



Monday 11th December 2023

Monthly Parish Update

Vale of White Horse District Councillors

Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and

Cllr Debra Dewhurst

Hello from Hayleigh and Debra

As we head towards Christmas, this will be our last update of the year. It's been a busy end to the year for us. This month the VoWHDC has been finalising the 'preferred options' for our Joint Local Plan with South Oxfordshire District Council. The Joint Local Plan will guide the kinds of new housing and jobs needed and where they should go, informing planning application decisions for the districts. Consultation on the preferred options will open in the near year for residents and parish councils to comment on.

We know residents are very concerned about healthcare locally, as are we. This month Debra spoke at the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting to raise the issue of healthcare provision in and around the Didcot area. She also challenged Dan Leveson, the Place Director for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) to give reassurances that the health centre planned for Great Western Park (GWP) will be built and asked him what is causing the delay. We are currently awaiting a response from Mr Leveson in writing and will share that when we have it.

We also raised the issue of dangerous parking around Costa and the other shops on Greenwood Way on GWP, with Thames Valley Police (TVP). Cars are being parked on the pavements reducing visibility, which could lead to an accident but the situation is made all the more complicated because the roads are yet to be adopted. Chief Constable Jason Hogg kindly suggested a meeting between TVP and Western Valley Parish Council to see how this issue can be tackled, which we hope to set up in the new year.

Whether you are celebrating Christmas or just taking a break, we wish you and your families an enjoyable and restful festive period. We hope that you can spend much-needed time with your loved ones, and we wish you happiness and good health for the new year ahead.

Merry Christmas!

As always, if you have any questions or suggestions for us as councillors, please do email us. As a reminder, council meetings are held in public and if you wish to address council or committee, you can contact Democratic Services ahead of time. If you need more guidance on this, please let us know!

We use these monthly updates to keep you updated on our activities and general council news. We also post on our councillor Facebook Pages:

www.facebook.com/CllrHayleigh & www.facebook.com/Debra4BlewburyAndHarwell

Please get in touch with any issues or concerns via email

hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk and debra.dewhurst@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Community Support

[Further support for new families who contributed to the UK's military operations in Afghanistan](#)

In addition to the Vale of White Horse District Council's [recently announced*](#) support for Afghan families, The Ministry of Defence is providing short term temporary homes in the Vale of White Horse for a number of new families arriving directly from overseas who have supported the UK's military operations in Afghanistan.

Change to Household Support Fund 4 - referral scheme opening soon

Support will soon be available again for residents finding it hard to cope with the rising cost of food and energy bills when the Household Support Fund reopens, but note that **the process has changed**.

The fund is available to all eligible households including residents who have previously received funds through the scheme. Previously residents could apply directly to the scheme, this time local organisations already supporting a South/Vale resident **submit a referral** to our Community Hub on the resident's behalf.

We've changed the approach to help a wider range of agencies refer residents. It also complements the help available through [Oxfordshire County Councils Resident Support Scheme](#) and the wider package of support that has been offered by central government.

The fund closes on **31 March 2024**, or sooner if it is fully allocated.

For more information contact our Community Hub team 01235 422600, email communityconnectors@southandvale.gov.uk

Community Hub

The Hub can offer support and direct people to help on a range of things including Cost of Living, food support, etc. If you are struggling financially or just finding life difficult, the community hub can help. Whether it's practical support or just advice, please get in touch:

- **Call:** 01235 422600
- **Email:** communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

The office hours are 8.30am - 5pm Mon to Thurs, 8.30am-4.30pm on Fri (and closed on bank holidays).

Community Payback (Unpaid Work) Scheme

What is the Community Payback Scheme: Community Payback is where offenders work on projects to pay back the community for their crimes, for example by:

- removing graffiti
- clearing wasteland
- decorating a community centre

The work must:

- benefit the local community
- not take paid work away from others
- not make a profit for anyone

How VoWH District Council can help: The Community Safety team, working together with HM Prison and Probation Service, can provide support and coordination for using unpaid work in community projects being run by any of our district, parish, or town councils within South and Vale.

How to refer a project: Projects should be referred using the referral form that can be downloaded here or by clicking the button below. The form is to be completed by a member or officer from any of our district, parish, or town councils within South and Vale. The completed referral form should be sent to communitysafety@southandvale.gov.uk.

Local News

Valley Park Update

This section of our report provides an overview of the current live planning applications for Valley Park. There are often several live applications relating to the development, however those labelled 'RM' i.e. 'Reserved Matters' are typically the most noteworthy as they request planning permission for specific parcels of housing on the development. Residents and parish councils can provide comments on these applications during the consultation period. Officers look at these comments and (where considered relevant to planning matters) seek to address them with the developers. Applications labelled as 'DIS' i.e. 'Discharge' relate to specific conditions from the outline planning permission and are not usually open for public consultation. The current live planning applications for Valley Park are listed below along with an update on the status of each provided by the Vale planning officers.

It is likely that both Taylor Wimpey and Persimmon will submit planning applications for more parcels of homes early in the New Year.

Applications Under Consideration

P22/V2744/RM – 246 dwellings – Taylor Wimpey first housing parcel

Revised plans were received in November 2023 and are currently subject to consultation which ends on 7 December 2023. Officers need to review the amendments and responses that have and may be received. As mentioned previously, parts of this parcel of land are in flood zones 2 and 3 and therefore, could be susceptible to fluvial flooding. Condition 36 of the outline planning permission excludes built development from flood zones 2 and 3 but the plans including the latest amendments, show housing in these areas which is not acceptable. Taylor Wimpey submitted flood modelling to the Environment Agency in September 2023 seeking to demonstrate that flooding is not an issue on site and that the Environment Agency's flood maps should be revised to categorise the site as flood zone 1 which is an acceptable location for housing. The Environment Agency has not accepted the flood modelling and Taylor Wimpey has now submitted further flood modelling to the Environment Agency and their response is awaited.

P22/V0604/RM – infrastructure for Persimmon and Taylor Wimpey first housing parcels

Following planning officer feedback to the applicants on the August 2023 amended plans, a new set of amended plans has been received today (1 December). These will be added to the file in the next few days and relevant consultation undertaken.

P22/V2624/DIS – Surface and foul water drainage

No change - This application has not progressed since the last updates i.e. we have requested cross sections for the proposed swales and attenuation basins and asked the applicant to address the Vale drainage engineer comments together with demonstrating that the drainage scheme can be accommodated with other proposed infrastructure e.g. footways and cycle ways and meet the Strategic Design Code expectations. This application is also held up as it overlaps with the two RM applications above.

P23/V0659/DIS – approval of details reserved by of condition 33 - Travel Plan

No change - OCC as highway authority responded to our consultation and are seeking amendments to the travel plan which were put to the applicants in May 2023 for consideration but no response has been forthcoming to date.

P23/V2247/DIS – application seeking approval of water course crossings – condition 28 of the outline planning permission

Following planning officer review of this application and discussion with our ecologist, it is unlikely that the proposal to provide box culverts to bridge watercourses is acceptable owing to the impact on habitat and wildlife movement along watercourses. The application is likely to be refused shortly.

Great Western Park update

Public spaces on Great Western Park

We are pleased to update everyone on the progress towards opening more public spaces on Great Western Park (GWP), including play parks and allotments.

Over the last two months we have continued to have some very constructive conversations with Taylor Wimpey, the housing developer for GWP. There are 40 remaining public space sites – which range from very small pieces of land to larger open spaces and we have agreed on 15 priority sites to focus on (which includes the skate park, play parks and allotments).

This will help us to focus attention on opening and operating these priority areas as soon as possible. We have already worked with Taylor Wimpey to open some sites prior to their official transfer to us because we know how valuable they are to the local community. This includes Diamond Drive playground (in between Diamond Drive and Hornsby Fields) and Aspen Way playground. This means all the play areas with playground equipment are now open (although we are advised a few play items are currently fenced off waiting for parts).

As part of the site transfer process between Taylor Wimpey and the councils, there is still work that needs to take place – all of which will take some time. Essentially, we need to iron out any issues, carry out all our due diligence checks and make sure Taylor Wimpey complete any outstanding issues before we take ownership. This process includes a period when Taylor Wimpey is responsible for maintaining the site to make sure all issues are sorted, which can take at least 12 months. Taylor Wimpey's latest timetable is for 11 sites to reach 'practical completion' in the next three months – this means we are satisfied that any outstanding issues will be resolved before we take ownership. Four sites have already reached this stage and should transfer to us in the first three months of 2024. The 11 sites due to achieve practical completion in early 2024 will hopefully transfer to us in early 2025.

The remaining 25 areas are at various stages of the process and will be picked up in mid-2024 following completion of the 15 priority sites.

The councils are working on a map that will show the location of and progress against each area, which we aim to share with future updates.

GWP health centre

You'll be aware, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) is responsible for healthcare services in Oxfordshire. We've updated you previously on how we've been working incredibly hard over the past few years to help overcome a series of challenges that have meant the ICB isn't immediately able to bring forward a health centre on Great Western Park.

In terms of what we as councils can influence, we are currently working with Taylor Wimpey on measures to take transfer of the site.

Once the site is transferred to us, we will enter into an agreement for lease with the Woodland Medical Centre's third-party primary care developer who will develop the facility (upon grant of planning permission) and then lease it to Woodlands Medical Centre.

The ICB also continues to work with Woodlands Medical Centre to expand their current facility at Woodlands Road in Didcot.

Over the coming months we'll keep the community updated on all the hard work we're doing to try and help our partners deliver the services that Great Western Park and Didcot badly need.

Climate & Environment News

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

Meeting, chaired by Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne, was held on Thursday 7th December. The [agenda](#) is on the Vale website. You can watch the meeting back (like all of our public meetings) by heading to the [YouTube](#) channel.

Highlights of the meeting included hearing about the efforts to decarbonise our leisure centres – one of the largest contributors to the Council's own emissions. Over 72 per cent reduction of kWh consumption will have been achieved by 31 March 2025 (compared to the 2019/2020 baseline) through the delivery of larger projects. More on the smaller projects later in the report (destratification!). There was also a report from our Climate Team on how we are supporting home retrofit activities – a key activity on the road to net zero.

Understanding the Net-Zero Challenge for local SMEs

South and Vale have partnered with Oxford Brookes Business School to help build our understanding of the challenges faced by local SMEs in becoming more environmentally sustainable. Funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the study will lead to creation of a programme of decarbonisation and sustainability support for businesses in our districts. This work will also help us to support businesses with the current cost of energy crisis, establishing support to may help to improve energy efficiency and reduce costs. [You can complete the survey by following this link.](#)

Join the fight against festive food waste – put your knowledge to the test and you could win a £100 farm shop voucher!

Residents in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse are being challenged to put their knowledge of food waste to the test and be in with the chance of winning a voucher worth £100 for a local farm shop and a hamper containing items to help reduce their waste!

Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

This summer (2023), the government named Oxfordshire County Council as a 'responsible authority' to drive nature recovery in the county through a [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#). Both of our councils are 'supporting authorities' along with Natural England and West Oxfordshire, Cherwell the city council. The county council has a new webpage introducing [Oxfordshire's LNRS](#) where they explain how they are preparing the strategy through engagement and consultations with a wide range of audiences to agree on species and habitats and how they can be supported.

We're looking to help local businesses become more sustainable

We've launched a survey to understand the challenges for local business to become more sustainable. Working with Oxford Brookes University and funded through the UK Share Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) ([South/Vale](#)) the study aims to create a programme of decarbonisation and sustainability support for businesses in our districts. This work will also help us to support businesses with the current cost of energy crisis. [The sustainable business survey is here.](#) It takes around 15 minutes to complete, and feedback is helpful to make sure we can provide the right kind of support to help local businesses grow sustainably.

Leisure centres install fan-tastic new energy saving measures

New measures at the Didcot centre follow a similar installation at the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre, in Abingdon in the Vale of White Horse district in June this year.

The council has just completed the installation of 11 destratification fans at the centre. These are designed to stabilise the temperature at the pool by deflecting hot air, which has risen to top of the high roof, back down to the lower area where the pool users are.

Before the fans were installed, the pool's heating system had to work harder to maintain a comfortable temperature for swimmers at pool level, while the heated air naturally rose to the highest point in the building and heat was then lost through the roof.

Council News

[Preparation underway for next stage of Joint Local Plan](#)

Innovative new planning policies to help two Oxfordshire districts reach their full potential and address challenges they face, are on the local agenda – and you'll soon be able to have your say. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are preparing to launch a second round of consultation early next year to develop their new Joint Local Plan to 2041.

The Joint Local Plan will help the councils determine planning applications, set out how and where new housing developments should take place, set standards for developments such as carbon and energy efficiency requirements, and guide what infrastructure is needed across the districts.

[Free parking days offered this December to help local shoppers and businesses](#)

Starting on 2 December and running until 23 December, free car parking is being provided at various sites in Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage, by the Vale of White Horse District Council, to encourage people to visit their independent shops for Christmas gifts to help support local businesses.

Drivers will be able to park for free in local car parks on these following Saturdays:

- Abingdon: 2, 9 and 16 December
- Faringdon: 2, 9 and 16 December
- Wantage: 9, 16 and 23 December

[Celebrate family and friendship at Cornerstone this Christmas](#)

Get ready to be swept away by the enchanting magic of Lyngo Theatre's Heart of Winter this December at Cornerstone Arts Centre Didcot. Heart of Winter is a new musical show which warmly celebrates family, friendship and the good fortune of finding the winter we really need and want.

[Council services over Christmas and New Year 2023/24](#)

A guide to council services over the Christmas and New Year period when the council offices are closed to the public.

Abbey House – Reception will close at Abbey House from 4.30pm on Friday 22 December 2023 and will reopen on Tuesday 2 January 2024.

Waste collections – all you need to know about waste collections over the Christmas and New Year period – including the changes to the collection dates and what to do if collections are disrupted – is on our [Vale Christmas waste page](#).

Housing – If you know anyone who is at immediate risk of being made homeless while our offices are closed, contact our out-of-hours service, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The number to call is 01235 422420. If you see someone sleeping rough and in an emergency situation you can call Streetlink on 0300 500 0914.

Cost of living help – The Community Hub will be closed from 4.30pm on Friday 22 December 2023 and will reopen on Tuesday 2 January 2024 at 8.30am. If you need support or advice over the festive period please [go to our Cost of living help pages for more information](#) or please contact our emergency out of hours phone number – 01235 422420.

Planning – Any planning applications or post submitted/received after 4.30pm on 22 December 2023, including electronic submissions, will be treated as having been received on our next working day, Tuesday 2 January 2024.

Council tax and benefits services – If anyone needs urgent help with council tax or benefits during the holidays, Capita's phone lines will be open as usual between 27 and 29 December.

Emergency Situations – There are details of what to do and who to contact during an emergency on our websites – [Emergency situations Vale](#)

Leisure Centres and Warm Spaces – over the Christmas period there will be changes to the opening times of our Better Leisure Centres, please check via the [Better UK website](#) or with staff at your local centre for details.

Our Leisure Centres are also open as [Warm Spaces](#) this winter from 9am to 2pm Monday to Friday. Pop in and charge your phone, have a hot drink and chat with others.