

Consultee Comments for West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan 2041

Consultee Details

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Comments

Witney Town Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to West Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan 2041 consultation. The Council acknowledges the extensive work undertaken in developing the draft plan and appreciates the strategic intent behind its proposals. However, it believes that there are several issues and constructive suggestions which should be addressed to ensure the plan fully meets the needs of Witney's residents, businesses, and future generations.

The Town Council's response is informed by its forthcoming Corporate Strategic Plan 2025-2029, which is underpinned by core pillars that guide decision-making and resource allocation:

- **An Engaged and Supported Community** – Actively engaging with residents and working collaboratively to promote wellbeing, safety, and opportunity for all.
- **An Empowered Community** – Enabling collaboration and innovation through the support and facilitation of local initiatives that drive positive change.
- **A Respectful Community** – Promoting inclusivity, fairness, and respect for all individuals, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age, or disability.
- **A Vibrant Local Economy** – Supporting and promoting local businesses, while fostering a resilient, locally controlled economy that safeguards Witney's distinctive character and heritage.
- **A Forward-Looking Town Council** – Championing the interests of residents and businesses in key strategic discussions, ensuring local voices are effectively represented.
- **A Beautiful Witney** – Enhancing and protecting open spaces and the natural environment to ensure a high-quality setting for residents and visitors.

Threaded through each of these pillars is a firm commitment to sustainability and resilience, culminating in a further, overarching strategic objective:

- **A Green and Resilient Town** – In line with the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019, it is committed to embedding environmental responsibility in all aspects of its work. The Council has set a goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2028 and actively supports broader efforts to secure a sustainable, low-carbon future for Witney.

This consultation response seeks to reflect these priorities, offering insights and recommendations to ensure the Local Plan 2041 supports a thriving, inclusive, and environmentally responsible future for Witney within its policies.

Policy specific points are as follows:

Core Policies (CP) 1-4 - Settlement Identity, Village Integrity & Community Governance

Witney Town Council supports the principle of maintaining distinct settlement identities and urges that strong safeguards are included to ensure villages retain their separation and character.

However, the Local Plan should recognise and include provision to support Community Governance Reviews. As development expands to the built-up areas of service centres such as Witney beyond current boundaries, there should be a clear and responsive mechanism for reviewing and adjusting parish/town boundaries to reflect this coalescence and ensure coherent community representation and funding for services.

Core Policy (CP) 4 - Housing Quality and Tenure

The town council recommends the Local Plan includes a position discouraging the continued sale of leasehold properties. There are clear disadvantages to developments which provide housing under this framework which is already evidenced in the town.

New development should be prioritised in and around town centres to ensure residents have more sustainable and convenient access to essential services.

The disparity between the quality of private and social housing must be addressed in the Local Plan. Social housing should meet the same standards as private developments to promote equity and dignity in living standards.

Core Policies (CP) 5-6 - Delivery of Infrastructure, Clarity and Enforcement

The plan must take a firmer stance on the delivery of promised infrastructure, particularly shops and community facilities, within large-scale developments. The Council recommend that developers be subject to stricter conditions and potential penalties if delivery is not made within agreed timescales in line with point 5.100.

Paragraph 5.83 is vague and insufficiently robust. It should clearly set out expectations for coordination between all relevant authorities and infrastructure providers, not just a 'timely manner.' Delays are often caused by third parties, and the policy should reflect this, ensuring that responsibility and accountability are embedded in the planning process.

Overall, Witney Town Council believes Core Policy 6 lacks clarity and enforceability in its current form and should be strengthened accordingly.

Core Policy (CP) 7 - Flood Risk Management

The plan's approach to flood risk, particularly in Witney, is notably weaker than in previous iterations with less of a focus on the subject. The town council strongly urges that flood mitigation policies be made more robust.

Witney, like other areas, faces real flood risks which need to be acknowledged and proactively addressed in Witney specific policies of the plan like they are for others.

Core Policy (CP) 9 - Community, Health, and Wellbeing

The emphasis on community, health, and wellbeing appears reduced compared to previous plans. These themes should be central and crosscutting throughout the plan, underpinning all aspects of development policy.

Although raised under DM 23, Community centres (including multi-use spaces such as public houses or halls) should be a required component of developments over a certain size. These facilities are essential for fostering community cohesion and delivering local services.

There is a significant lack of focus on the needs of young people in the current draft. The town council urges the inclusion of more targeted policies and investment in youth provision, particularly for early teens. This should include Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGAs), youth centres, recreational spaces, and facilities such as bowling. Provision should be equitable across all settlements, particularly in Witney and surrounding areas where a clear gap of non-sporting facilities exists.

Art and culture initiatives should be given greater consideration by developers from the earliest stages of planning and should be more robustly integrated into the Local Plan. These projects are intrinsic to a thriving town, enriching community identity and playing a vital role in attracting visitors to Witney.

While the aging population is referenced and welcomed in DM29, the plan does not go far enough in addressing/considering the diverse needs of this demographic alongside those of younger residents. Intergenerational planning should be considered, ensuring developments are inclusive, accessible, and support lifelong wellbeing.

Development Management Policies (DM)

DM1 – Key Principles for New Development

To promote sustainable and safe living environments, the following development Infrastructure standards should be included at construction stages in all new developments above a specific threshold:

- Installation of grit bins on roads with gradients above a certain level.
- Provision of bus shelters on key routes to encourage the use of public transport.

DM4 – A Healthy Food Environment

Allotment provision must be strengthened in the plan. While community gardens are a welcome feature, they are not a substitute for full size allotment plots. For developments over a defined threshold, a specific number of full-sized accessible allotments should be required to meet growing demand and support food resilience and community wellbeing.

DM37 - Sustainable Tourism

To support local businesses and promote tourism, Witney must be recognised as a visitor destination. Provision for coach and motorhome parking should be included in the plan, ensuring accessibility for a range of visitors to the towns heritage and provide a boost for the local economy.