

Council Agenda



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Summons to attend a meeting of Council

**to be held on Wednesday, 13 December 2023 at 7.00 pm
The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY**

Vivien Williams,
Head of legal and Democratic (interim)

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Agenda

Open to the public including the press

1. Apologies for absence

To record apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

(Pages 9 - 24)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Council minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2023.

3. Declarations of interest

To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

4. Urgent business and chair's announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the chair.

5. Public participation

To receive any questions or statements from members of the public that have registered to speak.

6. Petitions

To receive any petitions from the public.

7. Treasury Management Outturn 2022/23

(Pages 25 - 46)

To consider the report of the head of finance on the council's treasury management activities and prudential indicators for the financial year 2022/23.

At its meeting on 10 November 2023, Cabinet agreed the recommendations set out in the attached report and resolved:

- (a) to note the treasury management outturn report 2022/23;
- (b) that Cabinet is satisfied that the treasury activities have been carried out in accordance with the treasury management strategy and policy.

8. Council tax reduction scheme 2024/25

(Pages 47 - 51)

To consider the report of the head of finance on the adoption and implementation of a modified council tax reduction scheme for the financial years 2024/2025 onwards.

The recommendations set out in the attached report were agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 December 2023.

9. Council tax base 2024/25

(Pages 52 - 56)

To consider the report of the head of finance on the setting of the council tax base for 2024/25.

The recommendations set out in the attached report were agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 1 December 2024.

10. Section 106 (S106) Request - Chilton Parish Council - Play area / Recreation ground improvements

(Pages 57 - 64)

To consider the report of the head of finance on a request from Chilton Parish Council to release funds from two S106 contributions towards a play area/recreation ground improvement project at Chilton village active play area.

Cabinet, at its meeting on 1 December 2024, supported the proposal.

11. Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 - proposal to re-appoint a joint Independent Remuneration Panel

(Pages 65 - 69)

To consider the report of the head of legal and democratic on the appointment of a joint independent remuneration panel with South Oxfordshire District Council to review the councillors' allowances scheme.

12. Review of the council's Constitution

(Pages 70 - 80)

To consider the report of the head of legal and democratic on proposed revisions to the Constitution.

13. Appointment of interim monitoring officer

(Pages 81 - 82)

To consider the report of the deputy chief executive – transformation and operations, on the appointment of a monitoring officer.

14. Report of the leader of the council

To receive the report of the leader of the council.

15. Questions on notice

To receive questions from councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 33.

1. Question from Councillor Gascoigne to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

The government recently announced its plan for a 'smoke free generation' and its desire to stop children starting young and becoming addicted for life. Regulations around vapes are not up to the same standard as tobacco products. This can mean the marketing and the flavours make them particularly appealing for children. The government released a consultation on the matter.

Can the leader confirm whether she responded to this consultation?

2. Question from Councillor Thompson to Councillor Coleman, Cabinet member for environmental services and waste

Residents across the Vale and in my ward in Abingdon Peachcroft have pride in the community and are concerned about the upkeep of their streets. Street cleaning is a statutory function of Council and residents are keen to aid in this process by moving cars and ensuring vans have access to all parts of the road.

To enable this and meet our corporate plan objective of working in an open and inclusive way, would Council be able to publish its rota for street cleaning so residents can be made aware of schedules so they can plan accordingly?

3. Question from Councillor Houghton to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Many residents in my ward are extremely concerned about the potential impact of the proposed Botley West Solar Farm.

Can the Leader set out the council's current position on the proposal, outline any representations the Vale has made so far on the proposals and outline what further actions the council intends to take going forwards?

4. Question from Councillor Smith to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council

Residents in Cumnor, Botley and beyond have had to endure significant and ongoing disruption to transport in caused by the Network Rail closure of Botley Road, National Highways works to the A34, Thames Water, SGN, and other agencies closing the roads in this area. The accumulative impact of all these works on local businesses, bus services, taxis, and residents reliant on private cars to access Oxford City centre and Oxford train station is causing huge concern and confusion.

The communication from National Highways in particular about works on the Botley interchange have been, in my view, inadequate.

While I am aware of an officer group convened by the County Council to coordinate roadworks, I am concerned that they may not have adequate powers to direct national agencies.

Please can the leader explain who is accountable for timetabling and communication

about A34 works, National Rail and Thames Water projects, and if there is anything more this council can do to support the county council with to ensure that national agencies and private companies work together to avoid projects clashing over the coming years?

5. Question from Councillor Clegg to Councillor Lugova, Cabinet member for planning and development control

At the full Council meeting in July this year, we debated and agreed a motion supporting the view that we should all available steps to prevent or reduce sewage spills across the Vale.

Among other statements, we agreed that we believe “The planning system should ensure that new houses can only be occupied once sufficient capacity in the local sewerage network is in place.”

Outline approval for a new housing estate to the south-east of Marcham was granted in 2022, and an application for Reserved Matters is currently being assessed. To their credit, during the consultation period for the Outline Application, Thames Water “identified an inability of the foul water network infrastructure to accommodate the needs of this development proposal”. As a consequence of this, a condition was attached to the decision approving the Outline Application (condition 11) preventing occupation until suitable steps to address the foul water capacity had been taken.

Recognising that each enforcement matter must be assessed on its individual circumstances, could the Cabinet member please outline the general powers that the Vale has to enforce pre-occupation planning conditions and our approach to enforcement of these?

6. Question from Councillor Foxhall to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for Climate Action and the Environment

In the recent Council Climate Action Scorecards, released in October, Vale of White Horse gained a score of 42%. While this compares favourably with a District Council average of 39%, there are some notably weak areas identified, including in biodiversity and transport, which seems surprising given the work that our officers are doing. The LGA has stated that it “doesn’t support league tables as they often paint a two-dimensional picture of the context that councils are working within, and unfairly compare councils with different challenges”, whereas some other councils say they find them a useful tool to help us identify areas where we can improve”.

What is the Leader’s view of the Scorecards and our Council’s results, and does she believe they are a useful tool for improvement?

7. Question from Councillor Foxhall to Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for Finance

In response to the Chancellor’s autumn statement of 22 November, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has warned that a £19.1 billion erosion in the real value of departmental spending in 2027-8, is a “significant and growing risk” to their economic forecast. Given the relative protection for areas such as defence and the NHS, the Resolution Foundation has described the plans as “completely implausible” and “similar in scale to the peak years of austerity” but without the scope to cut spending further.

Does the Cabinet Member share this concern about the implications of the Autumn

Statement for local authority finances, and if so, what does he anticipate can be done to mitigate its effects on our council colleagues, our residents and our Council's priorities for our District?

16. Motions on notice

To consider motions from councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 38.

(1) Motion to be proposed by Councillor Clegg, seconded by Councillor Cooke:

Over the last two years, the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) has been placed by Thames Water into the Water Resource South East (WRSE) draft regional plan, the revised Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP24), and is also entered into an National Infrastructure evaluation named Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID) consisting of Ofwat, the Environment Agency, and the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

This Council, under both the previous Conservative and the current Liberal Democrat administrations, has consistently stood with local residents in expressing our concern and publicly stating our position against the SESRO scheme presented for consultation.

This council notes that

1. The multiple consultations carried out with the public in the last 18 months were for a design 50% smaller than that now being taken to the Secretary of State for approval.
2. Vale of White Horse District Council also stands against the proposed designs for SESRO.
3. Despite many Oxfordshire residents responding on SESRO, none of the issues presented has been addressed comprehensively. Many key assessments have not been submitted through RAPID to stakeholders, so external validation or even confirmation of existence is not possible.
4. Among the key concerns are: absence of assessment regarding the extra flooding risk associated with the proposed reservoir design; absence of assessment regarding the microclimate changes that would result from this large body of water being situated so close to the A34 road; absence of assessment of the potential subsidence that may be caused to other buildings in the surrounding area.
5. The current fragmented model of privatised water supply companies inhibits the development of national approaches to water resilience.

This council resolves to

1. Request a meeting with the current Secretary of State on a non-partisan basis, with invitations to: the Members of Parliament for Oxford West and Abingdon and for Wantage and Didcot; the Group Against Reservoir Development (GARD); the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE); the leaders of the groups represented in this chamber; and the County Councillors in the proposed zone of development and fall out. Said meeting to discuss the existing concerns that have

- not yet been addressed and the overall options for governance of the system.
2. Firmly request and campaign for the RAPID evaluation of SESRO to be paused until the flaws in the underlying data already highlighted by this council to OFWAT and Thames Water are resolved.
 3. Request the Chief Executive to establish a Water Resource Officer-Member Liaison Group.
 4. Call for the creation of a single, publicly owned national water supply provider.

(2) Motion to be proposed by Councillor James, seconded by Councillor Foxhall:

This Council has already made action on Climate Change a priority, in the 2020-2024 Corporate Plan and with the declaration of a Climate Emergency in February 2019. As many other local councils have recognised, the climate emergency is intertwined with a crisis in nature and this council has shown a strong commitment already to Nature Recovery in existing planning policy on Biodiversity Net Gain, and in motions passed by the council, for example the recent motion on the treatment of sewage in the district.

Council acknowledges that:

- Our societies and economies are intimately linked with and depend on biodiversity and nature. The natural world is essential for the provision of nutritious food (with soil and pollinators having a vital role), clean water, clean air, medicines, and protection from extreme weather, as well as being our source of energy and raw materials.
- The State of Nature 2023 report¹ shows a continuing decline in the UK's wildlife. The UK, like most other countries worldwide, has seen significant loss of its plants, animals and fungi. The UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth.
- In June 2023, a Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre Study commissioned by our Council reported that more grassland had been lost in Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire than across other parts of Oxfordshire and England.
- Actions to restore nature and biodiversity, as well as being vital for their own sake, often have an important co-benefit of storing carbon, so help to address climate change.
- The Environment Act (2021) puts the onus on local authorities to take responsibility for nature through Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the Biodiversity Duty
- Our residents have made it clear through their responses to the May 2022 Joint Local Plan Issues Consultation that they believe protecting and restoring our natural environment should be a very high priority.

¹ https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf

- A 2020 review from Public Health England² found that improving access to green space has health and well-being benefits and can help local authorities to address health and well-being issues, climate change and inequalities in their local area.

Council resolves to:

1. Ask Cabinet to ensure that addressing the climate and ecological emergencies and nature recovery remain strategic priorities for planning policies and design guides for new development through proposals in the Joint Local Plan (JLP), whilst seeking to support the principle of increasing equality of access for people to natural, green spaces.
2. Ask Cabinet to consider proposing that nature recovery has equal priority with climate change as headline themes for the Vale of White Horse District Council Corporate Plan, 2024 – 2028.
3. Ask Cabinet to consider extending the remit of CEAC to support Cabinet in addressing the twin priorities of Climate Change and Nature Recovery.
4. Ask Cabinet to consider support for a higher than nationally set level of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through the JLP and work with partners to support effective local use of any BNG offsetting arising from development in the Vale of White Horse.
5. Ask cabinet to consider and propose measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase within our own Council's operations and land holdings, in the area managed for nature and in species diversity, seeking also to increase community engagement.
6. Support the work of the Cabinet Member for Climate Action and the Environment in engaging with partners and local charities and environmental organisations in supporting nature recovery and in opposing damage, such as that caused by sewage spills and other pollution incidents that damage nature in our district.
7. Work pro-actively with partners to develop and to support the production of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire.
8. Look for opportunities to extend partnership with local charities and environmental organisations to deliver nature recovery in Vale of White Horse.
9. Seek to identify further habitat bank sites to build on the success of the Duxford Old River project and support new opportunities for landowners to diversify their income streams and deliver nature recovery.
10. Ask Cabinet to consider the Council becoming a responsible body for Conservation Covenants as a possible route to securing biodiversity net gain.
11. Where relevant, continue to include advocating for nature and ecological diversity in our responses as consultee to major infrastructure projects.
12. Ask officers to continue to ensure that climate action and ecological initiatives are embedded within all council work areas.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenpace_2020_review.pdf