

Witney Town Council Response to the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043 Consultation

Witney Town Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2043.

As the principal settlement within the District, Witney will continue to accommodate substantial housing, employment, and infrastructure growth throughout the plan period. The Town Council supports sustainable growth where it is infrastructure-led and accompanied by appropriate investment in transport, community facilities, leisure provision, environmental improvements, and public services that maintain and enhance residents' quality of life.

The Council has recently adopted an Infrastructure Funding Statement and associated infrastructure project list, identifying a range of local infrastructure priorities across the town. This document will be maintained and updated throughout the plan period and should be used to inform infrastructure planning, developer contributions and investment decisions associated with future growth.

Whilst the Council supports many of the ambitions contained within the emerging Local Plan, it considers that several policies require strengthening to ensure that development is supported by the infrastructure necessary to create sustainable, healthy, and resilient communities.

Strategic Infrastructure and Transport

Policies CP3 and CP8

Witney Town Council strongly supports the inclusion of the Northern Distributor Road and West End Link Road within the Local Plan. However, the Council considers the current policy approach insufficiently robust to guarantee delivery.

The Local Plan should:

- Require the delivery of the Northern Distributor Road and West End Link Road as critical infrastructure necessary to support planned housing growth. with key infrastructure delivered alongside or in advance of major development.
- Include clear phasing requirements linking the occupation of development to the delivery of strategic transport infrastructure.
- Require land safeguarding and route protection throughout the plan period.

The Council further recommends that the Northern Distributor Road be explicitly identified as a strategic distributor route forming part of Witney's long-term ring road network. The route should be designed to a standard comparable to Deer Park Road and not as an estate road serving adjoining development. The policy should clearly require a design specification capable of accommodating long-term traffic growth, public transport, active travel infrastructure, and future strategic connectivity needs.

Without stronger policy safeguards, there is a significant risk that piecemeal development could compromise the effectiveness and capacity of this strategically important route.

Future Public Transport Infrastructure

Policies CP8 and SP5

The Council recommends that the Local Plan adopt a more ambitious and longer-term approach to public transport planning.

Specifically, the Local Plan should:

- Safeguard land for a future transport interchange or bus terminal within or adjoining the town centre.
- Require major developments to contribute towards strategic public transport infrastructure.
- Support enhanced bus services linking new development with employment, education, and service centres.
- Safeguard potential corridors and land required for future rail infrastructure and future rail connectivity serving Witney and West Oxfordshire.

The Council believes that the aspiration for a future railway connection between Witney and Oxford should be formally recognised within the Local Plan. Although delivery may be beyond the plan period, safeguarding opportunities now will ensure future generations retain the option of delivering transformational public transport improvements.

Housing Growth and Strategic Development Areas

Woodford Way / Woodford Road Strategic Area

The Council supports the allocation of this area but considers that development must be accompanied by comprehensive infrastructure provision.

The Local Plan should require a holistic approach that delivers:

- Community facilities;
- Green infrastructure;
- Active travel routes;
- Public open space;
- Sustainable drainage infrastructure;
- Biodiversity enhancements;
- Youth facilities.

The Council would be against piecemeal development that delivers housing ahead of supporting infrastructure.

Policy WIT4: Town Centre Strategic Sites

The Council notes that the current approach could result in some of the most strategically important town centre sites being dominated by residential uses.

The Local Plan should require a comprehensive town centre masterplan for the Welch Way area and associated sites and should prioritise:

- Community uses;
- Public realm improvements;
- Cultural and arts facilities;
- Civic infrastructure;
- Public transport facilities;
- Green spaces;
- Mixed-use development.
- Flexible exhibition and community spaces.

The Council recommends that housing forms one component of redevelopment proposals rather than the principal objective.

Given the central location of these sites, they should be expected to deliver wider community and economic benefits which cannot easily be accommodated elsewhere.

Community Infrastructure

Policy CP7: Youth Services

The Council believes youth provision should be specifically identified as critical community infrastructure.

The Local Plan should require major residential developments to contribute towards:

- Dedicated youth facilities;
- Youth outreach services;
- Flexible community spaces suitable for young people;

Youth infrastructure should be planned alongside schools, sports provision, and open spaces rather than considered as an optional enhancement.

Healthcare Infrastructure

CP4: Delivering Infrastructure In-step with New Development

The Council considers healthcare provision to be a critical component of sustainable development.

The Local Plan should require major developments to contribute towards the expansion of primary healthcare facilities and capacity, ensuring that healthcare infrastructure keeps pace with population growth and does not place additional pressure on existing services.

Sport, Leisure, and Recreation

Policies CP4 and DM7

The Council considers the evidence demonstrates that existing leisure provision within Witney is already under significant pressure.

Resident feedback gathered through the Town Council's Annual Survey consistently identifies demand for additional leisure, recreation, and sporting opportunities.

The Local Plan should:

- Recognise the need for a new or replacement leisure centre serving Witney and the wider catchment area, alongside enhanced indoor and outdoor sports provision, including the development of an athletics running track to address a recognised gap in local sporting infrastructure.
- Identify leisure, sport and recreation facilities as strategic infrastructure required to support planned growth and healthy communities.
- Require major developments to make proportionate contributions towards the provision, enhancement and maintenance of indoor and outdoor sports facilities, including playing pitches, changing facilities and recreational spaces.
- Ensure that sufficient land is allocated and safeguarded to enable the future expansion of leisure, sport and recreation facilities where demand arises.

Without additional investment, population growth will place further strain on facilities that are already operating at or near capacity.

Allotments and Sustainable Communities

Policies CP7, DM1 and DM8

The Council recommends that allotments become a standard requirement within major residential developments.

The Local Plan should require development proposals to demonstrate how allotment provision has been incorporated into neighbourhood design and should only permit departures from this requirement where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated.

Allotments support:

- Food security;

- Climate resilience;
- Healthy lifestyles;
- Community benefit;
- Biodiversity.

The Council considers these benefits sufficiently important to justify stronger policy protection and delivery requirements.

Community Facilities and Public Houses

Policies CP6 and DM15

The Council recommends strengthening policies relating to the protection of public houses and other valued community facilities.

The Local Plan should:

- Presume against the loss of viable public houses and community facilities.
- Require comprehensive evidence demonstrating that continued operation is not feasible before alternative uses are considered.
- Recognise public houses and similar venues as important social infrastructure contributing to community wellbeing, social cohesion and local identity.
- Encourage the provision of new public houses, community hubs and comparable social gathering spaces within major residential developments, ensuring that growing communities are supported by accessible facilities that promote social interaction, community cohesion and a sense of place.

Arts, Culture and Public Art

The Council believes the Local Plan should place greater emphasis on cultural infrastructure.

The Council recommends that:

- Arts, cultural, exhibition and community spaces be recognised as essential infrastructure supporting vibrant communities.
- Strategic development sites be expected to contribute towards cultural facilities and programming.
- Public art requirements include clear arrangements for location, ownership, maintenance, and future funding.

Public art should not simply be installed to meet a planning requirement but should form part of a wider placemaking strategy that delivers long-term value for the community.

Climate Change, Flooding and Environmental Resilience

Policies CP1, CP10, DM1, DM2, DM9, DM10 and DM11

Given Witney's known vulnerability to flooding and increasingly frequent extreme weather events, the Council considers stronger climate resilience requirements are necessary.

The Local Plan should require all major developments to demonstrate how they will:

- Increase resilience to extreme weather events;
- Reduce surface water flood risk;
- Incorporate nature-based solutions;
- Deliver measurable climate adaptation benefits.

The Council particularly supports requirements for:

- Rain gardens;
- Sustainable Drainage Systems;
- Tree planting programmes;
- Green corridors;
- Water attenuation infrastructure;
- Nature-based flood management measures.
- Green canopies and urban greening measures;

These measures should become standard design requirements.

Biodiversity, Rewilding and Nature Recovery

The Council supports the biodiversity objectives within the Plan but considers opportunities exist to strengthen policy expectations.

The Local Plan should:

- Encourage biodiversity outcomes that exceed minimum statutory requirements.
- Support rewilding initiatives within strategic developments.
- Require connected ecological networks between development sites.
- Promote long-term habitat management arrangements.
- Encourage the use of native planting and locally appropriate landscape design.

The Council believes developments should actively contribute to nature recovery and environmental enhancement rather than simply mitigate their impacts.

Governance and Infrastructure Delivery

Policies SP1 and SP2

The Council notes the newly announced Community Governance Review and wider local government reorganisation proposals.

The Local Plan should recognise that governance arrangements may change during the plan period and should include sufficient flexibility to ensure infrastructure, assets and service provision reflect community needs regardless of future administrative boundaries.

Where development occurs adjacent to Witney, infrastructure planning should take account of the potential future governance and service responsibilities of local councils.

Infrastructure Funding Statement

The Council has adopted an Infrastructure Funding Statement project list identifying the infrastructure priorities necessary to support Witney's future growth.

The Council recommends that the Local Plan explicitly recognise locally prepared infrastructure plans as evidence when determining infrastructure requirements and allocating developer contributions. The Town Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement should be recognised as part of the Local Plan evidence base when identifying infrastructure priorities and allocating developer contributions and will continue to be updated throughout the plan period.