
Agenda Item: Community Asset Acquisition and Management Policy

Meeting Date: Monday, 28 September 2026

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO – Sharon Groth

The purpose of this report is to introduce the draft Community Asset Acquisition and Management Policy and its supporting Decision Framework, and to seek the Committee's endorsement before the Policy is referred to Full Council for adoption.

Background

Opportunities may arise for the Town Council to acquire, lease, manage or facilitate the management of land, buildings and services that provide a benefit to the community. Such opportunities may result from local government reorganisation, devolution of asset transfers from principal authorities, developer contributions, community initiatives or approaches from other public and charitable bodies.

The potential benefits can be significant, but each proposal may also create long-term legal, financial, operational and governance responsibilities. A clear framework is therefore required to ensure that opportunities are considered consistently, transparently and in the long-term interests of the Council and the community.

The matter was considered by the Personnel Sub-Committee at its meeting on 29 July 2026, when it was agreed that the proposed Policy and supporting Decision Framework should be referred to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee for consideration.

Proposed Policy and Decision Framework

The draft Community Asset Acquisition and Management Policy sets out the principles that will guide the Council when considering whether to acquire or take responsibility for a community asset. It does not commit the Council to accepting any particular transfer or opportunity. Each proposal would continue to be considered on its own merits, having regard to the Council's statutory powers, strategic priorities, financial position, available resources and the anticipated community benefit.

The supporting Decision Framework provides practical guidance through the main stages of assessment: identifying the opportunity; initial strategic appraisal; outline feasibility; stakeholder and community engagement; preparation of a business case; formal Council decision; due diligence and legal processes; transfer and mobilisation; and subsequent review.

The Framework is intended to guide rather than prescribe the process. It may be applied proportionately and adapted to reflect the nature, complexity, value, risks and timescales of an individual proposal. It also requires the Council to consider the most appropriate long-term governance and delivery model rather than presume that direct Council management will always be the preferred option.

Together, the Policy and Framework should provide Members and Officers with a consistent basis for assessing future opportunities, commissioning proportionate due diligence and identifying the information required before the Council makes a final commitment.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' The proposed Policy will help ensure that future asset opportunities are aligned with those priorities and contribute to sustainable community benefit.

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** - The Policy requires equality, diversity, accessibility and inclusion to be considered throughout the assessment of an asset opportunity and when evaluating community benefit and future use.
- b) **Biodiversity** - Environmental obligations and biodiversity implications would be considered during feasibility work and due diligence where relevant to the asset concerned.
- c) **Crime & Disorder** - The assessment of proposed uses, operating arrangements and site management would include relevant community safety and security considerations.
- d) **Environment & Climate Emergency** - Environmental sustainability, climate resilience and whole-life implications are included within the Policy's guiding principles and decision-making framework.

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.

The Policy is intended to reduce the risk of the Council accepting an asset without a clear understanding of its condition, liabilities, costs, legal position, operational requirements or governance arrangements. It supports proportionate investigation, professional advice, community engagement and a documented business case before any final decision is taken.

Social Value

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

A consistent approach will help the Council identify opportunities capable of protecting valued facilities, improving local services and delivering lasting community benefit. The Framework also encourages meaningful engagement and consideration of community-led and partnership delivery models where these offer effective and sustainable stewardship.

Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from adoption of the Policy.

Financial implications associated with an individual asset opportunity would be assessed through the Framework, including capital investment, whole-life costs, revenue implications, staffing, maintenance, income, reserves, external funding, borrowing and any appropriate exit strategy.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. Consider, amend if necessary, and endorse the draft Community Asset Acquisition and Management Policy and the supporting Decision Framework attached at Appendix A;
2. recommend the Policy and Decision Framework to Full Council for adoption; and
3. authorise the Town Clerk/CEO to make any minor typographical, formatting or consequential amendments required before presentation to Full Council, provided these do not alter the substance of the documents.