

Vale of White Horse

District Councillors' Report

Watchfield and Shrivenham Ward

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January 2025

Happy New Year to all our residents. Please find below a summary of some of our work and council news in December and January.

Ward Overview

BSW Integrated Care Board Meetings

On 27 January Viral and Kat joined a meeting with council officers and the Integrated Care Board to understand more about the changing approach to community services for Watchfield and Shrivenham residents. The ICB have appointed HCRG Care Group to lead the new community-based care partnership. They will work closely with Great Western Hospital, surgeries, hospices and local authorities. Key priorities are around prevention and early intervention, fairer outcomes and excellent services for patients. We also asked for further updates to ensure that Elm Tree Surgery is being supported.

More information about HCRG is here: <https://www.hcrgcaregroup.com/news-and-blogs/hcrg-care-group-appointed-to-lead-new-partnership-for-community-services-in-bsw/>

National Flood Risk Data

The Environment's Agency's publication of their new [National Assessment of Flood Risk](#) data was easily missed the week before Christmas. Kat raised this at full council on 18 December, putting forward an amendment to a motion asking for more resources and funding, better communication of resources, as well as urgent action to reduce flooding of homes, businesses and infrastructure. While the county council is the main flood authority, the new flood data is significant for residents and has implications for planning, and Kat requested that Vale communicates updates around NaFRA to parishes. The Leader has subsequently written to government:

<https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/democracy/environment-agency-and-government-need-to-do-more-to-prevent-flooding-in-the-vale/>

Townsend Road development.

Along with Cllr Sheldon (Shrivenham) Kat spoke at planning committee on 12 December to express our serious concern about the private sewage treatment works for the ten home Pars development. Kat corrected comments made by the developer's representative and explained the long history of ignored planning conditions and enforcement. Kat raised concern about the effluent being discharged into a field and the cost for new householders when sewage treatment costs were taken on by a management company. We are extremely disappointed by the decision to approve the application, but the Environment Agency's withdrawal of their objection gave committee no ground to justify a refusal that would hold on appeal. We thank the committee for their shared concern and discussion of this application. Full minutes here:

<https://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=102&MId=3289&Ver=4>

Coleshill Churchyard wall

We are pleased to hear that the major work to repair the Coleshill churchyard wall has now been contracted and is due to start in late February.

Devolution Forum at Parliament to represent Oxfordshire

Viral attended a forum at Parliament last week to meet Green MP Adrian Ramsay, Green Peer Natalie Bennett and Green Peer Jenny Jones to represent the issues affecting Oxfordshire during devolution. Viral also met with our new MP Charlie Maynard to discuss the impact of reorganisation of local government on our residents.

Ock Catchment Partnership

Kat attended a meeting of the Ock Catchment Partnership Group on 31 January. While this meeting primarily focused on Oxford the forum gives important access to Environment Agency and Thames Water staff, as well as representatives from council and volunteer groups throughout the catchment area.

Wicklesham and Coxwell Pits application for commercial development

OCC Application MW.0151/23

We are continuing to keep a watch on this application, there were further submissions around BNG and Highways, both from the OCC team and the applicant. This may come to committee on 24th Feb but some reports are still needed before this can be decided.

Council News

Local Government Re-organisation and Devolution

We are waiting to hear if May's county council elections will be postponed following the OCC leader's request to government that Oxfordshire join a fast-track timetable for devolution. It is expected that District Councils will be abolished and unitary councils established, but it is not yet clear what geographic boundaries any future unitaries will have.

Our present preference would be for a unitary formed from Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, positioning it as a rural unitary with non dominant large town or city, this would allow services deliver to focus on the needs of the largely rural community. However, there is a desire for a unitary formed with the current boundary and administration of Oxfordshire County Council by others.

Katherine and Viral have written to Cllr Thomas, Leader of the District Council expressing our concern about a recent letter to Cllr Leffman, Leader of OCC, in which Cllr Thomas characterised Swindon as a town with which Vale is not economically or demographically linked. Given Swindon's importance to Watchfield and Shrivenham residents, particularly for healthcare, but also for leisure, employment, sport and transport links, we have asked the leader to ensure discussions with our neighbour remain constructive, however the final boundaries end up being drawn for the new unitary or mayoral regions.

Councillor Allowances

All councils are required by law to appoint an independent panel to regularly review councillors allowances. Last year, the panel recommended an increase to £8391 per year which was a reduction by 33% from the median wage for our District (to reflect the "public service" element of a councillor's role). The Green group supported the recommendation, amended to reduce the amount to £7,514 by increasing the public service discount to 40%.

Having been reassured that the rise would have no effect on council services, we supported the increase, primarily because we are concerned that a lack of remuneration acts as a significant barrier to being a councillor for younger people, women, and those on low incomes or with caring responsibilities.

Full information is in the December Council reports:

<https://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=108&MId=3327>

Garden Waste Changes

The way you pay for Garden Waste bins is changing, the Vale will be moving to an annual permit from 1st April. The new permits can be purchased from the end of February, please go here for more information: <https://www.southandvale.gov.uk/garden-waste-permit/>

Funds

Connected Communities Fund

Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action have launched a **fund** to support local grassroots projects that create opportunities for older people 50+ and adults with additional needs; and promote socialising and building meaningful connections in the community. Categories include Community Based Socialising; Health & Wellbeing; Arts, Culture & Creative; Green/Environmental & Outdoor Activities; New Skills Learning.

Up to **£5,000 per project** is available. For full eligibility criteria and how to apply:
<https://ocva.org.uk/connected-communities-fund/>

Police and Crime Commissioner Fund

Organisations from across the Thames Valley can apply for a grant of up to £10,000 for projects that support one of the PCC's Police and Crime Plan priorities:

- Protecting Communities (including anti-social behaviour and road safety)
- Protecting People (including domestic abuse and the night-time economy)
- Protecting Property (including cybercrime and fraud and retail crime)

For this round of the Community Fund, there will be a focus on awarding grant funding applications to projects which support work to tackle anti-social behaviour and vehicle crime across Thames Valley.

More information: <https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/community-fund/>

Useful Council Links

- Flytipping, Littering and Abandoned Vehicles: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/environment-and-neighbourhood-issues/neighbourhood-services/littering-fly-tipping-and-dumping-waste/>
- Housing Team: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/housing/>
- Community Safety (anti-social behaviour, vulnerable people and domestic abuse): <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/community-help-and-safety/>
- Cost of Living Help: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/cost-of-living-crisis-advice-and-support/>
- Emergency Situations: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/community-support/emergency-situations/>