

Minutes of the Bicester Town Council Meeting

A meeting of the Town Council was held on **Monday 22nd June 2026** at **19:00 hrs** at **The Chamber Room, The Garth, Launton Road, OX26 2PS**.

Present:

Cllr Dr Paul Wheatley - **(Chair)**
 Cllr Dan Hallett – **(Vice Chair)**
 Cllr Donna Ford
 Cllr Sam Holland
 Cllr Harry Knight
 Cllr Damien Maguire
 Cllr Nick Mawer
 Cllr Chris Pruden
 Cllr Les Sibley
 Cllr Jim Webb
 Cllr John Willett

In Attendance:

Paul Canning, Deputy Town Clerk
 Chloe Challinger, Civic Administrator

Representatives from:

Cllr Sean Gaul (OCC)
 Cllr John Shiri (OCC)
 Cllr Julius Parker (CDC)
 Public Present

- 37/ 2627 Apologies for Absence**
RESOLVED that apologies were received from Cllr Rachel Mallows and Cllr Alisa Russell
- 38/ 2627 Declarations of Interest**
RESOLVED Declarations of interest were received from Cherwell District Councillors Chris Pruden, Les Sibley and John Willett.
- 44/ 2627 Update from Oxfordshire County Councillors**
RESOLVED that the following update was provided by Councillors from Oxfordshire County Council:
Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations and School Transport
- Legislative changes affecting the use of spare seats on disability-compliant school buses
 - Government concession has paused the change that adversely affected some parents

- OCC's long-standing practice is to procure just enough capacity for eligible children, so spare seats are always limited irrespective of PSVAR.
- Members and residents with affected families were asked to raise cases with the councillor so they can be reviewed

SEND Reform Plan

- SEND Reform Plan has been submitted to the Department for Education one day early due Friday, submitted Thursday.
- Plan is required to unlock a 90% deficit write-off and if successful, OCC will carry forward a £16million deficit. However, if unsuccessful, the remaining deficit will be £163million.

Local Government Reorganisation, Devolution and FSA or MSA

- Expectation of a decision in July regarding the local government reorganisation.
- Possible clash with timing of Labour Party leadership decisions and potential appointment of the Prime Minister, which may delay or accelerate decisions.
- Discussions include the following elements with OCC preference to be part of a mayoral strategic authority aligned with existing functional boundaries: not including Swindon:
 - FSA – Foundational Strategic Authority
 - MSA – Mayoral Strategic Authority Devolution
- Government discussion has focused on an FSA that does include Swindon, with a £250k incentive but estimated £1m running cost to OCC. OCC considers this “not what we asked for” and is treating it as a negotiation.

OCC Savings / Budget

- Council tax set to maximum but the Combined income is insufficient to fund current OCC services.
- OCC must identify £25million of savings; cabinet has asked for a higher list of potential savings to allow for most suitable options in saving.

Heatwave and Possible School Closures

- Deputy Director for Education has issued communications to schools regarding heatwave contingency.
- OCC will collate notification of closures from schools; however, closure decisions rest with headteachers therefore parents are advised to check school websites directly as schools may notify parents before OCC is informed.

Footpath Oxford Rd

- OCC have made progress with considerations for priority funding from both OCC and CDC for the work to be carried out. Dates are still to be confirmed.
- OCC have been requested to provide an update

45/
2627

Update from Cherwell District Councillors

RESOLVED that the following update was provided by Councillors from Cherwell District Council:

Town Centre Regeneration Funding

- Cherwell District Council has announced **£250,000** of CDC-funded money for development and regeneration.
- Funding earmarked for the town centre masterplan, building on existing regeneration work.

Elmsbrook – Section 106 Local Centre Issues

- Discussions held with planning officers regarding Elmsbrook local centre and ongoing Section 106 compliance issues.
- Officers are aware the developer has not formally offered the land to the local authority for £1 as required by the S106 agreement. This was meant to be completed early 2026, therefore requiring further investigation.

Questions to District Councillors

- Updates requested for Parking Outside the Library. It has been confirmed that an application has been submitted for a Traffic regulation order, however awaiting a decision.

**46/
2627**

Public Session

Elmsbrook Section 106

- Sold Nationally as England's first eco-town exemplar, intended to be a neighbourhood where every day needs are within easy reach.
- Over 10 years since first occupancy, there is still no local centre no shop, café, or daily-need services within walking distance:
 - Approximately 400 households currently live there; numbers will grow with an additional 530 homes at the "Firethorn" extension. Totalling nearly 1,000 homes.
- Prospective Puy du Fou attraction, employing approximately 2,000 staff expected by 2029
- Council monitoring data indicates 68% of residents primarily travel by car alone, contrary to eco-town aims, due largely to lack of walkable services.
- Without a local centre, every daily-needs trip becomes a car journey across Bicester, adding pressure to already congested routes e.g. A4095 and surrounding roads.

Under the 2021 S106 variation:

- If no occupier is found after **three years of active marketing**, the land must be offered to Cherwell District Council for **£1** so CDC can deliver a centre itself as with the existing Elmsbrook business centre.
- CDC officers have confirmed that **no such offer has yet been made**, even though the marketing period has expired.

Request: That Bicester Town Council uses its voice to:

- Press Cherwell to require the land to be offered and to take it up and deliver the local centre

Bicester Athletic Club

- The report in the pack on re-provision of the cricket ground at Whitelands is framed almost exclusively around rugby, with minimal mention of athletics or other sports.
- Historic planning discussions had included potential cricket and athletics uses at Kingsmere/Whitelands, but dedicated athletics provision seems to have fallen away.
 - Has around 200 members, primarily focused on children and young people 8–18, with some seniors.
 - Has never had its own track; relies on facilities at Cooper School, then Bicester School and relies on external funding through lottery etc.
 - Is currently facing deteriorating facilities e.g. run-ups, throwing areas, with estimated replacement needs of at least £70,000.
 - Fears that if local facilities cannot be maintained or developed, young athletes will have to travel to Banbury or Oxford, depriving Bicester.

47/
2627

Presentation of Whitelands by CDC Officer

- Playing pitch strategy whereby attempting to develop facilities further as well as providing a continuous contribution to sport with the proposal that the site at Whitelands is improved via increase in number of 3G pitches.
- With the cricket provision never being utilised, it has been suggested that Whitelands is made the home of Bicester rugby with rugby union supporting costs.
- 3G pitch is an addition to help with the positive encouragement for female rugby, whilst not limiting to other teams.
- There will be developer contributions but no requirement for Town Council funding for the new 3G pitch.
- Chesterton has best facilities for cricket so more uptake for cricket pitches being utilised there rather than at Whitelands.
- **Bicester Town Councillors raised the following but welcomed the 3G pitch with change of use of the cricket pitch:**
- Concerns other clubs were not consulted of the proposed changes and therefore encourage those interested to make a bid to Bicester Town Council and Cherwell District council stating interest in using available space.
- Positive support for wider community activities and therefore encourage the application for the opportunity to set-up and further establish Bicester clubs; keeping them within Bicester.
- Concerns about an existing sinking fund and if this would need to be expanded with the additional 3G Pitch. **ACTION** BTC officers to confirm the financial costings set aside to support the current 3G provision.
- Concerns about pitch size and losing part of the existing grass pitch to accommodate the new 3G pitch. **ACTION** BTC officers to circulate the proposed site plan once received from CDC.

- Highlighted that the governing body needs to be onboard with supporting the changes.
- Consideration for collaboration with local schools to access facilities during non-term time.
- Tennis courts were under discussion previously but no updates. Could be a potential option.
- Confirmation that the S106 fund would be used to support the facility and if there were options for additional funds being generated from the 3G pitch.

48/ Minutes of the Bicester Town Council

2627 RESOLVED that incorrect minutes were included in the agenda; officers apologised for the error and any inconvenience caused.

- BTC08/2526 – Monday 27th April 2026 was deferred for approval in the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the following minutes were **APPROVED**:

- BTC03Bb/2627 – Thursday 21st May 2026 EGM
- BTC03/2627 – Monday 1st June 2026 Committee Appointment for 2026-2027

Terms of reference were requested for CDC's Bicester Area Oversight Group and related groups.

39/ Annual Governance Statement (AGAR Section 1)

2627 RESOLVED the Council **CONSIDERED** and **AGREED** to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2025/26 Form 3 AND the Annual Governance Statement 2025/26.

40/ Annual Governance Statement (AGAR Pt2) Report

2627 RESOLVED the Council **CONSIDERED** and **AGREED** to the Accounting Statements of the Annual Governance Statement 2025/26.

41/ External Audit Report 2024-2025

2627 RESOLVED the Council **NOTED** the External Audit Report for financial year 2024-2025.

Councillors raised concerns about the public inspection documentation process and to ensure we remained compliant.

42/ Internal Audit Report 2025-2026

2627 RESOLVED the Council **NOTED** the Internal Audit Report for financial year 2025-2026.

43/ Internal Audit Quotation 2026-2027

2627 RESOLVED the Council **NOTED** the Internal Audit Quotation for 2026-2027 and **APPROVED** the quotation for 2026-2027.

49/ Sports Pitch Changes**2627**

RESOLVED that the council **CONSIDERED** the proposal to change the use of an existing cricket pitch but raised the following:

- All sports clubs should be given the opportunity to have access to the facilities with facilities not being limited to certain sports such as rugby and football.
- Encouragement on support for the youth of Bicester
- Concerns about the agreement with the rugby club and if this needs to be reviewed
- Bicester Athletics club would like access to better facilities
- Concerns about utilising space efficiently

The council approved an amendment to the proposed recommendation to be “To remove the provision of a cricket pitch and explore the options of providing additional grass pitch space for rugby”

The council approved the recommendation as amended.

50/ Cemetery**2627**

RESOLVED that the council **APPROVED** and **NOTED** the report for Officers to proceed to obtain 3 quotes for a professional 3rd party survey.

Councillors raised the following:

- Topple testing has been carried out approximately 10-15 years previously but agreed that this needs to be carried out more regularly.
- Maintaining records of consultation to have extensive records due to Health and safety compliance.
- CDC have the legal obligation to find a cemetery for Bicester Town. The onus does not reside with BTC.
- Meeting on the 14th of July with stakeholders at CDC to discuss potential progress.
- Concern about safeguarding those who have plots and ensuring accurate recording of these.
- Permanent facility preferred to the temporary one of approximately 10 years burial space. This is due to the rapid growth of residents within Bicester.

51/ Mayors Report**2627**

RESOLVED that the Council **NOTED** the Mayors report.

52/ Exclusion of Press and Public**2627**

RECOMMENDED That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the items set out below on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the general interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

**53/
2627 Recruitment for Vacant positions**

**54/
2627 Lease Agreement**

**55/
2627 Next meeting:**
Monday 12th October 2026, 7pm – The Chamber Room, Bicester Town Council