



Your Voice Counts

West Oxfordshire District Council **Local Plan and Council Plan Consultation**



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following a recent change in political administration, the District Council is updating both its Local Plan and Council Plan and is seeking early views from local residents and businesses on potential areas of focus.
- 1.2 This early engagement will help to ensure that both the Local Plan and the Council Plan address the issues of most importance and relevance to West Oxfordshire – rather than reading as if they could apply anywhere.

What is a Local Plan?

- 1.3 Local Plans set out a vision and framework for the future development of an area, enabling needs and opportunities to be identified and decisions made on key issues such as how much development takes place and where, what infrastructure is needed (e.g. new schools, open spaces etc.) and how positive outcomes such as environmental enhancements can best be achieved. In particular, they provide a basis for determining any planning applications that come forward.

What is a Council Plan?

- 1.4 The Council Plan is a strategic document setting out a direction of travel for the District Council and sitting at the heart of a range of other strategies including the Local Plan. Through the preparation of the new Council Plan, a set of priorities will be defined to ensure that all action taken by the Council either through service delivery or working with others makes a positive contribution to the communities, environment and economy of West Oxfordshire.
- 1.5 This will demonstrate the commitment of the Council to addressing those issues which are of most importance to communities, local businesses and partner organisations active in the District.

Why are they being reviewed?

- 1.6 The Local Plan is being reviewed for a number of reasons, not least a need for us to be much more ambitious in tackling climate change and improving health and well-being as well as addressing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and other changes since the current plan was adopted. It will also enable us to plan for the longer-term up to 2041.
- 1.7 The Council Plan is being reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose and reflects the priorities of the Council's new political administration following the local elections held on 5 May 2022.

Why should you get involved?

- 1.8 This is a very early stage consultation, feedback from which will be used to shape the content of both the new Local Plan and Council Plan.
- 1.9 This is a genuine opportunity to meaningfully influence both documents and we are therefore encouraging as many people to get involved as possible.
- 1.10 The consultation questions are purposefully short and punchy and the consultation has a strong digital focus to make it quick and easy to respond.

2. What are we trying to achieve?

2.1 Our overall approach will be guided by five key principles:

Principle 1 – completely new plans

2.2 Both the new Local Plan and the Council Plan will be completely new documents rather than ‘partial’ updates. This is not to say that elements of the existing plans won’t be carried forward but all aspects will be thoroughly ‘revisited’ as the new plans are prepared.

Principle 2 - early and effective engagement

2.3 In many instances, local authorities often work up a series of proposals in some detail before seeking views.

2.4 Through this consultation, we are deliberately looking to generate an early conversation with local residents and businesses about potential priority areas for the Local Plan and Council Plan before any specific objectives and proposals are identified.

Principle 3 – concise and focused

2.5 We want to make sure that the Local Plan and Council Plan focus specifically on the key priorities of most relevance to West Oxfordshire.

2.6 For Local Plans in particular, it is tempting to try and cover a huge range of issues which often results in very long, complicated and inaccessible documents that can run to hundreds of pages.

2.7 As such, we will be succinct and focused – drawing in large part on this initial consultation to develop an agreed scope.

Principle 4 – easy to read, understand and access

2.8 We are committed to ensuring that both the Local Plan and Council Plan are easy to read (avoiding jargon and using straightforward language) visually engaging and easy to understand.

2.9 We will also make documents genuinely accessible – with a particular focus on effective digital engagement, enabling people to put forward their views quickly and easily.

2.10 For the Local Plan, which is prepared over a longer timeframe, we will provide regular feedback at key stages so that people can see how their views have been taken on board.

Principle 5 – aspirational but deliverable

2.11 Finally, we are aiming to be aspirational but deliverable. In other words, whilst we will be ambitious and set the bar high, we will be realistic and ‘sense-check’ what the Local Plan and Council Plan can actually deliver and influence.

3. Timescales

- 3.1 The new Council Plan will cover the 4-year period 2022 – 2026 and will be drafted following this initial consultation, with a view to being formally adopted by the Council later this year.
- 3.2 The new Local Plan will cover the 20-year period 2021 – 2041 to ensure that it covers a period of more than 15-years from the assumed date of adoption (2024).
- 3.3 In terms of the timetable for preparing the new Local Plan, we are being purposefully ambitious, with the following key milestones¹ expected to apply:
- Plan preparation² (August 2022 – August 2023)
 - Formal publication³ (September 2023)
 - Submission for independent examination (December 2023)
- 3.4 This should enable the new Local Plan to be adopted in 2024.

4. Key considerations

- 4.1 It is important to note that the Local Plan and Council Plan are not being prepared ‘in a vacuum’ - indeed there are a number of other relevant considerations that need to be reflected in both documents.
- 4.2 This ranges from policy, guidance and legislation prepared at the national level right down to the County and District-level, including for example the District Council’s declaration of a climate and ecological emergency in 2019.
- 4.3 Some of the most significant influences are shown in the diagram below (note: this provides an overview and is not intended to be definitive).

¹ For further information see the [Local Development Scheme \(LDS\)](#)

² Regulation 18 - Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

³ Regulation 19 - Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

National

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- Environment Act 2021
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

Local

- West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031
- Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP)
- Current and emerging Neighbourhood Plans
- Climate and ecological emergency declared in 2019

Countywide

- Oxfordshire Strategic Vision
- Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan
- Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy
- Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan

5. Potential 'Areas of Focus'

- 5.1 We are looking to stimulate early discussion on the scope of the new Local Plan and Council Plan - in particular what are the issues of most significance and relevance to West Oxfordshire that they should be looking to address.
- 5.2 To 'kick-start' the conversation, we have identified six potential 'areas of focus':
- Tackling the climate and ecological emergency
 - Healthy, safe, strong and inclusive communities
 - An enhanced natural and built environment
 - Attractive, accessible and thriving places
 - Meeting the housing needs of all
 - A vibrant, resilient and diverse local economy
- 5.3 Below, we explain a little more about each of these, why we consider them to be important and outline some initial thoughts and ideas on how the Local Plan and Council Plan could potentially assist.
- 5.4 It is important to note that although we have grouped these into 6 main areas, they are all fundamentally inter-related. For example, unless we seek to tackle the climate and ecological emergency, we won't have healthy and safe communities. Similarly, if we don't provide enough new homes, the economy is likely to suffer.
- 5.5 It is also important to note that these are very much initial thoughts only and will be worked up in more detail depending on the feedback received.
- 5.6 We are keen to hear your views – in particular, whether we have identified the right issues but also whether there is anything important to the future success of West Oxfordshire that we might have missed.

6. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency

- 6.1 We are facing an emergency with the growing impacts of climate change continuing to cause devastating impacts on our communities. The crisis was brought into sharp focus on 20th July 2022 when the UK recorded its hottest ever temperature of 40.3°C, rail services were cut, planned surgeries cancelled and wild fires broke out, destroying land and homes.
- 6.2 We now know that in order to avoid catastrophic climate impacts, we need to limit global temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Recent reports have made it clear that urgent and bold action is needed if that target is to be achieved.
- 6.3 Fundamentally intertwined with climate change is an ecological emergency, with the climate crisis exacerbating nature's decline. Important habitats are being damaged and species are disappearing at an ever more alarming rate. Climate and ecology are intrinsically linked – one cannot be solved without the other.
- 6.4 There are three main ways in which we can address and cope with climate change. The first is to limit the impact we are having on the climate by minimising our carbon emissions. If we can successfully do that, global temperatures will be kept in check and catastrophic consequences will be avoided.
- 6.5 The second is to successfully adapt to the impacts of climate change that have already been set in motion or are likely to happen in the next few years. We are already seeing the effects of a changing climate with our ten hottest years on record all having occurred since 2002 and six of the wettest summers since 1998. Summers are likely to become 30% drier by 2050 and 40% drier by 2080.
- 6.6 We therefore need to adapt so that we continue to live happy and healthy lives. The design of our buildings for example can help ensure they are cool in the summer and warm in the winter whilst additional tree cover and vegetation can provide shade, particularly in urban areas.
- 6.7 Thirdly, we need to try where possible to reverse the impacts of climate change. The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision sets out an ambition that by 2050, Oxfordshire will be carbon neutral and accelerating towards a carbon negative future.
- 6.8 Set out below are some potential thoughts on how the Council Plan and Local Plan might look to have an influence in these areas.

To what extent do you agree that 'tackling the climate and ecological emergency' should be an area of focus for the Local Plan and Council Plan? (5 strongly agree- 1 strongly disagree)

5	4	3	2	1
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Net-zero carbon transport

- 6.9 Transport contributes around 37% of the District’s total carbon emissions so it is vital that we reduce that as far as possible. Oxfordshire County Council’s new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) aims to deliver a net-zero carbon transport and travel system that enables the county to thrive whilst protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents.
- 6.10 There are a number of ways we can minimise transport related carbon emissions, beginning with reducing our overall need to travel. If we live near to the services and amenities that meet our daily needs such as shops, schools, jobs, leisure and recreation, we will be less likely to travel.
- 6.11 Something we are keen to explore is the concept of the ‘20 minute neighbourhood’ - compact, vibrant and social neighbourhoods where people can easily walk or cycle to and from a range of services and facilities within 20 minutes.
- 6.12 We also need to focus on minimising car use. Like many rural areas, car ownership in West Oxfordshire is high but we can address this by providing attractive alternatives including high quality, safe and convenient walking and cycling routes and frequent, reliable public transport. More stringent parking standards and the use of shared car clubs and lift sharing arrangements can also encourage residents to reduce car use and ownership.
- 6.13 We recognise however, that as a predominantly rural area, walking, cycling and public transport will not always be feasible and that we therefore need to support the transition to zero-emission electric vehicles, ensuring that appropriate charging infrastructure is installed and sufficient electricity supply is available in new and existing developments and convenient public locations.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to deliver a net-zero carbon transport system? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Minimising carbon emissions from our buildings through retrofitting and requiring net zero carbon in new developments

- 6.14 Homes in West Oxfordshire account for around 32% of the District’s total carbon emissions so it is vital we do all we can to reduce that. There are two main ways, the first being to facilitate the retrofitting of more sustainable energy solutions (e.g. solar panels and replacing gas boilers with ground/air source heat pumps). Such measures are crucial because by 2050, people will still be living in 80% of the homes that exist today. Relying on new homes being built to higher standards will not be enough and the Council is committed to leading by example - accelerating the decarbonisation of our public sector buildings and energy efficiencies within them.

- 6.15 The second way is to ensure that new homes and non-residential uses are net zero carbon, built to high energy and sustainability standards to reduce energy use and minimise carbon emissions. This can be achieved through ultra-efficient building fabric as well as ensuring that any energy comes from renewable and low-carbon energy sources (e.g. solar, wind) instead of fossil fuels such as gas and oil. We also need to minimise the amount of ‘embodied’ carbon in new development which is the carbon associated with construction, operation and end of life demolition and disposal.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to reduce carbon emissions from existing buildings through retrofitting and require net zero carbon with high standards of energy and sustainability in all new developments? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Enabling the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy sources

- 6.16 A further influence the Council can have through the Council Plan and Local Plan is in enabling the roll-out and expansion of renewable and low carbon energy in preference to the continued use of fossil fuels.
- 6.17 We have the opportunity to identify suitable sites for larger-scale renewable and low carbon energy and ensure that new developments are supplied from such sources e.g. through the provision of solar photovoltaics on-site or in the locality.
- 6.18 We also have a role to play in guiding the strategic planning of energy infrastructure, supporting the wide-scale transition to net zero. This links with local energy plans and partnership working with energy companies to determine capacity, demand and forward planning.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to actively promote and enable the roll-out of renewable and low carbon energy sources in suitable locations across the District? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Making the most efficient use of our resources and minimising waste

- 6.19 The climate crisis is dramatically increasing the pressure on our existing resources (e.g. reduced agricultural productivity and increased demand for water) and so it is vital that we make the most efficient use of what we have - particularly those resources that are non-renewable.

- 6.20 There are a number of ways we can achieve this starting with making the most efficient use of land and buildings. Whilst the current Local Plan supports the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land and allocates a number of small brownfield sites, we could potentially do more such as setting specific targets for brownfield development, allocating more brownfield sites and providing incentives to developers of such sites. This approach would have the added benefit of directing development to accessible locations and promoting urban renewal.

- 6.21 We also need to make sure more generally that we are making the most efficient use of land when development does come forward including on undeveloped land. Again, whilst the current Local Plan offers some support for this, we could include specific 'targets' for the density of development depending on the location of development (e.g. higher densities in central urban areas and around key public transport nodes, subject to the character of the area and amenity etc.).

- 6.22 Maximising water efficiencies and conserving water use through rainwater harvesting and grey water recycling will also become increasingly essential with drier summers ahead. Whilst the current Local Plan already includes a specific water efficiency standard, this could potentially go further and be coupled with a more rigorous approach to water conservation more generally.

- 6.23 Linked to the issue of resource efficiency is waste and recycling and how we should look to move towards a 'zero-waste society'. Whilst the current Local Plan looks to minimise waste, we could potentially go further.

- 6.24 We could for example require greater use of recycled and sustainably sourced construction materials as well as setting design requirements for secure community recycling. We could also look to introduce stronger requirements for developers to consider waste at all stages of development in line with the concept of the 'circular economy' which sees waste as a resource rather than a problem. This would be consistent with the UK National Waste Strategy and Industrial Strategy.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to make the most efficient use of existing buildings and resources and create a 'zero waste' society? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Adapting to the effects of climate change that are already in motion or predicted to occur

- 6.25 Our communities continue to experience rising temperatures and extreme weather events (e.g. river flooding and heat waves) and the disruption this causes across all sectors. We need to adapt to these and future climatic effects to protect our quality of life, economy and environment, alongside minimising carbon emissions for current and future generations.

- 6.26 One of the main ways we can adapt is through the construction of more climate resilient buildings that minimise heat loss and the risk of overheating. We also need to support retrofitting of existing buildings to make them more climate resilient.
- 6.27 We can also look to ensure that future climate change impacts are considered when looking at future development proposals e.g. in assessing flood risk and ensuring that sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) also take into account water quality (pollution), biodiversity (wildlife and plants) and amenity.
- 6.28 The greening of our urban and natural landscapes through additional planting can also help to provide shade and multiple social and environmental benefits. The design of natural green space will need to become increasingly drought tolerant and the Council will have a part to play in advising on the types of habitats and species that will thrive in future climates.
- 6.29 Natural resources (e.g. air, water and soil) can provide benefits to people (known as ‘natural capital’) and form the first line of defence against climate change. There are many ways in which we can enable the use of natural resources to build climate resilience within our communities. These include protecting and planting vegetation for shade, wind buffers and carbon capture; local food production; and creating a network of accessible green and blue spaces.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to ensure that we adapt to the effects of climate change that are already in motion or predicted to occur? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Helping nature to recover and flourish

- 6.30 Nature – the plants and animals and the habitats and natural systems that support them – has its own intrinsic value but also matters to us by providing services and benefits, contributing to the economy, our health and well-being and enriching our lives.
- 6.31 West Oxfordshire has a diverse variety of habitats, from semi-natural limestone grassland in the Cotswolds, through the ancient woodland of the Wychwood Forest, to floodplain meadows in the Thames valley and its tributaries. About 4% of the District’s countryside falls within sites identified for their nature or geological importance, including 104 Local Wildlife Sites, 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the internationally important Cassington Meadows Special Area of Conservation, but the bulk of wildlife lives outside of these specially protected areas, including in our own back gardens.
- 6.32 While there have been some successes in Oxfordshire, such as breeding bitterns and red kites, the State of Nature in the county shows an overall trend of habitat and species fragmentation and decline. Development, transport, agricultural intensification and pollution has long been putting pressure on nature - its diversity, its quantity and its quality. And now the impacts of climate change are further exacerbating this trend.

- 6.33 In 2019 the District Council declared an ecological emergency and is seeking to create a resilient network of land and water, richer in plants and wildlife. Nationally, new incentives, actions and tools are coming forward to drive improvements for nature, including mandatory requirements for a net gain in biodiversity and the restoration and enhancement of the natural environment through the creation of Local Nature Recovery Networks. The Environment Act aims to halt the decline in species by 2030 and ‘bend the curve’ to increase species abundance by 10 per cent by 2042.

- 6.34 In addition to protecting and enhancing our countryside for nature, it is important to weave nature and green spaces into the fabric of our towns and villages.

- 6.35 The protection, enhancement, expansion and improved management of networks of natural habitats helps to manage the effects of climate change. For example, the planting of more trees and the restoration of grassland areas can not only lead to an increase in carbon capture, but can also mitigate against flooding events and improve habitat connectivity for species that are most affected by climate change such as birds and bees.

- 6.36 Identifying opportunities for nature-based solutions allow us to mitigate against and adapt to our changing climate, as well as make improvements for both wildlife and people.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to help nature to recover and flourish in order to reverse the impacts of climate change and secure nature’s benefits? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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7. Healthy, safe, strong and inclusive communities

- 7.1 The health of our residents is generally good with higher than average life expectancy and relatively low levels of long-term disability. Around two-thirds of the population are physically active, undertaking at least 150 minutes of exercise each week and rates of crime are low, with Carterton ranked as the safest town in Oxfordshire.
- 7.2 There are however health inequalities and hidden pockets of deprivation, with parts of Chipping Norton and Witney falling within the 40% most deprived areas of the country. Furthermore, almost 70% of adults are overweight or obese and we are seeing increased rural isolation, hospital stays for self-harm, depression, particularly amongst young people, and more deaths from strokes and respiratory diseases.
- 7.3 The place we live – the built, natural and social environment – can have a profound impact on our health and wellbeing, something that has become even more widely recognised since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 7.4 Achieving healthy and inclusive places, which promote contact with other people, are safe and accessible and enable and support active lifestyles can deliver improvements to health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities.

To what extent do you agree that achieving ‘healthy, safe and strong and inclusive communities’ should be an area of focus for the Local Plan and Council Plan? (5 strongly agree- 1 strongly disagree)

5	4	3	2	1
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Embedding ‘Healthy Place Shaping’ Principles

- 7.5 ‘Healthy place shaping’ is about making it easier for everyone to enjoy healthy, happy and sustainable lives. Nationally, a range of principles, policies and guidance have been published, including as part of the Government’s levelling-up agenda to ‘build back better’ and ‘build back fairer’.
- 7.6 Locally, the concept of healthy place shaping has been endorsed across Oxfordshire, with the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision aiming to achieve healthier and happier residents and improved overall wellbeing by 2050.
- 7.7 Working in partnership, our aim is to shape thriving communities where people can go about their daily activities in well-designed environments. For example, safe, convenient and equitable access to local amenities; services and green space; supporting social interaction; and creating a sense of belonging, identity and community. We see the Local Plan and Council Plan as a real opportunity to bring forward positive change.



- 7.8 Oxfordshire County Council has produced a useful Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Toolkit for those involved in the development process, including developers, planners and policy makers. It provides a mechanism for putting healthy place shaping principles into practice and delivering improvements to health and well-being, whether as part of regeneration and development schemes in existing communities or in new settlements.
- 7.9 As part of the new Local Plan, we could for example introduce a requirement for larger developments to be supported by HIA as well as subjecting the Local Plan itself to such an assessment.

How important is it to you that the Council embeds the principles of ‘healthy place shaping’ including through new development? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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Supporting physical health

- 7.10 Leisure time, sport, recreation and play are vital to good health and wellbeing. Providing opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to play and get exercise helps to address some of the known health issues in West Oxfordshire.
- 7.11 In the past, the focus has tended to be on providing specific space and facilities, such as leisure centres, playing fields and children’s play space. While the provision of such facilities continues to be important, there is now an increased emphasis on encouraging ‘activity’ in its widest sense, incorporating it into our everyday lives – making the active choice the easy choice.
- 7.12 Sport England has joined forces with Public Health England to promote activity, health and stronger communities, with key design principles for healthy, active lifestyles including ‘walkable’ communities where homes, schools, shops, community facilities, workplaces, open spaces and sports facilities are within easy reach of each other.
- 7.13 Connecting destinations by direct, safe and convenient walking and cycling routes is also important, as is the provision of a network of open space to support a range of activities and improve access to the open countryside.
- 7.14 The Local Plan and Council Plan provide us with an opportunity to ensure that such opportunities are fully realised.

How important is it to you that the Council supports improved physical health by providing a range of opportunities for leisure and recreation, walking and cycling including access to the open countryside? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Tackling mental health issues including rural isolation, loneliness and inequality

- 7.15 Mental illness can be more common, long lasting and have a greater effect than many other health conditions. It is estimated that one in four people in the UK will experience a mental condition and this figure is increasing. Locally, the prevalence of depression recorded by all GP surgeries has risen, in particular in Witney.
- 7.16 As West Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural district, with limited public transport and key facilities in some areas, isolation and loneliness are important factors affecting mental health. Feeling lonely is often associated with low life expectancy and can also be linked to an increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke; depression; cognitive decline; and Alzheimer’s disease.
- 7.17 The quality of the built environment can directly affect people’s mental health. Noise, pollution levels, quality of greenspace, proximity to trees and nature, access to services and condition of homes all play a part. The Government’s National Design Guide recognises this and sets out how well-designed places can help nurture and sustain a sense of community and support social interaction to reduce isolation and loneliness.
- 7.18 Creating accessible, inclusive places where buildings and spaces are designed to promote good mental health and wellbeing can have a significant positive impact. Multifunctional hubs can for example, provide adaptable, accessible spaces and facilities for communities, including meeting and event spaces.
- 7.19 Measures that enable community activation can also benefit people’s health, providing opportunities for connecting with local people and community groups, schools, and businesses and fostering inclusion, particularly of marginalised groups like children and young people.
- 7.20 Activities that support cultural enrichment and wellbeing, integrating culture and the arts (such as singing in a choir, performing amateur dramatics or incorporating public art within the public realm), can have a significant role in preventing ill-health, managing and treating illnesses and promoting health and wellbeing.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to address mental health issues including rural isolation, loneliness and inequality? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Providing people with the opportunity to grow food locally and make healthier food choices

- 7.21 Poor diet, physical inactivity and social isolation are major causes of ill-health and there is an increasing recognition of the implications of the obesity crisis, such as the rise in weight-related cancers, which adds further impetus to the government’s drive for ‘prevention before cure’.
- 7.22 On top of these health drivers and the climate change and biodiversity emergency, other events such as Brexit, the war in Ukraine and rising fuel, food and other living costs, highlight the need to re-evaluate the entire food system, including addressing food poverty and diet-related health issues.
- 7.23 Improving access to affordable healthy and sustainable food and drink is important in enabling people to eat balanced and healthy diets, and maintain healthy lifestyles. The Oxfordshire Food Strategy was published in May 2022 and aims to ensure that everyone in the county can ‘access affordable, healthy food in ways that promote dignity, recognise diversity, and celebrate our rich cultural heritage’.
- 7.24 There are a variety of projects already underway in the county, ranging from the Chippy Larder which is open to everyone and provides access to affordable food to the Chicky Larder in partnership with Bruern Farm which gets members involved with growing and learning new skills.
- 7.25 At Salt Cross Garden Village, the ambition is to create better food environments by providing opportunities for food growing such as allotments, community gardens, community orchards, roof gardens and edible landscaping with fruit and nut trees, and inspiring and enabling healthy eating through, for example, intergenerational cooking clubs and communal barbeque areas.

How important is it to you that the Council enables the provision of opportunities to grow food locally and make healthier food choices? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Ensuring that communities and new development are supported by timely investment in infrastructure (health, schools, green space, utilities etc.)

- 7.26 When development takes place, it inevitably increases the pressure on our local services and facilities including health care but also other areas such as school places, our transport network, green spaces and utilities.
- 7.27 We know from previous Local Plan consultations and Salt Cross Garden Village that people are often very concerned that development will come forward without full and thorough consideration of the impacts that it will have on local services and facilities. Communities are also often concerned that identified improvements are inadequate or will come forward too late in the day.

- 7.28 The Council Plan and Local Plan provide us with an opportunity to highlight the importance of proper and timely infrastructure provision and ensure that when new development does come forward, it does so not only with due consideration to any new occupants, but also to our existing communities.
- 7.29 Through the Local Plan in particular, there are a number of practical measures we could look to introduce to ensure this happens. The evidence which underpins the plan itself for example will need to carefully consider the infrastructure which is needed to support planned growth to 2041. This will include what improvements are needed, when they are needed and how they will be funded and delivered.
- 7.30 We can also ensure that developers provide clear information on the anticipated timing of development and how this reflects any necessary improvements to local services and facilities e.g. through the use of masterplans and site-specific infrastructure plans.
- 7.31 The Council will also continue to work with local communities preparing neighbourhood and community plans which can provide an invaluable ‘grass-roots’ tool for identifying local community priorities and needs.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to ensure that new development and local communities are supported by effective and timely investment in supporting infrastructure? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Ensuring that people are safe and feel safe through the design and layout of buildings and spaces and encouraging an appropriate mix of different uses

- 7.32 People’s experience and perception of their surrounding environment has a direct impact on their quality of life and health and wellbeing including feelings of safety, security and belonging. For example, a poorly lit, overgrown and secluded footpath, is far less likely to be used than a well-maintained, clear path with good signage and surveillance.
- 7.33 In short, we need to ensure that we are creating well-designed and safe places and there are a number of ways we can help to achieve this through both the Council Plan and Local Plan.
- 7.34 We can for example, ensure that the principles of crime prevention are considered early in the design process and that new developments take account of important factors such as:
- The need for buildings to provide a safe and secure environment and allow ease of access for emergency services;
 - Providing safe access to and from buildings in the event of evacuation;
 - The need for a clear separation between public and private spaces;
 - Pedestrian and cycle routes being direct and convenient, accessible for people of all abilities, appropriately lit, overlooked, welcoming, well-maintained, legible and supported with appropriate infrastructure (e.g. clear signposting, seating, cycle-parking and the use of digital technology, to encourage year-round use).

- 7.35 With the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads in Oxfordshire being higher than the national average, special consideration needs to be given to the way traffic and roads are dealt with. In addition to addressing pollution from traffic and reducing volumes and speeds, measures are needed to improve safety for all road users, particularly for those that walk and cycle and particularly in residential areas and around schools.
- 7.36 In addition to the specific measures outlined above, creating places with a mix of different uses and activities can also make people feel safer by increasing surveillance in public areas. A mix of uses can provide overlooking and natural surveillance from windows and balconies of nearby homes and active ground floor uses, such as shops and cafes, with entrances onto the public space mean people come and go at different times.
- 7.37 Attractive public and shared amenity spaces that are well designed and maintained often feel safe for occupants, visitors and passers-by particularly where there are a variety of surrounding uses and activities and where the dominance of motor vehicles is reduced. They can also be designed to provide flexibility for a range of civic, cultural and community functions and activities, such as markets, events and play, with well-located and highly visible cycle parks, tree planting for shade and outdoor seating.
- 7.38 These design ideas form the basis of areas known as ‘healthy streets’ or ‘living streets’ and are being introduced throughout the country, achieving multiple benefits, especially for people’s health and wellbeing.

How important is it to you that the Council requires well designed buildings and spaces with an appropriate mix of different uses to create safe, inclusive and welcoming environments? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

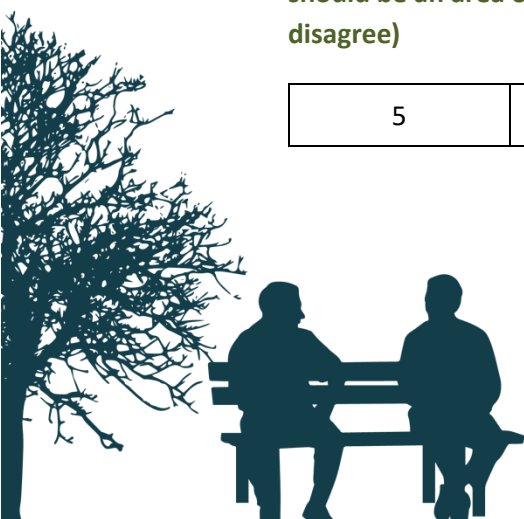
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8. An enhanced natural and built environment

- 8.1 West Oxfordshire is a beautiful area with an array of distinctive landscapes and townscapes, providing an attractive backdrop to a number of historic towns and villages. The Cotswolds National Landscape (formerly known as the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) covers a third of the district and part of the Oxford Green Belt is located in the east.
- 8.2 Our diverse natural environment has a variety of habitats that support a wide range of legally protected and priority species and other wildlife. There is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) of European importance at Cassington Meadows, as well as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), areas of Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Sites.
- 8.3 The District has a large number of listed buildings, scheduled monuments, conservation areas and registered historic parks and gardens of special historic interest. Blenheim Palace at Woodstock is a World Heritage Site (WHS).
- 8.4 Sand, gravel and limestone resources in the Lower Windrush Valley have been subject to extensive mineral extraction and sensitive restoration to improve nature and public access and support leisure and tourism uses.
- 8.5 The local distinctiveness and intrinsic quality of the environment provides an important resource, attracting people to live and work in the area, as well as contributing to the tourist economy.
- 8.6 As part of our green recovery, we must plan positively for the protection and enhancement of our natural and historic environment, based on a clear understanding of the importance and significance of built and natural assets. This is especially important for those that contribute to West Oxfordshire's distinct identity and the character, form and pattern of historic settlements.
- 8.7 We have the opportunity to develop a thriving ecological network, extending across the District, encompassing rivers, nature reserves, urban parks and agricultural farmland, ensuring priority habitats and species survive and delivering multiple benefits to nature and communities.
- 8.8 A high-quality, resilient environment can benefit us all through supporting economic growth, development, health, wellbeing and prosperity. This can be achieved by an innovative, efficient environmental sector and working together with other public and private sector partners to attract and deliver investment in the District; ensure sustainable, long-term stewardship of natural capital assets; and develop new and improved environmental knowledge, goods and services.

To what extent do you agree that achieving an enhanced natural and built environment should be an area of focus for the Local Plan and Council Plan? (5 strongly agree- 1 strongly disagree)

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Increasing biodiversity

- 8.9 Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth, in all its forms and interactions. Carbon emissions are placing stress on our ecosystems, which is exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. This is resulting in the loss and extinction of plant and animal species. We have a responsibility to not only halt this decline but to increase biodiversity across our District.
- 8.10 Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach which aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state post-development than beforehand. We would like to see exemplary biodiversity net gain in West Oxfordshire. By way of illustration, Salt Cross Garden Village aims to deliver 25% BNG compared to the emerging national benchmark of at least 10%.
- 8.11 Planting trees is one way to increase biodiversity, however, there are many others, including creating public and private green spaces within developments and improving links between wildlife sites beyond site boundaries. What is important is that the ecological improvements are high quality and suitable for their location. Assessing the existing ecological value of a site is a key part of this.
- 8.12 We also want to encourage householders and smaller developments to make ecological improvements, for example installing bird and bat boxes, planting wildflower meadows and pond restoration.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to increase biodiversity including a requirement for exemplary biodiversity net gain (BNG) in new developments? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Adopting an integrated approach to the water environment

- 8.13 Several rivers flow through West Oxfordshire providing important corridors for biodiversity, opportunities for recreation and forming part of the setting of many towns and villages. There are however challenges including water quality, supply and flooding.
- 8.14 Particular concerns have been raised recently over the water quality of our rivers and watercourses and the effect that raw effluent and agricultural practices (e.g. fertilizers and pesticides) are having on the health and biodiversity of aquatic ecosystems. The Council would like to see a significant betterment in water quality across the District and will continue to work with partners to achieve this including through a wider catchment based approach.
- 8.15 In terms of water supply, West Oxfordshire lies within an area of ‘serious’ water stress where there are limited water resources and a high and growing demand for water. Limiting water demand and extraction will help to protect aquifers and surface water. The Local Plan requires all new residential development to achieve water efficiency of 110 litres/person/day and this could be increased further.
- 8.16 Flood risk is also a key consideration for West Oxfordshire, with climate change leading to more flooding events in the District. There are a number of ways we can tackle this such as steering new development to those areas at least risk of flooding, making decisions based on the anticipated impacts of climate change and working with partners to deliver effective flood risk management and defences.

- 8.17 Flood risk, particularly from surface water, can also be tackled through robust and effective sustainable drainage systems (SuDs) which mimic nature and are an effective way of managing rainfall close to where it falls. Such systems help to ensure that new developments reduce the rate and volume of surface-water run-off. The use of SuDS and its ongoing maintenance is required as part of all major developments in the current Local Plan. We could potentially extend this to all applications that include a drainage scheme and provide further guidance and examples of best practice to maximise their environmental and amenity benefits.
- 8.18 The nature of the water environment is such that it is best addressed on a collective basis so that issues of water supply, use and recycling, disposal, quality and flood risk are not considered individually, but together to better manage water and deliver multiple benefits for people and wildlife.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to adopt an integrated approach to the water environment to ensure that issues of water supply, use, disposal, quality and flood risk are considered together? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

- 8.19 West Oxfordshire has distinctive heritage assets with characteristics deriving from the history, geology and landform of the District, including historic buildings, conservation areas, historic parks and gardens and archaeological sites.
- 8.20 The current Local Plan aims to conserve or enhance areas, buildings and features of historic, architectural and environmental significance, including both designated and non-designated heritage assets and habitats of biodiversity value.
- 8.21 National policy requires a pro-active approach, with the Council expected to set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. Councils are also encouraged to consider opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance.
- 8.22 The first step in conserving and enhancing our heritage assets and their settings is to understand their character and significance. As part of the new Local Plan and Council Plan, we could provide support for communities in the preparation of Village Design Statements and consider how to increase the number of Conservation Area Appraisals that are in place for the District's various Conservation Areas. We also have the opportunity to consider the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site and how its exceptional cultural significance (Outstanding Universal Value) can most appropriately be conserved and enhanced.
- 8.23 It is also important that we consider the historic environment in the context of climate change, with a need to reduce the energy use of traditional and historic buildings to minimise carbon emissions, save money and improve comfort and health.

- 8.24 Sensitive approaches to retrofit are required which protect and enhance their heritage value. Potentially we could look to embed a ‘Whole Building Approach’ which integrates fabric measures (e.g. insulation, new windows, draught proofing), and services (particularly ventilation, heating, controls and renewables) along with proper consideration of how people live and use the building.

How important is it to you that the Council adopts a positive approach to the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment and seeks to minimise carbon emissions from older buildings? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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Safeguarding the District’s highest quality agricultural land

- 8.25 Our agricultural communities have an essential role in increasing food production, reducing food miles, and enhancing the character of the countryside. The pressures of climate change, changing subsidy regimes, emerging markets, as well as environmental, hygiene and animal welfare standards have meant they have needed to continually adapt.
- 8.26 Managing farmland sensitively helps to maintain its productivity, combat habitat fragmentation, provides links between protected sites and creates a more resilient landscape that can deliver a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits.
- 8.27 Best and most versatile land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) is the most flexible, productive and efficient land, which can best deliver crops for food and non-food uses such as fibres and pharmaceuticals. We need to continue to protect this land through requiring sensitive farm diversification and the siting of development including renewable and low-carbon energy schemes in areas of lower agricultural value.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to protect the District’s highest quality agricultural land? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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Reducing pollution and improving the quality of our environment

- 8.28 Not only do we need to protect our natural environment from forms of pollution, including air, water, soil, noise and light, but we need to improve the quality of the environment across the District.
- 8.29 It is essential that the water quality of rivers and watercourses is improved and we will work with partners to achieve this.
- 8.30 Low air quality is experienced in the congested parts of our towns due to vehicle emissions. Reducing the need to travel and achieving a modal shift towards walking and cycling will lead to a reduction in emissions and an improvement in air quality. New development has to be located in accessible places with excellent pedestrian and cycle routes to existing facilities, access to public transport, and sufficient EV charging infrastructure.

- 8.31 The reuse of previously developed sites can assist in decontaminating land. Appropriate controls need to be in place to prevent the contamination of the water environment from land sources. Improving the quality of our soils is important for water management, biodiversity and food production and plays a vital role in climate change through storing carbon.
- 8.32 We also want to reclaim our dark skies and limit artificial lighting to enhance our natural environment and improve living conditions.
- 8.33 Noise pollution is an issue in some parts of the District due to disturbance caused by RAF Brize Norton and road traffic. We anticipate that significant and intrusive sources of noise will continue to be directed away from property and areas which are sensitive to noise.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to reduce all forms of pollution and improve environmental quality? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of our countryside

- 8.34 West Oxfordshire’s countryside has a distinctive character that is worthy of special protection. River valleys and wet meadows, historic parkland, ancient forest remnants, and undulating wolds landscape are important features and, in accordance with national policy, we need to recognise their intrinsic character and beauty.
- 8.35 Of particular importance is the Cotswolds National Landscape (previously known as the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) which covers around one third of the District.
- 8.36 The Council has a duty to conserve and enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of this area and we will continue to work in partnership with the Cotswolds National Landscape team and our local communities to achieve this.
- 8.37 Our current Local Plan sets out a general presumption against major development in this area, other than in exceptional circumstances. It offers support for smaller scale proposals that contribute to the economy and social well-being of local communities including affordable housing and small-scale renewable energy schemes.
- 8.38 A more restrictive approach to new housing applies than elsewhere in the District, with proposals on undeveloped, Greenfield land requiring particularly strong evidence of need to be considered acceptable.
- 8.39 Through the Council Plan and Local Plan we have an opportunity to consider the future of the Cotswolds National Landscape and how its environment, communities and businesses can thrive and prosper. This might include, for example, more specific consideration of future development needs including both market and affordable housing and the role and potential for net zero carbon development.

- 8.40 Land on the eastern edge of the District falls within the Oxford Green Belt, the protection of which is given great importance through national policy. The main aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Inappropriate development will not be permitted except in very special circumstances such as limited affordable housing for local community needs or buildings for agriculture and forestry.
- 8.41 The Oxford Green Belt is well-established and we do not envisage revisiting the existing boundary through the review of the Local Plan. We do however have the opportunity to provide guidance on appropriate forms of development within the District's Green Belt. We can also identify opportunities for positive enhancements, including for example through improved access, outdoor sport and recreation, retention and enhancement of the landscape, biodiversity enhancements and improving damaged and derelict land.

How important is it to you that the Council recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and pro-actively considers opportunities to enhance the Cotswolds National Landscape and Oxford Green Belt? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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9. Attractive, accessible and thriving places

- 9.1 West Oxfordshire is an attractive place to live, work and visit, with a varied network of towns, villages and other settlements that offer high quality environments and support a number of diverse, vibrant and flourishing local communities.
- 9.2 The Local Plan and Council Plan provide us with an opportunity to consider the role, function and appearance of those places; how we can protect all that is good about them; and how we can help to ensure they thrive and prosper in the future.
- 9.3 This reflects the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, which aims by 2050 to ‘have flourishing, diverse and vibrant communities rooted in pride with our local, national and international connections and a strong sense of civic identity.’
- 9.4 There are a number of ways in which the Local Plan and Council Plan can have a positive influence and impact. We have already touched on some of these including healthy place shaping, the timely provision of supporting infrastructure and the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.
- 9.5 Here we explore a number of other issues including the need to agree a ‘sustainable pattern of development’; how we can secure high quality, sustainable design; the wider application of garden village principles; the role of Neighbourhood Plans; and how we can positively plan for the future of our towns, villages and other settlements.

To what extent do you agree that the creation of attractive, accessible and thriving places should be an area of focus for the Local Plan and Council Plan? (5 strongly agree- 1 strongly disagree)

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A sustainable pattern of development for West Oxfordshire

- 9.6 National policy requires us to promote a sustainable pattern of development, taking account of future development needs, infrastructure provision, the environment and climate change. What constitutes a ‘sustainable’ pattern of development will however vary from area to area depending on these and other opportunities and constraints.
- 9.7 The current Local Plan is based on a ‘hierarchal’ approach, with most future growth being directed towards the District’s main towns of Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton and larger villages such as Eynsham and Woodstock. Land to the north of the A40 near Eynsham has been identified for the Salt Cross Garden Village on the basis that it will be designed in accordance with garden village principles thereby enhancing the natural environment, and offering high-quality affordable housing and locally accessible work in a beautiful, healthy and sociable community.
- 9.8 Future growth in the District’s smaller villages is more limited and, in very small settlements and open countryside, restricted to development that requires and is appropriate for a rural location.



- 9.9 The rationale for this overall approach is that our larger settlements offer the widest range of services and facilities, are accessible by a choice of transport modes (i.e. not just the car) and offer a good range of development sites and jobs.
- 9.10 The new Local Plan in particular provides us with the opportunity to explore the most appropriate pattern of future development. We need to decide whether we should be rolling forward our current approach, or looking to do something different, taking account of relevant factors such as accessibility, minimising carbon emissions and enhancing the environment.
- 9.11 Alternative options that we have previously considered include a more dispersed approach to growth as well as the potential to focus development along public transport corridors.

How important is it to you that the Council explores different options to help identify the most appropriate and sustainable pattern of future growth? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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High quality and sustainable design

- 9.12 Achieving beautiful, high quality and good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creating better places in which to live and work and helping to benefit existing communities.
- 9.13 The Council has a strong tradition of securing high quality design in new developments. Our well-respected design guide has been in place for some time and we have in-house urban design and architecture expertise. The multi award winning Marriotts Walk in Witney was commended for its high-quality design, good balance of facilities and architectural style and integration with the rest of the town.
- 9.14 Whilst the current Local Plan embeds the importance of high quality design, since it was adopted, the Government has raised the bar significantly in terms of design expectations, publishing a National Design Guide in October 2019 and a National Model Design Code in July 2021.
- 9.15 In general terms, Councils are expected to:
- Set out a clear design vision and expectations and explain how these will be tested to provide certainty about what is likely to be acceptable;
 - Enable effective engagement between applicants, communities and other interests;
 - Develop design policies with local communities so that they reflect local aspirations and understanding; and
 - Prepare design guides or design codes to provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places.

9.16 More specifically, Councils must ensure that developments:

- Are visually attractive;
- Are sympathetic to local character and history while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- Establish or maintain a strong ‘sense of place’;
- Optimise the potential of the site; and
- Create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being.

9.17 Building on our current design guidance, the new Local Plan provides the opportunity to set out our design expectations on a district-wide basis and potentially for specific locations. In line with the Council’s declaration of a climate and ecological emergency, we anticipate that this will not only deal with the physical appearance and aesthetics of new development but also its environmental performance learning from the Council’s ‘Sustainability Standards Checklist’. This expects high standards of energy and sustainability to be achieved in new and retrofit development (e.g. net zero carbon and minimising embodied carbon) with such matters to be factored in from the earliest stages of the design process.

9.18 We also have the opportunity to consider the use of design tools and frameworks such as ‘Building for a Healthy Life’, which aims to create places that are better for people and nature and is a current requirement of the Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan. Also the Council’s Net Zero Carbon Toolkit which provides practical tips on how to plan a net zero housing project and can help to shape our future plans.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to strengthen its approach towards sustainable design including the provision of specific design guidance? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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Rolling out garden village principles more widely

9.19 Through the current Local Plan, Salt Cross Garden Village is being taken forward in accordance with key garden village principles including:

- Land value capture for the benefit of the community
- Strong vision, leadership and community engagement
- Community ownership of land and long-term stewardship of assets
- Mixed-tenure homes and housing types that are genuinely affordable
- A wide range of local jobs within easy commuting distance
- Beautifully and imaginatively designed homes with gardens, combining the best of town and country to create healthy communities, and including opportunities to grow food
- Development that enhances the natural environment, providing a comprehensive green infrastructure network and net biodiversity gains, and that uses zero-carbon and energy positive technology to ensure climate resilience

- Strong cultural, recreational and shopping facilities in walkable, vibrant, sociable neighbourhoods
- Integrated and accessible transport systems, with walking, cycling and public transport designed to be the most attractive forms of local transport

9.20 Although many people remain concerned about the scale of growth planned, the adoption of these principles has been well supported on the basis that they will ensure the creation of a high quality and sustainable new community.

9.21 Whilst we already use these principles, we could potentially apply them more explicitly to future developments in West Oxfordshire. This could be achieved by setting out clear expectations for the quality of the places to be created and how this can be maintained in the long-term through appropriate management and stewardship arrangements.

9.22 This would support a number of the other issues and opportunities we have discussed elsewhere including reducing the need to travel, healthy place shaping and tackling climate change.

How important is it to you that the Council explores the potential to roll out garden village principles more widely to larger development proposals within the District? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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Neighbourhood and community planning

9.23 Neighbourhood Plans were introduced through the Localism Act in 2011 and play an important role in sustaining the prosperity of our towns and villages, providing an opportunity for local communities to develop a shared vision and shape the development and growth of their local area.

9.24 Neighbourhood Plans include policies for the development and use of land such as the provision of new affordable homes, the designation of areas of Local Green Space and consideration of local community infrastructure needs. Good neighbourhood plans focus on the key issues of most relevance locally, supporting the more strategic policies of the Local Plan.

9.25 Communities can also use Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders to grant planning permission directly although require the support of the local community through a referendum.

9.26 Once adopted, neighbourhood plans form part of the statutory development plan for the area and must be taken into account when any planning applications are determined within that area.

9.27 At present, West Oxfordshire has six adopted neighbourhood plans in place including:

- Charlbury (adopted 2021)
- Chipping Norton (adopted 2016)
- Eynsham (adopted 2020)
- Hailey (adopted 2019)
- Shilton (adopted 2018)
- South Leigh (adopted 2018)

9.28 A number of other plans are currently in preparation and the Council is keen to support more local communities in bringing forward neighbourhood plans and other community-led plans as appropriate.

9.29 The Council Plan and Local Plan can provide a framework to complement existing neighbourhood plans already in place and guide the future development of new plans across the district.

How important is it to you that the Council actively supports the preparation of neighbourhood plans and other community-led plans across the District? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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The future role of our town centres

9.30 Our market towns are hugely important focal points, both as service centres for the local population as well as being destinations that support the visitor economy. The town centres of Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Burford and Woodstock contain a wide diversity of uses, a strong tourism offer, niche markets and a high proportion of independent retailers.

9.31 These centres, however, continue to face a number of challenges. Increases in internet based retailing and blended working due to the pandemic, as well as decreases in visitor numbers particularly related to tourism, have required businesses to adapt.

9.32 Helping our towns to adapt in a way which retains their viability and vibrancy is one of our greatest challenges and the Council is looking to take a positive approach to the growth, management and adaptation of our town centres in line with national policy. The current Local Plan supports town centres as the focus for shopping, leisure, community facilities and services.

9.33 The traditional role of retailing as the town centre ‘anchor’ is changing and we have the opportunity to consider how we can best help businesses to adapt, for example by allowing a greater degree of flexibility in town centre uses. We can consider which mix of uses are suitable for town centres and how we can secure their vitality and viability in the long term.

- 9.34 A range of interventions are likely to be required, which may include upgrading the environment; improving digital infrastructure; providing flexible spaces for small and start-up businesses or temporary ‘pop-up’ type uses; and supporting specialist/independent shopping including local markets. The creation of pedestrian friendly streets and green spaces can play an important role in improving the attractiveness of our town centres and help to increase visitors and investment.
- 9.35 The provision of additional residential development in and around our town centres also has a potential role to play in raising footfall and activity throughout the day and evening, in turn supporting local businesses. It would also help to make efficient use of vacant and underused brownfield land.
- 9.36 It is important that we develop town centre strategies that enable us to capitalise on opportunities, continue to safeguard, and build resilience so that we protect the role of our town centres as community and commercial hubs.

How important is it to you that the Council adopts a positive strategy to support the revitalisation and viability of our town centres? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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Providing and retaining core services and facilities in smaller settlements

- 9.37 West Oxfordshire is a predominately rural area, with a number of smaller communities spread out across the District. The retention of core services and facilities in these smaller settlements is an important issue affecting the daily life of many residents.
- 9.38 Local services and facilities in our villages and hamlets include shops, post offices, pubs, community centres, leisure and sports facilities, libraries, school and health centres as well as other local facilities including allotments. They are vital to the well-being of our rural communities, meeting daily needs and creating job opportunities as well as providing places for people to come together, helping to reduce isolation, which is an increasing threat to our ageing population.
- 9.39 Due to changes in the way we access services, economies of scale, competition from larger settlements and a lack of investment, we have seen a trend towards the closure of local services and facilities in our villages and hamlets across the District. This has meant some local communities now have quite limited services on their doorstep and residents have to travel to larger settlements, often by car, or rely on online services.
- 9.40 The Council wants to retain and support an increase in the number of local services and facilities in our smaller settlements to support our rural communities and avoid additional trips to access goods and services.

- 9.41 Our current Local Plan requires robust evidence to justify a change of use and supports local communities in acquiring premises of value through the Community Right to Bid. In addition to this, we would like to take a proactive approach to supporting and facilitating new initiatives such as community run facilities and independent enterprises.
- 9.42 We could for example encourage the creation of small scale ‘hubs’ where residents can access a number of services in one place, perhaps a post office could be situated within a café or shop, attached to a community hall and close to other community facilities such as a play area.
- 9.43 Providing an appropriate scale of residential development in and around villages could also play a role in increasing demand for services and developer contributions could assist in supporting local services and facilities.

How important is it to you that the Council aims to retain and increase core services and facilities in the District’s villages and hamlets? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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10. Meeting the housing needs of all

- 10.1 West Oxfordshire is a very popular place to live due to its rich environment, good accessibility, vibrant towns and villages and high quality of life. A key role for the Local Plan and Council Plan is therefore to ensure that enough high quality homes come forward in the right places and at the right time to meet a broad spectrum of needs, incomes and circumstances.

To what extent do you agree that ‘meeting the housing needs of all’ should be an area of focus for the Local Plan and Council Plan? (5 strongly agree- 1 strongly disagree)

5	4	3	2	1
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Providing enough homes to meet identified needs

- 10.2 Nationally, the Government is committed to significantly boosting the supply of new homes, with local authorities expected to identify enough land for the short, medium and where possible, long-term. This is reflected in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision which seeks to ‘*deliver homes that meet our needs*’.
- 10.3 Our current Local Plan aims to deliver just under 16,000 new homes over the 20-year period 2011 – 2031 (i.e. just under 800 homes per year). This is a much higher level of growth than has been seen historically in West Oxfordshire – in part a result of the plan making provision for some of Oxford City’s unmet housing needs. In the first 10 years (i.e. from 2011 – 2021) just under 5,500 new homes have been built, with the remainder currently coming forward or in the pipeline.
- 10.4 Through the preparation of the new Local Plan, we will need to determine how many new homes are needed to 2041 and set an appropriate housing requirement to plan for. This will need to take account of any potential ‘under-supply’ during the current plan period, with some of the larger sites that are already allocated for development, not coming forward as quickly as expected.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to provide enough overall new homes to meet identified needs? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

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- 10.5 Because West Oxfordshire is a popular and attractive place to live, house prices in the District are generally very high, with some areas, particularly within the Cotswolds AONB and close to Oxford, being particularly expensive to live. Although household incomes are generally above average, many new homes are unaffordable to a lot of people, particularly first-time buyers and single-income families.



- 10.6 The Council Plan and Local Plan have a key role to play in enabling the delivery of more affordable homes in West Oxfordshire. Our current policies are already working well with 335 new affordable homes completed in 2020/21, however we have an opportunity to do more.
- 10.7 There are a number of measures which we could explore to increase the supply and range of affordable housing options. We could for example increase the number of new affordable homes that need to be provided alongside market housing (subject to viability) as well as identifying new sites specifically for new affordable homes such as rural exception sites.
- 10.8 We could also look to deliver a broader range of different types of affordable housing to ensure greater choice and improve affordability such as the provision of social rented housing and 'First Homes'.
- 10.9 It is essential that we also look beyond the short-term cost of new homes and consider the long-term, with stronger requirements for more sustainable building design meaning lower energy demands and reduced household bills – something that is becoming increasingly important given the current cost of living crisis.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to deliver an increase in the number and range of affordable homes and ensure that all new homes are affordable to run in the long-term? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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A broad mix of property types and sizes

- 10.10 We know that the current dwelling stock in West Oxfordshire is skewed towards larger, detached and semi-detached properties. There are relatively few terraces / town houses and fewer still flats and maisonettes. This not only restricts choice but impacts on affordability.
- 10.11 Everyone has different needs ranging from the first-time buyer looking for a relatively modest and affordable property, to families wanting more space and those already on the housing ladder the housing ladder for some time and now looking to downsize.
- 10.12 It is essential therefore that we look to enable and facilitate a broad mix of different property types and sizes so that we are able to meet a variety of needs. In larger developments, a mix of different property types and sizes can also help improve design and layout and encourage social interaction.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to achieve a broad mix of different property types and sizes to meet different needs? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Meeting the needs of different groups

- 10.13 As well as considering the overall mix of property types and sizes, we need to think about whether there are any particular groups to be provided for. This is reflected in national policy which suggests that provision should be made for those who require affordable housing (including younger people), families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes.
- 10.14 Building on appropriate evidence, we have the opportunity to identify specific needs and plan for them accordingly, potentially strengthening the approach set out in our current Local Plan. For older people and travelling communities for example, the current local plan adopts a 'criteria-based' approach setting out the broad principles of what will be permitted and where. We could instead, potentially identify specific sites to ensure that such provision comes forward.
- 10.15 Similarly, to make provision for people with disabilities, we could consider introducing stronger requirements for new homes to be built to higher standards of accessibility and adaptability.
- 10.16 For those wishing to rent, we might look to make specific provision for 'build to rent' accommodation - an increasingly important sector where housing is built specifically for rent over the longer-term with secure tenancies of 3 years or more.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to make more specific provision to help meet the needs of particular groups such as younger people, families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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The relationship between new homes and jobs

- 10.17 Although in the post-covid era working patterns have changed with more remote and hybrid working, there remains a strong link between the provision of new homes and economic prosperity with employers often citing a lack of suitable, affordable homes as a disincentive to economic investment and expansion. A lack of suitable, affordable homes can also put off potential employees, with a recent Youth Needs Assessment showing that most teenagers in West Oxfordshire don't think they will be living locally in the future due to high house prices.
- 10.18 Considering the provision of new homes alongside economic growth not only provides the opportunity to stimulate the economy but also to reduce out-commuting, rates of which are relatively high in certain parts of the District.

- 10.19 It also provides the opportunity to more comprehensively consider future infrastructure requirements as well as exploring the potential for appropriate forms of mixed-use development, particularly in and around town and village centres and other accessible locations.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to consider the relationship between new homes and jobs to support economic growth and reduce out-commuting? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Keeping the delivery of new homes under regular review

- 10.20 As well as addressing the overall number and type of new homes that are needed, we need to consider when they come forward to ensure that enough new homes are being built at any one time to meet identified needs. This is consistent with national policy which requires local authorities to make appropriate provision for the short, medium and where possible long-term, as well as setting out the expected rate of housing delivery over the plan period.
- 10.21 There are a number of potential measures we could take forward to ensure the right number of homes are coming forward when needed. For example, the development of a robust monitoring and delivery framework including a housing trajectory potentially broken down by specific sites, allocating a mix of different site sizes including smaller and medium sites (which often come forward more quickly) and the potential use of more stringent planning conditions to ensure the timely delivery of new homes.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to keep the delivery of new homes under regular review to ensure we are not delivering too few or too many at any one time? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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11. A vibrant, resilient and diverse local economy

- 11.1 Oxfordshire as a whole is a dynamic and successful economy, globally renowned for its excellence and scale of innovation, enterprise and research.
- 11.2 West Oxfordshire is a buoyant, diverse and resilient local economy, characterised by a skilled workforce and high rates of employment and economic activity. It has a strong presence in key sectors including advanced manufacturing and engineering with internationally recognised companies such as Siemens Magnet Technology, Owen Mumford, Abbott Diabetes Care, JSP, Alpine F1 and Polar Technology.
- 11.3 Rates of entrepreneurialism are high with lots of smaller businesses and indigenous growth. Around two thirds of jobs are taken by local residents. Employment density (i.e. the number of jobs by area) is quite low, with traditionally high levels of home working, particularly in the more rural parts of the District.
- 11.4 The main concentrations of employment are in and around the District’s larger settlements, particularly Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Eynsham and Woodstock. Witney is the largest centre of economic activity whilst Eynsham and Woodstock have particularly strong links with Oxford and its surrounds. Carterton is strongly influenced by the presence of RAF Brize Norton.
- 11.5 Despite the relative buoyancy of the economy, there is room for improvement. Productivity (i.e. output per head) is relatively low and average wages have not kept pace with other areas, being around two thirds of those in Oxford, Cherwell and the Vale of White Horse District.
- 11.6 Whilst low unemployment and high rates of economic activity are positive indicators, they combine to create a rather ‘tight’ labour market with potential employers and investors fearing they will be unable to find available workers. When coupled with a growing stock of older buildings, concerns around accessibility (including congestion along the A40) and strong competition from Oxford, these factors mean that levels of inward investment into West Oxfordshire are relatively low.
- 11.7 It is for these reasons that we believe the new Local Plan and Council Plan should focus on ensuring that our local economy is vibrant, resilient and diverse. In short, we need to create the right conditions for businesses to invest, expand and adapt.

To what extent do you agree that achieving a vibrant, resilient and diverse local economy should be an area of focus for the Local Plan and Council Plan? (5 strongly agree- 1 strongly disagree)

5	4	3	2	1
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Developing a clear economic vision and strategy for West Oxfordshire

- 11.8 In actively supporting economic growth and increasing productivity in the District, we need to develop a clear vision and strategy for what we want to achieve.
- 11.9 This presents an opportunity to consider how we can build on the District’s key strengths and local business needs, as well as wider opportunities for development, drawing on the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) which highlights Salt Cross Garden Village and Carterton as key economic assets.
- 11.10 The development of a clear economic vision and strategy also provides the opportunity to address potential barriers to investment and determine how we can be more flexible in accommodating future needs. This includes the support for different working practices, which was brought into sharp focus through the pandemic.
- 11.11 We will set out how existing businesses will be protected and grown; how we will attract more inward investment opportunities and increase productivity; how we will ensure that our rural economy, including community businesses are supported; how our towns and villages will evolve and thrive and what role West Oxfordshire will play in the broader Oxfordshire economy.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to develop a clear economic vision and strategy for West Oxfordshire building on its core strengths and opportunities? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Providing an appropriate amount and type of space for existing and new businesses

- 11.12 As well as developing a clear economic vision and strategy, we need to identify specific sites to meet identified needs and support local and inward investment.
- 11.13 There is a clear demand for business land in West Oxfordshire, as indicated by the success of the recent Stanley Court and Tungsten Park developments in Witney. However, other than Salt Cross Garden Village, the current supply of business land is very limited. This is compounded by the difference in value between land for residential and business development, which often means that potential economic land is developed for housing.
- 11.14 We therefore need to make sure that we allocate enough business land to meet current and future needs. This will ensure that such sites are not lost to other non-employment uses and support the growth of new and existing businesses in West Oxfordshire.
- 11.15 In addition to identifying specific sites, we can set out appropriate criteria to ensure that future business development comes forward in the most appropriate, sustainable locations and in the interests of the local and county economy.

- 11.16 We will need to cater for relatively small-scale indigenous growth as well as the potential for increased levels of investment in the clean and green economy and other key growth sectors. The proposed science and technology park at Salt Cross Garden Village is likely to act as a catalyst for attracting increased interest from larger companies, and we need to be in a position to accelerate this growth.
- 11.17 The provision of a balanced range of opportunities will support local economic growth and lever in additional inward investment, whilst also helping to deliver higher paid jobs and reduce levels of out-commuting, which are quite high in the eastern parts of the District.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to provide an appropriate amount of land to support the growth of existing and new businesses? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Protecting our existing economic assets

- 11.18 As well as providing opportunities for new and existing businesses to establish and grow, we need to make sure that we do not lose our existing economic assets to other uses, such as housing. This would lead to fewer long-term jobs and increased out-commuting or relocation, harming the local economy.
- 11.19 National policy now allows for more changes of use without planning permission and we therefore have less control over the loss of some employment uses. However, where permission is required, we believe we should be looking to retain such sites and protect them from other uses unless it can be robustly demonstrated that they are no longer needed for employment or the replacement use would help to strengthen the District's economy and enhance the well-being of our local communities. We believe that such an approach will help to achieve the right balance of homes and jobs.

How important is it to you that the Council seeks to protect existing employment sites from being lost to other uses? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Recognising new patterns of working

- 11.20 West Oxfordshire has a strong tradition of home-working, particularly in the more rural parts of the District, with around 35% of workers around Chipping Norton and Burford working mainly from home (pre-Covid).
- 11.21 During the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a successful shift towards much higher levels of remote and hybrid working and as we move into a post-Covid era, we need to recognise through the Council Plan and Local Plan that the way in which people work has changed and is likely to continue to change in the future.

- 11.22 Our plans need to be suitably flexible to allow for changing circumstances, including new working practices. There are a number of ways in which we can support home-working and provide additional flexibility, for example improved digital connectivity, the provision of flexible work space within new homes and the creation of shared or co-working spaces in convenient and accessible locations.

How important is it to you that the Council recognises and provides support for increased home and remote working? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Improving workforce skills

- 11.23 To achieve Oxfordshire’s economic ambition of becoming a top three global innovation ecosystem by 2040, we will require a highly skilled, adaptable and innovative workforce. The OxLEP Local Skills Report highlights three labour skills that should be developed: artificial intelligence (AI) and big data; business and digital/ ICT; and others termed soft skills (e.g. employability).
- 11.24 Employers specifically report shortages of degree level (Level 4+) candidates for occupations such as programmers and software developers and those with sector specific specialist skills. Other skills supply challenges exist, including an ageing population and attracting and retaining talent (linked to graduate retention and housing affordability).
- 11.25 Whilst West Oxfordshire is fortunate to benefit from a relatively highly skilled workforce, there is more we can do, with the recruitment of staff often being cited as one of the limiting factors holding back business growth.
- 11.26 We could introduce a number of potential measures, such as supporting the provision of new and enhanced learning establishments, and working with developers to create training and employment opportunities for local people as part of larger developments.
- 11.27 Community Employment Plans (CEPs) are employer-led initiatives and can include commitments such as apprenticeships, employment/training for all ages and maximising local labour and school, college and university engagement.
- 11.28 The current Local Plan encourages these plans to be produced. The new Local Plan could make them a requirement for certain types and scale of development.

How important is it to you that the Council focuses on improving workforce skills to increase well-being and prosperity? (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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Supporting the District’s rural and tourism economies

- 11.29 National policy emphasises the importance of supporting a prosperous rural economy. Local authorities should enable the growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas; the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses; sustainable rural tourism and leisure opportunities; and the retention and development of local services and facilities.
- 11.30 As West Oxfordshire is predominantly rural, the prosperity of the rural economy is vital but it is also complex. Agriculture is critical for local food production, however, farm businesses are under severe pressure and diversification will continue to be hugely important for this sector.
- 11.31 Retail and hospitality businesses such as shops, pubs and cafes are often at the heart of our rural communities and we must enable them to diversify and evolve with their communities, encouraging local produce and supply chains.
- 11.32 The rural economy is also home to other businesses, from large employers such as Alpine F1 and JSP through to micro businesses operating from people’s homes. We need to ensure that these businesses have the same opportunity to grow as their urban counterparts so they can create jobs in rural communities which in turn helps to support the retail and hospitality businesses. The availability and retention of appropriate business space in villages from workshops to office space is important in ensuring communities remain vibrant and sustainable.
- 11.33 Tourism is a very important sector of the West Oxfordshire economy, with the district benefitting from a range of historical and natural assets including the Cotswolds AONB, historic market towns and villages and Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site. Although tourism is one of our key sectors, it tends to be highly vulnerable to economic shocks and, as the pandemic has shown, it was hit harder than other sectors on employment numbers and visitor expenditure.
- 11.34 The rural economy and tourism are fundamentally linked, as the attraction of West Oxfordshire to tourists is in large part due to its attractive rural nature along with its vibrant towns and villages.

How important is it to you that the Council supports the District’s rural economy and tourism sector? 5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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12. Your Council and You

- 12.1 As a new Council for West Oxfordshire we want to understand how you would like us to work to meet the needs of residents and take action on the issues that are facing the District (such as the climate and ecological emergency, the health and well-being of our residents, ensuring people have a home that meets their needs, and how to ensure that our local economy is strong and resilient).
- 12.2 As part of our commitment to putting residents at the heart of what we do, we want to know what you value most about living in West Oxfordshire.

Tell us what you value most about living in West Oxfordshire

- 12.3 We know as well as having many things we value we also have many challenges to face as a community in West Oxfordshire whether that be the affordability of housing, the cost of living, tackling the climate emergency or preventing sewage entering our waterways among many other things.

If you could make one change to improve where you live, what would it be?

- 12.4 We would be grateful if you would answer the following questions to provide us with an insight into how we should approach our role to serve our local community and make an impact on some of the immediate and longer term challenges we face.

I believe the Council should work with other organisations to galvanise action on issues in the District

				
Strongly Agree				Strongly disagree



I believe the Council should take the lead on responding to issues in the District

				
Strongly Agree				Strongly disagree

I believe the Council should focus on efficient and cost effective service delivery

				
Strongly Agree				Strongly disagree

I believe the Council should focus on backing particular causes that are important to the District

				
Strongly Agree				Strongly disagree

How important to you is it that the Council is accessible, transparent and open to the public (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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How important to you is it that the Council is proactive and works with other organisations to address some of the big issues facing the District e.g. quality of the natural environment, cost of living crisis, health and well-being of residents. (5 being most important, 1 being least)

5	4	3	2	1
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13. How to respond

- 13.1 We are keen to hear from lots of different people and have made it as simple as possible to respond. If you would like to comment, please do so using our new digital engagement platform commonplace, which is available here:

<https://yourvoicecounts.commonplace.is>

Or by scanning the following QR Code using your mobile device:



- 13.2 Using this platform to respond will assist us greatly in reviewing the responses received. However, if you would prefer not to use this method you can send your comments to us via email to planning.consultation@westoxon.gov.uk

- 13.3 Or, you can write to us at:

Planning Policy Team
West Oxfordshire District Council
Elmfield, New Yatt Road
Witney
OX28 1PB

- 13.4 If you do email or write to us, it would be very helpful if you can clearly state which aspects of the consultation you are responding to. Comments that we receive via email or post will be added to the commonplace platform so we have a complete picture of what everyone has said.

14. What happens next?

- 14.1 Following the close of this initial consultation, we will carefully consider all of the views raised and use the feedback to shape the content of both the new Local Plan and the Council Plan.
- 14.2 As the Council Plan is a shorter, non-statutory document, we are aiming to work up a full draft for consideration at a meeting of Full Council later this year.
- 14.3 For the Local Plan, we will use the feedback received to 'hone in' on the issues that the Local Plan should be looking to address and work up some more detailed proposals with a view to further consultation.
- 14.4 At that point, we anticipate identifying more specific options and alternatives that will be tested and considered through evidence and further consultation as we develop the plan.

15. Further information and assistance

15.1 We have sought to make this initial consultation as user friendly as possible as we are keen to gather a wide range of views and opinions.

15.2 Hopefully you find it straightforward to respond, but if you do need assistance or require further information about the consultation or the overall process for taking the new Local Plan forward, please contact the planning policy team via:

- Email at planning.consultation@westoxon.gov.uk or
- Phone on 01993 861686