

CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Tuesday, 13 January 2026

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor S Simpson (Chair)

Councillors:	D Temple (In place of J Robertshaw) A Bailey A Mubin D Newcombe	R Smith J Treloar R Crouch (In place of D Enright)
Officers:	Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie	Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	None.	

CB21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Enright & J Robertshaw, Councillors R Crouch & D Temple attended as substitutes respectively.

CB22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

CB23 MINUTES

The minutes of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee meeting held on 9 September 2025 were received.

C505 – The Committee received an update to advise of the ongoing work in respect of a nature walk around Witney which was being carried out in collaboration with West Oxfordshire District Council and local residents.

C513 – Members were provided with a response provided by the Project Officer which addressed their questions regarding the Photovoltaic array and battery configuration for the West Witney Projects.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal updates be noted and,

2. That, the minutes of the Climate & Biodiversity Committee meeting held on 9 September 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

CB24 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

CB25 CLIMATE ACTION WORKING PARTY MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the Climate Action Working Party held on 25 September 2025.

15 - The Compliance & Environment Officer advised Members that the Eco Fair held on 9 October 2025 had been successful. It was proposed that any future Eco Fair should be held on a Saturday in order to attract a greater audience of residents.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the minutes of the Climate & Biodiversity Working Party meeting held on 25 September 2025 be noted.

CB26 CLIMATE ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Compliance & Environmental Officer, which provided an update on the draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

The Committee noted that, although overall emissions had remained broadly the same as the last review in 2019, the grounds maintenance services was now delivered in-house meaning a greater amount of data on fleet emissions was now captured and reflected in the emissions data. The Council had doubled both its fleet and workforce during that period, resulting in more accurate data for the Council to focus on. Members asked that the infographic be shared with all Councillors to inform them of the established new baseline.

In relation to next steps for implementation of the Action Plan, Members were advised that a comparison of the Council's building data and EPC ratings was underway. EPCs completed in December 2025 showed that Burwell Hall had improved from a Grade C to a Grade B, while the Corn Exchange had changed from a Grade B to a Grade C. It was noted that a further report would be provided on the reasons for this change at the Corn Exchange, however the primary reason identified for the change was the commencement of Café 1863 and its greater use as a facility. It was advised that improvements would be made within existing approved budgets.

The Committee noted that Low Carbon Hub had surveyed the Windrush Cemetery building and that a number of "quick wins" had already been identified and implemented, including the installation of timers on the electric heating system. These works were undertaken within existing maintenance budget parameters.

On the subject of benchmarking, Members were advised that the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) had enquired as to whether Witney Town Council could take a leading role, as SLCC did not currently hold benchmarking data, having not previously undertaken work in this area.

Members were informed that the implementation roadmap would be developed, with dates to be set once further detail was available, in order to provide accurate guidance to the Committee.

It was further noted that a Climate & Biodiversity Working Party would be arranged soon and that the revised Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan would be shared with all Council Officers for review and input from their respective areas of responsibility.

The Committee noted that the Action Plan included a traffic light system and a clear separation between emissions reductions attributable to the Council and those relating to the wider community, in line with the Committee's previous request.

Members thanked the Compliance & Environmental Officer for her work and expressed their desire for the Council to continue to lead by example and to focus further on reducing emissions.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the infographic contained within the report be shared with all Councillors.

CB27 LAKE & COUNTRY PARK REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer, who provided an update on works carried out at the Lake and Country Park.

The Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer outlined completed works, including flood mitigation measures, some of which had been part-funded through grant support, and path improvements around the lake, which had received positive feedback from the public.

Members were advised that a separate water testing report would be brought to a future meeting, and it was agreed that this report would be shared with WASP (Windrush Against Sewage Pollution).

Members were informed that steps would be taken to reduce the potential for anti-social behaviour in the area of the community orchard on the former railway line at the Country Park, where issues had been identified.

The Committee noted that an £87,000 grant application had been submitted to fund further path improvements around the lake, with an update on its success to be provided in future reports.

Members heard that the B&GSO continued to monitor avian flu and outlined the measures and actions that would be taken should any further cases be reported.

Members were also informed that opportunities to recruit additional volunteers would be pursued, including engagement at the forthcoming volunteer fair.

The Committee noted the positive engagement and strong collaborative working with the Witney Flood Group, with both parties providing mutual support and sharing information effectively.

Resolved:

That, the report and verbal update be noted.

CB28 NATURE VERGE UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the reports concerning the application for the establishment of Road Verge Nature Reserves in West Witney.

Members heard that Officers would liaise with the resident who had brought forward the proposal in order to monitor biodiversity changes and to consider the potential introduction of Road Verge Nature Reserves in other areas across Witney.

In response to a Member's question regarding signage, the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer advised that standard Oxfordshire County Council signage would be used, which is already well recognised by the public and local residents.

Members were unanimous in their agreement to support the application.

Resolved:

That the reports be noted.

CB29 SEASONAL PLANTING SCHEMES

The Committee received and considered the report of the Head of Estates & Operations regarding the proposed summer bedding.

Further to the report, the Compliance & Environmental Officer provided a verbal update on matters for consideration in relation to the proposed planting.

Members were advised that decisions regarding summer bedding needed to be progressed promptly. An option was therefore proposed to replace dahlias with antirrhinums, which would provide better value for money, similar colour displays, and comparable height, while also offering high pollinator benefits. It was noted that dahlias may be more appropriate for use in future once space becomes available at the new depot to allow for out-of-season bulb storage.

Officers requested guidance on moving towards a more perennial planting approach, while retaining some higher valued seasonal bedding in key locations, such as war memorials.

The Committee unanimously agreed to move towards a mixed planting arrangement and approved the removal of dahlias and their substitution with antirrhinums where Officers felt this was appropriate.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Officers proceed with a mixed planting arrangement with a full review of planting being presented to a future meeting.

CB30 **TREE POLICY**

The Committee received and considered the revised Tree Policy, together with a verbal explanation of the amendments from the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer.

The Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer explained the rationale behind the policy, highlighting the importance of having a clear and easily understood framework to support consistent decision-making, protect the Council's financial position, and ensure public funds were used responsibly.

Members noted that the primary purpose of the policy was to ensure the safe, sustainable, and cost-effective management of trees under the Council's control, balancing environmental stewardship with public safety and long-term maintenance responsibilities for the benefit of residents. Some members expressed concerns that the policy would not adequately support the most vulnerable members of the community.

A vote was taken on the acceptance of the policy without further amendment, with the following result:

For: 7

Against: 1

Recommended:

That, the revised Tree Policy be approved by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee at its meeting on 2 February 2026.

CB31 **MEMORIAL TREE POLICY REVIEW**

The Committee received and considered the revised Memorial Tree Policy.

Members welcomed the policy which was noted to be very clear and were unanimous in agreement with its approval.

It was requested that the policy be reviewed after two years.

Recommended:

That, the revised Memorial Tree Policy be approved by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee at its meeting on 2 February 2026.

The meeting closed at: 7.23 pm

Chair