

Council Agenda



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Summons to attend a meeting of Council

to be held on Wednesday 23 October 2024 at 7.00 pm
The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY

Nick Bennett,
Head of Legal and Democratic

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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 - 27)

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Council minutes of the meeting held on 17 July and the special meeting held on 18 September 2024.

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

(Page 28)

At the meeting held on 18 July 2024, Councillor Bentley, Chair of council, advised of the receipt of a petition submitted by Botley and North Hinksey Parish Council signed by in excess of 1400 signatures regarding the closure of the Harcourt Hill swimming pool facility and urging the council to find a way to keep the pool open for the coming year and find a solution for its long term future. The letter from the parish council is attached.

In accordance with the council's petition scheme, Council may:

- Decide to take the action the petition requests
- Not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate
- Refer the matter to Cabinet or the relevant committee and decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision,

7. S106 Request - Milton Parish Council - New Community Hall with Sporting Facilities, Potash Lane, Milton

(Pages 29 - 38)

To consider the report of the head of finance on a proposal to award funds to Milton Parish Council towards a new community hall with sporting facilities in Milton parish – attached. This item will not be considered if planning permission for this facility is not granted by the Council meeting.

8. Didcot Technology Park - Proposed Local Development Order

(Pages 39 - 205)

Cabinet, at its meeting held on 27 September 2024, considered the report of the head of planning to progress a Local Development Order (LDO) for Didcot Technology Park.

Plan 5 in the attached LDO incorporates a small change to the pedestrian/cycle route to ensure the developer can deliver it as required under the S106.

RECOMMENDATION: to adopt the Didcot Technology Park Local Development Order (LDO) (attached at Appendix 3 to the report of the head of planning to Cabinet on 27 September 2024), subject to completion of a legal agreement securing the elements referred to in paragraph 9 of the report.

9. Making of the Steventon Neighbourhood Plan

(Pages 206 - 210)

To consider the recommendations of the Cabinet member for planning, made on 8 October 2024, regarding the neighbourhood plan for Steventon following the referendum held on 5 September 2024.

The Individual Cabinet Member Decision is attached.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To make the Steventon Neighbourhood Development Plan, so that it becomes part of the council's development plan.

2. To authorise the head of policy and programmes, in consultation with the Cabinet member for policy and programmes and in agreement with the Qualifying Body – Steventon Parish Council, to correct any spelling, grammatical, typographical or factual errors together with any improvements from a presentational perspective.

10. Treasury Outturn 2023/24

(Pages 211 - 231)

Cabinet, at its meeting on 18 October, will consider the report of the head of finance on the outturn performance of the treasury management function for the financial year 2023/24.

The report of the head of finance, which the Joint Audit and Governance Committee considered on 15 October 2024 and Cabinet will consider on 18 October, is **attached**.

Cabinet's recommendations will be circulated prior to the Council meeting.

11. Report of the leader of the council

To receive the report of the leader of the council.

12. Future Oxfordshire Partnership - recent activity by Vale representatives' update

(Pages 232 - 239)

To receive the attached update report.

13. Questions on notice

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

1. Question from Councillor Foxhall to Councillor Foulsham, Cabinet member for Policy and Programmes

We recently learnt that the government's Planning Inspectorate has recommended that Oxford City Council withdraw its local plan.

The government inspectors' main reason for this was that Oxford City had not satisfied the duty to co-operate, in large part referring to South and Vale. Inspectors stated that "we do not consider that the Council has engaged constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in relation to the strategic matters of housing needs and unmet housing needs." [1]

In response, Councillor Susan Brown, Oxford City Council's leader has commented: "We have a longstanding history of working collaboratively with neighbouring councils and other stakeholders on planning issues affecting Oxfordshire - including during the preparation of this plan. The duty to cooperate is not a duty to agree." [2]

Which of these assessments does the Cabinet member consider most accurate?

[1] <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/3600/exam-20---inspectors-post-hearings-letter-to-council-september-2024>

[2] <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/1549/oxford-city-council-response-to-planning-inspectors-findings-on-its-draft-local-plan-2040>

2. Question from Councillor James to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for Climate Action, Nature Recovery, and Strategic Partnerships

In December 2023 this Council voted unanimously on a motion that noted the importance of Nature Recovery and made 12 resolutions towards delivering nature recovery in our district. They were:

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.

Can the Cabinet member for Climate Action, Nature Recovery, and Strategic Partnerships please report back on the current status of these 12 resolutions and any further plans that have been made since last December that will deliver nature recovery in the Vale of the White Horse?

14. Motions on notice

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

1. Motion to be proposed by Councillor Clegg and seconded by Councillor James

Council notes:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has approved Thames Water's Water Resources Management Plan 2024 (WRMP24).

The Environment Agency had advised that Thames Water should not be able to publish its WRMP24 without addressing significant remaining issues.

Thames Water submitted its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report for the reservoir to the Planning Inspectorate, which was then put out to consultation with organisations including this Council.

Thames Water is attempting to 'scope out' assessment of embankment breach risk, despite the Environment Agency's "Lessons from historical dam incidents" which sets out a series of incidents involving the breaching of embankments, along with many near misses and other serious incidents both in the UK and overseas.

The requirement to be able to reduce the reservoir water level by 1m per day would lead to a discharge into the River Thames that could cause very serious flooding downstream, especially if coinciding with high levels of flow along the Thames.

Thames Water appears to accept the need for assessing and managing this risk, however, this assessment will not be required before the Development Consent Order (DCO) approval, but after construction is largely completed.

Council resolves to:

Ask the Leader to request of the Secretary of State and of Thames Water that the following must come before DCO approval for SESRO and be published openly so that they can be scrutinised by all levels of government and by the public:

1. Embankment failure risk analysis and mitigation planning.
2. Risk analysis and mitigation planning for the impact of emergency drawdown on flooding along the Thames valley.

Ask the Leader to re-request a meeting with the current Secretary of State with invitations to: the Members of Parliament for Didcot and Wantage and for Oxford West and Abingdon; 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. Motion to be proposed by Councillor James and seconded by Councillor Patel

This Council notes: -

Through our actions and motions, all political groups in this council have demonstrated their strong desire to provide the services and support we are responsible for in a way that shows transparency and democratic accountability.

Polls show that the UK public supports public ownership of public services.

Councils across the country spend hundreds of millions of pounds buying in essential goods, services and expertise from the private sector each year.

The Public Services (Social Value) Act was introduced in 2012. It provides a legal basis for public authorities to look for wider social, economic and environmental benefits when undertaking procurement exercises.

There are well documented cases demonstrating insourcing public services can deliver

lower costs, more efficiency, a public sector ethos, and an enhanced level of democratic accountability for local residents.

That councils of all political persuasions have brought services back into local control to save money and gain control over essential services for their residents.

That outsourcing contracts necessarily results in public money going into private profit.

The Council further notes: -

Vale has successfully brought a number of services and staff in-house to gain greater control and value for money. These include finance, IT, HR and property management among others.

Consideration of direct provisioning requires a long lead time, and this cannot be assessed in the same way as an outsourced contract. To consider direct and outsourcing on the same short timescale effectively rules out the direct provisioning option.

Together with South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse District Council has purchased new waste vehicles for the use by our contractors and are currently in the process of purchasing a waste vehicle depot.

That the council has used LAHF funding to re-establish itself as an owner of housing and invested substantially in the resources to deliver as a residential landlord.

Extensive cuts to council funding under successive governments since 2010 have deeply harmed the ability of councils to build resilience, innovate and deliver.

That investing in strengthening the council's capacity and skills to deliver services in-house takes time, but it can make the council more sustainable, innovative and effective for the long term.

This Council therefore resolves to call on its Executive to: -

Continue to work with officers to develop strategies for greater democratic control of services wherever possible to deliver better results for citizens.

Seek to assess options of direct provisioning well ahead of contract renewal such that sufficient lead time is allowed for a change of delivery model to in-house, if that is found to be the preferred option.

Confirm its intention to always consider options for in-house delivery when reviewing any outsourced provision, with guidance to the policy development teams within the council on this priority.

Ask officers to ensure that if there is a need to engage consultants, there is a clear expectation that insourcing will be given as much weight as external contracts in any options appraisal.

Continue to call out the unfair and damaging cuts to local government funding by successive Governments since 2010.

