

**CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Tuesday, 8 September 2026

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

Present:

Councillor S Simpson (Chair)

Councillors:	A Mubin	G Meadows
	J Robertshaw	R Smith
	J Aitman	J Doughty
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Janine Sparrowhawk	Administration Asst - Communities & Planning
	Carl Whitehead	Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer
Others:	One member of the public. Councillor Geoff Doughty	

CB418 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Newcombe.

CB419 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

CB420 MINUTES

The minutes of the Committee meeting held on 19 May 2026 were received.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2026 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Cllr R Smith joined the meeting at 6:05pm

CB421 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

A resident addressed the Committee regarding Agenda Item 9 (Burford Road Verge Nature Reserve) and Agenda Item 10 (Community Hub Proposal, Land North of Burford Road), outlining the biodiversity and community benefits associated with both projects.

The resident provided updates on progress since submission of the Community Hub proposal and advised that support for the proposal had been received from neighbouring Parish Councils. The resident also provided information regarding Road Verge Nature Reserve scheme.

The Committee reconvened.

CB422 BURFORD ROAD - ROAD VERGE NATURE RESERVE

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

Members welcomed confirmation from Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) that the verges between Tower Hill and Dry Lane had now been formally designated as a Road Verge Nature Reserve.

The Committee recognised the significant contribution made by the resident, OCC and neighbouring parish councils in securing the designation and noted that signage installation and monitoring arrangements would follow.

Members suggested that the designation should be promoted through the Council's communications channels once signage had been installed.

Resolved:

1. That the designation of the Burford Road Verge Nature Reserve be noted; and
2. That Officers promote the designation through appropriate communication channels and on the Council's Website.

CB423 COMMUNITY HUB - DEVELOPMENT LAND NORTH OF BURFORD ROAD

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee received and considered the Community Hub proposal prepared by the resident for land north of Burford Road and heard an update on discussions held with neighbouring parish councils and developers.

Members noted that written support for the proposal had already been provided by neighbouring parish councils and recognised the potential for the project to deliver a community facility serving a number of surrounding communities whilst providing wider educational, recreational and biodiversity benefits.

During discussion, Members considered the opportunities for securing future funding through Section 106 contributions and agreed that the proposal should form part of the Council's developing infrastructure priorities. Reference was also made to the emerging Local Plan, current planning applications affecting the area and the need to ensure that appropriate community infrastructure was secured alongside future development. Particular interest was expressed in the proposals for a biodiversity buffer zone incorporating wildflower habitats, woodland planting and the restoration of a veteran orchard.

Members expressed broad support for the aspirations of the proposal and noted that consideration of infrastructure priorities properly fell within the remit of the Planning & Development Committee. As four members of that Committee were present, constituting a quorum, it was agreed that support should be given to the inclusion of the Community Hub proposal within the Council's emerging Section 106 infrastructure priorities and that an additional representation be submitted in support of the Community Hub proposal as part of the Council's response to the Curbridge Downs planning application currently under consideration.

Resolved:

1. That, support for the Community Hub proposal be incorporated into the Council's infrastructure and Section 106 priorities where appropriate; and
2. That, support for the proposal be conveyed through future planning representations where relevant.
3. That, an additional response be submitted to the Curbridge Downs planning application expressing the Town Council's support for the Community Hub proposal.

CB424 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer concerning the financial position of services within the remit of the Committee.

A Member sought clarification regarding the grant income associated with the flood resilience store project. Officers clarified that the amounts shown in the report related to grant income received, rather than expenditure.

Members noted that the report marked the beginning of the Council's budget setting process and acknowledged that a number of matters later on the agenda may have financial implications. It was therefore agreed that budget requirements arising from the review of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan would be considered later in the meeting.

During consideration of the Carbon Reduction Action Plan later in the meeting, Members returned to budget planning. A proposal was made by Councillor R Smith, seconded by Councillor J Doughty, to include a provisional budget request of £50,000 within the 2027/28 budget for carbon reduction projects which matched the previous year, subject to review and refinement as further information and costings became available. This was unanimously supported.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted;
2. That, the management accounts of the Committee's services for the period 1 April to 31 July 2026 be approved;
3. That, a provisional request of £50,000 for carbon reduction projects be considered within the 2027/28 budget setting process, subject to future review.

CB425 CLIMATE ACTION WORKING PARTY MINUTES

The minutes of the Climate Action Working Party meeting held on 11 June 2026 were received.

Members reviewed the recommendations arising from the Working Party and noted the progress being made on climate action projects.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate Action Working Party meeting held on 11 June 2026 be approved as a correct record.

CB426 BIODIVERSITY UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer together with a verbal update.

Members were advised that progress on the Curbridge Roundabout wildflower project had been delayed following discussions with contractors regarding traffic management requirements. A Member, in their capacity as an Oxfordshire County Councillor, offered to assist Officers in seeking traffic management support and progressing the project.

Updates were provided on grant applications submitted to Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE), ongoing biodiversity monitoring across Council sites and partnership working with local conservation organisations.

Members also considered a biodiversity planting proposal for the large bed at Fiveways roundabout which had been raised during Public Participation and were advised via an officer update that many of the principles were already reflected the Council's existing planting strategy for the town and the ongoing transition towards increased perennial planting.

Members supported the continued development of perennial planting schemes, recognising the biodiversity and long-term maintenance benefits. Updates were also provided on future biodiversity recording projects, including species surveys and monitoring initiatives.

The Committee welcomed the biodiversity improvements being achieved across Council-managed land and thanked Officers and volunteers that provided support for their continued work.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted;
2. That, assistance be sought through Oxfordshire County Council to help address traffic management requirements associated with the Curbridge Roundabout wildflower project; and
3. That, support be given to the continued development of perennial planting schemes as part of future budget planning.

Cllr G Meadows left the meeting at 6:48pm

CB427 LAKE & COUNTRY PARK REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer along with a verbal update.

Members noted the installation of interpretation boards at key entrances to the Country Park, additional seating funded through external grants and the submission of the Green Flag Award application.

An update was provided on the Railway Orchard project, including proposals for further interpretation signage reflecting the history of the former Witney branch railway line.

Officers advised that work would shortly commence on the development of the peninsula area, including installation of a palisade gate and creation of a Stonewort Bank. Members noted that the works were intended to protect wildlife and reduce disturbance to nesting birds. It was requested that appropriate signage be installed to explain the purpose of the gate and encourage public support for wildlife protection measures.

The Committee also noted ongoing consideration of a memorial bench request, wildlife monitoring initiatives and future biodiversity recording opportunities within the Country Park.

Members welcomed the continued progress being made and thanked Officers for their ongoing work.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted;
2. That, the continued development of the lake peninsula area, including the installation of the palisade gate and creation of the Stonewort Bank, be approved;
3. That, explanatory signage be installed at the peninsula to highlight the purpose of the gate and the need to protect wildlife and nesting birds;
4. That, the re-submission of a Green Flag Award application be noted;
5. That, the production and installation of an interpretation board for the Railway Orchard, at a cost of £70, be approved; and
6. That, Officers continue to assess requests for memorial benches in accordance with its policy.

Cllr G Meadows returned to the meeting at 6:56pm. She did not participate in the vote on items in Agenda Item 8 (Lake & Country Park Report) having not been present for the majority of the debate.

The Member of the Public left the meeting at 6:57pm.

CB428 CARBON REDUCTION ACTION PLAN

The Committee received and considered the report of the Administrative Support Assistant, Communities & Planning providing an update on progress towards delivery of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.

Members noted that a number of low-cost carbon reduction measures at Windrush Cemetery Depot had been identified for implementation and welcomed benchmarking work being undertaken with other local councils.

Work was also progressing to assess larger carbon reduction projects at the Corn Exchange, including solar photovoltaic panels, boiler replacement options and potential heat pump installation. Members noted that investigations were ongoing, including discussions with the West Oxfordshire District Council Planning Department regarding the feasibility of solar panel installations.

The Committee received updates on arrangements for the 2026 Eco Fair, the National Emergency Briefing screening held on 27 July 2026, and a range of wider environmental initiatives including energy tariffs and water conservation measures.

Members also received a verbal update from the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officer regarding consideration of the replacement of the Council's Utility Terrain Vehicle and noted that no suitable electric alternative had yet met operational requirements.

Further discussion took place regarding the impact of the exceptionally hot summer on newly planted trees. Members noted that a full assessment of losses was being undertaken and welcomed plans to develop replacement planting proposals focused on resilient, drought-tolerant native species. The Committee also noted, in response to a Member's question, that wildfire resilience was addressed within Action 31 of the draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan through the proposed Environmental Emergency Plan.

The Committee welcomed the progress made since the previous review and agreed that, subject to the incorporation of Member and Officer feedback, the revised Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan should be presented to Full Council on 12 October 2026 for adoption.

Members further agreed that a meeting of the Climate Action Working Party should be held following the Full Council meeting to review implementation priorities and make recommendations regarding budget requirements for 2027/28.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted;
2. That, Member feedback be incorporated into the draft Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan;
3. That, authority be delegated to the Deputy Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair, to finalise the document for submission to Full Council on 12 October 2026;
4. That, a Climate Action Working Party meeting be held following Full Council to review implementation priorities and budget requirements; and
5. That, the continued development of the detailed Action Plan, associated KPIs and future reporting arrangements be supported.

The meeting closed at: 7.37 pm

Chair