

Public Participation - 21 July 2026

Public Participation at the Town Council Meeting on Tuesday 21 July 2026

Editors Note: The Council allows 5 members of the public to speak before Town Council meetings in a section called 'Public Participation'. The rules were changed towards the beginning of this Council's term about 2 years ago, to allow items to be discussed that were not on the Agenda for that meeting. The meeting is now suspended at the beginning of this section, and the Council now only gives the most cursory summary of what was discussed in their published Minutes. Readers can read our reporter's understanding of what was said, but as there was so much public interest at this meeting (over 50 members of the public attending), the magazine has decided to print the public speeches. This was previously done in October 2024 - see Page 14 and 15.

Speaker 1 - Jo Lamb

Save our town centre post office!

"Woodstock will die if it loses its post office in the town centre". This remark was made recently by a retailer in Market Street ; such is the value placed on its services by Woodstock's business and residential community.

But the continuance of our post office in its central location is threatened from about the middle of next year, because of the way the latest rent review has been handled by our town council.

The current post office tenants have been serving our community for 23 years. Their leases of the post office and its upstairs flat are not due to expire until 2033. There was every reason for them to hope that this year's rent reviews would be similar to those conducted in previous years. These had always recognised the "added value" which a centralised post office provided.

Tragically, these hopes have been dashed. Woodstock Town Council demanded a staggering 88% increase in rent for the shop and its accommodation this year. It had unilaterally decided to remove the "value added" concession in such a way that the tenants could no longer afford to keep the business going until the end of their lease. Neither could they afford to live in the flat above the shop. This is an unsustainable position for them to endure, particularly whilst negotiations were continuing during the distressing circumstances of illness and now the very recent death of their son.

One remedy for this mess perhaps, failing all else, would be the grant of 2 new leases ending in 2033, on more acceptable and affordable terms, which recognised the value added element the central post office provides everyone locally.

If the Council declines to think again but instead, continues its current path, Woodstock is the loser in the longer term. Not only does the post office provide multiple services to us all, it acts as a reason for others to visit the town to shop here and enjoy our pubs and restaurants.

Apart from the surgery, the central post office is the most important business in Woodstock. When the location of the GP surgery was being considered, a town meeting was held to discuss that issue, even though in actual fact, the Council had no power whatsoever over its outcome.

By contrast, the Council does have power to decide what happens to the post office because it owns the building...but it does so on behalf of the local electorate. It has a democratic responsibility to allow people an opportunity to express their views on this important facility. There should at least be a public meeting organised. Such important decisions should not be taken behind closed doors in secret by a mere handful of Councillors with no public consultation whatsoever. Yet this is exactly what has been happening. Surely this is an indefensible and morally suspect approach?

I repeat: Woodstock needs its post office (including its upstairs flat) in the centre of town. In order to accommodate this there has to be a rent adjustment overall to reflect the add on value a central post office provides every sector of our community. Woodstock Town Council must bend over backwards to ensure this local service remains here over the long term.

Thank you!

Speaker 2 - John Brimble

Madam Mayor and Councillors, I am here to reveal to you the uncommonly high number of signatures that we have received. First, I want to tell you the procedure that I intend to follow. This recognises that in this public session nothing is recorded about what anyone says. I intend to do my best to encourage the councillors to agree through you and with the Town Clerk to include what I'm going to say within your minutes and to do that I propose when I have read out what I'm going to present you with, I shall, without words, once reconvened, approach you, if I may, and the Town Clerk, and give you a copy of what I'm going to read out.

So, this is to the Woodstock Town Council, Mayor Councillor Sarah Williams, and also as a side thing to your Town Clerk because I know you'd like everything to go through the Town Clerk.

I formally present to you and through yourself to the Town Councillors, a record of the result of the petition below, conducted along each Woodstock Street over the last two weeks.

This is the petition wording:

"WOODSTOCK POST OFFICE IS AT RISK!

We the undersigned, as residents and business owners of Woodstock and the surrounding area, hereby call on Woodstock Town Council to ensure by every means that Woodstock continues to have a post office in the present premises with affordable, integrated and subsidised living accommodation in the town centre for the long term benefits of all our residents and businesses."

Please confirm in the reconvened meeting the following number of signatures and that you will record this in the minutes for this meeting.

The number of valid signatures recorded - 1688. All names, postcodes and signatures are kept as a record. Should any councillor want to see, but not copy, 94 sheets, they are available from our record.

John Brimble and Jo Lamb signed this, on behalf of the 1,688 signees, including, for which I thank them wholeheartedly, 22 volunteer collectors, dated the 21st of July, 2026.

May I approach you? Thank you for hearing us.

Speaker 3 - Chris Coe

I too could have talked about the risk to our Post Office by the decisions and actions of a small number of Councillors, but others are better prepared to do this. I will, instead, turn to financial decision making.

When the Council discussed the 2025/26 budget, three Councillors commented that, and I quote, "the budget process was not transparent", "the independent auditors should be asked to review the budget process" and "the statutory rules were not followed". Despite this, at the third attempt, the budget was passed.

The budget more than doubled the 2024/25 actual spend on Staff and Administration adding an extra £109,500 of expenditure, whilst at the same time cutting service provisions to the community in order, I would assume, to get a broadly balanced budget.

Councillors are being asked tonight, at Item 14, to spend monies from the reserves. In the proposal before you, expenditure that was budgeted at £79,000 now has a suggested spend of £212,000, an additional £133,000 above the budget. There is then a further unbudgeted proposal to spend £34,000.

There will always be the need for planned capital expenditure and, inevitably, expenditure on unforeseen items. Most residents might, however, see a parallel between the additional budgeted expenditure on Staff and Administration of £109,500 and the proposal before Councillors tonight to spend £133,000 from reserves. This expenditure is on items which should have had an adequate budget in the first place but were reduced, I would suggest, to balance income and expenditure at the time of the original budget.

Given comments about the failures in the original budget process, I would ask that Councillors do not accept the proposal in front of them at Item 14. Spending from reserves on items underbudgeted by £133,000 should not be agreed without due scrutiny of both the original budget and the proposal before you. I ask this in the interests of your taxpayers and this community.

Thank you.

Public Participation - 1 September 2026

Public Participation at the Town Council Meeting on Tuesday 1 September 2026

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Speaker 1 - Hilary Brown*A Plan for Woodstock Resilience and Emergencies

I'm Hilary Brown, I'm a resident and I'm here also representing Sustainable Woodstock this evening. For those who don't know Sustainable Woodstock, we support climate and nature action through practical ideas, information and activities in Woodstock. We were established in 2008, we're all volunteers and one of 117+ Community Action Groups (CAGs) that make up the OCC supported Oxfordshire CAG Network.

I wish to use my 3 mins this evening to talk briefly on a subject that's important to all communities. I am here to ask if the Woodstock Town Council would add as an agenda item a motion to create a Community Resilience and Emergency Plan for the next full council meeting so that discussions can commence and move forward.

The community resilience and emergency plan is a local, volunteer-driven document that outlines how a community can prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises like severe weather, flooding, or power cuts. Local parish / town councils should play a vital frontline role in identifying our vulnerable residents, utilising local assets (like the Town Hall and Community Centre), and keeping people informed during the first crucial hours of a crisis. The plans would not replace our professional emergency services who do an incredible job. Instead, they help local residents work safely together while waiting for official help to arrive.

Advice suggests encouraging involvement with local community groups. We and other groups may be able to work alongside councillors to help the Council write the plan. The whole community can help by sharing their knowledge about flood risks, etc, finding out which neighbours are vulnerable and may need extra help ... and review the plan before it is finished. Some neighbouring parishes are already working with residents and instigating their plans using the free guidance and templates provided via OCC resilience teams.

The core elements of a plan include:

@Local Risk Assessment: Identifying specific local threats, such as flood-prone areas, power and water failures.

@Resource Inventory: Cataloguing local skills, equipment, 4x4 vehicles, and safe gathering places like the community centre.

@Vulnerable Register: Identifying elderly, disabled, or isolated residents who may need extra help during an evacuation or utility loss.

@Emergency Contact Tree: Key phone numbers for local coordinators, volunteers, the local council, and emergency services.

@Activation Triggers: Clear rules on who decides when to activate the plan and the first actions volunteers should take. How we cope with the effects of climate change to protect people and nature from current and future damage is called climate adaptation. Woodstock community would benefit greatly from a local emergency and resilience plan and with changing weather patterns increasing the frequency of extreme events - such as heatwaves, drought, severe storms, local flooding, fires and utility failures such as our recent water and electricity outages and the major gas outage that affected over 2000 Woodstock properties back in 2024 (although not climate related) is an example of when a resilience plan could help.

Speaker 2 - Chris Coe

Thank you Councillor Williams.

I want to address this to you Councillor Williams and also to Councillor Wheatley as Mayor and Deputy Mayor respectively. It's about the subject of how items find their way onto the Council agenda.

Despite the huge levels of concern about the risk of losing our Post Office, this subject is not on the agenda to be discussed tonight. Likewise, the apparent Council decision not to appoint a Caretaker for the Community Centre, and

the impact that will inevitably have on members of your community who use the building in the evenings, is not being discussed. Conversely, two of Councillor Grant's agenda submissions are on the agenda.

At item 9 Councillor Grant's submission reads - 'to receive a report with a motion for solar panels' which, interestingly, relates to the Community Centre. This could involve expenditure worth tens of thousands of pounds of your taxpayers' money. What, we as residents might ask, is the merit of such an agenda item if the building cannot now be hired in the evenings and the subject of not having a Caretaker is deemed unworthy of discussion?

Later, at item 17, Councillor Grant provides a comprehensive document on the failings of WODC with regards to the water meadows. What I don't recall, is Councillor Connolly's persistent attempts to table a motion that Woodstock Town Council undertakes its own duties of care to the water meadows being given such consideration.

I would urge you as Mayor and Deputy Mayor to take control of the agenda and to ensure that items selected for consideration genuinely represent your community's interests and not those of individual Councillors.

Thank you

Speaker 3 - Jo Lamb

Woodstock Post Office and integrated flat

Councillors will know by now, that a Petition, signed by 1725 local people, called on the Town Council to "ensure, by every means, that Woodstock continues to have a post office in the present premises, with affordable, integrated and subsidised living accommodation in the town centre, for the long term benefit of all our residents and businesses."

Our current post office tenants, Mr and Mrs Lally, have run the Post Office and lived in the flat above the shop since their first lease was granted in 2010. That lease contained provisions for regular rent reviews which operated without difficulty.

The Lallys entered into a new lease with the town council in December 2023. The rent at that time was £9332 per annum (plus VAT) for the shop and £11,168 for the flat. Total: £20,500. Once again, there was provision for rent reviews, the first one due this year.

As has been said before, in May this year following a rent review of the lease, the Council's agents required an 88% increase in rent overall to a total £38700. There was no detailed explanation given in justification of this assessment which came as a bombshell to the Lallys. This level of proposed rent increase was unaffordable. It also came at a time when the Lallys were experiencing a family tragedy with the serious illness which culminated in the death of their son. Yet right at such a time of huge personal loss, whilst the Lallys were at their son's bedside in a hospital in India, the town council's agents were still requiring them to decide on rent levels for their home and livelihood in Woodstock.

Think about it! That's almost inhumane.

Evidently, the town council wanted to get the flat back from the Lallys. It sought to do this by increasing the rent to an extortionate level so that the Lallys felt they would have to leave the flat before the lease required them to do so.

However, having considered the current lease as a whole, and furthermore taken the advice of a local chartered surveyor, it is abundantly clear to both of us that the agents' valuation of the property has been made on the basis that the flat is governed by a separate residential lease. It is not!

In fact, the current lease makes it clear that the flat cannot be separated off from the business. There is just the one lease which explicitly states this. It is a business lease.

The flat above the post office shop is governed by the Landlord and Tenant Acts. It is a business flat. It is not a residential flat governed by totally different laws. The lease in December 2023 to the Lallys includes the flat within its demise. This lowers its rental level. The flat is integral to the shop.

It follows from this, that the extortionate rent increase currently proposed by the Council's agents in this case is incorrect, because the valuation itself is based on the wrong legislation. Whilst the new rent for the shop has been agreed between the Council and the Lallys, the rental for the flat has not even been negotiated. It cannot have been,

because the whole basis of the negotiation was incorrect.

It also follows that there is no reason any more, for the Lallys to be forced to vacate their home because of the huge rent increase being demanded for the flat. The local community hopes that they would choose to remain in Woodstock and I am hopeful and indeed, optimistic, that given these revised circumstances, they will decide to do so.

Councillors..... If you don't stop squeezing the proverbial 'lemon', which is our post office AND its flat, you will find that there are only 'the pips' left. Woodstock will lose its post office - with all the implications that there would be for our business economy as well as for our residents and those living in surrounding villages.

This would be a DISASTER. The responsibility is yours.

Thank you.

Public Participation - 22 September 2026

Public Participation at the Town Council Meeting on Tuesday 22 September 2026

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Speaker 1 - Chris Coe

Thank you Councillor Williams.

I have sadly had cause to write to Councillors Williams, Wheatley and now Dawson, about more concerns regarding the governance of the Council's finances. As yet, I have not received a reply to my questions and concerns.

For the benefit of all Councillors, this relates to the process of allocating monies from reserves to specific expenditure items, whether Councillors have sufficient information to decide that such decision making is financially prudent, and who then determines which monies for which items are moved to the expenditure lines of the budget.

In the 21st July meeting, as shown in the published minutes of the 1st September Council meeting, the Council agreed to allocate £285,000 from reserves to various expenditure items.

Allowing for budgeted income, budgeted expenditure and prior commitments to spend from reserves, and excluding the general reserve and tenants deposits, I calculate that you wish to commit over £91,000 of monies you don't have. I have presented these numbers in a simple cashflow forecast but, as I indicated, I have not yet received a response.

Of equal, or possibly greater concern, is that between the July meeting and the September meeting £51,000 of expenditure from the agreed allocations was added to the budget for this year.

In the September agenda pack, there was no motion to add the various sums totalling £51,000 to the budget. Neither was there any reference to it in writing. Nor was it mentioned in the meeting itself. Councillors were, as stated in the agenda, simply asked to note the Cost Centre report. How could Councillors note a £51,000 increase which was not brought to their attention?

The question for Councillors therefore is, who made the decision to add a selective group of items worth £51,000 to the budget and why were you not asked, in Council, to agree to such a proposal?

In addition to seeking an answer to this question, I also hope you will look to address the matter of allocating £91,000 of reserves which you don't actually have available to allocate.

Councillors Williams, Wheatley and Dawson have all the detail for any Councillor interested in seeing it.

Thank you.

Speaker 2 - John Brimble

Thank you Mayor.

I have the advantage that all of you will be well aware of the background, so I am not going to bore you. I want to give you a timeline.

21st July 2026. In the public session of the Town Council meeting I read out a statement giving the total figure of signatures from the locality of 1688, in regard to dissatisfaction, my words, as to the handling of the Post Office and its future.

Once the meeting was reconvened, I handed a copy of the statement both to the mayor and the Town Clerk. I have been assured since, that each Councillor has more recently been delivered with a copy, so everybody knows. Should they not, they should ask why.

30th August 2026. Before the next meeting for the 1st September I wrote to the Mayor with a copy to the Town Clerk saying that I found the draft minutes relating to my contribution to be unrepresentative and inadequate for such a

serious subject. I pointed out that it was not as described my wish, but my intention, that once the meeting had been reconvened, I would approach both wordlessly with hard copies of the statement to be entered in the minutes as an amendment.

1st September 2026. The Mayor referred in her report to the petition but this excluded the number of signatures of 1688, which I would have thought was the salient information for recording, along with some explanatory words. I also was surprised for the petition not to have been put on the Agenda for discussion, though to be fair, I now appreciate that the council has a very full programme. I see no reason why the petition and progress arising should not appear as an Agenda item at the earliest opportunity and I do expect that.

22nd September 2026. Today, in the draft minutes recorded for today's meeting, there is no reference to my concerns. It is as if all that was gathered and presented has been subsumed. By whom? Ask yourselves? It just says in the last lot of Minutes 'Speakers number 2: Informed the Council he wished to hand in a petition to the mayor regarding the Post Office Flat'. Sorry! It was to do with everything to do with the Post Office and its future. What on earth is being written, it is ridiculous. There is no true record.

I ask the councillors here today to raise it in this session as a serious omission and ask for the petition and the number of signatures (1688) gathered to be included in the final Minutes for today's meeting.

Again, the Post Office is not on the Agenda at the very least I would have expected a proper progress report.

Thank you.

Speaker 3 - Ed Creasey

Thank you, Chair and Councillors.

I come to you with good news about the Water Meadows. Last week GLEAM, the Community Interest Company we've founded, sat down with expert representatives (from the Environment Agency, Oxfordshire County Council Flood Management, Blenheim Estate's hydrologist), along with several town councillors (attending as individuals rather than on behalf of Woodstock Town Council), and residents, to walk through next steps.

There was real agreement on the substance:

1. Resolving the blocked trash screen is a shared priority, by everyone.
2. I acknowledge not everyone on Woodstock Town Council agrees with this next point, but we all agreed ownership disputes shouldn't hold this up. In a follow-up email, the Environment Agency noted that absent evidence to the contrary (and councillors, please do share it with us if you have any) it's reasonable to assume Woodstock Town Council owns the trash screen and the culverts.
3. The eroding banks need repair. There's complete consensus on this.
4. Finally, the debris near the river should be cleared as a basic flood-risk duty by the landowner, Woodstock Town Council.

There was other good news on funding: we have enough money. Between GLEAM and the Council, there's enough funding to make a start. What's needed now is for Woodstock Town Council to consider our requests.

You have a lot of topics about the Water Meadows in both your minutes and your agenda. I've had excellent meetings with the Mayor to discuss our requests. And yet maintaining the meadow is still not on your agenda, despite your colleagues, not me, asking multiple times for it to be included.

It's great that Cllr Grant's concerns about the blocking of the watercourse near one of her neighbours are on last week's minutes, and that all of you agreed with that. We've been asking you to unblock the watercourse near our own properties for many months, if not years.

It's great the Local Plan discussion includes the Water Meadows. What isn't on it is the maintenance, repair, and restoration of our meadows. We'd be grateful for a sense of when you're going to address that.

We welcome Maurice Parkinson taking on the Wildlife Warden role, but we're concerned that wildlife stewardship is

the only part of this you're prepared to discuss, not the impact on people.

Finally, as you consider the Local Plan tonight: for as long as the trash screen stays blocked, water stays trapped on your land. This water that we know carries sewage. If you live in Woodstock and have a working nose, you'll have noticed the smell.

Today I went down as a citizen scientist and tested the water quality. It's poor again. Most citizen science tests on the River Glyme are rated poor.

This isn't a hypothetical situation. We have expert consensus, we have proof. Inaction is affecting residents. Children are playing in that river right now. Any water sitting on Woodstock Town Council land, because of a blocked trash screen, is something we'd ask you to at least talk about. Please get it on your agenda.

Thank you.

Ed Creasey, Founder Glyme Local Environment Action Movement (GLEAM)