

BLEWBURY PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORTS FOR 2020

1. Blewbury Parish Council Chairman's Report
2. Blewbury Parish Council Planning Report
3. District Council Report
4. United Charities Report
5. United Charities Accounts
6. Pre-School Report

1. Blewbury Parish Council Chairman's Report

Report of the Parish Council Chairman in the Absence of an Annual Parish Meeting 2020

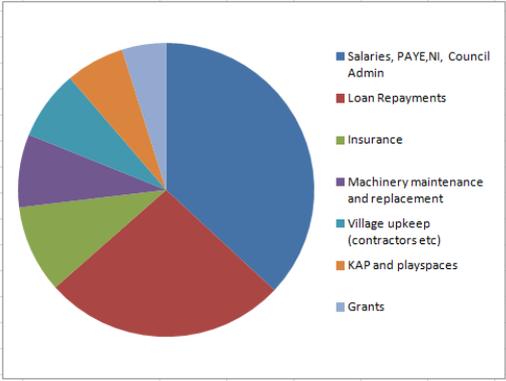
It goes without saying that the absence of an Annual Parish Meeting pales into insignificance when weighed against other things happening in all of our lives. However, for the sake of records, it is incumbent on me to record a précis of what has happened in the Parish Council over the last year. It will not include everything, my memory, or cover everything in detail and I would hope to be as concise as possible.

Each one of us contributes to the running of the Parish Council through the Council Tax system where an element known as the Parish Precept resides. At present this amounts to approximately £80 per residence per year. Without this money, the Parish Council would have no money at all to carry out village maintenance, a prime responsibility, or represent you as best we can on a broad range of other matters.

For the one percent of parishioners who still think the councillors get paid, the total pay to councillors is zero and the total of allowances claimed by councillors is zero.

In Fig 1 below, there is a breakdown of our expected income at the start of the 2019-20 financial year. It is a very rough analysis but designed to show you where the Parish Precept goes.

Blewbury Parish Council planned receipts and expenditure 2019 - 20 (Broadly categorized)						
Income		Precept	VH insurance refund	KAP(BVS)	Allotments	Total
		£61,260	£2,500	£800	£520	£65,080
Expenditure						
Salaries, PAYE,NI, Council Admin	£23,000					
Loan Repayments	£16,500					
Insurance	£6,000					
Machinery maintenance and replacement	£5,000					
Village upkeep (contractors etc)	£4,750					
KAP and playspaces	£4,000					
Grants	£3,000					
Total planned expenditure	£62,250					
Total planned income	£65,080					
Surplus	£2,830					



Assuming no unexpected expenditure, the Council would run a profit of £2830.

So, this would be the ideal situation whereby the budget set was a hundred percent accurate and there were no additional calls on our services or for cash injects from our dwindling reserves. The salaries PAYE segment is artificially high because it includes all administration matters, venue rental for meetings etc. Good value is achieved for salaries by adhering to nationally approved rates of pay.

Loan repayments, although reducing year on year and at a preferential rate, continue to account for twenty percent of the precept.

Historically, insurance has always been a major cost item and, if anything, will increasingly be so with the rise in litigation, effects of climate change on property and nature and the increased realisation that we are not immune from disaster.

So how did we fare?

Our total expenditure for the year was more like £75000 than the planned £62000. Every year we expect the unexpected which is why we include a small contingency to cover the cost. As is usually the case, the contingency this year wasn't enough. The shortfall was covered by a mixture of grant applications and robbing our reserves.

We are more fortunate than the District Council in that we are still allowed to increase our precept without referendum but are mindful of the impact this can have on parishioners and will continue to keep increases to a minimum in future years.

Changes at Parish and District Councils

Over the past year we have had elections for the District Council and potentially an election for the Parish Council. You will all be aware of the landslide victory for the Liberal Democrats in Oxfordshire. Regardless of your politics, this is a salutary lesson in listening to the people, something I hope we do on the Parish Council. As for our own election, it never happened as one candidate's application was rejected due to the strict, nay anal, adherence to archaic regulations by someone who shall be nameless at the Vale. So, nine applicants for nine places meant there would be no election. All's well that ends well after a comedy of errors.

Changes that have occurred at District level may see some re-focussing but there has been no immediate impact on the Parish. A District Council of any colour will continue to be strapped for cash and this will filter down to the Parish and affect its ability to cope with increased budgetary pressures.

Footpaths and verges

As you know, we have an excellent Lengthman who carries out maintenance of the village but time is a finite commodity and if District and County reduce their commitment to the parishes there will be an ever widening gap in coverage. Even so, I still consider the village to be in good shape with the condition of footpaths commensurate with living in a rural village.

If at any point lack of maintenance is having a major impact, we will have no alternative but to make higher charges on the village or accept a lower standard.

The future of Development

We now have an adopted Vale Local Plan with no recommendations for major development for Blewbury.

However, as I recall saying last year, other examples of proposed development such as the Oxford Cambridge Expressway and others continue to exercise our minds. A new organisation, the Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance (ONPA) has been set up and a Blewbury councillor is on the committee. They will be seeking to have input to all strategic planning around Oxfordshire and are aggressively engaging with associations such as the Oxfordshire Growth Board (OGB) on our behalf. The Didcot Garden Town Plan is continuing apace as can be seen by the decreasing amounts of green fields. There is little or no impact on the Parish but a promise to engage us in the near future.

Future Transport Options

The 94 bus service, albeit in a reduced form, is safe until 2021. The Downland Villages Transport Group which includes Blewbury continues to provide the weekly service to Wallingford. Our new District Council puts public transport higher on the agenda but we have seen little movement from County or their masters. We have consistently over the years reminded the District and County that the increased numbers of cyclists in the village risk their lives on a regular basis cycling along the A417 and the B4016. Progress has been made in making contacts that may be able to assist in funding a cycle path but it is a bit like pulling teeth and an imminent solution seems unlikely.

Voluntary Groups

Any Parish Council is reliant on the help of voluntary organisations within their village to carry out supplementary tasks. The BVS continues to contribute large amounts of effort and money to support village activities and facilities for which we are extremely grateful. As long as the Comedy Night is successful, the KAP area will receive funding from them.

This year the Rat Pack concert has subsidised a future purchase of Speed Watch equipment. There are many other Voluntary groups and individuals who have helped through the year. There have been projects to enhance the environment and I am thinking in particular of the laying of Hedges, so popular that they are running out of sites, Thermal imaging, permaculture, the School gardening project and all the other efforts of Sustainable Blewbury. If there is one area where a couple more volunteers would have made a big difference it is when six of us laid eleven tonnes of gravel on the footpaths.

Village Hall

At last, the Village Hall refurbishment commenced in January, only to be affected like everything else by the pandemic and social distancing measures. Although the work progresses, the pace has slowed and the finishing date will be pushed further into the future.

Tickers Folly Field and the Recreation Ground

Tickers Folly Field continues to be very popular and a destination of choice for families from around South Oxfordshire and the Vale. This brings with it a set of problems we didn't perhaps envisage. Usage is high so equipment maintenance costs are high. Amounts of refuse are high and

degradation of the car park surface is an annual problem. All this is at a cost and that is borne by Blewbury. We have been able to release £800 of Section 106 money from the District Council but it was a bit like getting blood out of a stone. A commitment to help fund the facility would be welcome, but unlikely. We do understand that we will have outside visitors as we appreciate that some are not as lucky Blewbury residents, having the open spaces we do. The half pipe, one of the most used facilities, has been refurbished at a cost of £2500 and we have a new barbecue built by volunteers.

Across the country, the demise of team field sports is being felt and the consequence for the Recreation Ground is that it is essentially a dog walking track being maintained to the level of a sports facility with the relevant costs. The occupancy of the Melland Room, through a lot of hard work, has gone some way to covering the cost of upkeep but a long term strategic plan needs to be put in place to secure its future.

Emergency Plan and reacting to emergencies

Blewbury has got an emergency plan, it was reviewed last year and absorbed into the overall emergency planning document of Oxfordshire County Council. It covered everything that we were likely to expect based on historical records. In other words we could react to weather related emergencies and loss of utilities. What, along with most other councils, wasn't included is the effects on village life of a pandemic or epidemic. It is now obvious that, as much as we hope it is never needed, we must include measures to respond.

Although nominally the Parish Council is the focal point for reaction to emergencies, in a village like Blewbury the parishioners soon take over. It was heart warming to see the speed at which the village responded to the pandemic with over a hundred Blewbury Good Neighbours coming forward within days.

Safety around the village

The first three sentences here are a repeat statement with no apology.

All of us should be, and most of us are, aware that the village is by choice a dark village. We carry torches. The Parish Council cannot be responsible for personal safety if this simple practice is ignored. This also applies to visitors who should where possible be made aware.

The inability of relevant authorities to take seriously speeding along the A417/B4016 has led to the realisation that a Community Speedwatch is the way forward, Over the last year a local group has been set up, at least 12 volunteers have taken the on line training , the Rat Pack has funded equipment and we are ready to go. Or would be if CV19 hadn't arrived with the result that PCSO support to finally approve sites and accredit operators is on hold.

And finally

The PC leaped headlong into the 21st century with a Zoom council meeting in March, whatever next.

And finally again

I am immensely grateful to every single parishioner who has done even the smallest thing to contribute to Blewbury being a great place to live. I am heartened by the village's response to the current crisis and confident that when all this comes to an end, the feeling of being part of one big supportive family will not.

It will be interesting to see what effect this long period of reflection will have on us and our masters. How soon will we return to high levels of food waste, massive levels of unneeded development, destruction of the environment and biodiversity. Or will we all have learned what is really important; good health, community and a simpler way of life.

Once again I am grateful to all my fellow councillors, our Parish Clerk and the Lengthman for the contributions that they have made towards the effective running of the village over the past year.

Best wishes Chris Lakeland 21 April 2020

2. Blewbury Parish Council Planning Report

Planning in Blewbury

There have been 46 applications for planning permission or listed building consent since the last Annual Planning Report in May 2018 (a small increase on the year before, when 38 applications were processed). One of these was refused, two withdrawn, four are awaiting determination by the local authorities and the rest were granted. The refused application was for the conversion of an existing double garage and swimming pool enclosure to form new dwelling at Rumsey's Barn, London Road. Since the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 virus in March 2020, planning applications are still being considered, but planning officers are working from home and not visiting sites unless absolutely necessary. There have been some attendant delays in processing applications at the Vale. At BPC, councillors are discussing planning applications over email and ratifying decisions at electronic PC meetings every month.

BPC assesses planning applications primarily by email. They are then discussed at monthly council meetings. Sometimes an application needs to be dealt with before the council meeting, but if it is contentious we can ask for an extension to the time limit. BPC, however, is only a consultee: we do not make the decisions.

BPC scrutinises applications on the basis of the policies in the village's Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), along with the Vale's planning policies. If an application conforms to both the NDP and the Vale's local plan policies, 'material considerations' are the only other means we can use to object to an application. Planning law does not define material considerations – they are derived from case law, but they can include:

- Overlooking and loss of privacy
- Overshadowing and loss of light
- Local circumstances (local knowledge from the PC is key here)
- History of a site e.g. if contaminated
- Local knowledge of drainage or other possible problems with services
- Noise, disturbance, smells
- Traffic and highway issues
- Scale of development
- Over-dominance
- Public view across the land
- Loss of important open spaces
- Landscaping
- Design, appearance, layout and materials
- Retention of important physical features
- Conservation of buildings etc.
- Impact on surroundings e.g. whether it affects the character or an area
- Emerging planning policy, depending on what stage it's at.

They cannot include:

- Morals or motives of the developer
- Effect on the value of a property
- Private property rights such as boundary or access disputes
- Possible future development not included in the application
- Comparison with other previously approved schemes on the site
- Matters covered by laws such as alcohol or gaming licences, or Building Regs.

Those interested in planning applications should first of all consult the Vale's website*. BPC encourages parishioners to write directly to the Vale's planning office, either in support of or against an application – the more voices that are heard, the better.

*<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=ApplicationCriteria&APPTYPE=ALL&TYPE=Application>

Blewbury's Neighbourhood Development Plan

There has been one occasion in the past year when the Vale disregarded our NDP-based objection for works to the former Methodist Chapel.

We believe that Blewbury's NDP has helped to protect the village from speculative development applications during the past year. However the presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' remains enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework – this effectively means that the job of planners at the Vale is to enable planning applications which meet the correct criteria, rather than to stand in the way of development per se.

Planning in the Vale of White Horse DC

The Vale's Local Plan 2031, Part 2 (Detailed Policies and Additional Sites) was adopted by the District Council in October 2019. This supports the Part 1 plan, setting out policies and locations for housing for the Vale's proportion of Oxford's housing need up to 2031. It also contains policies for the part of Didcot Garden Town that lies within the Vale of White Horse District. BPC is still sceptical that Didcot will look any greener or more garden-like at the end of the Garden Town process, however we will keep an open mind, and continue to monitor and discuss any plans at our monthly meetings. The Vale's Part 2 local plan also includes detailed development management policies to complement the Part 1 plan, and allocates additional development sites for housing.

The Oxfordshire Growth Deal

In 2018 Oxfordshire's local authorities signed the 'Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal' with central government, accepting a promise of £215m to fund infrastructure, in exchange for building 100,000 houses by the mid 2030s. This would grow the housing stock of Oxfordshire by 40% in the next 15 years, which by some measures is roughly three times the rate needed to meet the county's *actual* housing requirement. As part of this deal, local authorities agreed to produce a Joint Strategic Spatial Plan (JSSP) for the whole county, guiding development in the area up to the year 2050.

As a result of local elections in May 2019, the Vale of White Horse DC is now led by Liberal Democrats. One of the first things the newly elected councillors did was order a review of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, which is the vehicle in charge of delivering the JSSP and the Growth Deal. As a result the timetable for delivering the JSSP changed. Following the lockdown necessitated by the Covid-19 virus, this timetable has again been revised. At the time of writing, the JSSP had issued the following statement: 'All councils are still committed to producing the Plan, and the team are working hard to create the best Plan for the people of Oxfordshire. We are continuing to work remotely on the evidence base, with steering and working groups of technical experts, and developing spatial scenarios and options for testing. Given the latest situation with Coronavirus, we are keeping the Plan timetable under review and will issue further updates accordingly.'

The proposed Oxford-Cambridge Expressway

The proposed expressway between Oxford and Cambridge has stalled, following the Conservative Housing Minister Grant Shapps statement before the General Election in December 2019 that the road would be put 'under review' if the Conservatives won the election. Despite pronouncements from John Howell, MP for Thame, that the road had been 'cancelled', it now appears it could be resurrected in future. In September 2018 the preferred corridor routes were revealed by Highways England as B1 (west of Oxford, following the A34) and B3 (south of Oxford through the green belt and roughly following the River Thames). Blewbury is not included in this corridor, which ultimately means the village is not being assessed as part of the route options for the new road link. However, we are in the 'common corridor', which is where the new road will connect with existing infrastructure. We should note that even if the road does not pass close to Blewbury, it would have a huge impact on everyone living in Oxfordshire, not least because of the vast scale of housing envisaged to accompany the road. BPC will continue to monitor progress and update the village via the Bulletin and BPC's page on Blewbury's website (<http://blewbury.co.uk/event/blewbury-parish-council/>) and on the BPC section of the Blewbury Village Society Facebook page.

3. District Council Report

Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and Cllr Sarah Medley Parishes of Blewbury and Upton - 3rd May 2020

Introduction

Hello! It is hard to believe that it now a whole year since we were elected as your district councillors to represent the residents of the Blewbury & Harwell ward on the Vale of White Horse District Council. Our ward includes the beautiful historic villages of Blewbury, Harwell, Chilton and Upton, and a large section of the vibrant new Great Western Park housing development. Over the past year, we have really enjoyed settling into our new roles as councillors, and it has been an absolute privilege to represent you. You are a wonderful community, with so many dedicated volunteer groups running fantastic events, activities and clubs all year round. It has been particularly heartening to see how much community spirit and care for each other you all have, even more so in the recent circumstances of the coronavirus outbreak. Given the current uncertainty around the longer-term impact of the pandemic, it is not yet clear how it will affect the policies, plans and priorities of the council in the coming year; however this report summarises the key activities at the council and in the local area during the past year.

Coronavirus Community Support

We hope everyone is keeping well, staying safe and staying at home during these difficult and unprecedented times. As we write, it is hard to believe that we have already been in lockdown for over a month. Despite the tough situation, it has been wonderful to see how all the residents in our communities have been looking out for one another and keeping spirits up. On the local Facebook groups, it has been great to see neighbours donating food, plants and surplus supplies to one another, sharing tips on which small local businesses to buy from, and even doing weekly fancy dress when they put their bins out! Meanwhile, the incredible volunteer support groups have been doing an amazing job ensuring that food, supplies and medicine are delivered to their neighbours in need. From us and all the councillors and council staff at the Vale, a massive well done and thank you to all

the hard-working volunteers in these local groups: Blewbury Good Neighbours, Harwell Helpers, Chilton Mutual Aid, Great Western Park Community Support and the Upton village WhatsApp group. Likewise, the new Community Support Team at the South and Vale district councils have done a brilliant job getting up and running in such a short time, and they are now providing an invaluable service to put residents in contact with the help they require, whether it's from a local community volunteer group, a charity or another more specialised service. This new support team was developed to form a simple point of contact for those who are vulnerable, yet who have no support network and would otherwise be completely isolated. The support lines are open 8.30am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 5pm on Saturday and Sundays, and can be contacted as follows: If you have been identified as shielded / extremely vulnerable by the NHS and have nobody around to help with day to day tasks like shopping, please **call 01865 897820** or **email shield@oxfordshire.gov.uk**

Anyone else (not shielded) in this situation, **call 01235 422600** or **email communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk**

Council Activities

Fresh start for new council

When we were elected as your district councillors in In May 2019, we were part of a large group of new councillors in the same political group, who took over from the previous administration in running the council. It is a joy to be part of such a passionate and proactive group of dedicated councillors, who have really hit the ground running right from the start. The first step was to sort out the formalities of the new council, including appointing councillors to committee positions; Hayleigh joined the Joint Scrutiny Committee, Wantage Area Committee (Chair), Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, Climate Emergency Advisory Committee, Scrutiny Committee (Substitute) and Planning Committee (Substitute). Sarah joined the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee (Vice-Chair), Wantage Area Committee and the Scrutiny Committee (Substitute). New council Chair Cllr Margaret Crick selected her chosen charities: global poverty cause Practical Action and local environmental charity The Earth Trust.

Honesty, openness and transparency in local government are the guiding principles of the new group running the council, and we have endeavoured to demonstrate these values in all our work as councillors so far. Leader of the Vale, Cllr Emily Smith, recently started a new Leader's Blog to give residents more of an idea about all of the things the District Council is involved in. Our priorities as a council group are to look after our residents, and to protect the environment. With this in mind, the first motion we proposed - and passed - in the July 2019 council meeting was to vote to officially oppose the building of the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. We oppose the Expressway due to the negative impact that it will have on the residents and the natural environment across the Vale, and the extra traffic it will bring to the already overstretched A34. As a result, Cllr Debby Hallett, Deputy Leader of the Vale, wrote to Grant Shapps MP, Secretary of State for Transport. You can read a copy of the letter [here](#).

Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

One of the biggest changes in the past year was the formation of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee (CEAC) which our council group proposed and voted for in the Full Council meeting on 17th July. We are both passionate about environmental issues, with this being one of our motivations to become councillors, so Hayleigh joined the committee and Sarah was nominated as a substitute member. Climate change is huge issue that affects everyone, and we feel that the Local Authority should play its part in tackling it. Cllr David Grant was appointed as Chair of the committee. The CEAC's remit is to consider the council's environmental impact and look at how we can make sustainable choices to deliver the services we provide to our residents. It aims to work with partner organisations and local businesses and community groups on addressing the issues.

The committee held its first meeting in October, and many residents attended and spoke at the meeting, including people from Blewbury & Harwell. It's clear that residents of our ward, and Vale-wide are also hugely passionate about the environment, as every meeting since has had the most audience members of any of the council meetings we have attended! The committee agreed recommendations to commission work to be done by officers and to establish a communications plan to engage the community. We recommended that the council's cabinet set target dates for a carbon neutral council by 2030 (75% by 2025) and a carbon neutral district by 2045 (75% by 2030). Cabinet did agree to set these targets, which was good news.

In the most recent meeting in January 2020, the CEAC recommended new schemes for the council to tackle climate change, comprising a one-year programme of actions to begin the journey to meet our carbon targets. The programme included:

- a climate impacts section in all the council's reporting and decision-making
- identifying opportunities for investment in solar energy
- identifying opportunities for energy saving in council buildings including solar energy and heat pumps
- working with interested community action groups
- a feasibility study into electric vehicle hire for residents
- a feasibility study into increasing biodiversity and tree planting
- employing a climate change lead officer

The report also looked at how the council could develop a green travel plan for officers and members, create an action plan to reduce single-use plastic and help to promote healthier lifestyle choices including encouraging walking and cycling to reduce vehicle emissions. There is more information at: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/environment/climate-change> The Full Council held its budget meeting in February 2020, and within this the budget was identified and agreed for the climate projects listed above. Of course, as council resources are currently focused on the new Community Support service to help vulnerable residents during the coronavirus outbreak, a lot of this other work has temporarily been put on hold. However, we remain confident that the Climate Emergency is a priority for the council, and that the CEAC and councillors will continue to do what they can to reach the carbon targets set.

Local Plan Part 2

Another big topic for 2019 was the debate over whether the Council should adopt Part Two of Vale's Local Plan 2031 (LPP2). Part One was adopted in 2016, and this deals with the main housing sites and policies, whereas Part Two contains more detailed policies used in the determination of planning applications, and allocates housing sites. As the new group running the council was not responsible for developing LPP2, there were questions over the process of progressing a Local Plan in these circumstances. In August 2019, Deputy Leader of the Vale, Cllr Debby Hallett, wrote to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to raise this and other concerns, and invited the minister to revisit the Inspector's report, specifically looking at Oxford's unmet housing assessment and allocated development in the Green Belt. However, because of its advanced stage, options to change LPP2 were very limited, and withdrawing it would have left residents across the Vale exposed to speculative development. Subsequently, at the Full Council Meeting in October 2019, council voted to adopt LPP2. Hayleigh spoke at the meeting to highlight that despite our reservations about LPP2, adopting it was the best option to prevent more speculative development, which has historically been an issue in the villages we represent. Now that LPP2 is fully adopted, the new council administration can start work on the next local plan for our district, which will have higher environmental standards and help us plan more truly affordable homes and more social housing for the future.

Council Funding Concerns

At the latest Full Council Meeting on 12th February 2020, council approved the proposed budget for 2020/2021.

This budget allocated funding to focus on three key areas:

- tackling the climate emergency, a major priority for the council;
- working towards a new Local Plan which will work to address residents' concerns about the current plan and put the climate and local sustainability at the heart of any future development;
- addressing the council's own long-term financial situation by identifying savings that have the minimum impact on residents and businesses in the Vale, and identifying opportunities to generate additional income.

It has been very challenging for councillors and officers to develop this budget, after years of cuts in government funding and continuing uncertainty over future funding. Between 2011 and 2019, the Vale saw its revenue support grant funding from government reduced from £7.1million to zero. This was replaced by retained business rates and the New Homes Bonus, however the government indicated in July 2018 that the New Homes Bonus scheme would soon be ending. As a result of this, the council is now in an increasingly difficult financial position and could face a funding gap in excess of £6 million by 2024/25. In September 2019, Leader of the Vale Cllr Emily Smith wrote to Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to express serious concerns regarding the future funding of local government, particularly at district council level. The recent coronavirus crisis has only exacerbated the funding situation further, due to the costs of delivering additional support services and the significant impact on normal income streams. For some of the local councils, the scale of lost income is of greater financial impact than the additional costs being incurred. In response to this, Leader of the Vale Cllr Emily Smith signed a joint letter from the leaders of all six Oxfordshire councils to Government and the county's MPs, setting out the scale of the financial impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation across the local authorities, and urging the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, to ensure further Government support is provided to meet the funding shortfall. Without this support, authorities across Oxfordshire will become financially unsustainable with depleted or no reserves, and some could be unable to set a legal budget for 2021/22. More information on this situation can be found on the Vale website and this BBC News Article.

Council Tax Support

In February 2020, the district council's Cabinet approved the following three key changes to the Vale's Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which came into effect on 1 April 2020:

- The current 91.5 per cent limit and the band E restriction when calculating the council tax bill for single parents with children under age five will be removed. This will mean that qualifying residents will have their reduction calculated at 100 per cent of their council tax bill after any deductions and based on their property's actual council tax band.
- The definition of who is considered disabled and exempt will be widened to mirror Universal Credit provisions.
- Bereavement Support Payments, which are paid for a maximum of 18 months, will be disregarded as income when calculating an applicant's council tax reduction amount.

These changes were proposed following a public consultation on the existing Council Tax Reduction scheme, and as a result, more than 430 people on low income in the Vale of White Horse will receive additional support to help them pay their council tax. In light of the current coronavirus situation, there is now further council tax support available from government, for which residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction will receive a minimum of £150 off their council tax bill for 2020/2021, unless their bill is less than £150, in which case their bill will be reduced to zero. Residents who are currently not being paid, and are struggling to pay their council tax bill, are encouraged to apply for

Council Tax Reduction – their account will then be put on hold for 30 days while their application is processed: whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ctrs. More information on financial support for those struggling during the coronavirus pandemic can be found on the following page:

www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/news/2020/2020-04/support-people-struggling-financially-due-coronavirus-pandemic

Council Motions

As the new group in charge of the Vale, we have had a busy year proposing, and passing, a variety of motions at council meetings. Our motions have served various purposes, from invoking action on key local issues to clearly setting out our position on wider-ranging national issues. Here is a summary of the key motions over the past 12 months:

In July 2019, council voted to officially oppose the building of the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and to establish a brand-new Climate Emergency Advisory Committee. Hayleigh used her maiden speech at Council to show her support for the new climate committee, and to highlight the great work of local climate action groups such as Sustainable Blewbury.

In October 2019, Sarah used her maiden speech at Council to propose a motion asking officers to prepare a report on how the council could help mitigate adverse impacts of the UK leaving the EU on the rights of non-UK EU nationals. Motions were also passed at the October meeting on investments in low carbon funds, the A34 and changes to working with regional development organisations.

In December 2019, the following key motions were passed:

- Hayleigh proposed a motion to declare the council's support for the Votes at 16 campaign; calling for the extension of allow 16- and 17-year olds to be allowed to vote in all elections and referendums across the UK.
- Updating the council's equality policy to formally adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, and the All-Party Parliamentary Group's definition of Islamophobia, as well as condemn all inflammatory rhetoric in political discourse. Hayleigh spoke in support of this motion, reflecting on her own personal experiences of racism.

- Requesting that the Leader of the Vale write to relevant ministers and local MPs requesting that all elections be run using Proportional Representation. Agreeing that the council would commit to exploring planning policies which positively encourage all renewable sources of energy, including onshore wind farms as part of the next Vale Local Plan and Oxfordshire Plan 2050. Requesting that officers bring forward proposals for the Vale of White Horse District Council to consider a formal merger with South Oxfordshire District Council, creating a single district council based on their combined geography with increased financial resilience.

Local Area

Didcot Garden Town Project

In July 2019, the Didcot Garden Town team produced this handy summary of the project. The second page of the document highlights that Blewbury and Upton villages are within the “Area of Influence” of the Garden Town, meaning that the Parish Council and residents are important stakeholders for the delivery of the project, as specified in the proposed governance structure near the end of the document.

This new governance structure, which is more inclusive and community-driven than previously, was approved by Vale’s Cabinet in February 2020. The Cabinet also agreed to the following recommended changes from the Joint Scrutiny Committee (of which Hayleigh is a member):

1. the parish council representative on the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board be chosen from the five parish councils within the Didcot Garden Town Boundary (this includes Harwell village);
2. the Didcot Garden Town Advisory Board considers adding a voting member to increase its environmental representation

The next steps were to form the new ‘sounding boards’, the aim of which is to help gather views on new projects and ensure the wishes of the different aspects of the local community are heard as the Didcot Garden Town projects are developed. There are three sounding boards – one for local residents, one for the business community, and one for parish councils, so that they can feed their ideas into the Advisory Board. The council will be inviting parish and town councils located within Didcot Garden Town and the wider Area of Influence (this includes Blewbury and Upton) to participate. All the advisory board and sounding board meetings are set to be open for residents to attend.

The government also announced on 14 January that South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils will be receiving £100,000 to help support Didcot Garden Town, which the Advisory Board have discussed spending on projects that will help to improve sustainability and connections in the town and highlight smart technology. The garden town team will ask for both Councils to accept the new funding once the award is finalised with Homes England.

For more information on the Didcot Garden Town, see the website

www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/didcotgardentown.

Out and About in Blewbury and Upton

Thank you so much to the residents of Blewbury and Upton for electing us this time last year; it is an absolute privilege to represent you. You are a wonderful community, and it has been so heartening to see how much community spirit and care for each other you all have, particularly during the recent circumstances of the coronavirus outbreak.

So far, one of our favourite parts of being your councillors has been joining in with wonderful village events last year. In July 2019 we had a lovely time at the Blewbury School Fete, and we were very impressed by their Green theme – the PTA chair informed us that only a single black bin bag was needed for the whole event! Later in July we attended the fantastic Saturday performance of The Crucible by The Blewbury Players – well done to the actors and everyone involved in making the

show such a success. In August, Sarah was delighted to come along to Sustainable Blewbury's first Apple Juicing session of the year, the perfect way to use up surplus apples growing in the garden! On the first Saturday in September we had a lovely afternoon at the annual Upton Village Fete. A fab range of stalls from local groups, selling everything from jams & preserves to zero-waste products, and we enjoyed the delicious homemade pizza and cakes! It was great to chat to residents and learn more about the St Mary's church renovation project, as well as watching the impressive gymnastics display in the main arena. The Morris-dancing horse was definitely one of the highlights of the day! A brilliant event bringing the whole community together, well done to the organisers and everyone involved in making it such a success.

We really miss being out and about in our community, joining in with the fantastic groups, activities and events run by dedicated volunteers all year round. Right now, we're so proud of the local volunteer groups who are helping out their neighbours in need, and we're glad that we can play our part in helping these groups as your local councillors.

4. United Charities Report

The United Charities of Blewbury, Upton and Aston Upthorpe (2020)

The two main functions of The United Charities of the Ancient Parish of Blewbury, Upton and Aston Upthorpe are firstly to help people of all ages, who live in these parishes and who may need financial help and/or may have fallen on hard times and secondly to be responsible for the maintenance of the two alms-houses in Blewbury. The charity has the care and upkeep of the alms-houses in the Church yard which is one source of the charity's income plus some wise investments from the sale of land gifted to us over the years. We have undertaken and continue to undertake significant investment and improvements in both alms-houses. After advertising in the Village Bulletin, we are very pleased to announce that we appointed a Clerk/Treasurer and a Guardian to support the work of the Charity. This has proved invaluable. An outcome of the global pandemic is that our financial investments are markedly impaired. Unless there is an appreciable recovery, this will seriously affect the financial help we are able to give to others. It may be that we will be seeking support ourselves in order to carry out our key functions.

Whilst the United Charity's origins date from the 1600's, it aims to remain current with the needs of those within the villages who may require assistance and also to make everyone aware of the valuable work it does close to home in the community we all share. Anyone needing help, or who knows of someone in need, should get in touch with the Trustees. We also take self-referrals. We are able to give financial gifts to more people than currently request help. It may be that sometimes people are reluctant to ask for help or do not want to be seen as 'charity' cases. However, all applications are treated in confidence and are also discretionary.

As well as small monetary gifts at Christmas the Charity is able to help in other circumstances such as assisting with transport costs for frequent hospital visits, breaks for carers, items to help cope with disabilities and many other instances where people are having difficulties paying for essential items such as school uniforms as well as unexpected events. We also provide emotional support and can in many cases give advice on dealing with a range of issues such as finding tradesmen or carers. All applications are at the trustees' discretion and looked at entirely on a case by case basis. Amounts will vary depending on levels of need.

IF THE TRUSTEES DO NOT KNOW – THEY CANNOT HELP

If anyone wishes to make any type of gift or bequest to the charity to enable us to continue way into the future, that would be most welcome.

The existing trustees are:

Blewbury: Sheila Loy (Chairman), Ann Dendy, Jill Willison, Neil Buckley and Jackie Maguire

Aston Upthorpe: Mike Wigg, Louise Brimacombe. Upton: Liz Hardy.

Clerk/Treasurer: Hazel

Guardian: Diane McKay

All communication: unitedcharities@outlook.com

5. United Charities Accounts

UNITED CHARITIES OF THE ANCIENT PARISH OF BLEWBURY							
Registered Charity No: 203538							
Accounts to	2019		2018		2017		
31st December 2019	£	£	£	£	£	£	
INCOME							
Maintenance Contributions	9794	12	6420	5	5386		
Dividends	5349.61		5569.19		5995.71		
Insurance Claim	1755.96				4545.76	1	
Sundry	7.5		782.51	6	77.5		
		16907.07		12771.7		16004.97	
COIF Deposit Account Interest	5.67		42.01		23.8		
COIF Income Units *	13139.13		1893.76	7	12346.5		
COIF Income Units - Draw Downs *	13000						
COIF Accumulation Units *	1075.48		230.4		491.11		
		27220.28		2166.17		12861.41	
EXPENDITURE							
Energy	-1197.25		-1892.66	8	-1304.31		
Maintenance & Repairs	-22849.5	11	-32717.9	9	-29654.9		

Council Tax	0		-	2		-1041.02	2		
			1192.95						
Grants and Gifts	-2322		-			-3045.5			
			2863.47						
Sundry	-815.79	10	-	10		-1642	3		
			1135.23						
Management Expenses	-2525		-500			-750	4		
		-		-			-		
		29709.6		40302.2			37437.7		
SURPLUS		14417.7		-			-8571.3		
		7		25364.3					
ASSETS									
COIF Income Units *		166176.5		153037.4			176143.6		
COIF Accumulation Units *		6134.85		5059.37			4828.97		
COIF Deposit Account		51.42		2045.75			5003.74		
Nat West		4459.48		2258.49			1655.4		
Cash		25.22		28.72			162.28		
TOTAL		176847.5		162429.7			187794		
1 Bacon Almshouses		Market Value		Market Value			Market Value		
2 Bacon Almshouses		Market Value		Market Value			Market Value		
NOTES									
1	Final settlement for repairs, replacement flooring and electricity used during the drying out process								
2	Payable whilst property vacant, 50% discount applied for first 12 months whilst structural repairs carried out								
3	Includes refund of deposit to outgoing resident and Annual Insurance Premium (£712.24)								
4	Includes payment for 2016								
5	Resident in No. 2 Almshouses from 1st Oct.								
6	Includes refunds from return of building materials								
7	Residual income from £25,000 unit sale in Sept. when price per unit higher than on 31st Dec.								
8	Includes water for No.2 Almshouses from Oct. 2016 to Oct. 2018								
9	Includes authorised trustee remuneration (£1169.60)								

10	Includes Annual Insurance Premium (£739.37) 2018/(£764.29) 2019 year					
11	Includes reinstating gardens at No.2 (£4480.20) and chimney rebuild (£1486.96)					
12	Includes Deposit for Incoming Resident					

6. Pre-School Report

Blewbury Pre-School Parish Council AGM report 2020

Blewbury Pre-School offers early years education for all children under five years of age, preparing them for school life - both socially and educationally – so they are ready to make the most of their primary education.

Alongside the children’s Early Years Foundation Stage learning curriculum, Blewbury Pre-School playleaders create weekly themes with special activities that engage children with their active learning. A good example of this is the ‘people who help us week’, which last year included special talks at Pre-School by a dental nurse and a police officer.

The children also learn how different cultural events are celebrated, including Diwali, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and the UK’s four national days - St George’s, St Andrew’s, St Patrick’s and St David’s Day. In December we had our Christmas Nativity which parents and children from Blewbury Primary School thoroughly enjoyed, and more recently Shrove Tuesday saw the children (and parents!) joining in pancake races outside St Michael’s, which was great fun.

Blewbury Pre-School is a vital resource for many families. We are able to run the Pre-School through receipt of money from three sources;

- Government ‘free hours funding’ for every 3-4 year old for 15-30 hours per week
- fees directly paid by parents/carers for two-and-a-half year olds
- fundraising by the committee & staff and other financial donations

However there is a significant gap between what it costs to have a child at Pre-School and what the Government gives per child to schools through the free hours funding that is now available to all 3-4 year olds. The level at which these hours are funded by the government was set and frozen in 2015, so it doesn't take into account the subsequent increases of costs since (e.g. national living wage, staff pension auto-enrolment, rent, insurance).

Pre-Schools across the UK are facing having to find other ways of making up the difference or risk becoming unsustainable. Worryingly 42% of UK childcare providers say they face closure within the next academic year due to the 30 hours underfunding. Whilst we're hopeful that the UK Government will address these problems for all early years providers soon, it's clear we face an interim financial problem.

Government rules on free childcare means we are not allowed to charge top up fees to make up any shortfall, so charging families who perhaps are more able to pay more, is not an option. If we were to close, better-off families may well be able to find other provision for their children elsewhere, but vulnerable families are less likely to have this option. So maintaining this service for all is vital.

In an effort to bridge the funding gap, since September 2019 we've increased our hours of operation to 25 hours per week. We've also been busy fundraising – including a very successful Curry & Quiz night with raffle in June 2019 which raised over £3,000. We have raised money by having stalls at Blewbury School Summer Fair and at Blewbury Bonfire Night, have organised soup lunches for parents and grandparents at the Pre-School, and have helped BVS with organising Santa's Sleigh. We also continue to benefit from donations for eggs and logs available from the Pre-School.

Unfortunately as I write this, Blewbury Pre-School is closed due to the coronavirus lockdown, and sadly all future planned fundraising events have had to be cancelled. Of course we plan to start afresh once the lockdown ends.

We are enormously grateful to Blewbury Parish Council which has kindly offered us a one-off grant, to help cover the major shortfall in income we face in 2020. We've also reached out to

The Rat Pack charity and The Malthus Trust for help, and both have been very generous and we are hugely grateful for their support.

Indeed, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank to everyone in Blewbury and further afield who support us – as we really couldn't continue without you. Thank you.

Ciara Hardman-Cole
Chair, Blewbury Pre-School