

Didcot Garden Town

Note of Advisory Board meeting on Microsoft Teams 20 July 2026, 10 to 12noon

ATTENDANCE:

Board Members

Chair: (Substitute) Cllr Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Anne-Marie Simpson, Cabinet member for South Oxfordshire District Council
Cllr Kelly-Marie Morrison, Leader of Didcot Town Council
David Pryor, Chair of Didcot First
(Substitute) Cllr Mark Coleman, Deputy Leader Vale of White Horse
(Substitute) Cllr David Rouane, Leader Didcot Town Council for Kelly

Communities team, South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse District Councils

Nicky Wyer, Garden Communities Team Leader
Emma East, Didcot Garden Town Project Manager
Dionne Freeman, Didcot Garden Town Project Officer
Lenka Devereux, Community Wellbeing Business Support Officer
Charlotte Cottingham, Didcot Garden Town Programme Manager

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

Jayne Bolton, Community Wellbeing Manager
Jessie Fieth, Climate and Biodiversity Team Senior Climate Action Officer

Oxfordshire County Council

Julia Hawkins, Operations Manager Placemaking & Transport
Timothy Mann, Programme Lead updating on the HIF1 scheme
Burhan Khan, Project Manager NPR3, Oxfordshire County Council

Didcot Town Council

Janet Wheeler, Town Clerk for Didcot Town Council

Other attendees:

Eleanor Dowding, National Grid Electricity Transmission External Affairs Advisor
Nadia Murphy, ACOM on behalf of National Grid Engagement Consultant

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Tim Bearder, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Bethia Thomas, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Helen Pighills, Cabinet Member for Vale of White Horse District Council
Cllr Tony Worgan, obo. Leader, Cabinet Member for South Oxfordshire District Council
Phil Barker, Head of Communities
Judy Roberts, Cabinet Member for Oxfordshire County Council
Sian Carter (SC), Senior Partnership & Business Development Manager Homes England
Nigel Tipple, CEO Enterprise Oxfordshire England, Communities team
Cllr Rita Atkinson, Chairman of Sutton Courtenay Parish Council
Carmella Anderson, Leisure Development Officer
Andrea Bridgeman, Project Manager Construction & Asset Manager
Tom Rice, Planning Infrastructure Team Leader
Mark Gregory, Team Leader for Behaviour Change and Travel Plans
Karina Santiago, Senior Transport Planner – South and Vale

1.	Introductions declarations and conflicts of interest - Chair Apologies noted above. Councillor Fawcett attended and chaired on behalf of Cllr Bearder. Councillor Ruane attended on behalf of Cllr Morrison who was unable to stay for the whole meeting. Councillor Coleman attended on behalf of Cllr Thomas and Cllr Pighills. There were no declarations or conflicts of interest.
2.	Public participation – Chair There was no public participation.
3.	Notes and actions from previous meeting on 26 January 2026 - Chair The note from the previous meeting was accepted and it was noted that there were no outstanding actions.
4.	National Grid Community Fund – Eleanor Dowding Eleanor provided an update on National Grid's proposed £530,000 Community Benefit Fund, which has been created following the extension of the Didcot 400kV substation to support new electricity connections. The fund aims to benefit communities living, working and visiting the Didcot area. Stakeholder engagement has begun to identify local priorities, with further consultation planned through community events and an online feedback survey. NG is also seeking views on using the Didcot Garden Town boundary as the fund's geographical area. The fund is expected to open for applications in early 2027, with grants awarded on a rolling basis. Attendees were encouraged to suggest further stakeholders to engage and identify projects that could benefit from the funding. Members welcomed the proposed Community Benefit Fund and encouraged NG to build on existing local knowledge, grant programmes and evidence rather than duplicate previous work. It was noted that the council's grant networks, newsletter and the Powerhouse Grant Fund could help promote the fund and reach local organisations. Eleanor Dowding advised that the £530,000 fund is expected to be administered by an independent third party, with grants likely to be awarded quarterly and typically up to £20,000 per application. Members suggested using Didcot Civic Hall and the Annual Town Meeting to promote the fund. They also highlighted existing evidence from the Didcot Garden Town programme and Didcot Community Partnership, which could help inform funding priorities. Eleanor Dowding thanked members for their feedback and confirmed that the presentation slides and a feedback form would be circulated. National Grid will continue to engage with stakeholders and provide updates ahead of the fund opening in early 2027.

	ACTIONS: National Grid to consider existing evidence from the Didcot Garden Town programme and Didcot Community Partnership when developing fund priorities. National Grid to keep stakeholders updated on progress towards launching the Community Benefit Fund in early 2027. All to submit details of potential National Grid stakeholders, local priorities and potential projects via the feedback form including J. Bolton on existing grant programmes and promotion opportunities, the council's grants newsletter and links with the Powerhouse Grant Fund. J Wheeler to liaise with National Grid regarding promotion at Didcot Civic Hall and the Annual Town Meeting and David Pryor/Didcot Community Partnership to share local needs mapping and lessons from the Powerhouse Grant Fund application process.
5.	Culham and Didcot Heat Recovery Feasibility – Jessie Fieth Jessie provided a brief update on work to investigate opportunities for developing heat networks within the Didcot Garden Town area. Jessie explained that heat networks distribute heat from a central energy source to homes and businesses via underground hot water pipes, providing an efficient way of delivering low-carbon heating. She highlighted the increasing national focus on heat networks, noting the government's ambition for 7 per cent of heating demand in England to be met by heat networks by 2035 and around 20 per cent by 2050. The council's climate team is exploring opportunities to support district-wide decarbonisation by harnessing waste heat, with particular interest in the potential to utilise waste heat generated by proposed data centres within the district. As some data centre developments are already progressing through the planning system, the work is being advanced to ensure opportunities are not missed. Jessie confirmed that the Culham work includes the strategic developments. She explained the Culham and Abingdon work is currently more detailed, while the Didcot work is being progressed alongside in a separate study so that the two pieces of work can inform each other. Jessie advised that the work is at an early stage and that the findings presented represent preliminary indications of potential opportunities. More detailed work is planned to commence in the autumn, and she offered to return to a future meeting with further updates.
6.	Didcot Garden Town projects quarterly update – DGT team Emma East advised that the next twice-yearly Community Update Meeting will take place on 30 September, from 5.00 pm to 7.30 pm. The meeting will focus on the Garden Town parish councils, providing an opportunity to share updates and strengthen collaboration across the area. Discussions are ongoing with Harwell Parish Council regarding the format of the event, with options including either a drop-in session or an in-person meeting with presentations and speakers. The final format will be confirmed in due course. Emma also reported on an Environmental Visual Audit (EVA) undertaken in March by representatives from Thames Valley Police, Oxford City Council's

Community Safety Team and council officers. The audit focused on areas of Didcot that had generated reports of anti-social behaviour, littering and environmental neglect. The findings had been shared with the Garden Town team and Councillor Worgan. The EVA is a live document and is updated regularly.

Cllr Rouane asked whether the Environmental Visual Audit report could be shared, explaining that local business owners on Broadway had raised ongoing concerns about anti-social behaviour and would find the information useful.

Dionne Freeman provided an update on progress with the **Healthy Didcot project and Healthy Didcot Action Plan**.

Dionne reported that, through UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding, together with support from the Didcot Garden Town team, Didcot Powerhouse funding, and Didcot Town Council's Healthy Didcot projects, over 2,300 participants have engaged with Healthy Didcot activities:

- In May, 17 Healthy Didcot group members attended the Reducing the Risk Domestic Abuse Friends Awareness course.
- The Healthy Didcot online steering group meeting held on 25 June was attended by 30 people, bringing together community leaders, healthcare practitioners and voluntary organisations.
- The quarterly meeting provided an opportunity to review local public health data, evaluate existing signposting arrangements and strengthen connections between local services.
- Discussions focused on improving signposting and information-sharing arrangements, which will help inform the next in-person meeting scheduled for 16 September.
- Healthy Didcot contributed to the Didcot Festival of Cultures, with participation from Healthy Didcot groups and several funded projects supporting the event.

An update was provided on the **Didcot Festival of Cultures**, which took place on 11 July at Cornerstone Arts Centre.

The event attracted over 800 attendees and received very positive feedback. The festival was delivered in partnership with the Didcot Interfaith Group and Didcot Town Council, celebrating the cultural diversity of the town through a range of performances, workshops, community activities and international food. Many Healthy Didcot partner groups also participated, helping to deliver a free, inclusive and family-friendly event.

Dionne Freeman provided an update on the improvement works undertaken at **Cow Lane** in response to resident feedback and requests for improvements to the area.

David Rouane suggested that there had been limited visible improvement following the Cow Lane works and disappointment that the planned artwork could not proceed due to outstanding Network Rail permissions.

Dionne stated that during the recent road closure in early June, the Didcot Garden Town team and partner organisations completed as many improvements works as possible: Network Rail carried out additional repairs and signage improvements,

and Oxfordshire County Council replaced the existing lighting system. Dionne thanked Didcot Town Council for its support on the Sunday when they used their water bowser to help carry out the clean-up works.

After the clean-up Dionne met with the Ladygrove Residents Association on 15 June to provide updates. Clarification was sought regarding the residents' meeting, and Dionne agreed to follow up and share the feedback received.

The value of the Probation community payback team's involvement in the cleaning works was noted as was the new opportunity for collaboration with the probation team on further community improvement works.

Dionne Freeman updated the group on **other public art projects** being delivered in partnership with Didcot Railway Centre, Didcot Parkway Station and GWR.

- Funding from the GWR Community Improvement Fund is supporting the next phase of the Cow Lane Connecting Communities project.
- The first phase will transform the station underpass between the station and the car park, with community engagement workshops taking place over the summer to inform the artwork, which is due to be installed later this year.
- Initial engagement activities have already taken place at the Didcot Festival.
- Dionne also reported that Didcot Community Hospital is working with artist Becky Paignton to create a mosaic for outside the hospital for the benefit of patients, staff and the wider community.

Green Infrastructure – central Didcot (Zone 1)

Emma East updated the group on proposals for green infrastructure improvements:

- on Network Rail land, including wildflower planting, reduced mowing, interpretation boards, a bug hotel, and new planting around Didcot Parkway, subject to the necessary permissions
- plans for five new planters outside Cornerstone Arts Centre are progressing, with maintenance arrangements still to be agreed
- David Rouane raised concerns about the poor condition of existing planters in the town centre and requested that maintenance issues be addressed promptly and Janet Wheeler advised that Didcot Town Council had been seeking approval to maintain the Broadway planters but had not received clear permission.

Green Infrastructure – Ladygrove (Zone 2)

- Emma East reported that the tender documents for Zone 2 are nearing completion, with procurement expected to begin in September.
- The scheme includes new trees, wildflower areas, seating, low-level play features, public art opportunities and improvements to paths and sightlines. Grounds maintenance arrangements are also being reviewed to support the long-term management of the site.
- Janet Wheeler raised concerns about reports of static electricity shocks beneath the pylons and asked that safety be considered before installing new features. Emma confirmed that National Grid guidance had been

followed.

- Cllr Rouane asked for clearer communication on the replacement of removed play equipment and expressed concern about delays. Emma advised that replacement is dependent on future funding and agreed to follow this up with the relevant council team.
- Cllr Simpson asked whether other funding opportunities for play equipment could be explored. Emma confirmed that potential Section 106 funding linked to public art would be investigated.

Green Infrastructure – South East Didcot (Zone 3)

- Emma East updated the group on proposals to improve the National Cycle Route between Jubilee Roundabout and Millennium Wood, including vegetation management to improve visibility, biodiversity enhancements and replacement seating.
- Cllr Rouane mentioned the poor condition of the path surface and its impact on accessibility.

Wayfinding

- Emma East reported that permissions have been secured for most of the wayfinding signs, with contractors expecting to complete manufacture shortly. Installation of the approved signs is planned for late August/early September, with remaining signs to follow once outstanding permissions are received.
- Cllr Rouane expressed frustration at continued delays and asked Oxfordshire County Council to expedite the remaining approval.
- Cllr Fawcett offered to help progress the outstanding library sign approval, and Julia Hawkins confirmed that the County Council was working closely with the Didcot Garden Town team to resolve the remaining issues.

Sports and Leisure Update

- Charlotte Cottingham reported that an update on sports and leisure provision across the Garden Town and surrounding area would be circulated with the meeting notes.
- Since early 2025, over £762,000 of Section 106 and external funding has been secured, alongside £14,414 in Everyone Active grants to support local sports and leisure projects.
- The annual review of the Playing Pitch and Leisure Facility Strategies showed increased participation across a wide range of activities and community groups.

Didcot Broadway Redevelopment

- Informed by the project team Charlotte Cottingham provided an update on the Broadway redevelopment project, which has secured over £1 million in Government funding to deliver nine affordable homes and community space at 116–120 Broadway.
- Construction is expected to begin in autumn 2026, with completion

	anticipated in autumn 2027. The scheme will deliver sustainable, car-free homes with provision for public art. Discussion • David Pryor raised concerns about a section of the green route towards Earth Trust where connectivity remains incomplete. Emma East agreed to investigate further, and David will provide additional information offline. • Colleagues welcomed the increased use of the Earth Trust route and highlighted the importance of completing the remaining connections. ACTIONS: Emma East to liaise with the Community Safety Team to determine whether the Environmental Visual Audit (EVA) can be shared with Cllr Rouane and Didcot business owners. The DGT Team to ensure maintenance of the new Cornerstone and Broadway planters and clarify responsibilities for maintaining the Broadway planters. Emma East to review funding availability for the green infrastructure Zone 3 path surface. Cllr Fawcett offered to follow up with the relevant County Council contacts to help progress an outstanding permission for wayfinding signage at Didcot Library. Emma East to investigate the outstanding connectivity issues on the route to Earth Trust and David Pryor to provide further details and photographs of the route issues outside the meeting.
7.	Oxfordshire County Council projects quarterly update Burhan Khan provided an update on the Didcot Northern Perimeter Road Phase 3 (NPR3) scheme, which aims to reduce congestion by extending the A4130 to Hadden Hill. The northern section will be delivered by Oxfordshire County Council, while the southern section will be delivered by Blore Homes as part of its Section 106 obligations. Members noted that surveys have progressed well, including topographical, GPR, ecological and non-motorised user surveys, with geotechnical investigations planned later this year. Detailed design and environmental assessment work are continuing, alongside discussions with technical specialists and preparation of the planning application, which remains on track for submission in winter 2026/27. The overall programme is unchanged, with a planning decision anticipated in 2027, construction starting in spring 2028 and completion in 2029. Members raised concerns about the potential for the northern section to be completed before the southern section. Officers advised that discussions with Blore Homes are ongoing to coordinate delivery and explore bringing forward the Section 106 trigger for the southern section to reduce the risk of a delay between the two phases. Timothy Mann provided an update on the HIF1 project. Contractors have now been appointed for all three construction schemes. Enabling works are progressing across the sites, including archaeology, utilities, site clearance and compound

	establishment, while detailed design, approvals and land acquisition continue. Officers are also working closely with adjoining landowners and developers to coordinate construction activities. Over the coming months, the focus will be on completing design approvals, securing outstanding land, and transitioning from enabling works to main construction across all three schemes. Construction planning continues to prioritise minimising impacts on the road network. An update was provided on upcoming traffic management measures over the next six months, including temporary traffic lights and speed limit reductions on sections of the A415, A4130, B4016, Milton Road and around Collett Roundabout. Further updates will be provided through the project newsletter as works progress. David Pryor raised concerns about traffic congestion around the Orchard Centre and asked about measures being considered to improve access. Julia Hawkins (Oxfordshire County Council) confirmed that work was underway, including surveys and discussions with the Orchard Centre and local representatives, and welcomed further suggestions. David Rouane requested an update on the Didcot Central Corridor study and whether previous work could be shared. Julia Hawkins advised that an options review had been completed and work was underway to develop potential projects and identify funding opportunities. Further discussions with Didcot Town Council were offered to help shape the next stages.
8.	Didcot Town Council projects quarterly update Janet Wheeler provided an update on recent Didcot Town Council activities. The splash pad has been extremely well used over the summer, with staff supporting visitors and carrying out significant maintenance work behind the scenes to keep the facility operating. Thanks were given to staff for their efforts during the busy period. An update was provided on staff training, which has enabled more maintenance work to be carried out in-house, including repairs to play equipment, surfacing, fencing and car park facilities, helping to reduce costs. Recent projects highlighted included improvements to Edmunds Park, new seating, public art, community planting initiatives, car park marking, and the use of Healthy Didcot funding for new equipment and facilities. The team continues to deliver projects using local skills and recycled materials where possible. Some projects, including the accessible pathway at the mounds, have been delayed due to planning processes. David Pryor praised the work of the Town Council and raised concerns about delays in transferring 47 parcels of land from Taylor Wimpey at Great Western Park. He asked whether support could be provided to resolve outstanding issues with the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse legal teams. Janet Wheeler agreed to follow up, noting the potential for the land to support community uses, including allotments and recreation facilities. ACTION: J Wheeler to follow up with legal teams regarding the GWP land transfer

9.	Parish Council projects quarterly update – Rita Atkinson Cllr Atkinson was unable to attend today's meeting. This item has been deferred to the October Advisory Board meeting.
10.	Advisory Board and Community Update Meeting dates 2026 • Wednesday 30 September Community Update Meeting (Harwell Village Hall) • Monday 19 October at 10am Advisory Board (online)

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