

**Hello from Hayleigh & Sarah**  
**Coronavirus Update from your Local District Councillors**  
**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

Hello! It's hard to believe we have already been in lockdown for over a month now. Although this continues to be a tough and unprecedented situation for everyone, it has been wonderful to see how all the residents in our communities have been looking out for one another and keeping spirits up. On the local Facebook groups it has been great to see neighbours donating plants and surplus supplies to one another, sharing tips on which small local businesses to buy from, and Chilton has even been doing weekly fancy dress when they put their bins out! Meanwhile, the fantastic volunteer support groups have been continuing to help people with food shopping, medicine delivery and other essential tasks. The council has had encouraging reports from these voluntary and community groups that they are feeling confident and able to provide ongoing support to the people that need it, and that they generally have plenty of volunteers to sustain their operations. Well done and thank you to all the hard-working volunteers in our local groups: Blewbury Good Neighbours, Harwell Helpers, Chilton Mutual Aid, Great Western Park Community Support and the Upton village WhatsApp group.

**For the most up-to-date information on how the district council's services are affected, please take a look at the dedicated Vale webpage for updates: [www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/covid19](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/covid19)**

**Remember the simple message: Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives.**



### **Community Support Update**

**If you or someone you know has been identified as extremely vulnerable by the NHS and have nobody around to help with day to day tasks like shopping, please call 01865 897820 or email [shield@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:shield@oxfordshire.gov.uk).**

**Anyone in this situation that is not considered high risk can call 01235 422600 or email [communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk)**

These support lines are open 8.30am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm on Saturday and Sundays.

The Community Support Team at the Vale have also been working incredibly hard to respond to requests for help and match these up with local volunteer groups and support services. They have reported the following encouraging stats:

- We have now referred over 452 residents to our network of volunteers across South Oxfordshire and the Vale since the Community Support service began less than a month ago.
- We've also called over 537 residents on the shielded list to check if they needed additional or ongoing support.
- Food remains the main area people require support. Last week we provided 37 food parcels to residents of both districts that had nobody else to turn to and where we weren't able to immediately refer them to a volunteer group.
- This takes the total number of food parcels to 67 food parcels since launching the service, which has helped to feed 74 Adults and 22 children.

## Waste Collections

### Bulky waste collection service re-opened

The Vale of White Horse District Council has re-opened its paid-for bulky waste collection service for large household items. This service was temporarily stopped to allow the councils' waste contractor, Biffa, to prioritise the important kerbside household collections while members of their waste collection crews were off sick or self-isolating. Biffa has now built up sufficient resilience in its workforce and can now provide the paid-for service again. The situation is being regularly monitored and residents should be aware that if staffing levels fall the service may need to be suspended again.

- Bulky waste collection is a paid-for service costing £40 for up to three items - and £8 per additional item, up to a maximum of six items.
- As the council offices are currently closed to the public, at this time we can only take orders online using credit or debit cards for payment:
- The council cannot collect any type of commercial waste or DIY waste.
- Examples of items collected: furniture (such as sofas, chairs, and tables), televisions, washing machines, mattresses, fridges and freezers – household only (not ones made for commercial use).
- Residents can put out extra recycling that can't fit in the bin if it's left in a cardboard box or in a clear bag next to the green bin.
- Food waste is collected very week, again if there is too much for the bin then residents can leave extra in a bag on top of the food waste bin.

With household waste recycling centres still closed, there are clearly fewer places to dispose of unwanted items that do not fit into kerbside collections. However, the councils have issued a warning to anybody tempted to fly-tip - this includes leaving rubbish next to litter bins – that they will investigate and prosecute anyone found to be responsible.

To book a collection please visit <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/your-recycling-and-waste-collections/bulky-household>

### Garden Waste service now open to new customers

The Vale of White Horse district council has reopened its paid-for garden waste service to new customers, after a temporary suspension of taking on new customers due to members of the Biffa waste collection crews being off sick or self-isolating. Biffa has now built up sufficient resilience in its workforce to enable new customers to join.

- The service costs £49 per year and is an annual subscription paid by direct debit.
- As the council offices are currently closed to the public, at this time we can only take subscriptions online.
- The service will also take extra garden waste (equivalent of another brown bin eg three bin bags) on the week of 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> May.

For more details see the garden waste pages: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/garden-waste>

Alternatively, you can try the following tips to reduce your garden waste:

- **Grasscycling:** This is the natural recycling of grass by leaving clippings on the lawn when mowing. Grass clippings contain moisture, valuable nutrients, and decompose quickly. Grasscycling saves time and money and helps the environment. Mowing time is reduced since bagging and disposal of clippings is eliminated. Grass clippings add valuable nutrients and organic matter to the soil and produce healthy, green lawns.
- **Composting:** Build a compost heap or buy a compost bin online and compost your garden waste. More information can be found at [Recycle Now website](#) or [Oxfordshire County Council site](#)

## Council Tax

Where possible, you should continue to pay your bills as normal. Residents who are currently not being paid, and are struggling to pay their council tax bill, are encouraged to apply for Council Tax Reduction – their account will then be put on hold for 30 days while their application is processed: [whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ctrs](http://whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ctrs)

## Business Support

Businesses in the Vale of White Horse that are yet to submit their details for grant support in response to COVID-19 are being urged to do so as soon as possible via the form on the website:

[whitehorsedc.gov.uk/businessrates](http://whitehorsedc.gov.uk/businessrates)

Those businesses who have already applied and are eligible for support will receive their grant money by 30 April. Please note the following:

- Businesses receiving Small Business Rates Relief or Rural Rates Relief who wish to receive grants of £10,000 are required to provide information via the form on their respective council website. Awards will be considered in accordance with government guidelines.
- Businesses which are in receipt of the Enhanced Retail Discount for 2020/21 and have a rateable value of up to £15,000 which are not covered by the Small Business Grant Fund will also receive a grant of £10,000, in accordance with Government guidelines. Retail Leisure and Hospitality business properties with a rateable value of up to £50,999 will receive a grant of £25,000.
- Businesses are eligible for a grant on more than one property, providing they meet the criteria. However, they must submit a separate form for each property.
- Please note – it may take several days for grant money issued to appear in businesses bank accounts.
- If you are self-employed and in urgent need of financial assistance the government has advised that you should apply for [Universal Credit](#) and Council Tax Reduction. This will provide you with support until a grant for the self-employed becomes available in June.

The South & Vale Business Support team stays up-to-date on the latest government advice and support, and can advise on rates relief and business support grants:

- Visit their website for the latest info and to sign up for their e-newsletter: [svbs.co.uk](http://svbs.co.uk)
- Follow them on Twitter [@TeamSVBS](#)
- They have put together a very useful list of local businesses which are still trading: <https://www.svbs.co.uk/open-businesses/>
- If your business isn't listed yet then email them on [business.support@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:business.support@southandvale.gov.uk) to let them know you're still open

## Council Matters

- **Meetings:** The government has temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person during the coronavirus pandemic. Council officers and cabinet members at the Vale are currently investigating a suitable method of holding online meetings, for members of the public and press to also attend, whilst maintaining transparency, accessibility and accountability.
- **Planning:** Leader of the Vale, Cllr Emily Smith has recently written to the Secretary of State for the Ministry for Housing and Local Government, Robert Jenrick MP, to outline a number of concerns around the government's stance on targets for determining planning applications and the 5 Year Land Supply during the pandemic. You can [read Emily's letter here](#) and [the response from the Ministry here](#).
- **Parks:** The district council has kept its parks open to allow people to do their daily exercise. Most residents are using our parks responsibly, however there are few who still aren't sticking to the government's social distancing restrictions. We've used a temporary, harmless chalk-based paint to spray paint some reminder messages on the footpaths near our park entrances.

## Local News

### Consultation on new roads around Didcot

Oxfordshire County Council is consulting on draft designs of four routes within Didcot and the surrounding area: the widening of the A4130, the Science Bridge, the Didcot to Culham River Crossing and the Clifton Hampden Bypass. The consultation closes on **30 April** and all the information can be found on the website:

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/didcotupdate](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/didcotupdate)

### Harwell Vaccine Centre Fast-Tracked

As we both work in the science and engineering sector, we are very proud that the world-leading Harwell Campus is right on our doorstep, with many of the residents we represent employed at the campus. We are especially delighted by the recent news that the construction of the UK's Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre at Harwell has been fast-tracked. Building this vital research facility ahead of schedule allows it to play a key part in the UK's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, see the press release from the Harwell Campus: <https://www.harwellcampus.com/news/vaccines-centre-fast-tracked-at-harwell/>

### #CornerstoneAtHome Make a Leaf Project

Running out of creative project ideas to do during lockdown? [Cornerstone Arts Centre](http://www.cornerstone-arts.org/whats/make-leaf) and Didcot Garden Town are asking residents in the Didcot area to make a leaf to celebrate Didcot's green future. Your artwork will feature in a dedicated exhibition - your chance to be part of the history and art of Didcot Garden Town! Deadline for entries is Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May – for more info & how to enter please visit: <https://www.cornerstone-arts.org/whats/make-leaf>

## Charities and Support

### Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale is an independent charity that provides the local Citizens Advice service. They have been working hard to support the local community during the Coronavirus crisis and are encouraging people to seek their advice when they have a problem they can't resolve. Have a look for advice online at <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/coronavirus>. If an answer cannot be found, please call Adviceline on 0300 330 9042 or email us at: [didcot@osavcab.org.uk](mailto:didcot@osavcab.org.uk) or [abingdon@osavcab.org.uk](mailto:abingdon@osavcab.org.uk).

### The Motherkind Café

We can only imagine how challenging it must be to be in lockdown with young children or newborn babies right now. If you're in this position and would like to chat with some friendly faces who share what you're going through, search Facebook for [The Motherkind Cafe](https://www.facebook.com/TheMotherkindCafe), a post-natal wellbeing and emotional support group for mums in Oxfordshire. They are a volunteer-led peer support group with a range of online support available for mothers feeling overwhelmed, including a weekly informal zoom call, regular blog articles and a new podcast.

### Be Free Young Carers - 2.6 Challenge

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April would have been the 40th edition of the London Marathon. Unfortunately, as large events such as these have been cancelled, many charities are struggling to raise money right now. The [2.6 challenge](https://befeeyc.org.uk/), has been put together by the UK's organisers of mass participation event such as parkrun and London marathon. The idea is to choose a challenge related to the numbers 2.6 or 26 (the number of miles in a marathon and the date the event would have taken place), and raise money for charity.

We have decided to participate in the challenge by each running 2.6km on Sunday to raise money for Be Free Young Carers, a Harwell-based charity supporting young carers in Oxfordshire, who are particularly in need of support right now during the coronavirus pandemic. Find out more on their website: <https://befeeyc.org.uk/> and Facebook Page: [Be Free Young Carers](https://www.facebook.com/BeFreeYoungCarers), and keep an eye on our councillor Facebook Page on Sunday to see how we get on!

### Take care, stay safe, stay home!

We will endeavour to keep you updated on the council's response to the Coronavirus COVID-19 through future newsletters and our dedicated councillor Facebook Page: [Cllrs Hayleigh Gascoigne & Sarah Medley](https://www.facebook.com/CllrsHayleighGascoigneSarahMedley). Please do not hesitate to get in touch with any issues or concerns - our email addresses are [hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk](mailto:hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk) and [sarah.medley@whitehorsedc.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.medley@whitehorsedc.gov.uk).