Report from Cllr Lee Evans to Uffington Parish Council
November 2026

Please find below the key points of my report as District Councillor for the Stanford ward.

I'll happily speak to the report at the meeting, and answer any questions.

Local Government Reorganisation

Since we last met, the government has restarted the Local Government Reorganisation process. Under the latest proposals, the new 'Ridgeway' Council would come into effect on 1 April 2029, with elections to the new shadow authority held a year earlier, in May 2028.

The Vale of White Horse District Council elections in 2027 will go ahead as usual, although councillors will serve shortened terms.

I remain concerned about what merging much of the Vale with South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire will mean for our local area. The Vale's financial position is already poor, and merging with West Berkshire could make things much worse, as West Berkshire has had to get Exceptional Financial Support from the government.

Cearn Solar Farm

One of the issues most commonly raised with me is the proposed Cearn solar farm. I've taken time to look through the proposals, and I cannot support the plans because:

1. In my view, the proposed solar farm is too big, at around 2,800 acres and enough to power 143,000 homes. The Vale's countryside should not become the dumping ground for solar panels that largely serve other areas.
2. The scale of this plan would leave some villages, such as Lyford, surrounded by solar panels. That would fundamentally change these communities and their relationship with the countryside around them.
3. Much of the solar farm would be on agricultural land, and I believe food security – including locally grown food – should be a priority for us. There are better places for solar, including rooftops, car parks, and commercial and industrial sites.
4. The Vale is being asked to bear the burden of too much nationally significant infrastructure. Alongside the proposed 150-billion-litre 'White Horse Reservoir', this would be another extraordinarily large development in our area, and these projects would bring construction traffic, pressure on our roads and disruption to local communities.

Since the last Parish Council meeting, I have taken a motion to the Vale of White Horse District Council on the proposed solar farm. The motion said:

> *This Council notes that:*
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> - *A 2,800 acre solar farm, named 'Cearn Solar Farm', is being proposed in the Vale of White Horse.*
> - *Due to its potential generating capacity, the proposed solar farm is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP).*

This Council believes that:

- *The UK's energy demands should increasingly be met with renewable energy, and solar energy has a part to play as part of our energy mix.*
- *Solar panels should first and foremost be placed on non-agricultural land, including rooftops, car parks, commercial and industrial sites.*
- *The UK should strengthen its domestic food security, and the use of productive agricultural land for large-scale solar farms should be avoided.*

This Council further believes that:

- *The proposal for a Cearn solar farm represents a major, generational change to the countryside and the landscape in the Vale.*
- *Proposals for the solar farm must meet with the consent of the people who live nearby, who will be most affected by the development.*
- *Local residents, Parish Councils and Parish Meetings should be given timely and accessible information, meaningful opportunities to scrutinise proposals, and sufficient time to consider the plans and submit their views, throughout the development process.*
- *The Vale must not become the dumping ground for NSIPs, with many of the benefits going out of the Vale but the disadvantages remaining here in our district and being suffered by our residents.*

This Council therefore resolves to ask the Cabinet to:

- *Develop a comprehensive renewable energy policy for the Vale of White Horse, for consideration by Full Council, setting out the Council's approach to the siting of renewable energy infrastructure and giving regard to the protection of agricultural land and community engagement.*

This Council further resolves to ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs raising this Council's concerns about:

- *The size of the proposed solar farm and its impact on our rural landscape and local villages.*
- *The use of agricultural land for the solar farm, which undermines the UK's ability to grow its own food.*

This Council further resolves to ask the Leader of the Council to write to Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport raising Council's concerns about:

- *The impact of the construction of the proposed solar farm on local roads and infrastructure, which will be in addition to the impact of the proposed 'White Horse Reservoir'.*

Unfortunately, the motion was twice amended – without my support – and the contents were watered down and made much more favourable towards solar farms in the Vale.

I'll continue to raise concerns about the scale of this proposal, and associated issues.

Planning Changes

As of 31st October, the government's changes to the planning system have scrapped the call-in process, which enabled councillors to ask for applications to be decided in public by committee.

Many applications can now only be decided by Council officers, including applications for up to nine homes. I'm opposed to these changes, because I believe they apply a one-size-fits-all approach that will harm rural areas like ours.

My priority is, and will always be, to make sure that local voices are heard on planning issues and that we can have confidence in the integrity of the system.

New Consultation on Fawler Road Planning Application

As you may have seen, after further information was provided by the applicant, the Council has begun a new consultation on planning application P26/V0100/O.

The consultation is open until 17th November, and the new date for a decision is the end of November. (But of course, the decision date has been extended several times since the application was first submitted earlier in the year.)

Because of the changes in the law mentioned above, the earlier call-in I secured on this application is no longer valid. There is a new, more restrictive system for planning applications going to Committee, and I'm in discussion with Council officers about what that will mean in practice.

As with all applications, I want to make sure that local voices are heard, that there is transparency over how the application is decided, and that – whether we agree with the outcome or not – we can have confidence in the process.

Baulking Traffic Lights

You may have seen the appearance of temporary traffic lights on the A417 by the Baulking turn. These are due to be there until shortly before Christmas, to enable repair of a bridge, but that seems extraordinary to me given the limited works needed. I've raised this with Oxfordshire County Council. My concerns have been noted, and the bridges team are now looking into it. I'm strongly of the view that temporary traffic lights should only be there when necessary and for as briefly as necessary.

Parish Councils' Reservoir Survey

Several local parish councils have come together to run an independent survey of people who would be affected by the proposed 'White Horse Reservoir', should it go ahead. The findings

will help shape the parishes' own representations, and will be shared with the Vale of White Horse District Council, Oxfordshire County Council and relevant government bodies.

If anybody in our area would like to complete the survey, they can do so here: https://tinyurl.com/wh-resident-q

Questions to Full Council

For October's meeting of the Vale's Full Council, I submitted several questions, including on Abbey House (the Vale of White Horse's offices in Abingdon), the Council's financial health, scrutiny at the District Council, and the lack of data from the County Council on Stanford tip following my earlier motion at the District Council.

If there are any questions on these matters, I'm happy to speak to them in the meeting.

Local Recreation Facilities

Although it is outside this parish, I wanted to let you know about a project that Stanford in the Vale Parish Council is working hard on, which I'm very keen to support. Their plan is to turn a field off Cottage Road into a recreation site, including football pitches, tennis courts, changing rooms, etc. This would be a positive development for the local area, and would hopefully help provide new opportunities for people in Uffington and other nearby villages.

I'm glad that the Section 73 decision has now gone out, and I'll be doing whatever I can to make these plans progress as speedily as possible.