

West Oxfordshire District Council Council Plan 2020-2024



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL



Introduction

This document sets out the Council's key priorities, areas which require particular focus, and shows how the Council intends to achieve its ambitions for supporting local communities and the delivery of local services.

We are proud of the distinctive and special place that is West Oxfordshire and want to do everything we can to ensure it continues to be a great place to live, work and visit.

It is vital that the District maintains its special character as its economy flourishes and we work to support the future growth and opportunities that lie ahead. The Council Plan sets a direction that will help with this commitment and it sits at the centre of a range of related strategies, illustrated in the diagram opposite.

The Local Plan is a key document which supports the Council Plan and its adoption (September 2018) was a significant step as it provides a framework to help grow a successful and sustainable economy, building much needed new homes and securing infrastructure, whilst enhancing and conserving West Oxfordshire's environment. It details the strategic objectives for the district and the geographical locations prioritised for development.



In 2018, we invited the Local Government Association (LGA) to conduct a Corporate Peer Challenge - an external review of a Council's functioning and its ability to deliver on its plans. Its report outlines a range of positive factors in the Council's leadership and performance but it also provides some helpful pointers for improvement.

Our Peer Review found that the new Council Plan is an opportunity to:

- Align strategic objectives
- Make good use of community inputs – building on work in the Local Plan process
- Set out our economic ambitions as part of Oxfordshire's successful local economy
- Consider the scope to support

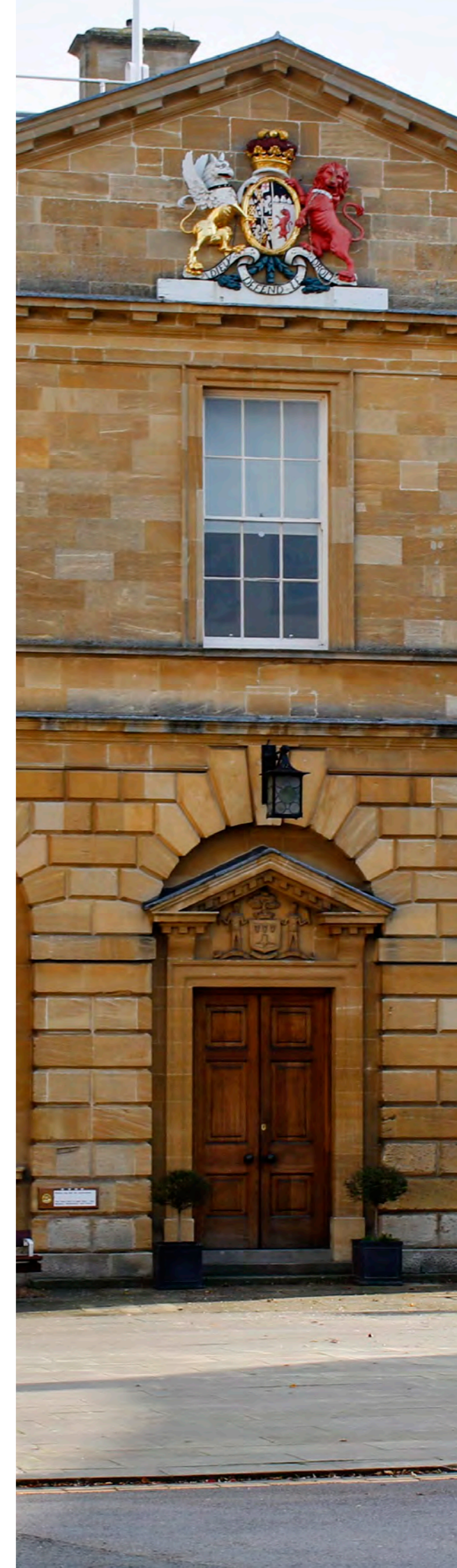
We are keen to take the initiative on this opportunity and this new Council Plan is a start, but to make sure we continue to develop this work, we need to work with our partner organisations and local communities, to secure their contributions to our action plan.

We will work in a variety of ways, leading by example, in support of our place-making role and advancing the future strength and sustainability of local communities. A key part of this will be our community leadership role working with partners and local areas.

Whilst taking a strategic lead to help create the future for West Oxfordshire, we plan to listen to and engage in joint work with our local communities. Our regular Town and Parish Forums are an example of this commitment.

We recognise that sometimes it will be a town or parish that takes a lead on a particular issue and the District Council and other partners will need to act in support of this initiative and enable improvements where possible. An example of this might be town partnership work that seeks to enhance the vitality of a market town.

Alongside our community leadership role, we will continue to ensure that we provide efficient value for money services. Our financial strategy is positioned to plan for and stay ahead of future challenges, such as changes to Government funding, service demand and other emerging risks. We are developing a Commissioning Strategy and Commercial Strategy which aim to ensure the Council retains its current healthy financial position whilst becoming less reliant upon volatile central government funding. Our planned Commissioning Strategy will cover everything we do and is focussed on meeting local needs and delivering excellent and efficient services in support of the Council Plan.





Vision

Our vision is to support West Oxfordshire to be fit for the future through:



1. Climate Action

Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.



2. Healthy Towns and Villages

Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone.



3. A Vibrant District Economy

Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy.



4. Strong Local Communities

Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities.



5. Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population

Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for the wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire.



6. Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance

Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.



Climate Action

Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.

We will foster our strategic approach to securing a low carbon future, taking steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change and deliver a net gain in biodiversity.

The District Council will develop and implement a Climate Change Strategy for West Oxfordshire with key actions to include:

- A Carbon Action Plan developed to identify and implement the action and projects required to become a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030.
- Work across functions and disciplines, with partners both in the Council and outside of the Council, to drive forward climate action across the District. This will address:
 1. meeting carbon reduction targets;
 2. improving air and water quality;
 3. a natural environment increasing in value for biodiversity and people;
 4. a landscape adapted to the pressures of flood risk; and
 5. the design and building of sustainable, low-carbon communities.
- Identifying initiatives towards preparing for and adapting to climate change, including enabling residents to adapt to extreme weather events, informed through engagement with local communities and partners.
- Piloting initiatives through the Oxfordshire Cotswolds Garden Village and considering roll out to other new areas of development.
- Increasing residential and commercial reuse and recycling and encouraging composting.

The District Council will also work to enhance our natural environment and boost biodiversity. Our overarching goal is to establish robust, resilient, well-functioning ecological networks which will require:

- Ongoing support for key local projects and initiatives, including the Lower Windrush Valley Project, the Wychwood Project, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).
- Managing the Council's land and assets for biodiversity, including the restoration of priority habitats, the recovery of priority species populations and opportunities for tree planting in suitable locations.
- Seeking to implement and maintain recommendations contained in the 'Windrush in Witney' Landscape Management Strategy.
- Continuing to support Oxfordshire's Conservation Target Areas and Local Wildlife Sites Project.
- Supporting the preparation and delivery of a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire (including the mapping of a Nature Recovery Network).
- Using the Council's planning powers to ensure that new developments deliver a net gain in biodiversity.

Measures of Success

The Council will report annually on the implementation of key actions, indicative measures of progress including:

- Achievement of targets within the Carbon Action Plan for a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030.
- Establishing a Climate Change Strategy in 2021 and use this to then chart improvement in measurable environmental and biodiversity enhancements.
- Production and delivery of a Green Infrastructure Strategy, incorporating the use of Building with Nature principles.
- The successful delivery of a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire.
- The implementation of a Biodiversity Net Gain mechanism in Development





Healthy Towns and Villages

We will pursue a place-based approach, working collaboratively with the health and voluntary sector and local communities, to enhance the health and wellbeing of West Oxfordshire's residents.

Key actions to include:

- Working with the health sector (especially the Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health) and other partners to establish a comprehensive network of healthcare facilities and services including creative approaches.
- Adopting a 'healthy place-shaping' approach in new and existing developments, ensuring that the necessary green and blue infrastructure, and the public realm, is provided to encourage healthy lifestyles and tackle physical inactivity; and that these link with established communities so that both new and existing residents benefit.
- Working closely and creatively with residents to understand needs and co-produce sustainable community-led solutions to tackle health and wellbeing challenges, for example tackling rural isolation and loneliness.
- Reviewing and delivering the Council's grants programme to ensure that it facilitates the enhancement of community facilities and the provision of activities which promote health and wellbeing.
- Working proactively and in partnership to ensure residents benefit from effective large scale county-wide or national health and wellbeing programmes.
- Producing an Asset Management Plan to maximise the community benefits of the Council's estate.
- Challenging the stigma around mental health and using creative interventions to help improve services especially for young people.
- Working with communities on healthy living initiatives in partnership with our leisure contractor, GLL.



Measures of Success

The Council will report annually on the implementation of key actions, indicative measures of progress include:

- Review of the position shown in updates to the health and wellbeing measures that inform the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Health and Wellbeing Strategy; and Director of Public Health's Annual Report.
- Submission of Health Impact Assessments with all strategic planning applications and implementation of the findings through the development scheme to which it relates.
- Production of a Leisure Strategy for West Oxfordshire, incorporating wide-ranging health, wellbeing and community benefits.





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A Vibrant District Economy

Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy.

Key actions to include:

- Working with business groups and partners including the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) to ensure there is a comprehensive range of support available for businesses.
- Creating an environment where businesses can grow through ample, high quality land/ sites for employment purposes, including key hubs at Carterton, Witney, Chipping Norton and the new Garden Village.
- Working with partners to secure new and upgraded infrastructure, including short and long-term enhancements to the A40 and the Cotswold railway line.
- Identifying and pursuing creative solutions for the provision of housing for key workers (in partnership with main employers in the district).
- Developing an approach to secure the future vitality and viability of our town centres that adapts to the specific challenges and opportunities faced in individual towns (key actions need to include the promotion of towns as destinations).
- Promoting the development of successful tourism enterprises in appropriate, sustainable locations in accordance with Local Plan Policy.
- The development of public realm improvement projects, electric vehicle charging points and policies to allow town centres to evolve to meet changing shopping and leisure habits.
- Where opportunities present, the Council can pursue investment opportunities that can stimulate development to deliver both an economic gain and a revenue return.



Measures of Success

The Council will report annually on the implementation of key actions, indicative measures of progress include:

- Economic indicators including activity rates; employment/ unemployment levels; tracking the position in business formation/ survival rates; and the quality of local jobs over time - work-place versus resident wage levels.
- New employment space and jobs created as a result of strategic site development and the reporting of agglomeration gains linked to Oxfordshire's developing Local Industrial Strategy.
- Business land / premises availability.
- Tourism related development schemes permitted - Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report.
- Town centre retail and business occupancy rates.





4 Strong Local Communities

Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities.

We will work with partners to strengthen the local communities across West Oxfordshire in order to enhance residents' quality of life.

Key actions to include:

- Creating new places that provide for a strong, vibrant, inclusive and connected community. The emphasis will be on 'place-making' rather than just buildings and spaces.
- Providing shared, accessible buildings, facilities and spaces that can help promote social integration and cohesion. In particular, initiatives such as parks with interactive features, community notice boards, and flexible spaces for local clubs and home workers that will help build a strong community.
- Directing our management of property assets through a new Asset Management Plan to achieve improvements in the joint use of sites through the One Public Estate programme.
- Working with local businesses in the villages and countryside in order to raise awareness of the opportunities for diversification (e.g. community hubs; pub walks and railway station opportunities).
- Working with partners to promote West Oxfordshire as a visitor destination whilst protecting its essential character.
- Helping build resilience in communities with more effective joint working and intelligence sharing.
- Amplifying the voice of residents especially those who have been heard less and take a strengths based approach to create inclusive communities.
- Developing our relationship with towns and parishes through regular Town and Parish Forums and encouraging local areas to engage with their residents to articulate and address local priorities.

Measures of Success

The Council will report annually on the implementation of key actions, indicative measures of progress include:

- Reviewing change in West Oxfordshire through aligning our Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report with the Council Plan so that we can assess changes in key economic, social and environmental indicators.
- A periodic look at how the District scores against comparative analyses shown in for example: the Thriving Places Index; and the Sustainable Growth Index.
- Increased engagement with towns and parishes to address priority community concerns.





5 Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population

Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for the wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire.

Key actions to include:

- Ensuring an adequate overall supply of housing to meet identified needs including those in need of affordable housing.
- Measures to increase the number of affordable housing units delivered annually, including the promotion of innovative housing solutions, so that we can reduce the housing waiting list.
- The promotion and delivery of self-build and custom build plots and opportunities to meet the needs of those on the Council's self-build register.
- Investigating a new West Oxfordshire living rent to ensure that affordable homes are truly affordable for local people and key workers.
- Using the planning system to ensure that new developments provide a range of housing products, including low-cost home ownership models, and the right size and flexibility of properties and property types to meet the current and future needs of our residents.
- Increasing the rate of delivery on larger strategic sites through proactive planning and the use of appropriate mechanisms (planning performance agreements and planning conditions), work with infrastructure providers, and sustainable methods of construction where appropriate.
- Exploring and developing new partnerships (for example the Blenheim approach) to deliver on: modern methods of construction to reduce carbon footprints, more landowner provided housing and genuine community-led housing opportunities.
- Identifying and enabling opportunities to meet the accommodation needs of travelling communities.

Measures of Success

The Council will report annually on the implementation of key actions, indicative measures of progress include:

- The Council's annual monitoring will include: five-year housing land supply measurement; total numbers of new dwellings; additional affordable housing units constructed; number of self and custom build opportunities delivered; number of new pitches and plots to meet the needs of the travelling community.
- Number of new homes built to accessible and adaptable standards in accordance with optional Part M4(2) of the Building Regulations.
- Our performance against meeting the housing needs of our communities: number of successful affordable housing allocations; number of temporary accommodation units available to the Council; number of empty homes within the District.





Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance

Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

We will continue to ensure that we provide efficient, value for money services whilst modernising Council services to ensure that they meet the evolving needs of customers and the area.

Key actions to include:

- Working with Publica, Ubico and other partners, to improve services by maximising accessibility, simplicity and quality.
- Engaging with service users to inform future service redesign.
- Introducing a new Council website that enables improved service access.
- Developing a property strategy/ asset management plan to outline how the Council can use its own property to deliver Council Plan objectives.
- Refreshing the Medium Term Financial Strategy to incorporate financial targets and setting a policy on the level of Council Tax which facilitates the Council's financial sustainability.
- Developing a Commissioning Strategy and Commercial Strategy which aim to ensure our financial position remains healthy whilst becoming less reliant upon volatile central government funding.
- Looking for opportunities through the One Public Estate programme to ensure that the public estate meets local needs and provides efficiencies.
- Using our investments, where appropriate opportunities present, to deliver on multiple objectives that deliver Council Plan priorities.
- Identifying, targeting and securing appropriate funding opportunities with external agencies.
- Referencing our Council Plan priorities as the context for assessing grant funding applications in support of community projects.

Measures of Success

The Council will report annually on the implementation of key actions, indicative measures of progress include:

- More residents transacting with the Council through self-service channels.
- Improvements in measures of customer satisfaction.
- An updated Medium Term Financial Strategy which includes the impact of changes to central government funding, incorporates realistic and achievable actions to mitigate reductions in government funding, and plans to achieve a balanced budget within the next five years.
- Council tax level within lowest five shire districts in the country.





**West Oxfordshire
District Council
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