EXTRA ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING
OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday, 2 February 2026

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

Present:

Councillor A Bailey (Chair)

Councillors:	J Doughty	G Doughty
	G Meadows	D Edwards-Hughes
	J Aitman	D Newcombe
	T Ashby	J Robertshaw
	D Enright	S Simpson
	R Smith	J Treloar
	R Crouch	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Caitlin Head	Finance Apprentice
Others:	Two members of the public.	

64 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Collins, A Mubin, and D Temple.

65 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

66 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The committee received representation from a member of the public concerning agenda items 4 and 5.

The Committee reconvened.

67 **COUNCIL BUDGET: REVISED BUDGET 2025/26 AND ESTIMATE 2026/27**

The Council received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (R.F.O).

The RFO advised that the final budget options presented in the report were the result of several months of work, in line with Committee direction and statutory and best practice requirements. He also responded to a member's pre-submitted question regarding salary calculations.

The final budget report outlined revised revenue budgets for 2025/26 and estimates for 2026/27, with detailed information on income and expenditure, general reserves, and rolling capital and special revenue projects. Members were provided with comprehensive financial forecasts and a range of funding options for the year ahead. Also included were scenarios relating to the Council's loan for the West Witney projects and consideration of opting to tax at Burwell Hall.

Members unanimously thanked the RFO for the preparation of the budget and the comprehensive nature of the report. It was acknowledged that inflationary pressures had impacted the budget and that the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee had made significant reductions to Committee requests submitted in November. Some Members expressed a preference not to defer expenditure that may become more costly in future and favoured either option 2 or option 4 within the report.

Cllr R Smith proposed the substantive motion of a 4.91% increase in the Council Tax, which was seconded by Cllr G Meadows. The Chair advised that all proposals and amendments would be considered following full debate.

Cllr J Doughty proposed an amendment for a 4.2% increase, seconded by Cllr G Doughty.

Other Members raised concerns about the impact of a Council Tax increase on residents. It was suggested that, in the absence of a costed decarbonisation plan, funding for this project should be removed. Members noted that this, together with a reduced loan requirement and other adjustments, including increasing prices at the 1863 café bar, could result in an alternative option of a 2% increase. It was also noted that verifying the costs of an alternative proposal during the meeting would be difficult.

Cllr D Edward-Hughes proposed a further amendment for a 2% increase, seconded by Cllr T Ashby.

Following the completion of the debate, a recorded vote was agreed, with amendments taken first and the original proposal treated as the substantive motion.

That the Council Tax precept be increased by 4.2%
For: Cllrs G Doughty & J Doughty
Against: Cllrs J Aitman, A Bailey, R Crouch, D Enright, G Meadows, D Newcombe, S Simpson & R Smith
Abstained: Cllrs T Ashby, D Edwards-Hughes, J Robertshaw & J Treloar.
The amendment was not carried.

That the Council Tax precept be increased by 2%
For: Cllrs T Ashby, D Edwards-Hughes, J Robertshaw & J Treloar
Against: J Aitman, A Bailey, R Crouch, J Doughty, D Enright, G Meadows, D Newcombe, S Simpson & R Smith
Abstained: Cllr G Doughty
The amendment was not carried.

That the Council Tax precept be increased by 4.91%
For: Cllrs J Aitman, A Bailey, R Crouch, D Enright, G Meadows, D Newcombe, S Simpson & R Smith
Against: Cllrs T Ashby, G Doughty, D Edwards-Hughes, J Robertshaw & J Treloar
Abstained: Cllr J Doughty

The proposal was carried.

The Committee also considered the scenarios for drawing down the West Witney projects loan and how the funds may be deployed in line with Council aspirations and longer-term financial standing of the Council.

Members discussed the implications of the various scenarios and expressed differing views on the preferred option should the project come in below budget and therefore not require all the funding allocated. Some Members felt that the Council should fully utilise the earmarked reserves allocated to the project, not to use any underspend on other projects, and to draw down a lower loan than that which had been approved. Others suggested that the full loan, as approved should be drawn down and those earmarked reserves not required then be used to deliver additional projects at the site, ensuring that facilities would be in place for the enjoyment of future generations.

Following the completion of the debate, a recorded vote was agreed on the two scenarios discussed.

That scenario two be approved –The Council would draw down the full amount of earmarked reserves and minimise the amount taken out as a loan. This would mean the loan taken out would be £979,901 i.e. £270,099 less than that which was approved.

For: Cllrs T Ashby, G Doughty, J Doughty, D Edwards-Hughes, J Robertshaw & J Treloar

Against: Cllrs J Aitman, A Bailey, R Crouch, D Enright, G Meadows, S Simpson & R Smith

Abstained: Cllr D Newcombe

The proposal was not carried.

That, Scenario One be approved – this assumed that the Council took up the full loan of £1,250,000. In this scenario then £270,099 of earmarked reserves would not be required and could be retained or redeployed.

For: Cllrs J Aitman, A Bailey, R Crouch, D Enright, G Meadows, D Newcombe, S Simpson & R Smith

Against: Cllrs T Ashby, G Doughty, J Doughty, D Edwards-Hughes, J Robertshaw & J Treloar

Abstained: none

The proposal was carried.

Finally, Members unanimously agreed to delegate authority to the Town Clerk/C.E.O to opt to tax Burwell Hall to enable the Council to continue reclaiming all input tax. The option would apply for a minimum period of twenty years and would be passed on to the end user, resulting in increased charges; however, the Council had the option of absorbing the VAT in the hire charges and this was the approach favoured by Members.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the revised budget for 2025/26 as presented be adopted and,
3. That, the budget for 2026/27 as presented be adopted and that its funding, including the reserve movements as recommended in the report and amount of precept, an increase of 4.91% be approved and,
4. That, Scenario One as presented in the report be approved as the Council's preferred approach to drawing down the loan for the West Witney projects and,
5. That, delegation be given to the Town Clerk/C.E.O to opt-to-tax at Burwell Hall and to absorb the additional VAT within the current letting fee.

68 **MINUTES - 5 JANUARY 2026**

Members received the minutes of the Extra Ordinary Council meeting held on 5 January 2026 for information.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January be noted.

A Member of the Public joined the meeting at 6:58pm

69 **TO FORMALLY DECLARE THE PRECEPT FOR 2026/27**

The Council received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (R.F.O).

Following approval of the budgets in the previous item, the formality of declaring the precept for 2026/27 was agreed. It was agreed that votes should be recorded.

That, the precept for 2026/27 be agreed as £2,427,251.

For: Cllrs J Aitman, A Bailey, R Crouch, D Enright, G Meadows, D Newcombe, S Simpson & R Smith
Against: Cllrs T Ashby, G Doughty, D Edwards-Hughes, J Robertshaw & J Treloar
Abstained: Cllr J Doughty

That, the Town Clerk be authorised to sign and serve a precept on the West Oxfordshire District Council.

For: Cllrs J Aitman, A Bailey, R Crouch, D Enright, G Meadows, D Newcombe, S Simpson & R Smith
Against: Cllrs T Ashby, G Doughty, D Edwards-Hughes, J Robertshaw & J Treloar
Abstained: Cllr J Doughty

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted,
2. That, the precept for 2026/27 be agreed as £2,427,251
3. That, the Town Clerk be authorised to sign and serve a precept on the West Oxfordshire District Council, in accordance with the appropriate provisions of the Local Government Act

1972 (as amended), requiring the District Council to pay the Town Council the sum of £2,427,251 in respect of Council Tax for the town during the financial year 2026/27.

The meeting closed at: 7.04 pm

Chair