

Katherine Foxhall and Viral Patel

District Councillors

**Watchfield and Shrivenham Ward
Vale of White Horse District Council**

Annual Report 2026



Introduction

It has been a very busy year, and as always our focus has been supporting our residents, parish councils and local organisations, speaking up for Watchfield, Shrivenham and surrounding villages at the District Council and working alongside our new County councillor Emma Markham on shared issues. We are always available to support residents – please do not hesitate to get in touch and we will try to help.

Health Services in Watchfield and Shrivenham

We have a regular quarterly meeting with Council officers and BANES, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board. Issues discussed include the impact on patients of changes to community service provision through the new HCRG contract; “blindspots” in patient referrals and access to patient records across Swindon/Oxfordshire boundary as well as community/ Great Western Hospital systems; urgent need for Elm Tree surgery to expand. Recently we have heard from professionals about low morale and staffing issues in community services, as well as difficulties for community teams accessing hospital records, and will raise this in the next meeting on April 23rd. We are also interested to learn more about any discussions the ICB may hold with housing developers.

Planning Applications

As well as supporting many residents and parish councils with planning queries and enforcement issues, we have worked hard this year to respond to major applications including Wicklesham Quarry, Shrivenham Golf Course, and Coleshill Solar Farm. Our work includes liaising with officers and parish councils to interpret official policies, request additional information and timelines, respond in writing to consultations, pass on news of national changes, and represent the interests of our ward and residents by speaking at both District and County Council planning committees.

Recently we have been supporting an application in Coleshill for a new pre-school childcare facility. We are working with applicants, parish council and District officers to review and overcome County Council Highways concerns about safe access. We have argued that the County Council’s own reports showed a real need for more childcare in this area, and we are determined that rural families should not be penalised for living in villages without streetlights or pavements. We are very hopeful of a positive decision shortly.

We were extremely disappointed by the decision to approve outline permission for an industrial development at Wicklesham Quarry, and will continue to strongly oppose the plans for up to 200 homes at Shrivenham golf course.

Flytipping

Flytipping remains a regular issue in our area, although the Council's Biffa team is very good at responding and investigating flytipping incidents. As Chair of the District Scrutiny Committee, Kat will be requesting a formal review to understand if there is any measurable effect on flytipping following the County Council's introduction of booking systems at Household Waste Recycling Centres.

Residents can find out more about how to report fly-tipping or check a waste carrier's permit here: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/fly-tipping/tougher-fines-to-tackle-fly-tipping-and-protect-our-environment/>

Supporting Residents with Council Tax

Falling behind with council tax can be incredibly stressful, but we are here to help residents who find themselves in difficulty. This year we have helped a number of residents who have had difficulties with council tax bills, connecting them with council teams and putting off aggressive bailiffs to give residents breathing room to find manageable payment plans.

The penalties for missing council tax payments are set nationally, but there is help locally for those who need it. For eligible residents there is a Council Tax Reduction Scheme that can help get residents back on track, and council officers can step in to stop bailiff actions. We would urge anyone worried about paying their council tax to get in touch early, before fines and missed payments add up.

More information is available here: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/council-tax/>

Housing, Neighbour Issues and Homelessness

We are regularly called on to help assist local people who have been housed inappropriately, are experiencing issues with neighbours or are concerned about someone who is, or who is being made homeless. Often these are complex situations involving medical, social services, police or other local council safety partnerships. We are able to support residents to reach the right people and get help. Please get in touch if you are concerned about someone in our area.

Faringdon Area Traffic Advisory Committee

Kat has a seat on this committee. Although it has no formal power, the committee does give direct access to county council highways officers and police. Together with County Cllr Emma Markham, Kat has repeatedly raised issues of flooding on the A420, and the general atrocious state of the A420 as well as the breakdown of roads at Kidson Trigg and between Longcot and Fernham. Like Cllr Markham, we are hugely frustrated at the length of time it takes to get either responses or action on serious safety issues in this area, and the speed at which many repairs disintegrate.

Green Group at the District Council

At the District council, our Green group has continued to challenge and scrutinise the large majority Liberal Democrat administration. Katherine chairs Vale Scrutiny committee, which exists to oversee executive decisions and council processes. This year the committee has investigated backdated charges to community groups and council tenants; secured changes to major council projects including the Council Plan, Joint Local Plan and scrutinised the budget process. In the coming year, the committee will be focused on supporting the council's transition to a unitary council.

In February, the Green Group secured extra money in the council's budget to help clear a backlog of £2million government money ring-fenced for Disability Facilities Grants which help residents stay in their homes or care for loved ones, for example by installing ramps and stairlifts.

The Year ahead

Much of next year's focus at Council will be on the upcoming local government reorganisation to unitary councils, but our priority will be ensuring that residents' access to services is not affected. We urge residents to get in touch if there is anything we can help with.

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