

BTC NPSG Meeting.
27 March 2026
Cotswold Gate Care Home

Present : Jennie Craven, Corinne Hoge, Paul Newman, Michael Taubenheim, Geoff Haines, Tom McCulloch (Community First Oxfordshire)

The meeting on 27 March 2026, featuring consultant Tom McCulloch from Community First Oxfordshire, detailed the complexities of creating a Neighborhood Plan (NP) for Burford. The discussion ranged from high-level legal strategies to specific local projects and funding challenges.

Strategic Scope and Examples from Nearby Towns

A Neighborhood Plan can be "as broad or as deep" as the community desires, ranging from half a dozen focused policies to over 15 comprehensive ones. Other nearby towns like **Watlington** have used NP reviews to include ambitious policies on **nature recovery, biodiversity, and climate change**. Conversely, towns like **Ducklington** are focusing on just a few key issues. The consultant noted that the NP is a "child of the local plan," meaning it must remain in legal conformity with West Oxfordshire's broader planning documents while adding "granular" local detail

Housing Challenges and Infrastructure Disconnect

The committee remains firmly opposed to a district-level proposal for housing south of **Sheep Street**. This site is particularly sensitive due to its proximity to an **ancient woodland**, a suspected **battlefield from 752 AD**, and concerns regarding **sewage capacity**. While the committee prefers focusing on brownfield sites, they were warned that an NP cannot legally overturn a site allocation already made in the Local Plan; it can only set high standards for how that development is executed.

The discussion highlighted a systemic "power imbalance" where **infrastructure** (roads, sewage, shops) is often treated as an afterthought by developers. Members compared modern "monstrosities" to failed 1960s/70s developments, arguing that the NP should force developers to think harder about the medieval character of the town.

Character Assessment and "Mobility Hubs"

To combat "identikit" or "banal" developments, the committee plans to commission a **character assessment and design code**. This process involves "place check walks" to define specific character areas, ensuring new builds are complementary to the town's morphology

In terms of tourism and the economy, the group discussed sustainable solutions for Burford's visitor traffic. Rather than just a car park, they explored the concept of a **"mobility hub"** on the A40, potentially featuring an **electric trolley bus** to transport visitors who might find the steep walk from the bottom of the town difficult.

Environmental Initiatives and the Windrush

Beyond formal planning, the committee is eager to address **river quality in the Windrush**, which is suffering from siltation and sewage issues. Members discussed collaborating with the group **Wasp** to document slooes and pipes and even suggested "walking the water" in waders to dislodge silt and collect rubbish.

Logistics, Funding, and Governance

The NP process is expected to take roughly **two years**, complicated by statutory consultation periods and the potential transition to a **unitary authority** in 2027 . The first administrative step is to have the NP area officially designated by West Oxfordshire. Funding is a significant hurdle as government grants have recently ceased. The committee discussed several options:

- **Private Donations:** Encouraging residents to support the plan through a Community Action Plan (CAP) that addresses "exciting" projects like leisure facilities.
- **Repurposing HGV Funds:** There is approximately **£20,000** in unspent funds earmarked for HGV signage that has been sitting for several years; the committee may look into using this for the NP.
- **Consultancy Costs:** A professional character assessment and design code package is estimated at just under **£8,000** .

Regarding governance, the **Steering Group** will act as a formal body of the town council, requiring official minutes and reporting. While a joint plan with **Fulbrook** was considered, the committee leaned toward keeping them separate to avoid complications with Fulbrook's specific development threats.

Community Engagement and Town Aesthetics

The group is currently in the middle of a "purdah" period due to May elections, which limits formal communication. Once this passes, they plan to launch a more detailed second survey and a "launch event" to build momentum