

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

Response from Witney Town Council – October 2021

As Witney is the administrative town and largest service centre in West Oxfordshire, the Town Council welcomes a further opportunity to help shape the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (OP 2050). The Council has ambitious, yet realistic aspirations for the services it offers as well as on the climate, environment and health and wellbeing of its residents, all of which share a synergy with this plan over the next 30 years. Below are comments concerning individual themes and policies of the plan:

Theme 1 – Addressing Climate Change

The Town Council welcomes policies on energy and hopes that all authorities can work collaboratively across Oxfordshire to deliver policies on locally distributed community energy networks in West Oxfordshire before 2050, therefore hastening sustainable design and construction.

Flooding is a particular risk in Witney with occurrences of serious flooding becoming more prevalent. The Town Council looks forward to policies addressing this issue particularly concerning mitigations which should be implemented prior to the commencement of new developments.

Theme 2 – Improving Environmental Quality

The Town Council looks forward to the OP 2050 protecting and enhancing the landscape characters in Witney, including the Upper and Lower Windrush Valley, buffers between the town and outlying villages and addressing the ownership & management of land.

Water quality and the affects of pollution in the River Windrush and its tributaries is a major concern in Witney. the Town Council would like to see policies addressing the discharge of sewage into the waterways by businesses, but also agricultural pollution from farms which lie outside of the town.

The Town Council would also welcome robust policies on air quality, with the Bridge Street area of Witney suffering poorly. The emerging Oxfordshire Transport Policy may take a lead on this, but the OP 2050 policies could be extended to include the sustainability of transporting food and products, looking at the links between the service centres such as Witney and its neighbours.

Theme 3 – Creating Strong & Healthy Communities

The Town Council is an enthusiastic supporter of creating healthy and stronger communities.

More consideration should be given on policies which allow access to land so residents can enjoy the countryside as recreation. Many areas within walking distanced are private and prohibit public access.

The connections between Witney village neighbours are generally only via roads and overgrown bridleways, rather than footpaths and designated cycle lanes. As a supporter of Active Travel, policies on this connectivity would be welcomed along with one providing infrastructure from new developments for the 15 Minute Neighbourhoods and School Streets initiatives

A more strategic oversight of County sports and recreational facilities is required with a greater power to deliver them by local Councils. The dissemination of information on local amenities to other areas in the County is needed. Stronger policies outlining infrastructure which developers must provide in their schemes for example football pitches and recreation areas should be provided.

Theme 4 – Planning for Sustainable Travel & Connectivity

The requirement of people, businesses, tourists and freight to traverse the County is a concern which needs to be addressed in the OP 2050. The current infrastructure is already oversubscribed and the effect this has on these groups cannot be underestimated in terms of cost to Witney, the community and the County.

The Town Council is a support of railway from Carterton to Oxford and beyond to serve the communities of South-West Oxfordshire. The current plans for the A40 bus lane between Witney and Oxford with a travel hub at Eynsham do not address the problem; any hub needs to be nearer to Witney to reduce the traffic between there and Oxford.

Transport links to Oxford Parkway and the outer parts of the County with rapid links to the rest of the County and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc should also be high in the priorities of forming the OP 2050.

Theme 5 – Creating Jobs & Providing Homes

The Town Council welcomes policies on the economy, jobs and tourism. It would further welcome policies on Town Centre renewal to help create a 'buzz' in the town centres, these could include easier facilitation of community events and festivities.

Policies on creating more easily accessible funding for and investment in culture and the arts would be welcomed. West Oxfordshire is severely lacking in this regard and is often overlooked during the current planning process.

Affordable housing is an issue in Witney and across West Oxfordshire so the Town Council would like to see policies which provide quality, local affordable homes, rather than landowners, investors, and developers profiting from inflated land and property values.

Town and Parish Councils often require land within their town or village centres to provide items discharging their functions of providing a community amenity. A policy to make it easier for towns to have the right to buy pockets of land in town centres would be welcomed.