

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Project Initiation Proposal

Burford Town Council • For Approval at Full Council

Presented by	Strategic Working Group
Meeting	First Full Council Meeting — Post 7 May 2026 Elections
Date	June 2026 (anticipated)
Status	For Approval and Adoption as a Council Project
Working Partners	West Oxfordshire District Council (pending outcome of Unitary decision)

1. Purpose of this Proposal

This proposal seeks Full Council approval to formally initiate a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish of Burford. It sets out the rationale, proposed scope, governance structure, resource requirements, and phased programme of work.

The Strategic Working Group (SWG) was tasked with bringing a formal proposal to Council, and agreed at the Full Council meeting of 7th January 2026 that a Stage One project proposal would be presented to the June 2026 Full Council meeting. This document fulfils that commitment.

2. Background and Strategic Context

2.1 Planning Pressures on Burford

Burford faces intensifying development pressure. The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the government's Standard Method have raised West Oxfordshire's indicative housing target from 549 to 889 dwellings per year. Without an up-to-date Local Plan, speculative applications can bypass local objection — as demonstrated by the Cotswold Gate development on the edge of the town, approved at appeal against local wishes.

A proposed high-density residential development on land off Shilton Road, which would create ribbon development stretching toward Carterton, illustrates the ongoing risk. Burford's unique heritage character, its position within the Cotswolds National Landscape, and its already-pressured infrastructure make a locally owned, legally weighted planning policy document more important than ever.

2.2 What Burford Residents Are Telling Us

The SWG has undertaken two rounds of community engagement, distributing close to 1,000 flyers and receiving 246 survey responses — 210 from residents, 28 from business owners, 23 from people working in Burford, and 8 from residents of neighbouring villages. The level of engagement impressed a consultant from Community First Oxfordshire, who has supported Neighbourhood Plans in Woodstock, Charlbury, Brize Norton, Milton under Wychwood, and Minster Lovell.

The top concerns identified by respondents were: Traffic (68%), HGV Traffic (62%), Sewage (52%), Lack of Parking (51%), New Development (50%), and Coach Parking (49%). The best things about living in Burford were: Being in the countryside surrounded by nature (81%), Historical Town (66%), the Community (65%),

and Beautiful Architecture (63%). Critically, 83% of respondents want to participate in defining the future of Burford — a strong mandate for the engagement programme set out in this proposal.

With 81% of respondents valuing the countryside and natural setting, the Neighbourhood Plan presents a clear opportunity to establish a green buffer around Burford, protecting fields and the town's landscape setting from encroachment.

2.3 What a Neighbourhood Plan Can Achieve

A Neighbourhood Plan (NP), prepared under the Localism Act 2011 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, is a statutory document. Once made, its policies carry full weight in the determination of planning applications. It gives BTC the power to:

- Designate Local Green Spaces and protect them from development
- Protect the setting and character of Burford's historic streetscape and listed buildings
- Set design policies that require new development to complement the town's built heritage
- Shape where and how housing, commercial, and visitor-economy development may occur
- Secure a proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts — rising from 15% to 25% for parishes with a made Neighbourhood Plan

An important caveat on scope: a Neighbourhood Plan is a land use document. It can shape how new development is designed and located, but it cannot directly control traffic management on existing roads — speed limits, weight restrictions, and HGV routing on existing networks remain the statutory responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council. Similarly, sewage infrastructure and digital connectivity fall outside land use planning powers. Many of BTC's highest-priority community concerns therefore require a two-track approach: planning policies in the NP for new development, and separate parallel advocacy through the TRO programme, Thames Water, and statutory providers. A non-statutory Community Action Annex to the NP is recommended to capture these non-planning commitments so they are not lost to the formal process.

The survey data confirms what BTC has heard consistently from residents: traffic, HGVs, parking, heritage protection, and landscape preservation are top priorities. A Neighbourhood Plan is one of the few tools giving the town council enforceable influence over these issues — and the level of community engagement already achieved gives this plan an unusually strong foundation from which to proceed.

3. Proposed Scope

The Neighbourhood Plan will focus on the following policy themes, informed by the 2024–25 Community Consultation and the priorities identified through BTC’s community engagement programme:

Built Heritage & Design	Policies to safeguard Burford’s Grade I and II* listed buildings, historic streetscape, and views across the Windrush valley
Housing & Development	Guidance on scale, type, and location of any new housing; protection against speculative ribbon development
Landscape & Green Space	Designation of Local Green Spaces including Coles Field; protection of the AONB / National Landscape setting; establishing a green buffer around Burford to protect the countryside and natural character valued by 81% of survey respondents
Transport & Movement	Policies supporting traffic management, HGV restriction, pedestrian priority, and parking; complementing the Strategic Review and TRO work
Visitor Economy	Managing the impact of tourism on residents’ quality of life, including coach parking and town centre management
Infrastructure	Physical infrastructure (water, sewage) and digital connectivity; including advocacy to Thames Water and network providers
Community Facilities	Community hub, leisure and sport facilities; audit of provision and policies to protect and enhance community assets
Environment & Climate Change	Policies aligned with NPPF climate requirements, ecological net gain, and BTC’s sustainability commitments

The plan area is proposed as the Burford parish boundary. Fulbrook Parish Council will be consulted throughout the process, given the shared landscape and transport context between the two parishes.

4. Community Engagement Forums

Community engagement is at the heart of the Neighbourhood Plan process. The ten forums below are drawn directly from the SWG’s community surveys (246 responses) and reflect the themes residents themselves identified. Each will be open to all residents and businesses, facilitated by the SWG, and its outputs recorded as part of the evidence base. With 83% of respondents expressing a wish to help shape Burford’s future, and 38% saying forums are their preferred format, strong attendance is anticipated.

#	Forum Theme	Key Topics
1	Traffic & Roads	Congestion; HGV and coach management; road safety; pedestrian priority; speeding; potholes and road condition; linkages to the Strategic Review and TRO programme
2	Parking & Mobility Hub	Parking strategy including a car park on the A40; coach drop-off points; resident parking permits; EV charging points (EVCP); shared mobility (bikes, e-scooters, car clubs); trolley bus concept
3	Environment, Sustainable Living & Climate Change	Nature recovery and ecological net gain; flood risk and the Windrush; green buffer around Burford; energy efficiency in new development; biodiversity and green infrastructure
4	Sustainable Tourism	Managing visitor numbers sustainably; Mobility Hub as visitor arrival point; Airbnb and short-term lets; balancing economic benefit with quality of life; noting 49% of 17-29 year olds do not own a car
5	Town Character Assessment & Historic Area Assessment	Evaluating the historic environment and defining Burford’s significance; conservation area guidance; design standards; shopfront and signage; views and National Landscape setting

6	Sport & Leisure	Making more of green spaces; sport and recreation facilities audit; countryside access; walking and cycling routes; bike lanes; children's and youth provision
7	Community Hub	A place where all ages can meet, play and share; future of the Tolsey; community transport including to Bradwell village; amenities at Cotswold Gate; public services
8	Planning & Development	What development is right for Burford? Housing need and location; design standards; brownfield-first; protection against speculative and ribbon development; Airbnb impacts
9	Sewage, Water & Infrastructure	Thames Water sewage discharge into the Windrush; water supply; digital infrastructure including mobile coverage and broadband; influencing statutory providers
10	Inter-Generational Project (Schools and Medical Care)	Building community around elders, children, and everyone in between; young people's needs; elderly residents' needs; schools; youth amenities; social cohesion across generations

Note: The “Mobility Hub” concept appears across Forums 2 and 4, reflecting its potential as both a parking/transport solution and a sustainable visitor arrival strategy. The SWG recommends it be treated as a cross-cutting theme with a dedicated working paper; Community First Oxfordshire can advise on approaches taken by comparable towns.

5. Proposed Programme

The Locality Neighbourhood Plans Roadmap indicates an average of 18–24 months from designation to a plan being made. The programme below reflects an 18-month best-case timetable; delays at examination or SEA screening could extend this. WODC has a legal duty to support and facilitate the process throughout.

Phase	Activity	Target	Lead
1	Designation — submit Neighbourhood Plan Area application to WODC; notify Fulbrook Parish Council as consultee; request WODC initiate SEA/HRA screening	Summer 2026	SWG / Clerk
2	Scoping & Evidence Base — commission baseline studies; review heritage, transport, housing and landscape evidence; await SEA/HRA screening outcome from WODC	Autumn 2027	SWG + Community First Oxfordshire
3	Community Engagement — ten themed public forums; workshops; surveys; begin Consultation Statement record	Winter 2026–27	SWG / BEAgles / Chamber
4	Draft Plan — develop vision, aims and policies; prepare Basic Conditions Statement; Reg 14 pre-submission consultation (minimum 6 weeks, statutory consultees including EA, Natural England, Historic England, OCC)	Spring 2027	SWG + Community First Oxfordshire
5	Submission — submit plan, Consultation Statement, Basic Conditions Statement and area map to WODC; Reg 16 publicity (6 weeks); independent examination	Autumn 2027	WODC / Examiner
6	Referendum & Adoption — community referendum organised by WODC; plan ‘made’ if majority in favour; post-adoption monitoring	Early 2028	WODC / BTC

6. Governance and Resources

6.1 Working Group

The Strategic Working Group will lead the project under delegated authority from Full Council, reporting at each Full Council meeting. A dedicated Neighbourhood Plan sub-committee with resident members is recommended and will be constituted at the next Full Council meeting if this proposal is approved.

6.2 External Support

The SWG has already met with a consultant from Community First Oxfordshire, who has supported Neighbourhood Plans in Woodstock, Charlbury, Brize Norton, Milton under Wychwood, and Minster Lovell. BTC will seek to formalise this relationship for evidence base preparation, policy drafting, and examination support. The consultant confirmed that BTC's pre-engagement strategy is working well and should reduce overall costs, and that keeping the Town Character Assessment in-house will deliver further savings. The Council should also explore external funding including WODC planning support funds and heritage or environmental grants.

6.3 Indicative Budget

Item	Indicative Cost
External funding (to be identified — WODC support, heritage/environment grants)	TBC
SEA/HRA screening (WODC statutory function)	WODC-funded
Consultant fees — evidence base and policy drafting	£8,000 – £15,000
Community engagement (events, printing, surveys)	£2,000 – £4,000
Examination and referendum (managed by WODC)	WODC-funded
Town Character Assessment (conducted in-house by SWG)	Staff time only
BTC staff time (Clerk / admin support)	In-kind contribution

Note: Two statutory documents must be produced and submitted alongside the plan: (1) a Consultation Statement, recording the full community engagement process from the outset; and (2) a Basic Conditions Statement, demonstrating how the plan meets national policy, sustainable development, conformity with WODC's strategic policies, and compliance with environmental obligations. The SWG should begin maintaining the Consultation Statement record immediately.

7. Recommendations

Full Council is asked to RESOLVE:

- That Burford Town Council formally adopts the Neighbourhood Plan as a Council project, as agreed in principle at the Full Council meeting of 7th January 2026.
- That the Strategic Working Group is authorised to submit a Neighbourhood Plan Area designation application to West Oxfordshire District Council.
- That the Town Clerk writes to WODC requesting that the statutory SEA/HRA screening process be initiated upon designation, given Burford's Cotswolds National Landscape setting and the Windrush river system.
- That the Town Clerk notifies Fulbrook Parish Council of the Neighbourhood Plan designation and invites their engagement as a statutory consultee.
- That the SWG begins maintaining a formal Consultation Statement record with immediate effect, capturing all community engagement activities from this point forward.

- That a budget allocation of up to £5,000 from reserves is approved for Stage One costs, with the Clerk tasked with identifying external funding sources to offset expenditure.
- That a Neighbourhood Plan sub-committee is established at this meeting, with terms of reference to be circulated within 28 days.
- That the plan includes a non-statutory Community Action Annex to capture commitments that fall outside land use planning — including HGV/traffic advocacy with OCC, sewage advocacy with Thames Water, and digital infrastructure lobbying — ensuring these priorities are not lost to the statutory plan process.

Prepared by the Strategic Working Group, Burford Town Council. May 2026.