

Cllrs Katherine Foxhall and Viral Patel

Watchfield and Shrivenham Ward -

Vale of White Horse District Council

Annual Report 2024-25

Introduction

Over the last year we have been honoured by how our close and collaborative relationship with the parishes and residents has continued to grow. We see the challenges so many of you have faced and how hard you have worked to address them and are pleased to have helped in any small way we can.

Local Case work

A large part of any councillors' role is to be contactable by residents and parishes on any matters that continues to be of concern, as such it is vital residents know who we are how to contact us and we thank all parishes for helping us distribute our monthly reports. We additionally try to reach all households by delivering newsletters, and have seen an uptick in contact from residents as a result.

To highlight some of the focus areas for us this year:

- **Health Services in Watchfield and Shrivenham** – . We have been in touch directly with Elm Tree surgery to understand from them the potential impact of local government reform, should the government decide to align regional political and health boundaries. We have also worked closely with council officers to re-establish a regular quarterly meeting with BANES, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board, to speak up for this area between Oxfordshire and Swindon. We have emphasised the urgent need to find new surgery premises, and have been briefed about the new community health services contract which began in April. While the switchover to HCRG seems to be going smoothly, Kat raised concerns about union recognition for staff in the most recent meeting and discussed a lack of information from Home Office about health needs within the Afghan Relocation Programme.
- **Flytipping** - Vale officers have worked with a local landowner to install CCTV at a regular fly-tipping spot. We regularly help and remind residents how to report fly-tipping, and to always use a registered waste carrier. On 1 April, fines for fly-tipping were increased significantly. More details about these, how to report fly-tipping or check a waste carrier's permit are here: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/fly-tipping/tougher-fines-to-tackle-fly-tipping-and-protect-our-environment/>
- **Afghan Relocation Scheme** - This has been a significant challenge this year. We have worked hard to support two-way communication with the councils but communication from the MoD and Home Office (who control the programme) remains a major issue. Thank you to everyone who has worked so hard to respond so positively and with such a warm welcome in a constantly changing and very complex

situation. We are concerned about ongoing misinformation and false rumours regarding the scheme, but there are also many examples of positive work being done to welcome our Afghan guests. A highlight has been the recent coffee morning which brought people together to enjoy cakes and treats, and a chance for us to hear more from community support teams addressing health, education, cultural and employment needs.

- **Supporting Tenants** - We continue to support tenants. After two years of flooding, several meetings, and thanks to much hard work by Vale's flood officer, residents of Lawrence Avenue have finally seen the land drainage system fully installed below the new primary school. We will stay in touch in case the issues move downstream. In Watchfield a family have returned home following a full refurbishment of their home after Viral supported them to get mould and damp fixed. Mould and damp issues in social housing continue to be a challenge, but we continue to intervene when asked to ensure resolutions are accelerated.
- **Tuckmill Meadow** - As the new contract with Earth Trust to help manage Tuckmill Meadow was finally agreed, Kat has been supporting the volunteer team at Tuckmill to understand their S106 funding allocations. More recently volunteers have raised concerns about damage to the footpath bridge – as this is a right of way we will work closely with our new county councillor to ensure OCC are aware.
- **Climate Action Fund** - Following success for local groups including the Hub in Shrivenham, Watchfield PC's water butt scheme and West Vale Canal trust, the Climate Action Fund is open again for applications with £100,000 available in total: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/community-support/grants/climate-action-fund/>
- **Planning** – Planning is a large part of the District Councils function and we have continued to scrutinise where necessary or simply to have conversations with officers to understand the rationale for a decision over this last year. The proposed large commercial development at Wicklesham has been a focus area for us. We have responded twice to consultations last year, and are still concerned about the proposed development and the evidence base in several areas presented in favour of the development. This decision on this application has been delayed again with additional changes being proposed by the applicant. With further changes having been submitted last month there is now a further need to consult with residents, elected & statutory representatives.

Greens in Opposition

As Greens in council, we have continued to scrutinise the role of the administration and the decisions being made for our residents, however there being only four of us has its limitations. The composition of the council over the last year has changed however, with 2 members of the former Liberal Democrat group sitting as independents, while this does not change the political balance significantly, it has provided extra independent eyes on the work of the council. Katherine continues to chair Scrutiny, a role in which she is able to further provide constructive scrutiny of the executive.

Over the year the Green Group at Vale have amended or proposed a number of motions in council, including on Local Government Reorganization where we have strongly favoured a unitary of Vale, South and West Berkshire in bringing together rural areas to form a new council; On budget we proposed a minor adjustment to ensure the Climate Action Fund should increase marginally this year compared to the amount that was available last year and not be less; In cabinet we have urged the executive to ensure parking charges and not council tax be used to cover the cost of carpark maintenance. On Leisure facilities we have challenged the executive on the limitations of provision in the Western Vale; On contracts proposing that in-sourcing is not discounted out of convenience and instead is based on improving services to our residents; On the Joint Local Plan that we should strive to increase the affordable housing limits on large developments given we live in one of the most unaffordable parts of the country.

We have not won many of these arguments, but not for the principle of our arguments but rather the politics.

The Year ahead

In the coming year the Green group will continue to work to improve the lives of our residents in all aspects that are within the control of this Council. We will help steward the Joint Local Plan through its hearing phases and continue to speak up for residents impacted by flooding, overdevelopment and the lack of infrastructure while ensuring larger developments are appropriately scrutinised.

Finally, we would like to very warmly welcome Cllr Emma Markham as our new County Councillor, and we very much look forward to working with Emma in the coming year as a part of the three strong Green team for Shrivenham and Watchfield.

Please do get in touch if there is anything you feel we can help with, and we look forward to working even more closely with our parishes this coming year.

Katherine and Viral

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