

# **Witney Town Council**

**\*\* 2nd & FINAL DRAFT \*\***

## **Corporate Strategic Plan 2025-2029**

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## **Mayor's Foreword – Putting People and Place First**

Witney is a town with a proud heritage and a strong sense of community. As Mayor, I am continually inspired by the way residents support one another, celebrate local identity, and work together to make our town such a special place to live.

This Corporate Strategic Plan sets out a clear vision for the future of Witney. It reflects the values that matter most to our community — care for one another, pride in our environment, and confidence in the future. It shows how the Town Council will continue to support community life, protect what makes Witney unique, and respond positively to change.

As Civic Head of the Council, I am proud to support this Plan and the commitment it represents to making Witney an inclusive, welcoming and thriving town for all generations.

*Cllr Andy Bailey,  
Mayor of Witney 2025–26*

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## **Leader's Statement – Delivering Change through Partnership**

Since 2019, Witney Town Council has experienced a period of significant change and development. Together with our partners, we have modernised services, invested in community facilities, strengthened our environmental ambitions and reinforced our commitment to local democracy.

This Strategic Plan for 2025–2029 is both a statement of continuity and a declaration of ambition. It reflects our determination to deliver on the priorities that matter most to residents — while also facing confidently into the challenges ahead, including climate resilience, housing pressures, infrastructure delivery and financial sustainability.

Delivering these ambitions will require strong partnership working with residents, businesses, community groups, West Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and many others. This Plan sets the strategic direction for the Council and provides a clear framework for turning shared priorities into meaningful outcomes for Witney.

*Cllr Ruth Smith,  
Leader of the Council & Chair of Policy, Governance & Finance Committee*

# **Town Clerk / Chief Executive's Introduction – From Strategy to Delivery**

This Corporate Strategic Plan provides the overarching framework that will guide decision-making, resource allocation and performance management across the Council from 2025 to 2029. It brings together the Council's strategic priorities into one coherent corporate direction, supported by a range of detailed strategies, management plans and service business plans.

This Plan does not replace those supporting strategies; rather, it sets the corporate context within which they operate, ensuring that all activity across the organisation is aligned to shared objectives and is focused on delivering real outcomes for the community.

The Council's officers are committed to translating this Strategy into effective delivery — whether through greener operations, well-maintained public spaces, strong financial stewardship, or improved community engagement. This is a living document, and we will continue to review and refine it to ensure it remains responsive to the needs of Witney and the people we serve.

*Sharon Groth,  
Town Clerk, CEO & Head of Paid Service*

# Executive Summary

Witney Town Council's Corporate Strategic Plan 2025–2029 sets out the Council's vision, priorities and delivery framework for the next five years. It provides a clear, practical and forward-looking roadmap for how the Council will serve the community, manage resources responsibly and respond to the opportunities and challenges facing the town.

The Plan is built around strong governance, community engagement, environmental responsibility and partnership working. It aligns the Council's existing strategies — including Open Spaces, Communications, Community Engagement and Investment — into one coordinated corporate framework.

The Council's key priorities for 2025–2029 include:

- Enhancing parks, play areas and community spaces
- Strengthening communication and resident engagement
- Tackling climate change and improving environmental resilience
- Securing fair developer contributions
- Preparing for local government reorganisation and boundary changes

Delivery will be led through the Council's committee structure, supported by clear performance monitoring, strong financial governance and partnership working with public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

This Plan will be reviewed annually and refreshed following the May 2027 Town Council elections to ensure it remains responsive, relevant and aligned with community needs.

# Introduction

Witney Town Council has been making positive progress in recent years and is committed to making Witney a great place to live, work and visit. This Corporate Strategic Plan sets out our shared vision for the town's future and the priorities we will pursue over the period 2025 to 2029, built on strong community values, environmental responsibility and sound governance.

This Strategic Plan provides the Council's overarching framework for delivering positive and lasting change in Witney. It brings together the Council's ambitions into a single, coherent and actionable vision, informed by our adopted strategies and plans, including the Open Spaces Strategy, the Lake & Country Park Management Plan, the Communications Strategy and Community Engagement Strategy, the Investment Strategy, service business plans, and the views of our residents and stakeholders.

This document establishes the Strategic Plan as the Council's primary corporate framework, bringing together and providing direction for all supporting strategies. Where there is any inconsistency between this Strategic Plan and a supporting strategy, this Strategic Plan will take precedence, and the relevant document will be reviewed and updated accordingly.

At its heart, this plan reflects a commitment to putting people first, protecting and enhancing our natural environment, and ensuring that Witney continues to thrive economically, socially and environmentally for future generations.

Building on the 2021 Open Spaces Strategy and subsequent grounds maintenance reviews, the Council reaffirms its commitment to modernising sporting provision, enhancing biodiversity and ensuring fair and inclusive access to leisure and recreation spaces. While many actions from the previous plan have been delivered, a number of priorities remain active, including improvements to basketball facilities, the reintegration of cricket at The Leys, and continued investment in depot infrastructure.

Witney is a vibrant and historic town with a strong sense of community and civic pride. As elected representatives, we are committed to building on this heritage and securing a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future for all who live, work in and visit the town. This Strategic Plan will guide the Council through to the next Town Council elections in May 2027 and beyond.

Working together with officers, community partners, local organisations and residents, the Council will deliver the actions and investments set out in this plan to help Witney flourish socially, environmentally and economically.

**Vision Statement** *"To improve the quality of life for present and future generations in Witney by promoting sustainability, inclusivity, and community wellbeing."*

**Mission Statement** *"To make Witney a great place to live, work and visit."*

The Council's strategic plan is built upon six fundamental pillars that guide our decision-making and resource allocation

1. **A forward-looking Town Council** - We represent residents and businesses on key strategic issues facing the town, ensuring their voices are heard at all levels.
2. **An engaged and supported community** - We actively seek engagement with all residents and work with others to enable them to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.
3. **An empowered community** - We encourage collaboration for the overall success of Witney through the facilitation and championing of change programmes and initiatives.
4. **A respectful community** - We promote inclusivity and treat all people fairly and with respect regardless of race, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability.
5. **A beautiful Witney** - We continue to improve and develop our open spaces while protecting and enhancing our natural environment.
6. **A vibrant local economy** - We promote local businesses and develop locally controlled economies that prioritise Witney while preserving our unique identity and heritage.

Woven through all six pillars is a golden thread – our unwavering commitment to sustainability and resilience – which forms the foundation of a seventh, overarching objective:

7. **A Green and Resilient Town** – *Rooted in the Council's 2019 Climate Emergency declaration.* We are committed to embedding environmental responsibility into everything we do. We aim to achieve carbon neutrality for the Council by 2028, while supporting wider efforts to create a thriving, low-carbon future for Witney.

# About Witney Town Council

Witney Town Council serves as the first tier of local government for the town, representing the interests, wellbeing, and aspirations of the community. The Council works to enhance the quality of life for residents by delivering a wide range of local services, managing community assets, and shaping the long-term development of the town.

## Our Structure

The Council operates through a combination of democratically elected representatives and a professional officer team who work together to provide effective, accountable governance.

- **17 elected, unpaid councillors**, serving a term until May 2027, who set the strategic direction and act as community champions.
- **Over 40 dedicated Officers**, employees and staff members who support the delivery of services, maintain facilities, and ensure the day-to-day running of the Council.
- **Six specialist committees**, each focused on a distinct area of Council responsibility, enabling informed decision-making and targeted oversight.

## Committee Structure

The committee system underpins the Council's governance approach, ensuring that decisions are considered thoroughly and transparently across all service areas:

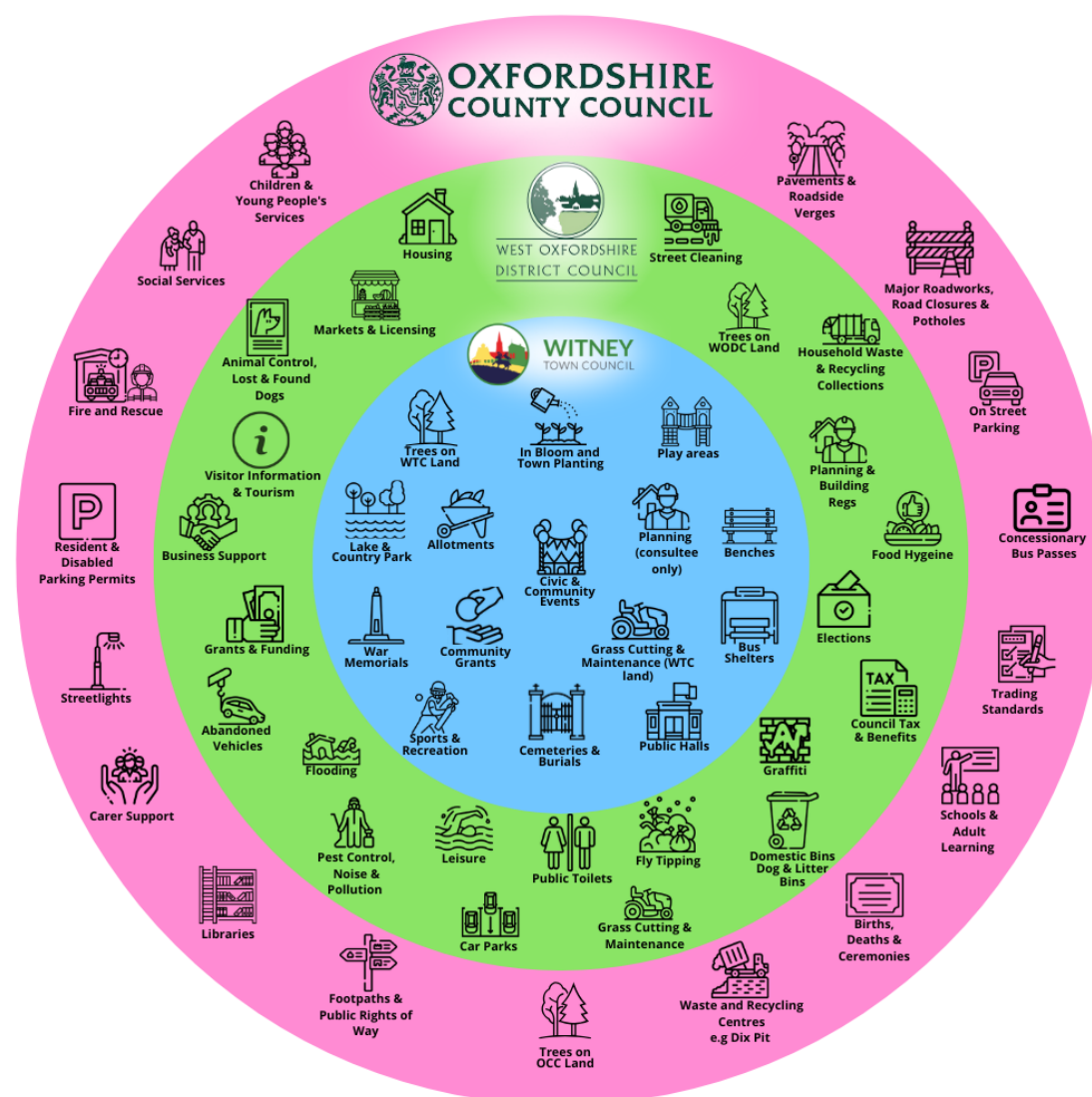
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee** – Oversees corporate governance, financial management, and strategic policy development.
- **Stronger Communities Committee** – Focuses on community engagement, events, partnerships, and initiatives that strengthen civic life.
- **Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee** – Manages the Council's operational assets including cemeteries, allotments, and public halls.
- **Parks & Recreation Committee** – Responsible for parks, play areas, sports facilities, and wider recreation provision.
- **Climate & Biodiversity Committee** – Leads the Council's environmental agenda, promoting sustainability, carbon reduction, and biodiversity enhancement.
- **Planning & Development Committee** – Reviews planning applications and contributes to the shaping of Witney's built environment and future growth.



## Our Services

Witney Town Council delivers a wide range of local services that support the day-to-day life of the community and complement those provided by West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

Responsibility for services in Witney is shared across all three tiers of local government. The diagram below illustrates how services are distributed between Town, District and County Councils, helping to clarify roles and avoid duplication.



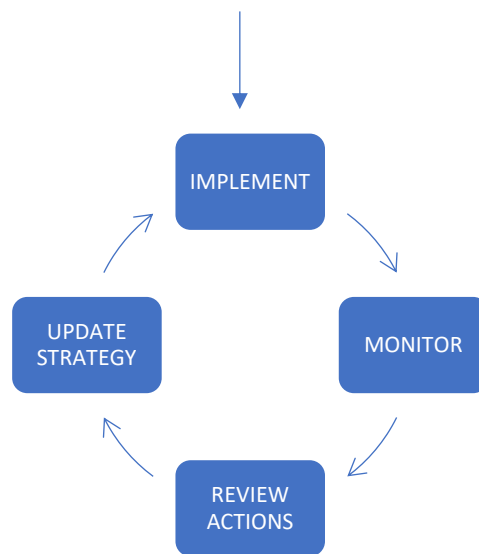
Through its direct service delivery, local leadership and community support role, Witney Town Council plays an important part in maintaining public spaces, supporting community life and contributing to the town's environmental and civic wellbeing.

## Strategic Plan Lifecycle

This Strategic Plan is a living document and will evolve as circumstances, priorities, and insights change. It is therefore essential that the Council reviews and updates it on a regular basis. The Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains current and effective.

As a guide the lifecycle is as follows:

### PREPARE & ADOPT THE STRATEGIC PLAN



# **Our Journey: Achievements 2019-2024**

## **A Period of Transformation**

The year 2019 marked a significant shift in Witney Town Council's political landscape. After more than 20 years of Conservative control, the town saw a change in administration as a majority of Labour and Co-operative councillors were elected to serve the community. This period represented an important phase of development in the town's governance and set the direction for many of the Council's recent achievements. In 2024, a Central Ward by-election resulted in the Council moving to no overall political control, with 8 Labour, 8 Conservative and 1 Green councillor, creating a new context for collaborative leadership and shared responsibility.

## **Rising to the COVID-19 Challenge**

The period between 2020 and 2022 was defined by unprecedented global challenges. The Council demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamentally changing how local government operated to ensure continuity of service for residents.

## **Digital Innovation in Governance**

We swiftly embraced technology to maintain democratic processes, transitioning committee and council meetings to digital platforms. This innovation ensured essential business could continue, maintaining transparency and accountability during uncertain times. During this period, both councillors and officers adapted to new ways of working through online meetings, which became essential when public gatherings were not possible. However, following the pandemic, legislation required the return to in-person meetings for formal council business, limiting the continued use of remote platforms.

Despite these restrictions, we have continued to use online meetings effectively for working parties and advisory committees, demonstrating our commitment to modern, accessible governance. The council stands ready to implement hybrid meetings when legislation permits, recognising the value they bring in supporting a more diverse and inclusive democracy. Hybrid options would help remove barriers for councillors with caring responsibilities or other commitments, enabling fuller participation and robust decision-making for all.

## **Community Support During Crisis**

During the height of the pandemic, we faced unprecedented challenges that required the temporary closure of many public facilities. Despite these necessary measures, the Council remained fully committed to supporting the

wellbeing and safety of our residents. This period served to underscore the crucial role that our public spaces play in fostering community resilience and connection.

The Corn Exchange was swiftly repurposed to serve as a temporary food bank and community larder, helping to coordinate and distribute essential supplies to those most in need. Staff and volunteers came together to ensure that vulnerable individuals and families had continued access to food and basic necessities during a time of great uncertainty and isolation.

Meanwhile, the town's recreation grounds took on renewed importance as safe, accessible spaces for outdoor activity. These green areas offered residents an opportunity for daily exercise and a vital escape from the pressures of home confinement. Whether it was a brief walk, a jog, or simply a moment of fresh air, these spaces provided comfort, relief, and a much-needed sense of normality—albeit in a limited form.

Through these efforts, we were reminded that even in the most trying of circumstances, community spirit, adaptability, and the thoughtful use of shared spaces can make a profound difference in people's lives.

## **Strategic Developments and Achievements**

### **The Corn Exchange Enhancement**

A key milestone in recent years has been the continued development of the Corn Exchange. Phases 1 and 2 of the enhancement programme led to the creation of a café/bar facility, significantly enriching the venue's overall offering. While Café Bar 1863 is an integral part of the Corn Exchange—supporting user groups, community meetings, and local activities—it also operates as a standalone attraction. It has quickly gained popularity, particularly among older residents, becoming a valued social hub.

The Council successfully secured Section 106 developer contributions over several years, in addition to a community grant from West Oxfordshire District Council. These funds enabled the procurement of cinema-quality tiered seating, a new screen, and an upgraded sound system. These improvements have helped establish the Corn Exchange as a premier community venue, which now proudly serves as a warm space in winter and a cool retreat in summer, with refreshments readily available.

The venue now hosts an increasingly diverse and dynamic programme of events. These include Council-run activities, as well as performances and productions by local amateur dramatics groups, cover bands, and touring theatre companies.

## **Strategic Open Spaces Revolution**

One of our most significant operational transformations was the comprehensive review and strategic overhaul of how we manage our open spaces. After more than 25 years of outsourced grounds maintenance, we made the bold and strategic decision to bring this service in-house—not as a cost-saving measure, but for improved service delivery, enable more responsive local control, and embed a proactive ethos into our green space management.

This change was underpinned by the development of the Witney Open Spaces Strategy (2021)—a landmark document shaped by wide community and stakeholder consultation. The strategy laid out a progressive vision for open spaces that are inclusive, biodiverse, well-used, and resilient to the challenges of climate change. Through it, we committed to delivering open spaces that improve public health, foster community pride, and enrich lives.

Key achievements during this period included:

- The introduction of modern, environmentally conscious grounds maintenance practices, including moves toward electric vehicles and sustainable equipment.
- The launch of biodiversity initiatives, including rewilding pilots and a new arboriculture management framework.
- Enhanced collaboration with sports clubs and community groups to improve local facilities and encourage broader participation.
- Clearer accountability and visibility in service provision—addressing longstanding confusion over which authority was responsible for specific sites.
- The creation of strategic masterplans for key parks, laying the foundation for future investment aligned with community needs.

Bringing grounds maintenance in-house was more than an operational shift—it marked the start of a cultural change in how we value, manage, and develop our open spaces. It demonstrated our commitment to placing quality, sustainability, and community voice at the heart of our public realm.

## **Revamping Urban Play: The New Leys Wheeled Sports Park**

A standout achievement in our infrastructure investment journey was the successful transformation of the Leys Wheeled Sports Park, completed in March 2024. This £158,000 regeneration project—made possible through a £57,975 grant from FCC Communities Foundation and a £100,000 commitment from Witney Town Council—represents a landmark investment in inclusive, youth-focused public realm infrastructure.

This was far more than a refurbishment. Informed by extensive input from young residents and wheeled sports enthusiasts, the new park incorporates dynamic ramps, ledges, and rails designed for skateboards, scooters, BMX bikes, and rollerblades. Its design consciously retained and repurposed existing features, reflecting a commitment to sustainability and community-led development.

The skate park has already become a vibrant hub for recreation and social connection. The space is designed to be open, safe, and engaging for beginners and seasoned riders alike. Importantly, this project embodies our ethos of designing with the community, not just for it. It is a direct result of listening to young people, involving them meaningfully in the process, and delivering a facility that speaks to their aspirations. The opening event drew wide attention, with BBC Radio Oxford and local media celebrating it as a milestone in youth engagement and placemaking.

### **Reimagining Family-Friendly Recreation: The Leys Splash Park Refurbishment**

A key infrastructure success in the final phase of this strategic cycle was the delivery of the Leys Splash Park refurbishment, completed on time and on budget ahead of the May 2025 half-term holidays. Originally scheduled for summer 2025, this fast-tracked project was the result of strategic financial planning—funded through earmarked annual reserves set aside since the original installation. The foresight to budget incrementally allowed the Council to deliver the upgrade without requiring additional taxpayer funding.

The refurbishment introduced vibrant new features including interactive jets, above-ground play structures, and a wheelchair-accessible “jump on me” start button, making the park more inclusive than ever before. A new rainbow-themed, slip-resistant floor and a behind-the-scenes overhaul of the plant room and water systems ensured the facility will remain reliable and fun-filled for years to come. Up to six jets operate simultaneously, encouraging dynamic, safe, and engaging water play.

Community consultation played a central role in the redesign. This project not only safeguards a treasured community asset but elevates it to a new standard of accessibility, sustainability, and joy—reflecting our long-term commitment to investing in play, inclusion, and quality of life for all residents.

# Our Strategic Priorities 2025-2029

## 1. A Forward-Looking Town Council

As Witney grows, so too does the need for proactive leadership and future-focused planning. The Town Council plays a vital role in ensuring that development benefits the whole community, is underpinned by good governance, which reflects local needs and priorities.

By engaging with residents and working with partners, we ensure that decisions are data-driven, transparent, and accountable. We will continue to invest in our internal capacity, digital systems, and training to meet the challenges of tomorrow while staying rooted in the values of local democracy.

**Strategic Intent:** Represent residents and businesses on key strategic issues facing the town, including planning for future growth and boundary considerations.

### Key Actions:

- Use data and resident feedback to inform policy decisions
- Advocate for Witney on key planning, transport, and housing issues
- Engage proactively in boundary review discussions to ensure adequate infrastructure and services for new developments
- Secure appropriate s106 agreements and council tax arrangements for major housing developments
- Invest in digital systems to streamline operations and enhance transparency
- Provide comprehensive training and development for councillors and staff
- Plan strategically for local government reorganisation implications

### Committee Delivery:

- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Strategic planning, governance framework oversight, financial management, boundary review engagement
- **Planning & Development Committee:** Planning application responses, development consultation, traffic and highways matters, s106 negotiations
- **All Committees:** Data-driven decision making and transparency enhancement

## 2. An Engaged and Supported Community

Witney is a town known for its strong sense of community and local pride. People here care about their neighbours, support local causes, and value the inclusive spirit that defines our town. Witney Town Council works to nurture this community strength by listening to residents, supporting essential services, and providing opportunities for people of all ages to get involved and feel represented.

Through open communication, partnerships, and targeted support, we aim to ensure that all residents – from young people to older generations – feel connected, valued, and able to lead fulfilling lives.

**Strategic Intent:** Actively seek engagement with all residents and work with others to enable them to lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.

### Key Actions:

- Enhance resident engagement through digital platforms, forums, and consultations
- Support social inclusion, volunteering, and wellbeing initiatives
- Work collaboratively to improve public health and tackle isolation
- Establish and support groups like Youth Council and Community Voices
- Ensure all voices in the community are heard and represented
- Conduct annual resident satisfaction surveys

### Committee Delivery:

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Community engagement frameworks, youth services, Witney Youth Council operations, annual resident satisfaction surveys
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Strategic oversight of community engagement and resource allocation

### Current Commitments:

- Community transport funding (£26,000)
- Detached youth work (£18,000)
- Children & youth grants (£20,000)
- Home Start support (£11,000)



### 3. An Empowered Community

Witney thrives when its people are empowered to lead, organise, and shape their community. The Council sees itself not just as a provider of services, but as a facilitator of local action and collaboration.

We aim to champion and support those making a difference in our town – from schools and voluntary groups to social enterprises and neighbourhood projects. Through grants, partnerships, and active citizenship programmes, we help strengthen community networks and build local capacity to deliver shared goals.

**Strategic Intent:** Encourage collaboration for the overall success of the town through the facilitation and championing of change programmes and initiatives.

#### **Key Actions:**

- Facilitate partnerships between groups, schools, charities, and businesses
- Offer grants and support to community-led initiatives aligned with our goals
- Encourage active citizenship and town pride
- Build capacity for shared service delivery where appropriate
- Support voluntary groups and community interest companies

#### **Committee Delivery:**

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Partnership facilitation, grant administration, community organisation support
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Grant policy oversight and strategic partnership development

## 4. A Respectful and Inclusive Community

Witney is a diverse town where every individual deserves to feel valued, heard, and treated with fairness. Inclusivity is not just a principle but a practice that guides how the Council works and makes decisions.

We are committed to ensuring that all communities in Witney – regardless of background, age, identity, or ability – have access to opportunities, spaces, and support. By embedding equality and respect across everything we do, we aim to create a town where everyone belongs and thrives.

**Strategic Intent:** Promote inclusivity and always treat people fairly and with respect regardless of race or racial group, sex or sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or disability.

### Key Actions:

- Ensure all residents feel represented and valued
- Promote equality, diversity, and inclusion through policy and practice
- Recognise and celebrate the cultural and social diversity of Witney
- Embed fairness and respect across all council operations
- Advocate for underrepresented groups in line with equality legislation

### Committee Delivery:

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Inclusivity advocacy, community representation, equality promotion
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Policy development with equality considerations
- **All Committees:** Embed inclusivity criteria in all decision-making processes

## 5. A Beautiful Witney

Witney's identity is deeply rooted in its natural beauty, historic charm, and well-maintained green spaces. Our parks, cemeteries, and open areas are not only places for recreation but also central to residents' wellbeing and the town's overall appeal.

Witney Town Council takes pride in managing and enhancing these spaces, ensuring they are accessible, welcoming, and environmentally sustainable. We are committed to delivering high standards in grounds maintenance, promoting biodiversity, and investing in public infrastructure that enhances the town's appearance and liveability.

**Strategic Intent:** To further improve and develop our open spaces, sporting and leisure facilities, and town infrastructure—protecting and enhancing our natural environment while enriching community wellbeing.

### Our Vision for Open Spaces

***“Our parks, open spaces and public realm will be high quality, well used and provide a modern, sustainable and diverse resource which will improve the health and enrich the lives of the communities at the heart of them; be of significant ecological value; and help to mitigate the effects of climate change”***

WTC Open Spaces Strategy, 2021

Open spaces are vital to the identity, wellbeing, and resilience of Witney. From the beauty of the Lake and Country Park to the energy of The Leys and the tranquillity of our cemeteries, these spaces define the character of our town. They are not just places for recreation—they are the green infrastructure that connects us, improves our health, supports biodiversity, and strengthens community pride.

Building on the **2021 Open Spaces Strategy**, the plan is to carry forward the clear framework for delivery across the five key themes.

### Major Ongoing and Planned Projects (2025–2029)

- **The Leys Masterplan** – £250,000 investment (opening Spring 2026)
- **Splash Park Renewal** – completed May 2025
- **West Witney Clubhouse Refurbishment** – in progress
- **New Works Depot** – operational by 2026

- **Play Equipment Renewal Programme** – ongoing annual investment £75,000
  - **Rewilding and Habitat Enhancement Zones** – expanding annually from 2025
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## Our Commitment

We will continue to deliver high-quality, accessible, and environmentally responsible open spaces that serve all residents. These investments are not merely aesthetic—they are essential to public health, social cohesion, and environmental resilience.

Through strong partnerships, clear planning, and community collaboration, we will create a **Beautiful Witney** where every green space, playground, and park reflects our shared pride and ambition for a sustainable future.

## Key Actions:

- Improve and maintain parks, allotments, and cemeteries to exceptional standards
- Promote biodiversity, tree planting, and community orchard gardens
- Develop sustainable landscaping practices with ecological value
- Keep the town clean, accessible, and safe
- Enhance infrastructure and public realm

## Committee Delivery:

- **Parks & Recreation Committee:** Maintenance of all recreation grounds, parks, and open spaces; play equipment management; sports facilities oversight
- **Climate & Biodiversity Committee:** Environmental spaces management, tree stock oversight, biodiversity enhancement
- **Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee:** Cemetery and allotment management
- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Town centre infrastructure including street furniture, bus shelters, and public realm

## 6. A Vibrant Local Economy

Witney is a thriving market town with a rich heritage, a strong sense of community, and a growing local economy. It offers a diverse range of shops, services, and green spaces that serve both residents and visitors alike.

Witney Town Council plays an active role in supporting this vibrancy by organising regular events and community activities, maintaining key town assets such as street furniture and floral displays, and helping to create a welcoming environment through supporting and influencing public realm improvements.

We also support our local retail and hospitality sectors and advocate for better connectivity through pedestrian improvements, public transport support by ensuring the continuation of the town bus service through a commitment to ongoing grant funding, and advocates for free accessible town centre parking.

Our strategy not only commits to maintaining these services, but also to enhancing them – ensuring that Witney remains a well-connected, attractive, and inclusive place to live, work, and visit.

**Strategic Intent:** Promote local businesses and develop locally controlled economies that put Witney first whilst preserving and enhancing our history and unique identity.

### Key Actions:

- Support local businesses and markets through strategic partnership working
- Promote town centre vibrancy through events and cultural activities
- Partner with economic development stakeholders to attract investment and skills
- Celebrate Witney's heritage while encouraging innovation
- Collaborate with Chamber of Commerce to improve visitor experience and Welcome to Witney initiatives
- Explore coach parking and drop-off solutions to support tourism

### Committee Delivery:

- **Stronger Communities Committee:** Partnership working with businesses, Chamber of Commerce collaboration, visitor experience enhancement, as well as a strong programme of cultural events town wide – helping to facility third party events on Council owned land, and by holding Council-led events, encouraging residents and visitors into the town to support local businesses.

- **Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee:** Continue to develop and enhance the Corn Exchange as community hub and arts centre
- **Policy, Governance & Finance Committee:** Strategic oversight and resource allocation

## 7. A Green and Resilient Town

Witney is shaped by its natural surroundings – from the River Windrush that flows through its heart to the green spaces, meadows, and historic landscapes that define its identity. Protecting and enhancing our environment is central to building a sustainable, resilient town for future generations. It also strengthens community wellbeing and supports the services and spaces that make Witney a vibrant place to live.

In recent years, the Town Council has taken important steps to reduce its own carbon footprint and support biodiversity, and we encourage others in our community to do the same. This strategy builds on that foundation, reaffirming our commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2028 and responding to the climate and ecological emergencies through meaningful, locally driven action.

**Strategic Intent:** Commit to reducing the Council's carbon footprint and implementing actions from the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency declarations.

### **Key Actions:**

- Achieve net zero carbon emissions in Council operations by 2028
- Implement comprehensive Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
- Work with schools and community groups on environmental education
- Encourage active travel and sustainable energy use
- Manage environmental spaces for biodiversity enhancement

### **Committee Delivery:**

- **Climate & Biodiversity Committee:** Climate strategy development, carbon reduction implementation, environmental spaces management, community engagement on climate issues
- **All Committees:** Integrate climate and biodiversity considerations into all operations

### **2025/26 Priorities:**

- Develop comprehensive Climate Change Strategy by October 2025
- Establish baseline carbon emissions and reduction targets
- Implement Carbon Literacy training for staff and councillors
- Review procurement policy for low-carbon suppliers
- Expand wildflower areas and habitat enhancement projects

## Alignment with the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041

Witney Town Council recognises the importance of aligning its strategic priorities with the long-term vision of West Oxfordshire District Council's *Local Plan 2041 (WOLP)*. The Local Plan will shape development across the district and is a critical framework for how Witney continues to thrive as the district's principal service and administrative centre.

In response to the open consultation on the draft Local Plan objectives, Witney Town Council has made detailed submissions at every opportunity to ensure that the WOLP reflects local priorities and community needs. This submission is closely aligned with the Council's own strategic objectives "pillars", particularly in relation to sustainability, infrastructure, inclusivity, and community well-being.

### Key Priorities Submitted by Witney Town Council:

The Council has identified the following priorities, many of which cross-cut our strategic objectives:

- **Sustainable Community Infrastructure** (aligns with Pillars 2, 3, 5, and 7):
  - Designation of land for burial space, sports pitches with associated changing facilities, and further allotment provision.
  - Allocation of land for community halls and scout camping spaces.
  - Expansion of healthcare provision and youth centres.
  - Improved public realm with more public art and support for public houses.
- **Transport, Access & Connectivity** (aligns with Pillars 1, 4, and 7):
  - Enhanced car, electric vehicle, cycle, and coach/campervan parking infrastructure.
  - Improved pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.
  - Stronger transport links between Witney and Carterton, including a segregated cycle lane and slip-road access to the A40.
  - Integration of sustainable transport with future rail connectivity.
- **Housing & Social Sustainability** (aligns with Pillars 2 and 6):
  - A robust housing mix including affordable homes, social rent for key workers, and independent living options for older residents.
  - Support for community-led housing and Council involvement in building social housing stock.
- **Green Infrastructure & Energy** (aligns directly with Pillar 7 – the Golden Thread: A Green and Resilient Town):
  - Designated land for community horticulture and food-growing projects.
  - Local generation of green energy with mechanisms for community benefit or payback.
  - Stronger flood resilience and water quality management policies, including specific recognition of the flood risk in Witney.



## Flooding and Resilience

Following recent significant flood events in Eastfield Road, Hailey Road, West End Industrial Estate, and Bridge Street, Witney Town Council has requested that the *Local Plan 2041* explicitly address flood risk in Witney. The Council is also taking steps to strengthen local flood resilience, including:

- Advocating for inclusion of flood mitigation in future development policy.
- Improving emergency response coordination, including identifying a single emergency contact point and better use of Council halls as places of refuge.
- Enhancing collaboration with local groups such as the Witney Flood Group.
- Supporting training for Council staff in sandbag deployment and flood response.
- Committing to proactive monitoring of post-flood clean-up, such as sandbag collection.
- Desilting project initiated in October 2025, and will monitor with the help of the Witney Flood Group and residents of Riverside Gardens for future involvement.

## Allotment Provision

Witney Town Council remains committed to protecting and enhancing allotment provision. While current provision exceeds some benchmarks, unmet demand in certain areas signals the need for proactive action. The Council has resolved to:

- Continue prioritising land allocation through large developments.
- Actively monitor and explore emerging land opportunities.
- Work closely with the Witney Allotment Association to ensure effective management, clearer data, and availability of plots.

This alignment with the Local Plan demonstrates the Town Council's commitment to shaping a **resilient, inclusive, and forward-thinking Witney**, with infrastructure and development that truly serve the needs of the town's residents now and into the future.

## Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge introduced by West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) to help fund the infrastructure required to support growth across the district. It applies to most new developments based on the additional floor space created and is intended to contribute towards essential infrastructure such as highways, education, open spaces, community and cultural facilities, and other services that support sustainable development.

WODC formally adopted its CIL Charging Schedule on 1 October 2025, with the charging regime taking effect from 31 January 2026. Any CIL-liable planning permissions granted on or after this date will be subject to the levy. The adopted charging rates vary by type and scale of development. Major strategic sites identified in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 — including Salt Cross Garden Village, West Eynsham, North Witney, East Witney, and East Chipping Norton — are exempt from CIL, with infrastructure instead secured through alternative planning mechanisms.

Under national regulations, a proportion of CIL receipts must be passed directly to the relevant town or parish council. As Witney Town Council does not currently have an adopted Neighbourhood Plan, it will receive 15% of CIL receipts arising within the parish boundary, capped at £100 per existing dwelling (plus indexation). Should a Neighbourhood Plan be adopted in future, this proportion would increase to 25% with no cap, providing significantly greater scope for local investment.

CIL receipts passed to Witney Town Council must be used to support the development of the area. This includes funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of local infrastructure, or other projects that help to address the impacts of development. This could include, for example:

- Enhancing local community and leisure facilities;
- Improving pedestrian and cycle connectivity between new developments and the town centre;
- Investing in parks, play areas and open spaces;
- Supporting public realm improvements and sustainable transport initiatives; and
- Enhancing climate resilience and green infrastructure projects.

Alongside CIL, the Council continues to engage with Section 106 (S106) planning obligations and Section 278 highway agreements, which are used to secure site-specific mitigation and infrastructure directly related to individual developments. These mechanisms remain particularly important where development takes place outside the parish boundary but generates significant impacts on services and infrastructure within Witney.

Recognising the importance of a clear, consistent and strategic approach to developer funding, the Planning & Development Committee resolved to establish a formal Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) for the Town Council. This will take the form of a rolling, prioritised list of projects that may be suitable for funding through CIL, S106 and S278 agreements. The IFS will:

- Align directly with the Council's Strategic Plan and the emerging West Oxfordshire District Council Local Plan 2041;
- Support timely and evidence-based engagement with WODC and developers;
- Improve transparency and consistency in the way developer contributions are sought; and
- Be reviewed annually and formally approved by Full Council.

The introduction of CIL, alongside the establishment of an Infrastructure Funding Statement, provides Witney Town Council with a stronger framework to plan proactively for growth. It will enable the Council to better secure investment in infrastructure that supports community wellbeing, environmental sustainability and the long-term resilience of the town, while ensuring that the impacts of development are managed in a fair and coordinated way.

## Alignment with Existing Strategies and Plans

This Strategic Plan is supported by a number of adopted strategies and management plans that guide specific areas of the Council's work. These documents provide the detailed policy frameworks and delivery mechanisms that underpin the Council's corporate priorities for the period 2025–2029.

Key supporting strategies include:

- **Open Spaces Strategy** – guiding the management and enhancement of parks, recreation grounds, allotments, open spaces, biodiversity, public realm and outdoor amenities.
- **Communications Strategy** – setting the framework for how the Council communicates with residents, promotes transparency and engages with different audiences.
- **Community Engagement Strategy** – shaping how the Council involves residents and community groups in decision-making, consultation and service planning.
- **Medium Term Financial Strategy and Investment Strategy** – directing how the Council manages its finances, investments, reserves and approach to risk, liquidity and ethical/sustainability considerations when investing public funds.

Key supporting management plans include:

- Corn Exchange, Café/Bar 1863 and Burwell Hall Business Plan
- Lake & Country Park Management Plan
- Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan

# Community Engagement & Communications

**Strategic Objective:** To foster an informed, involved and empowered community through clear, accessible and engaging communication.

## Overview

Witney Town Council recognises that effective communication is central to strong local democracy, high-quality service delivery and building public trust. Building on the adopted Communications Strategy and Community Engagement Strategy, this Strategic Plan embeds a long-term commitment to consistent, open and modern communication, both internally and externally.

## Strategic Aims (2025–2029)

1. Strengthen Public Engagement and Transparency
  - Deliver timely updates on Council decisions, projects and services
  - Promote meaningful opportunities for community input through consultations, surveys and events
2. Grow Digital Reach and Accessibility
  - Expand the use of video, graphics and visual storytelling
  - Ensure website content is accessible, relevant and optimised for mobile use
3. Support Inclusive Communication
  - Provide information in accessible formats and use plain English
  - Maintain a mix of digital and printed communications
  - Re-establish the “Voice of Witney” contact list for regular two-way dialogue
4. Enhance Internal Communications
  - Introduce and embed a modern staff intranet or alternative form of communication accessible to all
  - Improve cross-department information-sharing and collaboration
5. Manage Reputation and Media Relations
  - Maintain positive working relationships with local media
  - Monitor and respond to public sentiment and misinformation

## Delivery Actions

- Grow social media audiences, particularly through Instagram and video
- Trial live-streaming of meetings and consultations
- Produce two printed newsletters per year

- Develop content explaining the roles of Town, District and County Councils
- Monitor engagement through analytics, surveys and feedback

#### Outcome Measures

- 90% resident satisfaction with Council communications
- 20% increase in digital engagement by 2029
- 95% of media coverage rated positive or neutral
- New intranet operational by 2026
- "Voice of Witney" network active and contributing annually

# **Strategic Delivery Framework**

## **Committee-Led Implementation**

Each strategic objective will be delivered through the Council's committee structure, ensuring strong governance, accountability and specialist oversight. Committees will work collaboratively while maintaining their specialist focus areas, with regular cross-committee coordination to ensure holistic delivery.

## **Resource Allocation and Performance Monitoring**

Progress will be tracked through:

- Regular committee updates and strategic reviews
- Annual strategic plan assessment aligned with budget cycles
- Public reporting via website, newsletters, and social media
- Performance indicators aligned to strategic objectives
- Regular councillor and officer accountability measures
- Annual resident satisfaction surveys to measure impact

## **Partnership Working**

We will work collaboratively with:

- West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council
- Local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce
- Community groups and voluntary organisations
- Schools and educational institutions
- Environmental and heritage organisations
- Residents and community stakeholders
- Developers and planning authorities on boundary and infrastructure matters

## **Strategic Context:**

# **Local Government Reorganisation and Community Governance Review**

## **The Changing Landscape**

Local government is undergoing significant reform following the Government's devolution proposals published in December 2024. These plans are expected to replace the current two-tier system with new unitary authorities, fundamentally reshaping local governance across England.

## **Implications for Witney**

This transformation presents both challenges and opportunities, for Witney Town Council including:

### **Opportunities:**

- Improved integration of services
- Enhanced strategic capacity
- Greater accountability
- Potential for devolved powers and funding

### **Our Strategic Response:**

- Proactive engagement in reorganisation discussions
- Asset mapping and financial modelling for potential transfers
- Stakeholder engagement to support enhanced service delivery
- Ensuring that "finance follows function" in any asset transfer

## **Community Governance Review Considerations**

With significant housing growth planned on the outskirts of the current Witney boundary, the Council will continue to explore the case for a community governance review. As the service centre for surrounding areas, new development places increasing pressure on Witney's services and infrastructure.

### **Key Priorities:**

- Participation in development discussions
- Securing appropriate Section 106 contributions
- Advocate for boundary adjustments that reflect service delivery realities
- Capture council tax revenue from developments that rely on Witney's services and facilities



**Strategic Approach:**

- Early engagement with planning authorities and developers
- Infrastructure impact assessments
- Community consultation
- Financial modelling of service delivery implications

## Looking Forward: Our Commitment to Witney

This Strategic Plan sets out Witney Town Council's commitment to leading the town with ambition, responsibility and care through to 2029 and beyond. Through focused committee leadership, strong partnerships and meaningful community engagement, the Council will deliver improvements that support a thriving, inclusive and resilient town for future generations.

Success will be measured not only by projects delivered, but by the long-term benefits to quality of life, environmental sustainability, community wellbeing and economic vitality. Together, we will create a town that is vibrant, inclusive, beautiful, and sustainable—a place we can all be proud to call home.

### Key Milestones

- **2025:** Climate Change Strategy development and major infrastructure delivery
- **2026:** Mid-term strategic review and community consultation
- **2027:** Town Council elections and Strategic Plan refresh
- **2028:** Net zero carbon emissions target for Council operations
- **2029:** Full Strategic Plan review and next phase development

### Our Promise

Witney Town Council commits to:

- Transparent and accountable governance
- Genuine community engagement
- Sustainable management of public resources
- Continuous service improvement
- Advocacy for Witney's interests at all levels of government

This Strategic Plan will be reviewed annually, with a comprehensive refresh following the May 2027 elections.

**Document Status:** DRAFT Corporate Strategic Plan 2025-2029 v.1

**Approved:** [Date]

**Next Review:** Annual review cycle with major review May 2027

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