

2024 manifesto

West Oxfordshire
District Council
election

 **Labour**
and **co-operative**

Labour: on your side in West Oxfordshire

Labour councillors have been in an alliance running West Oxfordshire District Council since 2022, after decades of Conservative rule and austerity. We have balanced the budget and kept council tax low, carefully investing where we can, to save and to improve services, supporting our residents.

In this manifesto we share a vision of West Oxfordshire, which we invite you to share.

Labour's aims and values

1. The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe, and where we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect.
2. To these ends we work for:
 - **A dynamic economy**, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation to produce the wealth the nation needs and the opportunity for all to work and prosper with a thriving private sector and high-quality public services where those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to them
 - **A just society**, which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as the strong, provides security against fear, and justice at work; which nurtures families, promotes equality of opportunity, and delivers people from the tyranny of poverty, prejudice and the abuse of power
 - **An open democracy**, in which government is held to account by the people, decisions are taken as far as practicable by the communities they affect and where fundamental human rights are guaranteed
 - **A healthy environment**, which we protect, enhance and hold in trust for future generations.
3. Labour is committed to the defence and security of the British people and to co-operating in European institutions, the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other international bodies to secure peace, freedom, democracy, economic security and environmental protection for all.
4. Labour shall work in pursuit of these aims with trade unions and co-operative societies and also with voluntary organisations, consumer groups and other representative bodies.
5. On the basis of these principles, Labour seeks the trust of the people to govern.

Labour's vision for West Oxfordshire

- We want our district to be a place which values social equality and wellbeing for all, regardless of our differences, abilities and backgrounds. We measure our success by the welfare of everyone, and particularly the most vulnerable, as well as the achievements we celebrate together.
- Labour works to end the cost-of-living crisis, and to end poverty. Nobody should worry where their next meal is coming from, or live in insecure poorly heated homes.
- Our district should be resilient, and as during the pandemic Labour will work with community groups, councils and businesses so we can look after each other in times of need.
- We want opportunities – for example in education or employment – to be available to everyone, and to be based in our district to minimize the need to travel and maximize the vitality of our communities – not a dormitory district but a vibrant place to live and thrive.
- We work for a thriving local economy providing equal and excellent opportunities for all of us to express our talents.
- We work with councils, businesses and residents to promote environmental sustainability and to combat the climate emergency. This includes support for the move towards net zero, with renewable energy a priority.
- We demand a healthy and productive environment, including productive agricultural land, clean rivers, nature recovery and a healthy increase in biodiversity, access to nature for mental wellbeing, and access to locally produced food.

Labour success story

Our towns and villages, such as Witney, Chipping Norton, Eynsham and Carterton, have many of the attributes of ideal effective communities. They host many community assets for the wellbeing, health and education of its residents. All basic needs can be met without leaving the town or village. The furthest home in the village or town is only a few minutes on foot from the centre and shops. Many local stores such as the Market Garden shop in Eynsham offer a fine example of a local business which provides villagers with locally grown healthy mainly organic food and locally made products, and same day deliveries to those unable to physically shop.

Labour councillors contribute to the local plan for West Oxfordshire to champion sustainable development. Surrounding villages to our market towns and larger village centres are not always well connected by public transport, excluding many. We campaign and work for the vitality of our markets and town and village centres, as well as better public transport and continued free parking across the district.

Labour's manifesto for West Oxfordshire

Our manifesto is a list of priorities and promises. It includes plans for our councillors to work on this year, but also a guide for action by our hundreds of members and many thousands of supporters and local residents who want to make West Oxfordshire a fairer and better place.

Our manifesto includes measures to strengthen our communities through implementing co-operative values, reflecting our views as the Labour and Co-operative Party group on the West Oxfordshire District Council, as well as the values of the Labour Groups and councillors on Town and Parish Councils, and the Labour and Cooperative Group on Oxfordshire County Council.

Labour is on your side, and the side of people across our beautiful district.

Our priorities are:

1. Building strong safe communities and supporting families in a cost of living crisis
2. Promoting young people
3. Boosting our economy
4. Developing West Oxfordshire sensitively
5. Protecting our environment, building sustainability and cutting waste
6. Improving health, safety and wellbeing
7. Building the right homes in the right places at the right price
8. Ending homelessness
9. Better roads, faster travel and less traffic
10. Supporting rural and village communities
11. Protecting council democracy

1. Building strong safe communities and supporting families

This is a time of great change in our world, and there are challenges at every turn. Never have public services been needed more, and yet they are starved of the resources they need to match demand thanks to 14 years of Conservative austerity and the vicious cost-of-living crisis made much worse by Liz Truss crashing the economy. Care services and support for people with disabilities, children and young people, new parents and older people have all been slashed. Mortgages, rents, energy and food costs have gone through the roof. It is not just, it is not right, that those least able to defend themselves find their services under threat.

Labour Councillors argue consistently for more resources for the things we care about and which support our society. We work to safeguard care services for those who need them to live full lives, with Labour quitting the alliance at the County Council in protest at the Liberal Democrat approach to special needs education and funding for children with disabilities. We work for inclusive communities. We campaign against the iniquities of Universal Credit, and expensive homes, which lead to parents working several jobs to make ends meet, as well as commuting huge distances. We put our councils firmly on the side of families, our community, and wider society.

We also know there are a growing number of us living into old age, and others who need care, in our district, and we will meet the needs of these groups as well as making sure our public buildings and services are accessible to everyone.

Labour success story

A decade and a half of cuts by the Conservative Government has left many families choosing between heating and eating. In a great country and town like ours, that's a disgrace. Labour councillors have led the work to provide warm spaces, put food on the table, and back community groups to support our families, with grants from Witney Town Council, use of council buildings for support services such as Chippy Larder, and enhanced household support funds from West Oxfordshire District Council.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

Everyone should be valued for what they can do, not judged for what they can't. We believe that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we can alone. Labour values create the means to realise our true potential, and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many not the few.

We champion the rights of vulnerable groups, including those with long-standing health issues. We do all we can to mitigate the effects of pernicious government policies, such as the faulty introduction of Universal Credit and the cost-of-living crisis, and lead the campaign for a change in policy which costs society and those least able to manage. We know that the best outcome for everyone, is for us all to be supported to reach our potential.

1. Labour will continue to provide warm and welcoming spaces for everyone. We will introduce 'One Stop Shops', for example with advice and information, for everyone including those with disabilities and particular needs. The Town and District Shops in Witney town centre are one example of this, front desks in the town centre for a wide range of services and support.
2. Labour will campaign for the Witney police station to reopen to provide reassurance and a point of contact with the police across the district, as well as for improvements in the 101 and other ways to contact the police.
3. Access is a crucial issue for disabled people, and particularly those with prams or buggies, or in wheelchairs. We will conduct an audit of building and parking regulations to make sure they are enforced, and make it policy that refuse collectors return bins as they were found so as not to block paths for wheelchair users; also we will work with households that leave bins out on pavements blocking the way to find a better solution. This will also include a campaign against obstructive pavement parking. We will improve the pavements for wheelchair, mobility scooter and pushchair users.
4. We will continue to explore ways to make sure that policy papers to West Oxfordshire District Council carry an outline assessment of the impact on equality and environmental issues. We will continue to scrutinise all policy for its impact on everyone including the most vulnerable groups in society.
5. We will pay particular attention to those with "hidden" disabilities, such as autism or long-term health conditions such as anxiety, diabetes or irritable bowel syndrome, and ensure there are people advocating for such groups.
6. Labour Councillors have been at the forefront of efforts with other parties to recreate Youth Services, including championing the Witney Youth Forum to fill the vacuum left by the closure of Base 33 and the decline in council services. We will continue to knit together a coalition to provide youth services across the town. We led the introduction of a new youth officer at the District, and supported a mental health champion as well as executive lead.

7. Education is the gateway to opportunity, so we will place schools at the heart of work with young people, and to encourage FE colleges to offer a wide range of options for lifelong learning across the community
8. We are committed to building on community action and linking voluntary, charitable and state support services, as well as sharing information
9. The cost and quality of services for disabled people are a concern; we want to see everyone have access to the same opportunities.
10. Working across Councils, we will provide specialist housing with support for those with complicated needs
11. Wherever possible, we are committed to supporting everyone to live the lives they wish to lead, where they want to live, rather than building “clusters” of specialist housing that keep people with complex needs apart from their neighbours and community
12. We will promote direct provision of County home care services, and explore new cooperatives that give service users, carers and staff a stake
13. Achieving food justice. Labour councillors will always take action to assist those struggling to put food on the table. We have supported the appointment of a food champion at the district council. We have a Food Action Plan for the district, supporting local producers, reducing “food miles”, and making affordable food available while supporting our food banks and larders. Labour will redouble efforts to make sure everyone receives all the benefits they are entitled to, and increase the take up of Healthy Start vouchers.

2. Promoting young people

We know we have a crisis of opportunity, health and wellbeing among our young people. A new youth officer has been appointed at the council to coordinate work, which goes a little way to plug the gaps of a decade of Conservative cuts.

Grants are available for youth projects, and also for young entrepreneurs. Labour will always back our younger generations to give them opportunities and see them thrive.

Labour success story

Labour and Cooperative Party-led Witney Town Council introduced a Youth Fund in 2019 which provides grants to community groups supporting young people. We support the Early Years centre in Witney, as well as now providing for outreach work across the town – including detached youth work on three nights a week. This is now to be supplemented by a Youth Officer for West Oxfordshire, and a range of grants for young people, clubs and initiatives – including on mental health which is in crisis.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

14. Promote and target all our grant schemes to young people
15. Prioritise projects that involve and engage people under 25
16. Support youth projects across the district with money and energy
17. Work with our schools and colleges to prioritise the wellbeing of young people
18. In particular, campaign for massively improved Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, CAMHS, which is struggling with a decade of cuts and an explosion in demand

3. Boosting our economy

Labour is proud to lead in West Oxfordshire on building businesses and jobs. We will revive our markets, and provide more events like the hugely successful Christmas markets. Labour led the purchase, at a bargain price for local taxpayers, of Marriotts Walk shopping centre, which will revive our town centre and district. We plan to work on filling our empty shops and boost trade – including maintaining free parking and better buses into town.

We value our major employers, such as Blenheim Palace, RAF Brize Norton, Alpine FI, Abbott Diabetes, Owen Mumford, Polar Technology and Soho Farmhouse. A wide range of world-beating companies are based in our District. Labour will continue to support these companies to grow and offer careers and training to our residents. We also support the many small businesses in our district, as evidenced by the recent grant scheme to assist growth led by Labour on the district.

However we know that the economic situation is tough. We will use the council powers to support employment, and “punch above our weight” – reversing the drift towards commuting out of the district.

Labour success story

Labour has commissioned a review of markets across the district, and is working on plans to grow them as a way to make our towns more vibrant and fun – driving extra customers into all shops, pubs and restaurants. The Witney Christmas Market at Marriotts Walk brought in an extra 15,000 people from across the region, and takings were up across the town and district. Footfall was up 60% year on year. We will work with businesses across the district to build on more visitors, whether to Diddly Squat Farm or Blenheim Palace, or Downton Abbey tours to Cogges Farm. More events are also great for residents.

Community wealth building

Anchor institutions such as hospitals, colleges, religious institutions and sports clubs spend millions of pounds annually on goods and services, but much of that spend has limited additional benefit for the local economy. If we can overhaul the way these institutions spend money, we can transform a local economy. Buying goods and services locally means local businesses, social enterprises and co-operatives can thrive and grow, resulting in new local employment opportunities and money remaining in our community.

Community wealth building offers an opportunity for local people to take back control, to ensure that the benefits of local growth are invested in their local areas and are used to support investment in productive economic activities. It encourages people and their local institutions to work together on an agenda of shared benefit.

It goes hand in hand with devolution and is a perfect counter to austerity and the cost-of-living crisis.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

19. Along with Labour Party across the country, we will set a target to double the size of the local co-operative sector
20. Locally we will urge the council to take an active role in the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, which is working together to create a more equal and sustainable region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county
21. Encourage local investment: community banks, credit unions and other social investments, to reach those without access to mainstream finance, and to keep money circulating in the local economy
22. We will boost the co-operative economy, including employee-owned businesses, local co-operatives, and other community-based businesses
23. We will support local leadership: local and devolved government bringing together stakeholders to drive the community wealth building strategy forward
24. We will lead the fight against corporate tax avoidance, and consider promoting the Fair Tax Mark as a way to empower consumers to choose companies that pay their way

4. Developing West Oxfordshire Sensitive

The District Council is responsible for the local plan, which determines the development of our towns and villages to meet the needs of our residents.

The current plan lasts until 2031 and the next one is being developed and consulted upon.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

25. Insist on development that creates jobs and puts the right homes in the right places at the right price.
26. Defend our communities by making them sustainable but not overwhelmed. We believe no town should become so big that it isn't possible to walk from the edge to the centre in a few minutes.
27. Put communities at the heart of planning, expanding the support for sustainable community plans at parish level.
28. Fight for infrastructure to support new homes and jobs.
29. Continue to fight for the best outcome for existing and future residents in North Witney; Labour councillors opposed a massive development and will carry on encouraging more development and funding for Carterton.
30. The plan includes Salt Cross Garden Village, but it must enhance and not blight the neighbouring communities such as Eynsham, and be a beacon for net-zero community-friendly development.
31. Encourage use of appropriate small-scale local and affordable developments to keep villages as living communities.
32. Support strategic transport links, health and education investment and social housing.
33. Create a jobs strategy that reduces commuting and supports family life.

5. Protecting our environment, building sustainability and cutting waste

West Oxfordshire is a lovely part of the world. Our towns and countryside are valued by all of us, and by visitors all year round. Our health and that of the world depends on the actions of each of us, and your council should play a leading role.

Cleaning up our rivers, tackling floods

Labour councillors have been at the heart of efforts to clean up our rivers and streams. Holding Thames Water and the Environment Agency to account, we will not give up until they sort it out. Labour councillors led the reporting after the floods in 2020, bringing all agencies together.

Labour success story

One of the first things the Labour Town Council did in 2019 is declare a climate emergency. Targets have been set for reaching net zero operations before 2030. Labour County Councillors have championed a County freight strategy to cut air pollution and noise on rural and town roads, with the Windrush Valley as a trial and Chipping Norton high on the list.

We will not stand by as our rivers and streams die. Labour-led Witney Town Council engages with the Environment Agency and Thames Water over sewage into Colwell Brook which flows to council land. Labour-led Witney Town Council is seeking permissions from the Environment Agency to dredge the river at Bridge Street to reduce flood risk, because no other agency will. Labour councillors have ensured that the three council levels now work together more effectively to plan for and mitigate against flooding.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

We want to save the planet and secure West Oxfordshire. Environmental priorities for Labour mean we will:

34. Engage with the Botley West Solar Farm project to ensure that whilst West Oxfordshire makes a meaningful contribution to tackling climate change and keeping energy bills down, the character of our beautiful towns and villages is well preserved. There will be no blanket approvals. We will ensure that any such development will bring significant economic benefits to the community for example through grants and shared ownership or energy discounts, alongside apprenticeships and skilled job opportunities fit for the modern green era.

35. Tackle the growing air pollution crisis – currently areas of both Witney and Chipping Norton far exceed UK government targets and EU legal limits. We will promote vehicle weight restrictions in key problem areas and demand diversions from new developments.
36. Invest in electric vehicle charging points in all council car parks and offer to village halls across West Oxfordshire.
37. Work with planners and house builders to ensure all new substantial housing developments are designed to the highest environmental standards, with nature in mind, and incorporate wildlife friendly areas and dedicated spaces for nature.
38. Work with local cycling groups and other interested parties to create a safe complete cycle path network to improve cycling amenities and increase use of bikes around the district.
39. Provide waste disposal centres across the district, including replacing Dix Pit in the north of the district, partly funded by fees from neighbouring districts.
40. Promote the use of the Labour-backed District Guide to Nature Recovery and the plans that go alongside it, to safeguard wildlife and countryside.
41. Support the work of environmental projects in the district such as the Lower Windrush Project and Witney Woodland Volunteers. We will encourage the use of the Nature Recovery plan and the new Biodiversity Toolkit across the district.
42. Introduce a water refill scheme to reduce plastic pollution at source, promote residents' health and wellbeing and save residents' and visitors' money.
43. Oppose fracking in West Oxfordshire, with all the dangers it entails and the pointless carbon it extracts.
44. Support the work to make our rivers and streams clean and safe as a priority.
45. Engage in a new contract for waste and recycling that makes sure our rubbish is reduced and recycled properly – including plastics.
46. Back disinvestment from tobacco and fossil fuels.
47. Many new homes are built with a management charge to cover maintenance of shared areas of grass or common unadopted services such as drives. Some older developments now have very basic levels of maintenance with only two grass cuts a year. We will introduce new resident co-operatives to share the cost more fairly and hire best value local contractors to carry out this work. We will also continue to pursue a single "green team" approach across councils to make more of our resources and staff at Town or Parish, District and County.

6. Improving health, safety and wellbeing

With more housing coming to West Oxfordshire, we are committed to increasing our health infrastructure, not decreasing it.

Labour success story

Grassroots community campaigns are the foundation of the Labour movement. We understand that when a community is empowered and supported by local representatives, voices are heard and change happens.

When our community in Witney was served a threat of closure to yet another of its GP surgeries, we launched the Save Cogges Surgery campaign to ensure residents and patients had a voice and be part of shaping the future of healthcare within our town. We now stand proudly with residents as we celebrate the continued future of Cogges Surgery, showing what can be achieved when a community is united and listened to.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

48. Fight, fight and fight again to stop closures like that proposed at Cogges Surgery and threats to other services in our district, to make sure residents have access to services when and where they need them.
49. Campaign for the reintroduction of a front desk at the Police Station in Witney, and better access to the police across the district.
50. Work in close partnership with councils and authorities, at all levels, to develop and safeguard local social care, youth and children's services. This includes looking for ways to make council buildings and facilities available for health and wellbeing.
51. Improve the health of people living within the district, to reduce demand on medical services and improve quality of life.
52. Tackle air pollution in parts of Witney and Chipping Norton (see plan for more electric/hybrid vehicles above) and use the local plan to reduce traffic congestion that causes it.
53. Improve leisure, fitness and sports facilities throughout the area, making them accessible to all (ie not excluding those on low incomes, and ensuring attractive and varied provision). We support "social prescribing" in which GPs give passes to leisure facilities to improve health; and we will work towards a scheme in which carers and those they care for are given discounted or free access to leisure facilities.

54. Invest in new leisure facilities, including promoting outdoor and informal opportunities, alongside schools, parish and town councils, and the NHS.
55. Encourage walking and cycling by providing safe routes.
56. Tackle the cost-of-living crisis, which is a major contributor to poor health, and campaign for a government that will end austerity and invest in growth.
57. Monitor benefits take-up, pay and household costs, and the use of food banks, and work to end the scandal of hunger and poverty in West Oxfordshire.
58. Build a solid and strong support network for victims of domestic violence.
59. Work closely with county, parish and town councils, and the police, to cut crime and reduce vulnerability.
60. Implement the District Food Action Plan, to eliminate food poverty in West Oxfordshire by exploring schemes to end school holiday hunger, supporting food banks, promoting community growing projects and co-operative allotments.
61. Work with public services, trade unions and local businesses to ensure people are safe at work, and work with the police to make sure community safety is a priority.
62. End modern slavery – we are proud to have taken action on this at West Oxfordshire District Council, and to have received support from all councillors.

7. Building the right homes in the right places at the right price

We will ensure we have adequate, safe and clean homes for all our residents which guarantee their wellbeing and health, and which consider complex care and housing needs. We are taking active steps to build new social housing, and to safeguard the effective maintenance of existing social housing.

Labour success story

West Oxfordshire Labour has long argued that the Council should use its own reserves (and its borrowing capacity) to invest directly in new affordable social housing. We supported the public petition in 2018 that argued for the Council to do just that. In opposition we set an agenda that the District Council has now followed by setting aside £10 million to work with Cottsway Housing Association in the provision of new additional affordable homes. Our Executive members on the district council have secured over 20 new affordable homes already, and are engaged in plans for a new generation of council houses.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

Social housing

Meeting the acute shortage of affordable housing in the District by:

63. Exploring ways to reintroduce council housing, at a rent everyone can afford, across the district.
64. Using Council reserves directly to deliver construction and maintenance services that can guarantee high quality council housing, or facilitating Housing Associations to do so, with secure lifetime tenancies and genuinely affordable rent (i.e. social rent at between 50% to 60% of market rents).
65. Prioritise provision of homes at social rents and to cease disposal or transferring of public land, council estates and commercial property for the benefit of private-sector housing and investment opportunities for the few who can afford them.
66. Require at least 1:1 replacement, within the same neighbourhood, of Housing Association homes sold under right to buy or otherwise.
67. Support new co-operative and community-led housing schemes, including Community Land Trusts such as the emerging CLT in Chipping Norton.
68. Explore the development of new council homes on unused pieces of land.

69. Environmental standards: ensure all new homes in West Oxfordshire are built to the highest safety, environmental and construction standards. We should consider setting new ultra-high standards for new homes.

Supporting private sector tenants

We believe that the District Council should act as a community hub and support for residents on all housing related issues well beyond its statutory responsibilities.

As such it should:

70. Establish a private tenants' association to bring together private renters to support one another.
71. Do all we can to reduce homelessness by offering incentives to private sector landlords and letting agents where appropriate by way of rent in advance payments, damage waiver guarantees and rent guarantees.
72. Publish a Private Renters' Charter setting out the standards that the Council expects from landlords and in respect of their properties.
73. Create a Voluntary Register of Landlords that adhere to the code of standards contained in the Private Renters' Charter.
74. Help private renters understand their rights by providing website based advice or an advice hotline.

8. Ending homelessness

Labour success story

West Oxfordshire Labour advocated the purchase of homes so that the District Council could itself provide emergency accommodation locally and within the District.

We are pleased that the Council has now bought an appropriate property in West Oxfordshire for emergency accommodation use so we will now be less reliant on private sector and often far flung hotel accommodation.

Led by Labour Councillor Geoff Saul, we are investigating in new temporary accommodation for homeless people in an unused council property.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

Simply, we will end rough sleeping and waits for emergency accommodation in West Oxfordshire and work with Oxford to contribute to a county- and countrywide solution. We will do this by:

75. Buying or renting further homes so the council provides emergency accommodation directly, including exploring the use of council property and working with neighbouring authorities.
76. Publicising the Streetlink website to alert authorities promptly to homelessness.
77. Developing a twelve-point plan so residents can help homeless people, as done by Oxford City Council.
78. Working with housing providers and landlords, and advice agencies, to end no-fault evictions and cut all evictions to a minimum.
79. Training volunteers to report rough sleeping and talk with homeless people.
80. Enter into a strategic partnership with the NHS, charities and campaigners to tackle underlying causes.

9. Better roads, faster travel and less traffic

With slower speeds across towns and villages, our roads are safer. Town centre traffic in Witney has been cut despite vocal Conservative opposition, but we need Shores Green A40 junction as soon as possible; building is planned to start this year.

The improvements to the Witney High Street, based on feedback from everyone in town, are due by 2025, and work has been carried out on the feasibility of a bypass for heavy traffic in Chipping Norton, Burford, Leafield, Eynsham and elsewhere across the District. This will continue following the HGV Strategy introduced by Labour on the County Council.

Our aim is for our town centres to become cleaner, safer, tree-lined streets with beautiful new seating and lovely spaces to rest and enjoy: great for everyone and really good for town centre businesses. As funds allow, we will move towards this goal, guided at every stage by local residents and businesses.

We will continue to promote walking and cycling as healthy and free ways to get around. To do so, we must invest in safe streets and better crossings, and expand the network of routes across our district.

Across the District thanks to Labour we will introduce mobility hubs, places where we can all access a range of transport options including buses, parking, electric car hire, bike hire and, in some cases, trains. These will transform our ability to get around, and about 20 are planned in West Oxfordshire in spots such as Witney and Chippy town centres, all our railway stations, village cluster centres, and Eynsham Park and Ride.

Labour success story

Labour pressure has led to some progress on funding the £30 million backlog of urgent maintenance in West Oxfordshire alone. The Labour budget at County in 2024 released a further £5 million for road maintenance. We know residents are paying the price in vehicle damage and accidents. We are proud to have played a crucial part in the establishment and success of West Oxfordshire Community Transport, securing buses across West Oxfordshire.

As well as the fabulous cooperative community buses from West Oxfordshire Community Transport (WOCT), we have championed the introduction of the West Oxfordshire Tube to London. WOCT offers services across the towns of Witney, Carterton and the Wychwoods. Similar services such as First and Last Mile community transport in Eynsham have been launched to follow this model.

Witney has made successful bids for Active Travel England funds to improve our footpaths and cycleways. This leads to walking and cycling path and junction improvements and also to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which we got ahead of other market towns because the Labour-led Town Council campaigns so actively. One example of an improvement is the impending surfacing of the path between Madley Park and Newland bus stops.

In Chipping Norton, Labour influence on the town council has led to them funding their LCWIP directly and the town has used 20 mph limits to make streets safer, particularly from HGV traffic.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

By working together with the County Council, the highways authority, using powers which are already in use in Oxford City, we can target resources at the most urgent fixes and guide a better use of scarce resources. Labour will:

81. Prioritise the four-way Shores Green junction on the A40 at Oxford Hill Witney as a way to reduce traffic in Witney Town Centre
82. Beautify Witney and Chippy town centres, with better paving, seating, signage and planting of trees to make them lovely spaces to rest and enjoy, as resources allow.
83. End transport inequality by promoting and expanding community transport, including West Oxfordshire Community Transport, The Villager services, and hospital transport services from Volunteer Link-Up
84. Support bus lanes, and protect cycle lanes, along the A40
85. Use housing and other developments in Chipping Norton to divert traffic from the middle of town
86. Connect our railways by making stations mobility hubs, with car clubs, better parking and buses to meet the trains
87. Promote a new railway for Witney, Carterton and beyond to meet the need to travel to Oxford
88. Build a cycle lane from Eynsham and Botley, and between Carterton and Witney
89. Build a new transport hub on the A40, to provide park and ride, additional services such as shopping delivery, and a transfer point for new local bus services for communities including Eynsham, Freeland, Hanborough, Stanton Harcourt, Bablock Hythe, Northmoor and Freeland, and the S1, S2 and S7 services to Oxford and the hospitals

90. Promote and improve the West Oxfordshire Tube direct to London, including at weekends and late at night
91. Promote 20mph in all villages

Our roads are a disgrace, and in some places a danger. Labour will:

92. Devolve potholes: set up a joint working approach to fixing our roads, with local knowledge at West Oxfordshire District targeting potholes with a local crew doing the work
93. Cut road damage and traffic problems by closer monitoring and better oversight of utility company digs
94. Use planning powers to ensure a joined-up approach to building new roads and renewing existing roads
95. Prioritise well-maintained footpaths and cycle ways to keep users safe, including a dedicated cycle network within Witney town
96. Tag all essential roadworks to be paid for by landowners and developers

10. Supporting rural and village communities

Half the population of West Oxfordshire lives outside our towns in the villages and hamlets.

Labour and the Co-operative movement were born out of rural working landscapes such as this.

We are determined the council does more to support active living rural communities, not chocolate box holiday home clusters.

Labour success story

The development chaos before the Local Plan 2031 and currently, when Labour argued for plan-led development but the council lost several decisions, has led to developers running the show. Labour argued strongly for sustainable, social housing in our villages: right place, right sort of housing, at the right (small) scale, allowing our young people to stay in their home village. We also championed the community bus, saving several routes from closure, and hope to do more.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

Develop a place-based industrial strategy for rural areas:

- 97. Support for small-scale enterprise and manufacturing
- 98. Place-based investment
- 99. Support for technical education
- 100. Commitment to community wealth building initiatives
- 101. Demand better mobile phone coverage across the district

Provide better rural transport:

- 102. Work in partnership with stakeholders to restore rural bus services
- 103. Work with stakeholders to improve rail services
- 104. Develop safe cycle networks
- 105. Educate young drivers on dangers of rural roads

Build local, affordable housing:

- 106. Democratic local involvement in planning

- 107. Real affordable alongside social housing to meet local need
- 108. Small-scale development on disused plots of land
- 109. Promotion of self-build plots

Commit to ending rural isolation:

- 110. Support establishment of local 'hubs' in villages – such as a 'hub in a pub'
- 111. Support for young families by taking services to them via local 'hub'
- 112. Re-introduce a mobile library service
- 113. Encourage 'community organisers' to direct funding and delivery of services at village level

Support co-operative and community-led services:

- 114. Villages work best together, supporting each other; we are committed to support local initiatives
- 115. We will hold regular meetings with parishes across the district to brainstorm community-led solutions and spread best practice

11. Protecting council democracy

Council democracy is under threat on a number of fronts. In West Oxfordshire there is an added factor, with benefits and risks, because of changes to the way we deliver services, through the review of council-owned companies Publica and Ubico.

Two council-owned companies called Ubico and Publica currently employ most of our staff, in a shared structure we jointly own with neighbouring districts. The benefits are savings in management costs, more capacity particularly for specialist services like emergency planning, union recognition for staff, and services being brought back “in house” from outside contractors.

This programme has involved significant sharing of resources, to cut costs without reducing levels of service. However, there are concerns about staff morale and ability to innovate in response to local need. There have been concerns we might end up as a zombie district, or clone authority, providing the minimum locally and shorn of expertise – until the recent actions by the alliance in which Labour plays a leading part. By looking only at costs, national government can lose sight of the value we can offer, or what more we can do to make our communities fairer, stronger and more vibrant.

Labour success story: scrutiny and all-party participation

All of the political and representative roles in the Council used to be held by the ruling Conservative Group until 2022, including scrutiny roles. In other councils including Oxford and Oxfordshire, and in Westminster, scrutiny in particular is led by all parties including opposition. We propose things should change to improve accountability and decision making.

Labour has supported a review and reform the scrutiny function in the council, training councillors to do it better. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Council are now elected on a free vote, not from a ruling group but instead based on merit and skillset, with Chair and Vice Chair from different groups. Members of opposition parties have been made chairs and vice-chairs of scrutiny committees. We support the recording of all votes at committees, as well as at full council, on request of councillors.

What West Oxfordshire Labour will do

We value what our staff have to offer. We will:

116. Rebalance the relationship between the council and our companies Publica and Ubico, to make sure economies of scale are reconciled with greater local control, capacity and expertise. This will mean taking certain functions and staff back into council employment from Publica.
117. Insist that staff are represented in new structures, so their voice and experience is heard (including through trade union recognition, which we welcome and promote at WODC).
118. Apply a “West Oxon First and Last” test to changes and to shared services, checking that the council is more, and not less, capable to meet the needs of the district.
119. Insist on joint working with other public bodies who share our focus, in particular Oxfordshire authorities and local resident groups.
120. Scrutinise budgets and financial reports to make sure we are not leaking money to other districts in the shared service, and vice versa.
121. Conduct annual surveys to measure the effectiveness, and in particular the sense of local responsiveness, of our services, staff and management. This includes asking all staff anonymously for their views.
122. Absolutely oppose any privatisation, and promote rules to prevent any future sale of council assets or service teams.
123. Give service users a voice in decisions that affect them.

Contact West Oxfordshire Labour & Cooperative Party

Want to know more? Contact your local councillor, or get in touch below.

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"What I mean by Socialism is a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brainsick brain workers, nor heart-sick hand workers, in a word, in which all men would be living in equality of condition, and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all – the realisation at last of the meaning of the word COMMONWEALTH."

*William Morris, West Oxfordshire resident,
in "How I became a Socialist", published in Justice 1894.*