Minutes of a Meeting of the Woodcote Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan Committee

Monday 10th August 2026 at 19:00, Lion's Den, Woodcote Community Centre

Public Session (Prior to the Start of the Meeting)

None.

Members Present:

Chair	Cllr K Davies(KD) [From 19:05]
Members	Cllr N Dudley (ND)
	Mr M Smith (MS)
	Mrs F Cork (FC) [Until 20:29]

Officers Present

Deputy Clerk	Mrs L White (LW)

Public and Press at least one member of public and press was present.

Meeting Started: 19:00

26.04.1. Election of Chair

26.04.1.1. To receive the declaration of acceptance of office of co-opted members [LGA 1972 s83(4)]

The declarations of acceptance of office were signed by the co-opted members, FC and MS, and countersigned by the Deputy Clerk and received.

26.04.1.2. To elect a Chair for the year ahead [LGA 1972 ss15(2) and 34(2)]

Resolved: Approved Unanimously to elect Cllr Davies.

26.04.1.3. To receive Chair's declaration of acceptance of office [LGA 1972 s83(4)]

Resolved: Approved Unanimously to receive the declaration of acceptance of office at the earliest opportunity after the meeting, as Cllr Davies had not arrived yet.

Resolved: Approved Unanimously Mr Smith to Chair the meeting.

26.04.2. To receive apologies for absence. [LGA 1972 s85(1)]

Apologies were received in advance of the meeting from Cllr Peirce. Cllr Davies was also absent.

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26.04.3. To receive declarations of interest for items on this agenda [LA 2011 s31]

The co-opted members were reminded that they must complete their register of members interest within 28 days, and return to the Deputy Clerk. No declarations of interest were made with respect to this meeting.

Cllr Davies arrived, and signed the declaration of acceptance of office to be the Chair, it was countersigned by the Deputy Clerk, and Cllr Davies took over chairing the meeting.

26.04.4. To approve the minutes of previous committee meetings. [LA 1972 Sch 12. Para 41(1)] – None

None – First meeting.

26.04.5. To receive nominations to join the Neighbourhood Plan Committee.
NOTE: Only the Council can approve adding members.

One member of public was present and expressed their interest in joining the committee. The committee agreed to propose them to the Full Council.

26.04.6. To discuss the neighbourhood plan process, to agree actions on how to proceed.
This may include: seeking additional members, a first questionnaire to the parish, delivery, message to deliver, potential policies to pursue, whether to consult before creating the list, or drafting a list to then consult with, etc.

a) Summary

The meeting was held to consider whether the Woodcote Neighbourhood Plan should now be reviewed and potentially updated, and to discuss the implications of the changing planning policy and housing requirements in South Oxfordshire.

It was noted that the current Neighbourhood Plan is due to reach the end of its five-year period in September next year. The meeting therefore provided an opportunity to consider what has changed since the plan was prepared, whether its policies are still effective, and whether there would be benefit in undertaking a review.

b) Housing requirements and the changing planning context

An explanation was given of how housing requirements are established through the planning system.

The District Council's Local Plan sets a housing requirement for the district over the plan period. This is based on the Government's standard method for calculating housing need, although historically districts have sometimes chosen to plan for a higher figure.

The district then determines how that housing requirement is distributed between towns, larger villages and smaller villages, together with any strategic development sites.

A significant issue is the District Council's current housing land supply position. Where a council cannot demonstrate the required five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, its housing policies can be considered out of date and the "tilted balance" may apply when planning applications are determined.

Under the transition arrangements associated with the current planning system, the housing-land-supply requirement is expected to become six years in the relevant circumstances.

The current Joint Local Plan (JLP) for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse is progressing under the previous planning framework and remains important during the transition period.

It was noted that, following the current planning changes and the introduction of a new standard method, future housing requirements are likely to be significantly higher than under the previous methodology.

The precise effect of these changes on South Oxfordshire, particularly following local government reorganisation, is not yet clear and further work will be needed to understand the likely future housing requirement.

c) The settlement hierarchy

Woodcote was historically identified as a "larger village" within the settlement hierarchy.

There had previously been considerable discussion about this classification, including the argument that Woodcote did not have the same level of services as some other settlements classified as larger villages.

Under the emerging Joint Local Plan, Woodcote has been treated differently and is now identified within a lower/medium-sized village category. This change may be significant when future housing requirements are considered.

It was suggested that this should be kept under review as the planning framework changes.

d) Local housing need

There was discussion about the distinction between:

- the **number of homes** that a settlement is required to accommodate; and
- the **type and mix of homes** that should be provided.

A Neighbourhood Plan cannot simply disregard a housing requirement imposed through the wider planning system. However, it can provide evidence about the type and mix of housing that is appropriate to the local community.

The previous Neighbourhood Plan was informed by demographic information and a detailed survey of households within the village.

This evidence suggested a particular need for smaller homes, including starter homes and homes suitable for people wishing to downsize.

It was acknowledged, however, that the original survey is now several years old and that people's housing preferences may have changed.

There was therefore interest in revisiting the evidence concerning local housing need at village level.

It was also noted that the previous analysis used demographic information and standard assumptions about household composition and the number of children and adults likely to occupy different sizes of homes.

The meeting recognised that the evidence base could potentially be refreshed as part of any Neighbourhood Plan review.

e) Effectiveness of existing Neighbourhood Plan policies

A key reason for reviewing a Neighbourhood Plan is not simply to respond to changes in housing numbers, but also to establish whether existing policies are actually achieving what the village intended.

Examples were discussed where policies in the previous plan had proved insufficiently precise when planning applications were subsequently determined.

One example concerned a development where the wording of the policy was considered too vague, allowing an interpretation that did not achieve the intended outcome.

The importance of drafting policies clearly and precisely was therefore emphasised.

The Parish Council should consider whether there are any existing policies which:

- are not giving the Parish Council the influence it expected;
- have been interpreted differently from their original intention;
- have proved difficult to apply when planning applications have been submitted; or
- need strengthening or clarification.

The aim should be to produce policies which provide genuine local control while remaining robust at examination and appeal.

f) The National Planning Policy Framework and changing "basic conditions"

The planning policy framework has changed since the existing Neighbourhood Plan was prepared.

Previously, one of the key requirements was that a Neighbourhood Plan should be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan, together with meeting the other statutory "basic conditions".

The position is changing so that Neighbourhood Plans will now need to comply with the new National Development Management Policies (NDMPs), instead of complying with the Local Plan strategic policies.

The NDMPs form part of the developing national planning framework and are expected to become increasingly important when the Neighbourhood Plan is reviewed.

The meeting noted that the precise final form and implications of the new NDMPs were not yet completely clear and would need to be monitored.

The changing National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) therefore provides another reason for considering whether the existing plan should be reviewed.

g) Housing allocations in the existing plan

The previous Neighbourhood Plan included a number of housing allocations.

It was noted that a number of these sites have now been completed or are substantially committed, including:

- the Garden Centre site;
- Chiltern Rise
- Long Toll site opposite the offices.
- the offices at Long Toll, some of which may have been converted under permitted development rights;
- Church Farm, where outline planning permission has been granted; and
- the Reservoir site, which has planning permission.

There was concern that, by the time a revised Neighbourhood Plan reaches examination, some of the remaining allocations may either have been completed or be sufficiently advanced that they can no longer be treated as future allocations.

This could potentially leave the revised plan without sufficient allocated sites to demonstrate that the housing requirement has been met.

The point was made that sites which have already been developed cannot simply continue to be counted as future allocations.

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h) Previous housing allocation and the National Landscape

Under the previous Neighbourhood Plan, the village was allocated an additional 115 homes.

The Parish Council argued that this level of development could not reasonably be accommodated because of the environmental constraints affecting Woodcote, particularly the National Landscape (formerly the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty/AONB).

The Parish Council commissioned a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and used this evidence to demonstrate that the full allocation could not reasonably be accommodated.

Following assessment of the available sites, the evidence identified capacity for approximately 53 additional homes.

The District Council initially sought a higher level of provision, but ultimately accepted the evidence presented.

The meeting considered this evidence to remain potentially useful when considering future housing numbers.

It was also noted that the current NPPF places significant emphasis on protecting National Landscapes.

i) The importance of NPPF paragraph 14

A substantial part of the discussion concerned the protection available to communities with a qualifying Neighbourhood Plan under paragraph 14 of the NPPF.

Recent planning decisions and legal cases were discussed which indicate that simply having a housing requirement of zero does not necessarily provide sufficient protection.

The discussion suggested that, in order to benefit from the relevant paragraph 14 protection, a Neighbourhood Plan may need to allocate at least one site, even where the formal housing requirement is zero.

This was identified as a significant issue for Woodcote.

There was concern that, if the revised plan does not contain an appropriate allocation, the village could potentially lose an element of the protection that the Neighbourhood Plan currently provides.

The exact legal position should be checked carefully as part of any review before a decision is made.

j) Existing and potential future sites

A number of existing, previous or potential sites were discussed.

These included:

- the Reservoir site;
- Church Farm;
- the Garden Centre;
- the Long Toll offices;
- the site at the bottom of Wood Lane;
- land behind Yew Tree Farm/Behoes Lane;
- Chiltern Rise;
- the field alongside Bouchiers;
- the Coal Yard;
- and other sites previously submitted through the "call for sites".

It was recalled that approximately 17 sites had previously been put forward for consideration.

Some sites had subsequently been withdrawn, rejected through the LVIA process, developed, or otherwise become unsuitable for consideration as new allocations.

Chiltern Rise

The 2nd, previously reserve site at Chiltern Rise was discussed as a possible future allocation.

It had previously been rejected following the LVIA process and there were concerns about its landscape impact.

However, it was noted that there continues to be pressure for development on the site and that it may therefore need to be considered again if the Neighbourhood Plan is reviewed.

There was concern that reconsidering the site could be controversial locally.

Bouchiers

The Bouchiers site had previously been put forward but was subsequently withdrawn by the landowner.

It was therefore not currently available as an allocation unless circumstances changed.

Wood Lane site

The site at the bottom of Wood Lane was considered potentially problematic because of uncertainty over whether it would actually be developed.

If it remained the only significant outstanding allocation, there could be a risk that the village would be relying on a site which may not come forward.

Land near the Oratory school golf course

A number of strips of land and other potential areas were mentioned, including land near the edge of the golf course.

It was recognised that the suitability of such sites would need to be considered through the appropriate landscape assessment and planning evidence.

Rumsey's Field / Wayside Green

The historical development of Rumsey's Field was discussed.

Research into the development history of South Oxfordshire villages had identified Rumsey's Field as a site which had been considered for development historically but had never been developed.

The land had historically been associated with Christchurch and Wayside Green, and the site's history includes previous planning applications and continuing access arrangements.

It was acknowledged that the site has a significant local history and that there has previously been strong opposition to development there.

The meeting also recognised the general risk that, when land is considered for allocation, developers may seek a larger development than the Parish Council would wish to support.

k) Should further sites be identified?

A central question for the Parish Council is whether to:

1. review the existing plan without identifying additional housing sites; or
2. undertake a more substantial review which considers whether additional allocations are required.

There are arguments on both sides.

A more limited review would be considerably less work and would avoid reopening potentially contentious questions about new development sites.

However, there is a concern that simply updating the plan without identifying an allocation could leave the village vulnerable if existing allocations are no longer available and the housing-land-supply situation remains weak.

There was particular concern about whether a developer could challenge the plan on the basis that it did not adequately meet the housing requirement or did not provide the necessary allocation to benefit from the relevant NPPF protection.

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The meeting therefore agreed that this issue requires careful consideration before deciding the scope of the review.

l) Infill development

It was noted that the existing plan allows for appropriate infill development.

However, it was explained that infill development cannot simply be counted towards meeting a housing requirement where the wider housing calculation has already assumed a level of windfall/infill development.

The distinction between allocated housing sites and general infill development therefore needs to be understood when considering whether the plan is meeting its housing requirement.

m) Character areas, design guides and design codes

A further significant opportunity arising from a review would be the introduction of **character areas, design guides and design codes**.

These can provide considerably more detailed local control over the design of new development and, in some circumstances, extensions.

The process could involve identifying different character areas within the village and describing the characteristics that make each area distinctive.

The plan could then establish design principles appropriate to those areas.

Potential matters for consideration include:

- building materials;
- architectural style;
- roof forms;
- porches;
- windows;
- building layouts;
- relationship to the street;
- extensions;
- landscaping and green space;
- parking;
- electric vehicle charging;
- and the relationship between new development and existing buildings.

It was noted that design codes can potentially provide a stronger basis for decision-making than general descriptive policies.

An example was discussed concerning the specification of extensions, including matters such as whether an extension should be single storey and how far it should be set back from the front of the existing property.

n) Parking and future transport requirements

The meeting also discussed the changing requirements around parking and electric vehicles.

There was concern that policies which seek to minimise or eliminate off-street parking may not adequately reflect the needs of residents, tradespeople, carers, district nurses and other people who need access to vehicles.

At the same time, the increasing use of electric vehicles means that future developments will need to consider charging infrastructure.

A reviewed Neighbourhood Plan could potentially contain requirements for electric vehicle charging points and other appropriate infrastructure.

It was noted that previous attempts to introduce stronger requirements had been considered too restrictive, but the planning environment may now be more supportive of such policies.

15. Funding

The Parish Council still holds approximately £9,000–£10,000 of funding previously awarded in connection with the preparation of the earlier Neighbourhood Plans.

Although the Locality Neighbourhood Planning grant scheme is no longer available for new applications, the existing funds remain available to the Parish Council and may be capable of being used for appropriate work associated with the Neighbourhood Plan.

It was suggested that this funding could potentially be used to commission specialist advice or consultancy work, for example in relation to:

- character assessments;
- design guides and design codes;
- landscape evidence;
- housing needs evidence; and
- reviewing or testing proposed policies.

A possible approach would be for the Parish Council to undertake as much of the initial work as possible itself, using the existing evidence and previous work, and then use a consultant to review and test the work. This could provide reassurance that proposed policies are robust and are not unnecessarily restrictive or vulnerable to challenge.

16. Overall considerations

The meeting recognised that undertaking a full Neighbourhood Plan review would be a significant piece of work.

The potential benefits include:

- retaining and strengthening local planning policies;
- updating policies which have proved ineffective;
- ensuring the plan reflects current local housing needs;
- establishing stronger design policies;
- potentially strengthening the village's position when planning applications are determined;
- and maintaining the protections available to a qualifying Neighbourhood Plan.

The disadvantages include:

- significant time and administrative work;
- the need for updated evidence;
- potential consultancy costs;
- reopening contentious questions about housing sites;
- the possibility that the review ultimately results in little change;
- and the risk that considering new sites creates expectations or controversy within the village.

The meeting therefore did not reach a final decision on whether to undertake a full review.

17. Suggested next steps

It was suggested that members should take some time to consider the discussion before deciding on the scope of any review.

In particular, the Parish Council should consider:

- Whether the Neighbourhood Plan should be reviewed now.
- Whether the review should be limited to updating existing policies or should include consideration of new housing allocations.
- What housing requirement, if any, is likely to apply to Woodcote under the emerging planning framework.

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- Whether at least one housing allocation is required to maintain the relevant NPPF paragraph 14 protection.
- Which of the existing allocations can still legitimately be treated as allocations at the time of submission of a revised plan.
- Whether the existing housing evidence and local housing-needs survey should be updated.
- Whether the previous LVIA evidence remains sufficiently robust or needs updating.
- Whether Chiltern Rise and any other previously considered sites should be reassessed.
- Whether character assessments and design codes should form part of the review.
- Whether any of the current policies need amending / updating / removing or add new ones, particularly:
    - More solar panels?
    - More trees?
    - Careful orientation of homes / roof pitch for sun capture.
- Whether specialist planning advice should be obtained before the Parish Council decides the precise scope of the review.

The overall conclusion was that the Parish Council should **not rush into opening up the whole Neighbourhood Plan without first understanding the risks and benefits**. A short period of further consideration and evidence gathering would allow members to decide whether a full review is justified and, if so, what its scope should be.

[FC Left the meeting 20:29]

26.04.7. Matters for future discussion.

See action items above.

26.04.8. Confirm the date and times of meetings for the year ahead.

It was agreed to hold meetings on 2nd and 4th Monday of the Month going forward, in the community centre, book for 1.5 hours

There being no further business to be transacted, the Chair closed the meeting **20:35**.

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