

Annual Report 2023/24

COUNCILLOR SALLY POVOLOTSKY

**Oxfordshire County Councillor
Hendreds & Harwell Division**

2023/24 Annual Report

What's been happening

The biggest change to the division in the period was the **Electoral Commission review**, which confirms that Hendreds & Harwell is one of the largest and growing divisions in Oxfordshire and as such in 2025 electoral year it will be split into 3, so 3 councilors will represent the area, and it combines / splits out with other areas...

1. Harwell, Western Valley – becomes one division
2. Charlton, Kingsgrove, Ardington & Lockinge, East and West Hendred, Chilton, Upton and Blewbury is another
3. And finally Steventon groups with Drayton, Sutton Courtney and Milton parishes for the final division.

As many of you will know, I have an ever-increasing workload and now you can see why. The reality has been I simply just haven't had enough time to do everything, and I have always prioritized Casework and individual needs as well as emergencies and large pending issues, sometimes over attending Parish Council meetings. I hope you will see that this is because our residents really matter, even though many of these are confidential matters I cannot discuss. I appreciate your understanding and am and have always been available rapidly by phone / text.

It wont surprise you to know I haven't been serving you all quietly, but I have had a major blip this first part of 2024, firstly a fire at a property we rent for my partners art and my pottery and we had to move out, and I have had whooping cough and am still getting better, 3 months later, just need less rain and mud. Meanwhile I will keep asking the questions no one else wants to ask and serving you the best I can. I have taken a break from Facebook for a while, as just find its overwhelming and not good for my headspace.

Another change was in **December 2023 I left the Group**, the administration group, of Liberal Democrats and continue to sit on OCC as an Independent. My frustration with poor decision making, strategy and direction was long voiced inside the group and I tried to influence where I could, but it was clear the voices of my residents and our rural communities were falling on deaf ears, especially around transport, roads and our

most vulnerable. **I am now the Leader of TIVOO – The Independent Voice of Oxfordshire**, and will continue to represent in an open and transparent way. I have realized that politics doesn't help anyone, and we need more voices that are just about the right thing for our residents and not about getting reelected or political point scoring.

“Helping one person might not change the whole world, but it could change the world for one person”

This May sees elections for the Police and Crime Commissioner. We have tried on several times in the division to get some actions on...

- *Speeding and poor driver behaviours*
- *On street parking, blocking access for active travel users*
- *Anti Social Behaviours*
- *More police presence / preventative policing.*

Please think about your community and who best can represent your views when you vote this may and please remember voter ID. This is a huge role, and also pays a huge amount of money for the individual, the website says £88,600 for PCC in Thames Valley!

Roads – we have had a long battle around the HIF1 infrastructure and its now in Public Inquiry. I have represented public views at the hearing and we expect an outcome end of the Summer 2024. HIF1 is a new proposed road from Western Valley / Valley Park to Culham, with bridges / fly overs. We all know the local congestion and flooding issues and this scheme is funded by government as part of the Tory led growth deal, which resulted in the huge number of new homes in the locality. More info when I get it! You

can watch the inquiry here - <https://www.youtube.com/@HIF1Didcot> – I spoke on Day 2 (first speaker).

Budgets – I am afraid I didn't agree with the new OCC budget and the final deal done with Labour and the Lib Dem Green administration. I had no issues with the administrations budget, but once again Labour came in with fantasy spends on feasibility studies and cuts in real time costs to Adult Social care. Its hugely disappointing after a nearly 10 hour meeting, that the ideas of all groups were not considered, **all** the main parties had some brilliant options for the residents of Oxfordshire, but as always politics is a horrid game which doesn't put people first! I voted against the final budget.

Children – I have worked closely since September 2022 with parents, carers and users of Oxfordshire's SEND services (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and now sit on the new EYP (Education and Young Persons) Scrutiny Committee. In September 2023 Oxfordshire failed its Ofsted on SEND alongside the Health Authority (as there's joined services between health and education). I continue to voice concerns at all levels and support some of our families in the division on a daily basis. It's a hugely complex area and once again plenty of government failings, but, there is plenty of issues inside OCC and with a new Director of service we are starting to see some rapid changes, although not rapid enough for many of our families with complex needs.

SESRO – we continue our fight and I continue to voice concerns at the highest levels, this could be a report in its own right. I recently spoke at the Clay Compaction Trial planning application which was called into Planning Committee and was very disappointed by the material planning considerations by the committee members, and it was passed pending county archology recommendations due to a find. Thames Water continue to pollute the Letcombe and Ginge brooks and frankly are leaving our infrastructure to crumble. I have written to the Secretary of State to call for a Public Inquiry into the Thames Water Management Plan and got a cut and paste reply, and similarly continue to call for the MP, David Johnston, to meet with local residents, neither are coming to fruition. I promise to keep trying and keep SESRO on the agenda at OCC, where the council remains in staunch objection.

Flooding – We have and continue to suffer from freak weather events, and this has had a continued impact on Steventon especially. In January 2024 after Storm Henk, I organized a public meeting and we formed a Community flood group. Things continue to build and I couldn't be prouder of what the parish is achieving and the number of volunteers taking the reins. We have more to do, but we have a foundation and have met with the Environment Agency and councils around remits and working together, funnily enough Thames Water have been late to the table and lack lustre, despite the amount of human effluent we have had in homes, gardens and streets.

Citizenship – I am a big believer that we are the answer to most of the worlds problems and that the system is broken beyond repair. I am hugely proud of being a part of helping some set up (and volunteering* when I can at...)

1. Roots & Shoots Steventon – Community café and allotment
2. HEG Community Larder and Café – East Hendred
3. Harwelcome – Harwellian (Harwell) – and a special thanks to ex Cllr Sarah Medley for all her hard work and Debbie G!
4. Hendred Community Cinema nights
5. Upton Community events – well done Nicola for all you and the teams hard work!
6. The Chiton Market is making its appearance again, and is always a wonder on the triangle!

I really want to know what's going on in your parishes, so please do let me know, and if I can be of any assistance.

Councillor Priority Fund – this sadly looks like its coming to an end, which is a tragedy, as it's the only lever we have to help, as councilors, small groups, I do have some funding left, and will share my spending soon, so far an Accessible Trampoline in Chilton, Mental Health First Aider training for teachers in the division, Compost Toilet for Parkinson.me in Ardington, West Hendred Village Hall – hire costs for small groups and Set up costs for Steventon Community Flood Group. Do chat with me, I have allowed some money for Toad Ladders too for Ardington Toad Patrol.

Steventon Bridge – yet another failure of multiple agency ownership / operation, the last correspondence I got from chasing up works (remember we have had a channel now since Dec 2021), was as follows; ‘ *The design of the proposed repairs is largely completed, but the works programme is down to the available possessions and Milestone our term Consultant/Contractor have been struggling to get a response from Network Rail. Milestone are seeking a response again from Network Rail, before escalating through the County Council to try and get a response. If only Network Rail rules of the route possessions are available, i.e. Saturday night into Sunday mornings, then it is expected that 25 of these possessions will be required to complete the work. The works are desired to start this summer, however even rules of the route possessions generally need to be booked at least 16 weeks in advance. It is hoped that we can carryout the work on the back of longer planned possessions by Network Rail, such that far fewer rules of the route possessions will be required. To book our own longer possessions, Network Rail typically require 2 years notice, with weekend long possessions typically costing around £300,000. There are also likely to be complications over the Public Liability Insurance requirements for these works, for which the Council and our contractors are normally required to have £10m insurance cover, but Network Rail are likely to seek higher cover in this instance, which will add significant cost and complications which may also delay the programme. i.e. for other planned works Network Rail are requiring £150m PLI insurance which is costing an extra £380,000. The proposed works to Steventon bridge are probably higher risk to Network Rail than these other works, for which a suitable PLI limit, which primarily relates to risk of disrupting train operators still needs to be agreed.*”

I can provide you with a more definitive update once a suitable response from Network Rail has been obtained.

If you are reading this in the same vein that I am, this is utterly bonkers especially given the last line access, that Network Rail arrived late, and the team got barely a few hours work done. Its just another shambles of private v’s public operating.

Highways – we have several schemes we are waiting on consultation, including the West Hendred crossing, which is stalled. I am trying to find out why, appears it’s the Milestone contractor and further tree surveys.... I am pushing weekly. Blewbury, pending again more safety reviews of Bessel’s Way and London Road / A417 for crossing for children, I will keep asking, the new way we are supposed to communicate with Highways isn’t working in my opinion and I am pleased to see Cllr Waine has put a question to council for tomorrow saying exactly this (April Full Council).

POTHoles – you may have seen the notice that OCC budgeted an extra £7m and this is being rolled out now. <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/7-million-road-resurfacing-programme-to-begin-next-month/>

I have been impressed that what we really need is the Land Rental and also we need more foremen and people who inspect the Highway after permits have been issued, as contractors and utility companies leave things in a mess!

Active Travel - Finally you may already be aware of this, and if it is of interest, colleagues in our Active Travel team host a monthly Active Travel Roundtable which is open to all. The meeting is intended for those interested in walking, cycling and wheeling across Oxfordshire - to share news, spark debates and foster collaboration between residents, officers and councillors. To be included in the Teams invitation for these sessions, please email Isabela.Cull@Oxfordshire.gov.uk.

We have completed the Upton cycle project and crossing and am in constant debate about the Icknield way. Also the Steventon Active Travel up to the lights and down to Milton Interchange will be completed by end of 2024.

Full Council and motions – I have pitched many motions and seconded a fair few in the last 12 months, in fact tomorrow (16th April) I am seconding and proposing motions, one on removal of community beds post hospital care and the other around the voice of the young person in SEND improvement. I have posted questions from the Steventon Bridge to Lack of transparency and openness.

Didcot Healthcare / GWP Medical Centre – I am sure Debra and Hayleigh will have updated as much of this sits with the District, but I am 1) appalled that CIL money has been committed without a public say so, or even the parishes, towards a gap in funding, and effectively to pay a developer to do their job...(and they will own and lease the building to the healthcare service so they will make ££) and that 2) I have been trying to get the CEO of the ICB to meet with Upton / Harwell and Western Valley parishes but they think the microsite is enough to answer all our questions, I have pushed back! **Here is the ICB microsite** -

<https://www.bucksoxonberks.w.uk/our-places/great-western-park-didcot-gp-services/>

OALC – I am the Oxfordshire CC representative, and I am really excited about the Town and Parish Charter, and what this can mean to support local councilors, I am concerned through that Vale of White Horse seems to have direction from their leader not to support, which is of a great concern.

Smoke Free Oxfordshire – I am a huge supporter of this, as an Ex Smoker, have a read....<https://www.oalc.org.uk/local-news>

Urgent from OCC

Travel focus group participants needed

We want to know how residents feel about travel in Oxfordshire. We're inviting residents to take part in various online and in-person discussion groups and we're offering a £50 voucher to say thank you for taking part (terms and conditions apply). People can sign up for the following groups on Let's talk Oxfordshire: young people aged 18 - 24 years; families; adults aged 65+ years; commuters; and businesses.

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/travel-focus-groups>

Including Everyone 2024 - 28. We're refreshing our equalities, diversity and inclusion framework, known as 'Including Everyone'. The framework will set out our vision and priorities to work towards to achieve our goals. To help steer our direction, we want to hear about residents' experiences and what they think it's most important for us to work on. The survey on Let's talk Oxfordshire is live until Tuesday 30 April.

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/including-everyone-2024>

For now, its my honor to serve you and I will hopefully see you all soon!

Cllr Sally Povolotsky FRSA

Hendreds and Harwell division

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