the A44 corridor and wider town centre.
 - ii) Improving cycling infrastructure and secure cycle parking to promote active travel.
 - iii) Supporting public transport accessibility and wayfinding for better navigation to and around the town centre.
 - c) Enhancing the public realm and historic environment by:
 - i) Delivering high-quality public realm improvements including greening, tree planting, new seating, street furniture, and attractive spaces to dwell and socialise.
 - ii) Creating a central public space as a focal point for community gathering, events, and cultural activity.
 - iii) Respecting and enhancing the historic character of the town, including the preservation of burgage plots and sensitive treatment of heritage assets and shopfronts.

- iv) Supporting the preparation and promotion of heritage trails and guides as part of the visitor offer.
- d) Supporting tourism and cultural identity by:
 - i) Promoting Chipping Norton as a historic and cultural visitor destination, anchored by its heritage, theatre, cinema, and independent shopping experience.
 - ii) Coordinating tourism activity and promotion across West Oxfordshire's town centres to deliver a more coherent and compelling district-wide offer.
 - iii) Supporting cultural venues such as The Theatre Chipping Norton and The Living Room Cinema to expand and diversify programming that attracts residents and visitors alike.
 - iv) Enhancing the town's cultural calendar through events, festivals, and seasonal programming, supported by improved branding and promotion.

Chipping Norton - Future Development Locations

- 7.4.38 The current Local Plan allocates one site at Chipping Norton – the Land East of Chipping Norton Strategic Development Area (SDA). The allocation envisages around 1,200 new homes of which 173 have already been completed - 100 homes on land to the south of Banbury Road and 73 homes as part of a mixed-use development south of London Road.
- 7.4.39 Delivery of the remainder has been delayed for various reasons including the fact that a large proportion of the south-east part of the site has now been designated as a scheduled monument due to the presence of iron age and romano-british archaeological remains.
- 7.4.40 Officers understand that the primary landowners are considering how to proceed in light of the scheduling decision and that the main landowner – Oxfordshire County Council Property and Facilities – is considering whether it can bring forward the land which is in their control to the north of London Road. This would mean a significant reduction in the number of homes delivered – possibly around 750 - although this is a very broad estimate.
- 7.4.41 As discussions remain ongoing, Officers propose to revisit the issue as part of the focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025. Without prejudice to that process, for the purposes of this preferred options consultation paper and establishing the residual number of new homes that will need to be accommodated through new allocations in the 2041 Local Plan, Officers have assumed the delivery of a reduced quantum of around 750 homes.
- 7.4.42 In terms of other potential development areas, options for development at Chipping Norton are limited by the extent of the Cotswolds National Landscape which washes over much of the town. Very recently, the Council resolved to grant outline planning permission for the construction of up to 104 new homes on land to the south of Charlbury Road on the southern fringe of the town subject to the completion of a Section 106 legal agreement.
- 7.4.43 The potential for any further development opportunities at Chipping Norton will be explored as part of the focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025.

Bampton Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Bampton

- 7.5.1 Under draft Core Policy 2, Bampton is identified as a Tier 2 Service Centre and will be expected to accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the village and supports its local service function.
- 7.5.2 Within this context, below we have outlined thoughts on what an overall strategy for Bampton might look like. To do this, we have first prepared a brief profile of the village in 2025. Using this and other relevant information, we have identified key issues which the local plan will need to address and worked this into a draft vision and strategy.

Bampton in 2025

- 7.5.3 Bampton is a large, historic village located approximately 7km (4.5 miles) southwest of Witney. With a 2021 population of around 3,000 residents and 1,300 households, Bampton has seen steady growth in recent years, including new developments to the north and east of the village. The age profile is broadly in line with national trends, although there is a slight underrepresentation of residents aged 15–24.
- 7.5.4 Levels of deprivation are low and employment levels are high, with over a third of the working-age population working from or mainly from home. Car usage for commuting is high, and public transport usage is comparatively low, reflecting the poor services available.
- 7.5.5 Bampton is served by the Pulhams No. 19 bus route, providing hourly services to Carterton and Witney six days a week. There are no Sunday services, and train access is limited, with the nearest station with an hourly service being Hanborough 14 miles away.
- 7.5.6 The village boasts a strong historic and cultural character, with the majority of the settlement designated as a conservation area (since 1976), containing numerous listed buildings. This includes the Grade I listed Church of St Mary the Virgin, a landmark with Saxon origins, Norman and Gothic additions, and a prominent spire.
- 7.5.7 Historic buildings such as Ham Court, Weald Manor, and The Deanery underscore Bampton's significance as one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements in Oxfordshire, with roots stretching back to the Iron Age and references in the Domesday Book (1086).
- 7.5.8 Bampton retains a well-defined nucleated layout, with some dispersed housing on its edges, including provision for gypsy and traveller communities. Most housing consists of traditional stone or brick-built houses.
- 7.5.9 The village core sits on gravel terraces, and while the bulk of Bampton lies within Flood Zone 1, parts of the southern and western fringes fall within Flood Zone 3 due to proximity to the Shill Brook.

- 7.5.10 Community amenities are strong for a rural settlement of its size, including a primary school, pre-school, doctor's surgery, library, shop and post office, and a range of pubs and eateries.
- 7.5.11 Cultural life is vibrant, with Bampton Classical Opera, the West Ox Arts Gallery, and a longstanding Morris dancing tradition, celebrated annually on the late May Bank Holiday. Bampton was also a key filming location for the popular series *Downton Abbey*, further increasing its visitor profile.
- 7.5.12 The village supports a range of recreational activities, including Bampton Town Football Club, a skatepark, and the Bampton & District Aunt Sally Association, reflecting a strong sense of community engagement and local tradition.
- 7.5.13 Bampton's heritage, location, and community facilities position it as a sustainable rural service centre, but future development must remain sensitive to its historic character, conservation constraints, and flood risk areas.

Key Issues for the Local Plan to address

- 7.5.14 Drawing on the profile above and other relevant information, we have identified a number of key issues that the new Local Plan might seek to address in relation to Bampton.

1. Managing Sustainable Growth

- Bampton has experienced **steady housing growth** since 2011. Any further development must:
 - Be appropriately scaled to the village's character and capacity.
 - Avoid overburdening existing infrastructure and services.
 - Respect the **conservation area** and **heritage assets** which dominate the village core.

2. Flood Risk and Climate Resilience

- While much of the village lies in **Flood Zone 1**, key fringes lie in **Flood Zone 3** and are at **high fluvial flood risk** from the Shill Brook and Highmoor Brook.
- New development must include **robust flood mitigation** and **sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)**.
- The Local Plan must ensure future housing and infrastructure avoids areas at greatest risk particularly in the **south and west (Flood Zone 3)**.

3. Transport and Connectivity

- There is **very limited public transport**, with **no Sunday bus services** and **minimal rail access**.
- High **car dependency** for commuting increases pressure on local roads and contributes to carbon emissions.

- The plan should explore:
 - Improved **public transport connections** (e.g. more frequent services or Sunday buses).
 - Enhanced **active travel infrastructure** (walking/cycling).
 - **Better digital infrastructure** to support growing homeworking patterns.

4. Heritage Protection

- Bampton's **historic environment is a key asset** but also a constraint:
 - The **conservation area, listed buildings, and archaeological sensitivity** require that any development is **high quality, contextually appropriate, and minimally intrusive**.
 - The local plan must continue to ensure **rigorous heritage-led planning**.

5. Infrastructure and Facilities

- Although Bampton has a **good range of community facilities**, these are likely to need enhancement to support a growing and changing population.
- Bampton sewage treatment works are under capacity and lead to frequent spills
- The plan should consider:
 - The **capacity of the primary school and GP services**.
 - Support for **youth facilities**, public spaces, and recreational provision.
 - Long-term sustainability of key assets such as the **library and arts/cultural facilities**.

6. Housing Needs and Affordability

- With strong local character and heritage constraints, **housing delivery** requires careful consideration.
- The plan must address:
 - Proportionately-scaled provision of new homes including **affordable housing**.
 - Appropriate **tenure mix** to meet demographic needs, particularly for **younger households** and the **ageing population**.

7. Employment and Economic Opportunities

- While employment levels are high, many residents **work from home** or **commute by car**.
- The plan should consider:
 - Support for **home-based businesses and remote working**.
 - Opportunities for **small-scale employment space**, especially within mixed-use or reuse of existing buildings.
 - Enhancing **digital connectivity** to underpin the homeworking economy.

8. Tourism and Cultural Identity

- Bampton's **Morris dancing tradition, Downton Abbey filming history, and historic assets** attract visitors.
- The plan should balance:
 - Support for **low-impact tourism** and **cultural promotion**.
 - Management of **visitor traffic and parking**, particularly in a village layout not designed for modern vehicle use.

Draft Vision and Strategy

- 7.5.15 Based on the profile and key issues outlined above, we have prepared a draft vision and settlement strategy, the purpose of which is to provide an overarching policy framework against which development proposals at Bampton will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan. It also provides a framework for any future Neighbourhood Plan.

Bampton in 2041 – A Draft Vision

Bampton's vision is to evolve as a vibrant and inclusive rural community that celebrates its rich heritage, supports local needs, and enhances resilience in the face of climate and societal change. By blending careful conservation with thoughtful growth, Bampton will continue to be a cherished place to live, work, and visit.

A Historic Village with a Strong Community Spirit

By 2041, Bampton will continue to foster a strong and inclusive sense of community. The village's extensive historic character, from its medieval street pattern to its cultural traditions such as Morris dancing, will remain central to local identity. Community hubs, green spaces, and local facilities will be maintained and enhanced to support well-being across all age groups.

A Place of Heritage-Led, Sustainable Growth

Development in Bampton will be sensitive and proportionate in scale. New housing will respond to the village's distinct character and help meet affordability challenges, particularly for younger households and those working locally. Buildings will be energy-efficient and resilient to climate impacts, including flooding. The re-use of brownfield and underused sites will be prioritised wherever possible, alongside enhanced green infrastructure, nature corridors, and tree planting.

A Connected, Low-Carbon Rural Settlement

By 2041, Bampton will be more connected and sustainable. Public and community transport options will be improved, reducing car dependency and supporting access to jobs and services. Digital infrastructure will be strengthened to support remote working and small business development. Walking and cycling routes will be enhanced to encourage active travel within and around the village, linking to neighbouring settlements and the wider countryside.

A Village Rooted in Culture and Local Enterprise

Bampton's reputation as a centre of cultural life and tourism, including its association with traditional dance and filming locations, will be nurtured in a way that respects village life. The local economy will be supported through small-scale enterprise, remote work hubs, and the careful promotion of sustainable tourism. Heritage buildings and community assets will be adapted to ensure long-term use and financial viability.

BAM1 – A Strategy for Bampton

- 1) Bampton must continue to function as a sustainable rural service centre, valued for its historic character, community spirit, and natural setting. The Council will support proposals that help the village adapt to future challenges while respecting its identity and environmental constraints.
- 2) Development proposals will be supported where they:
 - a) Support Bampton's role as a distinctive rural community by:
 - i) Maintaining and enhancing the village's network of community facilities and services;
 - ii) Promoting Bampton's cultural life and traditions in a way that enriches resident experience and attracts responsible tourism;
 - iii) Supporting local events, arts, and heritage initiatives that reinforce village identity and economic vitality.
 - b) Enable well-integrated, proportionate growth that meets local needs by:
 - i) Delivering a mix of housing types with a focus on affordability and accessibility for local people;
 - ii) Prioritising the sensitive reuse of land and buildings within the existing built area;
 - iii) Ensuring all development demonstrates high design quality and is appropriate to the village's historic and rural character, particularly within or adjacent to the Conservation Area.
 - c) Strengthen resilience and environmental sustainability by:
 - i) Avoiding new development in areas at highest flood risk and incorporating SuDS and flood mitigation in all new proposals;
 - ii) Supporting biodiversity, tree planting, and green infrastructure within and around the village;
 - iii) Promoting the energy-efficient design of new buildings and, where appropriate, the sensitive retrofitting of older properties.
 - d) Improve transport and digital connectivity by:
 - i) Enhancing provision for walking and cycling, including safe routes to school, community facilities, and neighbouring villages;
 - ii) Supporting improved public and community transport services, especially to nearby towns and railway connections;
 - iii) Strengthening digital infrastructure to support remote working and access to online services.
 - e) Promote inclusivity, well-being, and quality of life by:
 - i) Ensuring new development contributes to improved health, education, and recreational infrastructure;
 - ii) Encouraging use of public spaces and community venues for intergenerational and inclusive activities;
 - iii) Supporting initiatives that address social isolation, especially among older residents and young families.
- 3) The Council will work in partnership with Bampton Parish Council, the local community, infrastructure providers, and stakeholders to guide future change in a way that is balanced, inclusive, and resilient, including through the potential preparation of any future Neighbourhood Plan.

Bampton – Future Development Locations

- 7.5.16 The adopted Local Plan 2031 does not allocate any sites at Bampton, but a number of medium-scale residential schemes have come forward in recent years, including land to the north of New Road (160 homes) and land to the east of Mount Owen Road (160 homes).
- 7.5.17 In accordance with the proposed draft spatial strategy (Core Policy 3) there is an expectation that Tier 2 service centres such as Bampton will accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the settlement and will support its local service function. For new housing, the primary focus is intended to be on small (<10 units) and medium-scale sites (10 – 300 units).
- 7.5.18 A number of potential sites have been put forward by landowners and developers for consideration at Bampton and are in the process of being assessed by Officers. The focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025 will provide details of any locations that are considered suitable for potential allocation through the new Local Plan.

Burford Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Burford

- 7.6.1 Like Bampton, Burford is proposed to be identified as a Tier 2 Service Centre, reflecting the good level and variety of services and facilities it offers despite its relatively modest size.
- 7.6.2 In accordance with the proposed spatial strategy, Burford will therefore be expected to accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to its size and supports its local service function. However, because of its location within the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) the scale and extent of development will be limited in accordance with national policy¹¹.
- 7.6.3 Within this context, below we have outlined our thoughts on what an overall strategy for Burford might look like. To do this, we have first prepared a brief profile of the town in 2025. Using this and other relevant information, we have identified key issues which the local plan will need to address and worked this into a draft vision and strategy.
- 7.6.4 Because Burford has a defined Town Centre, we have also set out an initial draft Town Centre strategy.

Burford in 2025

- 7.6.5 Burford is a small but vibrant market town in the western part of West Oxfordshire, often celebrated as the ‘Gateway to the Cotswolds’. Set along the River Windrush and nestled within the Cotswolds National Landscape, the town is renowned for its historic charm, rich architectural heritage, and strong sense of place.
- 7.6.6 Its striking High Street, lined with medieval, Tudor, and Georgian buildings, reflects a legacy that dates back to the Anglo-Saxon and medieval wool trade periods.
- 7.6.7 Burford plays a significant role in the local economy despite its modest size. With a population of approximately 1,977 across 885 households (2021 Census), it is the smallest of West Oxfordshire’s service centres but offers a level of amenities that far exceeds its scale.
- 7.6.8 The town centre encompasses just under 10,000 square metres of retail floorspace, largely composed of independent, boutique retailers specialising in art, antiques, homewares, crafts, and fashion. A low retail vacancy rate and rising footfall illustrate its commercial vitality.
- 7.6.9 Tourism is central to Burford's identity and economy. Visitors are drawn to its picturesque streets, cultural attractions such as the Tolsey Museum and the Grade I listed Church of St John the Baptist (dating from 1175), and nearby destinations including the Cotswold Wildlife Park and Crocodiles of the World.

¹¹ NPPF paragraph 189

- 7.6.10 Burford's hospitality sector, anchored by historic establishments such as The Baytree and The Bull Hotels adds to its appeal as a destination for day-trippers and longer stays.
- 7.6.11 However, the town also faces notable challenges. Its high environmental quality and conservation designations have limited housing development since the late 1980s, contributing to a shortage of affordable homes and high property prices.
- 7.6.12 Traffic congestion, particularly at the River Windrush crossing and along the A361 which cuts through the High Street, along with pressure on car parking and relatively limited public transport options, present ongoing infrastructure constraints. Heavy goods vehicle (HGV) traffic remains a particular concern for residents and businesses alike.

Key Issues for the Local Plan to Address

- 7.6.13 Drawing on the profile above and other relevant information, we have identified a number of key issues that the new Local Plan might seek to address in relation to Burford.

1. Sustainable Growth and Heritage Protection

- Burford has experienced relatively limited housing growth due to its sensitive historic and environmental setting.
- The Local Plan must explore options for limited, well-designed housing to meet local needs, especially affordable homes, without compromising the town's character, setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape, or historic assets.
- Opportunities for adaptive reuse of existing or underused buildings should be considered alongside limited, sensitive greenfield expansion.

2. Housing Needs and Affordability

- High property prices and a lack of new housing supply have created affordability issues, particularly for younger residents and local workers.
- The Plan should explore proportionate housing provision focused on local needs, including affordable housing and housing suitable for an ageing population.

3. Traffic, Parking and Transport Connectivity

- Traffic congestion, especially along the A361 and across the Windrush bridge, is a long-standing concern.
- Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) movements through the historic town centre are particularly problematic.
- The Plan should promote traffic mitigation, explore HGV management strategies, and enhance pedestrian, cycle, and public transport connectivity.
- Car parking capacity remains under pressure and may require strategic solutions.

4. Public Transport and Active Travel

- Public transport provision is limited, reinforcing car dependency.
- Improved public transport services, including more frequent and lower-carbon options, are essential.
- The Plan should support new and enhanced active travel routes to improve safety, accessibility, and reduce car use, particularly between Burford and Fulbrook across the Windrush Bridge.

5. Climate Resilience and Environmental Protection

- As part of the Cotswolds National Landscape, Burford's environmental quality is a key asset and constraint.
- The Plan should support nature-based solutions such as rain gardens, green infrastructure, and measures to improve air quality and urban cooling.
- Retrofitting historic buildings for energy efficiency must be encouraged in a heritage-sensitive manner.

6. Tourism and Visitor Management

- Tourism is central to Burford's economy but places pressure on coach and car parking infrastructure, especially during peak periods.
- A coordinated tourism strategy is needed to manage visitor flows, encourage off-peak visits, support local businesses, and protect residential amenity.

7. Community Services and Facilities

- While the town has a strong sense of community, it must remain inclusive and well-served.
- The Plan should support enhancements to community facilities that promote health, wellbeing, and social cohesion, including public gathering spaces and youth and elderly services.

8. Economic Development and Local Employment

- The economy is underpinned by independent retail, hospitality, and culture.
- The Plan should support local enterprises, cultural events, and digital infrastructure to maintain economic vitality.
- Opportunities for small-scale, flexible workspaces and support for home-based businesses should be explored.

Draft Vision and Strategy

- 7.6.14 Based on the profile and key issues outlined above, we have prepared a draft vision and settlement strategy, the purpose of which is to provide an overarching policy framework against which development proposals at Burford will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan. It also provides a framework for any future Neighbourhood Plan.

Burford in 2041 – A Draft Vision

Burford's vision is to be a living example of how historic towns can thrive sustainably, preserving their architectural and cultural legacy while meeting the needs of today's residents, visitors, and future generations.

A Resilient, Inclusive, and Well-Connected Community

By 2041, Burford is working to ensure that its strong sense of community remains inclusive and intergenerational. Community facilities and programmes promote health, well-being, and social cohesion, while active travel infrastructure including improved pedestrian and cycle routes strengthens connectivity both within the town and to neighbouring areas. Public transport options have transitioned toward carbon neutrality, reducing car dependency and traffic impacts on the historic High Street.

A Model of Heritage-Led Sustainability

Recognising its unique historic fabric, Burford is taking steps to demonstrate how conservation and innovation can go hand-in-hand. Initiatives are underway to retrofit heritage buildings with energy-efficient technologies in a manner sensitive to their character. As part of a wider district-wide sustainability effort, Burford is laying the groundwork for green infrastructure such as increased biodiversity planting, rain gardens, and enhanced green spaces to support urban cooling, environmental resilience, and quality of life.

A Thriving Local Economy Driven by Culture and Tourism

Burford's economic vitality continues to be anchored in its strong independent retail sector, hospitality, and cultural offerings. A co-ordinated tourism strategy is being developed to balance visitor appeal with resident needs - enhancing wayfinding, promoting off-peak tourism, and supporting local artisans and producers. The town centre is not only a destination but a vibrant community space, active during the day and evening, with public art, events, and gathering places.

Managing Growth with Character and Care

Mindful of housing affordability pressures, Burford is engaging in district-led efforts to explore opportunities for carefully designed, sustainable housing that meets local needs without compromising environmental or heritage values. Limited development and adaptive reuse of underused buildings are being considered to support a diverse and inclusive community, while avoiding unsustainable sprawl.

Looking Ahead

Burford's path toward 2041 is rooted in its past but focused on the future. As part of a District striving for environmental excellence, digital connectivity, and social equity, Burford aims to be a beacon for how small historic towns can contribute to a bigger sustainable picture. Through partnership, innovation, and stewardship, Burford will continue to be a place where people want to live, work, visit, and invest - cherished for its beauty, and respected for its forward-thinking approach.

BUR1 – A Strategy for Burford

- 1) Burford will continue to serve as a distinctive service centre and key visitor destination within West Oxfordshire, valued for its exceptional historic character, cultural heritage, and setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape. The Council will support proposals that sustain and enhance Burford's social, economic, and environmental well-being, in accordance with the town's vision and strategic objectives.
- 2) Development proposals will be supported where they:
 - a) Strengthen Burford's role as a sustainable rural service and tourism centre by:
 - i) Supporting the vitality and diversity of the town centre through the retention and enhancement of independent retail, hospitality, and cultural uses;
 - ii) Promoting tourism that respects the town's character, improves the year-round visitor experience, and contributes to the local economy;
 - iii) Encouraging initiatives that enhance the evening economy and support local arts, events, and creative industries.
 - b) Support sensitive, well-integrated development that meets local needs by:
 - i) Prioritising the reuse of existing buildings and limited development within the built-up area;
 - ii) Delivering a balanced mix of housing, with an emphasis on affordable and smaller homes suited to local people, including younger households and essential workers;
 - iii) Promoting high-quality design that responds to the historic environment and landscape context, including the Conservation Area and Cotswolds National Landscape.
 - c) Enhance local infrastructure and sustainable transport by:
 - i) Improving provision for walking and cycling, including safe links between residential areas, the town centre, and local attractions;
 - ii) Supporting low-carbon transport solutions, such as community transport, electric vehicle infrastructure, and better visitor wayfinding;
 - iii) Managing traffic impacts and congestion, particularly on the A361 and at the Windrush bridge, to improve safety and quality of place for residents and visitors.
 - iv) Improving the public transport infrastructure (bus shelters, real time information, coach parking) and car parking provision
 - d) Protect and enhance the town's environmental and heritage assets by:
 - i) Conserving and sensitively adapting historic buildings and public spaces to support sustainability and continued use;
 - ii) Delivering biodiversity enhancements and green infrastructure within and around the town, including tree planting, pollinator corridors, and climate-resilient landscaping;
 - iii) Promoting high standards of environmental design, including retrofitting of historic buildings with energy-efficient technologies where appropriate.
 - e) Foster community well-being and inclusivity by:
 - i) Supporting improvements to health, leisure, education, and social care infrastructure to meet the needs of all age groups;
 - ii) Encouraging the use of community facilities and public spaces to strengthen social cohesion and reduce isolation;
 - iii) Ensuring that development contributes positively to local character, identity, and quality of life for residents.

- 3) The Council will work collaboratively with the local community, town and parish councils, statutory bodies, highway authority and tourism organisations to ensure that Burford evolves in a way that is inclusive, resilient, and aligned with its long-term role as a historic market town and rural hub within the District.

Burford Town Centre

Context

- 7.6.15 Burford town centre serves as a key rural service hub in the western part of West Oxfordshire and a popular visitor destination within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Though smaller in scale than other town centres in the District, it plays an outsized role in providing independent retail, hospitality, and cultural services, both for local residents and the significant number of tourists it attracts year-round.
- 7.6.16 The centre offers a strong and distinctive retail mix, almost entirely comprised of independent traders. With around 9,310 sqm of retail floorspace, Burford supports a vibrant blend of boutique shops, antique dealers, art galleries, and specialist retailers, reinforcing its reputation as a high-quality shopping destination. Retail vacancy is notably low, reflecting strong demand and a resilient independent retail sector, underpinned by consistent tourism footfall.
- 7.6.17 The town's historic High Street is central to its commercial function, providing a continuous frontage of heritage buildings adapted for modern retail and hospitality uses. Local businesses are supported by a loyal customer base and the town's high visibility within the wider Cotswold visitor economy.

Leisure, Culture and Community Offer

- 7.6.18 While Burford lacks large-scale cultural venues, it offers a rich leisure and visitor experience through its high-quality pubs, restaurants, and historic attractions. The Tolsey Museum, located in a former 16th-century market toll house, showcases the town's long history and plays a key role in Burford's cultural identity.
- 7.6.19 Community life is closely tied to Burford's heritage and built environment. Public houses, inns, and cafés contribute to the evening economy, while events and seasonal festivals provide further vibrancy. St John the Baptist church and the Warwick Hall are good examples of how historic premises are used to support both tourism and community interaction.

Accessibility and Movement

- 7.6.20 Burford's compact town centre is walkable, but movement is constrained by traffic congestion, especially at the A361 River Windrush crossing, which channels heavy goods vehicles through the High Street. Narrow pavements and high visitor numbers can create conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.

- 7.6.21 Car and coach parking is limited and often oversubscribed, particularly in peak tourist periods, which affects both visitor experience and access to local businesses. Public transport options are limited, contributing to a reliance on car travel. Measures to improve active travel, better signage, and safer crossing points are key priorities for improving accessibility and town centre resilience.

Town Centre Floorspace and Performance

- 7.6.22 Despite its small population, Burford performs strongly in terms of retail presence relative to its size. The 9,310 sqm of town centre floorspace supports a high-quality independent retail offer with minimal vacancies, reflecting its role as a specialist and destination shopping location. Unlike larger centres, the mix skews heavily toward comparison retail and hospitality rather than convenience services.
- 7.6.23 While formal footfall data is limited, anecdotal and observational evidence suggests consistently high levels of visitor activity, particularly during weekends and holiday seasons. The town's resilience is largely supported by the tourism economy, though seasonal fluctuations and operational cost pressures remain challenges for long-term performance.

Environmental Quality and Heritage

- 7.6.24 Burford town centre is recognised for its exceptional heritage character and environmental quality. Its setting within the AONB and designation as a Conservation Area provide strong protections, but also limit opportunities for large-scale change. The historic fabric of the town, with its medieval, Tudor, and Georgian architecture, is a central element of its identity and economic success.
- 7.6.25 Careful management of shopfronts, signage, and public realm improvements will be essential to preserving the integrity of the townscape. The visual and environmental appeal of the town centre underpins its success, making heritage conservation and high design standards a continued strategic priority.

A Potential Strategy for Burford Town Centre

Why is a Town Centre Strategy needed?

- 7.6.26 A strategy for Burford town centre is needed for several key reasons:
- To safeguard a thriving but vulnerable centre: While Burford currently enjoys a low retail vacancy rate and strong independent offer, its heavy reliance on tourism makes it susceptible to seasonal fluctuations, rising operational costs, and broader changes in consumer behaviour. A proactive strategy is essential to sustain vitality, support local businesses, and manage evolving pressures on the town centre economy.
 - To manage the impact of traffic and accessibility challenges: The A361, which runs through the High Street, brings significant HGV traffic and congestion, particularly at the River Windrush crossing. This not only undermines pedestrian safety and air quality but also affects the overall visitor experience. A coordinated approach to improving movement, parking, and active travel infrastructure is critical to ensuring a safe and accessible town centre.

- To preserve and enhance Burford's historic character: As a Conservation Area within the Cotswolds AONB, Burford's heritage setting is both a key asset and a planning constraint. The strategy must support sensitive development, heritage-led regeneration, and public realm improvements that enhance the town's unique identity while accommodating modern needs.
- To diversify and future-proof the town centre offer: With changing patterns in retail and leisure consumption, Burford must consider how to broaden its town centre function beyond traditional retail—encouraging greater use of space for community, cultural, and flexible business uses, including workspace and creative industries that align with its artisanal strengths.
- To support inclusive growth and community needs: As a rural service centre, Burford plays an important role in serving residents of the town and nearby villages. The town centre must remain accessible, welcoming, and relevant for a range of users—including older residents, families, and local workers—not just visitors.
- To maximise the visitor economy sustainably: Burford's national and international appeal as the 'Gateway to the Cotswolds' is a powerful economic driver. However, this success must be carefully managed to avoid over-tourism, support green travel options, and enhance the visitor experience while maintaining the town's social and environmental fabric.

Preferred Approach

7.6.27 Our preferred approach for Burford is conservation-led, community-oriented, and sustainability-focused, aiming to safeguard the town's historic character while enhancing its function as a local service centre and high-quality visitor destination within the Cotswolds. It focuses on:

1. Placemaking, Environmental Quality, and Movement

- Improve the environmental quality and experience of the High Street and Church Green through public realm enhancements, including greening, seating, and surface upgrades in keeping with the town's historic fabric.
- Address the impacts of traffic and air pollution along the A361 corridor, including exploring traffic calming, alternative routing, and improved pedestrian safety measures.
- Enhance permeability and inclusivity by improving pedestrian links between key destinations (e.g. car parks, the river, the church, and High Street) and addressing physical barriers to movement.
- Introduce coordinated wayfinding and heritage signage to connect visitors with attractions, public facilities, and walking/cycling routes.

2. Adaptive Reuse and Mixed-Use Opportunities

- Encourage the sensitive reuse of vacant or underused historic buildings for flexible, mixed-use purposes including independent retail, cafés, cultural space, co-working, and health services.
- Support upper-floor conversions and live-work units that diversify the residential mix while retaining active ground-floor uses.
- Promote temporary and community-led uses to activate underutilised space and support local enterprise.

3. Sustainable Tourism and Heritage Management

- Reinforce Burford's role as a sustainable tourism hub by promoting low-impact travel, improving visitor infrastructure, and supporting longer stays over high-volume day trips.
- Develop and promote heritage-based visitor experiences including trails, guides, and interpretation that celebrate the town's history while managing footfall and environmental pressures.
- Support events, festivals, and cultural programming that reflect local identity, involve the community, and extend the visitor season sustainably.

4. Supporting Local Enterprise and Services

- Strengthen Burford's identity as a centre for high-quality, independent retail, craft, and hospitality businesses, providing appropriate support and space for small enterprises.
- Enhance the market offering and explore themed or seasonal events to support footfall and local producers.
- Maintain and expand the town centre's role in meeting everyday service needs for residents and rural communities, including healthcare, post office services and essential retail.

7.6.28 Our approach aims to balance preservation with progress, ensuring that Burford's town centre remains economically active, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable, while retaining its historic charm and role as a Cotswold gateway.

7.6.29 This approach is reflected in the initial draft policy below.

BUR2 – Burford Town Centre

- 1) Burford Town Centre will continue to play a key role in serving local communities and supporting West Oxfordshire's visitor economy, building on its distinctive historic character, strong independent retail offer, and gateway location within the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB).

The Council will support development that enhances the vitality, sustainability, and resilience of the town centre, while protecting its unique identity, addressing environmental pressures, and promoting inclusive access for residents and visitors alike.

- 2) In managing change, development proposals will be supported where they contribute to the following overarching aims:

- a) **Enhancing vitality, viability, and flexibility by:**

- i) Maintaining a balanced mix of town centre uses, with a particular emphasis on protecting and promoting independent shops, cafes, and visitor-related services that reflect Burford's market town character.
- ii) Resisting the loss of active ground-floor uses within the Primary Shopping Area unless it can be demonstrated that the change would not undermine the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- iii) Supporting the re-use of under-used or vacant buildings for flexible, temporary, and mixed uses, including creative workspace, pop-ups, local maker studios, education, and health services.
- iv) Encouraging activity throughout the day and evening by supporting family-friendly food, cultural, and leisure uses that contribute to a safe and inclusive environment.
- v) Facilitating opportunities for small-scale, sustainable business growth, including community enterprise, craft production, and digital start-ups aligned with the town's character.

- b) **Improving accessibility, movement, and environmental quality by:**

- i) Supporting measures to reduce the dominance and environmental impact of through-traffic on the A361, including traffic calming, air quality improvements, and strategic transport interventions.
- ii) Enhancing pedestrian and cycle connectivity throughout the town centre, particularly between the High Street, Church Green, the car parks, and the River Windrush corridor.
- iii) Improving wayfinding, signage, and accessibility for all users, including older people and those with mobility impairments.
- iv) Promoting sustainable travel options, including public transport links, bike parking, and access to regional walking and cycling routes.

- c) **Enhancing the historic environment and public realm by:**

- i) Ensuring that all development within the Conservation Area and Cotswolds National Landscape respects and enhances local character, scale, materials, and historic plot patterns.
- ii) Delivering sensitive public realm enhancements that include appropriate lighting, seating, greenery, and high-quality surfacing to improve pedestrian comfort and townscape quality.
- iii) Conserving and celebrating heritage assets through initiatives such as interpretation panels, heritage trails, and digital guides.

- iv) Promoting the adaptive reuse of historic buildings to support sustainable economic activity and community use, while retaining key architectural features.

d) Supporting sustainable tourism and cultural identity by:

- i) Promoting Burford as a high-quality visitor destination that celebrates its history, landscape setting, and independent character while actively managing pressures related to over-tourism and traffic.
- ii) Supporting the coordination of visitor information, digital promotion, and sustainable travel advice to enhance the experience for day-trippers and longer-stay tourists.
- iii) Encouraging cultural programming and events, including festivals, markets, and exhibitions that showcase local talent, heritage, and crafts.
- iv) Facilitating collaboration between local organisations, businesses, and cultural partners to strengthen Burford's brand and contribution to the wider West Oxfordshire and Cotswolds tourism economy.

Burford – Future Development Locations

- 7.6.30 The adopted Local Plan 2031 does not allocate any sites at Burford and new housing growth has been limited other than recent development to the west of Shilton Road, south of the A40.
- 7.6.31 In accordance with the proposed draft spatial strategy (Core Policy 3) there is an expectation that Tier 2 service centres such as Burford will accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the settlement and will support its local service function. For new housing, the primary focus is intended to be on small (<10 units) and medium-scale sites (10 – 300 units).
- 7.6.32 However, as much of the town lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB), there is an expectation that development will be limited in accordance with national policy.
- 7.6.33 A number of potential sites have been put forward by landowners and developers for consideration at Burford and are in the process of being assessed by Officers. The focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025 will provide details of any locations that are considered suitable for potential allocation through the new Local Plan.

Charlbury Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Charlbury

- 7.7.1 Under draft Core Policy 2, Charlbury is identified as a Tier 2 Service Centre and will be expected to accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the village and supports its local service function.
- 7.7.2 Within this context, below we have outlined our thoughts on what an overall strategy for Charlbury might look like. To do this, we have first prepared a brief profile of the village in 2025. Using this and other relevant information, we have identified key issues which the local plan will need to address and worked this into a draft vision and strategy.
- 7.7.3 Importantly, because Charlbury has an adopted Neighbourhood Plan, we have sought to incorporate this into our approach wherever possible.

Charlbury in 2025

- 7.7.4 Charlbury is an historic market town situated in the Evenlode Valley, approximately 10km (6 miles) north of Witney. It is designated in the current Local Plan 2031 as a Rural Service Centre due to its broad range of local services and strategic role supporting surrounding rural communities.
- 7.7.5 Nestled within the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB), Charlbury's setting is one of its most defining and valued characteristics, offering expansive views of Cornbury Park, the Wychwood Forest, and the surrounding upper Evenlode valley.
- 7.7.6 At the time of the 2021 Census, Charlbury had a population of approximately 3,100 residents, living in around 1,400 households, reflecting modest growth since 2011. The town has a slightly older age profile, with a higher proportion of residents aged 55–64, and low levels of household deprivation.
- 7.7.7 While overall employment levels are broadly average, a notable proportion of the working-age population is self-employed or work mainly from home, underlining the town's appeal to home-based professionals and creative industries. Car use remains high, although Charlbury benefits from good public transport links, including direct rail services to Oxford, London, Worcester and Great Malvern via the Cotswold Line, and regular bus connections to Witney and Chipping Norton. Travel by bus for commuting purposes, however, remains relatively low.
- 7.7.8 Charlbury's housing stock is predominantly made up of houses, arranged in a traditional nucleated pattern. The town centre, designated a Conservation Area since 1974, retains a medieval street layout and is characterised by local stone buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries.

- 7.7.9 It contains a large number of listed buildings, including the Grade I listed Church of St Mary the Virgin, which has origins in the Norman period and remains a central landmark. The historic and architectural richness of Charlbury is further enhanced by the proximity of significant estates including Cornbury Park and Lee Place, the latter being the home of the Duchess of Marlborough.
- 7.7.10 While much of Charlbury lies in Flood Zone 1 and is at low risk of fluvial flooding, the River Evenlode and its spring-fed tributaries create areas of Zones 2 and 3 flood risk to the west of the town. The town has also experienced surface water flooding, particularly in areas with steeper gradients, highlighting the need for ongoing investment in sustainable drainage systems and climate resilience.
- 7.7.11 Charlbury is a thriving community with a high level of civic engagement and a diverse range of facilities and services, including a primary school, library, GP surgery, post office, Co-op supermarket, and various independent retailers. It also hosts a wealth of cultural and recreational activities, such as the Charlbury Beer Festival, Riverside Music Festival, and Charlbury Street Fair, and boasts a strong tradition of volunteerism and local activism. This sense of vibrancy is also reflected in the number of clubs and societies active in the town, from cricket and football to walking groups, arts initiatives and the Women's Institute.
- 7.7.12 Charlbury plays an important role as a service hub for surrounding villages, supporting their social and economic sustainability. However, the town also faces a number of challenges, including an ageing population, housing affordability pressures, parking and traffic concerns, and the need to balance development with the preservation of its natural, historic and built environment. There is a recognised requirement for more affordable and modest-sized housing to support a balanced and inclusive community.
- 7.7.13 As set out in the Charlbury Neighbourhood Plan, the town is committed to managing future growth in a way that is climate-conscious, community-led, and sensitive to local character. The Town Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, and the community continues to support West Oxfordshire's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030.
- 7.7.14 Future development will need to demonstrate high standards of sustainability, protect key landscape and heritage assets, and contribute positively to Charlbury's identity as an unspoilt but accessible Cotswold town - off the beaten track, yet with strong national and regional connections.

Key Issues for the Local Plan to address

- 7.7.15 Drawing on the profile above and other relevant information, we have identified a number of key issues for the new Local Plan to address.

1. Managing Sustainable Growth

- Charlbury has seen modest housing growth in recent years but faces ongoing pressures due to its high desirability and strong transport connections.

- Future development must:
 - Be proportionate to the town's scale and rural service centre role, avoiding harm to its sensitive landscape setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape.
 - Respect the town's historic character, conservation area, and settlement form, including the protection of key views across the Evenlode Valley and from the town towards Cornbury Park and Wychwood Forest.
 - Support a balanced and inclusive community by delivering a greater range of affordable and smaller homes suited to younger households, key workers, and downsizers.
 - Enhance the vitality of the town centre and maintain Charlbury's role as a service hub for nearby rural communities.
 - Be carefully phased and appropriately located to ensure infrastructure (e.g. school, GP services, transport) can support population changes.

2. Housing Affordability and Community Balance

- High house prices and a dominance of larger properties have limited opportunities for younger people and families to remain in the town.
- Development must:
 - Prioritise affordable, energy-efficient homes that meet identified local needs.
 - Enable opportunities for local people to stay within the community across different life stages.
 - Ensure that new housing integrates with the existing community, avoiding isolated or car-dependent development.

3. Transport and Accessibility

- Charlbury benefits from good rail connectivity but experiences high levels of car dependency.
- Development must:
 - Support safe walking and cycling routes within the town and to the station, school, and key services.
 - Minimise reliance on the private car through improved public and community transport options.
 - Address parking constraints in the town centre and around the railway station.
 - Be mindful of the rural road network's capacity, particularly in relation to larger-scale development.

4. Flood Risk and Climate Resilience

- Although most of Charlbury lies in Flood Zone 1, areas around the River Evenlode and its tributaries are prone to fluvial and surface water flooding.
- Development must:
 - Avoid high-risk flood zones and areas with known surface water flooding issues.
 - Incorporate robust Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and permeable surfaces.
 - Contribute to wider climate resilience by delivering biodiversity net gain, improved green infrastructure, and low/zero carbon buildings.
 - Support Charlbury's community-led climate action objectives and ambition to be carbon neutral.

5. Landscape and Heritage Protection

- Charlbury's setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape and its wealth of listed buildings and historic townscape require sensitive management.
- Development must:
 - Preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area and avoid harm to designated heritage assets.
 - Protect key views into and out of the town, including towards Cornbury Park, the Wychwood Forest, and the Evenlode Valley.
 - Maintain and enhance the town's distinct identity as an accessible yet unspoilt Cotswold town.

6. Community Infrastructure and Services

- Charlbury is well-served for a small town but could face pressure on local infrastructure with future growth.
- Development must:
 - Support the retention and improvement of key services including the primary school, health care, library, and retail facilities.
 - Help fund community and leisure facilities, particularly for younger people and older residents.
 - Reinforce the town's active community life and support the continued delivery of local events and initiatives.

Draft Vision and Strategy

- 7.7.16 Based on the profile and key issues outlined above, we have prepared a draft vision and settlement strategy, the purpose of which is to provide an overarching policy framework against which development proposals at Charlbury will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan and the Charlbury Neighbourhood Plan.

Charlbury in 2041 - A Draft Vision

By 2041, Charlbury will remain a distinctive, inclusive, and forward-looking rural town, nestled within the Cotswolds National Landscape and playing a vital role as a Rural Service Centre for West Oxfordshire. It will continue to be a place where people of all ages and backgrounds feel welcome, supported, and able to thrive - underpinned by strong community spirit and a deep commitment to local stewardship.

Charlbury will have met the challenge of sustainable growth in a way that reflects local needs and aspirations. New housing will be modest, well-integrated, and tailored to support a balanced demographic - including affordable homes for key workers, younger people, and downsizers - while respecting the town's historic character and natural setting.

The town will lead locally on climate action, with new development contributing to net-zero carbon goals through energy-efficient design, reduced car dependency, and climate-resilient infrastructure. Walking, cycling, and public transport will be the first choice for local journeys, supported by well-connected routes and inclusive access for people of all ages and abilities. Charlbury's valued green spaces, trees, and biodiversity will be protected and enhanced. Development will respect the town's unique landscape setting, important views, and rich heritage—preserving the character of the Conservation Area and ensuring that new buildings are well-designed, distinctive, and in harmony with their surroundings.

The town centre will continue to be a thriving hub, supporting independent businesses, local services, and a vibrant cultural life. Charlbury's identity as a Cotswold Gateway and Walkers are Welcome town will be promoted through sustainable tourism and access to the surrounding countryside.

Charlbury in 2041 will be a community where:

- Everyone can participate fully in local life and access high-quality services.
- Development is locally appropriate, inclusive, and well-designed.
- Carbon emissions are rapidly reduced and climate resilience is embedded.
- Heritage, biodiversity, and landscape are protected and enhanced.
- Local jobs, home working, and small businesses are supported.
- Public transport is reliable and accessible, and active travel is the norm.

Above all, Charlbury will continue to reflect the values of its residents - balancing progress with preservation and ensuring that its evolution is shaped by and for the community it serves.

CHA1 – A Strategy for Charlbury

- 1) Charlbury will continue to play an important role as a sustainable service centre, recognised for its strong community spirit, historic character, and setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape. The Council will support proposals that help Charlbury meet local needs, enhance community well-being, and respond to the climate and nature emergencies, while ensuring that growth remains sensitive to its valued landscape and heritage.
- 2) Development proposals will be supported where they:
 - a) Reinforce Charlbury's role as a distinctive and inclusive rural town by:
 - i) Maintaining and strengthening the town's network of local services, businesses, and community facilities;
 - ii) Supporting opportunities for sustainable tourism and active recreation, reflecting Charlbury's status as a Walkers are Welcome and Cotswold Gateway town;
 - iii) Enabling inclusive and intergenerational access to services and public spaces, including through improvements to local mobility for older people and those with disabilities.
 - b) Deliver well-integrated, sustainable growth that meets local needs by:
 - i) Providing a mix of housing types and tenures, with a particular emphasis on affordability for households on or below median incomes, essential workers, first-time buyers, and downsizers;
 - ii) Prioritising development on previously developed land or sites well-related to the existing built-up area, avoiding sprawl into sensitive landscapes;
 - iii) Ensuring high standards of design that reflect Charlbury's historic context, character, and setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape and Conservation Area.
 - c) Tackle the climate and ecological emergencies by:
 - i) Supporting low and zero-carbon development and energy-efficient buildings that go beyond minimum regulatory standards;
 - ii) Ensuring new development is well-located to reduce the need for car travel, and promotes sustainable travel options such as walking, cycling and public transport;
 - iii) Delivering biodiversity net gain, enhancing existing green and blue infrastructure, and incorporating robust Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to manage flood risk.
 - d) Improve connectivity and local infrastructure by:
 - i) Enhancing safe, inclusive walking and cycling access across the town, including to the town centre, schools, station, and countryside;
 - ii) Strengthening digital infrastructure to support remote working and access to services.
 - iii) Supporting reliable and frequent public transport services, maintaining access to the railway station as a key regional connection, and encouraging increased use through integrated transport services
 - e) Protect and enhance the town's heritage and landscape setting by:
 - i) Safeguarding the special character of Charlbury's Conservation Area, historic buildings, archaeological features, and distinctive streetscapes;
 - ii) Respecting important views into and out of the town, particularly across the Evenlode Valley and surrounding countryside;
 - iii) Conserving and enhancing trees, green spaces, and features important for biodiversity and visual amenity.

- 3) The Council will work proactively with Charlbury Town Council, the local community, infrastructure providers, and stakeholders to guide future change in a way that is locally distinctive, inclusive, and resilient. Together, these efforts will ensure Charlbury continues to thrive as a welcoming, well-connected, and environmentally responsible rural town at the heart of West Oxfordshire.

Charlbury – Future Development Locations

- 7.7.17 The adopted Local Plan 2031 does not allocate any sites at Charlbury and new housing growth has been relatively limited in recent years.
- 7.7.18 In accordance with the proposed draft spatial strategy (Core Policy 3) there is an expectation that Tier 2 service centres such as Charlbury will accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the settlement and will support its local service function. For new housing, the primary focus is intended to be on small (<10 units) and medium-scale sites (10 – 300 units).
- 7.7.19 However, as the town lies within the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB), there is an expectation that development will be limited in accordance with national policy.
- 7.7.20 A number of potential sites have been put forward by landowners and developers for consideration at Charlbury and are in the process of being assessed by Officers. The focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025 will provide details of any locations that are considered suitable for potential allocation through the new Local Plan.

Eynsham Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Eynsham

- 7.8.1 Under draft Core Policy 2, Eynsham is identified as a Tier 2 Service Centre and will be expected to accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the village and supports its local service function.
- 7.8.2 In relation to future residential development, beyond existing commitments and allocations, this is anticipated to include a combination of small and medium-scale sites.
- 7.8.3 Within this context, below we have outlined our thoughts on what an overall strategy for Eynsham might look like. To do this, we have first prepared a brief profile of the village in 2025. Using this and other relevant information, we have identified key issues which the local plan will need to address and worked this into a draft vision and strategy.
- 7.8.4 Because Eynsham has a Neighbourhood Plan, we have sought to incorporate this into our approach wherever possible.

Eynsham in 2025

- 7.8.5 Eynsham is a thriving and historically rich service centre located in the east of West Oxfordshire District, with a population of approximately 5,300 (2021 Census). Positioned just beyond the western edge of the Oxford Green Belt and south of the A40, it lies midway between Oxford (8km) and Witney, making it a strategically important settlement in terms of accessibility, service provision, and employment.
- 7.8.6 Despite its village designation, Eynsham is the fourth largest settlement in the District - larger than many small towns - and plays a vital role in supporting the wider rural hinterland. It boasts a strong local identity and sense of community.
- 7.8.7 The village is characterised by a compact and nucleated form, developed intensively within clearly defined natural and infrastructure boundaries, including the River Thames floodplain to the south and east, and the A40 to the north. While green space within the village is limited, the surrounding open countryside is easily accessible on foot, reinforcing the village's rural character and appeal.
- 7.8.8 Historically, Eynsham has evolved from a Saxon settlement and monastic centre into a modern, mixed-use community with deep cultural roots. Its built environment retains significant heritage assets including the Church of St Leonard and the Bartholomew Room, and views into the historic core with mature trees and traditional rooftops remain a defining feature.

- 7.8.9 Eynsham offers a broad range of facilities for its size, including primary and secondary schools, shops, a post office, health services, pubs, a library, and leisure spaces. Employment is a key strength, with major employers such as Siemens and the Oakfield Industrial Estate based on the village's periphery. Levels of economic activity are high, with notable rates of home working. However, car use remains common despite excellent public transport links, particularly due to strategic constraints on the road network.
- 7.8.10 The A40, while providing direct access to Oxford and beyond, suffers from severe congestion - especially at peak times - creating delays and knock-on effects across neighbouring routes and settlements. Further pressure arises from congestion at the Swinford Toll Bridge on the B4044, a major local pinch point.
- 7.8.11 Planned infrastructure improvements, including a recently completed park and ride site and further proposed improvements to the A40 including bus priority, aim to address these longstanding issues.
- 7.8.12 Recent years have seen relatively modest housing growth at the village's eastern and western fringes. Looking ahead, Eynsham is expected to play a pivotal role in meeting identified development needs with the current Local Plan 2031 having established the principle of a strategic urban extension to the west of the village.
- 7.8.13 This expansion along with the proposed Salt Cross Garden Village to the north of the A40, must be carefully balanced to protect the character, cohesion, and sustainability of the existing village community.
- 7.8.14 Eynsham is a vibrant, active, and well-connected settlement - distinctly rural in identity yet urban in scale and function. Its continued success depends on maintaining this balance, addressing infrastructure constraints, and ensuring that new development enhances its unique blend of heritage, community life, and strategic significance.

Key Issues for the Local Plan to address

- 7.8.15 Eynsham plays a pivotal role within West Oxfordshire's settlement hierarchy as one of the district's largest and most well-connected rural service centres. With its rich historic legacy, compact form, strong community spirit, and strategic location on the A40 corridor, the Local Plan 2041 must carefully address a range of complex and interrelated issues to ensure Eynsham's continued success and sustainability as both a community and a place to live, work, and travel through.
- 7.8.16 The following key issues have been identified based on profile above and the vision and objectives of the Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) as well as the wider policy context.

1. Managing Growth While Preserving Village Character

- **Issue:** Eynsham has experienced relatively modest growth, including infill development and larger housing schemes to the west and east. Further expansion is planned, including a strategic urban extension to the west and Salt Cross Garden Village to the north.

- **Implication for the Plan:** Future growth must be carefully managed to preserve Eynsham's compact form, historic core, and rural character. A continued focus on high-quality design and strong integration with the existing settlement will be essential.

2. Housing Mix and Affordability

- **Issue:** The village needs a diverse housing mix to maintain its age and income diversity and to support local employment needs.
- **Implication for the Plan:** Policy should support delivery of varied housing types and tenures to meet the needs of all groups – including young families, essential workers, and older residents – in line with Objective ENVI of the Neighbourhood Plan.

3. Community Infrastructure and Accessibility

- **Issue:** Eynsham's success as a community is partly due to its compact form and ease of access to schools, shops, leisure, and healthcare. However, growth will place additional demands on facilities.
- **Implication for the Plan:** New development must contribute to the delivery and enhancement of community facilities, ensuring that accessibility and equity are maintained for both new and existing residents in line with Objective ENV3 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

4. Transport and Congestion

- **Issue:** Severe traffic congestion along the A40 and at Swinford Toll Bridge continues to constrain movement and affect air quality and quality of life.
- **Implication for the Plan:** There is an urgent need to support and deliver strategic transport improvements to and from Oxford, including improved public transport (bus lanes and a future rail connection) and active travel infrastructure. Plan policies should mitigate traffic impacts and support sustainable modes (Neighbourhood Plan Objective ENV5).

5. Employment and Economic Development

- **Issue:** Eynsham has a relatively strong employment base with major employers (e.g. Siemens), but pressure from housing growth and commuting patterns risks undermining local job opportunities and economic self-sufficiency.
- **Implication for the Plan:** Future development should safeguard and promote a balanced local economy, ensuring that a range of job types, services, and retail offerings remain viable and accessible within the village (Neighbourhood Plan Objective ENV6).

6. Sustainability and Climate Resilience

- **Issue:** Eynsham's position near flood-prone areas, and its growth trajectory, demand a clear response to climate change.

- **Implication for the Plan:** High environmental standards must be embedded in new development, including energy efficiency, sustainable drainage, biodiversity gain, and climate resilience (Neighbourhood Plan Objective ENV7)

7. Landscape and Natural Environment

- **Issue:** Eynsham's lack of a village green is partially offset by strong links to the surrounding countryside, which are highly valued by residents.
- **Implication for the Plan:** Protecting and enhancing green corridors, trees, hedgerows, and public rights of way within and beyond the village will be essential to maintaining the rural identity and mental and physical wellbeing of the community (Neighbourhood Plan Objective ENV4).

8. Integrating the Salt Cross Garden Village

- **Issue:** The new settlement planned to the north of Eynsham (Salt Cross) presents opportunities but also risks in terms of cumulative impact on infrastructure, character, and service capacity.
- **Implication for the Plan:** A coordinated approach is needed to ensure the new garden village complements rather than competes with Eynsham. Shared infrastructure, employment hubs, and environmental buffers must be planned in line with the principles of Neighbourhood Plan Objective ENV8.

9. Preserving and Enhancing Heritage Assets

- **Issue:** Eynsham's medieval core, historic abbey site, and conservation area form a key part of the village's identity.
- **Implication for the Plan:** Development proposals must respect the historic fabric and setting of the village, ensuring that change reinforces local distinctiveness and character rather than diluting it.

10. Delivering Compact and Connected Development

- **Issue:** Eynsham's compact layout is integral to its community cohesion and sustainability.
- **Implication for the Plan:** Future growth, including the Salt Cross development, must prioritise walkability, permeability, and integration with the existing village to support a cohesive community model and avoid sprawl.

Draft Vision and Strategy

- 7.8.17 Based on the profile and key issues outlined above, we have prepared a draft vision and settlement strategy, the purpose of which is to provide an overarching policy framework against which development proposals at Eynsham will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan. It also provides a framework for the updated Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan currently being drafted by the Parish Council in conjunction with Community First Oxfordshire.

Eynsham in 2041 – A Draft Vision

A Connected, Distinctive, and Sustainable Rural Centre

By 2041, Eynsham will remain one of West Oxfordshire's most vibrant and sustainable rural service centres — a place with a strong community identity, a proud heritage, and a distinctive relationship with its countryside setting. New and existing residents alike will benefit from an inclusive, attractive, and well-connected place to live, work and thrive.

A Growing Community with a Strong Sense of Place

Eynsham will retain its compact village character and its reputation for community spirit, supported by sensitive and well-designed development. Growth will be carefully planned and infrastructure-led, enhancing quality of life while protecting the parish's historic core, rural setting, and strong environmental assets. The Salt Cross Garden Village will emerge as a new, standalone settlement that complements Eynsham, sharing services and infrastructure where beneficial and enhancing the wider area as a whole.

A Sustainable, Green and Low-Carbon Place to Live

Eynsham's future will be shaped by sustainability and climate resilience. Development will respond positively to the challenges of climate change by promoting high energy standards, biodiversity enhancement, and excellent public and active transport links with access to a railway station in the Salt Cross Garden Village. A balanced mix of homes, services, and green infrastructure will ensure the village remains inclusive and adaptable to future needs.

A Centre for Local Employment, Innovation, and Access to Nature

Eynsham's economic role within the A40 science and technology corridor will be strengthened, offering job opportunities at a range of skill levels and sustaining a diverse and resilient economy. Local shops and services will continue to support everyday needs, while residents and visitors alike will benefit from improved access to the countryside, expanded green infrastructure, and an enhanced public realm.

EYN1 – A Strategy for Eynsham

Eynsham will continue to play a central role in the district as a Tier 2 service centre, providing homes, services, and infrastructure to meet local and strategic needs while retaining its historic village character and strong sense of community.

The Council will support proposals that contribute to a high-quality, sustainable, and inclusive future for the parish of Eynsham, in line with the objectives of the Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan. Development proposals will be supported where they:

- a) Support Eynsham's role as a key service centre by:
 - i) Maintaining and enhancing community facilities including education, healthcare, cultural venues, and open spaces
 - ii) Improving access to local services and ensuring that new development is integrated into and well connected with the wider village structure;
 - iii) Encouraging community uses and small-scale retail that enhance village life and local identity.
- b) Enable infrastructure-led, sustainable growth that meets local and strategic needs by:

- i) Delivering a balanced mix of housing types and tenures, with a strong emphasis on affordability and lifetime adaptability;
 - ii) Ensuring that new development is of high design quality and responds positively to local heritage, setting, and landscape character;
 - iii) Coordinating infrastructure delivery, including schools, health services, and utilities, in parallel with housing growth.
- c) Ensure Salt Cross Garden Village complements rather than competes with Eynsham by:
 - i) Providing shared infrastructure, green space, and services where mutually beneficial;
 - ii) Ensuring new development avoids harm to the distinct identity and setting of Eynsham village.
- d) Strengthen climate resilience and environmental sustainability by:
 - i) Promoting energy-efficient and zero and low-carbon building standards in line with national climate objectives and the Eynsham CAPZero Community Action Plan;
 - ii) Incorporating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), water-sensitive design, and nature-based solutions;
 - iii) Enhancing biodiversity, tree cover, and habitat connectivity across the parish.
- e) Improve transport and digital connectivity by:
 - i) Supporting delivery of current proposed and potential future A40 improvements, re-building the railway line and active travel links;
 - ii) Creating safe, direct routes for walking, cycling, and mobility users across Eynsham including effective integration with the West Eynsham SDA and to Salt Cross and Oxford;
 - iii) Expanding digital infrastructure to support remote working, education, and innovation.
- f) Promote economic vitality and inclusive access to employment by:
 - i) Encouraging a diverse local economy including innovation, light industry, and home-based enterprises;
 - ii) Supporting the continued vitality of Eynsham's shops, markets, and hospitality sector;
 - iii) Enabling flexible and accessible employment space suited to local skills, education and enterprise needs.
- g) Enhance quality of life, green infrastructure and access to nature by:
 - i) Protecting and enhancing Eynsham's network of green spaces, footpaths, and countryside access;
 - ii) Providing inclusive and accessible play, leisure, and recreational facilities in line with population growth;
 - iii) Supporting cultural, community and wellbeing initiatives that bring people together and reinforce a strong village identity.

The Council will work in partnership with Eynsham Parish Council, local communities, developers and infrastructure providers to ensure that growth is coordinated, sustainable, and reflective of Eynsham's unique qualities.

Eynsham – Future Development Locations

- 7.8.18 The adopted Local Plan 2031 allocates one large strategic site to the West of Eynsham – the West Eynsham SDA. The allocation envisages around 1,000 homes of which 237 have already been completed.
- 7.8.19 Active progress is being made with bringing forward the remainder, with a developer-led masterplan endorsed by the District Council in March 2022.
- 7.8.20 Since then, there have been some delays - primarily due to the uncertainty created by the revised scope of A40 improvement works being progressed by Oxfordshire County Council.
- 7.8.21 In essence, the A40 improvement works have been ‘pared back’ in light of inflationary cost pressures and this has created difficulties in terms of agreeing the most appropriate point of access into the West Eynsham SDA from the A40, including any potential alignment with Salt Cross Garden Village to the north.
- 7.8.22 In order to move matters forward, the District Council has recently commissioned consultants Pell Frischmann to prepare an updated access strategy. This work is currently underway and should be finalised in June 2025.
- 7.8.23 The District Council anticipates that this will provide the necessary clarity and confidence for the main landowners to come forward with planning applications for the remainder of SDA, within the context of the original masterplan document endorsed in 2022 but also taking account of the more recent access strategy recommendations.
- 7.8.24 Based on the indicative capacity outlined in the 2022 masterplan, Officers anticipate a further 950 homes coming forward at the West Eynsham SDA in the period up to 2041.
- 7.8.25 The focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025 will provide details of any other locations at Eynsham that are considered suitable for potential allocation through the new Local Plan.

Long Hanborough Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Long Hanborough

- 7.9.1 Under draft Core Policy 2, Long Hanborough is identified as a Tier 2 Service Centre and will be expected to accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the village and supports its local service function.
- 7.9.2 Within this context, below we have outlined our thoughts on what an overall strategy for Long Hanborough might look like. To do this, we have first prepared a brief profile of the village in 2025. Using this and other relevant information, we have identified key issues which the local plan will need to address and worked this into a draft vision and strategy.

Long Hanborough in 2025

Location & Setting

- 7.9.3 Long Hanborough is a large and historically rich village located in West Oxfordshire, approximately 6.4 km (4 miles) northeast of Witney and around 9 km (6 miles) northwest of Oxford. Positioned on the edge of the Cotswold National Landscape, the village lies along the A4095 and is nestled between the River Evenlode and its tributaries, with scenic views and a varied natural landscape including floodplains and ridges.

Demographics

- 7.9.4 At the 2021 Census, Long Hanborough had an estimated population of around 3,000 people across approximately 1,200 households, marking steady growth since 2011. The population shows a fairly balanced age distribution, though there are slightly fewer residents in the 15–24 age bracket. The area has very low levels of deprivation and notably high employment among the economically active population.

Transport & Accessibility

- 7.9.5 The village is well connected by both road and public transport. Hanborough railway station, on the village's outskirts, offers direct services to Oxford, Reading, and London Paddington via the Cotswold Line. However, station car parking is at capacity and access by the A4095 is congested.
- 7.9.6 Regular buses run to Oxford and Witney, including late-night and weekend services. Despite excellent public transport, car usage remains high among commuters, while walking and cycling rates are low.

Housing & Settlement Pattern

- 7.9.7 Long Hanborough predominantly comprises detached and semi-detached houses, with the main settlement laid out in a linear fashion along the A4095, and denser residential clusters to the west and east. Part of the village, particularly Millwood End, is within a Conservation Area established in 2004 and includes many listed buildings. The most prominent is the Grade I listed Church of St Peter and St Paul, with 12th-century origins and an iconic octagonal spire.

Facilities & Services

7.9.8 The village hosts a range of community amenities including:

- A primary school (Hanborough Manor C of E School)
- A pre-school
- Two pubs (The Three Horseshoes and The George & Dragon)
- A GP surgery, dental practice, and pharmacy
- Local shops including a Co-Operative store and post office
- Community life includes active groups such as the local Women's Institute.

History & Heritage

7.9.9 Long Hanborough has archaeological finds indicating Bronze Age and Iron Age activity. It was part of the Wychwood Forest in medieval times and has evolved over centuries from a rural agrarian village to a commuter hub for Oxford. The village has a strong architectural heritage, with a mix of thatched, stone, slate, and tile-roofed cottages. Historic transport links and religious institutions, such as the Methodist and Christ Church churches, further contribute to its character.

Environment & Landscape

7.9.10 The parish's natural geography includes river meadows, ancient woods, limestone ridges, and alluvial plains. Most of the village lies in flood zone 1, though parts of the north and east fringe into flood zone 3. The Evenlode River and Caverswell Brook contribute to the area's natural drainage and landscape features.

Culture & Attractions

7.9.11 Long Hanborough is home to the Oxford Bus Museum and the Morris Motors Museum, located next to the railway station. These museums attract visitors with their collections of vintage buses, coaches, and classic Morris vehicles. Nearby attractions include Blenheim Palace (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), Combe Mill, and North Leigh Roman Villa.

Key Issues for the Local Plan to address

7.9.12 Drawing on the profile above and other relevant information, we have identified a number of key issues for the new Local Plan to address in relation to Long Hanborough.

1. Managing Sustainable Growth

- Long Hanborough has seen significant housing growth in recent years, particularly through large-scale developments on the village edge.
- Future development must:
 - Be proportionate to the village's role and scale, avoiding over-expansion.
 - Integrate with the existing village form and character, including respecting key views and settlement edges.
 - Support the continued viability of local services and amenities.
 - Be phased appropriately to ensure supporting infrastructure keeps pace with population growth.

2. Flood Risk and Climate Resilience

- Most of Long Hanborough lies within Flood Zone 1, but localised surface water flood risk and climate pressures remain a concern.
- Development must:
 - Incorporate robust Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).
 - Avoid exacerbating runoff impacts, particularly in downstream areas.
 - Support wider climate resilience through energy efficiency, biodiversity gain, and green infrastructure.

3. Transport and Connectivity

- The village benefits from Hanborough railway station, providing direct access to Oxford and London, but car use remains high.
- The plan should support:
 - Improvements to the frequency and reliability of rail services and access to the station from across the village.
 - Enhanced bus service coverage, particularly evenings and weekends.
 - Safe and connected walking and cycling routes, especially between new developments, the station, school, and local centre.
 - Improved parking management and increased capacity, especially near the station and local shops.

4. Heritage and Landscape Protection

- Long Hanborough's historic environment and surrounding landscape contribute strongly to its character.
- The local plan must:
 - Safeguard heritage assets, including Hanborough Conservation Area and listed buildings.
 - Preserve key landscape features and sensitive views across the Evenlode Valley.
 - Ensure new development is of high design quality and contextually appropriate.

5. Infrastructure and Community Facilities

- With recent population growth, pressure is mounting on local infrastructure and services.
- The plan should assess and plan for:
 - Capacity of Hanborough Manor Primary School and early years provision.
 - Expansion and resilience of GP and healthcare services, which may be accessed outside the village.

- Enhanced community space, youth facilities, and sports provision to support a growing and diverse population.
- Investment in utility infrastructure, including drainage and broadband.

6. Housing Needs and Affordability

- Recent housing growth has not fully addressed affordability or the needs of younger and ageing residents.
- The local plan should:
 - Prioritise affordable housing delivery for those with local connections.
 - Provide a balanced tenure mix, including smaller dwellings and housing suited for downsizing.
 - Encourage high-quality, sustainable housing design aligned with net zero targets.

7. Employment and Economic Opportunities

- Long Hanborough has relatively limited employment land but benefits from proximity to Oxford and Witney.
- The plan should:
 - Support home-based and remote working, including digital connectivity upgrades.
 - Encourage small-scale employment provision, including co-working spaces and reuse of redundant buildings.
 - Consider links with nearby employment hubs and support access to training opportunities.

8. Tourism, Identity, and the Blenheim Context

- Proximity to Blenheim Palace and the surrounding countryside gives Long Hanborough a distinct visitor appeal.
- The local plan must:
 - Balance tourism-related opportunities with the protection of village character and tranquillity.
 - Address parking and traffic issues during peak visitor periods.
 - Promote local heritage and green assets through low-impact tourism, wayfinding, and cultural events.

Draft Vision and Strategy

7.9.13 Based on the profile and key issues outlined above, we have prepared a draft vision and settlement strategy, the purpose of which is to provide an overarching policy framework against which development proposals at Long Hanborough will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan. It also provides a framework for any future Neighbourhood Plan.

Long Hanborough in 2041 – A Draft Vision

Long Hanborough's vision is to evolve as a sustainable, well-connected rural community that meets the needs of local people while protecting its valued landscape, heritage, and identity. Building on its strategic location, strong community infrastructure, and transport links, the village will grow in a measured and climate-conscious way - remaining a desirable place to live, work, and thrive.

A Growing Village with a Strong Local Identity

By 2041, Long Hanborough will retain its welcoming, community-focused character. The village's historic roots, including its conservation area and traditional linear form, will continue to shape its sense of place. Growth will be accompanied by investment in green spaces, community facilities, and inclusive services that benefit all generations. Development will support an increasingly diverse population while ensuring that Long Hanborough's rural setting and views across the Evenlode Valley are respected.

A Place of Infrastructure-Led, Sustainable Growth

Long Hanborough will accommodate a proportionate level of housing and employment growth that supports its role as a Tier 2 service centre. Development will be focused on meeting local needs particularly for affordable and accessible housing - through high-quality design and energy-efficient buildings. New infrastructure will be delivered in step with development, helping to ease existing pressures on schools, healthcare, transport, and utilities. Nature-based solutions, biodiversity enhancement, and sustainable drainage will be integral to all new schemes.

A Rail-Linked Rural Community with Low-Carbon Ambitions

By 2041, Long Hanborough's transport connectivity will be a key strength. Hanborough Station will be better integrated into the village and more accessible by foot, cycle, and bus. Car dependency will be reduced through investment in active travel infrastructure and public transport options. Digital connectivity will be improved to support homeworking, education, and local enterprise, enabling a shift toward a more resilient, low-carbon rural economy.

A Village Supporting Enterprise, Nature, and Quality of Life

The local economy will be supported through flexible workspace, support for home-based businesses, and access to key employment hubs via rail. Local shops, services, and hospitality will continue to provide for residents and visitors alike. Tourism opportunities linked to Blenheim Palace and the surrounding landscape will be promoted in a way that protects village character and infrastructure. Public spaces, cultural life, and access to nature will be central to quality of life.

LH1 – A Strategy for Long Hanborough

Long Hanborough will continue to play a key role as a Tier 2 Service Centre, providing homes, services, and connections for West Oxfordshire while retaining its rural character and strong community identity.

Development proposals will be supported where they:

- a) Support Long Hanborough's role as a well-connected rural service centre by:
 - i) Maintaining and enhancing community facilities, including the primary school, GP services, and public open spaces;
 - ii) Encouraging new or expanded local services in accessible, walkable locations;
 - iii) Supporting small-scale retail and community uses that contribute to local vitality.
- b) Enable infrastructure-led, proportionate growth that meets local needs by:
 - i) Delivering a mix of housing types and tenures, with a particular focus on affordability and accessibility for local people;
 - ii) Prioritising previously developed land or infill sites, while ensuring any edge-of-village development is well integrated and landscape-led;
 - iii) Ensuring all new development demonstrates high design quality and responds to the local vernacular and historic context.
- c) Strengthen climate resilience and environmental quality by:
 - i) Avoiding areas of highest flood risk and incorporating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and water-sensitive design;
 - ii) Promoting biodiversity net gain, habitat connectivity, and tree planting across new and existing neighbourhoods;
 - iii) Ensuring energy-efficient, low-carbon building design and encouraging renewable energy use where appropriate.
- d) Improve transport and digital connectivity by:
 - i) Enhancing walking and cycling infrastructure, including safe routes to school, the station, and village services;
 - ii) Supporting improved public transport connections, particularly bus services and sustainable access to Hanborough Station;
 - iii) Upgrading digital infrastructure to enable remote working, online services, and business development.
- e) Promote inclusivity, well-being, and quality of life by:
 - i) Delivering new or enhanced healthcare, education, and recreational infrastructure in step with growth;
 - ii) Supporting inter-generational living through inclusive design and housing options for older people and young families;
 - iii) Promoting cultural, leisure, and environmental initiatives that foster community cohesion and reduce social isolation.

The Council will work in partnership with Hanborough Parish Council, local residents, service providers, and developers to guide change in a way that is balanced, forward-looking, and sensitive to Long Hanborough's distinct sense of place.

Long Hanborough – Future Development Locations

- 7.9.14 The adopted Local Plan 2031 allocates two ‘non’ strategic sites at Long Hanborough, land at Oliver’s Garage (25 homes) and land at Myrtle Farm (50 homes).
- 7.9.15 The Oliver’s Garage site has now been completed and occupied. The Myrtle Farm site has not progressed to a planning application and the landowner has confirmed to the District Council that they will not be bringing the site forward for development and wish it to be ‘de-allocated’. For this reason, it is assumed that no new homes will be provided on this site in the period to 2041.
- 7.9.16 Alongside these allocated sites, there have been a number of speculative planning permissions granted and completed since the adoption of the 2031 Local Plan, including land adjacent to Hanborough Station and several sites on the western fringe of the village.
- 7.9.17 In accordance with the proposed draft spatial strategy (Core Policy 3) there is an expectation that Tier 2 service centres such as Long Hanborough will accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of the settlement and will support its local service function. For new housing, the primary focus is intended to be on small (<10 units) and medium-scale sites (10 – 300 units).
- 7.9.18 Long Hanborough also has the advantage of the Hanborough Railway Station sitting on the North Cotswold line and enabling access by rail to a broad range of destinations including Oxford and London.
- 7.9.19 A number of potential sites have been put forward by landowners and developers for consideration at Long Hanborough and are in the process of being assessed by Officers. The focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025 will provide details of any locations that are considered suitable for potential allocation through the new Local Plan.

Salt Cross Garden Village Settlement Strategy

- 7.10.1 Salt Cross Garden Village (previously known as the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village) is a planned new garden community located to the north of the A40 near Eynsham.
- 7.10.2 The adopted Local Plan 2031 allocates the site as a 'strategic location for growth' (SLG) intended to accommodate about 2,200 homes together with around 40 hectares of business land in the form of a science/technology park and a range of supporting services and facilities including new schools, open spaces, community facilities and an integrated public transport hub (park and ride).
- 7.10.3 The site was initially identified in 2016 in response to an increase in West Oxfordshire's identified housing needs and to assist Oxford City with its unmet housing needs as identified at that time.
- 7.10.4 Although the site is not yet under construction, Salt Cross is being actively promoted on behalf of the landowners by Grosvenor who submitted an outline planning application in 2020.
- 7.10.5 Policy EW1 of the current Local Plan 2031 applies and requires comprehensive development led by an 'Area Action Plan' (AAP). Council Officers have therefore been working with Grosvenor, Eynsham Parish Council, the local community and other key stakeholders over several years to bring the AAP forward.
- 7.10.6 The draft AAP was submitted for examination in 2021 and after a lengthy examination, the Inspector's final report was published in March 2023, recommending that it be adopted subject to a number of changes. However, these changes did not accord with the Council's net zero carbon ambitions. A subsequent 3rd party legal challenge has resulted in the examination being re-opened on a focused basis to consider Policy 2 relating to net-zero carbon development.
- 7.10.7 A hearing session will take place at the end of June 2025 after which, the Council hopes to be in a position to formally adopt the AAP in autumn 2025 and work with Grosvenor to progress the outline planning application to approval.
- 7.10.8 The AAP will provide the detailed planning framework for guiding future development at Salt Cross (including a vision, objectives and specific policies) and so forms effectively forms the strategy for guiding development in that location in the period up to 2041 and beyond.
- 7.10.9 Assuming a resolution to grant outline planning permission is achieved in 2026, based on the AAP phasing evidence, Officers consider it reasonable to expect the first housing completions at Salt Cross to take place by 2030 with delivery of around 1,800 homes by 2041. The remainder would be completed beyond the plan period.

Woodstock Settlement Strategy

A Strategy for Woodstock

- 7.1.1.1 Under draft Core Policy 2, Woodstock is identified as a Tier 2 Service Centre, reflecting the good level and variety of services and facilities it offers despite its relatively modest size (population of around 3,000¹²).
- 7.1.1.2 In accordance with the overall spatial strategy outlined in Core Policy 3, Tier 2 Service Centres including Woodstock will be expected to accommodate a proportionate level of growth which is appropriate to the size of each settlement and supports their local service function. In relation to future residential development, this is anticipated to include a combination of small and medium-scale sites.
- 7.1.1.3 Within this context, below we have outlined our thoughts on what an overall strategy for Woodstock might look like. To do this, we have first prepared a brief profile of the village in 2025. Using this and other relevant information, we have identified key issues which the local plan will need to address and worked this into a draft vision and strategy.
- 7.1.1.4 As Woodstock has a Neighbourhood Plan, we have sought to reflect this wherever possible. Also, because Woodstock has a defined Town Centre, we have set out an initial draft Town Centre Strategy.

Woodstock in 2025

- 7.1.1.5 Woodstock is an historic market town and designated rural service centre located in the eastern part of West Oxfordshire, with a population of approximately 3,000 residents. Renowned nationally and internationally for its strong heritage and its adjacency to Blenheim Palace – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – Woodstock plays a dual role as a vibrant local service centre and a key tourism destination.
- 7.1.1.6 The town is defined by its attractive medieval core, strong independent retail presence, and a high-quality built and natural environment, underpinned by a strong sense of place and cultural identity.

Strategic Role and Connectivity

- 7.1.1.7 Woodstock's location along the A44 places it strategically between Chipping Norton and Oxford, providing vital transport connections. It is well served by the S3 premium bus route with regular services to Oxford, Charlbury, and Chipping Norton. The town also benefits from proximity to rail stations at Long Hanborough and Charlbury, both on the Cotswold Line, offering wider regional connectivity. Dedicated cycle routes link Woodstock with Oxford, enhancing opportunities for active travel.

¹² 2021 Census

- 7.11.8 Congestion on the A40 and associated traffic diversion along the A44 present ongoing transport challenges, with high through traffic levels and freight movements affecting local amenity. Woodstock's connectivity to Oxford is particularly important, with around 30% of residents commuting to the city – the highest proportion in the District – reflecting the town's role as a commuter settlement.

Economic Role and Employment

- 7.11.9 Woodstock is one of the District's key employment areas, accounting for a substantial share of West Oxfordshire's economic activity. Employment opportunities are located both within the town – such as the Owen Mumford manufacturing facility and The Quadrangle office development – and nearby at Eynsham and Long Hanborough.
- 7.11.10 Tourism plays a critical role in Woodstock's economy. Blenheim Palace attracts visitors year-round through seasonal events, concerts, and festivals, and serves as a cornerstone of the town's cultural and evening economy. This tourism footprint supports a diverse array of independent businesses, including hotels, restaurants, art galleries, antique shops, and cafes.

Housing and Growth

- 7.11.11 Woodstock has experienced steady but modest residential growth over the past decades, with most expansion occurring through post-war estate development. The adopted Local Plan 2031 includes three site allocations – land to the east of Woodstock – 300 homes (currently under construction) land at Hill Rise – 120 homes (hybrid planning permission for 180 homes) and land north of Banbury Road (180 homes (outline planning permission for 235 homes).
- 7.11.12 In addition, Cherwell District Council is preparing a new Local Plan, the formal draft version of which seeks to allocate further land to the south east of the town for the provision of an additional 450 homes. West Oxfordshire District Council has formally objected to the proposal, in large part due to the potential impact on the setting of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.
- 7.11.13 This level of growth underscores the need for carefully managed infrastructure provision, open space protection, and integration of new neighbourhoods into the historic fabric of the town.
- 7.11.14 The Woodstock Neighbourhood Plan reflects these concerns, with a focus on protecting green spaces and ensuring sustainable growth.

Services and Facilities

- 7.11.15 Woodstock provides a strong range of local services and facilities relative to its size, serving both the local population and the surrounding rural hinterland. Key services include primary and secondary education (Woodstock CE Primary and The Marlborough School), a GP surgery, the Oxfordshire Museum, and community facilities such as Woodstock Town Hall and public open spaces including New Road Recreation Ground and the Watermeadows.

7.11.16 Despite the town's cultural and recreational offerings, it has limited accessible public open space beyond institutional playing fields. The Watermeadows, located in the heart of the town, offer valuable biodiversity and community amenity, but further enhancements to green infrastructure are needed to support a growing population.

7.11.17 In addition, the need for a new GP surgery has long been identified as a priority for the town and discussions are currently ongoing to identify an appropriate solution.

Heritage and Environment

7.11.18 The heritage value of Woodstock is exceptional. The central conservation area encompasses nearly 200 listed buildings, reflecting its medieval origins and architectural richness. The townscape is defined by well-maintained historic streets, shop frontages, and public spaces such as Market Place and High Street, which contribute significantly to its character and identity.

7.11.19 To the west, Blenheim Park and Palace form a major cultural landscape of national and international significance. The Park includes designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Conservation Target Areas (CTA), making environmental stewardship an important consideration in any future growth.

7.11.20 Woodstock's rural setting includes rolling limestone wolds, the River Glyme valley, and surrounding farmland, with defined settlement boundaries that help maintain a clear distinction between urban and rural areas.

Town Centre and Tourism

7.11.21 The town centre is a vital economic and social hub with a notable independent retail and hospitality presence. Events such as *Woodstock Live*, *A Night of a Thousand Candles*, and the *Woodstock Festive Fayre* contribute to a year-round calendar of cultural activity, often coordinated through the *Wake Up To Woodstock* business association.

7.11.22 Woodstock also benefits from a strong evening and night-time economy, supported by local venues and seasonal events hosted at Blenheim Palace. Ongoing opportunities exist to better coordinate marketing efforts, enhance public realm quality, and expand heritage-based experiences.

Key Issues for the Local Plan to address

7.11.23 Drawing on the profile above and other relevant information, we have identified a number of key issues that the new Local Plan might seek to address in relation to Woodstock.

I. Managing Sustainable Growth

- Woodstock has seen steady residential expansion, with several housing sites under construction or planned.
- Any further development must:
 - Be carefully integrated into the town's historic fabric and rural setting.

- Avoid adverse impacts on the setting of Blenheim Palace (UNESCO World Heritage Site).
- Be supported by timely delivery of infrastructure and public services.

2. Transport and Connectivity

- Woodstock benefits from good regional connectivity via the A44, S3 bus route, and proximity to rail.
- However, through-traffic and congestion—especially from A40 diversions—negatively affect local amenity
- The plan should explore:
 - Mitigating traffic impacts through traffic calming or strategic routing.
 - Enhancing bus frequency and links to local stations.
 - Improving active travel routes, particularly cycling access to Oxford.

3. Infrastructure and Facilities

- The town is relatively well-served but faces pressures from planned housing growth.
- Key infrastructure challenges include:
 - Provision of a new or expanded GP surgery, which has long been identified as a priority.
 - Ensuring educational facilities can meet future demand
 - Enhancing and maintaining public open spaces such as the Watermeadows.

4. Heritage Protection and Setting

- Woodstock's historic character is central to its identity, with nearly 200 listed buildings and a large conservation area.
- Development must:
 - Be heritage-led and contextually sensitive.
 - Protect views and the historic relationship with Blenheim Palace and Park.
 - Respect the integrity of the town's medieval core and built environment.

5. Housing Needs and Affordability

- Substantial housing growth is underway or planned.
- The plan must address
 - A balanced supply of housing types and tenures, including affordable housing.
 - Integration of new homes with the town's character and green infrastructure.
 - Cumulative impacts on traffic, heritage, and community services.

6. Employment and Economic Opportunities

- Woodstock is a key employment hub with a strong mix of local businesses and commuting links to Oxford.
- The plan should support:
 - Diverse employment space, including opportunities at The Quadrangle and Owen Mumford.
 - Home-based businesses and flexible working enabled by strong digital infrastructure.
 - Proximity to employment clusters in Eynsham and Long Hanborough.

7. Tourism, Town Centre and Cultural Identity

- Tourism is vital, driven by Blenheim Palace and year-round cultural events
- The town centre has a strong independent retail and hospitality offer.
- The plan should balance:
 - Support for sustainable tourism that protects local amenity
 - Enhancement of public realm and marketing coordination.
 - Preservation of the town centre's vibrancy and historic charm.

8. Environment, Green Space and Biodiversity

- The town is set within a valued rural and natural landscape, including the River Glyme, Watermeadows, and SSSI areas.
- The plan must:
 - Protect and enhance green infrastructure.
 - Ensure new development includes accessible open space.
 - Support biodiversity and environmental stewardship, particularly near Blenheim Park and the Glyme valley.

Draft Vision and Strategy

7.11.24 Based on the profile and key issues outlined above, we have prepared a draft vision and settlement strategy, the purpose of which is to provide an overarching policy framework against which development proposals at Woodstock will be considered alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan and the Woodstock Neighbourhood Plan.

Woodstock in 2041 - A Draft Vision

By 2041, Woodstock will be a thriving, sustainable, and inclusive historic market town that builds on its exceptional heritage and cultural identity while embracing innovation and change. As a key rural service centre in eastern West Oxfordshire, Woodstock will continue to support the wider district through carefully managed growth, enhanced connectivity, and a strong local economy rooted in place.

The town's distinctive medieval character and close relationship with Blenheim Palace will be preserved and enhanced through heritage-led planning and sensitive design. The town centre will flourish as a vibrant hub of independent retail, hospitality, and cultural activity, offering a welcoming environment for both residents and visitors.

New development will be well-integrated into the town's historic fabric and rural landscape, scaled to meet local housing needs while protecting key environmental assets. A genuine mix of housing, including affordable homes and diverse tenures, will support a balanced, multi-generational community. Green infrastructure and open space will be central to new neighbourhoods, enhancing wellbeing and biodiversity.

Woodstock will be at the forefront of climate resilience and environmental stewardship. Development will contribute to West Oxfordshire's carbon reduction goals through zero- and low-carbon buildings, sustainable drainage, and the protection of sensitive landscapes including the Glyme Valley and Blenheim Park.

A more connected Woodstock will emerge through investment in sustainable transport, including improved bus links, better access to nearby rail services, and safer walking and cycling routes – especially to Oxford. These improvements will reduce congestion, lower emissions, and improve quality of life.

Employment opportunities will be diverse and future-facing, with growth in the creative, digital, tourism, and green sectors. Home-based working and small business development will be supported by strong digital infrastructure and flexible workspaces.

By 2041, Woodstock will be a healthy, inclusive, and culturally rich community where residents of all ages can live well, work locally, and take pride in their shared heritage. It will remain a place of national and international significance, woven into the landscape of West Oxfordshire and a model for sustainable rural town living.

WD1 – A Strategy for Woodstock

Woodstock will continue to serve as a key rural service centre in eastern West Oxfordshire, playing a dual role as a vibrant local community and a destination of national and international significance. Development will be directed to locations that respect the town's exceptional historic environment, enhance local infrastructure and green space, and support inclusive, sustainable growth. Future change will be managed to protect Woodstock's unique setting, especially in relation to Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site and its surrounding landscape. In managing future change, the Council will support development proposals that contribute to the following overarching aims:

a) Delivering sustainable patterns of growth by:

- i) Prioritising previously developed land and well-located infill sites within or adjacent to the existing built-up area, where they can enhance townscape character, heritage value, and community infrastructure;
- ii) Ensuring new development is carefully scaled and landscape-led, integrating seamlessly with the town's historic fabric and respecting the setting of Blenheim Palace and surrounding rural views;
- iii) Providing a balanced mix of housing, including genuinely affordable homes and diverse tenures, to meet local needs and support a multi-generational community;
- iv) Requiring high-quality, low-carbon design and sustainable construction in all new development, with integration of green infrastructure and active travel routes.

b) Strengthening local infrastructure and services by:

- i) Coordinating investment in health, education, transport, and digital infrastructure to support a growing population, including delivery of a new GP facility and expanded school capacity;
- ii) Enhancing green space provision, particularly accessible public open space and play facilities, to address existing deficits and meet future demand;
- iii) Securing developer contributions and strategic funding to ensure infrastructure delivery is aligned with new development, including sustainable transport upgrades and climate resilience measures.

c) Supporting a vibrant and diverse economy by:

- i) Protecting and enhancing existing employment sites and encouraging sensitive intensification where appropriate;
- ii) Supporting tourism and the visitor economy, including sustainable access to Blenheim Palace, the conservation of the town centre, and promotion of cultural events and independent businesses;
- iii) Enabling local enterprise, home-working, and the creative and green economies through flexible workspace, strong digital connectivity, and mixed-use development opportunities.

d) Protecting and enhancing heritage, landscape and natural capital by:

- i) Ensuring all development preserves and enhances the historic character of Woodstock, including the conservation area, listed buildings, and key public spaces such as the Market Place and High Street;
- ii) Safeguarding the setting of Blenheim Palace and Park, maintaining a clear distinction between town and countryside, and avoiding visual or functional encroachment on designated landscapes and heritage assets;
- iii) Improving green and blue infrastructure, including the River Glyme, Watermeadows, and local biodiversity networks, while integrating sustainable drainage and flood risk management.

Woodstock Town Centre

Context

7.11.25 Woodstock town centre is a small but historically significant centre in West Oxfordshire, known for its proximity to Blenheim Palace – a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most prominent tourist attractions in the region. The town functions as a key gateway to the Palace, drawing domestic and international visitors throughout the year. Woodstock's historic character, strong independent retail scene, and cultural offer contribute to its identity as a destination town with a distinctive sense of place.

Retail, Services and Function

- 7.11.26 Woodstock is characterised by a predominantly independent retail offer, with small-scale units housing antique shops, art galleries, and handcrafted goods. The town also offers a range of pubs, restaurants, and boutique accommodations, many housed within attractive historic buildings such as The Bear Hotel and The Kings Arms. The primary retail frontages are located along Oxford Street (A44), High Street, and Market Place/Market Street.
- 7.11.27 The centre is largely composed of comparison retail and leisure services, which together account for nearly 70% of units and around 80% of commercial floorspace. While smaller in scale, the town centre demonstrates strong vitality, with a very low vacancy rate of 5.5% – well below the national average of 14.1%. Its historic market continues to drive footfall and supports a lively town centre environment.

Leisure, Culture and Community Offer

- 7.11.28 Woodstock's cultural offer is closely tied to its heritage assets, particularly Blenheim Palace and the Oxfordshire Museum, both of which support the day-time and visitor economy. Seasonal events and temporary venues such as the Blenheim Palace outdoor cinema add to the town's cultural calendar, helping to diversify the offer and attract broader audiences.
- 7.11.29 The local business network, including the 'Wake Up To Woodstock' (WUTW) association, plays an active role in promoting the town. Events such as Woodstock Live, A Night of a Thousand Candles, and the Woodstock Festive Fayre not only enhance the evening economy but also help foster community engagement and repeat visitation.
- 7.11.30 Food and drink venues such as The Aviary Bar, The Nest at the Feathers Hotel, and the award-winning Back Lane Tavern contribute to the town's growing reputation as a dining destination and support a diverse, high-quality evening economy.

Accessibility and Movement

- 7.11.31 Woodstock benefits from good regional connectivity via the A44 and nearby train services linking to Oxford, London, Reading, and Worcester. However, the historic layout of the town and limited on-street parking provision present ongoing accessibility challenges. Footfall has declined by 10% between January and August 2024, partly due to these constraints and wider shifts in town centre usage patterns.
- 7.11.32 Opportunities exist to enhance pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, improve wayfinding, and invest in the public realm to better accommodate both residents and visitors. Cycle parking is available and forms part of the town's active travel strategy, which could be expanded further through new routes and pedestrian improvements.

Town Centre Floorspace and Performance

- 7.11.33 With approximately 9,030 sqm of commercial floorspace, Woodstock is one of the smaller town centres in the District, comparable to Burford. The average unit size is 112 sqm for convenience goods and 159 sqm for retail, leisure, and service uses overall, reflecting the small-scale, independent character of the town's offer. Despite its smaller footprint, the centre performs well, supported by tourism-related footfall and strong occupancy levels.

7.11.34 The centre's compact nature and consistent use of historic buildings mean that opportunities for expansion are limited. However, scope remains for the re-use of vacant units and enhanced coordination of town centre promotion.

Environmental Quality and Heritage

7.11.35 Woodstock boasts an attractive environmental quality underpinned by its architectural heritage, clean streets, and distinctive shop frontages. The visual character of the town, centred around Market Place and High Street, plays a crucial role in its appeal to visitors and residents alike.

7.11.36 Public realm enhancements such as greening, improved seating, and upgraded street furniture would help reinforce the town's charm and support its role as a year-round destination. Proposals to establish a heritage trail and invest in more coordinated events and branding could further enrich the visitor experience and help offset seasonal footfall variations.

A Potential Strategy for Woodstock Town Centre

7.11.37 The purpose of our draft strategy is to:

- Support Woodstock's role as a historic market town and key visitor destination linked to Blenheim Palace and the wider West Oxfordshire area.
- Enhance the vitality, viability, and resilience of the town centre by building on its tourism appeal, independent retail offer, and cultural assets.
- Promote a balanced mix of small-scale, independent uses that contribute to the centre's charm, character, and distinctiveness.
- Encourage the flexible re-use of vacant or under-utilised premises for creative, community, or visitor-focused uses.
- Strengthen Woodstock's year-round visitor economy through coordinated events, heritage trails, and improved promotion.
- Improve access and movement for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users, while addressing parking challenges.
- Invest in public realm improvements including greening, street furniture, and enhanced wayfinding to support footfall and enjoyment.
- Protect and celebrate the town's historic environment, architecture, and shopfronts as a key part of its identity and appeal.
- Promote Woodstock as a high-quality cultural and heritage destination within a coordinated West Oxfordshire visitor offer.
- Support community-led initiatives such as Wake Up to Woodstock that enrich the town's evening and events economy.

Why is a Town Centre Strategy needed?

7.11.38 The strategy is needed for a number of reasons:

- **To respond to falling footfall:** Despite a low vacancy rate and strong tourism appeal, Woodstock has experienced a 10% decline in footfall between 2023 and 2024, indicating a need to sustain and diversify visitor and local engagement.
- **To build on its unique strengths:** Woodstock's proximity to Blenheim Palace, its rich heritage, high-quality public realm, and strong independent retail and hospitality offer present a solid base for further growth and coordinated promotion.
- **To support tourism and the local economy:** With a significant tourist role, Woodstock requires a clear strategy to manage visitor flows, improve infrastructure, and support local businesses in delivering a high-quality, year-round visitor experience.
- **To address limited service diversity:** The town has relatively few financial and business services, and limited unit sizes restrict larger-format uses, underlining the need to support a flexible and balanced mix of uses.
- **To enhance movement and accessibility:** Parking pressures, car dominance on main routes, and opportunities for better pedestrian and cycle connections highlight the need for integrated improvements to access and mobility.
- **To future-proof the town centre:** With rising business costs and changing consumer behaviours, Woodstock needs a strategy to maintain its resilience, encourage innovation, and ensure its continued vitality for both residents and visitors.

Preferred Approach

7.11.39 Our preferred approach for Woodstock is place-led, heritage-sensitive, and visitor-focused, aimed at sustaining the town's unique character while enhancing its appeal for residents and tourists. It centres on:

1. Placemaking, Public Realm and Accessibility

- Improve the quality and coherence of key spaces such as Market Place and High Street through landscaping, seating, and heritage-appropriate materials.
- Enhance pedestrian safety, reduce congestion impacts, and improve wayfinding to better connect the town centre with Blenheim Palace and local amenities.
- Create more welcoming and inclusive public spaces for socialising, events, and dwell time.

2. Adaptive Reuse and Flexible Uses

- Support the creative reuse of underused buildings for cultural, community, or small business purposes, including meanwhile uses and upper-floor conversions.
- Encourage a mix of uses that support town centre vibrancy, including co-working, health services, and small-scale residential.

3. Cultural Activation and Events

- Build on Woodstock's existing cultural calendar and community initiatives to develop year-round programming and visitor engagement.
- Support local groups and businesses in delivering events, trails, and pop-up activities that enhance footfall and vibrancy.

4. Independent Retail and Visitor Economy

- Strengthen Woodstock's identity as a high-quality independent retail and heritage destination.
- Provide support for small businesses and promote coordinated tourism marketing linked to Blenheim Palace and the wider district offer.

7.11.40 This approach is reflected in the initial draft policy below.

WD2 – Woodstock Town Centre

- 1) Woodstock Town Centre will continue to play a distinctive role as a historic market town and gateway to Blenheim Palace, with a strong emphasis on tourism, independent retail, leisure, and heritage-led cultural activity. The Council will support development that enhances the vitality, viability, and resilience of the centre while reinforcing its unique historic character and contribution to the wider visitor economy of West Oxfordshire.
- 2) In managing change, development proposals will be supported where they contribute to the following overarching aims:
 - a) **Enhancing vitality and viability by:**
 - i) Maintaining and promoting a strong independent retail and leisure offer, particularly within the Primary Shopping Area, to preserve Woodstock's character and strengthen its function as a tourist destination.
 - ii) Supporting the re-use of vacant or underused premises for flexible and creative uses such as pop-ups, co-working, small-scale galleries, or artisan retail.
 - iii) Encouraging initiatives that enhance the quality and appeal of the town's market and seasonal street events.
 - iv) Promoting family-friendly, early-evening and evening economy activities to increase footfall and vibrancy throughout the day.
 - v) Supporting small businesses, creative industries, and start-ups through provision of adaptable commercial space and event programming.
 - b) **Improving accessibility, safety, and movement by:**
 - i) Enhancing pedestrian and cycle access through improved footways, signage, and active travel links to nearby transport nodes, including Blenheim Palace and Hanborough Station.
 - ii) Improving car and cycle parking provision and wayfinding to accommodate visitors and reduce congestion in key areas.
 - iii) Supporting public transport access to the town centre and promoting sustainable transport connections to surrounding settlements.

c) Enhancing the public realm and historic environment by:

- i) Delivering high-quality improvements to Woodstock's Market Place and High Street including seating, planting, lighting, and street furniture that enhance the centre's setting and usability.
- ii) Preserving and sensitively enhancing the historic architecture, shopfronts, and built environment that underpin the town's special character.
- iii) Supporting a coordinated approach to shopfront improvements, building maintenance, and greening of public spaces.
- iv) Promoting the development and implementation of heritage trails, interpretation signage, and digital guides to enrich the visitor experience.

d) Supporting tourism and cultural identity by:

- i) Promoting Woodstock as a key cultural and heritage destination within the District, linked to Blenheim Palace, the Oxfordshire Museum, and the town's calendar of events
- ii) Supporting local cultural initiatives and events including those led by the Wake Up To Woodstock (WUTW) partnership and other community groups.
- iii) Encouraging collaboration with nearby centres and tourism partners to deliver a coherent and compelling visitor offer.
- iv) Facilitating opportunities for temporary and pop-up cultural venues such as open-air cinemas, exhibitions, and performances to enhance the year-round appeal of the town.

Woodstock – Future Development Locations

7.11.41 As outlined above, the adopted Local Plan 2031 allocates three 'non' strategic sites at Woodstock, land to the east of Woodstock (300 homes) land at Hill Rise (120 homes) and land north of Banbury Road (180 homes).

7.11.42 The land east of Woodstock has planning permission for 300 homes and is currently under construction. Land at Hill Rise has a hybrid planning permission for 180 homes (i.e. a combination of outline and detailed permission) and land north of Banbury Road has outline planning permission for 235 homes. As such, for the purposes of the emerging Local Plan, these sites will be counted as past completions and existing commitments.

7.11.43 The focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025 will provide details of any other locations that are considered suitable for potential allocation through the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041.

Rural Area Strategy

7.12.1 The settlement hierarchy embedded in draft Core Policy 2 is based on the following categories:

Tier 1 – Principal Towns

Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton

Tier 2 – Service Centres

Bampton, Burford, Charlbury, Eynsham, Long Hanborough, Woodstock, Salt Cross Garden Village (new)

Tier 3 – Villages

Alvescot, Ascott under Wychwood, Aston, Bladon, Brize Norton, Cassington, Chadlington, Churchill, Clanfield, Combe, Curbridge, Ducklington, Enstone, Filkins & Broughton Poggs, Finstock, Freeland, Fulbrook, Great Rollright, Hailey, Kingham, Langford, Leafield, Middle Barton, Milton under Wychwood, Minster Lovell (South of Burford Road), North Leigh, Over Norton, Shipton under Wychwood, Standlake, Stanton Harcourt, Stonesfield, Tackley, Wootton

Tier 4 – Small villages, hamlets and open countryside

All other villages and settlements not listed above plus open countryside.

7.12.2 Whilst we have prepared draft settlements strategies for each of the Tier 1 Principal Towns and Tier 2 Service Centres, there are too many Tier 3 and 4 villages and hamlets to draft an individual strategy for each.

7.12.3 We propose to address this by including within the new local plan, a vision and strategy for the rural area which would apply to development proposals in Tier 3 and 4 locations and complement the overall spatial strategy embedded in Core Policy 3 – Spatial Strategy.

Rural Area Vision

7.12.4 Our vision for the rural areas of West Oxfordshire is as follows:

Our Rural Areas in 2041

West Oxfordshire's rural areas will continue to play a vital role in the life and identity of the district. By 2041, the villages, hamlets and countryside of West Oxfordshire will remain distinctive, thriving, and resilient - supporting strong local communities, farming and land-based industries, small-scale enterprise, and rich cultural and environmental assets.

Development in rural areas will be modest in scale and carefully guided to respect local character, landscape sensitivity, and environmental constraints. Housing and other forms of development will respond directly to local needs, particularly for affordable and accessible homes, to help retain younger people and support ageing populations.

Rural sustainability will be enhanced through digital connectivity, support for local facilities and businesses, investment in active travel and public transport, and nature recovery. The built and natural heritage of West Oxfordshire's countryside including its historic villages, agricultural landscapes, river valleys, and the Cotswolds National Landscape, will be protected and enhanced for future generations.

Rural Area Strategy

7.12.5 Building on the draft vision and overall spatial strategy embedded in draft Core Policy 3, we have drafted a rural area strategy policy below.

RA1 – Rural Area Strategy

The rural areas of West Oxfordshire, comprising Tier 3 Villages and Tier 4 Small Villages, Hamlets, and Open Countryside, will be supported to evolve in a way that prioritises local need, environmental sustainability, and protects community integrity.

Development will reflect the varying size, function, and capacity of each settlement while safeguarding the intrinsic value of the rural environment.

Development in the rural areas will be supported where it:

- a) Meets demonstrable local needs, including:
 - i) Affordable and appropriately sized homes for local people, prioritising young households and older residents wishing to downsize;
 - ii) Housing that supports rural workers or enables long-standing residents to remain in their community;
 - iii) Small-scale employment, community, or tourism-related development that maintains or enhances rural vitality.
- b) Reflects the scale, character, and function of the settlement, by:
 - i) Being proportionate in size and scale and sensitively located relative to the existing built form;
 - ii) Respecting key landscape features, views, settlement edges, and historic or environmental designations;
 - iii) Ensuring high-quality, locally distinctive design that complements the rural setting.
- c) Enhances sustainability and resilience, through:
 - i) Avoiding Zone 2 and 3 areas of flood risk and integrating sustainable drainage and climate-resilient infrastructure;
 - ii) Securing biodiversity net gain and contributing to local and strategic nature recovery efforts;
 - iii) Incorporating energy-efficient, zero and low-carbon construction and supporting renewable energy where appropriate.
- d) Supports the vitality of rural communities, by:
 - i) Maintaining and enhancing valued local services such as schools, shops, pubs, and community facilities;
 - ii) Encouraging small-scale rural enterprise, homeworking, and flexible business space in appropriate locations;
 - iii) Strengthening digital connectivity and access to services, including through improved broadband and mobile coverage.
- e) Improves rural accessibility and mobility, by:
 - i) Supporting active travel through the delivery of safe and attractive walking and cycling links within and between settlements;
 - ii) Enhancing access to public and community transport, particularly connections to larger service centres and towns;
 - iii) Minimising reliance on private car use wherever possible and reducing rural transport isolation.
 - iv) Makes use of existing or future potential railway connections.

The Council will work in close partnership with local communities, Parish Councils, neighbourhood plan groups, and other stakeholders to ensure that rural change is guided by local knowledge, reflects community aspirations, and contributes positively to the long-term sustainability of West Oxfordshire's rural areas.

Rural Areas – Future Development Locations

- 7.12.6 One of the weaknesses of the current Local Plan 2031 is that it places too much reliance on large, strategic-scale housing sites – several of which have come forward much slower than anticipated.
- 7.12.7 This has caused difficulties in terms of housing land supply rendering the Council open to speculative development, often in inappropriate, sensitive locations.
- 7.12.8 The new Local Plan 2041 provides an opportunity to identify a larger number of smaller site allocations including at Tier 3 settlements. This approach will not only help to support housing delivery but is consistent with national policy which emphasises the importance of small and medium-sized housing sites as they support small and medium enterprise housebuilders and are often built out relatively quickly.
- 7.12.9 The focused consultation on preferred development areas planned for autumn 2025 will provide details of Tier 3 village locations that are considered suitable for potential allocation through the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041.
- 7.12.10 It should be noted that at this stage, Officers do not anticipate identifying any preferred development areas within the Tier 4 small villages, hamlets and open countryside.
- 7.12.11 This is because the overall spatial strategy (draft Core Policy 3) adopts a restrictive approach to new housing in such locations with development only permitted in the limited circumstances outlined in draft Policy DM26.

8. Development Management Policies

- 8.1.1 In this section of the paper, we set out a suite of development management policies that are intended to cover matters that are typically raised when the Council is dealing with planning applications. They are essentially intended to be the main ‘day-to-day’ policies to guide development decisions.
- 8.1.2 The Government has indicated that it intends to introduce national development management policies in due course but as there is no clear timetable for this happening or clarity on what issues national policies would address, we feel it is important for the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 to include a number of locally specific policies.
- 8.1.3 The proposed policies are set out on a thematic basis for ease of reference. We would welcome views on the overall scope of these policies as well as the preferred approach which is proposed under each. We would also welcome views on whether there are any key areas of policy which we haven’t sufficiently addressed.

Healthy, Safe, Strong and Inclusive Communities

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Policy DMI – Key Principles for New Development

What will this policy do?

- 8.1.4 The policy is intended to set out a series of key principles which all new development will be expected to adhere to in the interests of good planning and protecting and enhancing the District's built, historic and natural environment and local communities.

Why is it needed?

- 8.1.5 The current West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 includes Policy OS2 – Locating Development in the Right Places which, in addition to setting out the overall spatial strategy for the District, includes a series of general principles which all new development is expected to comply with.
- 8.1.6 Those general principles are well-used and often cited by Planning Officers and applicants when development proposals are being considered. They do however include a degree of repetition with other policies and national policy on issues such as flood risk, provision of supporting infrastructure, conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of the Cotswolds National Landscape and development in the Green Belt.
- 8.1.7 The review of the Local Plan presents the opportunity to update and strengthen these general development principles and in doing so, remove any repetition with other plan policies or national policy.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.1.8 Our preferred approach is to refine the general principles that currently sit within Policy OS2 of the adopted West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031. These provide a good starting point for preparing an updated policy.
- 8.1.9 To avoid duplication with other local and national policies, we propose to delete reference to the following issues:
- Flood risk
 - Conservation and enhancement of the natural, historic and built environment
 - Conservation of landscape and scenic beauty in the AONB
 - Green Belt
 - Provision of supporting infrastructure
- 8.1.10 The primary focus of the policy will therefore be on the following issues:
- The need for new development to be proportionate and appropriate in scale to its location and context, taking into account potential cumulative impact of development in the locality;
 - Ensuring that development relates well to the existing built form and/or character of the local area;
 - Protecting the identity of separate settlements including the avoidance of coalescence;

- Ensuring compatibility with existing, adjoining uses;
- Ensuring a high standard of amenity for existing and new occupants;
- Protecting and where possible, enhancing the local landscape and setting of settlements;
- The protection of important areas of open space including designated local green spaces;
- The provision of safe vehicular and pedestrian access.

8.1.11 This approach is reflected in draft Policy DMI below.

DM1 – Key Principles for New Development

All new development proposals will be required to adhere to the following key principles to ensure that they contribute positively to the sustainability, character, and quality of the local area:

- 1) **Proportionate and Contextually Appropriate Development**
Development must be proportionate and appropriate in scale, form, and character to its location, taking into account the potential cumulative impact of development in the locality.
- 2) **Integration with the Built Form and Local Character**
Development proposals must relate well to the existing built form, respecting the architectural styles, materials, and layouts that define local character and vernacular. Design should respond innovatively and sensitively to the distinctiveness of the area and maintain its identity; this is especially important in historic places such as Conservation Areas.
- 3) **Preservation of Settlement Identity**
Development should not lead to the coalescence of settlements. Proposals must demonstrate how they will protect the separate identity of settlements by maintaining appropriate physical and visual gaps between them.
- 4) **Compatibility with Existing and Adjoining Uses**
Proposals must ensure that development is compatible with existing and adjoining land uses. Development that is likely to cause harm or conflict with neighbouring uses will not be supported unless such impacts can be effectively mitigated.
- 5) **High Standard of Amenity**
Development must provide a high standard of amenity for both existing and future occupants. Proposals should avoid adverse impacts from noise, pollution, overshadowing, or overlooking and should ensure adequate levels of privacy, natural light, and usable outdoor space.
- 6) **Protection and Enhancement of the Local Landscape**
As far as is reasonably possible, development must protect and, where possible, enhance the local landscape and the setting of settlements. Proposals should demonstrate how they contribute to maintaining the scenic quality and biodiversity of the area while avoiding adverse visual impacts.
- 7) **Protection of Important Open Spaces**
Existing open spaces, including designated Local Green Spaces, must be protected from development unless there are exceptional circumstances. Proposals should avoid the loss of open spaces that contribute to the community's recreational, ecological, or visual needs.

8) **Safe Vehicular and Pedestrian Access**

Development must ensure the provision of safe, convenient, and inclusive access for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists. Proposals should demonstrate how they integrate with and relate to the existing local transport network and avoid adverse impacts on road safety or traffic congestion.

9) **Safety of Children and Vulnerable Users**

Where relevant, new development will be required to demonstrate how any risks to children and other vulnerable users have been identified and mitigated through the site layout, design, and safeguarding measures such as secure boundaries, surveillance, and safe routes.

Implementation and Monitoring

To ensure compliance with this policy, all development proposals must be accompanied by appropriate assessments and plans, including, design and access statements, transport assessments, landscape and visual impact appraisals, and, where necessary, amenity impact assessments.

Policy DM2 – Green Infrastructure

What will this policy do?

8.1.12 Green Infrastructure is defined in national policy ‘A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity’.

8.1.13 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that new development in West Oxfordshire protects, enhances, and integrates high-quality green infrastructure that delivers environmental, social, and economic benefits.

8.1.14 It requires major developments to provide strategic green spaces, support climate resilience, improve biodiversity, promote health and wellbeing, and ensure long-term management and sustainability.

Why is it needed?

8.1.15 The policy is needed to ensure that green infrastructure is recognised and integrated as a vital component of sustainable development. As West Oxfordshire experiences growth, it is essential to protect and enhance its natural assets, ensuring that development contributes positively to the environment, biodiversity, nature recovery and the wellbeing of communities.

8.1.16 Green infrastructure provides critical benefits such as mitigating climate change impacts, improving air quality, managing flood risks, and enhancing recreational opportunities, which are increasingly important in the face of environmental challenges.

- 8.1.17 It is the holistic mechanism for integrating biodiversity, nature recovery, ecological networks, landscape, health, well-being, recreation, climate, natural capital, sustainable travel and active routes, etc. It encompasses a wide range of assets and can provide a huge number of benefits for people, including many of the ecosystem services such as air quality, water quality, flood alleviation, connection with nature, sense of place and shade.
- 8.1.18 Without clear policy guidance, there is a risk that new developments may fail to deliver the multi-functional green spaces needed to support healthy, sustainable, and resilient communities. This policy provides a framework to secure and maintain a high-quality green infrastructure network for current and future generations.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.1.19 The preferred policy approach focuses on integrating green infrastructure into new developments by setting clear requirements for protection, enhancement, and connectivity of green and blue spaces.
- 8.1.20 It requires strategic developments to allocate around 50% of site areas to green infrastructure, requires major developments to provide a Green Infrastructure Strategy, and emphasises long-term management and multi-functional benefits, such as climate resilience, biodiversity, nature recovery and health improvements.
- 8.1.21 The policy aligns with national standards and encourages excellence through accreditation schemes like Building with Nature. This approach ensures sustainable, high-quality, and well-managed green infrastructure in all significant developments. It also supports the integrated management of the natural and historic environment, where possible.

DM2 – Green Infrastructure

Protection and Enhancement of the Green Infrastructure Network

Development proposals will be expected to protect and enhance features/assets that form part of West Oxfordshire's green infrastructure network. Proposals should seek to improve integration and connectivity wherever possible to deliver a cohesive and high-quality green infrastructure network that benefits both people and nature and where possible, heritage.

Green Infrastructure Strategy for Major Development

All major development proposals must be accompanied by a Green Infrastructure Strategy. This strategy should:

- a) Identify and map the existing green infrastructure network within and surrounding the development site and the proposed enhancements.
- b) Set out clear plans for the creation, integration, and long-term management of all green infrastructure features (or assets).
- c) Include detailed ongoing management maintenance and stewardship arrangements to ensure the network remains functional, accessible, and high quality for people and nature

Green Infrastructure in Strategic Sites

For strategic development sites of more than 300 homes, around 50% of the site area should contribute to the overall green infrastructure network. This includes communal open spaces, parks, green corridors, water features, and other multi-functional green and blue spaces. For smaller, non-strategic proposals, an appropriate proportion of green infrastructure will be required having regard to the overall site size and the extent of the developable area.

Long-Term Management and Maintenance

Development proposals will be required to demonstrate how they will address the long-term management, maintenance and stewardship of green infrastructure, including funding mechanisms and governance arrangements.

Multi-Purpose Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure should be demonstrably multi-functional, providing a range of benefits such as:

- a) Avoiding or reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts, including flood management and heat island mitigation.
- b) Enhancing biodiversity and providing habitat and species connectivity and contributing towards the aims and objectives of the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- c) Contributing to improved health and wellbeing by providing opportunities for recreation, exercise, and mental health support.
- d) Supporting air quality improvements and carbon sequestration.

National Standards and Best Practices

Development proposals must have regard to Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework, including the Green Infrastructure Standards and the 15 Green Infrastructure Principles, ensuring they contribute meaningfully to the wider network.

Support for Nationally Recognised Accreditation

Development proposals that demonstrate exemplary green infrastructure provision by striving to achieve nationally recognised accreditation schemes such as 'Building with Nature' will be supported and encouraged.

Implementation and Monitoring

This policy will be implemented through the submission of Green Infrastructure Strategies, design and access statements, Ecological Impact Assessments, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) reports and monitoring of green infrastructure delivery on strategic and major development sites.

Collaboration with stakeholders such as Natural England, local communities, and landowners will be encouraged to achieve the policy's objectives.

Policy DM3 – Sport, Recreation and Play

What will this policy do?

- 8.1.22 This policy will help to protect, enhance, and provide for a wide range of sport, recreation and play opportunities across West Oxfordshire, recognising their vital role in supporting health, wellbeing, community cohesion and quality of life.
- 8.1.23 By safeguarding existing facilities and requiring appropriate provision in new development, the policy will ensure that all residents – regardless of age or ability – have access to high-quality, inclusive and sustainable spaces for physical activity, play, and social interaction.

Why is it needed?

- 8.1.24 Like many areas across the UK, West Oxfordshire faces challenges linked to inactivity, social isolation, and rising levels of poor physical and mental health. In particular, rates of childhood obesity have increased, with nearly one in four children in the district overweight or obese by the time they start primary school - a figure that rises to around one in three by Year 6.
- 8.1.25 Access to safe, inclusive, and high-quality spaces for physical activity, sport, and play is widely recognised as a key factor in addressing these issues. Ensuring that existing facilities are protected and that new developments contribute appropriately to meeting local needs is vital in creating active, healthy and resilient communities. Embedding this policy in the Local Plan helps to secure the long-term infrastructure needed to support these outcomes, in line with national planning guidance, Sport England advice, and local public health priorities.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.1.26 Our preferred approach is based on protecting, enhancing and proactively planning for sport, recreation and play provision across West Oxfordshire to support healthier, more active communities.
- 8.1.27 We want to ensure that existing facilities are safeguarded and improved where needed, and that new development makes a positive contribution to meeting identified local needs in a flexible, inclusive and sustainable way. This means aligning new provision with the latest evidence, including the West Oxfordshire Strategic Outcomes Planning Model (2024) and the Playing Pitch Strategy (2022), while ensuring that facilities are accessible, well-designed, and integrated into the wider network of green spaces, transport links and community infrastructure.
- 8.1.28 We also want to ensure that new development helps create places that promote physical activity as part of everyday life, embedding Sport England's Active Design principles and creating opportunities for informal play, walking, cycling and recreation for all ages and abilities.
- 8.1.29 The preferred approach is also rooted in collaboration with communities and stakeholders to ensure that provision reflects local aspirations and supports long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.
- 8.1.30 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

DM3 – Sport, Recreation and Play

1) Protection of Existing Facilities

Existing open spaces, playing pitches, sports, recreation, and play facilities – including formal and informal spaces, leisure centres, parks, playgrounds, and allotments – will be safeguarded against loss or degradation.

Development proposals that would result in the loss or deterioration of such facilities will only be supported where:

- a) An up-to-date and robust assessment (such as the West Oxfordshire Strategic Outcomes Planning Model or Playing Pitch Strategy) demonstrates the facility is surplus to current and future requirements; or
- b) Equivalent or improved replacement provision is secured, in terms of quantity, quality, functionality, and accessibility, in a suitable and convenient location; or
- c) The proposal provides alternative sports or recreational facilities, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss.

2) Provision in New Developments

New residential and mixed-use developments must make appropriate provision for sport, recreation and play to meet the needs arising from the development.

This should include:

- a) On-site provision of play areas, open spaces, and sport/recreation facilities in line with national and local standards, the West Oxfordshire Infrastructure Delivery Plan and other relevant evidence
- b) Off-site contributions where on-site provision is not appropriate, secured through planning obligations; and
- c) Early engagement with Town and Parish Councils, Sport England, and local communities to ensure that provision is tailored to local needs.

3) Supporting New Facilities

The Council will support proposals for new or expanded sport, recreation, and play facilities where they:

- a) Address identified needs and gaps in provision as set out in the latest Playing Pitch Strategy, Strategic Outcomes Planning Model, other relevant evidence or local consultation;
- b) Are located in accessible and sustainable locations, well-connected by walking, cycling, and public transport;
- c) Are inclusive, safe, and designed to accommodate all ages and abilities;
- d) Include long-term management and maintenance arrangements to ensure continued public benefit; and
- e) Are designed in accordance with best practice such as Sport England's Active Design principles and Play England's Design Principles for Successful Play.

4) Design and Multi-Functionality

All new and upgraded sport, recreation and play facilities should

- a) Be designed to support a range of activities and enhance the overall environment, including biodiversity where possible;
- b) Be integrated into the wider network of green and blue infrastructure;
- c) Incorporate sustainable features such as SuDS and climate resilience measures;
- d) Ensure inclusivity for people with disabilities and all age groups.

5) Maximising Shared and Community Use

The Council will support and encourage shared use of school and private sport/recreation facilities, including through secured community access agreements, to increase public access and value where the delivery of standalone facilities is unviable or would not represent the optimum use of existing assets.

6) Evidence Base

Proposals will be assessed with reference to the most up-to-date evidence, including the West Oxfordshire Strategic Outcomes Planning Model (2024), Playing Pitch Strategy (2022), and Sport England facility calculators. These will be used to determine needs, guide provision, and secure appropriate developer contributions.

Policy DM4 – A Healthy Food Environment

What will this policy do?

- 8.1.31 This policy aims to support the creation of healthy, sustainable food environments within new developments. It seeks to promote food security, access to healthier food options, and opportunities for food growing, as well as the integration of these opportunities within both private and public spaces.
- 8.1.32 The policy encourages design strategies that prioritise the availability of healthy food and the promotion of healthy eating behaviours among residents.

Why is it needed?

- 8.1.33 Implementing a local plan policy to create healthy food environments in West Oxfordshire is essential to address pressing public health concerns, particularly the rising rates of childhood obesity. Data indicates that in Oxfordshire, 18.6% of Reception year children (ages 4-5) were classified as overweight or obese in 2019/20, increasing to 29.4% by Year 6 (ages 10-11). This upward trend mirrors national patterns, where approximately 23% of children are obese by age 11. The correlation between obesity and socioeconomic factors is also evident, with higher prevalence in more deprived areas.
- 8.1.34 A dedicated policy would promote access to nutritious, affordable food and limit the proliferation of unhealthy food outlets, especially near schools. This aligns with recent changes to national policy which seek to discourage the provision of hot food takeaways and fast-food outlets within walking distance of schools and other locations where young people congregate and in locations where there is evidence that a concentration of such uses is having an adverse impact on health, pollution or anti-social behaviour.
- 8.1.35 By fostering environments that support healthy dietary choices, the policy aims to mitigate obesity rates, reduce health disparities, and enhance the overall well-being of West Oxfordshire's residents.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.1.36 Our preferred approach emphasises integrating healthy food environments into new developments to promote healthier, more sustainable communities. It prioritises food-growing opportunities through allotments, community gardens, and private garden spaces, while encouraging access to healthy food outlets within walking distance of residential areas.

8.1.37 Public spaces are designed to incorporate edible planting and promote community engagement in food-related initiatives. Residential units must include kitchens and storage facilities that enable healthy food preparation. The policy also supports sustainable food production through rainwater harvesting, composting, and climate-responsive designs.

8.1.38 Community involvement and long-term management are central to the policy, ensuring inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability of food-growing spaces. Monitoring and implementation ensure compliance and foster collaboration with local stakeholders.

8.1.39 In summary, the objectives of the policy are to:

- Ensure new developments provide access to a variety of healthier food options.
- Promote opportunities for food growing through accessible allotments, community gardens, and edible planting.
- Integrate food-friendly spaces within the design of residential and public areas, including provisions for food storage and kitchen space.
- Foster a sense of community and local food production through public realm interventions and collaborative initiatives.

8.1.40 An initial draft policy is set out below.

DM 4 – A healthy food environment

Food Growing Opportunities

Allotments and Community Gardens

All new residential developments of 50 or more units must include dedicated spaces for community gardens or allotments. The design of these spaces should be integrated into the development's layout, ensuring easy access for all residents, including those with mobility issues. These spaces should support sustainable food production, use healthy, uncontaminated soil, promote biodiversity, and be adaptable to different types of growing (e.g., vegetable patches, fruit trees, communal gardening spaces).

Private Garden Space

Where private gardens are provided, developers should aim to include space for residents to grow food, such as designated areas for vegetable gardens or raised beds. This provision should be appropriate for the size and scale of the development.

Access to Healthier Food Options

Food Retail

Strategic-scale developments should include, where feasible, spaces for local food retail outlets that offer fresh, healthy food options such as fruits, vegetables, and other minimally processed products. These can include local markets, grocery stores, or food cooperatives within walking distance of residential areas.

Proximity to Food Outlets

Developments should be designed to ensure that residents have easy access to grocery stores and other healthy food outlets within a 10-minute walk, supporting both physical and food accessibility.

Hot Food Takeaways and Fast-Food Outlets

Other than in defined town centre locations, planning permission will only be granted for hot food takeaways and fast-food outlets where it can be demonstrated that there are no schools or other places where young people gather within walking distance. In all locations, proposals will also be required to demonstrate that they would not lead to an unacceptable and harmful concentration of such uses.

Opportunities within the Public Realm

Edible Planting in Public Spaces

Public realm areas, such as parks, streets, and squares, should incorporate edible planting, such as fruit trees, herb gardens, or edible shrubs, where appropriate. These areas should be designed with public access and food-growing opportunities in mind, providing a sustainable source of fresh produce and creating opportunities for community engagement and food education.

Soil quality, water availability and potential contamination should be considered when selecting sites for edible planting and they should be designed with biodiversity in mind, incorporating habitats and/or features for wildlife such as orchards, hedgerows wildflowers, companion planting and shelter for pollinators.

Public Education and Engagement

Developments should encourage community participation in the care of food-growing spaces, through initiatives such as community gardening programs, edible food walks, or food workshops. These programs should promote awareness of the benefits of growing food, sustainability, and healthy eating.

Encouraging Sustainable and Local Food Production

Developments should encourage the use of sustainable and locally sourced food production methods and the use of climate-responsive designs that support sustainable food production, including green roofs or walls for growing food, and passive design techniques that support year-round food growing.

Community Engagement and Governance

Community involvement in the planning, design, and ongoing management of food-growing spaces and initiatives will be encouraged. Developers should work with local food groups, urban farming networks, and community organisations to ensure that food-growing spaces are accessible, inclusive, and meet the needs of local residents.

Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency

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Policy DM5 - Achieving Net-Zero Carbon Development

What will this policy do?

- 8.2.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all new development across the district is aligned with the UK's climate goals by achieving net-zero operational carbon emissions and significantly reducing embodied carbon.
- 8.2.2 The policy sets a clear, district-wide standard for how buildings must be designed, constructed and operated, using a combination of ultra-low energy building fabric, efficient systems, fossil fuel-free energy, and on-site renewable energy generation. It promotes a fabric-first approach and energy hierarchy that reduces demand before supplying energy renewably.

Why is it needed?

- 8.2.3 West Oxfordshire, like many rural areas, faces the dual challenge of accommodating future growth while responding to the climate emergency. As development continues across the district, including the delivery of new homes, infrastructure and community facilities, it is critical that this growth aligns with national and local carbon reduction targets.
- 8.2.4 Buildings are responsible for a significant proportion of carbon emissions, both through operational energy use and embodied carbon in construction materials. Without strong local policy intervention, new development risks locking in decades of carbon emissions that undermine the district's climate ambitions.
- 8.2.5 The introduction of a district-wide net-zero carbon policy ensures that West Oxfordshire takes a proactive, leadership role in promoting climate-resilient, energy-efficient development. While Building Regulations are gradually tightening, they still fall short of delivering truly net-zero performance, particularly when it comes to whole-life carbon impacts and post-construction verification. This policy goes beyond minimum standards to require performance-led design and delivery, helping to futureproof new buildings and reduce the long-term energy burden on occupants.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.2.6 Our preferred approach is to require all new development in West Oxfordshire to be designed and delivered in line with net-zero operational carbon principles. This means new buildings must be highly energy efficient, entirely fossil fuel free, and powered by on-site renewable energy wherever technically feasible. We believe this is the most effective way to align development with the district's climate commitments, reduce long-term energy costs for occupants, and deliver comfortable, future-ready buildings that support health and wellbeing.
- 8.2.7 We propose a performance-led approach that prioritises measurable outcomes over theoretical compliance. This includes requiring energy use and carbon performance to be modelled using trusted, predictive tools such as PHPP or CIBSE TM54, with results verified through post-occupancy monitoring. By setting clear energy use intensity (EUI) targets for different building types, the policy provides consistency and clarity for developers while encouraging best practice and innovation.

- 8.2.8 Crucially, our preferred approach applies these principles consistently across the district, not just in exemplar sites like Salt Cross Garden Village, thereby ensuring that all communities benefit from high-quality, low-carbon development. It supports a fabric-first strategy, focusing on reducing energy demand through passive design and ultra-efficient building fabric before turning to low-carbon technologies and renewables.
- 8.2.9 This approach is ambitious but achievable. It reflects the urgency of the climate crisis and the responsibility of the planning system to shape sustainable, resilient places. It also responds to increasing expectations from residents, businesses, and developers for policies that deliver genuine climate action while creating better, more liveable environments.
- 8.2.10 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM5 - Achieving Net-Zero Carbon Development

All new development must be designed to achieve net-zero operational carbon, reduce embodied carbon, and demonstrate a clear pathway to climate resilience.

This will be achieved through ultra-low energy building fabric, high energy efficiency, fossil fuel-free systems, and on-site renewable energy generation, supported by predictive modelling, verification and post-occupancy monitoring.

1) Net-Zero Operational Carbon Requirements

- a) All new development must achieve net-zero operational carbon on-site as the default requirement, with energy demand met through a combination of:
 - i) Ultra-low energy fabric performance
 - ii) High-efficiency building systems
 - iii) On-site renewable energy generation (e.g. solar PV, heat pumps)
- b) Where full on-site renewable energy provision is not technically feasible, the following hierarchy must be applied:
 - i) Maximise renewable generation on-site (including building-mounted and ground-mounted)
 - ii) Consider connection to a local zero-carbon energy network
 - iii) As a last resort, consider off-site renewable provision or carbon offsetting, in line with local offsetting mechanisms or funds to be set by the Council

2) Building Fabric and Energy Demand Standards

- a) New buildings must be designed to meet a space heating demand of <15–20 kWh/m².yr, verified via predictive energy modelling (e.g. PHPP or CIBSE TM54) at the detailed planning stage and subject to post-completion monitoring.
- b) Fabric performance must prioritise insulation, airtightness, thermal bridging minimisation and passive solar design.

3) Energy Efficiency – Sector-Specific Energy Use Intensity (EUI) Targets

All buildings must be designed to meet the following energy use intensity (EUI) targets:

- i) Residential: <35 kWh/m².yr
- ii) Offices: <55–70 kWh/m².yr (dependent on occupancy patterns)
- iii) Schools: <65 kWh/m².yr

For other building types (e.g. retail, leisure, healthcare, industrial), targets should be discussed with the Council at the pre-application stage, referencing industry standards such as the Net Zero Carbon Buildings Standard.

A validated energy modelling approach must be agreed with the Council and applied consistently across building types and proposals.

4) Overheating and Thermal Comfort

- a) Development must address overheating risk through passive design first, including orientation, massing, shading, natural ventilation, and thermal mass.
- b) At the outline stage, proposals must consider solar orientation and form. At the detailed stage, compliance with the following standards must be demonstrated through dynamic modelling:
 - i) Part O of Building Regulations (residential)
 - ii) CIBSE TM52 or equivalent (non-residential)

5) Fossil Fuel-Free Development

All new development must be fossil fuel free, meaning:

- a) No connection to mains gas for space heating, hot water or cooking
- b) No use of oil, LPG or diesel-based systems for permanent heating or power

Low carbon, renewable-compatible alternatives (e.g. electric heat pumps, induction hobs) must be used.

6) Embodied Carbon Reduction

- a) Proposals must demonstrate how embodied carbon has been assessed and minimised, with reference to lifecycle stages A1–A5 (including substructure, superstructure, MEP, façade, and finishes but excluding renewables).
- b) All major development must undertake embodied carbon assessments at the outline and detailed stages, using nationally recognised tools (e.g. OneClick LCA, eTool).
- c) Where possible, full lifecycle analysis (stages A–C) is encouraged.

7) Energy Strategy, Monitoring and Verification

All major development must submit a comprehensive Energy Strategy, including:

- a) Predicted total energy demand (kWh/yr)
- b) Predicted on-site renewable generation (kWh/yr)
- c) Modelling tools and methodology used
- d) Monitoring and metering plan

Post-occupancy energy monitoring must occur annually for five years, with findings shared via a district-wide data platform managed or endorsed by the Council.

8) Implementation and Transitional Arrangements

- a) The Council will publish guidance to support developers with compliance pathways, verification procedures, and updated performance benchmarks.
- b) A phased approach may be permitted for smaller schemes to account for technical or financial viability constraints, with a clear trajectory toward net-zero compliance.
- c) All proposals will be expected to demonstrate a commitment to continuous performance improvement, with innovation, monitoring and best practice sharing encouraged across the District.

Policy DM6 - Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development

What will this policy do?

- 8.2.11 The purpose of this policy is to support West Oxfordshire's transition to a net zero carbon future by enabling the sensitive and sustainable deployment of renewable and low carbon energy technologies across the District.
- 8.2.12 The policy aims to provide a positive planning framework that encourages the development of a wide range of technologies - including solar, wind, hydro, biomass, heat pumps, battery storage and district heating - while ensuring that proposals are appropriately located, well-designed, and do not result in unacceptable harm to the district's valued landscapes, heritage, biodiversity or communities.

Why is it needed?

- 8.2.13 The climate emergency is one of the most urgent challenges facing society, and local planning policy plays a critical role in delivering the transition to a low carbon future.
- 8.2.14 West Oxfordshire District Council has declared a climate and ecological emergency and is committed to supporting the national objective of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. To do this, the District must significantly increase the generation and use of renewable and low carbon energy.
- 8.2.15 A clear, locally tailored policy is therefore essential to provide certainty for developers, communities and decision-makers, ensuring that new energy infrastructure contributes positively to this goal while respecting the district's environmental and landscape sensitivities.
- 8.2.16 West Oxfordshire has substantial potential to generate more clean energy through solar, wind, hydro and biomass technologies, as identified in the 2016 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Assessment.
- 8.2.17 However, this potential is constrained by factors such as landscape sensitivity, dispersed settlement patterns, aviation safeguarding zones, and the presence of protected areas including the Cotswolds National Landscape and the Green Belt.

8.2.18 Without a robust policy framework, there is a risk that renewable energy development will either be pursued in unsuitable locations or that viable opportunities will be missed due to uncertainty or opposition. The policy aims to address this by setting out clear criteria, identifying suitable types of development, and ensuring that proposals are appropriately balanced against local environmental and community considerations.

What is our preferred approach?

8.2.19 Our preferred approach is to support the sensitive and sustainable deployment of renewable and low carbon energy technologies across West Oxfordshire, in a way that contributes meaningfully to climate action while safeguarding the district's distinctive character, valued landscapes and biodiversity.

8.2.20 This approach is based on encouraging a wide range of technologies including solar, small-scale wind, hydropower, biomass, heat pumps and battery storage, with a particular focus on appropriately scaled developments in suitable locations, as identified through local evidence and landscape assessments. We propose to give strong support to community-led schemes and projects that demonstrate clear local benefit.

8.2.21 Within sensitive areas such as the Cotswolds National Landscape and the Green Belt, our approach is to apply greater scrutiny to ensure that development proposals conserve and enhance natural beauty or demonstrate very special circumstances. This balanced, locally informed approach ensures West Oxfordshire can maximise its renewable energy potential while maintaining the environmental and visual qualities that make the District unique.

8.2.22 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM6 - Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development

1) Strategic Approach

West Oxfordshire District Council will support the transition to a net zero carbon future by proactively encouraging the generation and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, including heat and electricity.

Development proposals will be supported where they:

- a) Maximise the potential for the deployment, re-powering and life extension of renewable and low carbon energy technologies in appropriate locations;
- b) Avoid unacceptable adverse impacts on the intrinsic character and beauty of the District, its biodiversity, the significance of its heritage assets and the special qualities of its towns, villages and countryside;
- c) Contribute positively to the decentralisation and diversification of energy supply; and
- d) Facilitate co-location of energy generation with potential heat customers and suppliers where viable, and;
- e) Explore opportunities for dual land use strategies, such as combining renewable energy with food production, biodiversity enhancement, or community access where feasible.

2) Suitable Locations and Technology Types

The Council will have particular regard to the findings of the 2016 'Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Assessment and Strategy for West Oxfordshire' and associated landscape capacity assessments. Development proposals should refer to these documents and relevant maps of suitability.

The following principles apply:

a) **Solar Energy:**

Commercial-scale solar developments will be supported in 'more suitable' areas, subject to the protection of high-grade agricultural land and biodiversity. In relation to Grade 3 agricultural land, applicants will be expected to confirm whether the land is Grade 3a or 3b. Proposals that incorporate dual land use - such as agrivoltaics or pollinator-friendly planting - will be particularly encouraged.

Proposals in areas identified as 'less suitable' will need to be robustly justified, including with reference to the criteria used to identify the 'more suitable' areas.

b) **Wind Energy:**

Due to airspace and landscape constraints, the potential for medium and large-scale wind turbines is limited. However, small-scale wind developments may be appropriate within areas identified as 'more suitable' and are encouraged, particularly where visual and cumulative impacts can be acceptably mitigated.

c) **Hydropower:**

Run-of-river hydro schemes will be supported in locations where technical and ecological feasibility has been demonstrated and where there is no significant adverse impact on water quality, biodiversity, or flood risk.

d) **Biomass and Renewable Heat:**

Small-scale biomass schemes, especially those that incorporate sustainable woodland management, will be supported. Opportunities for renewable heating (e.g. ground-source and air-source heat pumps) must be integrated into development proposals in accordance with Policy DM5.

e) **Battery Energy Storage:**

Battery storage facilities will be supported, particularly where they enhance the efficiency and resilience of the renewable energy system, provided that site-specific impacts (e.g., landscape, noise, and grid connection) are appropriately managed in accordance with relevant policies of this plan.

f) **District Heating and Heat Networks:**

District heating will be supported for new developments or large existing sites where sufficient heat demand exists to justify the investment.

3) Cotswolds National Landscape

Within the Cotswolds National Landscape, renewable and low carbon energy proposals will be subject to particularly careful scrutiny to ensure consistency with the statutory purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

Proposals will generally be expected to be small-scale and must demonstrate how they have addressed the relevant considerations set out in the Cotswolds National Landscape Board's Position Statement on Renewable Energy.

Large-scale proposals will only be supported in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that there is no significant harm to the landscape and that the development is in the public interest.

4) Green Belt Considerations

In accordance with national policy, within the Green Belt, proposals for renewable and low carbon energy development will be considered inappropriate development and very special circumstances will need to be demonstrated. Such circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits of renewable energy generation, provided that harm to the Green Belt is clearly outweighed.

5) Community-Led and Local Benefit Schemes

West Oxfordshire District Council places particular value on community-led renewable energy developments. Proposals that are initiated by, or demonstrably benefit, local communities (including through an agreed financial payment or equivalent) will be strongly supported, including those which contribute to local energy resilience, affordability, dual land use and democratic ownership.

6) Development Management Criteria

All proposals for renewable and low carbon energy development must:

- a) Give significant weight to the environmental, social, economic and community benefits of renewable and low carbon energy generation;
- b) Avoid significant adverse cumulative landscape and visual impacts, particularly in areas of high landscape sensitivity;
- c) Protect biodiversity and habitats, and demonstrate net gains where possible;
- d) Assess impacts on heritage assets and their settings through the provision of a heritage impact assessment and avoid or mitigate any harm to the significance of affected assets;
- e) Address amenity impacts (e.g. noise, shadow flicker, glint and glare) in relation to nearby residents and sensitive uses;
- f) Include robust site-specific assessments of technical feasibility, grid connectivity, and land quality (including agricultural land classification where relevant).

7) Monitoring and Review

The Council will monitor the deployment of renewable and low carbon energy developments across the district and review the policy in light of technological advances, market trends, and national policy updates.

Policy DM7 - Retrofitting for Energy Efficiency, Carbon Reduction and Climate Resilience

What will this policy do?

- 8.2.23 The purpose of this policy is to significantly improve the energy performance and climate resilience of West Oxfordshire's existing building stock, which represents a major source of carbon emissions and energy inefficiency.
- 8.2.24 By encouraging and supporting sensitive and sustainable retrofit measures including energy efficiency upgrades, low-carbon heating systems, on-site renewables, and smart energy technologies, the policy aims to reduce operational carbon emissions, lower energy bills, and extend the life and functionality of buildings across the District.

Why is it needed?

- 8.2.25 The retrofitting of existing buildings is essential to achieving West Oxfordshire's climate and sustainability objectives. Around 80% of the buildings that will be in use in 2050 already exist today, and many of them were constructed to outdated standards with poor thermal performance, inefficient heating systems, and limited climate resilience.
- 8.2.26 Without proactive policies that enable and encourage retrofit, these buildings will continue to contribute disproportionately to the District's carbon emissions and leave residents vulnerable to rising energy costs and extreme weather.
- 8.2.27 The new West Oxfordshire Local Plan presents a vital opportunity to embed retrofit as a key planning priority. Retrofitting existing buildings not only helps reduce carbon emissions, but also delivers wider co-benefits such as improved indoor comfort, health, air quality, and affordability.
- 8.2.28 As energy prices fluctuate and climate risks increase, upgrading the performance of our existing buildings is critical to ensuring long-term resilience for communities across the district.
- 8.2.29 There is also a growing need to take a more strategic and consistent approach to retrofit within the planning system. While many homeowners and developers are keen to invest in improvements, they can face uncertainty and lack clear guidance on how best to retrofit in a sustainable and sensitive way, particularly when dealing with heritage assets or complex sites.
- 8.2.30 This policy addresses that gap by providing a clear framework for integrating retrofit into planning proposals, encouraging early consideration of retrofit opportunities, and promoting a whole building approach for traditionally constructed buildings that supports high-quality outcomes and conserves heritage significance.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.2.31 Our preferred approach is to embed retrofit as a core planning priority across West Oxfordshire by supporting and encouraging sensitive, sustainable improvements to existing buildings. We want all development involving existing buildings to actively consider opportunities for enhancing energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions, and improving

climate resilience -whether through targeted upgrades or a comprehensive, whole building approach.

- 8.2.32 Our approach places particular emphasis on performance-led outcomes, early-stage design integration, and the careful treatment of heritage and traditionally constructed buildings. It also supports the use of best practice methods, such as pre-redevelopment audits and lifecycle assessments, to inform retrofit strategies.
- 8.2.33 By taking this proactive and flexible stance, we aim to make retrofit the norm rather than the exception- ensuring that existing buildings contribute meaningfully to the district's wider sustainability goals.
- 8.2.34 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM7 - Retrofitting for Energy Efficiency, Carbon Reduction and Climate Resilience

West Oxfordshire District Council will support and encourage the sustainable retrofitting of existing buildings to significantly improve their energy performance, reduce carbon emissions, and enhance resilience to climate change. This policy applies to all development proposals that involve existing buildings, including extensions, conversions, and major redevelopment.

General Principles

- a) Development proposals that incorporate retrofitting measures to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, enhance climate resilience, or enable renewable energy generation will be supported.
- b) Interventions should follow the energy hierarchy:
 - i) Reduce energy demand through energy efficiency improvements (e.g. insulation, air tightness, efficient heating/cooling systems)
 - ii) Use energy efficiently, through smart controls, storage, and peak demand reduction measures
 - iii) Supply energy renewably using on-site renewable energy technologies
- c) Proposals that result in measurable improvements to a building's long-term performance, usability, condition and environmental sustainability will be given significant positive weight.

Site-Wide Approach

- a) For sites with multiple buildings or major developments (10+ dwellings or 1,000m² floorspace), a site-wide retrofit strategy must be submitted. This should include:
 - i) An Energy and Carbon Statement identifying all retrofit opportunities explored, including quantified performance gains
 - ii) A pre-development audit (e.g. BRE-compliant) identifying opportunities for reuse, retention, or retrofitting of existing buildings, materials, and structures
 - iii) A clear rationale for how climate adaptation measures have been incorporated

Heritage and Traditional Buildings

- a) For traditional or heritage buildings, a sensitive and informed retrofit approach is required. Proposals must demonstrate:
 - i) A whole building assessment that considers heritage significance, current energy performance, climate risks, and long-term use
 - ii) Measures to minimise harm to heritage value through careful material selection, design, and sequencing of works
 - iii) Input from appropriate professionals, including heritage, conservation, and energy experts where needed
 - iv) Compliance with necessary consents (e.g. Listed Building Consent, works affecting TPOs)
 - v) For non-designated buildings within Conservation Areas, proposals must demonstrate an approach that respects the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as a whole, while still maximising energy performance improvements where possible.
- b) Where harm to heritage significance occurs, it must be outweighed by clear and demonstrable public benefits.

Natural Resource Protection and Climate Adaptation

- a) Retrofit proposals should also consider their impact on natural resources including air, water, and soil, take opportunities to mitigate environmental harm and provide compensation for protected species, particularly nesting birds and roosting bats.
- b) Measures to enhance building resilience to future climate conditions (e.g. overheating risk reduction, improved ventilation, flood resilience) should be incorporated where relevant.

Implementation

The Council may request post-completion monitoring of retrofit outcomes for major schemes to support continuous learning and district-wide performance improvements.

Policy DM8 - Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Nature Recovery

What will this policy do?

- 8.2.35 Policy DM8 aims to ensure that all new development in West Oxfordshire delivers a measurable, lasting, and positive impact on biodiversity. Its core purpose is to embed biodiversity enhancement into the design, implementation, and long-term management of new developments in a realistic and achievable way.
- 8.2.36 Biodiversity net gain proposals must demonstrate a high-quality integrated approach that is linked to the green infrastructure strategy and provides tangible benefits for local nature recovery. All developments will also be required to demonstrate how they have considered the District Licensing approach for great crested newts where ponds within 500 metres of the development site would be directly or indirectly affected as a result of the proposal.

8.2.37 The policy will aim to encourage all strategic sites to enter the scheme subject to an initial impact assessment by NatureSpace, which will be commissioned by the council to inform this requirement. This recognises the significance of the District Licensing Scheme in providing compensatory habitat elsewhere within the district to maintain and expand existing populations for this species and provide wider environmental benefits.

Why is it needed?

8.2.38 West Oxfordshire's natural environment is one of its greatest assets. However, like many areas across the UK, it faces growing pressure from development, climate change, biodiversity loss and habitat fragmentation.

8.2.39 Policy DM8 is essential to ensure that new development actively contributes to the recovery and enhancement of biodiversity, rather than contributing to its decline. By requiring measurable biodiversity net gain (BNG), that is high-quality and ecologically meaningful, the policy ensures that all development delivers tangible ecological improvements and supports the long-term resilience of the District's natural assets.

8.2.40 The Environment Act 2021 introduced a legal requirement for most developments to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain. Our proposed policy seeks to go further by ensuring that BNG is not only a numerical target but also provides a meaningful contribution to local nature recovery.

8.2.41 The policy is intended to be a key mechanism for delivering the ambitions of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which identifies locally important habitats and species, and sets out priorities for nature recovery across the county.

8.2.42 The policy will align planning decisions in West Oxfordshire with this strategy by requiring that biodiversity enhancements are functionally connected to wider ecological networks target areas identified for restoration and provide enhancements for species. In doing so, it supports landscape-scale conservation efforts, helping to create coherent, resilient ecosystems that can better withstand environmental pressures.

8.2.43 The policy introduces a specific focus on the District Licensing Scheme for great crested newts as a good example of an approach that provides significant benefits for a protected and priority species beyond the traditional licensing route and enables the creation of a range of terrestrial and aquatic habitats that have a much wider positive impact on the natural environment. The scheme is designed to deliver a net gain in habitat for great crested newt populations whilst also being a quicker and easier route through planning and licensing for developers. It is a key example of a strategic approach to species conservation and use of the scheme should therefore be encouraged.

8.2.44 The policy complements the wider objectives of the Environment Act 2021, national planning policy and guidance, and the Local Plan's ambitions for sustainable growth.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.2.45 Our preferred approach is to ensure that all development in West Oxfordshire delivers ecologically meaningful and measurable improvements to biodiversity, with a strong emphasis on appropriate habitat creation and enhancement within developments and a contribution towards the aims and objectives of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- 8.2.46 All new development in West Oxfordshire must deliver a high-quality, design-led approach to Biodiversity Net Gain that ensures it is integrated into the design of the development from the outset and contributes towards the opportunities identified in the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy, including species-specific enhancements.
- 8.2.47 Our approach prioritises the use of the mitigation hierarchy to avoid and minimise harm to biodiversity from the outset and expects developments to integrate biodiversity into their design in ways that contribute to wider ecological networks. It also encourages collaboration between ecologists and landscape architects to create places that are good for both people and nature, e.g. through a holistic green infrastructure approach.
- 8.2.48 Where on-site gains are not feasible, our approach supports carefully targeted off-site compensation that aligns with local nature recovery priorities. This approach reflects a commitment to landscape-scale ecological restoration, supports the aims of the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and ensures that development plays a positive role in creating a greener, more resilient District.
- 8.2.49 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM8 - Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Nature Recovery

All development in West Oxfordshire will be expected to deliver a measurable and lasting positive contribution to biodiversity and nature recovery, which is ecologically meaningful, realistic and achievable. This will be achieved through statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) or through bespoke biodiversity enhancements, including adherence to the mitigation hierarchy.

The Mitigation Hierarchy

All development proposals must follow the mitigation hierarchy to address biodiversity impacts and clearly demonstrate how the following steps have been considered and assessed as part of the Ecological Impact Assessment and BNG approach:

- 1) **Avoid:** Identify and avoid impacts on biodiversity where possible during the early planning and design stages.
- 2) **Minimise:** Where impacts cannot be avoided, reduce them to the lowest possible level through design changes or operational measures, including sensitive site layout.
- 3) **Mitigate:** Provide on-site mitigation to offset any residual impacts after avoidance and minimisation. This may include habitat creation, restoration, or enhancement within the development site.

- 4) Compensate:** As a last resort, provide compensation for any residual loss of biodiversity. This compensation should be through financial contributions toward off-site biodiversity initiatives, only when on-site mitigation and enhancement are not feasible or sufficient. As part of the statutory BNG process, off-site units must be located within the District (where appropriate units are available) or as close as possible to the District and these must actively contribute towards the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Major Development: Must deliver a minimum of 20% biodiversity net gain.

Minor Development: Must deliver a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain.

Exempted Developments: Must incorporate biodiversity enhancements to provide for appropriate types of habitat and features for species that are in-keeping with and proportionate to the type of development.

All development proposals must comply with the BNG good practice principles and associated guidance and demonstrate how the best outcome for biodiversity has been achieved as part of the Ecological Impact Assessment process and (where appropriate) green infrastructure strategy. This means that a high-quality design-led approach is required that takes account of local habitats and species and contributes towards the opportunities identified in the emerging Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The BNG proposals must demonstrate that they will result in ecologically meaningful, realistic and achievable outcomes.

All developments must provide details of the management and monitoring of the BNG proposals, including the regular submission of monitoring reports with full details of remedial measures that will be implemented if necessary, for approval by the local planning authority. This would usually be in the form of a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) using the Defra template.

Biodiversity Enhancement

The design of new developments must be informed by an Ecological Impact Assessment to ensure that adequate impact assessment and mitigation, compensation and opportunities for biodiversity enhancement are incorporated. Development proposals should avoid fragmentation of habitats and, where possible, integrate enhancements for species into the built environment (e.g., bird and bat boxes, hedgehog highways, swift and bee bricks, pollinator-planting and green walls). Habitat improvements must be functionally linked to the wider ecological network, contributing to coherent and resilient ecological corridors, particularly as part of a green infrastructure strategy.

Householder and brownfield site proposals are encouraged to deliver biodiversity enhancements wherever practical.

For all development proposals providing biodiversity enhancements, a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan (BEP) must be provided including detailed specifications for all enhancement features and information on how these will be maintained and monitored for the lifetime of the development.

Nature Recovery

In addition to statutory Biodiversity Net Gain, all qualifying developments must contribute towards high-quality, locally relevant nature-recovery projects, including, but not limited to, the restoration of degraded priority habitats and Local Wildlife Sites, the creation of high or very high

distinctiveness habitats, support for the restoration of priority species populations and funding for small, high-value sites such as springhead mires.

These contributions could be delivered through a variety of ways such as:

- A higher percentage of BNG onsite or offsite that is focussed on high or very high distinctiveness habitats (where appropriate and agreed) (above the minimum statutory 10%);
- Direct agreements with trusted local delivery partners (e.g. Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment);
- Participation in a local nature fund that targets the implementation of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy so that developers can contribute financially to pre-approved projects aligned with local ecological needs; or
- Off-site works, provided they are supported by ecological evidence and aligned with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, e.g. developer-led habitat creation projects or habitat banks that can demonstrate a high-quality approach.

A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will set out how this policy operates in practice, including eligibility criteria, governance and delivery mechanisms.

District Licensing for great crested newts

All major developments will be required to join the District Licensing Scheme for great crested newts via NatureSpace where ponds within 500 metres of the site will be affected either directly or indirectly as a result of the proposal in any of the impact risk zones.

All developments within the Red Impact Risk Zone will be required to apply to join the District Licensing Scheme for great crested newts through NatureSpace Partnership unless the Ecological Impact Assessment submitted with the planning application provides an acceptable justification for not doing so.

All developments within the Amber Risk Zone will be required to investigate the option of joining the District Licensing Scheme for great crested newts through NatureSpace and the reasons for not taking this route clearly explained and justified in the Ecological Impact Assessment.

Policy DM9 - Waste and the Circular Economy

What will this policy do?

- 8.2.50 The purpose of this policy is to reduce the environmental impact of waste generated by new development across its lifecycle - during construction, occupation and eventual demolition. It aims to ensure that all development in West Oxfordshire actively contributes to a more sustainable and circular economy by minimising waste production, promoting the reuse and recycling of materials, and ensuring efficient, forward-thinking waste management practices are embedded into the design and operation of new places.
- 8.2.51 The policy also seeks to support innovation in waste infrastructure, particularly on strategic development sites, to help future-proof the district's approach to waste and resource management.

Why is it needed?

- 8.2.52 Effective waste management is a critical element of sustainable development, particularly in the context of climate change, resource scarcity, and the growing need to reduce environmental impacts.
- 8.2.53 It is vital that new development supports the transition from a linear to a circular economy - one that keeps materials in use for as long as possible and minimises the need for landfill. Embedding circular economy principles into planning policy ensures that developments not only reduce waste at source, but also promote long-term sustainability through thoughtful design, efficient material use, and robust waste infrastructure.
- 8.2.54 New communities will generate significant volumes of construction and operational waste and it is essential that this is planned for from the outset, particularly through the incorporation of advanced waste collection systems on larger sites, to ensure ease of recycling, reduce visual and environmental impacts, and future-proof developments in line with emerging best practice.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.2.55 Our preferred approach is to embed sustainable waste management throughout the entire development process, from construction to operation. It prioritises waste minimisation, resource efficiency, and the promotion of circular economy principles.
- 8.2.56 This will help to ensure that developments not only reduce waste generation but also maximise the reuse and recycling of materials.
- 8.2.57 We are seeking to encourage the integration of innovative waste infrastructure that supports the segregation of materials, maximises recycling, and enhances the efficiency of waste handling across all phases of development. This will help to ensure that new developments are well-equipped to manage waste sustainably while contributing to wider efforts to reduce landfill and promote a more sustainable economy.

DM9 - Waste and the Circular Economy

Waste Minimisation During Construction

Design for Waste Reduction: Developers must design buildings and infrastructure with waste minimisation in mind. This includes considering the efficient use of materials, reducing the need for hazardous substances, and adopting modular or prefabricated components where possible to reduce construction waste.

Construction Waste Management Plans: A Construction Waste Management Plan (CWMP) must be submitted with all planning applications for major development. This should outline strategies to minimise waste during construction, including:

- 1) Reduction of packaging and off-cuts through efficient design and ordering.
- 2) On-site separation of materials for reuse, recycling, and disposal.
- 3) Measures to reduce the use of single-use materials and minimise construction waste requiring disposal.
- 4) Targeted diversion rates for recycling and reuse of construction and demolition waste.

Waste Management During Operation

Operational Waste Management Plans

All major developments must include an Operational Waste Management Plan (OWMP) explaining how waste will be managed once the development is operational. This plan must:

- 1) Provide facilities for the storage and collection of recyclable and non-recyclable waste, with clear separation of materials.
- 2) Encourage the use of composting, where feasible, for organic waste.
- 3) Promote strategies to reduce waste generation, such as providing residents, tenants, or businesses with information on waste reduction, reusing items, and recycling.
- 4) Provide space for segregated bins and storage areas for recyclable and reusable materials in residential, commercial, and communal areas.

Waste Hierarchy and Circular Economy Principles

Applying the Waste Hierarchy

All development proposals must adhere to the waste hierarchy to minimise the environmental impact of waste.

- 1) Prevention: Developments should focus on designing out waste from the outset, using fewer resources and producing less waste.
- 2) Reusing: Where possible, materials should be reused on-site or within the development, particularly through the use of reclaimed materials and components. Building reuse (and where necessary, sensitive adaptation) will be favoured above demolition and rebuilding.
- 3) Recycling: Promote the recycling of materials on-site and ensure that the infrastructure for recycling is easily accessible to users of the development.
- 4) Recovery: Encourage energy recovery from waste materials that cannot be reused or recycled.
- 5) Disposal: Waste requiring final disposal should be minimised to the greatest extent possible with preference given to energy recovery where appropriate.

Support for the Circular Economy

Developers are encouraged to design buildings and developments that contribute to a circular economy by:

- 1) Using recycled and sustainably sourced materials during construction and fit-out, where feasible.
- 2) Designing buildings with flexible layouts and easily adaptable spaces to extend the life of materials and reduce the need for future demolition.
- 3) Encouraging the repurposing or upcycling of waste materials.
- 4) Ensuring buildings are designed with future reuse or adaptation in mind, promoting long-term sustainability.
- 5) Partnering with local recycling or waste management initiatives, businesses, and organisations that promote the reuse and recycling of materials, contributing to the local circular economy.

Construction Materials and Resources

Sustainable Materials

Developers should prioritise the use of sustainably sourced, durable, and recyclable materials in the construction phase. Where possible, reclaimed or recycled materials should be used to reduce environmental impact.

Minimising Packaging Waste

Developers should ensure that construction materials arrive on-site with minimal packaging and use packaging that can be easily recycled or reused.

Waste Management Infrastructure

Adequate Provision for Waste Storage

New developments, particularly large-scale residential or mixed-use developments, must provide adequate infrastructure for waste segregation, storage, and collection. This includes space for the storage of recyclables and general waste, as well as appropriate signage to encourage proper waste separation.

Design for Reuse and Recycling: The design of new buildings should incorporate infrastructure to facilitate the reuse and recycling of materials, such as recycling bins, composting facilities, and storage areas for reusable items.

Strategic Developments and Advanced Systems: Developers of strategic residential developments of 300 or more homes will be strongly encouraged to embed advanced waste collection systems, such as underground refuse storage (URS) or similarly innovative solutions technologies, to reduce visual clutter, improve hygiene, minimise odour and vermin issues, and enhance the efficiency of waste collection.

The inclusion of such systems will be afforded significant weight in the decision-making process, recognising their contribution to environmental quality, public realm enhancement, and operational efficiency.

Where such provision is not proposed, applicants must provide clear and robust evidence demonstrating why it is not practical, feasible, or financially viable to do so within the context of the development.

Monitoring and Implementation

To support the successful delivery of this policy, developers of major proposals must demonstrate how waste will be minimised, managed and monitored during both construction and operation.

As a condition of planning permission, applicants will be required to submit a Construction Waste Management Plan (CWMP) and an Operational Waste Management Plan (OWMP), setting out how waste will be reduced, segregated, reused, or recycled in line with the waste hierarchy and circular economy principles.

During construction, developers should undertake periodic waste audits to track progress and update their waste management approach as necessary. Once developments are occupied, the effectiveness of operational waste strategies should be kept under regular review, with a brief summary report submitted annually to the Council for major developments.

An Enhanced Natural, Historic and Built Environment

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Policy DM10 - Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character through New Development

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that new development conserves and enhances the character and quality of the surrounding landscape by requiring development proposals to be informed by thorough assessments of local landscape character and sensitivity, especially in valued areas like the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.2 Policy DM10 will help to manage growth in a way that protects the District's distinctive rural and historic character. West Oxfordshire is known for its picturesque landscapes, including the Cotswolds National Landscape, traditional villages, and rich cultural heritage.
- 8.3.3 As pressure for new development increases, there is a risk that poorly designed and laid out proposals could erode the very features that make the area special.
- 8.3.4 This policy will ensure that developers take a proactive approach to understanding the landscape before building, so that new development respects, reflects and complements its surroundings.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.5 Our preferred approach is to ensure that all new development in West Oxfordshire is landscape-led, meaning that the design and layout of proposals must start with a clear understanding of the landscape character and its sensitivities. This involves using evidence such as Landscape Character Assessments and visual impact studies to guide where and how development should take place.
- 8.3.6 It places strong emphasis on integrating development with its landscape context, both visually and functionally. Our preferred approach is to promote design that reflects the scale, form, and features of the surrounding environment, making use of local building materials, respecting traditional settlement patterns, and retaining important natural elements such as trees, hedgerows, and watercourses.
- 8.3.7 It also prioritises the protection and enhancement of key landscape features and views and requires mitigation measures where harm cannot be fully avoided. Finally, it aims to support long-term stewardship of the landscape by requiring landscape management plans for major developments.
- 8.3.8 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM10 - Conserving and Enhancing Landscape Character through New Development

Understanding and Assessing Landscape Character

Landscape Character Assessments

New development proposals must be informed by an understanding of the landscape character of the site and its surroundings. A Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) or a detailed landscape and visual impact assessment should be submitted for major developments to identify key features of the landscape, including topography, views and cultural heritage.

Landscape Sensitivity

Development proposals must assess the sensitivity of the landscape in which they are located. This includes evaluating the impact of the proposed development on the local landscape character, scenic views, and any protected or valued landscapes including the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Design Integration and Landscape Context

Contextual Design

Development must be designed to integrate with the surrounding landscape, respecting its scale, form, and character. The design should take account of the existing landform, local building materials, landscape elements (such as trees, hedgerows, and water features), and traditional settlement patterns.

Height, Massing, and Layout

The height, massing, and layout of new buildings should be designed to respect and reflect the landscape character. For example, buildings should avoid dominating or disrupting important views, skylines, or natural features, and should blend into the existing topography and built environment.

Landscaping and Planting

High-quality landscaping should be integrated into the design of new developments to enhance the local character, mitigate the impact of built structures, and create a harmonious transition between the built and natural environment. This will include planting native species, retaining existing trees and hedgerows where relevant, and providing green infrastructure to enhance biodiversity.

Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Features

Retention of Key Landscape Features

Development proposals must retain, protect, and enhance important landscape features, such as mature trees, hedgerows, watercourses, and historic boundaries, where possible.

Minimising Visual Impact

Proposals should aim to minimise any adverse visual impact on the landscape. This includes the appearance of the development in the context of long-range and local views including public viewpoints.

Mitigating Negative Impacts

Landscape Mitigation Measures

Where development may cause harm to the landscape character, appropriate mitigation measures should be proposed. Where necessary, visual screening or buffering should be provided to mitigate the impact of development on surrounding landscapes.

Promoting Local Identity and Heritage

Respecting Local Distinctiveness

New development should celebrate and reflect local landscape character and identity, ensuring that it complements the distinct characteristics of the area.

Conservation of Historic Landscapes

Development should conserve and enhance historic landscapes, including agricultural landscapes, parks, gardens, and other cultural landscapes. Development must be designed to respect the heritage value of the landscape and contribute to its continued preservation.

Long-Term Landscape Management and Maintenance

Landscape Management Plans

For major developments, a Landscape Management Plan (LMP) must be provided to ensure that the landscape elements of the development are properly managed and maintained over time.

Policy DMI I - Trees and Hedgerows

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.10 Trees and hedgerows are vital components of the natural environment, providing ecological, aesthetic, and environmental benefits. They enhance biodiversity, improve air quality, mitigate climate change, and contribute to the character and beauty of the landscape. This policy sets out requirements for the protection of existing trees and hedgerows, as well as the provision of new planting within new developments in West Oxfordshire.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.11 As development pressures increase, there is a growing risk that natural features could be lost or degraded without proper protection. Trees and hedgerows not only support a wide range of wildlife, but they also provide important ecosystem services, improving air quality, regulating temperature, managing surface water, and enhancing visual amenity.
- 8.3.12 By embedding a strong policy into the Local Plan, we can ensure that new development contributes positively to the district's green infrastructure rather than diminishing it.
- 8.3.13 With increasing recognition of the importance of nature-based solutions to address climate change and biodiversity loss, encouraging the protection, enhancement, and creation of tree and hedgerow networks will help to support our broader climate and ecological goals, aligning with national and local sustainability objectives.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.14 Our preferred approach seeks to protect and enhance West Oxfordshire's natural environment by prioritising the retention and careful management of existing trees and hedgerows within development proposals.
- 8.3.15 Recognising the significant ecological, visual, and environmental value these features provide, our proposed approach encourages developers to design with nature in mind, integrating mature trees and established hedgerows into layouts wherever possible.
- 8.3.16 Where loss is unavoidable due to site constraints or safety concerns, the approach requires clear justification and robust compensatory planting to ensure there is no net loss of biodiversity or landscape quality.
- 8.3.17 Our approach is also forward-looking, supporting the creation of new trees and hedgerows as a vital part of green infrastructure in new developments. By encouraging the planting of native and locally appropriate species, and ensuring their long-term care and management, the policy helps to build resilient landscapes that can adapt to climate change, support wildlife, and enhance the wellbeing of local communities.
- 8.3.18 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM11 – Trees and Hedgerows

Protection of Existing Trees and Hedgerows

Retention of Existing Trees and Hedgerows

Where possible, existing trees and hedgerows should be retained and incorporated into development proposals. The loss of mature trees and hedgerows should be avoided unless it is absolutely necessary due to site constraints or health and safety concerns. Proposals should demonstrate how the development respects and integrates existing tree and hedgerow features into the site layout and design.

Tree and Hedgerow Protection During Development

Where development is proposed in close proximity of an existing tree or hedgerow, a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) and/or Hedgerow Protection Plan (HPP) must be submitted as part of the planning application demonstrating how trees and hedgerows will be safeguarded during the construction phase.

Survey and Assessment

A tree survey and hedgerow assessment should be submitted as part of the planning application for any major development, identifying the location, condition, and species of all trees and hedgerows on or near the site. Where it is necessary to remove trees or hedgerows, the reasons for removal must be clearly set out along with any compensatory planting proposals.

Replacement Planting

Where trees or hedgerows are lost as a result of development, developers will be required to provide replacement planting at a ratio of at least 2:1 for trees and 3:1 for hedgerows, unless this is not feasible due to site constraints. Replacement planting should be located on-site wherever possible and be of equivalent or greater biodiversity value.

Provision of New Trees and Hedgerows

Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity

The provision of new trees and hedgerows must be considered as part of the broader green infrastructure strategy for the development. This includes ensuring that planting schemes:

- Increase connectivity between habitats, creating wildlife corridors and linking with existing natural features and
- Enhance biodiversity by planting a variety of native species that support local wildlife.
- Do not inhibit pedestrian and cycle connectivity in development

Landscape Design

New tree planting and hedgerow creation should be designed with careful consideration of their long-term growth and environmental impact. Species selection should prioritize native or locally adapted species, taking into account soil conditions, water availability, and climate resilience. Planting arrangements should allow for the full growth of trees and hedgerows and should be located in areas where they will not obstruct future development or create safety hazards.

Maintenance and Establishment

Developers must commit to the establishment and maintenance of new trees and hedgerows for a minimum period of five years following planting. This includes ensuring proper watering, pruning, and protection from damage during the establishment phase. The developer must also submit a long-term management plan for the ongoing care of trees and hedgerows beyond the initial five years.

Policy DM12 - Light Pollution and Dark Skies

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.20 This policy aims to safeguard and enhance dark skies across West Oxfordshire by ensuring that new development minimises light pollution and integrates lighting solutions that are appropriate for the surrounding environment.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.21 There is a growing recognition of the need to protect the night-time environment and as development continues to take place across the District, there is a risk that the cumulative impact of poorly designed or excessive outdoor lighting could significantly erode the quality of the night sky, leading to increased skyglow, light spill, and disruption to both human and ecological systems. A clear policy on this issue will help to ensure that lighting is considered from the earliest stages of development and that measures are in place to minimise its impact on local amenity, wildlife, and landscape character.
- 8.3.22 West Oxfordshire is fortunate enough to be home to one of the region's most important night-sky assets, the Rollright Stones Dark Sky Discovery Site. Recognised for its exceptional stargazing conditions and low levels of light pollution, this site offers educational, cultural, and recreational value, drawing visitors from across the area. Preserving the quality of the night sky around such locations is essential not only to maintain their special character and public enjoyment but also to support West Oxfordshire's identity as a district that values and protects its natural and historic assets.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.23 Our preferred approach seeks to minimise light pollution and protect the quality of West Oxfordshire's dark skies by promoting responsible, context-sensitive lighting design in all new developments. This includes using energy-efficient, low-impact lighting that is carefully directed and controlled to reduce unnecessary brightness, prevent skyglow, and avoid light spill into surrounding areas, especially those that are environmentally sensitive.
- 8.3.24 Our proposed approach also emphasises the importance of integrating lighting into the natural, historic and built environment in a way that respects local character, supports biodiversity, and ensures public safety.
- 8.3.25 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM12 - Light Pollution and Dark Skies

Protection of Dark Skies

Dark Sky Areas: Development proposals within or near designated dark sky areas must demonstrate that they will not cause harm to the quality of the night sky. Any development within these areas should prioritise the preservation and enhancement of dark skies, following best practice in outdoor lighting design.

Minimising Light Spill: Development proposals must ensure that external lighting is designed and installed in a way that prevents light spill beyond the development site. Lighting should be directed downwards, shielded, and controlled to avoid upward light spill, glare, and light pollution.

Lighting Design and Specification

Use of Appropriate Lighting: External lighting should be appropriate to the nature and use of the development and should minimise light levels in areas that do not require illumination. All lighting should be designed to prevent skyglow (the brightening of the night sky over urban areas) and to limit spill into adjacent areas.

Energy-Efficient and Low-Impact Lighting: Developers should use energy-efficient lighting solutions and consideration should be given to the use of automatic controls to enable lighting to be switched off or dimmed when it is not needed, particularly in sensitive areas with low human activity at night (e.g., in rural or residential areas).

Colour Temperature: All external lighting should use lamps with a correlated colour temperature (CCT) of 3000 Kelvin or lower, particularly in or near designated dark sky areas, wildlife-sensitive zones, and rural locations. Warmer light sources reduce skyglow and are less disruptive to wildlife and human circadian rhythms.

1.3 Specific Lighting Types

Residential Lighting: Residential developments should ensure that lighting is sensitive to the surrounding environment, providing adequate illumination for safety without compromising dark skies.

Commercial and Public Lighting: Non-essential commercial or public lighting should be minimised and lighting should be directed and controlled to avoid impacting dark skies and wildlife.

Road and Pathway Lighting: Lighting of roads, paths, and pedestrian areas should be designed to ensure safety without excessive brightness. Where feasible, new developments should incorporate designs that integrate with the natural environment, utilising low-level, downcast lighting.

Sports Lighting: Proposals involving sports facilities requiring floodlighting must demonstrate that lighting design minimises glare, skyglow, and light spill to surrounding areas, especially near residential properties, wildlife habitats, or designated dark sky areas. Lighting should only be used during operational hours and should incorporate time controls to ensure it is switched off when not in use.

Minimising Impact on Biodiversity

Wildlife Considerations: New development must consider the potential impact of lighting on wildlife habitats, especially where these areas are known to support protected species. Developers should incorporate design features that minimise the effects of lighting on sensitive species, such as low-light zones, lighting shields, and light-curtaining techniques.

Lighting Buffer Zones: Where new development is proposed near sensitive habitats (such as wetlands, woodlands, or wildlife corridors), a buffer zone should be maintained that limits the use of lighting and reduces its impact on biodiversity.

Integration with the Surrounding Environment

Context-Sensitive Lighting: Development proposals must ensure that lighting solutions are sensitive to the local context. Rural developments should avoid intrusive lighting that contrasts with the natural, low-light character of the area.

Visual Impact of Lighting: The visual impact of lighting on the surrounding area must be considered as part of the design process. This includes avoiding overly bright or obtrusive lighting features that dominate the landscape or obscure important natural or cultural features.

Lighting Assessment and Management

Lighting Impact Assessment: For developments likely to generate significant light pollution, a lighting impact assessment should be submitted as part of the planning application. The assessment must demonstrate how the proposed lighting scheme will prevent adverse impacts on dark skies, sensitive habitats, and local amenity and incorporate appropriate mitigation.

Long-Term Lighting Management: Developers must commit to the long-term management and maintenance of lighting systems to ensure that they continue to comply with this policy.

Policy DMI3 - Air Quality and Pollution

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.27 This policy is intended to ensure that all new development in West Oxfordshire contributes to the protection and improvement of air quality, safeguarding both human health and the natural environment.
- 8.3.28 It will help to prevent new development from causing or worsening air pollution, particularly in sensitive areas such as the Witney and Chipping Norton Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.29 Poor air quality is increasingly recognised as a significant threat to both human well-being and the environment, with long-term exposure to pollutants linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, as well as other health issues. As West Oxfordshire continues to experience development, this policy will help to ensure that new development projects do not exacerbate existing air quality issues, particularly in areas of Witney and Chipping Norton, where Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) have been designated due to elevated pollution levels.
- 8.3.30 Additionally, West Oxfordshire is home to ecologically sensitive areas such as the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which can be negatively affected by air pollution, particularly from nitrogen deposition.
- 8.3.31 The policy will provide a framework to safeguard these protected habitats, ensuring that new developments do not cause harm to biodiversity or threaten their integrity.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.32 Our preferred approach seeks to ensure that all new development in West Oxfordshire contributes to the protection of air quality by preventing pollution and mitigating its impact, especially in sensitive areas including the Witney and Chipping Norton Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and the Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 8.3.33 Our approach emphasises the need for comprehensive air quality assessments, the implementation of sustainable design solutions, and strict controls on construction-related emissions. It aims to promote proactive, long-term solutions to air pollution by requiring developers to assess and mitigate potential air quality impacts before, during, and after construction.
- 8.3.34 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM13 - Air Quality and Pollution

All new development in West Oxfordshire must be designed and located to ensure it does not cause or contribute to poor air quality and is not at risk from existing sources of air pollution.

Development should support the district's broader environmental and public health objectives, contributing to the improvement of air quality and minimising human and ecological exposure to harmful pollutants.

1. Air Quality Impact on Sensitive Locations

Development proposals that individually or cumulatively could lead to a deterioration in air quality, particularly in or near the following sensitive areas, will be subject to stricter scrutiny and mitigation requirements:

- a) Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Witney and Chipping Norton, where pollution levels have historically exceeded national air quality objectives.
- b) The Oxford Meadows Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is sensitive to nitrogen deposition and other air pollution effects due to its internationally designated habitats.

2. Requirement for Air Quality Impact Assessments (AQIA)

An Air Quality Impact Assessment (AQIA) will be required for:

- a) All major developments
- b) Any development likely to result in a significant increase in vehicle traffic or emissions (e.g. from heating, industrial uses).
- c) Any development located within or near an AQMA or the Oxford Meadows SAC.
- d) Proposals that form part of a larger cumulative development likely to impact local or strategic air quality levels.

The AQIA must assess the potential impacts on local air quality during both construction and operation, taking into account cumulative effects with other planned or existing developments. It should model pollutant levels where appropriate and evaluate impacts on human health and ecological receptors.

3. Mitigation Measures

Where an AQIA identifies likely significant adverse impacts on air quality, appropriate and proportionate mitigation must be secured through the planning process. Measures may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Sustainable transport infrastructure (e.g. walking, cycling, EV charging).
- b) Reduced car dependency and traffic management schemes.
- c) Low-emission building design, heating systems and energy sources.
- d) Landscaping and green infrastructure to support pollutant absorption.
- e) Off-site mitigation contributions, where on-site measures are insufficient.

In or near the Oxford Meadows SAC, developments must demonstrate compliance with the Habitat Regulations and ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of the protected site from air pollution, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

4. Construction Phase Control

All major developments must incorporate Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP) that include:

- a) Dust suppression and control measures.
- b) Monitoring of particulate matter where appropriate.
- c) Limiting construction vehicle emissions and on-site machinery impacts.
- d) Protocols for responding to air quality breaches during works.

Particular care must be taken in or near the AQMAs and the Oxford Meadows SAC, where enhanced construction-phase controls may be required due to increased sensitivity.

5. Monitoring and Management

In sensitive areas (Witney AQMA, Chipping Norton AQMA, and near Oxford Meadows SAC), developments may be required to contribute to:

- a) Air quality monitoring during and post-construction.
- b) The preparation of Air Quality Management Plans.
- c) Ongoing compliance reviews and adaptive mitigation where thresholds are at risk of being exceeded.

Policy DMI 4 – Listed Buildings

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.36 This policy is intended to ensure that any development affecting Listed Buildings or their setting safeguards their special architectural and historic interest. It seeks to provide a clear framework to guide sympathetic change, ensuring that alterations, additions, or changes of use are designed with sensitivity and care.
- 8.3.37 The intention is to protect the significance of Listed Buildings for current and future generations by requiring high-quality design that respects the character, fabric, and context of these irreplaceable designated heritage assets.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.38 West Oxfordshire is renowned for its rich and varied historic environment, which forms a fundamental part of the District's character, identity, and appeal. From the iconic towns of Woodstock and Burford to the historic villages and hamlets scattered throughout the rural landscape, the area boasts an exceptional legacy of Listed Buildings, conservation areas, and historic landscapes.
- 8.3.39 As the District looks ahead to 2041, it faces increasing development pressures, including the need for housing, economic growth, and infrastructure improvements. In this context, there is a clear need for robust planning policies that ensure this growth does not come at the expense of the historic environment. The inclusion of a dedicated policy on Listed Buildings in the new Local Plan reflects the importance of balancing change with conservation, allowing heritage assets to adapt and evolve in ways that sustain their significance, while enabling appropriate new uses and sensitive development.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.40 Our preferred approach is based on a heritage-led, design-focused strategy that recognises the value of West Oxfordshire's historic environment as a key asset in shaping sustainable development.
- 8.3.41 It places the conservation and enhancement of Listed Buildings and their settings at the heart of decision-making, ensuring that change is managed in a way that respects the District's unique character and historic significance.
- 8.3.42 It aims to promote high-quality, context-sensitive design that complements the architectural and historic qualities of heritage assets, while allowing for appropriate adaptation and continued use. This balanced approach supports the reuse and sensitive development of heritage buildings, encouraging proposals that respond positively to their surroundings, reinforce local identity, and deliver long-term public benefits.
- 8.3.43 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

DM14 – Listed Buildings

Development proposals involving alterations, additions to, or change of use of a Listed Building (including partial demolition), or for development within its curtilage or affecting its setting, will only be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that:

1) Conservation and Enhancement of Significance

The proposal conserves or enhances the special architectural or historic interest of the Listed Building, including its fabric, detailed features, character, appearance, and setting

Development should better reveal or reinforce those elements which contribute to the building's heritage significance

Proposals must respect the integrity and authenticity of the Listed Building and retain the special interest that justifies its designation.

2) Respect for Historic Context and Setting

The development respects and reinforces the building's historic curtilage, surrounding context, and its value as part of a group of heritage assets.

Historic landscape or townscape relationships, such as burgage plots, parklands, street frontages, designed landscapes, or historic farmyards, must be preserved or enhanced.

Key views, vistas, and the wider setting of the Listed Building should not be harmed.

3) High-Quality, Sympathetic Design

Proposals must demonstrate design that is sympathetic to the Listed Building and its setting, including any adjacent heritage assets.

Appropriate design includes careful consideration of siting, size, scale, height, alignment, materials and finishes (including colour and texture), architectural form, and detailing.

New works must not dominate or detract from the Listed Building, but should complement and harmonise with its character and setting.

4) Managing Harm and Loss

Substantial harm to or total loss of significance to Listed Buildings Registered Parks will be wholly exceptional (for Grade I and II*) and exceptional (for Grade II).

Proposals resulting in substantial harm or total loss of the significance of a Listed Building will be refused unless it is clearly demonstrated that:

- a) The harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm, or
- b) All reasonable use options have been exhausted, including marketing, and conservation through charitable, public, or grant-funded means is not possible.

Where proposals result in less than substantial harm, this harm must be minimised and clearly justified, with any adverse impacts outweighed by demonstrable public benefits or securing the optimum viable use of the building.

5) Change of Use and Evidence Requirements

Change of use will be supported where the new use can be accommodated without adverse impact on the Listed Building's significance, fabric, appearance, character, or setting.

Where relevant, proposals should include proportionate investigation, documentation, and public dissemination of any changes, loss of historic fabric, or previously unknown features.

Policy DMI5 – Conservation Areas

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.45 This policy aims to ensure that development within or affecting the setting of West Oxfordshire's Conservation Areas conserves or enhances their special architectural and historic interest. It aims to provide a clear framework to guide high-quality, sensitive development that respects the distinctive character, appearance, and significance of these areas, while also supporting their sustainable use and long-term stewardship.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.46 West Oxfordshire's historic environment is one of its defining strengths, encompassing a rich and varied collection of Conservation Areas that reflect the District's long and layered history. These areas are central to the character, identity, and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire, and they contribute significantly to its quality of life, sense of place, and visitor appeal.
- 8.3.47 However, this historic character is under increasing pressure from changing land use needs, development demands, and climate adaptation requirements. Without clear guidance, poorly

designed or insensitive development risks undermining the special qualities that make these places unique.

- 8.3.48 This policy is needed to ensure that future growth in West Oxfordshire is managed in a way that protects and enhances the historic environment, setting out a robust, consistent framework for assessing proposals affecting Conservation Areas which balances the need for change with the importance of preserving what makes these places special.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.49 Our preferred approach is to positively manage change within West Oxfordshire's Conservation Areas by promoting high-quality, well-informed development that preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area in accordance with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It seeks to ensure that all proposals are carefully assessed against the distinctive character, setting, and significance of each area, with reference to relevant Conservation Area Character Appraisals and the West Oxfordshire Design Guide.
- 8.3.50 Rather than preventing development, our approach encourages context-sensitive and sustainable design that respects the established pattern, materials, and features of historic places. It also supports the restoration, retention, and adaptive reuse of buildings and spaces that make a positive contribution to the area's character, helping to reduce cumulative harm and promote regeneration.
- 8.3.51 This balanced and proactive strategy enables the District to accommodate necessary growth and change, while safeguarding the irreplaceable heritage that defines West Oxfordshire's identity.
- 8.3.52 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

DM15 – Conservation Areas

1) General Principles

Development proposals within or affecting the setting of a Conservation Area will be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that they:

Conserve or enhance the area's character and appearance, including consideration of the development's location, form, scale, massing, density, height, layout, landscaping, alignment, use, and external appearance.

Respect the setting of the Conservation Area, including the impact on views and vistas within, into, and out of the area, and preserve or enhance those that contribute positively to its significance.

Respond to local distinctiveness and reflect the architectural and historic qualities identified in Conservation Area Character Appraisals and the West Oxfordshire Design Guide.

Retain and respect the historic street pattern, original plot boundaries, and significant spaces such as paddocks, greens, gardens, and gaps between buildings which contribute to the area's spatial character.

Preserve features of special interest, such as traditional shopfronts, walls, trees, hedgerows, farmyards, and other elements that define the special qualities of the Conservation Area.

Demonstrate compatibility with wider social, environmental, and historic context, contributing to the vitality and sustainable future of the area without undermining its special interest or appearance.

Incorporate sensitive lighting and signage, where applicable, ensuring that it does not detract from the area's historic character.

2) Demolition within Conservation Areas

Applications for the demolition of buildings or structures in a Conservation Area will only be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- a) The building does not make a positive contribution to the special interest, character, or appearance of the Conservation Area; or
- b) The building is of no historic or architectural interest, is beyond repair, and is incapable of viable reuse; and
- c) Any replacement building proposed makes an equal or greater contribution to the character and appearance of the area through high-quality, context-sensitive design.

3) Restoration, Reuse, and Adaptive Use

Wherever possible, the **sympathetic restoration and adaptive reuse** of buildings and structures that contribute positively to the Conservation Area will be supported.

Development should seek to:

- a) Retain and repair original features and materials, wherever feasible, and use appropriate conservation techniques.
- b) Minimise harm to heritage significance by avoiding unnecessary alterations or loss of historic fabric.
- c) Ensure that any reuse or adaptation of historic buildings is sensitive to their character while allowing for modern functionality and viability.

4) Assessing Harm and Public Benefit

Proposals resulting in less than substantial harm to the significance of a Conservation Area must provide a clear and proportionate justification, including identification of any public benefits that outweigh the harm.

Proposals that would result in substantial harm or total loss of a Conservation Area's significance will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, where it is demonstrated that the harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that cannot be otherwise delivered.

5) Enhancing Significance

Development that would better reveal, reinforce, or enhance the significance of a Conservation Area and its setting through sensitive design, public realm improvements, or repair of historic fabric will be strongly supported.

Policy DMI 6 - Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.54 This policy is intended to protect and manage West Oxfordshire's rich archaeological heritage, including assets designated as Scheduled Monuments and non-designated remains of national significance.
- 8.3.55 It aims to ensure that development proposals conserve or enhance the significance of these assets, including their setting, and that any potential harm is carefully justified, minimised, and appropriately mitigated.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.56 The District has a rich and diverse historic environment that reflects thousands of years of human activity. This includes prehistoric burial mounds, Roman settlements, Saxon and medieval features, and more recent historic landscapes, many of which survive as below-ground archaeological remains that are not always visible but are nonetheless irreplaceable.
- 8.3.57 As West Oxfordshire continues to experience development pressure, particularly in and around historic towns and rural settlements, there is a growing risk that important archaeological remains could be inadvertently disturbed, damaged, or lost. This policy will help to ensure that archaeological significance is properly assessed, understood and taken into account in the design and determination of development proposals.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.58 Our preferred approach is based on the principle of proactive and proportionate protection of West Oxfordshire's rich archaeological heritage. It seeks to ensure that nationally important archaeological remains, whether designated as Scheduled Monuments or demonstrably of equivalent significance, are preserved in situ wherever possible.
- 8.3.59 It promotes early and informed decision-making through appropriate site assessments and evaluations and where development is proposed in archaeologically sensitive areas, applicants are expected to demonstrate a clear understanding of potential impacts and explore options to avoid or minimise harm.
- 8.3.60 Where harm is unavoidable, our approach requires a robust mitigation strategy through investigation, recording and analysis, with the aim of preserving archaeological information for public benefit and advancing knowledge.
- 8.3.61 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

DM16 - Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments

1) Protection of Significance

Development proposals affecting archaeological remains must conserve or enhance their significance and take full account of the contribution made by their setting. Scheduled Monuments and non-designated remains of national significance should be preserved in situ wherever possible.

2) Assessment and Investigation

Applicants must undertake an appropriately detailed archaeological assessment to determine the presence or potential of archaeological remains on site. Proposals should demonstrate engagement with the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and relevant guidance.

This should include:

- a) A desk-based assessment where a site on which development is proposed includes, or has the potential to include, heritage assets with archaeological interest.
- b) A field evaluation, where necessary, conducted by a suitably qualified archaeological organisation.

The scope and methodology for all assessments must be agreed in advance with Oxfordshire County Council's archaeological team, and with Historic England in cases involving Scheduled Monuments, through a Written Scheme of Investigation. Early engagement with Historic England is recommended for development that is likely to affect a Scheduled Monument.

3) Harm and Justification

Substantial harm to or total loss of significance to a Scheduled Monument will be wholly exceptional. Where development would result in harm to, or total loss of, the significance of archaeological remains:

- a) Substantial harm will only be permitted where it is clearly justified by substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm, and no reasonable alternative exists.
- b) Less than substantial harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

For non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, a presumption in favour of avoidance of harm applies, due to their irreplaceable nature. Any harm must be proportionate to the asset's significance and clearly justified.

4) Mitigation and Publication

Where the loss of archaeological significance is unavoidable and justified:

- a) Harm must be minimised through careful design, including changes to building footprints, construction techniques, and landscaping.
- b) A programme of archaeological investigation, recording, and analysis will be required before development begins. This must be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority.
- c) The results of investigations must be published and made publicly accessible.

Policy DMI 7 - Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.63 This policy is intended to safeguard and enhance the special historic interest, character, and setting of Registered Historic Parks and Gardens in West Oxfordshire. It seeks to ensure that any development proposals affecting these nationally important heritage assets are based on thorough research, respect their historic significance, and preserve or reinstate key features.
- 8.3.64 The policy also aims to encourage sensitive restoration, promote public appreciation, and ensure that any potential harm is fully justified, mitigated, and outweighed by clear public benefit.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.65 A dedicated policy on Registered Historic Parks and Gardens is essential for West Oxfordshire because these landscapes are irreplaceable components of the district's historic environment, contributing significantly to its cultural identity, aesthetic character, and sense of place.
- 8.3.66 Parks and gardens such as those found at Blenheim Palace, Cornbury Park, and Rousham are not only valuable for their design, planting schemes, and built features, but also for their historic associations and the ways they shape the local landscape.
- 8.3.67 As development pressures continue to grow, particularly in areas of historic and environmental sensitivity, a robust policy is needed to ensure that these heritage assets are protected and appropriately managed for future generations.
- 8.3.68 This policy provides clear guidance for applicants, decision-makers, and the community on how to approach change within or near Registered Parks and Gardens. It ensures that development proposals are informed by a proper understanding of the landscape's significance and require a high standard of justification for any harm. The policy also encourages positive conservation efforts, including the restoration of historic features and improved public interpretation, which can bring broader cultural and educational benefits.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.69 Our preferred approach is based on the principle of conserving and enhancing the special historic interest and significance of Registered Parks and Gardens as key heritage assets within West Oxfordshire. It seeks to ensure that any development proposals affecting these landscapes are grounded in a thorough understanding of their historical, aesthetic and communal value, and are designed in a way that respects their character, setting and key features.
- 8.3.70 The approach also encourages positive interventions, such as the restoration of lost or degraded historic elements and promotes public interpretation and enjoyment of these landscapes. It recognises the irreplaceable nature of Registered Parks and Gardens and aims to guide change in a way that both protects their integrity and supports their sustainable long-term management.
- 8.3.71 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

DM17 - Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

1) Conservation and Enhancement Requirements

Development proposals will be supported where they:

- a) Conserve or enhance the special historic interest, layout, design, character, appearance, and setting of the Registered Park or Garden;
- b) Protect and respect key views into, from, and within the landscape, including any visual or experiential qualities that contribute to its significance;
- c) Avoid the loss of or harm to historic features, such as boundary walls, water features, tree avenues, planting schemes, ornamental buildings, or historic circulation patterns
- d) Are informed by thorough historical research and a clear understanding of the asset's development, function, and contribution to the wider historic environment;
- e) Incorporate appropriate landscape or built interventions to reinstate lost features or remove modern intrusions that detract from the asset's significance, where evidence supports this approach.

2) Restoration and Interpretation

Proposals that would enable the restoration or interpretation of original landscape designs or features will be actively encouraged. Such projects should enhance public appreciation and enjoyment of the Registered Park or Garden.

3) Harm and Justification

Substantial harm to or total loss of significance to Registered Parks and Gardens will be wholly exceptional (for Grade I and II*) and exceptional (for Grade II).

Any level of harm must be justified by clear and convincing evidence. Where harm is unavoidable, proposals must demonstrate that:

- a) The public benefits decisively outweigh the harm;
- b) All reasonable alternatives have been considered;
- c) The scheme includes appropriate mitigation and archival recording, where relevant.

4) Assessment and Evidence Requirements

Applicants must:

- a) Describe the significance of the heritage asset and its setting, proportionate to the nature and scale of development;
- b) Demonstrate how the proposal has been informed by the Historic Environment Record (HER), relevant Conservation Area Appraisals, and the Historic England Register entry;
- c) Provide desk-based assessments or fieldwork where required, including historical research, landscape assessments, or visual impact studies.

Policy DMI8 - Conversion, Extension and Alteration of Traditional Buildings

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.73 The policy aims to ensure that the conversion, extension, or alteration of traditional buildings in West Oxfordshire is carried out in a way that conserves and enhances their historic and architectural significance. It seeks to protect the distinctive character, materials, and craftsmanship of these buildings, while supporting sensitive and sustainable reuse that respects their original form, features, and setting.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.74 Traditional buildings such as historic farmsteads, cottages, barns, and other vernacular structures form an essential part of West Oxfordshire's rural and historic landscape. These buildings not only contribute to the area's unique architectural character and sense of place, but also reflect centuries of local history, craftsmanship, and cultural development.
- 8.3.75 However, such buildings are increasingly under pressure from modern demands, including changes of use, extensions, and conversions that may not respect their original design, materials, or setting. Without clear policy guidance, there is a risk of inappropriate alterations that could result in the irreversible loss of historic fabric, character and significance.
- 8.3.76 A specific policy is therefore needed to ensure a consistent and well-informed approach to managing change. It provides applicants and decision-makers with a framework for ensuring that proposals preserve the authenticity and heritage value of traditional buildings, while allowing for their sensitive adaptation to meet contemporary needs.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.77 Our preferred approach is to ensure that any proposals affecting traditional buildings are based on a clear understanding of their historical, architectural, and cultural significance. It aims to support sensitive and sustainable forms of reuse, alteration, and adaptation that respect the character, materials, and original form of these buildings, while allowing for their continued viable use.
- 8.3.78 This approach is based on national best practice, including Historic England guidance, and reflects the principle that traditional buildings are irreplaceable heritage assets. It prioritises conservation-led design, minimal intervention, and the retention of key historic features, ensuring that change is sympathetic, informed, and enhances the long-term stewardship of West Oxfordshire's historic built environment.
- 8.3.79 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

DM18 - Conversion, Extension and Alteration of Traditional Buildings

In order to safeguard the distinctive architectural, historic, and landscape character of West Oxfordshire, proposals involving the conversion, extension, or alteration of traditional buildings will only be supported where they are informed by a clear understanding of the building's historic significance, architectural qualities, and relationship to its setting.

Proposals must demonstrate high-quality, sensitive design and construction which responds to the character, appearance, materials, and craftsmanship of the original structure.

Development proposals will not be permitted where they would:

- a) Involve extensive or unjustified alterations to the existing structure or result in the loss of historic fabric, features of architectural or vernacular interest (such as traditional roof structures, fireplaces, openings, internal layouts, or decorative detailing)
- b) Introduce extensions, dormers, or new openings that would unbalance, obscure or compromise the original scale, form, massing or proportions of the building;
- c) Use inappropriate or unsympathetic materials or detailing that detract from the traditional character or integrity of the building;
- d) Harm the setting or curtilage of the building, including traditional outbuildings, walls, boundary treatments or landscaping features associated with its historic use.

In assessing proposals, regard must be had to:

- a) The building's age, construction techniques, architectural form, and original or historic function;
- b) The contribution it makes to local character, distinctiveness, and landscape setting;
- c) Any evidence from the Historic Environment Record (HER), Conservation Area Appraisals, or local heritage list.

Where appropriate, proposals should:

- a) Re-use and repair existing features and materials rather than replace them;
- b) Minimise the need for substantial structural intervention;
- c) Seek to maintain or reinstate traditional layouts, uses, or construction methods where this contributes positively to heritage significance;
- d) Incorporate traditional sustainable design principles, provided these are compatible with the historic fabric.

Applications must be supported by a Heritage Statement setting out the building's historic and architectural significance, assessing the impact of proposed changes, and explaining how the design responds to this understanding. Where harm is proposed, this must be clearly justified and, where possible, mitigated through careful design and appropriate detailing.

Proposals that secure the long-term viable use of a traditional building in a manner that sustains and enhances its significance will be supported in principle, provided they comply with the above criteria.

Policy DMI9 - Non-Designated Heritage Assets

What will this policy do?

- 8.3.81 The policy aims to ensure that non-designated heritage assets in West Oxfordshire such as locally important buildings, archaeological sites, and historic landscapes are properly identified, valued, and protected. It seeks to promote their sensitive management, avoid unnecessary harm or loss, and encourage their retention and enhancement.

Why is it needed?

- 8.3.82 A policy on non-designated heritage assets is required because these assets, while not formally protected through national designation, still make a vital contribution to the local character, identity, and historic narrative of the district.
- 8.3.83 Without a specific policy, these locally valued assets may be vulnerable to inappropriate development or gradual loss, especially where their significance is not immediately recognised.
- 8.3.84 This policy ensures that decisions relating to such assets are made in an informed and balanced way, taking into account their contribution to local distinctiveness and the wider historic environment.
- 8.3.85 It also aligns with national planning policy, which emphasises the importance of conserving the historic environment as a core element of sustainable development.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.3.86 Our preferred approach is to ensure that non-designated heritage assets are appropriately recognised, understood, and treated with the level of care proportionate to their significance. This approach is based on the principle that all heritage assets, whether designated or not, are irreplaceable and contribute to the richness and character of West Oxfordshire's historic environment.
- 8.3.87 It seeks to avoid harm or loss wherever possible, and where change is proposed, it must be sensitively managed through a balanced and informed decision-making process that considers the significance of the asset, the extent of any impact, and the wider public benefits of the development.
- 8.3.88 An initial draft policy is outlined below.

DM19 - Non-Designated Heritage Assets

Development proposals affecting non-designated heritage assets - including historic buildings, locally valued structures, archaeological remains of local interest, and unregistered historic parks and gardens - will be assessed with careful consideration of their heritage significance, contribution to local character, and community value.

As non-designated heritage assets are also irreplaceable components of the historic environment, there will be a general presumption in favour of their conservation, and in particular, the avoidance of harm or loss.

Where harm is unavoidable, a balanced and proportionate judgement will be applied, taking into account:

- a) The asset's degree of significance, including architectural, archaeological, historic, or artistic interest
- b) The scale and nature of harm or loss;
- c) The extent to which the proposal sustains or enhances the asset's heritage value or setting;
- d) The public benefits of the proposal, including opportunities for enhancement, reuse, or long-term viability.

Proposals must demonstrate that the significance of the non-designated asset has been clearly understood and assessed, including through use of the Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), local listing or other sources of evidence. Where necessary, applications should be supported by a heritage statement, including an appropriate level of historical research, analysis, or archaeological investigation.

Design approaches should reflect the principles applied to designated assets, such as respecting the asset's historic form, setting, and materials, while promoting sympathetic and sustainable re-use or adaptation.

Proposals that secure the future of non-designated heritage assets, including through repair, conservation-led design, or community-led restoration, will be strongly supported.

Where development would result in the total loss of a non-designated heritage asset, the applicant must provide clear justification, including evidence that all reasonable alternatives have been considered and that appropriate recording and archiving of the asset will be undertaken in line with Historic England guidance.

Attractive, Accessible and Thriving Places

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Policy DM20 - Town Centres

What will this policy do?

- 8.4.1 This policy is intended to promote, protect, and enhance the vitality, viability, and resilience of West Oxfordshire's five defined town centres Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Burford, and Woodstock ensuring they remain vibrant, inclusive, and adaptable places.

Why is it needed?

- 8.4.2 West Oxfordshire's town centres play a crucial role in the district's economic, social, and cultural life. As hubs of retail, leisure, and community services, they support local businesses, provide employment, and serve as focal points for residents and visitors alike.
- 8.4.3 However, like many areas across the UK, West Oxfordshire's town centres face increasing pressures from changing consumer habits, the rise of online shopping, and the impacts of broader economic shifts. Without clear guidance and support, these centres risk decline, losing their vibrancy, diversity, and relevance to the communities they serve.
- 8.4.4 The policy is also necessary to ensure that development is directed in a way that strengthens the character and identity of each town centre. Each centre, from the larger, more commercially focused Witney, to the tourist-driven Burford and Woodstock, has its own distinct role within the District.
- 8.4.5 A tailored and strategic approach helps ensure that growth and investment enhance rather than dilute these unique qualities. The policy provides a framework to manage change positively, allowing town centres to evolve in response to modern demands while safeguarding what makes them special.
- 8.4.6 Moreover, the policy recognises the importance of sustainability and resilience in town centre planning. Encouraging a mix of uses such as housing, workspace, cultural and evening economy activities helps reduce reliance on a single sector like retail and builds a more robust, adaptable local economy.
- 8.4.7 By promoting active travel, improving accessibility, and enhancing the public realm, the policy also aligns with broader goals around climate action, health, and inclusivity.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.4.8 Our preferred approach is to promote a town centre-first strategy that supports the long-term vitality, viability, and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire's five defined town centres.
- 8.4.9 It prioritises these centres as the primary locations for retail, leisure, community, and commercial uses, encouraging development that enhances their unique roles, strengthens their resilience, and supports a diverse, inclusive, and adaptable mix of activities.
- 8.4.10 Our approach seeks to enable positive growth through diversification - welcoming a broader range of uses such as housing, culture, and workspace - while also enhancing the public realm, connectivity, and overall user experience.

8.4.11 By focusing investment within town centres and applying robust tests to development proposed elsewhere, we aim to manage change effectively, protect existing assets like outdoor markets, and ensure that each centre continues to meet the evolving needs of its community in a sustainable and coordinated way.

8.4.12 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM20 - Town Centres

West Oxfordshire's town centres play a vital role in supporting the economy, fostering community cohesion, and providing access to key goods and services. The Council will promote and protect the long-term vitality, viability, and resilience of the following five defined town centres:

- Principal Town Centre: Witney
- Primary Town Centres: Carterton, Chipping Norton
- Town Centres with a Significant Tourist Role: Burford, Woodstock

Town centres will be the preferred location for new retail, leisure, community, and commercial activity, with a focus on ensuring they remain vibrant, adaptable, and inclusive places that reflect the unique character of each settlement.

1) Supporting Growth, Diversification and Resilience

The Council will support investment in town centres that:

- a) Enables diversification into leisure, cultural, residential, workspaces, and community uses;
- b) Enhances the evening and night-time economy;
- c) Supports active travel and public transport connectivity;
- d) Improves the public realm, accessibility, and safety for all users;
- e) Strengthens the unique character and offer of each centre.

Development proposals must reflect the dynamic nature of town centre environments and seek to respond positively to changing consumer behaviour and economic trends.

2) Primary Shopping Areas (PSAs)

Primary Shopping Areas (PSAs) are defined for each of the defined Town Centres. These areas remain the commercial core and will be the preferred location for a range of town centre uses, including retail, food and drink, leisure, entertainment, and civic functions.

Proposals that support the vitality and active use of ground floor premises within these areas will generally be supported, provided they do not result in concentrations of a single use that would adversely affect footfall, diversity, or amenity.

3) Sequential and Impact Assessments

The Council will apply the sequential test and impact test in accordance with national policy to proposals for main town centre uses that are not located within defined town centres and are not in accordance with the Local Plan or an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

An impact assessment will be required for any proposed retail or leisure development exceeding 280 sq.m gross floorspace outside of defined town centres.

The assessment must consider:

- a) Impact on town centre investment;
- b) Impact on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade.

4) Loss of Town Centre Uses

Proposals resulting in the loss of town centre uses within the defined town centres will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that:

- a) Following a robust and proportionate marketing exercise, the premises are not reasonably capable of continued use or redevelopment for a viable town centre use; or
- b) The proposed alternative use would make a positive contribution to the vitality, viability, or diversity of the town centre.

Concentrations of single uses (e.g., betting shops, takeaways, or cafes) will not be permitted where this would undermine the area's function, character, or amenity.

5) Outdoor Markets

Proposals for new off-street permanent and temporary street markets will be supported, provided that:

- a) The scale, nature, and location would not harm existing shopping facilities or markets located within town centres;
- b) There would not be an unacceptable impact on local amenity or the general environment
- c) Adequate provision is made for traders' parking, deliveries and servicing, set-up and storage of stalls, power supply, and waste storage and disposal;
- d) There would not be an unacceptable impact on traffic flow or contribute to traffic congestion in the area; and
- e) Appropriate public protection and health and safety measures are in place.

The Council will seek to maintain and enhance existing outdoor markets across the District, recognising their contribution to local distinctiveness and community activity.

Development proposals that would have a detrimental impact on existing outdoor markets will not be permitted. Where construction or redevelopment proposals may temporarily or permanently affect the operation of a market, applicants will be required to assess the potential impact and demonstrate appropriate mitigation to ensure continuity of market activity.

6) Public Realm, Accessibility, and Parking

All development within town centres must contribute positively to the character, quality, and accessibility of the public realm.

Where development proposals generate significant additional car parking demand, developers will be required to provide on-site parking or make appropriate contributions to public parking provision.

7) Partnership Working

The Council will continue to work proactively with local communities, businesses, and stakeholders to support the vitality of each town centre. Initiatives may include:

- Public realm improvements;
- Events and cultural programming;
- Active travel infrastructure;
- Digital connectivity and promotion.

Policy DM2I - Previously Developed Land and Development Densities

What will this policy do?

- 8.4.13 This policy aims to promote the efficient use of land, prioritising the re-use of previously developed land and encouraging higher-density development in urban areas and around key transport hubs.

Why is it needed?

- 8.4.14 As pressure to deliver new homes and infrastructure continues to grow, it is vital to prioritise the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land in order to reduce the reliance on greenfield sites, protect open countryside, and support the regeneration of underused or derelict areas.
- 8.4.15 By encouraging development on brownfield sites, the policy helps to optimise land use, revitalise local communities, and contribute to the creation of more compact, walkable, and environmentally sustainable places.
- 8.4.16 Additionally, the policy addresses the importance of development density, particularly in urban areas and locations with strong transport links. Encouraging higher-density development in appropriate locations such as near train stations or major bus interchanges not only makes efficient use of land but also supports more sustainable travel behaviours, reduces car dependency, and enhances access to jobs and services.
- 8.4.17 At the same time, the policy will help to ensure that development is sensitive to local character and delivers high-quality living environments, with the necessary infrastructure, green space, and community facilities to support vibrant, inclusive neighbourhoods.
- 8.4.18 This balanced approach is essential for managing growth effectively while aligning with wider environmental and social objectives.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.4.19 West Oxfordshire is committed to promoting sustainable development by encouraging the re-use of previously developed land (PDL) and ensuring that new development is designed to make the most efficient use of land.
- 8.4.20 Our approach seeks to support the delivery of housing and employment opportunities while protecting valuable greenfield sites and promoting sustainable growth patterns. Higher-density development will be particularly encouraged in urban areas and around key transport hubs to support sustainable transport options and local services.
- 8.4.21 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM21 - Previously Developed Land and Development Densities

1) Re-Use of Previously Developed Land

The re-use of previously developed land (brownfield land) will be strongly encouraged as a priority for new development, in order to make efficient use of available land, support regeneration, and reduce the need for development on greenfield sites.

Development proposals on previously developed land will be supported provided that they:

- a) Do not result in significant environmental harm or the loss of important natural features.
- b) Contribute positively to the regeneration of the area and the creation of sustainable communities.
- c) Are designed to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the local area.

2) Efficient Land Use and Density

New development should make the most efficient use of land, with an emphasis on achieving appropriate and sustainable density levels.

Higher-density development will be supported in urban areas and locations with good access to public transport, key services, and employment opportunities, particularly around transport hubs, such as railway stations and bus interchanges.

Proposals for development should:

- a) Achieve a density that reflects the surrounding urban context, maximises land use efficiency, and supports the sustainability of local infrastructure.
- b) Ensure that higher-density developments do not compromise the quality of life for residents or the character of the area. This includes providing appropriate amenities, open spaces, and green infrastructure within the development.
- c) Promote a mix of uses, including residential, commercial, and community uses, where appropriate, to create vibrant, sustainable neighbourhoods.

3) Urban Areas and Key Transport Hubs

In urban areas and around key transport hubs, higher-density development will be supported where it contributes to the vitality and sustainability of the area, and where it is consistent with the character and scale of surrounding development.

Key transport hubs include those with high public transport accessibility, such as mainline train stations and major bus interchanges.

Development near such hubs should:

- a) Be designed to integrate with existing transport infrastructure and promote sustainable travel options, including walking, cycling, and public transport.
- b) Maximise the use of available land while ensuring high standards of design and quality of living.

Policy DM22 - Re-use of Non-Residential Buildings

What will this policy do?

- 8.4.22 The purpose of this policy is to support the sustainable re-use of both traditional and non-traditional non-residential buildings in West Oxfordshire, in a way that strengthens the rural economy, supports farm diversification, and meets identified local needs.
- 8.4.23 By enabling a broader range of employment, tourism, and community uses in rural areas, the policy will help contribute to the vitality of local communities while promoting efficient use of existing built assets and reducing pressure on greenfield development.

Why is it needed?

- 8.4.24 West Oxfordshire is a largely rural District, with a significant number of traditional and modern agricultural buildings that are no longer suited to their original use. Without a clear and supportive framework, these buildings risk falling into disrepair or being redeveloped in ways that are unsympathetic to their surroundings. By enabling their sensitive re-use, the policy will help to preserve the district's built heritage and rural character while making more efficient use of existing assets.
- 8.4.25 Moreover, rural communities in West Oxfordshire often face limited access to employment, services, and community facilities. Encouraging the re-use of both traditional and non-traditional buildings for appropriate economic, tourism, and community purposes can provide new opportunities for local enterprise, support farm diversification, and help sustain village life.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.4.26 Our preferred approach is to enable the sensitive and sustainable re-use of both traditional and non-traditional buildings in rural areas, in order to support a thriving and diverse rural economy while preserving the district's distinctive character and heritage.
- 8.4.27 It seeks to prioritise the conversion of existing buildings for employment, tourism, and community uses where they are appropriately located, well-designed, and do not require significant alteration or expansion.
- 8.4.28 This approach will help to make efficient use of existing resources, reduce the need for new development in the countryside, and ensure that rural communities remain vibrant, resilient, and well-served.
- 8.4.29 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM22 - Re-use of Non-Residential Buildings

The Council strongly supports the sensitive and sustainable re-use of both traditional and non-traditional buildings for employment, tourism, and community uses, particularly where this contributes to the vitality of the rural economy, supports farm diversification, and meets identified local needs.

1) Re-use of Traditional Buildings

The re-use or conversion of traditional non-residential buildings will be supported where all of the following criteria are met:

- a) **Positive Contribution to Local Character:** The existing form, scale, and architectural character of the building make a positive contribution to the rural or settlement context.
- b) **Respect for Heritage and Design Integrity:** The building is structurally capable of conversion without the need for substantial rebuilding, extension, or alteration that would compromise its original form or result in the loss of features of architectural, artistic, historic, or ecological value.
- c) **Appropriate Location and Use:** The proposed use is of a type and scale appropriate to the building's location, having regard to accessibility to nearby settlements, services, and facilities, and ensuring there is no undue harm to the character, landscape, or amenity of the surrounding area.

Sensitive design and the incorporation of energy efficiency improvements will be encouraged where they respect the heritage and appearance of the original structure.

2) Re-use of Non-Traditional Buildings

The re-use of non-traditional buildings (including modern agricultural or industrial buildings) for employment, tourism, and community uses will be supported where the proposal:

- a) Is Located within or adjoining a Tier 1 – 3 settlement; or
- b) Forms Part of a Farm Diversification Scheme in accordance with Policy DM36; or
- c) Responds to a demonstrable local need that cannot reasonably be met elsewhere through the use of existing or allocated buildings or land.

In all cases, the following additional criteria must be met:

- a) **Local Character:** The design, scale, and siting of the building do not detract from the character or appearance of the surrounding area, including landscape setting.
- b) **Proportionate scale and sensitivity of use:** The proposed use is appropriate to the building's context and can be accommodated without substantial alteration or extension of the host building, and without generating unacceptable impacts in terms of traffic, noise, or amenity.
- c) **Design quality and sustainability:** Proposals should incorporate high standards of design, environmental performance, and landscape integration, including measures to enhance biodiversity, where feasible.

Policy DM23 - Protection and Provision of Community Facilities and Services

What will this policy do?

- 8.4.30 The purpose of this policy is to protect, enhance, and ensure the sustainable provision of community facilities and services across West Oxfordshire. Recognising the vital role that facilities such as schools, healthcare, public houses, libraries, and local shops play in supporting the wellbeing, cohesion, and resilience of communities, the policy seeks to prevent their unjustified loss or degradation.

Why is it needed?

- 8.4.31 The policy is needed to ensure that the essential social infrastructure which underpins community life in West Oxfordshire is not eroded by development pressures, market forces, or changing land use trends.
- 8.4.32 Community facilities are central to the everyday lives of residents, fostering social interaction, supporting public health and wellbeing, and creating a sense of identity and belonging. Once lost, these facilities are often difficult or impossible to replace, particularly in rural areas where commercial viability may be limited.
- 8.4.33 Without a strong and clear policy in place, there is a risk that valuable community assets could be lost through speculative redevelopment or neglect, leading to weakened social cohesion, increased isolation, and reduced access to key services, especially for vulnerable or less mobile groups.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.4.34 Our preferred approach seeks to safeguard and strengthen the role of community facilities and services as essential components of sustainable, inclusive, and resilient communities. It is based on the principle that these facilities should be retained wherever possible, and that any proposed loss must be fully justified through clear evidence of non-viability and a transparent, community-informed process.
- 8.4.35 The approach prioritises early engagement with local people, supports innovative reuse and repurposing of facilities, and ensures that, where loss is unavoidable, alternatives that continue to deliver community or local economic value are explored first. It also actively promotes the provision of new or enhanced facilities, particularly in areas of growth, ensuring they are well-designed, accessible, and responsive to both current and future community needs.
- 8.4.36 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM23 - Protection and Provision of Community Facilities and Services

1) Protection of Existing Community Facilities and Services

The Council will safeguard existing community facilities and services, including but not limited to public houses, schools, healthcare facilities, village halls, libraries, post offices, places of worship, recreational spaces, and local shops from development that would result in their unjustified loss or significant harm.

Development proposals involving the loss, change of use, or redevelopment of a community facility, including public houses, will only be permitted where it is clearly demonstrated that:

- a) The facility is no longer viable, necessary, or in active use, and that all reasonable efforts have been made to retain or repurpose it for community use, including a robust and active marketing campaign for at least 12 months at a realistic and competitive price;
- b) A viability assessment has been submitted, including trading accounts (where relevant) and an independent expert evaluation;
- c) The proposal includes mitigation measures or makes provision for an equivalent or improved replacement facility that is accessible to the same community and is delivered and operational prior to the loss of the existing facility.

2) Sequential Approach to Alternative Uses

Where the loss of a community facility is justified under the above criteria, applicants must demonstrate the application of a sequential approach to the consideration of alternative uses. The following order of preference will apply:

- a) Employment-generating uses that provide local job opportunities
- b) Community-based uses (e.g. co-working spaces, local enterprise hubs, cultural or educational uses)
- c) Affordable housing, particularly social or genuinely affordable rented homes
- d) Open market housing or other commercial uses only where options (a) to (c) have been shown to be unfeasible.

3) Community Value Considerations

Where a facility, particularly a public house, has been designated or nominated as an Asset of Community Value (ACV), additional weight will be given to its retention. In such cases, applicants must demonstrate that the community has been given adequate and realistic opportunity to bid for or take on operation of the facility, and that local groups have been fully engaged as part of the marketing process.

4) Provision of New Community Facilities and Services

The Council strongly supports the delivery of new or enhanced community facilities where they:

- a) Address identified gaps in provision, supported by community consultation or strategic assessments
- b) Are designed to be accessible, inclusive, flexible, and environmentally sustainable;
- c) Are well located, within or adjacent to existing settlements and accessible by walking, cycling, and public transport;
- d) Contribute to the creation of vibrant, healthy, and resilient communities, promoting opportunities for social interaction and wellbeing.

5) Community Facilities in New Developments

Larger strategic-scale developments, particularly residential or mixed-use schemes, must include appropriate provision for community infrastructure. Proposals must be accompanied by a Community Infrastructure Statement outlining:

- a) What facilities will be delivered, when, and by whom
- b) How facilities will be managed and maintained over time;
- c) How proposals respond to the needs of both existing and future populations.

Multi-functional community spaces that combine a variety of uses (e.g., meeting, sports, cultural activities) will be particularly supported to maximise social value and long-term sustainability.

Policy DM24 - Active and Healthy Travel

What will this policy do?

- 8.4.37 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that walking, cycling, and other forms of active travel are fully integrated into the planning, design, and delivery of development across West Oxfordshire.
- 8.4.38 The policy aims to protect and enhance existing active travel networks such as footpaths, bridleways, and cycle routes while requiring new developments to prioritise safe, accessible, and well-connected infrastructure that supports healthy, low-carbon lifestyles.

Why is it needed?

- 8.4.39 The policy will help to address key challenges around climate change, public health, and sustainable growth. As the District continues to expand with new housing, employment, and infrastructure, there is a growing need to reduce reliance on private car use, cut carbon emissions, and promote healthier, more active lifestyles.
- 8.4.40 Active travel options like walking and cycling offer practical, low-cost alternatives to driving, particularly for short local journeys, yet without clear planning policy support, these modes often remain under-prioritised in new developments.
- 8.4.41 West Oxfordshire's mix of rural and urban areas also presents unique opportunities and challenges for creating a well-connected, inclusive travel network. Protecting existing routes while building new, high-quality links will help to ensure that all residents, regardless of age or mobility, can safely and confidently access key destinations such as schools, shops, and workplaces.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.4.42 Our preferred approach seeks to embed active and healthy travel as a fundamental part of how places are planned, designed, and delivered in West Oxfordshire. It prioritises the protection of existing walking, cycling, and multi-use routes, while promoting the creation of safe, direct, and well-connected active travel infrastructure as part of all new developments.
- 8.4.43 This approach is built on the principle that active travel should be the easiest and most attractive choice for local journeys. It emphasises high-quality design, integration with green infrastructure, and strong connections to key destinations such as schools, shops, and public transport.
- 8.4.44 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM24 - Active and Healthy Travel

1) Protecting Existing Active Travel Networks

Existing active travel routes, including public rights of way, footpaths, bridleways, and cycle paths, will be protected and safeguarded from development that would cause harm to their connectivity, accessibility, or character.

Proposals that affect these networks must:

- a) Demonstrate how the integrity and usability of existing routes will be maintained or enhanced.
- b) Avoid severance of active travel routes and mitigate impacts where harm cannot be avoided, such as through diversions or improvements to alternative routes.
- c) Retain green corridors and features that enhance the user experience of active travel routes, such as tree cover, biodiversity, and natural landscaping.

2) Integrating New and Enhanced Active Travel Networks

New development proposals must:

- a) Prioritise the creation of safe, direct, and attractive active travel routes that connect with existing networks and key local destinations, including schools, workplaces, shops, healthcare facilities, and public transport hubs.
- b) Ensure that active travel infrastructure is designed to a high standard, following national and local guidance such as Local Transport Note 1/20 (Cycling Infrastructure Design) and any relevant local standards including the Oxfordshire Walking and Cycle Design Standards.
- c) Incorporate segregated walking and cycling paths, where appropriate, to ensure the safety and comfort of all users, including children, older people, and those with disabilities.
- d) Provide sufficient amenities to support active travel, such as secure cycle parking, storage, and charging facilities for e-bikes.
- e) Contribute to the establishment of strategic, district-wide active travel networks that link rural and urban areas, ensuring routes are future-proofed for increased usage and changing mobility needs.

3) Active Travel as a Core Design Principle

Active travel must be embedded as a fundamental component of the design and layout of all new developments, including:

- a) Residential developments, which should integrate active travel routes into their internal design and link to nearby communities and services.
- b) Employment and mixed-use developments, which must include dedicated infrastructure to facilitate commuting by walking and cycling.
- c) Public realm improvements, ensuring pedestrian and cyclist safety is prioritised through measures such as traffic calming, pedestrianised zones, and crossings.

4) Supporting Active Travel with Green Infrastructure

Active travel networks should be designed to integrate with green infrastructure, enhancing biodiversity and creating attractive, multi-functional corridors that encourage their use.

Proposals should:

- a) Align active travel routes with green spaces and natural features, creating pleasant and shaded pathways.
- b) Incorporate planting, sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), and wildlife-friendly measures alongside active travel infrastructure.

5) Promoting Active Travel in the Wider Community

The Council will work with developers, local communities, and stakeholders to:

- a) Identify opportunities to enhance and extend the existing active travel network as part of new developments or infrastructure improvements.
- b) Encourage initiatives that promote active travel, such as safe cycling campaigns, community walking groups, and partnerships with schools and employers.
- c) Ensure active travel plays a central role in delivering net-zero carbon objectives by reducing reliance on car travel.

Monitoring and Compliance

All major developments must include an Active Travel Plan, demonstrating how the proposal aligns with this policy and promotes active travel.

Policy DM25 – Parking Standards for New Development (Car and Cycle Parking)

What will this policy do?

- 8.4.45 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that parking provision in new development across West Oxfordshire supports sustainable travel choices, responds to local context, and contributes to well-designed, inclusive and low-carbon communities.
- 8.4.46 It aims to reduce reliance on private cars especially in more accessible locations by carefully managing the amount and design of car parking, while ensuring high-quality, secure cycle parking is standard.

Why is it needed?

- 8.4.47 The policy aims to respond to some of the district's key challenges around climate change, transport, and placemaking. Private car use remains high in many areas, contributing to carbon emissions, congestion, and air quality issues, particularly in and around our towns and key growth areas.
- 8.4.48 By setting clear but flexible parking standards, the policy will help reduce car dependency over time and encourage more people to walk, cycle, or use public transport instead.
- 8.4.49 At the same time, West Oxfordshire includes a wide range of towns, villages and more rural areas and it is important that parking requirements reflect this diversity. The policy supports more sustainable travel in locations where it's realistic, while ensuring safe and appropriate levels of parking are still provided where needed. It also responds to emerging needs around EV infrastructure and inclusive design, helping to future-proof new developments and support the delivery of healthy, accessible and well-connected places. This includes consideration of other low-emission technologies, ensuring flexibility as transport systems evolve

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.4.50 Our preferred approach is based on promoting a balanced, context-sensitive parking strategy that supports sustainable travel and high-quality placemaking. This means encouraging lower levels of car parking, especially in well-connected locations, while ensuring developments remain accessible and functional.
- 8.4.51 The approach prioritises walking, cycling, and public transport by integrating high-quality cycle parking, car-free or car-lite development where appropriate, and infrastructure for electric vehicles.
- 8.4.52 It also recognises the need for flexibility, tailoring parking provision to reflect local circumstances, while aligning with Oxfordshire County Council's wider transport and climate objectives.
- 8.4.53 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM25 – Parking Standards for New Development (Car and Cycle Parking)

1) Application of Standards

Development proposals across West Oxfordshire must comply with the most up-to-date version of Oxfordshire County Council's Parking Standards for New Developments. This applies to all residential and non-residential schemes and must be tailored to reflect the location, accessibility, and context of each site, including proximity to Oxford, existing and planned sustainable transport networks and the ambition to promote active and low-carbon travel choices.

2) Residential and Non-Residential Development

Parking provision for residential developments should be determined based on site location, dwelling size and tenure, allocation strategy (allocated/unallocated spaces), and the presence of parking controls or enforcement.

In town locations where high-quality public transport, walking, and cycling infrastructure exists or is proposed, reduced levels of on-site parking or car-free development will be supported where justified. In more rural locations, parking provision must strike a balance between supporting active travel and preventing inappropriate on-street or highway safety issues.

Non-residential proposals must align with Oxfordshire County Council's 'Decide and Provide' approach, ensuring that parking levels reflect the ambition to reduce car trips by 25% by 2030 and by 33% by 2040. Development proposals must provide robust, site-specific transport assessments and justify any deviation from the recommended standards, including evidence of operational requirements and sustainable travel alternatives.

3) Cycle Parking

All new developments must provide high-quality, secure, and accessible cycle parking in line with minimum standards. Cycle parking must be conveniently located, well-lit, covered, and integrated into the design of the site. Proposals must support the continued growth of cycling for commuting and leisure purposes, and provision should be made for larger cycles, e-bikes, and adapted cycles where appropriate.

4) Design and Integration

Parking must be designed to avoid adverse impacts on the character and quality of place, ensuring that it is useable, safe, and does not compromise pedestrian or cyclist safety. The design of parking must be consistent with Oxfordshire County Council's Street Design Guide and Secure by Design principles.

5) Car-Free and Low-Car Developments

Car-free and low-car developments will be supported in locations with excellent access to public transport (within 400m of frequent services), good walking and cycling infrastructure, and a range of local amenities within 800m. In such cases, Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) may be required to manage on-street parking. Adequate provision must still be made for people with limited mobility, operational requirements, and car club spaces.

6) Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure

All developments must provide electric vehicle charging infrastructure in accordance with Policy 29 of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). Residential development must include active EV charging for each dwelling with off-street parking, and passive provision elsewhere as appropriate.

7) Parking for People with Impaired Mobility

Provision must be made for accessible parking spaces for Blue Badge holders. These spaces should be within the curtilage of the property and provide level access to entrances. Where this is not feasible, they must be located within 50m of the principal building entrance.

8) Visitor Parking and Strategic Sites

Visitor parking should be provided based on the level of unallocated parking within the development, with a maximum guideline of 1 space per 5 dwellings where needed. For large or strategic sites, visitor parking should be unallocated, located in clusters, and integrated with any proposed mobility hubs or shared mobility services.

Meeting the Housing Needs of All

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Policy DM26 - Windfall Housing

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.1 A 'windfall' housing proposal refers to a speculative development that comes forward on a site not allocated for housing in the Local Plan or a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 8.5.2 The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear framework against which such windfall proposals can be considered, prioritising the re-use of previously developed land and ensuring that proposals align with the overall spatial strategy and key development principles of the Local Plan.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.3 At the national level, the NPPF emphasises that local authorities should support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions, giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes. Small and medium sized sites are seen as making an important contribution to housing supply, helping to support smaller housebuilders and being generally able to be built out more quickly.
- 8.5.4 At the local level, windfall development has historically played a significant role in contributing to West Oxfordshire's housing land supply and we expect this trend to continue. Core Policy 4 – Delivering New Homes is based on a relatively conservative assumption of 150 homes per year from windfall housing sites in the period 2028 – 2041, equating to 1,950 homes overall.
- 8.5.5 In reality, the contribution from windfall sites is likely to be much higher than this and establishing a clear framework for windfall development will help to ensure that new housing continues to contribute positively to the district's housing supply while supporting the overall spatial strategy.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.5.6 Our preferred approach is to ensure that where new homes are proposed on unallocated sites, that priority is given wherever possible to the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land and that growth is directed towards the Tier 1 Principal Towns, Tier 2 Service Centres, and Tier 3 Villages in line with the overall spatial strategy.
- 8.5.7 In this respect, our approach promotes sustainable growth, encourages the efficient use of land, and helps protect the open countryside.
- 8.5.8 A more restrictive approach will apply in Tier 4 Small Villages, Hamlets, and Open Countryside, where development will only be permitted in specific, limited circumstances. This will help to safeguard rural landscapes while still allowing for specific local housing needs to be addressed.
- 8.5.9 Overall, our balanced approach supports the delivery of much-needed housing while maintaining the character and environmental quality of West Oxfordshire.
- 8.5.10 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM26 - Windfall Housing Development on Unallocated Sites

Overview

Windfall housing developments on unallocated sites will be positively supported, provided they are consistent with the overall spatial strategy of the Local Plan and other relevant policies, including the general development principles outlined in Policy DMI and any made Neighbourhood Development Plans.

In accordance with the proposed spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy, the primary focus for windfall developments will be the Tier 1 Principal Towns, followed by Tier 2 Service Centres and then Tier 3 Villages. A more restrictive approach will apply to developments in Tier 4 Small Villages, Hamlets, and Open Countryside.

Priority will be given to the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land in preference to the use of undeveloped greenfield land.

Windfall Development at Tier 1 Principal Towns, Tier 2 Service Centres, and Tier 3 Villages

New windfall housing proposals will be permitted at Tier 1, 2, and 3 settlements in the following circumstances:

- Previously Developed (Brownfield) Land: The site is within or adjoining the built area and the proposal complies with the general development principles in Policy DMI and other relevant development plan policies.
- Undeveloped (Greenfield) Land Within the Built Area: The proposal complies with Policy DMI and other relevant development plan policies.
- Undeveloped (Greenfield) Land Adjoining the Built Area: Proposals must demonstrate that they are necessary to meet identified housing needs, align with the overall spatial strategy outlined in Policy CP3, and comply with Policy DMI and other relevant development plan policies.

Within the Cotswolds National Landscape and Tier 3 Villages, evidence of specific local housing need will be required, such as needs identified through a neighbourhood plan or affordable housing needs specific to a settlement.

Elsewhere, evidence may be presented on a District-wide basis and/or as identified in an adopted neighbourhood plan.

Where proposals involve undeveloped land that cannot reasonably be considered to adjoin the built area of a Tier 1, 2, or 3 settlement, the site will be treated as open countryside, and the Tier 4 policy provisions below will apply.

Windfall Development in Tier 4 Small Villages, Hamlets, and Open Countryside

A more restrictive approach will apply to windfall developments in Tier 4 areas, in line with the overall spatial strategy (Policy CP3). In these areas, new dwellings will only be permitted in the following circumstances:

- There is an essential operational or specific local need that cannot be met in any other way, including the re-use of existing buildings.
- The proposal represents the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or is appropriate enabling development to secure the future of a heritage asset.
- The proposal involves residential development of exceptional quality or innovative design.

- New accommodation is proposed in accordance with Policy DM32 – Travelling Communities.
- Accommodation will remain ancillary to existing dwellings, secured as appropriate through a planning condition.
- It involves the replacement of a dwelling on a one-for-one basis.
- The proposal involves the re-use of an appropriate existing building that enhances its immediate setting and demonstrates that the building is unsuitable for other uses, such as business, recreation, community use, tourist accommodation, or visitor facilities, unless the proposal addresses a specific local housing need that would otherwise not be met.
- The site is allocated for housing within an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

Policy DM27 – Creating Mixed and Balanced Communities

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.11 This policy aims to ensure that all new residential developments contribute to the creation of mixed and balanced communities by providing an appropriate variety of housing types, sizes, and tenures that meet local needs.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.12 A balanced and inclusive housing stock is essential for supporting sustainable communities across West Oxfordshire. Evidence consistently shows a need for a wider variety of homes, reflecting the changing demographics and housing needs of the District. This includes providing suitable accommodation for families, first-time buyers, older residents, and people with disabilities.
- 8.5.13 As the population ages, the demand for accessible and adaptable homes is expected to grow. Ensuring that all new homes meet the M4(2) standard and requiring a proportion of larger developments to deliver M4(3) wheelchair adaptable homes will promote inclusivity and provide suitable living environments for people with mobility impairments.
- 8.5.14 The policy also supports the provision of affordable housing and encourages mixed-tenure developments to reduce socio-economic segregation and enhance social cohesion. By creating diverse, integrated communities, West Oxfordshire can foster a stronger sense of belonging and improve quality of life for all residents.
- 8.5.15 Furthermore, applying indicative dwelling size requirements ensures that developments reflect local housing need, balancing supply and demand for different home sizes. Through ongoing monitoring and site-specific considerations, the Council will ensure that the policy remains responsive to changing local needs, contributing to a resilient and equitable housing market.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.5.16 Our preferred approach is to ensure that all new residential developments contribute to the creation of mixed and balanced communities by providing an appropriate mix of housing types, sizes, and tenures that meet local housing needs.
- 8.5.17 This approach is based on promoting inclusivity, supporting a diverse range of residents including families, older people, first-time buyers, and those with disabilities, and ensuring the delivery of accessible and adaptable homes.
- 8.5.18 By encouraging mixed-tenure developments and requiring a proportion of wheelchair adaptable homes in larger schemes, the policy aims to create sustainable, integrated communities and maintain a balanced housing stock across West Oxfordshire.
- 8.5.19 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM27 – Creating Mixed and Balanced Communities

Overview

All new residential development will be expected to contribute towards the objective of creating mixed and balanced communities by providing an appropriate mix of housing types, sizes, and tenures to meet identified local housing needs.

Development proposals that demonstrate an appropriate mix of housing will be given favourable consideration, particularly where they address specific local housing requirements and contribute to a more balanced housing stock within West Oxfordshire.

Indicative Dwelling Size Requirements

Major residential developments (10 or more dwellings) will be expected to accord with the following indicative dwelling size requirements for market and affordable housing¹³:

Market Housing

1-bed	4%
2-bed	16%
3-bed	49%
4+bed	27%

Affordable Housing

1-bed	21%
2-bed	55%
3-bed	19%
4+bed	5%

These are indicative requirements only and provide a start point for agreeing an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes. The precise mix will be subject to site-specific factors and up-to-date evidence on local housing needs including the Council's housing register in relation to affordable housing.

Demonstrating a Balanced Housing Stock

Mixed-tenure developments that provide a combination of market and affordable housing, helping to foster inclusive and sustainable communities will be positively supported.

Developers will be required to provide a clear justification of how their proposals contribute towards a more balanced housing stock. This should include an assessment of how the

¹³ The indicative mix requirements are aligned with the findings of the West Oxfordshire Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) 2025.

development meets the needs of different groups, including but not limited to families, older people, first-time buyers, people with disabilities, and those requiring affordable housing.

Accessible and Adaptable Homes

All new homes must be built to Part M4(2) (Category 2: Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings) standards, or any equivalent replacement standards, to ensure homes are flexible and capable of adaptation to meet changing needs over time.

Wheelchair Adaptable Homes

To support the anticipated increase in the number of people with disabilities, linked to the ageing population, the Council will require major residential developments to provide a percentage of market and affordable homes as wheelchair adaptable dwellings designed to meet Building Regulation Requirement M4(3).

The proportion of M4(3) homes will be subject to negotiation based on site-specific circumstances, but as a minimum, at least 5% of homes should meet this standard.

Implementation and Monitoring

The Council will monitor the delivery of housing mix through its Annual Monitoring Report to ensure that the objectives of this policy are effectively achieved.

Policy DM28 - Affordable Housing

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.20 The purpose of this policy is to help increase the supply of affordable housing in West Oxfordshire to meet identified needs. The policy will do this in two main ways, firstly by setting out a requirement for certain ‘qualifying’ market housing schemes to provide new affordable homes as part of the overall scheme mix and secondly by setting out the circumstances in which small-scale ‘exception sites’ that provide new affordable homes to meet identified local housing need, will be permitted.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.21 Housing affordability is a significant challenge in West Oxfordshire, driven by a combination of high house prices, a relatively limited supply of affordable homes, and increasing demand. The area’s attractive rural setting, proximity to employment centres such as Oxford, and strong transport links contribute to elevated property values. This has created affordability pressures for many local residents, particularly low- and middle-income households, first-time buyers, and key workers who are essential to the local economy.
- 8.5.22 A persistent gap between local wages and house prices further exacerbates the issue. Average house prices in West Oxfordshire are considerably higher than the national average, while earnings have not kept pace with rising housing costs. This disparity results in many households being priced out of the housing market, increasing reliance on the private rental sector or pushing people to seek accommodation further afield. In turn, this can lead to longer commutes, reduced quality of life, and challenges in maintaining strong, inclusive communities.

8.5.23 The availability of affordable housing is also crucial for ensuring that younger generations, families, and those with specific housing needs can remain in their local communities. Without adequate affordable housing provision, rural areas may experience population decline, school closures, and the loss of essential services. Additionally, the increasing need for specialist housing, including sheltered and extra-care housing for older people, adds further pressure on the housing supply.

What is our preferred approach?

8.5.24 Policy DM28 responds to the challenges outlined above by establishing clear and proportionate requirements for the delivery of affordable homes across the District. It prioritises the provision of social rented housing, reflecting the acute need for genuinely affordable homes. This is consistent with the most recent local housing needs assessment (LHNA) for West Oxfordshire which suggests that of the total affordable housing need (5,412 homes) around 68% (3,691 homes) should be in the form of social rented housing.

8.5.25 By requiring affordable housing contributions from market-led developments and supporting exception sites for local needs housing, the policy aims to ensure that a diverse range of housing options is provided.

8.5.26 The benchmark requirement of 40% affordable housing provision in market-led schemes is consistent with the West Oxfordshire LHNA which suggests total affordable housing need of up to 38%.

8.5.27 The policy encourages the integration of affordable homes within mixed-tenure developments to foster inclusive and sustainable communities. It also recognises the importance of flexibility by accommodating site-specific viability considerations while maintaining a firm commitment to maximising affordable housing delivery.

8.5.28 In doing so, Policy DM28 plays a vital role in addressing West Oxfordshire's housing affordability pressures and supporting the long-term resilience and inclusivity of the District's communities.

8.5.29 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM28 – Affordable Housing

Overview

This policy supports the provision of affordable housing in West Oxfordshire to address local housing needs, promote mixed and balanced communities, and ensure that a range of housing options are available across the District.

Development proposals that improve housing affordability and/or increase the supply of affordable homes to buy or rent will be supported in principle, subject to the specific considerations outlined below and compliance with other relevant local plan policies.

‘Qualifying’ Market Housing Developments

Affordable housing will be sought as part of market housing-led schemes in the following circumstances:

- Major developments resulting in a net gain of 10 or more dwellings or involving a site of 0.5 hectares or more.
- Within the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) a lower threshold of 5 or more dwellings will apply.

The requirement to provide affordable housing will apply to market-led specialist older persons’ housing (e.g. sheltered housing and extra-care housing) where self-contained units of accommodation are proposed.

On-Site Provision

A general presumption applies in favour of on-site affordable housing provision. Alternative delivery through off-site contributions or financial payments will only be considered where robust justification is provided, demonstrating that on-site provision is unfeasible or that off-site alternatives would better meet local housing needs.

Affordable Housing Requirement

Subject to viability, an overall District-wide requirement of 40% affordable housing will apply on market-led housing schemes.

Proposals exceeding the 40% requirement will be positively considered in the planning balance, provided they deliver an appropriate mix of housing types and tenures.

Where major development is brought forward within the Oxford Green Belt under the 'Golden Rules,' set out in national policy, the level of affordable housing provision sought will be increased to at least 50%, subject to viability.

Developments that involve the re-use or redevelopment of vacant domestic buildings will benefit from a reduced affordable housing contribution, equivalent to the existing gross floorspace of the buildings.

Type and Mix of Affordable Homes

Affordable housing will be required to meet identified local housing needs, with a particular emphasis on the provision of social rented homes¹⁴.

For build to rent schemes, affordable private rent will be the expected form of affordable housing provision and will generally be set at 20% in line with national policy.

¹⁴ In line with the identified requirements of the West Oxfordshire LHNA (2025)

Design and Layout

Affordable homes should be tenure blind and well-integrated across developments. On larger schemes, affordable housing should be arranged in small clusters, proportionate to the overall scale of the development.

Rural Exception Sites (RES)

Small-scale rural exception sites will be supported where robust evidence demonstrates a specific local need for affordable housing. Proposals must be well-related to existing built-up areas. Where family homes are proposed as part of the proposed mix of house types, the site should be within walking distance of a primary school.

Affordable homes on rural exception sites will be secured as affordable in perpetuity through legal agreements. A limited proportion of market homes may be permitted where essential to support site viability.

First Home Exception Sites

First Home Exception Sites will be supported where the following criteria are met:

- The site is adjacent to an existing settlement.
- The proposal addresses an identified local housing need.
- The proposal is proportionate to the scale of the settlement, considering the existing number of households and the relative increase.

In line with national policy, First Home Exception Sites will not be supported within the Oxford Green Belt or the Cotswolds National Landscape.

Priority will be given to applicants with a local connection to the village, parish, or neighbouring parishes. A small proportion of market homes (generally no more than 20% of the total) may be permitted where necessary to ensure the site's viability.

Consideration may also be given to other affordable housing tenures as part of the mix, subject to evidence of local need.

Policy DM29 - Specialist Housing for Older People

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.30 Policy DM29 aims to support the provision of specialist housing for older people, including extra-care housing, sheltered housing, and other supported living options, in suitable and sustainable locations with good access to services and facilities. It encourages inclusive developments that foster social integration and community engagement.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.31 Including a policy supporting the provision of specialist housing for older people in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan is essential to address the needs of a rapidly ageing population. As people live longer, the demand for suitable, accessible, and adaptable housing will increase.
- 8.5.32 Specialist housing, such as extra-care housing and sheltered housing, provides older residents with the opportunity to live independently while having access to on-site care and support if needed. This ensures a higher quality of life and reduces pressure on healthcare and social services.

- 8.5.33 Encouraging the integration of specialist housing within sustainable locations close to existing services and facilities promotes active and inclusive communities. Providing opportunities for older people to engage socially and access local amenities supports well-being and reduces the risk of isolation and loneliness.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.5.34 Our preferred approach is based on proactively meeting the needs of West Oxfordshire's ageing population by encouraging the provision of specialist housing for older people. This includes extra-care housing, sheltered housing, and other supported living options designed to enable independent living while providing access to care and support as needed.
- 8.5.35 By promoting the development of such housing in sustainable locations with good access to services, facilities, and public transport, the policy aims to enhance the quality of life for older residents and reduce social isolation.
- 8.5.36 Our preferred approach also seeks to encourage the integration of specialist housing within larger strategic housing developments of 300 or more dwellings to ensure a balanced housing mix that reflects the needs of all age groups. This approach will help to foster inclusive, age-friendly communities where older people can remain socially engaged.
- 8.5.37 Under our proposed approach, where it is not feasible to provide specialist housing on-site, developers will be required to provide clear, evidence-based justifications, ensuring that the policy remains flexible while maintaining its core objective.
- 8.5.38 Furthermore, our approach emphasises the importance of accessible and adaptable design, requiring compliance with Building Regulation standards (M4(2) and M4(3)) in accordance with Policy DM27. This will help to ensure that homes are suitable for older residents and those with mobility impairments, promoting long-term independence. By encouraging a range of tenures, including affordable housing, the policy also ensures that specialist housing options are available to people across all income levels.
- 8.5.39 Through ongoing monitoring and collaboration with developers and service providers, our approach will support the delivery of inclusive, sustainable communities that respond to the evolving needs of West Oxfordshire's older population.
- 8.5.40 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM29 - Specialist Housing for Older People

Overview

The Council supports the provision of specialist housing for older people, including but not limited to extra-care housing, sheltered housing, and other forms of supported living. Proposals for such housing will be encouraged in appropriate, sustainable locations that are well-related to existing services, facilities, and public transport connections.

Integration and Social Inclusion

Developments should be designed to encourage social integration and inclusion, fostering a sense of community and enabling older residents to remain active and engaged.

Provision on Larger Strategic Sites

On larger strategic housing sites of 300 or more dwellings, there is an expectation that specialist provision for older persons' housing will be made as part of the overall housing mix. This may include extra-care housing, sheltered housing, or age-restricted housing schemes subject to evidence of local housing need.

Strategic housing proposals that do not include specialist older persons' housing will only be considered acceptable where it can be robustly demonstrated that:

- a) The site and/or location is not suitable for such uses; or
- b) There are other valid reasons why such provision cannot be made as part of the scheme.

Design and Accessibility

All specialist housing must be designed to meet the needs of older people, incorporating high-quality design standards, including accessibility, safety, and adaptability in accordance with Building Regulation Requirements M4(2) and M4(3) and the requirements set out in Policy DM27.

Affordable and Mixed-Tenure Options

Proposals for specialist housing should provide a range of tenures, including affordable housing, to ensure choice and accessibility for all income groups.

Implementation and Monitoring

The Council will monitor the delivery of specialist housing through its Annual Monitoring Report and ensure that the needs of older people are effectively met as part of the overall housing strategy for West Oxfordshire.

Policy DM30 – Custom and Self-Build Housing

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.41 The purpose of this policy is to support the delivery of custom and self-build homes in West Oxfordshire, increasing housing choice and meeting local needs. It will do this by applying a specific requirement for larger residential schemes to include a proportion of custom and self-build opportunities as part of the overall mix of homes provided and also by outlining other relevant factors that will be taken into account when smaller standalone custom and self-build housing proposals come forward.

- 8.5.42 In this respect, it is important to note that the policy must be read in conjunction with other relevant plan policies, in particular Policy DM26 – Windfall Housing Development on Unallocated Sites.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.43 Custom and self-build housing plays a crucial role in diversifying the housing market, offering greater choice for local people, and contributing to the delivery of high-quality, sustainable homes. In West Oxfordshire, there is increasing demand for self-build opportunities from individuals and families seeking to design and construct their own homes, tailored to their specific needs and preferences. By supporting this form of housing, the Local Plan can help foster more inclusive, balanced communities and respond directly to local aspirations.
- 8.5.44 Affordability pressures in the District further underscore the need for this policy. Custom and self-build housing often provides a more cost-effective route to homeownership, enabling people to create homes that meet their needs within their budget. This is particularly important in areas where high house prices can otherwise exclude local residents. Additionally, supporting affordable custom and self-build plots as part of major developments ensures that a wider range of people can access these opportunities, including those on moderate incomes.
- 8.5.45 Self-builders are typically more invested in the design and sustainability of their homes, leading to higher-quality construction and greater environmental performance. By requiring large developments to allocate a proportion of plots for self-build and custom-build, the policy ensures that self-build opportunities are an integral part of West Oxfordshire's housing growth. Provisions for alternative off-site delivery and appropriate marketing periods provide flexibility while maintaining the objective of increasing supply.
- 8.5.46 Moreover, integrating self-build housing into major developments contributes to mixed, vibrant neighbourhoods where homes of different tenures co-exist. This promotes social cohesion and a greater sense of community ownership. By establishing clear expectations for serviced plot delivery, the policy offers certainty for developers, self-builders, and local communities alike.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.5.47 Our preferred approach is to support the delivery of custom and self-build housing in West Oxfordshire by requiring major developments to provide at least 5% of plots as serviced plots for self and custom-build homes. This ensures greater housing choice, encourages local participation in homebuilding, and promotes affordability.
- 8.5.48 Flexibility is provided through the option for off-site provision where on-site delivery is not feasible, and a clear marketing period ensures genuine opportunities for self-builders. Affordable self-build housing will also be sought and integrated where appropriate, contributing to a diverse and inclusive housing market.
- 8.5.49 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM30 – Custom and Self-Build Housing

Overview

This policy supports the delivery of custom and self-build housing in West Oxfordshire to diversify the housing market, increase housing choice, and meet identified needs.

Proposals will be approved in suitable, sustainable locations subject to compliance with other relevant policies of this Plan. Where development is proposed on greenfield land, particular regard should be given to the quality of agricultural land, with avoidance of the best and most versatile land (Grades 1–3a) wherever possible

Provision on Major Developments

Minimum Requirement:

All housing developments of 100 or more dwellings are required to provide at least 5% of the residential plots as serviced plots for custom and self-build housing. This can include partially completed units for self-finish.

Alternative Provision:

Where it is demonstrated that on-site provision is not feasible, the Council may accept the provision of serviced plots in a suitable, sustainable off-site location.

Marketing and Release:

- Serviced plots must be actively marketed for an agreed period (typically 12 months), including direct promotion to those on the Council's Custom and Self-Build Register.
- If the plots remain unsold after this period, they may be developed by the applicant for market housing, subject to evidence demonstrating a lack of interest.

Affordable Custom and Self-Build Housing

For major custom and self-build developments (10 or more plots, or 5 or more in the Cotswolds National Landscape), affordable self-build or custom-build plots will be required in accordance with Policy DM28.

Design and Integration

Custom and self-build homes should adhere to the West Oxfordshire Design Guide as well as the National Design Guide and Design Code to ensure high-quality design and sustainability.

On large developments, plots should be integrated into the site's masterplan and contribute to creating a balanced community.

All homes should be tenure blind and complement the character of the wider development.

Monitoring and Review

The requirement for serviced plots will be monitored through the Council's Annual Monitoring Report.

Policy DM3I - Community-Led Housing

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.50 The policy aims to support the development of small-scale, sustainable, community-driven housing projects that meet local needs, particularly for affordable housing. It encourages Town and Parish Councils to identify potential sites through Neighbourhood Plans and supports the creation of community-led exception sites to deliver new affordable homes, in particular social rented accommodation.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.51 The policy is needed to address the growing demand for affordable, sustainable housing that is driven by and for local communities in West Oxfordshire. As housing pressures increase, particularly in rural areas, there is a need for innovative and locally controlled solutions to meet housing needs.
- 8.5.52 Community-led housing allows local people to take an active role in shaping their own housing and ensuring that it reflects the needs and aspirations of the community, rather than being purely market-driven.
- 8.5.53 It offers a way to deliver affordable housing, including social rented homes, in areas where traditional development might not be viable or where existing rural exception sites are not appropriate.
- 8.5.54 By supporting these projects, the policy empowers communities to retain control over their future development, helps preserve local character, and ensures long-term affordability, particularly for those most in need. Such schemes can foster greater social cohesion, create local employment opportunities, and enhance the sustainability of rural communities.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.5.55 Our preferred approach is to support small-scale, community-led housing developments in suitable, sustainable locations that meet local housing needs. We encourage Town and Parish Councils to identify potential sites through Neighbourhood Plans and offer support for community-led exception sites where the majority of housing is affordable and a limited amount of market housing may be permissible to ensure viability.
- 8.5.56 These developments should be led by not-for-profit organisations, controlled democratically by the community, and deliver long-term benefits to local residents, with a particular focus on social rented housing.
- 8.5.57 The size of such sites should be proportionate to the existing settlement and designed to enhance the community's sustainability and resilience.
- 8.5.58 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM31 - Community-Led Housing

Overview

This policy provides positive support for the delivery of community-led housing schemes across West Oxfordshire to meet local housing needs, promote inclusive development, and empower communities.

Community-led housing developments will be supported in principle in appropriate, sustainable locations, subject to compliance with other relevant Local Plan policies.

Support for Community-Led Housing

Proposals for small-scale community-led housing schemes will be encouraged where they contribute to meeting identified local housing needs and demonstrate meaningful community involvement.

Town and Parish Councils are encouraged to identify suitable sites for community-led housing through their Neighbourhood Plans, reflecting local priorities and aspirations.

Community-Led Exception Sites

Community-led exception sites will be supported on land that would not otherwise be considered suitable for rural exception sites, provided the site is adjacent to an existing settlement and proportionate in scale (typically not exceeding 1 hectare or 5% of the settlement size).

The predominant form of housing on community-led exception sites must be affordable housing, with a strong emphasis on social rented homes.

A limited proportion of market housing (up to 20%) may be permitted where necessary to ensure the scheme's financial viability and deliverability.

Definition of Community-Led Development

For the purposes of this policy, community-led development is defined as:

- A project initiated and driven by a not-for-profit organisation for the primary purpose of meeting local housing needs rather than pursuing commercial gain.
- Developed by or in partnership with a legally constituted organisation, which may include a co-operative society, community benefit society, or company limited by guarantee.
- Democratically controlled by its members, with open membership available to beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries.
- Managed or stewarded by the community-led organisation, potentially in collaboration with a Registered Provider of Social Housing, to ensure long-term benefits for the community.
- Designed to provide clearly defined community benefits, with appropriate measures in place to secure these benefits over time, including in cases where the organisation ceases to operate.

This policy will be applied alongside other relevant policies of the Local Plan to ensure that community-led housing schemes contribute to creating well-balanced, sustainable communities across West Oxfordshire.

Policy DM32 – Meeting the Needs of Travelling Communities

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.59 The policy will help to ensure that the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople in West Oxfordshire are met through a fair and inclusive approach. By facilitating the provision of new pitches and plots through site expansions, intensifications, or new developments, the policy supports the delivery of suitable, sustainable housing options.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.60 The policy is essential for ensuring that the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople are adequately addressed in a way that is inclusive, fair, and sustainable. The accommodation needs of these communities are distinct, and without specific provision for their housing, they may face marginalisation and difficulties accessing essential services and facilities.
- 8.5.61 As part of a broader commitment to meeting diverse housing needs across the district, the policy ensures that travelling communities are integrated into the planning process, allowing for their accommodation to be planned and managed appropriately, rather than being left to ad hoc or unregulated solutions.
- 8.5.62 The most recent gypsy and traveller accommodation assessment for West Oxfordshire (2024) identifies a residual need for 28 pitches for gypsies and travellers in the period 2023/24 – 2041/42, including 2 pitches in the short-term to 2027/28 and 26 pitches in the longer-term. For Travelling Showpeople, the evidence suggests a total need for 8 plots, including 4 in the short term to 2027/28 and 4 in the longer term to 2041/42.
- 8.5.63 West Oxfordshire, like many other areas, must respond to the ongoing accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople. This includes providing suitable sites in locations that are accessible to healthcare, education, and other vital services while respecting environmental and transport considerations.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.5.64 Our preferred approach is to ensure that the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople are met in a fair, inclusive, and sustainable manner.
- 8.5.65 It aims to integrate suitable provisions for travelling communities into the planning process, particularly in larger strategic sites, to foster social inclusion and community cohesion.
- 8.5.66 Our approach encourages the development of new sites and the expansion of existing ones in locations that are accessible to essential services and facilities, while considering environmental and transport factors.
- 8.5.67 It also supports community-led proposals, empowering travelling communities to play a role in meeting their own housing needs.

8.5.68 Ultimately, it aims to provide a balanced, inclusive approach that respects the distinct needs of travelling communities while ensuring that any loss of existing sites is appropriately mitigated.

8.5.69 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM32 – Travelling Communities

Overview

This policy provides for the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople in West Oxfordshire, in accordance with the most recent accommodation assessment of need.

The Council will make provision for additional pitches and plots throughout the plan period, through a combination of extant planning permissions, the expansion or intensification of existing sites, and, where appropriate, new sites.

All development proposals for Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople accommodation will be assessed in line with other relevant policies of the Local Plan.

Strategic Site Provision

All strategic sites (i.e., those with 300 or more homes), including site allocations and windfall proposals, will be required to assess the potential for including accommodation for travelling communities as part of the overall development mix. Comprehensive evidence must be provided to demonstrate that appropriate consideration has been given to this requirement.

Strategic sites that do not include such provision will only be permitted if clear evidence shows that there is no identified need, or if a well-reasoned rationale demonstrates that the site is unsuitable for this purpose. In such cases, consideration may be given to meeting the need through an off-site proposal, provided it delivers equivalent benefit, meets the identified need in full, and is secured through appropriate mechanisms such as planning obligations. Proposals that actively incorporate accommodation for travelling communities will be viewed favourably in the overall planning balance.

Criteria for Site Selection

Proposals for new sites or the expansion and intensification of existing sites will be supported where they meet the following criteria:

- **Accessibility:** Proximity to settlements with a range of services and facilities, particularly healthcare and education. Sites should generally be located within 3 – 5km of the built area of Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements to ensure access to essential services and facilities.
- **Environmental Considerations:** The site must avoid areas at risk of flooding, harm to the historic and natural environment, and significant noise or disturbance.
- **Transport and Infrastructure:** The site should have safe access to the highway network, with the potential to provide necessary utilities (electricity, drinking water, sewage treatment, and waste disposal) without significant impact.
- **Living Conditions:** The site must offer a satisfactory living environment, including safe access to outdoor amenity space or provisions for such space on-site, especially child-friendly areas.
- **Community Integration:** Proposals must include arrangements for proper site management to promote community cohesion between settled and traveller communities.

- **Deliverability:** Sites must be capable of being developed efficiently, with clear demarcation of pitch or plot boundaries and appropriate landscaping in keeping with the local context.

Proposals will also need to demonstrate compliance with the general principles set out in Policy DMI.

Development in the Cotswolds National Landscape or Oxford Green Belt will not be supported unless there is an overriding need or exceptional justification.

Loss of Existing Sites

The loss of authorised pitches or plots for Gypsies, Travellers, or Travelling Showpeople will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that:

- The site is no longer suitable for its intended use, and suitable alternative provision is made available on a site of equal or better quality, with access to comparable services.
- There is no longer a need for such provision in the District. Any alternative provision must be secured through planning conditions and legal agreements, with replacement pitches made available before the original site is lost.

Community-Led Sites

The Council will support community-led proposals for Gypsy, Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople sites, where the development is led by, or with, a not-for-profit organisation, and serves the needs of the local travelling community. Such developments should be in line with other relevant plan policies.

Policy DM33 - Loss, Replacement and Sub-Division of Existing Dwellings

What will this policy do?

- 8.5.70 The overarching purpose of the policy is to protect West Oxfordshire's existing housing stock while supporting sustainable adaptations, including alterations, extensions, and subdivision to create new homes. It also seeks to prevent the unnecessary loss of dwellings to non-residential uses and encourages the reuse of long-term empty homes to meet local housing needs.

Why is it needed?

- 8.5.71 West Oxfordshire faces significant development constraints, including environmental protections, limited land availability, and the need to preserve the District's rural character. As a result, it is essential to make the most efficient use of the existing housing stock to meet local housing needs.
- 8.5.72 National policy emphasises that planning policies and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land. The proposed policy ensures that existing homes are retained and adapted where appropriate, providing opportunities for sustainable growth thereby helping to reduce the need for new development.

8.5.73 The protection of existing dwellings is also vital for maintaining the character and cohesion of local communities. Allowing for appropriate alterations, extensions, and subdivision enables households to adapt their homes to changing needs, supporting multi-generational living and offering smaller, more affordable homes. Additionally, the responsible re-use of long-term empty properties can help address housing shortages, reduce pressure on greenfield sites, and contribute to the vitality of towns and villages.

What is our preferred approach?

8.5.74 Our preferred approach is to adopt a generally positive stance towards development proposals affecting existing dwellings, recognising the importance of retaining and making efficient use of the existing housing stock.

8.5.75 It seeks to balance the need for housing growth with the preservation of community character by supporting sustainable adaptations, such as alterations, extensions, and subdivision, while preventing unnecessary loss of homes to non-residential uses.

8.5.76 Additionally, the policy promotes the re-use of long-term empty homes and allows for one-for-one replacement of dwellings where appropriate, ensuring a flexible yet protective approach to managing the District's housing needs.

8.5.77 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM33 - Loss, Replacement and Sub-Division of Existing Dwellings

The Council recognises the importance of alterations, extensions, and sub-division of existing dwellings as an important source of new homes. Such proposals will therefore be positively and favourably considered, subject to the key considerations and requirements outlined below.

Alterations, Extensions, and Sub-division of Existing Dwellings

- Proposals to alter, extend, or sub-divide existing dwellings will be supported where they:
- Respect the character, appearance, and architectural integrity of the existing building and the surrounding area.
- Do not cause unacceptable harm to the amenity of neighbouring properties, residents, or visitors.
- Provide satisfactory internal and external living conditions.
- Include appropriate levels of private outdoor space, parking provision, and refuse storage.
- In Tier 4 areas, favourable support will be given to the sub-division of larger dwellings, provided it can be robustly demonstrated that continued use as a single residential unit is not viable, and sub-division is the most effective way to secure its ongoing residential use.

Replacement of Existing Dwellings

Proposals for the 'one-for-one' replacement of existing permanent dwellings will be supported where they:

- Do not involve the loss of a building of historical, architectural, or local significance.
- Are of a scale and design that is proportionate to the original dwelling and in keeping with the character and appearance of the surrounding area.
- Avoid any harmful ecological impacts and provide appropriate mitigation where necessary.
- Do not result in a net loss of residential accommodation.

Loss of Existing Dwellings to Non-Residential Uses

The loss of existing dwellings will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where one or more of the following criteria are satisfied:

- The dwelling is located in a demonstrably unsuitable location for residential use.
- The property fails to provide satisfactory living accommodation that cannot reasonably be improved.
- The dwelling is not needed to meet identified local housing needs, as evidenced through an up-to-date local housing need assessment.
- The proposed use would deliver a demonstrable benefit to the local community, such as enhancing local services, facilities, or amenities. In such cases, a 'statement of community benefit' or equivalent will be required in support of any planning application to provide the necessary evidence.

Encouragement of Active Use of Empty Homes

Proposals that would bring long-term empty homes into active use or occupation will be strongly supported, particularly where they contribute to meeting identified housing needs and enhancing the vitality of the local area.

Supporting Information

Applicants will be required to provide clear evidence to justify any proposed loss, sub-division, or replacement of existing dwellings, including viability assessments, structural reports, and statements of community benefit where applicable.

The Council will apply this policy in conjunction with other relevant policies within the Local Plan to ensure that development supports sustainable growth and maintains a balanced housing stock across the District.

Vibrant, Resilient and Diverse Local Economy

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Policy DM34 - Provision and Protection of Land for Employment

What will this policy do?

- 8.6.1 The policy is intended to support the delivery of West Oxfordshire's economic vision to 2041 by enabling the provision of high-quality employment space across a range of sectors.
- 8.6.2 It seeks to ensure an adequate and flexible supply of employment land and premises to meet the needs of a modern, low-carbon economy and to support local, regional, and national economic priorities.

Why is it needed?

- 8.6.3 West Oxfordshire's economy is diverse and evolving, with growing demand for high-quality employment space across a range of sectors including advanced manufacturing, research and development, green technologies, and logistics.
- 8.6.4 In planning for sustainable growth to 2041, it is essential to ensure that the supply of employment land and premises keeps pace with economic needs, supports business innovation, and provides opportunities for job creation close to where people live.
- 8.6.5 Without a clear and proactive policy framework, there is a risk of losing valuable employment land to competing uses, missing opportunities to attract inward investment, and failing to respond to the changing nature of work in a modern, low-carbon economy.
- 8.6.6 Policy DM34 is needed to guide the location, type and quality of new employment development, while also protecting existing sites that contribute to the local economy. It provides a balanced approach, encouraging new employment proposals in sustainable locations, including on windfall sites within key settlements, while resisting the unjustified loss of employment land that could undermine long-term economic resilience.
- 8.6.7 The policy also aligns with wider national and regional economic strategies and ensures that land use planning in West Oxfordshire actively supports inclusive, innovation-led economic growth.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.6.8 Our preferred approach is to ensure a flexible, responsive and sustainable supply of employment land and premises across West Oxfordshire, to support a diverse and resilient local economy to 2041.
- 8.6.9 This includes promoting the delivery of high-quality new employment space in appropriate locations, with a focus on key growth sectors and modern working practices, while protecting valuable existing sites that continue to meet business needs.
- 8.6.10 We propose to prioritise development on allocated sites and previously developed land within and adjoining our most sustainable settlements, while also enabling appropriate expansion and intensification of existing sites.

8.6.11 Proposals for the loss of employment land will be carefully assessed to ensure they do not undermine the district's economic potential. This balanced approach will help maintain West Oxfordshire's competitiveness, support local jobs, and align economic growth with our broader ambitions for sustainable development and place-making.

8.6.12 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM34: Provision and Protection of Land for Employment

Proposals for employment development will be supported where they are demonstrably aligned with the Council's economic vision and objectives to 2041 and support other local, regional and national economic priorities.

Significant weight will be afforded to proposals which contribute to the advancement of key growth sectors including green technologies, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, knowledge-based industries, logistics, and digital innovation.

Allocated and Windfall Employment Sites

Allocated Sites

Employment development will be permitted on land identified for such uses in the Local Plan or a made Neighbourhood Plan, subject to site-specific policies and other relevant policy requirements of this Plan.

Windfall Sites in Tier 1 - 3 Settlements

Employment development will also be supported on windfall sites within the built-up areas of Tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements, provided that:

- a) The scale and nature of the development is appropriate to the location and the settlement hierarchy;
- b) The site is well connected to local infrastructure, services, and sustainable transport options;
- c) The proposal makes efficient use of land, with a preference for the re-use or redevelopment of previously developed (brownfield) land over the use of greenfield sites.

Rural and Tier 4 Locations

Proposals for employment development beyond the built areas of Tier 1–3 settlements or within Tier 4 locations will be considered under the provisions of Policy DM35 – Supporting the Rural Economy.

Expansion or Intensification of Existing Employment Sites

Proposals for the expansion, intensification, or upgrading of existing employment sites will be supported where they:

- a) Are compatible with the surrounding land uses and do not result in unacceptable harm to the amenity of nearby occupiers or the environment;
- b) Demonstrate that the scale and type of use can be accommodated by existing or improved infrastructure, particularly in terms of access, parking and servicing;
- c) Maximise the efficient use of land and buildings, including upward extension or infill where appropriate;

Loss of Employment Land and Premises

Proposals involving the partial or complete loss of employment land or premises to non-employment uses, whether through change of use or redevelopment, will only be permitted where:

- a) The site is no longer economically viable or fit for continued employment use and there is no reasonable prospect of its continued use for employment purposes, demonstrated through active and realistic marketing for at least 12 months;
- b) The loss would not harm the overall supply of employment land in that locality and would not undermine the Council's economic objectives;
- c) The proposal would provide significant wider public benefits, such as delivering affordable housing, community infrastructure or environmental enhancements, which outweigh the loss of employment space.

In considering such proposals, the Council will have regard to the nature, condition, and location of the site, market demand, and the strategic importance of the employment use in the local context.

Implementation and Monitoring

The Council will work with public and private sector partners to ensure a sufficient supply of high-quality employment land and premises is available across the district. The provision, take-up, and loss of employment land will be monitored annually and reviewed to ensure continued alignment with the district's economic vision and spatial priorities.

Policy DM35 - Supporting the Rural Economy

What will this policy do?

- 8.6.13 The purpose of this policy is to enable appropriate economic development in rural areas such as small-scale employment sites, farm diversification schemes, and rural enterprise, while ensuring that such growth respects the character, landscape and infrastructure of the countryside.

Why is it needed?

- 8.6.14 West Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural district where farming, land-based industries, and small businesses form an essential part of the local economy, community identity and landscape management. However, rural areas face growing challenges, including economic uncertainty in the agricultural sector, limited access to modern infrastructure, changing patterns of work, and a lack of affordable housing for rural workers.
- 8.6.15 Without a robust and forward-looking policy, there is a risk that opportunities for rural enterprise could be stifled, traditional industries weakened, and rural communities left behind in the broader economic development of the district.
- 8.6.16 The policy is needed to provide a clear, supportive framework for rural economic development that reflects both national guidance and local circumstances. It ensures that the Local Plan actively promotes economic resilience and diversification in the countryside while safeguarding the character, tranquillity, and environmental quality that make West Oxfordshire's rural areas distinctive.

8.6.17 By offering flexible support for farm diversification, home-based working, small-scale employment, and rural workers' dwellings, the policy responds to current and future rural needs in a planned, sustainable and sensitive way - contributing to the district's broader goals of inclusive growth and climate resilience.

What is our preferred approach?

8.6.18 Our preferred approach is to proactively support the sustainable growth and diversification of the rural economy in West Oxfordshire, recognising the vital role that rural businesses, farms, and land-based enterprises play in the district's social, economic and environmental fabric.

8.6.19 It aims to enable appropriate economic development in rural areas, particularly through the re-use of existing buildings and small-scale, well-designed new development, while ensuring that proposals are sensitive to local character, landscape and infrastructure capacity.

8.6.20 Our proposed approach seeks to strike a balance between enabling rural enterprise and protecting what makes our countryside special. It promotes flexibility in response to changing rural needs, encourages innovation and supports the provision of rural workers' dwellings where there is a proven need.

8.6.21 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM35 - Supporting the Rural Economy

Development proposals that support the sustainable growth, diversification and resilience of the rural economy in West Oxfordshire will be supported, provided they are appropriately located, sensitively designed, and consistent with the character and function of the countryside.

Employment Development in Rural Areas

Small-scale employment development, including new businesses, will be supported within or adjacent to the built area of Tier 1 – 3 settlements where:

- a) The scale and nature of the proposal is commensurate with the size and character of the settlement;
- b) It does not detract from residential amenity or landscape character;
- c) Safe and suitable access is available and traffic impacts are acceptable;
- d) Opportunities for sustainable transport access are maximised.

In Tier 4 locations, new or replacement buildings for employment use will be supported where:

- a) The proposal is required for a specific rural business need or land-based enterprise that cannot be reasonably accommodated in a more sustainable location;
- b) The scale, design and siting of the development is compatible with a countryside location;
- c) Existing buildings are re-used where feasible;
- d) The development is physically well-related to existing settlements where possible and uses previously developed land in preference to greenfield sites.

Farm Diversification and Land-Based Enterprises

Proposals for rural diversification will be supported where they:

- a) Form part of a viable farm or rural estate business and will contribute to its ongoing viability;
- b) Remain secondary to the primary agricultural function and do not prejudice future agricultural activity;
- c) Are compatible with rural character and landscape setting;
- d) Re-use existing buildings wherever practicable;
- e) Demonstrate no significant adverse impacts on local amenity, highways or public rights of way;
- f) Include a business plan demonstrating long-term viability, where new buildings are proposed.

Farm Shops and Local Produce Outlets

Farm shops and outlets selling local produce will be supported where they:

- a) Are part of a genuine farm diversification scheme;
- b) Primarily sell produce from the host farm or those in the immediate vicinity;
- c) Do not harm the viability and vitality of nearby town or village centres;
- d) Are of an appropriate scale and design for their setting;
- e) Are subject to planning conditions limiting the sale of non-local goods where necessary.

Sustainable Location and Accessibility

Recognising the dispersed nature of rural communities, proposals may be supported in locations not well served by public transport where:

- a) There is no unacceptable impact on the local road network;
- b) Development is designed to reduce car dependency and supports access by walking, cycling or community transport;
- c) Opportunities to enhance local sustainability (e.g. improving footpath or cycle links) are incorporated.

Rural Worker Dwellings

Where essential to the functioning of a rural business, proposals for rural workers' dwellings will be supported in accordance with Policy DM26 – Windfall Housing where it can be demonstrated that there is an essential operational or specific local need that cannot be met in any other way, including through the re-use of existing buildings.

In such cases, rural worker dwellings must be proportionate in scale, location, and occupancy to the demonstrated need and will remain tied to the enterprise via condition or legal agreement

Policy DM36 - Learning, Skills and Training Opportunities

What will this policy do?

- 8.6.22 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that growth and development in West Oxfordshire actively supports education, employment, and skills development to foster inclusive, resilient, and prosperous communities.
- 8.6.23 The policy sets out a proactive and collaborative approach, giving significant weight to the creation, expansion, or improvement of education facilities, particularly where linked to planned growth and requiring contributions or infrastructure provision where justified.

Why is it needed?

- 8.6.24 West Oxfordshire is home to a diverse range of residents, including young people, older workers, and those looking to reskill, who all require accessible and relevant learning pathways. As the area continues to experience development, particularly with larger housing and commercial projects, there is a growing need to provide sufficient education infrastructure, vocational training, and employment opportunities.
- 8.6.25 This policy is intended to address these needs by ensuring that new developments are linked to the creation or expansion of education facilities and that they integrate skills development into the planning process. By embedding opportunities for local apprenticeships, traineeships, and employment, the policy helps to ensure that growth is accompanied by social mobility and community resilience, particularly in rural areas where access to training and employment can be more limited.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.6.26 Our preferred approach is to ensure that new development in West Oxfordshire contributes to the creation of a skilled, inclusive workforce by integrating education, training, and employment opportunities.
- 8.6.27 It prioritises the provision of education infrastructure as part of major developments and encourages the submission of Community Employment Plans (CEPs) for larger developments. These plans are expected to promote apprenticeships, vocational training, local employment, and engagement with schools and colleges.
- 8.6.28 The policy aims to support local economic growth by fostering skills development, reducing barriers to employment, and creating opportunities for residents across all ages, ensuring that development delivers long-term social and economic benefits for the District.
- 8.6.29 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM36 - Learning, Skills and Training Opportunities

The Council will take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to supporting the development of learning, skills and training opportunities across West Oxfordshire, recognising their essential role in enabling inclusive growth, social mobility, and community resilience.

Education Provision

Where appropriate and supported by evidence, major developments will be expected to make provision for education infrastructure on-site or through appropriate financial contributions, secured via a Section 106 legal agreement or other appropriate mechanism.

Significant weight will be given in the decision-making process to the creation, expansion or alteration of educational facilities, particularly where these directly support planned or committed growth.

Learning, Skills and Employment Integration

Larger development proposals will be encouraged to embed opportunities for skills development, local employment, and training as part of a place-based approach to inclusive growth.

Major developments (defined as 10 or more dwellings or 1,000 sqm non-residential floorspace) will be encouraged to submit a Community Employment Plan (CEP).

Strategic-scale developments (300 or more dwellings or 4,000 sqm or more non-residential floorspace) will be required to submit a CEP as part of any planning application.

The scope and detail of each CEP should be proportionate to the scale of development but will typically include the following elements:

- 1) Provision of apprenticeships and vocational technical training pathways;
- 2) Delivery of employment and training initiatives across all age groups;
- 3) Traineeships for young people, particularly those not in employment, education, or training (NEET);
- 4) Use of best endeavours to maximise local labour, including pre-employment training programmes and opportunities for local businesses to participate in procurement processes;
- 5) Support for local and regional skills and training events;
- 6) Engagement initiatives with schools, colleges, and universities.
- 7) Promotion of inclusive economic development, including partnerships with social enterprises, volunteering opportunities, charitable contributions, and community outreach projects related to learning, skills, and employment.

Monitoring and Collaboration

The Council will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of CEPs and will work collaboratively with delivery partners to identify areas of need, track local outcomes, and continuously improve opportunities for education, employment, and skills development across the District.

Policy DM37 - Sustainable Tourism

What will this policy do?

- 8.6.30 The purpose of this policy is to guide the development of West Oxfordshire's tourism sector in a way that is sustainable, inclusive, and sensitive to the district's unique natural, cultural, and heritage assets.

Why is it needed?

- 8.6.31 West Oxfordshire is a district defined by its rich natural landscapes, historic market towns, vibrant villages, and internationally recognised assets such as the Cotswolds National Landscape and the River Thames. These features make the area a popular destination for visitors, but they also create pressures on infrastructure, local communities, and the environment—especially during peak seasons. At the same time, tourism is a key contributor to the local economy, particularly in rural areas where it supports jobs, farm diversification, and small businesses.
- 8.6.32 The policy is needed to manage this growth in a balanced and sustainable way—ensuring that tourism continues to bring economic and social benefits without undermining the very qualities that attract people to the area. By focusing development in appropriate locations, encouraging low-impact travel and design, and protecting the landscape and heritage of the district, the policy will help West Oxfordshire to grow its visitor economy while safeguarding its distinct character and environmental integrity for future generations.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.6.33 Our preferred approach is to have a policy that supports the growth of West Oxfordshire's tourism sector in a sustainable, inclusive, and place-sensitive way; one that strengthens the local economy while protecting the district's unique environmental, cultural, and heritage assets.
- 8.6.34 The policy prioritises development in well-connected, higher-tier settlements, encourages the reuse of land and buildings, and ensures that proposals in rural areas are appropriate in scale, justified by their setting, and deliver clear community or environmental benefits.
- 8.6.35 It also promotes high-quality design, low-carbon travel and operations, and alignment with climate and biodiversity goals, helping to ensure tourism contributes positively to both local communities and the wider economic and environmental landscape.
- 8.6.36 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM37 - Sustainable Tourism

West Oxfordshire's tourism sector will be supported and developed in a sustainable, inclusive, and place-sensitive manner, capitalising on the district's unique natural, cultural, and heritage assets for the benefit of visitors, residents, and the local economy.

Tourism and leisure proposals that positively contribute to the local economy and enhance the distinct character, landscape, and built environment of West Oxfordshire will be supported, particularly where they:

- 1) Promote year-round tourism to reduce seasonal pressures.
- 2) Encourage low-carbon and sustainable forms of travel and accommodation.
- 3) Engage local communities and support local supply chains.

Locational Strategy

The primary focus for new and expanded tourism and visitor proposals will be within the built-up area of Tier 1, 2, and 3 settlements, as defined in Core Policy 2 – Settlement Hierarchy.

Proposals in these locations must:

- 1) Be commensurate in scale with the character, infrastructure, and role of the settlement.
- 2) Accord with the general development principles set out in Policy DMI.
- 3) Prioritise the reuse of previously developed land and existing buildings wherever possible.
- 4) Ensure accessibility by sustainable modes of transport and contribute to reducing the need for car travel.

A 'town centre first' approach will apply to tourism and leisure uses such as hotels, conference facilities, and cultural venues, unless strong justification is provided for alternative locations based on functional or locational needs.

Outside the built-up area of Tier 1–3 settlements, including in Tier 4 settlements and the open countryside, new and expanded tourism and visitor proposals will be supported where they are appropriate to their rural context and meet one or more of the following criteria:

- 1) Are functionally linked to a specific rural, historic, or environmental attraction.
- 2) Are of a type and scale that cannot reasonably be accommodated within the built area of a Tier 1–3 settlement.
- 3) Support the diversification of an existing farm enterprise or rural estate.
- 4) Involve the sensitive re-use of an existing building that is appropriate in scale, design, and location.

Such proposals must demonstrate compatibility with their countryside setting, avoid adverse impacts on landscape character, biodiversity, and local amenity, and deliver clear economic or community benefits.

Environmental and Design Considerations

All tourism development proposals must:

- 1) Conserve and, where possible, enhance the natural environment, historic assets, and landscape character, particularly within designated areas such as the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB)
- 2) Incorporate high-quality design that reflects local character and vernacular.
- 3) Be designed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, minimise environmental impacts, and support zero or low-carbon operations and infrastructure.

Policy DM38 - Supporting Digital Infrastructure for Home and Co-Working

What will this policy do?

- 8.6.37 This policy is intended to promote the development of new and enhanced digital infrastructure to support the growing demand for remote working, home-based businesses, and co-working spaces in West Oxfordshire, ensuring equitable access to high-speed connectivity for residents and businesses.

Why is it needed?

- 8.6.38 West Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural district with a dispersed settlement pattern, which presents both challenges and opportunities when it comes to digital connectivity. Many rural communities in the district continue to experience slower broadband speeds and patchy mobile coverage, placing them at a disadvantage in an increasingly digital world.
- 8.6.39 The shift towards remote and flexible working, accelerated by recent global trends, has created a growing demand for high-quality digital connectivity in both homes and co-working environments. By promoting digital infrastructure as a core requirement for new development and supporting its enhancement in existing areas, the policy helps create resilient, future-ready communities.
- 8.6.40 This approach is vital for supporting local businesses, enabling entrepreneurship, and reducing the reliance on long-distance commuting, which aligns with the district's broader sustainability and carbon reduction goals. As West Oxfordshire continues to experience growth and development, embedding digital infrastructure at the planning stage will help to ensure developments are equipped for the long term, avoiding costly retrofitting.

What is our preferred approach?

- 8.6.41 Our preferred approach is one of proactive facilitation and integration, aimed at embedding advanced digital connectivity as a key element of both new and existing development. It reflects a strategic commitment to future-proofing communities by ensuring access to fast, reliable, and inclusive digital networks across the entire district, particularly prioritising underserved rural areas.
- 8.6.42 At its core, our approach seeks to promote a forward-thinking and place-based approach, encouraging digital infrastructure not just as an add-on, but as a fundamental requirement from the earliest stages of planning and design. This will help to ensure that all forms of development including residential, commercial, or mixed-use are equipped to meet evolving connectivity demands, thereby supporting flexible working patterns, economic innovation, and local enterprise.
- 8.6.43 The approach also emphasises environmental sensitivity and collaboration and proposals will also be expected to use existing infrastructure efficiently and incorporate sustainable practices, such as mast-sharing, to reduce unnecessary environmental disruption.
- 8.6.44 An initial draft policy is provided below.

DM38 - Supporting Digital Infrastructure for Home and Co-Working

The provision of new and upgraded digital infrastructure will be supported where it:

- a) Delivers fast, reliable, and future-proof connectivity, such as full-fibre broadband and 5G networks, to all parts of the district, including rural and underserved areas.
- b) Facilitates flexible and sustainable working practices, including remote working and the development of co-working hubs.
- c) Contributes to the district's economic resilience and competitiveness by supporting home-based businesses, start-ups, and innovation.

Integration with New Development

All new development proposals must:

- a) Be designed to incorporate the highest standard of digital connectivity, including full-fibre broadband infrastructure, from the outset.
- b) Ensure that new residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments provide sufficient capacity to meet current and future digital connectivity needs.
- c) Include digital connectivity as a key consideration in the master planning and design stages.

Enhancing Existing Areas

Proposals for the enhancement of digital infrastructure in existing residential and employment areas will be supported where they:

- a) Minimise visual and environmental impacts, including the sensitive siting and design of telecommunications equipment and supporting infrastructure.
- b) Improve connectivity for underserved or poorly connected areas, ensuring that rural communities are not left behind.

Supporting Co-Working Spaces

The development of co-working spaces will be supported where proposals:

- a) Are located within existing settlements, making use of accessible and sustainable transport options where available.
- b) Provide high-quality digital connectivity, alongside other facilities and services that support collaboration and productivity.
- c) Enhance opportunities for local residents to work closer to home, reducing the need for commuting and contributing to reduced carbon emissions.

Minimising Environmental Impacts

Proposals for digital infrastructure must:

- a) Be designed and sited to minimise visual intrusion, particularly in sensitive locations such as the Cotswolds National Landscape or Conservation Areas.
- b) Avoid harm to the natural environment, including protected habitats and species, and incorporate mitigation measures where necessary.
- c) Use shared infrastructure, such as mast-sharing or co-location, to reduce unnecessary proliferation of equipment.

Collaborative Delivery

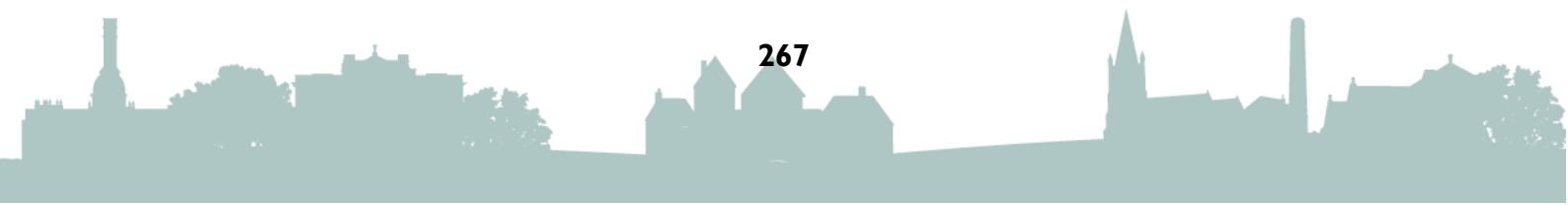
The Council will work in partnership with developers, telecommunications providers, and local communities to:

- a) Facilitate the roll-out of digital infrastructure in line with national and local priorities.
- b) Address barriers to delivery, such as access to funding or permissions for infrastructure deployment.
- c) Encourage the integration of digital connectivity improvements into wider regeneration or development projects.

Evidence and Compliance

All planning applications involving digital infrastructure or major new development must:

- a) Include a Digital Infrastructure Statement demonstrating how the proposal meets this policy's requirements and providing evidence of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including telecommunications providers and the local community, where applicable.





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