

Item 5 Budget Proposals for 2026/27 to 2030/31

Shirburn Parish is a key stakeholder in the Watlington Relief Road scheme promoted by the County Council. It is proposed to allocate £14.1m of corporate funds in the council's draft 2026/27 budget so the project can progress.

Shirburn Parish has Grade I & II Listed heritage assets of national and historic importance. The parish would be negatively impacted by the proposed relief road and objects to the council's planning application.

We are grateful for the opportunity to raise that the Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee has insufficient information to support the allocation of £14.1m from the council's corporate funds to the WRR project.

The council's finance officers have confirmed the criteria for securing firm corporate funds for capital projects.

£14.1m is proposed from corporate funds on the basis the council would seek further funding from other sources, S106, CIL to mitigate the value of OCC funds required to support the scheme. The council has proposed to use its funds to enable the scheme to proceed subject to planning approval. However further S106 funding will be sought to replace this corporate funding as far as possible in order to maximise the overall funding available for the capital programme.

The Committee has no details on any further funding that the council has identified could be recouped by the council investing £14.1m corporate funds in this scheme. Nor does the Committee have a firm go live date when construction will commence for inclusion in the council's firm 2026/27 capital programme.

The funding criteria for corporate funds was not understood when councillors considered the 2025/26 budget. The funds were assumed to be largely secured from developer contributions, which is not the case. The funding decision in 2025/26 was also made without information that the scheme is technically challenging to build. The council recently revealed it is a "complex infrastructure project".

The WRR is labelled as to "encourage and facilitate active travel and improve Oxfordshire towns". The scheme is more than doubling capacity for motor traffic. It does not contribute to the council's policy to reduce private car trips. Watlington is not a town in the way Wantage or Abingdon are and it does not have a marketplace or market square

These are important matters that concern very large sums of scarce public monies. We ask the Performance & Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to recommend removing corporate funds from the WRR and reallocate these funds where they will maximise the overall funding available for the capital programme and deliver the council's corporate plans and policies, and to recommend an immediate review of council recommended low cost alternatives at Watlington.

R Parker, Chair
Shirburn Parish