
Agenda Item: Public Convenience Provision in Witney

Meeting Date: Monday, 6 October 2025

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO – Sharon Groth

The purpose of this report is to

- brief Members on West Oxfordshire District Council's (WODC) Public Conveniences (PCs) Review decision of 10 September 2025 and its proposal to transfer responsibility for facilities to town and parish councils;
- to set out the specific implications for Witney (Leys Recreation Ground and Langdale Gate); and to seek direction on the Town Council's position and next steps.

Background

WODC operates 13 sets of PCs across 8 locations. In light of financial pressures and anticipated local government reorganisation towards Unitary Authorities in 2028, the District Council's Executive agreed to engage Town/Parish Councils on transferring facilities, streamlining provision where transfer is not feasible, and closing some sites where alternative provision exists.

WODC has written to Witney Town Council (19 Sept 2025) initiating engagement and requesting an indication by 30 November 2025 whether the Town Council wishes to explore transfer. Where transfer is not pursued, WODC anticipates closures or lease terminations by 31 March 2026; transfers to complete by 30 June 2026.

WODC's basis for transfer allows either peppercorn lease or (where not within a WODC car park) freehold at nominal consideration, typically with covenants securing continued provision or a clawback/capital receipt on disposal. Existing WODC cleaning/maintenance contracts would end on transfer, requiring local arrangements.

Current Situation

A) Leys Recreation Ground PCs

- Status & context: The existing standalone PC block at The Leys is adjacent to the leisure/café hub. Courtside Hubs CIC/The Leys Hub are bringing additional PC provision within the complex, accessible from the car park during café opening times.

- WODC intention if not transferred: *Closure* of the existing Leys PC block (with potential for repurposing the building).
- Opportunity: With new hub PCs available, the existing block could be repurposed (e.g., changing rooms, storage, community facility) to meet Leys users' needs and avoid dilapidation.

B) Langdale Gate PCs

- Status & context: Centrally located near the car park; part of the building accommodates Shopmobility which WODC seeks to protect.
- WODC intention if not transferred: *Retention* by WODC, due to location and Shopmobility, but they have requested the Town Council consider taking them on.
- Transfer terms noted: Would consider long lease or freehold (freehold value restricted by covenant to £1, with requirement to continue PC provision or pay capital receipt if sold). Shopmobility's continued provision to be protected in any case.
- Implication: On the evidence provided (condition, low income, ongoing costs), transfer would likely add a net recurrent cost burden to the Town Council.

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

Retaining publicly accessible PCs at Langdale Gate (by WODC) supports accessibility for disabled residents, older people, families, and those with health conditions.

Ensuring ongoing PC access at The Leys via the Hub and exploring inclusive designs for any repurposed space (e.g., accessible changing) supports equality of access.

b) Biodiversity

Neutral—repurposing existing fabric at The Leys avoids new build and land-take; any minor works should protect green infrastructure on the recreation ground.

c) Crime & Disorder

Repurposing the disused Leys block reduces risk of anti-social behaviour and vandalism associated with vacant buildings.

Good lighting, sightlines and natural surveillance to be considered in any design.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency

Potential carbon savings from adaptive reuse of the Leys structure versus demolition/new build.

Future energy efficiency upgrades (e.g., insulation, efficient lighting, water-saving fittings) can be included in repurposing works and in any negotiated standards for WODC-retained sites.

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 exposure if the Town Council assumes Langdale Gate: ongoing net revenue cost plus future capital liabilities.

Asset deterioration at The Leys if the building is closed without timely repurposing.

Service continuity risks if Hub opening hours differ materially from historic Leys PC hours—mitigations via signage and communications.

Legal/estate risks around covenants and Shopmobility protection—mitigated through due diligence and heads of terms.

Social Value

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

Sustaining convenient, clean, and accessible WC provision in the town centre and at The Leys underpins participation in leisure, events, and local commerce.

Repurposing the Leys block for changing/storage supports grassroots sport and community activity.

Financial implications

According to WODC Officers the current following costs are:

Leys Recreation Ground PCs:

WODC 10-year condition estimate (existing block): £49,275.

Operating cost & usage (current): Annual cost £29,670; income £584; footfall 2,925; opening 07:30–18:00 (3 cleans/day).

Langdale Gate PCs:

WODC 10-year condition estimate: £45,350.

Operating cost & usage (current): Annual cost £32,214; income £1,092; footfall 5,464; opening 07:30–18:00 (3 cleans/day).

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report, and WODC's Public Conveniences Review decision and engagement timetable: and

1. agree that Witney Town Council does not take on the Langdale Gate PCs at this time, noting WODC's stated intention to retain them and to protect Shopmobility.
2. agree in principle to seek the freehold (or a suitable lease) of the former Leys PCs building upon WODC closure, to repurpose it to meet the needs of Leys users and to prevent dilapidation, subject to satisfactory terms, covenants, and business case.
3. authorise the Town Clerk to engage with WODC [and Courtside Hubs CIC/The Leys Hub], and to report back with detailed options, costs, and funding proposals.