

At the Heart of the Vale

Council Plan 2025-29



**Vale
of White Horse**

District Council



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www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/CouncilPlan25-29



Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce ‘At The Heart of the Vale’, our new Council Plan setting out our priorities and making communities the focus of all our goals. I give my heartfelt thanks to everyone who gave us feedback during our early engagement process last year. Your input played an important role in shaping our plan.

Our Council Plan looks ahead to the next four years and what we want to achieve. However, it is set within a context of significant change for local government. In December 2024, the Government introduced plans for local government reorganisation and devolution in the English Devolution White Paper. As a result, the future of district councils like Vale of White Horse is uncertain.

Though faced with a period of significant change, our work continues to deliver the vital services our communities depend on. While we wait for further details and timings for reorganisation and devolution, we are united in our mission to achieve certainty and stability for our district as soon as possible, prioritising the needs of the communities we serve.

Climate and nature recovery continue to be at the heart of everything we do, and we are

committed to driving progress to achieve our ambitious net zero targets. At the same time, we are prioritising the delivery of the affordable homes people need and the infrastructure to go with them. We are also committed to promoting community resilience and empowerment and we aspire to have healthy and sustainable communities which benefit from inclusive, accessible services and active engagement.

Our financial stability is testament to our prudent financial management over recent years and aligns with our drive for continuous improvement and service innovation. It has become a cliché to talk of the last four years

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Foreword continued

as 'unprecedented times', but it is also true. We have had to confront numerous challenges and change the way we do things to meet the changing needs of our communities.

With local government reorganisation and devolution firmly on the horizon, the years ahead are set to present more challenges - but also opportunities. We will do everything we can to push for a swift and clear way forward in the best interests of our district, while protecting local services.

I trust our Council Plan provides clarity on what we will set out to achieve over the next four years. Our Annual Delivery Plan will set out more detail on how we aim to do that within the environment of change.

**Foreword by Cllr Bethia Thomas,
Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council**



Our vision

For Vale of White Horse to be a vibrant and sustainable district where residents, communities, and businesses thrive.

Placing climate action and nature recovery at the heart of everything we do, we will support our businesses and communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience. We will focus on delivering the homes people need, prioritising affordability and high-quality, sustainable development, while working with partners to enhance or provide infrastructure which integrates seamlessly with existing communities. In collaboration with key partners, our local services will promote community resilience and public health, champion inclusivity, and deliver value for money. Our district will be a place that people of all ages are proud to live, work, learn, and play in, where visitors are met with a warm welcome.



Our priorities

Work to deliver our priorities is underpinned by objectives which we will seek to achieve by focusing on a range of outcomes. The outcomes are listed in each of the relevant sections throughout the document.

Action on climate change and nature recovery:

Protecting and enhancing our environment, building resilience and adapting to the effects of climate change, and leading the district to net zero.



Promoting healthy, sustainable, and inclusive communities:

Building vibrant, inclusive, and resilient communities where all residents can lead healthy and fulfilling lives.



Providing the homes and infrastructure people need:

Supporting access to high-quality, affordable housing and essential infrastructure that meets local needs and supports wellbeing.

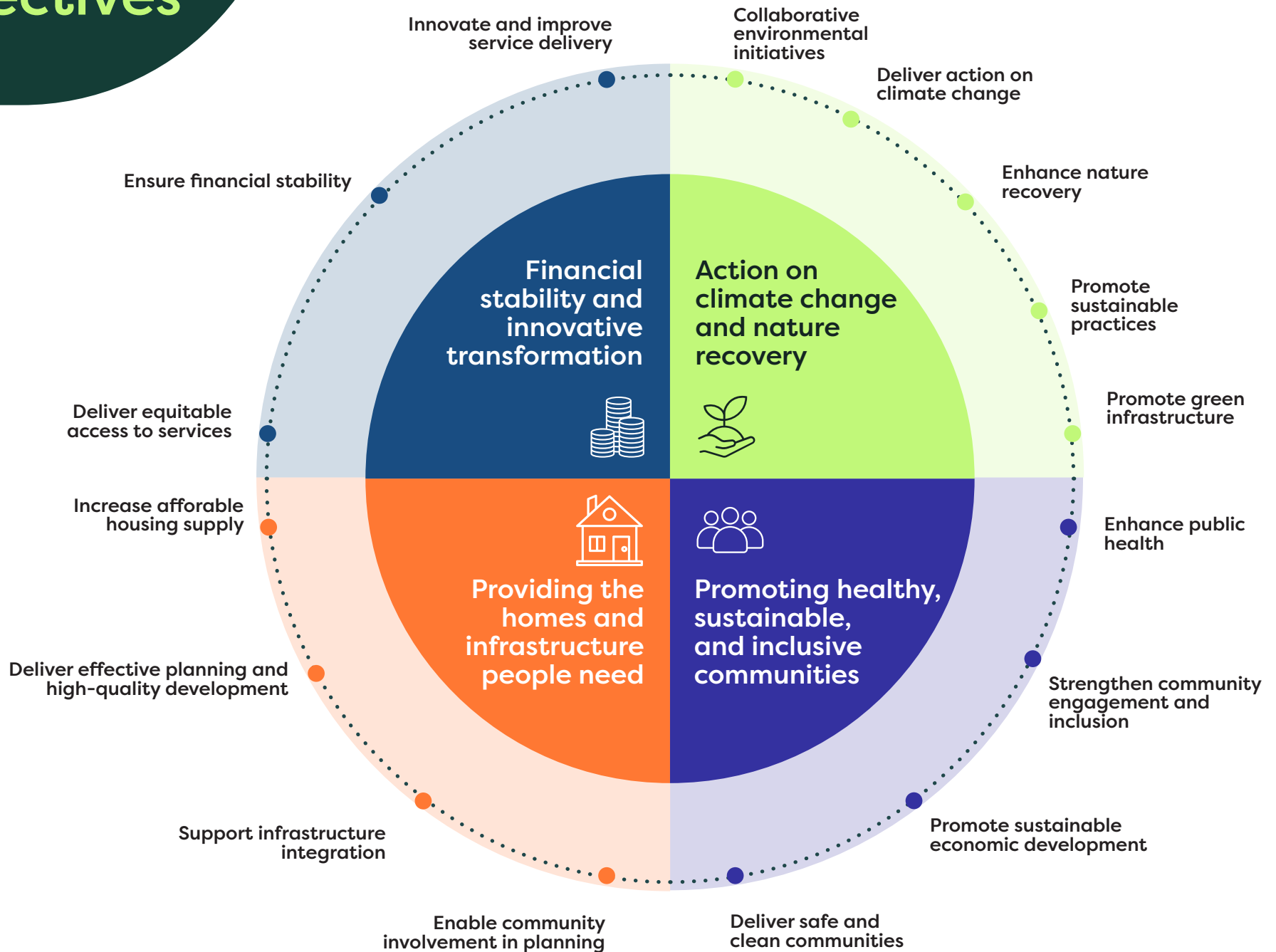


Financial stability and innovative transformation:

Continuous innovation and responsible investment to achieve financial stability and ensure equitable access to services.



Our priorities and objectives



Our principles

In addition to the priorities and objectives set out in our Council Plan, the work we do to deliver our vision for the district is guided by two key principles. These form the strong foundation upon which our priorities and objectives have been developed and remain at the heart of everything we do:

Working openly, transparently, responsibly, and in partnership

We will:

- Foster a culture of openness and transparency, ensuring residents are informed and involved in decision-making processes.
- Uphold the highest standards of integrity and accountability, ensuring that all actions are aligned with the best interests of the community.
- Build and maintain strong partnerships with residents, businesses and stakeholders to exercise influence, enable effective delivery of our vision, and address the diverse needs of our communities.

Supporting thriving local businesses:

We will:

- Champion local businesses, providing support and creating an environment that fosters growth and innovation.
- Work in partnership to develop initiatives and policies that enhance the local economy and create high quality job opportunities.
- Promote sustainability and clean technologies, to ensure that the Vale's business community contributes to our broader goals of climate action and environmental stewardship.

Action on climate change and nature recovery



Protecting and enhancing our environment, building resilience and adapting to the effects of climate change, and leading the district to carbon neutrality.

Largely rural, our district is well-placed to be a safe haven for wildlife and nature. Protecting and enhancing our environment is key to preserving it for future generations. We are committed to taking action on climate change and supporting our residents and businesses to adapt to its impacts, restoring our natural world and fostering resilience within our communities.

We have already taken significant climate action, including in reducing carbon emissions. We have firm plans to build on these successes through the delivery of our joint Nature and Climate Action Plan 2025-2029 with South Oxfordshire District Council. However, despite our ongoing efforts, more needs to be done to mitigate the impacts of climate change and ecological degradation.

We are committed to working with our communities and partners on

environmental initiatives and green infrastructure projects that enhance biodiversity, support interconnected wildlife habitats, and protect green spaces. Encouraging and supporting the adoption of sustainable practices across the district remains key to achieving our goals.

Where we are now: Having declared a climate emergency in 2019, Vale of White Horse has made significant strides in taking action on the climate emergency and protecting and restoring our natural world. However, there is still more work to do.

Where we want to be: By 2029, the council will have made significant progress towards achieving its ambitious target of becoming net zero in its operations by 2030. The district as a whole will also be

on track to becoming net zero by 2045. Our natural habitats will help to provide safe havens for wildlife and enhance biodiversity, and we will have supported our communities to foster climate resilience and adapt to the impacts of climate change.



Action on climate change and nature recovery: Objectives

Deliver action on climate change:

Seek to achieve net zero in council operations by 2030 and a net zero district by 2045. Support our residents and businesses to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and foster resilience to extreme weather events.

Enhance nature recovery:

Put nature recovery at the heart of our grounds maintenance operations. Work with partners to restore natural habitats and species populations throughout the Vale of White Horse, focussing our efforts on the priorities identified in the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Integrate natural habitats and balance good growth with net gains for nature.

Promote sustainable practices:

Encourage residents and businesses to adopt sustainable practices through education, incentives, and community programmes. Foster community-led sustainability initiatives and environmental stewardship and partnerships with local businesses and organisations to promote sustainable practices.

Promote green infrastructure:

Support green infrastructure projects and the protection of green and blue spaces to enhance biodiversity and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Collaborative environmental initiatives:

Work with communities and partners to deliver effective nature recovery and biodiversity projects.



Outcomes

- Expand and scale-up decarbonisation activity to achieve net zero for the district by 2045
- Reduce operational greenhouse gas emissions
- Support communities to alleviate and adapt to extreme weather events
- Enhance biodiversity
- Collaborate to achieve our climate and ecological goals
- Increase and enhance green infrastructure

How we will measure progress

- Progress towards net zero carbon district by 2045
- Biodiversity Net Gain reporting
- Reduction in operational greenhouse gas emissions
- Narrative and number of flood and drainage alleviation schemes facilitated and/or implemented
- Amount of residual waste per household
- Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting



Promoting healthy, sustainable, and inclusive communities



Building vibrant, inclusive, and resilient communities where all residents can lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

The Vale's numerous unique and diverse communities are one of the district's most valuable assets and continue to be places where people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can live, work and play together. We will continue to encourage sustainable local economic development, and the creation of local jobs that align with sustainable practices and technologies. Enhancing community resilience and ensuring robust support systems to safeguard vulnerable residents, young and old, a flourishing arts and culture scene, and opportunities to promote physical and mental health remain a priority.

Through direct work and exerting our influence to advocate for change, we have a continued focus on enhancing the local environment to ensure it is safe and clean. Our ambition is to have a district free from litter and fly-tipping, where pollution in our air and water is maintained to at least the minimum safe levels.

Our district is fortunate to benefit from a diverse and thriving economy, including a vibrant visitor economy. We will continue to encourage sustainable local economic development and support local businesses and organisations to become leaders in sustainable technology and innovation.

Where we are now: The Vale's towns and villages are home to numerous diverse communities of all ages, each with their own unique identity and characteristics. While the district is regarded as relatively affluent, disparities in areas such as health, education and employment still exist.

Where we want to be: Our vision is to be a district where residents can live healthy lives, supported by inclusive and accessible facilities and green spaces. We want to embrace our differences and create cohesive, empowered, and adaptive communities that can be resilient and recover from unforeseen and challenging events. We will work with diverse groups

to address existing inequalities and disparities, including around health, education, and employment, to ensure services are inclusive and equitable.



Promoting healthy, sustainable, and inclusive communities: Objectives

Enhance public health:

Support initiatives that promote physical and mental health.

Strengthen community engagement and inclusion:

Work with communities and partners to build strong relationships and promote participation in community life.

Promote sustainable economic development:

Support, champion and collaborate with local businesses to enable the creation of high-quality job opportunities, use of new technologies, and promotion of responsible resource use that align with sustainable practices.

Deliver safe and clean environments:

Work with communities to be free from pollution and other environmental hazards and provide healthy living conditions for all residents.



Outcomes

- Work in partnership to enhance health and wellbeing in our communities
- Promote a thriving and sustainable local economy
- Take action to improve the safety and cleanliness of the local environment
- Promote community engagement
- Promote equalities, diversity and inclusion within our communities
- Support residents via the Community Hub

How we will measure progress

- Number of people (You Move) and families (Move Together) participating in the council's physical activities programmes/events
- Public participation in equalities roadshow events
- Diversity of representation in responses to our consultations
- Number of residents accessing community hub services
- Number of Community Employment Plans being supported by Economic Development, and social and economic value delivered through them
- Number of leisure centre improvement projects underway/completed
- Number of projects to promote and enhance water quality including driving improvements in the ecological health of our rivers



Providing the homes and infrastructure people need



Supporting access to high-quality, affordable housing and working in partnership to influence the delivery of essential infrastructure that meets local needs and supports wellbeing.

In the Vale, strong demand for housing is being driven by population growth and changing demographics. Our ambition is to increase the supply of quality, affordable housing for our residents, providing a mixture of tenures to meet different needs, including social housing, using our planning policies to ensure that this is done in a sustainable way.

It is crucial that the provision and enhancement of essential infrastructure keeps up with the pace of housing development, and that new developments seamlessly integrate with existing communities and environments. Development must be sustainable and have appropriate adaptations that help mitigate against the impacts of climate change and deliver net zero. The provision of green, open spaces and prioritising connectivity via walking, cycling and public

transport will support sustainable lifestyles and promote healthy place-shaping. Together with our communities, we will work to identify and address local needs with the ambition of building a vibrant and sustainable future and seek to influence national planning policy for the benefit of our local area.

Where we are now: Population growth and changing demographics are driving demand for housing. While the council has made progress in increasing the supply of housing, challenges remain in ensuring that homes are affordable. There are also concerns about the quality and sustainability of new housing developments and the capacity and provision of essential infrastructure.

Where we want to be: We aim to have a diverse supply of affordable housing

options that cater to all parts of our communities. New developments will be well-planned, promote sustainability, and will either provide or enhance necessary infrastructure, ensuring that residents have access to essential services.



Providing the homes and infrastructure people need: Objectives

Enable community involvement in planning:

Engage with residents and support neighbourhood planning to enable developments to meet community needs and preferences.

Support infrastructure integration:

Strive for new developments to be accompanied by the timely delivery of essential infrastructure and for existing infrastructure to be enhanced to cope with increased demand as a result of development.

Deliver effective planning and high-quality development:

Implement policies that balance growth with environmental protection and sustainability, while promoting high-quality development and construction standards.

Increase affordable housing supply:

Set and achieve appropriate targets for the delivery of genuinely affordable homes across the district.



Outcomes

- Increase delivery and acquisition of affordable housing
- Prevent and tackle homelessness
- Deliver integrated infrastructure that meets local need
- Increase public and community involvement in planning
- Ensure effective planning policies

How we will measure progress

- Number of accommodation units directly provided by the council as a housing
- Homelessness prevention rate/percentage of potential homelessness cases successfully prevented
- Average length of stay in Emergency (hotel/B&Bs) Temporary Accommodation
- Amount of CIL funding received for use by the district council and approved for spend, and details of council projects delivered
- Number of successful Neighbourhood Plan proposals made (adopted)
- Joint Local Plan examined and adopted



Financial stability and innovative transformation



Continuous innovation and responsible investment to achieve financial stability and ensure equitable access to services.

Despite the challenges facing local government finances across the country, Vale of White Horse remains financially stable thanks to our responsible and robust financial management. While pressures caused by macro-economic factors outside our control and the uncertainties of local government reorganisation persist, we remain committed to solidifying our financial future by continuing to act responsibly with the resources we have.

Our ambition is to innovate and transform service delivery. We aspire to have modern, accessible and user-friendly services that deliver the great outcomes and customer service excellence that our residents expect and deserve.

Equitable access to services is one of our central commitments to our residents. Achieving this means maintaining and improving our culture of openness, accountability and engagement while

championing and promoting diversity and inclusion.

Where we are now: Through careful management and prudent action, the Vale has managed to stabilise its finances. We are an efficient, cost-effective council which continues to provide high-quality services to residents while adapting and innovating to drive continuous improvement. However, maintaining long-term financial stability in the face of uncertain Government funding allocations and local government reorganisation remains a challenge.

Where we want to be: We aim to maintain financial stability and continue to provide value for money through responsible financial management and seeking to maximise external funding opportunities. Through continued innovation, the services that we provide will remain modern, accessible, and user-friendly, underpinned by a culture of continuous improvement.



Financial stability and innovative transformation: Objectives

Ensure financial stability:

Ensure responsible management of public funds to ensure efficient and effective resource use, maximise external funding opportunities from grants and partnerships, and influence Central Government for an appropriate and longer-term financial settlement for local government.

Innovate and improve service delivery:

Drive continuous improvement to ensure efficient, effective delivery of high-quality services, including embracing technology to promote resilience in service delivery.

Deliver equitable access to services:

Champion and promote diversity, including identifying and removing barriers to council services to ensure equitable access for all.



Outcomes

- Deliver robust financial reporting and forecasting
- Maximise external funding opportunities to support our services and deliver great outcomes
- Deliver strategic and operational change projects to drive transformation
- Ensure all residents receive great customer service
- Ensure all residents have equitable and inclusive access to council services
- Exercise strong stewardship of all council assets

How we will measure progress

- Value and benefits of external funding secured
- Number and outcome of complaints
- Customer Services waiting and response times
- Comprehensive tracking of our financial performance
- Sign-ups to customer services 'My Account' and Council Tax and Benefits online portal



Get in touch

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