



Lost or Abandoned Property Policy

Date Ratified:	14 th April 2026
Meeting:	Finance and General Purpose Committee
Review date:	14th April 2029 (3 yearly review)
Supersedes:	Policy for Abandoned Bikes

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1. POLICY OVERVIEW

This policy sets out how Thornbury Town Council will securely handle, store, and process lost and found property on its sites. The aim is to keep items safe and reunite them with their owners wherever possible. If items remain unclaimed, the Council will dispose of them responsibly, including donating suitable items to local reuse charities.

Larger items such as bicycles or children's scooters are occasionally found on Council land. As storage is limited, a consistent and practical approach is required. This policy considers limited space, limited staffing, and the Council's commitment to reuse and recycling.

2. DEFINITION OF LOST PROPERTY AND ABANDONED VEHICLES

2.1 'Lost property' is a broad term used to identify items that do not belong to the Council and have been left (accidentally or otherwise) in our premises or on our land. 'Lost Property' does not refer to items left in the care of officers at a venue/event for the duration of a visitor's stay, for example a pushchair.

2.2 'Lost property' also related to an item which has been reported lost in one of our venues or on our land but has not been found by or handed in to officers.

2.3 A vehicle may be considered abandoned if one or more of the following apply:

- It has no registered keeper and is untaxed (DVLA check).
- It has been stationary for a significant time (typically 7+ days).
- It is damaged, unroadworthy, burnt out, or missing parts such as number plates.
- It appears intentionally left without regard for return.

2.4 The Council is acting as a *custodian (bailee)* of items, not the owner.

3. MANAGING LOST PROPERTY

The following actions will be taken when a report of lost or found property is made:

3.1 All small items are brought to the Town Hall, where they are recorded in the Lost Property Log and a Lost Property Form is completed by the Office Administrator.

3.2 Larger items are stored at the Mundy Playing Fields. When a larger item is found, the site team will telephone the Town Hall to provide the necessary details, and a Lost Property Form will be completed accordingly.

3.2.1 All found items are kept in storage for a maximum of 3 months (see table below), or until claimed, or passed on to an appropriate organisation such as the police if required. Small items are stored at the Town Hall, while larger items are stored at the Pavilion at the Mundy Playing Fields.

3.3 The council will take reasonable steps to identify and contact the owner before disposal. In the interim storage, notifications and disposal of specific items will be managed according to the table below.

Storage, Notification and Disposal Guidance		
Type of Item	Period of Retention	Notification and Method of Disposal
Credit/Debit Cards	1 week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call the number on the back of the card, report it as found, and follow their instructions. • Do not contact the named cardholder unless you personally know them. • Securely retained and normally for up to 1 week, but may be extended where value, ownership likelihood or risk justifies it • Log the name, first 6 digits, and last 4 digits in the Lost Property Log. • After 1 week, cut the card into small, irregular pieces (including chip, strip, number, signature, security code) and dispose of the pieces in general waste, ideally across multiple bins. • Update the Lost Property Log.
Passports and Personal Identification, Driving Licence, Keys, etc	3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, contact the owner after 24 hours to ask whether they wish to claim the item or advise how the Council should dispose of it. • If the owner cannot be contacted, report the item immediately to the relevant authority (e.g. police, bank) and store it securely unless instructed otherwise. • Unless the issuer requests the item's return, any unclaimed item normally for up to 3 months, but may be extended where value, ownership likelihood or risk justifies it, should be securely destroyed and the Lost Property Log updated.
Mobile Telephones	3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the owner, if possible, to ask whether they wish to claim the phone. • If the owner cannot be contacted, store the phone securely. • Item to be securely retained and normally for up to 3 months, but may be extended where value, ownership likelihood or risk justifies it • Disposal to include destroying the SIM card, donate the phone to a mobile recycling scheme, and update the Lost Property Log.
Items of Potential or Known Value e.g. Purse, Money or Jewellery	3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the owner, if possible, to ask whether they wish to claim the goods or advise how they should be disposed of. • If the owner cannot be contacted, report the item to the police and store it securely unless advised otherwise. • Item to be securely retained and normally for up to 3 months, but may be extended where value, ownership likelihood or risk justifies it

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For disposal of purses, handbags, wallets and similar items, securely destroy all personal information before updating the Lost Property Log.
Low Value Items e.g. Clothing, Children's Toys, Single Gloves.	1 month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact the owner, if possible, to ask whether they wish to claim the goods or advise how they should be disposed of. Item to be securely retained and normally for up to 1 month, but may be extended where value, ownership likelihood or risk justifies it For disposal, donate to a Council-supported local charity, or If unsuitable, dispose of in general waste or donate to a charity shop. <p>Update the Lost Property Log.</p>
Medicine	1 month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact the owner if possible. Item to be securely retained and normally for up to 1 month, but may be extended where value, ownership likelihood or risk justifies it (unless perishable). If unclaimed, take to a pharmacy for safe disposal and update the Lost Property Log. If perishable, take to a pharmacy for disposal immediately.
Food, Perishables and Items where Hygiene is a Consideration.	1 day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dispose of same-day in general waste unless claimed. For water bottles: empty contents and follow Low-Value Items procedure.
Bikes, e-Bikes, Scooters and e-Scooters	1 month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council will remove and dispose of abandoned bikes and scooters. Items should only be treated as abandoned after reasonable efforts to identify the owner Locks and chains may be cut with no compensation provided. Item to be retained and normally for up to 1 month, but may be extended where value, ownership likelihood or risk justifies it Storage during this period may not be secure.
Abandoned Vehicle	7+ days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine whether a vehicle is abandoned, The Council will liaise with the relevant principal authority where statutory powers sit with them. <p>Officers will check for signs such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of use over an extended period - being untaxed - being declared SORN (Statutory Off-Road Notice) - being significantly unroadworthy (e.g., flat tyres, missing wheels) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If deemed abandoned, officers will attempt to contact the owner. If no contact can be made with the owner, a 15-day notice will be placed on the vehicle. The police will also be notified to confirm whether the vehicle has been involved in any criminal activity. After this period, arrangements will be made to remove the vehicle from site.

4. LOST PROPERTY LOG

Thornbury Town Council keeps a lost property log for recording the following details:

- Description of the item
- Location where the item was lost/mislaid/found/abandoned
- Date the item was lost/mislaid/found/deemed to be abandoned
- Details of any notification issued (e.g. to Police, owner)
- Location of item while being stored
- Name and details of claimant
- Signature of owner for receipt of goods
- Note of whether the owner's identification was checked upon handover
- Date the item was claimed or handed over to a Charity, the Police or otherwise disposed of.

5. RECLAIMING LOST PROPERTY

Any person reclaiming property will be asked for information about the item. If appropriate, they must show their ID card or other photographic identification prior to the item being returned. When an owner reclaims an item, the Lost Property Log should be updated, and the claimant should sign the Lost Property Log to show they have received it.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY:

6.1 Items with no significant value will be disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner.

6.1.1 **Recycling:** Items that can be recycled will be processed through appropriate recycling channels to minimise environmental impact.

6.1.2 **Landfill:** Items that cannot be recycled will be disposed of in landfill, ensuring compliance with local environmental regulations

6.1.3 **Special Disposal Programmes:** For items that require special handling (e.g. electronics, batteries) The Town Council will utilise designated disposal programmes to ensure safe and environmentally friendly disposal.

6.1.4 **Partnerships:** The Town Council will seek partnerships with local environmental organisations to enhance the effectiveness of its disposal efforts and promote sustainability within the community

7. POLICY CLARITY: CLASSIFICATION, AUTHORITY AND DISPOSAL OF VALUABLE ITEMS

7.1 Definition of Valuable Items

For the purposes of this policy, an item shall be considered "valuable" where it has:

- A reasonable resale or replacement value (typically estimated at £50 or above, unless otherwise determined by the Council), or
- Evidential, historical, or cultural significance, or
- A likelihood of being subject to ownership claims due to its nature (e.g. electronics, jewellery, tools, or identifiable personal effects).

The Council reserves the right to exercise discretion in determining value based on condition, market context, and recoverability.

7.2 Assessment and Classification

All found or abandoned items must be assessed at the point of intake and classified as either:

- Low value (no significant resale or recovery value), or
- Valuable (meeting one or more of the criteria above)

The classification decision must be:

- Recorded in the Lost Property Log
- Supported by a brief rationale
- Reviewed by a second officer where the item is borderline or potentially high value

7.3 Authorisation and Decision-Making

Decisions relating to the retention and disposal of valuable items must be formally authorised as follows:

- Initial classification: Administrator
- Disposal decision: CEO, Deputy Clerk or Facilities Officer
- Any deviation from standard disposal routes (e.g. retention for Council use):
Requires documented managerial approval with justification from Full Council.

No single officer should have sole control over the classification, storage, and disposal of high-value items without appropriate oversight.

7.4 Approved Disposal Routes for Valuable Items

The council will take reasonable steps to identify the owner.

Where items are of significant value, consideration should be given to police notification and/or extended retention.

Where a valuable item remains unclaimed after the prescribed retention period, disposal must be undertaken using one of the following approved methods:

- a) Sale

- Items should normally be sold via public auction, competitive resale platforms, or other transparent methods
- Sale must aim to achieve best reasonable value
- Details of the sale (method, date, price) must be recorded

b) Donation

- Items may be donated to registered charities or community organisations where sale is not proportionate or appropriate
- The receiving organisation must be recorded

c) Retention for Council Use

The retention for Council use is only permitted where:

- no owner has been identified after reasonable efforts
- there is a clear operational need
- the decision is formally recorded with justification

d) Destruction

- Destruction of valuable items should only occur where:
 - The item is unsafe, illegal, or unfit for use, or
 - Data protection or legal considerations require it
- Reasons for destruction must be clearly documented

7.5 Handling of Proceeds

Any income generated from the sale of unclaimed valuable items must:

- Be paid into the Council's accounts in accordance with financial regulations
- Be appropriately coded and recorded for audit purposes
- Not be retained by individual officers under any circumstances

7.6 Audit and Record-Keeping Requirements

A complete audit trail must be maintained for all valuable items, including:

- Date and location found
- Description and assessed value
- Actions taken to identify the owner
- Storage arrangements and access records
- Final disposal method and authorisation

Records must be retained in line with the Council's records management policy and be available for internal and external audit.

7.7 Data Protection Compliance

Prior to disposal (including sale or donation), all valuable items must be checked for personal data.

- Any personal or sensitive data must be securely removed or destroyed in accordance with data protection legislation
- A record of data sanitisation or destruction must be made where applicable

8. DOCUMENT RETENTION AND LEGAL COMPLIANCE

8.1 Retention of Records

All records relating to lost or abandoned property, including Lost Property Logs, claim forms, correspondence, valuation records, and disposal documentation, shall be retained for a minimum period of six years from the date the case is closed (i.e. when the item is returned, disposed of, or otherwise resolved).

Where a case involves a dispute, claim, high-value item, or other elevated risk, records shall be retained for six years from the date of final resolution, or longer where required by law or the Council's records management policies. Retention periods may be extended for legal, insurance or audit purposes

8.2 Legal and Regulatory Compliance

Record retention and handling under this policy shall comply with all relevant legislation and guidance, including:

- Limitation Act 1980 (regarding time limits for potential claims)
- UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (regarding the lawful processing, storage, and disposal of personal data)
- Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (regarding financial accountability and audit requirements)

The Council shall ensure that personal data is processed in accordance with the Data Protection Policy

LOST PROPERTY – ITEM FOUND ON THORNBURY TOWN COUNCIL PROPERTY

Section one:

Item description: (What is the item? Colour? Size? identifying marks?)
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Location found:

<input type="checkbox"/> Mundy Playing fields	<input type="checkbox"/> Chantry Playing Fields	<input type="checkbox"/> Streamleaze Play Area
<input type="checkbox"/> Chantry Playground	<input type="checkbox"/> Eastland Road Play Area	<input type="checkbox"/> Osprey Park Play Area
<input type="checkbox"/> Skate Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Town Hall	

Date and time: _____

Found by: _____

Form completed by: _____

Reference number: Year: _____ **Number on lost property log:** _____

Location held:

<input type="checkbox"/> Mundy Playing fields	<input type="checkbox"/> Town Hall
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Additional notes: _____

Section two: To be completed upon claim of item

Name of claimant: _____

Address: _____

Signature: _____

Date and time: _____

**LOST PROPERTY - ITEM REPORTED LOST ON THORNBURY TOWN COUNCIL
PROPERTY**

Item description:

(What is the item? Colour? Size? identifying marks?)

Location lost: _____

Date and time: _____

Name of owner: _____

Contact details: _____

Additional notes: _____

LOST PROPERTY LOG – THORNBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Reference number	Date found	Description of item	Location		Location of item while being stored	Status		Date		
			Lost	Found		Claimed	Unclaimed	Charity	Police	Disposed of