

**Annual Report 2021/22 to Parish Councils
in Watchfield & Shrivenham Ward
from Vale of White Horse District Councillors
Simon Howell and Elaine Ware**

Introduction

The last twelve months have been challenging for everyone. Although Covid 19 has started to reduce it is still prevalent in and around our local community. Throughout the pandemic the Vale has worked with Oxfordshire partners to provide support to all its towns and villages. We continue to thank our local coordinators for the support they offered to those who were unable to get out and about during the restrictions.

One area that raised its head during the early part of the first Lockdown was the statistical information and updates that were circulated by the Vale to towns and parishes. It was identified early on that the information was from Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and did not include those villages in the Western Vale that are served by Swindon and other CCG's. This issue led to Elaine amending a Motion on health services that was put to a full Vale Council requesting that formal meetings be arranged with Swindon CCG and other CCG's. The first of the meetings with Swindon CCG took place in January of this year and it was agreed to hold regular meetings three or four times a year. The next one is scheduled for 6 May 2022.

Planning – Planning as is usual is always top of our agenda. We deal with numerous applications and often we call in the controversial ones for the Planning Committee to consider. Between April 2021 and March 2022 over 150+ applications were submitted to the Vale from our Ward villages. There were three particular applications which were submitted for determination by the Planning Inspectorate under the appeals process. Two of these has been dismissed and the other is awaiting determination.

Construction of the new roundabout on the A420 to serve Cross Trees Park development in Shrivenham was delayed. This was due to the ongoing and never-ending roadworks at Gablecross and White Hart Roundabout in Swindon.

The new primary school in Shrivenham was also delayed for various reasons, primarily funding, but it is now anticipated to be built and ready for occupation by September 2023.

Waste & Recycling – Once again the Vale is amongst the top 10 UK Local authorities for recycling. There was an issue last August when the garden waste service was suspended. The lack of service led to Simon as Leader of the Opposition at the Vale, to call an Extraordinary Full Council meeting on 21 September. A number of public speakers addressed the Council expressing their concerns. Following the lengthy debate it was confirmed that the service would recommence on 27 September. Without Simon's intervention the lack of service would probably have continued.

Civil Parking Enforcement – The new scheme was launched in November 2021. Officers will enforce the majority of restrictions where traffic orders and regularity signs and lines are in place. Problems such as pavement parking are not enforceable unless there are formal restrictions. Initially the focus will be on the three towns of Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon. The scheme is operated by the County Council on behalf of the Vale.

EV Charging Points – Charging points are being installed in three Vale Car Parks – Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon. Each car park will have twelve charging points. These are primarily for use by those who do not have access to home charging.

Budget and Changes to Car Parking – At the February Council meeting the budget was submitted for approval. An amendment was proposed by the Opposition which would increase the Community Climate Action fund from £50,000 to £125,000, reduce office accommodation costs on vacating Milton Park by utilising Council owned property to save rental costs and to freeze Council Tax for the forthcoming financial year. The amendment was put to a vote and was lost. The budget as presented was approved.

Included in the budget was the proposal to reduce the two hours free parking to 1 hour from 4 April in all car parks except Southampton Street in Faringdon which would retain the 2 hours. This was because it would assist with attracting people into the town centre. Additional charges were also included so that if for example you want to use Gloucester Streetcar park in Faringdon for two hours you would have one hour free and the second would cost £1.50.

White horse lottery – The lottery was launched on 14 June 2021 and has seen a number of good causes throughout the Vale benefit from the scheme.

Boundary Review – There is to be a Boundary Review for Oxfordshire. The impact on the Vale is that the instead of being included in two constituencies it will move to three. The three are: Didcot & Wantage, Oxford West and Witney. The Watchfield & Shrivenham Ward will move from Wantage & Didcot to Witney. Final recommendations will be made to Government in October 2022 with the new boundaries possibly coming into force in May 2023.

Ukraine – like all Councils the Vale has a responsibility to help with the refugee crisis. We are working in partnership with the County Council, other local authorities and organisations across Oxfordshire. Working together has proved to provide the necessary support that is required. In the past the Vale has provided assistance for both Syrian and Afghan refugees and will continue to support the Governments Homes for Ukraine scheme

NEV – The New Eastern Villages – Swindon's Eastern expansion is beginning to create problems for local villages. The roadworks to accommodate almost 9000 dwellings, the necessary infrastructure together with the construction of Symmetry Park and the new Amazon distribution centre have created a great deal of

inconvenience to all in the local area. The construction of the NEV is scheduled to take around 14 years. The impact on the A420 which is already at capacity cannot be underestimated. In addition the regeneration of the former Honda site although not directly on the A420 will of course create additional traffic. This development is scheduled to take up to ten years. So basically our local communities will be surrounded by construction sites for the foreseeable 14 years. Simon met with the Leader of Swindon Borough Council recently to discuss the A420 and the issues that the NEV are creating not just for the Western Vale but for the whole of the A420 to Oxford. Arrangements are in hand to hold regular meetings to ensure that Swindon recognises that what they do in the NEV has an effect on the Vale's towns and villages.

Policing – We continue to work closely with the Faringdon Neighbourhood Team. However, the NAG 1 -Neighbourhood Action Group has not been able to meet due to the pandemic and not all members having access to online services. It is hoped that the NAG group will be meeting again very soon.

Conclusion – We continue to represent our 12 Parish communities and work tirelessly to ensure that your voices are heard. We attend a variety of meetings at the Vale and with other Councils and organisations. We work closely with our Parish Councils and make representations on their behalf when needed. Although we may not advertise what we do on a daily basis we are always available to provide assistance and advice to our residents. We are passionate about our communities and will continue to serve you all as best we can, In recent months we have held “Meet your Councillors” events. These proved to be popular and we intend to hold more during the coming months. In the meantime we provide monthly reports to our Parish Councils giving updates on both local and Vale wide issues.

Cllrs Simon Howell and Elaine Ware

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