

Full Council

Committee Meeting of Witney Town Council

Monday, 15th December, 2025 at 7.00 pm



To members of the Full Council Committee - A Bailey, J Doughty, O Collins, G Meadows, J Aitman, T Ashby, D Enright, R Smith, D Temple, A Mubin, R Crouch, G Doughty, D Edwards-Hughes, D Newcombe, J Robertshaw, S Simpson and J Treloar (and all other Town Councillors for information).

You are hereby summonsed to the above meeting to be held in the **Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney** for the transaction of the business stated in the agenda below.

Admission to Meetings

All Council meetings are open to the public and press unless otherwise stated.

Numbers of the public will be limited, with priority given to those who have registered to speak on an item on the agenda. Any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting should contact the Committee Clerk derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk in advance.

Recording of Meetings

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 the council's public meetings may be recorded, which includes filming, audio-recording as well as photography.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings, please let the Deputy Town Clerk or Committee Clerk know before the start of the meeting.

Agenda

1. Apologies for Absence

To consider apologies and reasons for absence.

Committee members who are unable to attend the meeting should notify the Committee Clerk derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk **prior to the meeting**, stating the reason for absence.

Standing Order 8(e)(v) permits the appointment of substitute Councillors to a Committee whose role is to replace ordinary Councillors at a meeting of a Committee if ordinary Councillors of the Committee have confirmed to the Proper Officer **before** the meeting that they are unable to attend.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests in any of the items under consideration at this meeting in accordance with the Town Council's code of conduct.

3. Public Participation

The meeting will adjourn for this item.

Members of the public may speak for a maximum of **five minutes** each during the period of public participation, in line with Standing Order 25. Matters raised shall relate to the following items on the agenda.

4. **Draft Strategic Plan 2025-2029** (Pages 3 - 40)

To receive and consider the report of the Town Clerk and the Draft Strategic Plan for 2025-2029.

5. **NALC - Local Council Award Scheme (Silver)** (Pages 41 - 50)

To receive and consider the report of the Deputy Town Clerk.

6. **Exclusion of Press & Public**

To consider and if appropriate, to pass the following resolution:

That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

7. **Pavilion Working Party** (Pages 51 - 55)

To receive the confidential report and recommendation from the Pavilion Working Party.



Town Clerk

FULL COUNCIL



Agenda Item: Adoption of the Corporate Strategic Plan 2025–2029

Meeting Date: Monday 15 December 2025

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO

The purpose of this report is to present Members with the Final Draft Corporate Strategic Plan 2025–2029 for consideration and formal adoption by Full Council. The Strategic Plan sets out the Council's corporate vision, priorities and delivery framework for the next five years and will act as the overarching strategic document guiding policy development, service delivery, financial planning and partnership working.

Members are also asked to note that a detailed Action Plan, setting out individual actions, projects, lead committees, timescales and performance measures, will be drafted once the Corporate Strategic Plan is adopted. The phasing and final delivery of elements within that Action Plan will be subject to the final outturn of the 2026/27 budget and the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Background

The Council's previous strategic direction has been guided by a range of adopted policy documents and service strategies, including the Open Spaces Strategy (2021), Communications Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy, Investment and Medium Term Financial Strategy along with annual business and service plans. While these documents have provided clear direction in specific service areas, Members identified the need for a refreshed, single Corporate Strategic Plan to draw these strands together into one coherent corporate framework.

Development of the 2025–2029 Corporate Strategic Plan

Work on a new Corporate Strategic Plan commenced following Member discussions during the 2024/25 municipal year. The intention was to establish a clear and forward-looking corporate framework that:

- Reflects the Council's long-term ambitions for the town;
- Aligns service delivery, asset management, investment and financial planning;
- Provides a clear strategic context for Committee decision-making; and
- Strengthens transparency and accountability to residents.

The Final Draft Plan has been shaped through Committee meetings, data from the annual residents' surveys, officer input, alignment with existing strategies and engagement with key

partners where appropriate. It has also been developed in the context of significant external change, including:

- Local government reorganisation proposals;
- Community governance review considerations;
- The emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041; and
- The Council's Climate and Biodiversity Emergency commitments.

Current Situation

1. Status of the Corporate Strategic Plan

Members are presented with the Final Draft Corporate Strategic Plan 2025–2029 for adoption. The Plan sets out:

- The Council's Vision and Mission;
- Seven Strategic Priority Themes - Pillars:
 1. A Forward-Looking Town Council
 2. An Engaged and Supported Community
 3. An Empowered Community
 4. A Respectful and Inclusive Community
 5. A Beautiful Witney
 6. A Vibrant Local Economy
 7. A Green and Resilient Town
- The Council's governance and committee framework for delivery;
- Strategic alignment with district-level planning and infrastructure policy;
- A clear commitment to annual review and post-election refresh in 2027.

The document is currently text-heavy by design to clearly establish the Council's strategic intent, governance framework and delivery principles. Once adopted, the Plan will undergo some design elements to make it more appealing to read and published as a public-facing document, incorporating photography, illustration and examples of Witney Town Council's public realm, services and community assets.

2. Action Plan

Once adopted a detailed Action Plan will be drawn up as a supporting appendix.

This will:

- Translate the Strategic Priorities into specific actions and projects;
- Identify the lead Committee(s) and officers for each action;
- Set indicative timescales and delivery phases;
- Identify performance measures and reporting arrangements.

The Action Plan will be a live working document, subject to annual review alongside the Strategic Plan itself. Some projects and actions will be contingent upon budget availability and the outcome of the 2026/27 budget process and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

3. Relationship to Budget & Financial Planning

The Strategic Plan provides the corporate framework within which the Council's annual budgets and medium-term financial planning will be developed. While many priorities reflect existing service commitments and approved capital projects, some elements of the Action Plan will be dependent upon:

- The final 2025/26 outturn;
- The financial position entering the 2026/27 budget cycle;
- External funding opportunities (grants, S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy);
- Future investment returns.

Adoption of the Strategic Plan does not itself authorise expenditure; rather, it establishes the policy and strategic basis against which future financial decisions will be tested.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

Equality: The Corporate Strategic Plan embeds a strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, with a dedicated strategic priority focused on building a respectful and inclusive community. The themes within the Plan support equality of access to services, facilities, decision-making and community life across all protected characteristics.

Biodiversity & Environment: The Strategic Plan reinforces the Council's Climate and Biodiversity Emergency commitments, with a clear objective to achieve net zero carbon in Council operations by 2028 and to embed environmental responsibility across all service areas, asset management and procurement.

Crime & Disorder: The Plan places strong emphasis on community engagement, youth provision, public realm quality and community facilities, all of which contribute positively to community safety, wellbeing and the reduction of antisocial behaviour.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

- Financial risk if ambitions exceed available resources;
- Delivery risk if actions are not effectively prioritised through the Action Plan;
- Reputational risk if expectations are not managed through realistic timescales;
- External risk arising from local government reorganisation and planning reform.

These risks will be managed through phased delivery, annual review, robust financial governance and ongoing Member oversight.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

- Investment in parks, play, culture and community assets;
- Support for voluntary and community sector partners;
- Promotion of health, wellbeing and inclusion;
- Environmental enhancement and climate action;
- Strengthening democratic engagement and representation.

Financial implications

The Corporate Strategic Plan itself does not create a direct financial commitment. Financial implications will arise through the delivery of individual projects and actions contained within the accompanying Action Plan. These will be considered through:

- The annual budget-setting process;
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- The capital programme;
- External funding bids and developer contributions.

Members are specifically asked to note that elements of the Action Plan will be subject to the final outturn of the 2026/27 budget and future financial capacity.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Consider and adopt the Final Draft Corporate Strategic Plan 2025–2029 as the Council’s primary corporate policy framework.
2. Note that the supporting Action Plan will be to be drafted once the Corporate Strategic Plan is adopted and will be subject to annual review and budget approval.
3. Agree that, following adoption, the Strategic Plan will undergo design and published in a public-facing illustrated format.
4. Agree that the Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually, with a comprehensive refresh following the May 2027 Town Council elections.

Witney Town Council

**** 2nd & FINAL DRAFT ****

Corporate Strategic Plan 2025-2029

CONTENTS PAGE

Mayor's Foreword – Putting People and Place First

Witney is a town with a proud heritage and a strong sense of community. As Mayor, I am continually inspired by the way residents support one another, celebrate local identity, and work together to make our town such a special place to live.

This Corporate Strategic Plan sets out a clear vision for the future of Witney. It reflects the values that matter most to our community — care for one another, pride in our environment, and confidence in the future. It shows how the Town Council will continue to support community life, protect what makes Witney unique, and respond positively to change.

As Civic Head of the Council, I am proud to support this Plan and the commitment it represents to making Witney an inclusive, welcoming and thriving town for all generations.

*Cllr Andy Bailey,
Mayor of Witney 2025–26*

Leader's Statement – Delivering Change through Partnership

Since 2019, Witney Town Council has experienced a period of significant change and development. Together with our partners, we have modernised services, invested in community facilities, strengthened our environmental ambitions and reinforced our commitment to local democracy.

This Strategic Plan for 2025–2029 is both a statement of continuity and a declaration of ambition. It reflects our determination to deliver on the priorities that matter most to residents — while also facing confidently into the challenges ahead, including climate resilience, housing pressures, infrastructure delivery and financial sustainability.

Delivering these ambitions will require strong partnership working with residents, businesses, community groups, West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and many others. This Plan sets the strategic direction for the Council and provides a clear framework for turning shared priorities into meaningful outcomes for Witney.

*Cllr Ruth Smith,
Leader of the Council & Chair of Policy, Governance & Finance Committee*

Town Clerk / Chief Executive's Introduction – From Strategy to Delivery

This Corporate Strategic Plan provides the overarching framework that will guide decision-making, resource allocation and performance management across the Council from 2025 to 2029. It brings together the Council's strategic priorities into one coherent corporate direction, supported by a range of detailed strategies, management plans and service business plans.

This Plan does not replace those supporting strategies; rather, it sets the corporate context within which they operate, ensuring that all activity across the organisation is aligned to shared objectives and is focused on delivering real outcomes for the community.

The Council's officers are committed to translating this Strategy into effective delivery — whether through greener operations, well-maintained public spaces, strong financial stewardship, or improved community engagement. This is a living document, and we will continue to review and refine it to ensure it remains responsive to the needs of Witney and the people we serve.

*Sharon Groth,
Town Clerk, CEO & Head of Paid Service*

Executive Summary

Witney Town Council's Corporate Strategic Plan 2025–2029 sets out the Council's vision, priorities and delivery framework for the next five years. It provides a clear, practical and forward-looking roadmap for how the Council will serve the community, manage resources responsibly and respond to the opportunities and challenges facing the town.

The Plan is built around strong governance, community engagement, environmental responsibility and partnership working. It aligns the Council's existing strategies — including Open Spaces, Communications, Community Engagement and Investment — into one coordinated corporate framework.

The Council's key priorities for 2025–2029 include:

- Enhancing parks, play areas and community spaces
- Strengthening communication and resident engagement
- Tackling climate change and improving environmental resilience
- Securing fair developer contributions
- Preparing for local government reorganisation and boundary changes

Delivery will be led through the Council's committee structure, supported by clear performance monitoring, strong financial governance and partnership working with public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

This Plan will be reviewed annually and refreshed following the May 2027 Town Council elections to ensure it remains responsive, relevant and aligned with community needs.

Introduction

Witney Town Council has been making positive progress in recent years and is committed to making Witney a great place to live, work and visit. This Corporate Strategic Plan sets out our shared vision for the town's future and the priorities we will pursue over the period 2025 to 2029, built on strong community values, environmental responsibility and sound governance.

This Strategic Plan provides the Council's overarching framework for delivering positive and lasting change in Witney. It brings together the Council's ambitions into a single, coherent and actionable vision, informed by our adopted strategies and plans, including the Open Spaces Strategy, the Lake & Country Park Management Plan, the Communications Strategy and Community Engagement Strategy, the Investment Strategy, service business plans, and the views of our residents and stakeholders.

This document establishes the Strategic Plan as the Council's primary corporate framework, bringing together and providing direction for all supporting strategies. Where there is any inconsistency between this Strategic Plan and a supporting strategy, this Strategic Plan will take precedence, and the relevant document will be reviewed and updated accordingly.

At its heart, this plan reflects a commitment to putting people first, protecting and enhancing our natural environment, and ensuring that Witney continues to thrive economically, socially and environmentally for future generations.

Building on the 2021 Open Spaces Strategy and subsequent grounds maintenance reviews, the Council reaffirms its commitment to modernising sporting provision, enhancing biodiversity and ensuring fair and inclusive access to leisure and recreation spaces. While many actions from the previous plan have been delivered, a number of priorities remain active, including improvements to basketball facilities, the reintegration of cricket at The Leys, and continued investment in depot infrastructure.

Witney is a vibrant and historic town with a strong sense of community and civic pride. As elected representatives, we are committed to building on this heritage and securing a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future for all who live, work in and visit the town. This Strategic Plan will guide the Council through to the next Town Council elections in May 2027 and beyond.

Working together with officers, community partners, local organisations and residents, the Council will deliver the actions and investments set out in this plan to help Witney flourish socially, environmentally and economically.

Vision Statement *"To improve the quality of life for present and future generations in Witney by promoting sustainability, inclusivity, and community wellbeing."*

Mission Statement *"To make Witney a great place to live, work and visit."*

The Council's strategic plan is built upon six fundamental pillars that guide our decision-making and resource allocation

1. **A forward-looking Town Council** - We represent residents and businesses on key strategic issues facing the town, ensuring their voices are heard at all levels.
2. **An engaged and supported community** - We actively seek engagement with all residents and work with others to enable them to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.
3. **An empowered community** - We encourage collaboration for the overall success of Witney through the facilitation and championing of change programmes and initiatives.
4. **A respectful community** - We promote inclusivity and treat all people fairly and with respect regardless of race, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability.
5. **A beautiful Witney** - We continue to improve and develop our open spaces while protecting and enhancing our natural environment.
6. **A vibrant local economy** - We promote local businesses and develop locally controlled economies that prioritise Witney while preserving our unique identity and heritage.

Woven through all six pillars is a golden thread – our unwavering commitment to sustainability and resilience – which forms the foundation of a seventh, overarching objective:

7. **A Green and Resilient Town** – *Rooted in the Council's 2019 Climate Emergency declaration.* We are committed to embedding environmental responsibility into everything we do. We aim to achieve carbon neutrality for the Council by 2028, while supporting wider efforts to create a thriving, low-carbon future for Witney.

About Witney Town Council

Witney Town Council serves as the first tier of local government for the town, representing the interests, wellbeing, and aspirations of the community. The Council works to enhance the quality of life for residents by delivering a wide range of local services, managing community assets, and shaping the long-term development of the town.

Our Structure

The Council operates through a combination of democratically elected representatives and a professional officer team who work together to provide effective, accountable governance.

- **17 elected, unpaid councillors**, serving a term until May 2027, who set the strategic direction and act as community champions.
- **Over 40 dedicated Officers**, employees and staff members who support the delivery of services, maintain facilities, and ensure the day-to-day running of the Council.
- **Six specialist committees**, each focused on a distinct area of Council responsibility, enabling informed decision-making and targeted oversight.

Committee Structure

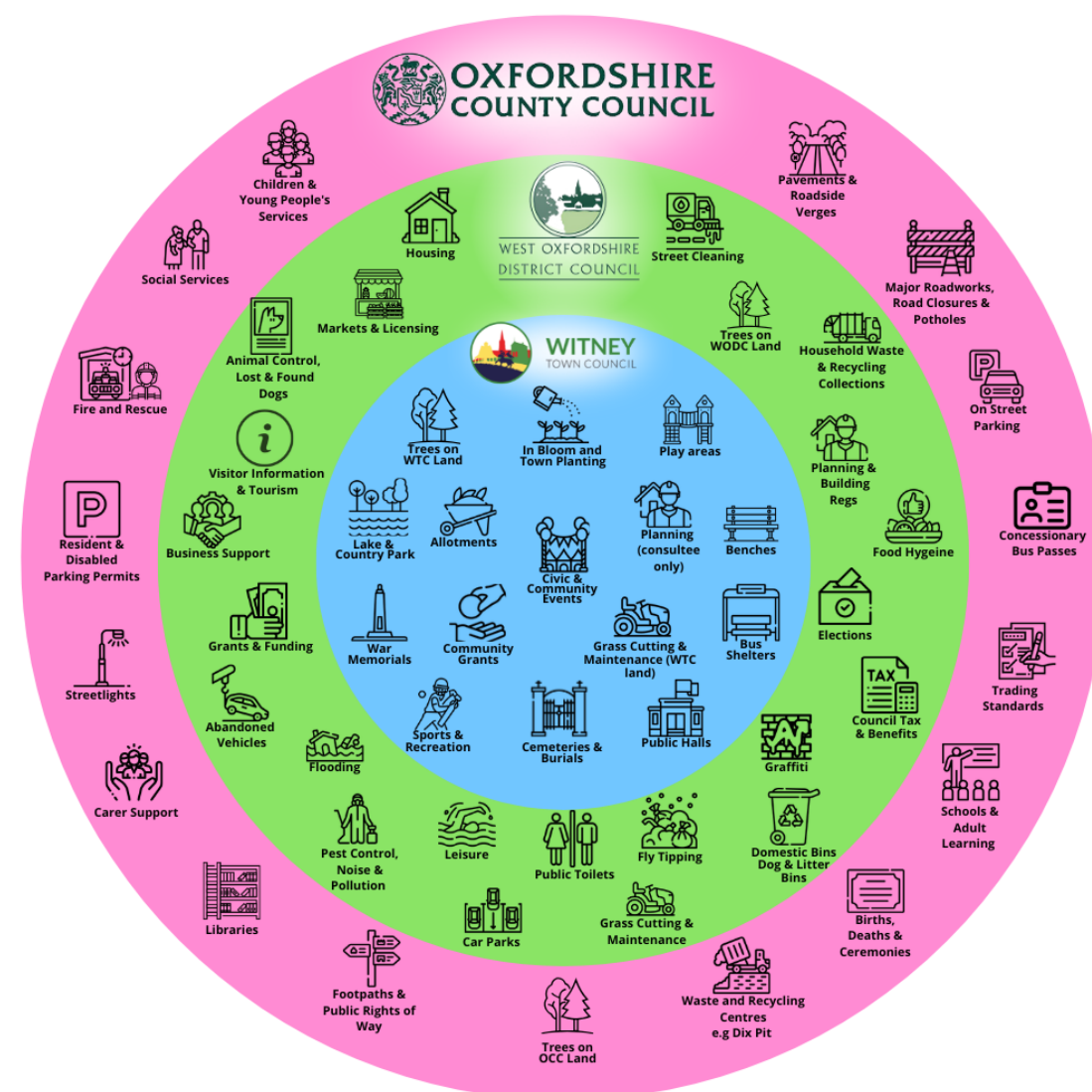
The committee system underpins the Council's governance approach, ensuring that decisions are considered thoroughly and transparently across all service areas:

- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee** – Oversees corporate governance, financial management, and strategic policy development.
- **Stronger Communities Committee** – Focuses on community engagement, events, partnerships, and initiatives that strengthen civic life.
- **Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee** – Manages the Council's operational assets including cemeteries, allotments, and public halls.
- **Parks & Recreation Committee** – Responsible for parks, play areas, sports facilities, and wider recreation provision.
- **Climate & Biodiversity Committee** – Leads the Council's environmental agenda, promoting sustainability, carbon reduction, and biodiversity enhancement.
- **Planning & Development Committee** – Reviews planning applications and contributes to the shaping of Witney's built environment and future growth.

Our Services

Witney Town Council delivers a wide range of local services that support the day-to-day life of the community and complement those provided by West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

Responsibility for services in Witney is shared across all three tiers of local government. The diagram below illustrates how services are distributed between Town, District and County Councils, helping to clarify roles and avoid duplication.



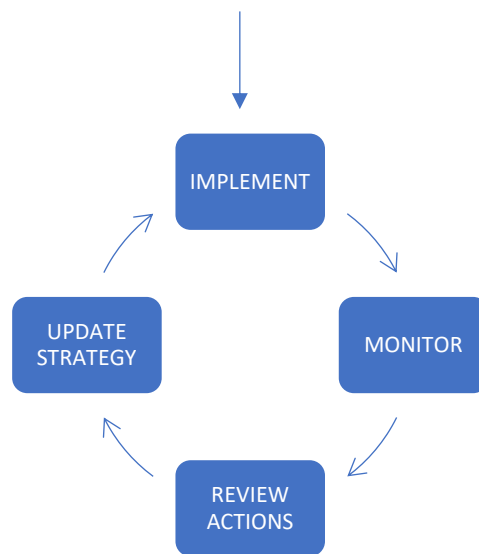
Through its direct service delivery, local leadership and community support role, Witney Town Council plays an important part in maintaining public spaces, supporting community life and contributing to the town's environmental and civic wellbeing.

Strategic Plan Lifecycle

This Strategic Plan is a living document and will evolve as circumstances, priorities, and insights change. It is therefore essential that the Council reviews and updates it on a regular basis. The Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains current and effective.

As a guide the lifecycle is as follows:

PREPARE & ADOPT THE STRATEGIC PLAN



Our Journey: Achievements 2019-2024

A Period of Transformation

The year 2019 marked a significant shift in Witney Town Council's political landscape. After more than 20 years of Conservative control, the town saw a change in administration as a majority of Labour and Co-operative councillors were elected to serve the community. This period represented an important phase of development in the town's governance and set the direction for many of the Council's recent achievements. In 2024, a Central Ward by-election resulted in the Council moving to no overall political control, with 8 Labour, 8 Conservative and 1 Green councillor, creating a new context for collaborative leadership and shared responsibility.

Rising to the COVID-19 Challenge

The period between 2020 and 2022 was defined by unprecedented global challenges. The Council demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamentally changing how local government operated to ensure continuity of service for residents.

Digital Innovation in Governance

We swiftly embraced technology to maintain democratic processes, transitioning committee and council meetings to digital platforms. This innovation ensured essential business could continue, maintaining transparency and accountability during uncertain times. During this period, both councillors and officers adapted to new ways of working through online meetings, which became essential when public gatherings were not possible. However, following the pandemic, legislation required the return to in-person meetings for formal council business, limiting the continued use of remote platforms.

Despite these restrictions, we have continued to use online meetings effectively for working parties and advisory committees, demonstrating our commitment to modern, accessible governance. The council stands ready to implement hybrid meetings when legislation permits, recognising the value they bring in supporting a more diverse and inclusive democracy. Hybrid options would help remove barriers for councillors with caring responsibilities or other commitments, enabling fuller participation and robust decision-making for all.

Community Support During Crisis

During the height of the pandemic, we faced unprecedented challenges that required the temporary closure of many public facilities. Despite these necessary measures, the Council remained fully committed to supporting the

wellbeing and safety of our residents. This period served to underscore the crucial role that our public spaces play in fostering community resilience and connection.

The Corn Exchange was swiftly repurposed to serve as a temporary food bank and community larder, helping to coordinate and distribute essential supplies to those most in need. Staff and volunteers came together to ensure that vulnerable individuals and families had continued access to food and basic necessities during a time of great uncertainty and isolation.

Meanwhile, the town's recreation grounds took on renewed importance as safe, accessible spaces for outdoor activity. These green areas offered residents an opportunity for daily exercise and a vital escape from the pressures of home confinement. Whether it was a brief walk, a jog, or simply a moment of fresh air, these spaces provided comfort, relief, and a much-needed sense of normality—albeit in a limited form.

Through these efforts, we were reminded that even in the most trying of circumstances, community spirit, adaptability, and the thoughtful use of shared spaces can make a profound difference in people's lives.

Strategic Developments and Achievements

The Corn Exchange Enhancement

A key milestone in recent years has been the continued development of the Corn Exchange. Phases 1 and 2 of the enhancement programme led to the creation of a café/bar facility, significantly enriching the venue's overall offering. While Café Bar 1863 is an integral part of the Corn Exchange—supporting user groups, community meetings, and local activities—it also operates as a standalone attraction. It has quickly gained popularity, particularly among older residents, becoming a valued social hub.

The Council successfully secured Section 106 developer contributions over several years, in addition to a community grant from West Oxfordshire District Council. These funds enabled the procurement of cinema-quality tiered seating, a new screen, and an upgraded sound system. These improvements have helped establish the Corn Exchange as a premier community venue, which now proudly serves as a warm space in winter and a cool retreat in summer, with refreshments readily available.

The venue now hosts an increasingly diverse and dynamic programme of events. These include Council-run activities, as well as performances and productions by local amateur dramatics groups, cover bands, and touring theatre companies.

Strategic Open Spaces Revolution

One of our most significant operational transformations was the comprehensive review and strategic overhaul of how we manage our open spaces. After more than 25 years of outsourced grounds maintenance, we made the bold and strategic decision to bring this service in-house—not as a cost-saving measure, but for improved service delivery, enable more responsive local control, and embed a proactive ethos into our green space management.

This change was underpinned by the development of the Witney Open Spaces Strategy (2021)—a landmark document shaped by wide community and stakeholder consultation. The strategy laid out a progressive vision for open spaces that are inclusive, biodiverse, well-used, and resilient to the challenges of climate change. Through it, we committed to delivering open spaces that improve public health, foster community pride, and enrich lives.

Key achievements during this period included:

- The introduction of modern, environmentally conscious grounds maintenance practices, including moves toward electric vehicles and sustainable equipment.
- The launch of biodiversity initiatives, including rewilding pilots and a new arboriculture management framework.
- Enhanced collaboration with sports clubs and community groups to improve local facilities and encourage broader participation.
- Clearer accountability and visibility in service provision—addressing longstanding confusion over which authority was responsible for specific sites.
- The creation of strategic masterplans for key parks, laying the foundation for future investment aligned with community needs.

Bringing grounds maintenance in-house was more than an operational shift—it marked the start of a cultural change in how we value, manage, and develop our open spaces. It demonstrated our commitment to placing quality, sustainability, and community voice at the heart of our public realm.

Revamping Urban Play: The New Leys Wheeled Sports Park

A standout achievement in our infrastructure investment journey was the successful transformation of the Leys Wheeled Sports Park, completed in March 2024. This £158,000 regeneration project—made possible through a £57,975 grant from FCC Communities Foundation and a £100,000 commitment from Witney Town Council—represents a landmark investment in inclusive, youth-focused public realm infrastructure.

This was far more than a refurbishment. Informed by extensive input from young residents and wheeled sports enthusiasts, the new park incorporates dynamic ramps, ledges, and rails designed for skateboards, scooters, BMX bikes, and rollerblades. Its design consciously retained and repurposed existing features, reflecting a commitment to sustainability and community-led development.

The skate park has already become a vibrant hub for recreation and social connection. The space is designed to be open, safe, and engaging for beginners and seasoned riders alike. Importantly, this project embodies our ethos of designing with the community, not just for it. It is a direct result of listening to young people, involving them meaningfully in the process, and delivering a facility that speaks to their aspirations. The opening event drew wide attention, with BBC Radio Oxford and local media celebrating it as a milestone in youth engagement and placemaking.

Reimagining Family-Friendly Recreation: The Leys Splash Park Refurbishment

A key infrastructure success in the final phase of this strategic cycle was the delivery of the Leys Splash Park refurbishment, completed on time and on budget ahead of the May 2025 half-term holidays. Originally scheduled for summer 2025, this fast-tracked project was the result of strategic financial planning—funded through earmarked annual reserves set aside since the original installation. The foresight to budget incrementally allowed the Council to deliver the upgrade without requiring additional taxpayer funding.

The refurbishment introduced vibrant new features including interactive jets, above-ground play structures, and a wheelchair-accessible “jump on me” start button, making the park more inclusive than ever before. A new rainbow-themed, slip-resistant floor and a behind-the-scenes overhaul of the plant room and water systems ensured the facility will remain reliable and fun-filled for years to come. Up to six jets operate simultaneously, encouraging dynamic, safe, and engaging water play.

Community consultation played a central role in the redesign. This project not only safeguards a treasured community asset but elevates it to a new standard of accessibility, sustainability, and joy—reflecting our long-term commitment to investing in play, inclusion, and quality of life for all residents.

Our Strategic Priorities 2025-2029

1. A Forward-Looking Town Council

As Witney grows, so too does the need for proactive leadership and future-focused planning. The Town Council plays a vital role in ensuring that development benefits the whole community, is underpinned by good governance, which reflects local needs and priorities.

By engaging with residents and working with partners, we ensure that decisions are data-driven, transparent, and accountable. We will continue to invest in our internal capacity, digital systems, and training to meet the challenges of tomorrow while staying rooted in the values of local democracy.

Strategic Intent: Represent residents and businesses on key strategic issues facing the town, including planning for future growth and boundary considerations.

Key Actions:

- Use data and resident feedback to inform policy decisions
- Advocate for Witney on key planning, transport, and housing issues
- Engage proactively in boundary review discussions to ensure adequate infrastructure and services for new developments
- Secure appropriate s106 agreements and council tax arrangements for major housing developments
- Invest in digital systems to streamline operations and enhance transparency
- Provide comprehensive training and development for councillors and staff
- Plan strategically for local government reorganisation implications

Committee Delivery:

- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Strategic planning, governance framework oversight, financial management, boundary review engagement
- **Planning & Development Committee:** Planning application responses, development consultation, traffic and highways matters, s106 negotiations
- **All Committees:** Data-driven decision making and transparency enhancement

2. An Engaged and Supported Community

Witney is a town known for its strong sense of community and local pride. People here care about their neighbours, support local causes, and value the inclusive spirit that defines our town. Witney Town Council works to nurture this community strength by listening to residents, supporting essential services, and providing opportunities for people of all ages to get involved and feel represented.

Through open communication, partnerships, and targeted support, we aim to ensure that all residents – from young people to older generations – feel connected, valued, and able to lead fulfilling lives.

Strategic Intent: Actively seek engagement with all residents and work with others to enable them to lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.

Key Actions:

- Enhance resident engagement through digital platforms, forums, and consultations
- Support social inclusion, volunteering, and wellbeing initiatives
- Work collaboratively to improve public health and tackle isolation
- Establish and support groups like Youth Council and Community Voices
- Ensure all voices in the community are heard and represented
- Conduct annual resident satisfaction surveys

Committee Delivery:

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Community engagement frameworks, youth services, Witney Youth Council operations, annual resident satisfaction surveys
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Strategic oversight of community engagement and resource allocation

Current Commitments:

- Community transport funding (£26,000)
- Detached youth work (£18,000)
- Children & youth grants (£20,000)
- Home Start support (£11,000)

3. An Empowered Community

Witney thrives when its people are empowered to lead, organise, and shape their community. The Council sees itself not just as a provider of services, but as a facilitator of local action and collaboration.

We aim to champion and support those making a difference in our town – from schools and voluntary groups to social enterprises and neighbourhood projects. Through grants, partnerships, and active citizenship programmes, we help strengthen community networks and build local capacity to deliver shared goals.

Strategic Intent: Encourage collaboration for the overall success of the town through the facilitation and championing of change programmes and initiatives.

Key Actions:

- Facilitate partnerships between groups, schools, charities, and businesses
- Offer grants and support to community-led initiatives aligned with our goals
- Encourage active citizenship and town pride
- Build capacity for shared service delivery where appropriate
- Support voluntary groups and community interest companies

Committee Delivery:

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Partnership facilitation, grant administration, community organisation support
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Grant policy oversight and strategic partnership development

4. A Respectful and Inclusive Community

Witney is a diverse town where every individual deserves to feel valued, heard, and treated with fairness. Inclusivity is not just a principle but a practice that guides how the Council works and makes decisions.

We are committed to ensuring that all communities in Witney – regardless of background, age, identity, or ability – have access to opportunities, spaces, and support. By embedding equality and respect across everything we do, we aim to create a town where everyone belongs and thrives.

Strategic Intent: Promote inclusivity and always treat people fairly and with respect regardless of race or racial group, sex or sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or disability.

Key Actions:

- Ensure all residents feel represented and valued
- Promote equality, diversity, and inclusion through policy and practice
- Recognise and celebrate the cultural and social diversity of Witney
- Embed fairness and respect across all council operations
- Advocate for underrepresented groups in line with equality legislation

Committee Delivery:

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Inclusivity advocacy, community representation, equality promotion
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Policy development with equality considerations
- **All Committees:** Embed inclusivity criteria in all decision-making processes

5. A Beautiful Witney

Witney's identity is deeply rooted in its natural beauty, historic charm, and well-maintained green spaces. Our parks, cemeteries, and open areas are not only places for recreation but also central to residents' wellbeing and the town's overall appeal.

Witney Town Council takes pride in managing and enhancing these spaces, ensuring they are accessible, welcoming, and environmentally sustainable. We are committed to delivering high standards in grounds maintenance, promoting biodiversity, and investing in public infrastructure that enhances the town's appearance and liveability.

Strategic Intent: To further improve and develop our open spaces, sporting and leisure facilities, and town infrastructure—protecting and enhancing our natural environment while enriching community wellbeing.

Our Vision for Open Spaces

“Our parks, open spaces and public realm will be high quality, well used and provide a modern, sustainable and diverse resource which will improve the health and enrich the lives of the communities at the heart of them; be of significant ecological value; and help to mitigate the effects of climate change”

WTC Open Spaces Strategy, 2021

Open spaces are vital to the identity, wellbeing, and resilience of Witney. From the beauty of the Lake and Country Park to the energy of The Leys and the tranquillity of our cemeteries, these spaces define the character of our town. They are not just places for recreation—they are the green infrastructure that connects us, improves our health, supports biodiversity, and strengthens community pride.

Building on the **2021 Open Spaces Strategy**, the plan is to carry forward the clear framework for delivery across the five key themes.

Major Ongoing and Planned Projects (2025–2029)

- **The Leys Masterplan** – £250,000 investment (opening Spring 2026)
- **Splash Park Renewal** – completed May 2025
- **West Witney Clubhouse Refurbishment** – in progress
- **New Works Depot** – operational by 2026

- **Play Equipment Renewal Programme** – ongoing annual investment £75,000
 - **Rewilding and Habitat Enhancement Zones** – expanding annually from 2025
-

Our Commitment

We will continue to deliver high-quality, accessible, and environmentally responsible open spaces that serve all residents. These investments are not merely aesthetic—they are essential to public health, social cohesion, and environmental resilience.

Through strong partnerships, clear planning, and community collaboration, we will create a **Beautiful Witney** where every green space, playground, and park reflects our shared pride and ambition for a sustainable future.

Key Actions:

- Improve and maintain parks, allotments, and cemeteries to exceptional standards
- Promote biodiversity, tree planting, and community orchard gardens
- Develop sustainable landscaping practices with ecological value
- Keep the town clean, accessible, and safe
- Enhance infrastructure and public realm

Committee Delivery:

- **Parks & Recreation Committee:** Maintenance of all recreation grounds, parks, and open spaces; play equipment management; sports facilities oversight
- **Climate & Biodiversity Committee:** Environmental spaces management, tree stock oversight, biodiversity enhancement
- **Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee:** Cemetery and allotment management
- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Town centre infrastructure including street furniture, bus shelters, and public realm

6. A Vibrant Local Economy

Witney is a thriving market town with a rich heritage, a strong sense of community, and a growing local economy. It offers a diverse range of shops, services, and green spaces that serve both residents and visitors alike.

Witney Town Council plays an active role in supporting this vibrancy by organising regular events and community activities, maintaining key town assets such as street furniture and floral displays, and helping to create a welcoming environment through supporting and influencing public realm improvements.

We also support our local retail and hospitality sectors and advocate for better connectivity through pedestrian improvements, public transport support by ensuring the continuation of the town bus service through a commitment to ongoing grant funding, and advocates for free accessible town centre parking.

Our strategy not only commits to maintaining these services, but also to enhancing them – ensuring that Witney remains a well-connected, attractive, and inclusive place to live, work, and visit.

Strategic Intent: Promote local businesses and develop locally controlled economies that put Witney first whilst preserving and enhancing our history and unique identity.

Key Actions:

- Support local businesses and markets through strategic partnership working
- Promote town centre vibrancy through events and cultural activities
- Partner with economic development stakeholders to attract investment and skills
- Celebrate Witney's heritage while encouraging innovation
- Collaborate with Chamber of Commerce to improve visitor experience and Welcome to Witney initiatives
- Explore coach parking and drop-off solutions to support tourism

Committee Delivery:

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Partnership working with businesses, Chamber of Commerce collaboration, visitor experience enhancement, as well as a strong programme of cultural events town wide – helping to facility third party events on Council owned land, and by holding Council-led events, encouraging residents and visitors into the town to support local businesses.

- **Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee:** Continue to develop and enhance the Corn Exchange as community hub and arts centre
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Strategic oversight and resource allocation

7. A Green and Resilient Town

Witney is shaped by its natural surroundings – from the River Windrush that flows through its heart to the green spaces, meadows, and historic landscapes that define its identity. Protecting and enhancing our environment is central to building a sustainable, resilient town for future generations. It also strengthens community wellbeing and supports the services and spaces that make Witney a vibrant place to live.

In recent years, the Town Council has taken important steps to reduce its own carbon footprint and support biodiversity, and we encourage others in our community to do the same. This strategy builds on that foundation, reaffirming our commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2028 and responding to the climate and ecological emergencies through meaningful, locally driven action.

Strategic Intent: Commit to reducing the Council's carbon footprint and implementing actions from the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency declarations.

Key Actions:

- Achieve net zero carbon emissions in Council operations by 2028
- Implement comprehensive Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
- Work with schools and community groups on environmental education
- Encourage active travel and sustainable energy use
- Manage environmental spaces for biodiversity enhancement

Committee Delivery:

- **Climate & Biodiversity Committee:** Climate strategy development, carbon reduction implementation, environmental spaces management, community engagement on climate issues
- **All Committees:** Integrate climate and biodiversity considerations into all operations

2025/26 Priorities:

- Develop comprehensive Climate Change Strategy by October 2025
- Establish baseline carbon emissions and reduction targets
- Implement Carbon Literacy training for staff and councillors
- Review procurement policy for low-carbon suppliers
- Expand wildflower areas and habitat enhancement projects

Alignment with the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041

Witney Town Council recognises the importance of aligning its strategic priorities with the long-term vision of West Oxfordshire District Council's *Local Plan 2041 (WOLP)*. The Local Plan will shape development across the district and is a critical framework for how Witney continues to thrive as the district's principal service and administrative centre.

In response to the open consultation on the draft Local Plan objectives, Witney Town Council has made detailed submissions at every opportunity to ensure that the WOLP reflects local priorities and community needs. This submission is closely aligned with the Council's own strategic objectives "pillars", particularly in relation to sustainability, infrastructure, inclusivity, and community well-being.

Key Priorities Submitted by Witney Town Council:

The Council has identified the following priorities, many of which cross-cut our strategic objectives:

- **Sustainable Community Infrastructure** (aligns with Pillars 2, 3, 5, and 7):
 - Designation of land for burial space, sports pitches with associated changing facilities, and further allotment provision.
 - Allocation of land for community halls and scout camping spaces.
 - Expansion of healthcare provision and youth centres.
 - Improved public realm with more public art and support for public houses.
- **Transport, Access & Connectivity** (aligns with Pillars 1, 4, and 7):
 - Enhanced car, electric vehicle, cycle, and coach/campervan parking infrastructure.
 - Improved pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.
 - Stronger transport links between Witney and Carterton, including a segregated cycle lane and slip-road access to the A40.
 - Integration of sustainable transport with future rail connectivity.
- **Housing & Social Sustainability** (aligns with Pillars 2 and 6):
 - A robust housing mix including affordable homes, social rent for key workers, and independent living options for older residents.
 - Support for community-led housing and Council involvement in building social housing stock.
- **Green Infrastructure & Energy** (aligns directly with Pillar 7 – the Golden Thread: A Green and Resilient Town):
 - Designated land for community horticulture and food-growing projects.
 - Local generation of green energy with mechanisms for community benefit or payback.
 - Stronger flood resilience and water quality management policies, including specific recognition of the flood risk in Witney.

Flooding and Resilience

Following recent significant flood events in Eastfield Road, Hailey Road, West End Industrial Estate, and Bridge Street, Witney Town Council has requested that the *Local Plan 2041* explicitly address flood risk in Witney. The Council is also taking steps to strengthen local flood resilience, including:

- Advocating for inclusion of flood mitigation in future development policy.
- Improving emergency response coordination, including identifying a single emergency contact point and better use of Council halls as places of refuge.
- Enhancing collaboration with local groups such as the Witney Flood Group.
- Supporting training for Council staff in sandbag deployment and flood response.
- Committing to proactive monitoring of post-flood clean-up, such as sandbag collection.
- Desilting project initiated in October 2025, and will monitor with the help of the Witney Flood Group and residents of Riverside Gardens for future involvement.

Allotment Provision

Witney Town Council remains committed to protecting and enhancing allotment provision. While current provision exceeds some benchmarks, unmet demand in certain areas signals the need for proactive action. The Council has resolved to:

- Continue prioritising land allocation through large developments.
- Actively monitor and explore emerging land opportunities.
- Work closely with the Witney Allotment Association to ensure effective management, clearer data, and availability of plots.

This alignment with the Local Plan demonstrates the Town Council's commitment to shaping a **resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking Witney**, with infrastructure and development that truly serve the needs of the town's residents now and into the future.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge introduced by West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) to help fund the infrastructure required to support growth across the district. It applies to most new developments based on the additional floor space created and is intended to contribute towards essential infrastructure such as highways, education, open spaces, community and cultural facilities, and other services that support sustainable development.

WODC formally adopted its CIL Charging Schedule on 1 October 2025, with the charging regime taking effect from 31 January 2026. Any CIL-liable planning permissions granted on or after this date will be subject to the levy. The adopted charging rates vary by type and scale of development. Major strategic sites identified in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 — including Salt Cross Garden Village, West Eynsham, North Witney, East Witney, and East Chipping Norton — are exempt from CIL, with infrastructure instead secured through alternative planning mechanisms.

Under national regulations, a proportion of CIL receipts must be passed directly to the relevant town or parish council. As Witney Town Council does not currently have an adopted Neighbourhood Plan, it will receive 15% of CIL receipts arising within the parish boundary, capped at £100 per existing dwelling (plus indexation). Should a Neighbourhood Plan be adopted in future, this proportion would increase to 25% with no cap, providing significantly greater scope for local investment.

CIL receipts passed to Witney Town Council must be used to support the development of the area. This includes funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of local infrastructure, or other projects that help to address the impacts of development. This could include, for example:

- Enhancing local community and leisure facilities;
- Improving pedestrian and cycle connectivity between new developments and the town centre;
- Investing in parks, play areas and open spaces;
- Supporting public realm improvements and sustainable transport initiatives; and
- Enhancing climate resilience and green infrastructure projects.

Alongside CIL, the Council continues to engage with Section 106 (S106) planning obligations and Section 278 highway agreements, which are used to secure site-specific mitigation and infrastructure directly related to individual developments. These mechanisms remain particularly important where development takes place outside the parish boundary but generates significant impacts on services and infrastructure within Witney.

Recognising the importance of a clear, consistent and strategic approach to developer funding, the Planning & Development Committee resolved to establish a formal Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) for the Town Council. This will take the form of a rolling, prioritised list of projects that may be suitable for funding through CIL, S106 and S278 agreements. The IFS will:

- Align directly with the Council's Strategic Plan and the emerging West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan 2041;
- Support timely and evidence-based engagement with WODC and developers;
- Improve transparency and consistency in the way developer contributions are sought; and
- Be reviewed annually and formally approved by Full Council.

The introduction of CIL, alongside the establishment of an Infrastructure Funding Statement, provides Witney Town Council with a stronger framework to plan proactively for growth. It will enable the Council to better secure investment in infrastructure that supports community wellbeing, environmental sustainability and the long-term resilience of the town, while ensuring that the impacts of development are managed in a fair and coordinated way.

Alignment with Existing Strategies and Plans

This Strategic Plan is supported by a number of adopted strategies and management plans that guide specific areas of the Council's work. These documents provide the detailed policy frameworks and delivery mechanisms that underpin the Council's corporate priorities for the period 2025–2029.

Key supporting strategies include:

- **Open Spaces Strategy** – guiding the management and enhancement of parks, recreation grounds, allotments, open spaces, biodiversity, public realm and outdoor amenities.
- **Communications Strategy** – setting the framework for how the Council communicates with residents, promotes transparency and engages with different audiences.
- **Community Engagement Strategy** – shaping how the Council involves residents and community groups in decision-making, consultation and service planning.
- **Medium Term Financial Strategy and Investment Strategy** – directing how the Council manages its finances, investments, reserves and approach to risk, liquidity and ethical/sustainability considerations when investing public funds.

Key supporting management plans include:

- Corn Exchange, Café/Bar 1863 and Burwell Hall Business Plan
- Lake & Country Park Management Plan
- Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

Community Engagement & Communications

Strategic Objective: To foster an informed, involved and empowered community through clear, accessible and engaging communication.

Overview

Witney Town Council recognises that effective communication is central to strong local democracy, high-quality service delivery and building public trust. Building on the adopted Communications Strategy and Community Engagement Strategy, this Strategic Plan embeds a long-term commitment to consistent, open and modern communication, both internally and externally.

Strategic Aims (2025–2029)

1. Strengthen Public Engagement and Transparency
 - Deliver timely updates on Council decisions, projects and services
 - Promote meaningful opportunities for community input through consultations, surveys and events
2. Grow Digital Reach and Accessibility
 - Expand the use of video, graphics and visual storytelling
 - Ensure website content is accessible, relevant and optimised for mobile use
3. Support Inclusive Communication
 - Provide information in accessible formats and use plain English
 - Maintain a mix of digital and printed communications
 - Re-establish the “Voice of Witney” contact list for regular two-way dialogue
4. Enhance Internal Communications
 - Introduce and embed a modern staff intranet or alternative form of communication accessible to all
 - Improve cross-department information-sharing and collaboration
5. Manage Reputation and Media Relations
 - Maintain positive working relationships with local media
 - Monitor and respond to public sentiment and misinformation

Delivery Actions

- Grow social media audiences, particularly through Instagram and video
- Trial live-streaming of meetings and consultations
- Produce two printed newsletters per year

- Develop content explaining the roles of Town, District and County Councils
- Monitor engagement through analytics, surveys and feedback

Outcome Measures

- 90% resident satisfaction with Council communications
- 20% increase in digital engagement by 2029
- 95% of media coverage rated positive or neutral
- New intranet operational by 2026
- "Voice of Witney" network active and contributing annually

Strategic Delivery Framework

Committee-Led Implementation

Each strategic objective will be delivered through the Council's committee structure, ensuring strong governance, accountability and specialist oversight. Committees will work collaboratively while maintaining their specialist focus areas, with regular cross-committee coordination to ensure holistic delivery.

Resource Allocation and Performance Monitoring

Progress will be tracked through:

- Regular committee updates and strategic reviews
- Annual strategic plan assessment aligned with budget cycles
- Public reporting via website, newsletters, and social media
- Performance indicators aligned to strategic objectives
- Regular councillor and officer accountability measures
- Annual resident satisfaction surveys to measure impact

Partnership Working

We will work collaboratively with:

- West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council
- Local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce
- Community groups and voluntary organisations
- Schools and educational institutions
- Environmental and heritage organisations
- Residents and community stakeholders
- Developers and planning authorities on boundary and infrastructure matters

Strategic Context:

Local Government Reorganisation and Community Governance Review

The Changing Landscape

Local government is undergoing significant reform following the Government's devolution proposals published in December 2024. These plans are expected to replace the current two-tier system with new unitary authorities, fundamentally reshaping local governance across England.

Implications for Witney

This transformation presents both challenges and opportunities, for Witney Town Council including:

Opportunities:

- Improved integration of services
- Enhanced strategic capacity
- Greater accountability
- Potential for devolved powers and funding

Our Strategic Response:

- Proactive engagement in reorganisation discussions
- Asset mapping and financial modelling for potential transfers
- Stakeholder engagement to support enhanced service delivery
- Ensuring that "finance follows function" in any asset transfer

Community Governance Review Considerations

With significant housing growth planned on the outskirts of the current Witney boundary, the Council will continue to explore the case for a community governance review. As the service centre for surrounding areas, new development places increasing pressure on Witney's services and infrastructure.

Key Priorities:

- Participation in development discussions
- Securing appropriate Section 106 contributions
- Advocate for boundary adjustments that reflect service delivery realities
- Capture council tax revenue from developments that rely on Witney's services and facilities

Strategic Approach:

- Early engagement with planning authorities and developers
- Infrastructure impact assessments
- Community consultation
- Financial modelling of service delivery implications

Looking Forward: Our Commitment to Witney

This Strategic Plan sets out Witney Town Council's commitment to leading the town with ambition, responsibility and care through to 2029 and beyond. Through focused committee leadership, strong partnerships and meaningful community engagement, the Council will deliver improvements that support a thriving, inclusive and resilient town for future generations.

Success will be measured not only by projects delivered, but by the long-term benefits to quality of life, environmental sustainability, community wellbeing and economic vitality. Together, we will create a town that is vibrant, inclusive, beautiful, and sustainable—a place we can all be proud to call home.

Key Milestones

- **2025:** Climate Change Strategy development and major infrastructure delivery
- **2026:** Mid-term strategic review and community consultation
- **2027:** Town Council elections and Strategic Plan refresh
- **2028:** Net zero carbon emissions target for Council operations
- **2029:** Full Strategic Plan review and next phase development

Our Promise

Witney Town Council commits to:

- Transparent and accountable governance
- Genuine community engagement
- Sustainable management of public resources
- Continuous service improvement
- Advocacy for Witney's interests at all levels of government

This Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually, with a comprehensive refresh following the May 2027 elections.

Document Status: DRAFT Corporate Strategic Plan 2025-2029 v.1

Approved: [Date]

Next Review: Annual review cycle with major review May 2027

Contact: Witney Town Council, Town Hall, Market Square, Witney OX28 6AD

FULL COUNCIL



Agenda Item: NALC Local Council Award Scheme – Silver Award

Meeting Date: Monday, 8 December 2025

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to seek the Council's confirmation that it has the necessary documents and policies in place to apply for silver accreditation under the NALC Local Council Award Scheme.

Background

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Award Scheme provides councils with the opportunity to demonstrate that they meet sector-defined standards, while also establishing a framework for ongoing improvement in governance, transparency, and best practice.

The scheme comprises three award levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. At its meeting held on 9 December 2024 (Minute No. 709), the Council resolved that it met the criteria required to apply for the Bronze Award, which was subsequently achieved in March 2025.

As discussed at that time, the Council's aspiration was to progress to the Silver Award within 12 months, with the aim of achieving Gold by the end of the current Council term in 2027. The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) describes the Silver Award as follows:

"The attainment of the Silver Award signifies that a council excels in governance, community engagement, and continuous improvement. Distinguished by going beyond mere legal obligations, quality councils emerge as leaders within their communities, consistently seeking opportunities to enhance and develop further.

To secure the Silver Award, a council not only fulfils all the requisites of the Bronze Award but also provides additional evidence showcasing exemplary governance, effective community engagement, and notable council improvement initiatives. Given the elevated level of this accomplishment, a council bestowed with the Silver Award may also qualify to exercise the general power of competence, underscoring its commitment to exceptional standards and proactive leadership."

Current Situation

To achieve the NALC Local Council Awards Scheme Silver Award status, the Council must first meet the criteria for both bronze and silver awards and resolve that it has the following and publishes them online:

Bronze Award

Governance	
Standing Orders	The current Standing Orders were adopted on 23 June 2025. The next review is due in May 2026. They are viewable here WTC Standing Orders
Financial Regulations	The current Financial Regulations were adopted on 9 June 2025. The next review is due in June 2026. They are viewable here WTC Financial Regulations
Code of Conduct	The Council re-adopted the Oxfordshire Code of Conduct on 7 May 2025. The next review is due in May 2026. They are viewable here WTC Councillor Code of Conduct
Publication Scheme	The Council reviewed and adopted an updated Publication Scheme on 24 November 2025. The next review is due in November 2027. It is published on the Town Council's website here WTC Publication Scheme
Last Annual Return	Is published on the Town Council's website here WTC - Annual Return 2024-25
Transparent Information about Council Payments	In line with the transparency code, payments over £500 can be viewed on the Council's website here WTC Payments over £500 2025-26
A calendar of meetings, including the annual meeting of electors	Is published on the Town Hall noticeboard and its website here WTC Meetings Calendar
Minutes for at least one year of full council, committee and sub-committee meetings	Are viewable on the Council's website under each Committee here WTC Agendas & Minutes
Current Agendas	Are viewable on the Council's website under each Committee as above WTC Agendas & Minutes
The budget and precept information for the current or next financial year	Is viewable on the Council's website here WTC - Budget & Precept Explained 2025-26 WTC Annual Budget Summary 2025-26
Complaints procedure	The Council reviewed and adopted an updated Complaints Policy on 24 November 2025. The next review is due in . It is viewable on the Council's website here WTC Complaints Policy
Accessibility Statement	Is viewable on the Council's website here WTC Accessibility Statement
Privacy Notice	The Council reviewed and adopted an updated Publication Scheme on 24 November 2025. The next review is due It is published on the Council's website here WTC Privacy Notice
Biodiversity Policy	The Council reviewed and adopted an updated Biodiversity Policy on 25 November 2024. The next review is due in May 2026. It is viewable on the Council's website here WTC Biodiversity Policy

Community	
Council Contact Details	Councillors' names and email addresses are published on the Council's website here WTC Councillors
Councillor Information including registers of interests, in line with the Transparency Code	Register of Interests are listed on the Town Council's website under each Councillor here Link to Councillors Register of Interests (JA)
Its Action Plan for the year ahead	The Council has action plans for each committee for the forthcoming year, agreed in May/June 2025 which can be seen here [Links to Committee Action Plan Pages]
Evidence of consulting the community	Council consultations occur throughout the year. The most popular is the Annual residents' survey which is delivered to every household in February. The Council's consultation page can be seen here WTC Consultations
Publication of Council activities	The Council publishes its activities on a number of social media, online and hard copy outlets. For the purpose of this award, the quarterly newsletter can be viewed from the home page of the Council's website here Witney Town Council – Official Site of Witney Town Council
Evidence of participating in town and county planning	The Council convenes a meeting of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee every three weeks. Details of planning responses can be seen in the minutes published here WTC Planning Minutes 18 November 2025
Evidence of publicising elections and vacancies on the council	The Council publicises all town council elections on noticeboards, social media and website. Notice of the most recent by-election can be seen here: WTC - Notice of Town Council Election (Web)

The Council must also resolve that it has:

Governance	
A Risk Management Policy	An updated Risk Management Policy was adopted by the Council on 31 March 2025 (minute no. F189 refers) and can be seen here WTC Risk Management Policy
A Register of Assets	A register of Assets is maintained by the Council's RFO.
Up-to-date insurance policies that mitigate the risk to public money	The Town Council's current insurance policy runs from 1 April 2025 -31 March 2026. It includes Employers Liability, Public Liability, Motor Vehicles, Money, All Risks and Fidelity Guarantee up to the sum of £5m and more. This is attached as Appendix A .
Community	
Evidence of considering the impact of functions and decisions on crime and disorder in the local area	All Council reports include a Crime and Disorder Impact Assessment which highlights and asks Councillors to consider crime and disorder. This report below, highlights the impact but also contains a section on engaging with the local police around anti-social behaviour at The Leys Recreation Ground WTC Community Engagement Report - July 2025 The Council also invites a member of the neighbourhood policing team to attend all Full Council meetings (and Annual Town Meeting) to discuss any relevant issues or concerns. This can be seen in the minutes here (minute no. 570)

	Full Council Minutes- Monday 6th October 2025
Development	
Disciplinary & Grievance procedures	The Council has disciplinary and grievance procedures set out in the Staff Handbook issued to all staff. This is attached as Appendix B
A policy for training and development of staff and councillors	New staff undergo induction training and specific in-house training for their roles. Statutory training modules are in place regarding health & safety and data protection. The Council retains an annual budget for staff training. This is attached as Appendix C New Councillors receive an induction pack, and the Council retains an annual budget for Councillor training and has a designated policy which was adopted on 21 July 2025. This is due for review in 2027 and can be viewed here WTC Councillor Training Policy
A record of all training undertaken by staff and councillors in the last year	All staff training is requested and logged on an internal HR platform, Breathe HR. It is confirmed via 1:1 meetings and/or via submission of a Training Needs Analysis Form. Councillor training can be viewed on the Council's website under each individual Councillor. This can be seen here Link to Councillor Training (GD)
A Clerk who has achieved 12 CPD points in the last year	The Town Clerk has achieved 12 CPD points in the last year.
Signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge, including adopting a Dignity at Work Policy	The Town Council signed up the Civility & Respect Pledge in October 2022 https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/civility-and-respect/

Silver Award

To achieve the silver award, the Council must resolve that it has the following items and publishes them online:

Governance	
A Health & Safety Policy	Witney Town Council reviewed and re-adopted a Health & Safety Policy on 29 July 2024. The next review is due in 2026. The Council's H&S Policy Statement is published on the Town Council's website here WTC Health & Safety Policy The Council's full H&S Policy is attached as Appendix D
An Equality Policy	Witney Town Council has an adopted Equality Policy which applies internally and outside the Council. This can be seen here [Link to follow] All Council reports contain an Equality Impact Assessment which can be seen in the report here FC Report 17th February 2025
A Co-option Policy	Witney Town Council reviewed and re-adopted a Co-option Policy on 25 November 2024. The next review is due in November 2026. It is published on the Town Council's website here WTC Co-option Policy
Community	
A Community Engagement Policy involving two-way communication between Council and community	The Council reviewed and adopted a Community Engagement Strategy on 9 June 2025. The next review is due in June 2027. It is published on the Town Council's website here WTC Community Engagement Policy

Councillor Profiles	<p>Councillors have a basic profile on the Council's website which includes their name, photo, contact details, membership of committees, ward and election details, attendance, declarations and links to training, declared hospitality (if any) and register of interests.</p> <p>WTC Councillor Profile (JA)</p>
A Grant Awarding Policy	<p>The Council reviewed and re-adopted its grant aid policy on 25 March 2024. The next review is due in March 2026. It is published on the Town Council's website here</p> <p>WTC Grant Aid Policy</p>
Evidence showing how electors contribute to the Annual Town Meeting	<p>The Town Council advertises the Annual Town Meeting every year in the February newsletter which goes to every household. This can be seen for 2025 here</p> <p>WTC Spring Newsletter 2025 - Join the Conversation</p> <p>In addition, the Council places an advertisement in the local paper 2 weeks before and promotes the meeting by placing posters on noticeboards and on social media.</p> <p>The agenda for the Annual Town Meeting includes wording inviting questions from electors and can be seen here</p> <p>Annual Town Meeting Agenda 2025</p> <p>Every year, the Council invites grant awardees during the previous 12 months to attend and speak to electors in the foyer of the venue.</p>
An Action Plan and related budget responding to community engagement and setting out a timetable for action and review	<p>The Council adopted a Medium-Term Financial Strategy on 21 July 2025 as a working document. This can be seen here</p> <p>WTC Medium Term Financial Strategy</p> <p>The above is aligned with the Council's Corporate Strategic plan The plan contains a Council vision and key objectives and can be seen here</p> <p>[Link to Plan]</p> <p>The document is fed from the work of its committees, in turn led from customer engagement either directly or through an annual resident's survey. The Strategy also links to other Council strategies such as an Open Spaces Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy [expand]</p>
Evidence of community engagement, council activities and the promotion of democratic processes in the annual report which is actively shared with the community, online material and regular news bulletins	<p><u>Social Media</u></p> <p>The Town Council engages with residents on activities via Facebook, X, Insta, TikTok and YouTube. These can be accessed by clicking the links at the bottom of the Council's website home page here</p> <p>Witney Town Council – Official Site of Witney Town Council</p> <p><u>Annual Report</u></p> <p>The Council produces an Annual report for the Annual Town Meeting in March. The report highlights Council activities during the previous 12 months, broken down into work by each Committee. This is published on the Council's website and promoted on social media. The report can be seen here</p> <p>WTC Annual Report 2024-25</p> <p><u>WTC newsletters</u></p> <p>These are issued quarterly. The first quarter newsletter is delivered to every household and contains the year's budget/precept information and annual residents' satisfaction survey. The other three are issued digitally on the council's</p>

	<p>website and shared on social media. It is also printed and placed in the Council's public hall/café at the Corn Exchange and distributed to the library and care homes. The most recent newsletter can be seen here WTC Autumn Newsletter 2025</p> <p><u>Communications Strategy</u> The Council has adopted a Communications Strategy to ensure it reaches residents. A new version is currently being finalised but the original version can be seen here WTC Community Engagement Strategy</p> <p><u>Council Meetings</u> The Council published notice of its committee meetings on its website and social media once the agendas packs have been prepared and intends to live broadcast Council/Committee meetings from January 2026. A website post can be seen here Agenda for Policy, Governance & Finance Committee – Monday 24th November 2025, 6.00 pm – Witney Town Council</p> <p><u>Annual Residents' Satisfaction Survey</u> Every February, the Council conducts an annual satisfaction survey of residents on its services both in paper and online. Previous survey results can be seen on this page Consultations – Witney Town Council The results of the survey are compiled by Committee and presented to the Council with input from officers which can be seen here H401 Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments 7th July 2025 Many comments fall under the remit of the principal Councils. These are categorised and sent to the CEOs of the organisations so we are lobbying on behalf of residents. A response from Oxfordshire County Council in response in 2025 can be seen here Minute no. 594 Full Council 6th October 2025</p>
<p>Evidence of helping the community plan for its future</p>	<p><u>Developer Contributions</u> The Council regularly comments on large developments within and on the periphery of the town and requests Section 106 contributions. An example of this can be seen here WODC Planning Response to 25_02184_FUL.pdf</p> <p><u>Principal Authority Engagement</u> The Town Council also constructively engages with its principal authorities Oxfordshire County (OCC) & West Oxfordshire District Councils (WODC) on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Plan 2041/43 Comments (WODC) Minute no. P673 Planning & Development 18th November 2025 Road Infrastructure Projects/consultations (OCC) Minute no. P478 Planning & Development 26th August 2025 Witney High Street Renovation Project Minute no. 581 Full Council 14th October 2024 <p>The Council considers environmental impact several ways.</p> <p><u>Climate & Biodiversity Committee</u> The Council has a designated Climate & Biodiversity Committee which was created in May 2025. The terms of reference for the Committee can be seen here</p>

	<p><u>Climate & Biodiversity - Terms of Reference</u></p> <p><u>Compliance & Environment Officer</u> The Council employs a Compliance & Environment Officer whose role is to help deliver the Council's climate emergency declaration of 2019 and achieve carbon neutrality across the Council's Estate by 2028.</p> <p>In addition, the Council hosted an Eco Fair with representatives from several local stakeholders to show residents how they may reduce their carbon consumption and highlight that the Council has a thermal imaging camera available for loan free of charge to residents</p> <p><u>Committee Reports</u> All Committee reports contain an impact assessment on the environment which obligates officers and Councillors to consider how the matter before them. This can be seen here <u>Climate & Biodiversity Report 9th September 2025</u></p> <p><u>Planning & Development Committee</u> The Planning & Development Committee consider environmental issues when consulted on all planning applications within the parish. The terms of reference (g and h) can be seen here <u>Planning & Development - Terms of Reference</u></p> <p><u>Stakeholders & Local Groups</u> The Council also works with several stakeholder groups and volunteers, the latter on planting schemes – community orchard planting, hedgerow planting, tiny forest monitoring.</p> <p>The Council holds litter picking equipment which is available for use by groups free of charge.</p> <p>In addition, the Council has also lobbied the Environment Agency on flooding issues and works with Witney Flood Group in helping to avoid and prepare for flooding in the town.</p> <p>In addition, the Council passed a motion against Thames Water as a competent sewerage provider due to the amount of pollution in the local river and concerns by residents. <u>Minute no. 345 - Full Council 17th June 2024</u></p>
Evidence of encouraging public engagement in local democracy	<p><u>Youth council</u> The Town Council re-established a Youth Council in 2024 as a way of hearing the views of young people and to encourage interest in local democracy. The details of the YC can be found here <u>Witney Youth Council – Witney Town Council</u></p> <p><u>Promotion on Standing as a Councillor</u> The Committee Clerk authored an article for the Spring 2025 Newsletter about the benefits of becoming a local Councillor (as part of attaining his CiLCA). This newsletter was delivered to each household and the article on page 4 can be viewed here <u>WTC Spring Newsletter 2025</u></p> <p><u>Public Participation</u> The Town Council welcomes residents to participate in Council meetings and indicates this in text on all Committee agendas under 'Admission to Meetings' which can be seen here</p>

	Council Agenda And on the main page of the Council's meetings webpage here Browse Meetings The Council's Standing Order 25 also makes provision for public participation.
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The Council must also resolve that it has:

Governance	
A Scheme of Delegation	The Council's scheme of delegation was reviewed and re-adopted on 23 June 2025 and can be seen here WTC Scheme of Delegation This will be reviewed again in 2027.
Community	
At least two thirds of its councillors who stood for election, or significant evidence of the Council advertising vacancies	Witney Town Council has seventeen ward Councillor positions. Sixteen WTC Councillors were elected in May 2023. A further Councillor was elected in November 2024.
Evidence of customer service in how the Council handles correspondence with the public	Witney Town Council adopted Customer Service Standards which outline the expectations of customers on 3 February 2025 which can be seen here WTC Customer Service Standards The Council's complaints policy also outlines expectations in relation to complaints. Complaints are anonymised, summarised and presented to the Council six-monthly for transparency.
Development	
A qualified Clerk	The Town Clerk & CEO Sharon Groth is qualified to the following level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIPD Level 5 Associate Diploma in People Management • CMI Level 7 Certificate Senior Leadership Programme in Strategic Management • CMI Level 5 Certificate in Management & Leadership • IOSH Managing Safely • Certificate of Higher Education in Local Policy: from University of Gloucestershire - Cheltenham (Local Policy (now Community Governance)) • CiLCA Section L07 Law – The General Power of Competence (GPC) (England) • NVQ 2, 3 & 4 in Accounting (Association of Accounting Technicians - AAT) Post nominals & Affiliations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FCMI – Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute CMI • FSLCC - Fellow of the Society of Local Council Clerks • Assoc.CIPD – Associate Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development • MAAT – Member of the Association of Accounting Technicians [membership lapsed]
A formal appraisal process for all staff	The Council has a formal appraisal process as seen in the staff handbook. This is attached as Appendix C

The deadline for the next round of applications is 5 January 2026.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – accreditation affirms the Council's commitment to ensuring equality in Council services.
- b) Biodiversity – accreditation affirms the Council's commitment to ensuring consideration of biodiversity in providing Council services.
- c) Crime & Disorder – accreditation affirms the Council's commitment to ensuring consideration of crime and disorder Council services.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct impact from the contents of this report.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Attaining the NALC award(s) demonstrates the Council's compliance with statutory governance and transparency requirements. It provides a structured framework to initiate and plan the initial stages of improvement, fostering increased performance and confidence. Establishing policies for continuous development becomes a key outcome, aiding the Council in pursuit of excellence.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

There is no direct positive change from the contents of this report, but the accreditation of the awards enshrines community engagement and will ensure services are delivered which will improve the lives of residents.

Financial implications

- The cost of applying for registration is £50
- The Silver Award accreditation fee for the Local Council Award Scheme is £80.00 (reduced as the bronze award was received in the last 12 months).
- The cost can be funded from budget line 4024/702 – Democratic Representation & Management Subscriptions.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

- That, the Council confirms that it has the required documents, information and conditions are in place (whether published or not) for both the bronze and Silver Local Council Award

Scheme Award, and that these are published on the Council's website, where applicable and,

- That, therefore, as it meets all the criteria, it resolves to apply for the Silver Award.

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