



Monday 18th April 2022

Annual Report

Vale of White Horse District Councillors

Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and Cllr Sarah Medley

Blewbury, Harwell, Chilton and Upton

Introduction

Hello! It is now almost three years since we were elected as your district councillors. The past two years have of course been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, so we very much hope that this coming year brings back some form of normality for everyone. Despite the pandemic, there has been a lot of activity at the council this past year. In this report we present the key highlights, alongside updates on the Valley Park development and the council's progress in tackling the climate emergency.

Highlights

COVID-19 Community Support

The Community Support Hub, originally set up by the council in 2020 in response to the pandemic, has continued to help residents in need throughout 2021 and 2022. The service is still available for anyone in need of help: if you have COVID-19, or if you are struggling financially, or if you are just finding life difficult due to the pandemic. Whether it's practical support or just advice, get in touch. Call: 01235 422 600 (Mon to Thurs 8.30-5pm and Fridays 8.30-4.30pm) or visit www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/communityhub.

Healthcare in Didcot

As your local councillors, we are very aware of the many issues faced by residents in accessing healthcare in the Didcot area. Working alongside the Patient Participation Groups of the three medical centres, we have been calling on the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning group (CCG) to provide transparency and clarity on the timescales for delivering the long-overdue healthcare centre on Great Western Park. We are pleased to say that the CCG are now engaging, and they have kindly agreed to provide an **update for the public at the Great Western Park Residents' Association Meeting at 8pm on Monday 9th May**. The meeting will be held in a hybrid in-person and online format, at Boundary Park Sports Pavilion and on Zoom. Please keep an eye on the [GWP Residents' Association website](#) for more details.

This update follows on from the November GWPRA meeting last year, where we invited the CCG to attend and explain the situation to residents. Julie Dandridge, CCG Deputy Director of Primary Care, and Jo Cogswell, CCG Director of Transformation, attended the meeting and explained that the process for setting up new GP facilities is complex; it is not something which happens automatically when new developments are built. The CCG requires GPs, which are independent businesses, to commit to the provision of services for a new development. This is either done through working together with existing GP practices, or seeking a completely new provider.

In the case of the long-awaited GP surgery on Great Western Park, the CCG have been working together with the Didcot medical practices. The main issue is the need for a suitable building - various options have been considered over the past few years, to determine the best fit for GWP. The good news is that the CCG have now identified a suitable developer with experience of building medical facilities. The next stage of the process is for an appointed [District Valuer](#) to determine whether the proposed facility is value for money for the CCG, and the next stage after that is to apply for planning permission.

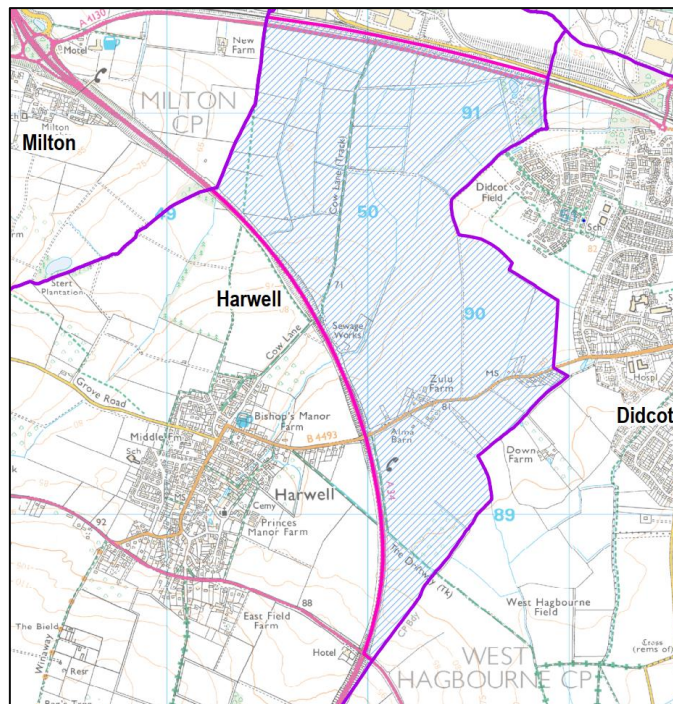
It appears that there is still some way to go in the process, however the CCG are pleased to be able to report back to the public that significant progress is now being made. They are not yet able to state a timescale for when the new GP facility on GWP will be open for patients, however they are very aware of the urgent need to alleviate the pressure on GP services in the Didcot area.

Harwell East: New Parish for 2023

Residents are invited to [have your say on proposed changes](#) to parish boundaries, as part of the council's Community Governance Review which takes place every four years. After the 2014 Community Governance Review, the council resolved to create a new parish of Harwell East, comprising the part of Harwell parish that lies to the east of the A34.

At its meeting on [21 June 2018](#) the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee agreed to defer the creation of the new parish until after the 2019 elections. Democratic Services are now working on the creation of the new parish for implementation at the 2023 elections. There will be consultation and involvement with local residents.

For context, all of Harwell village will remain within the existing Harwell Parish, however the section of Great Western Park which is currently in Harwell Parish will become part of the new Harwell East Parish, as will the entirety of the new Valley Park development.



Map showing the location of the new Harwell East Parish – highlighted in blue

Extra Care Housing on Great Western Park

Residents living on the Great Western Park housing estate will no doubt have noticed the new apartment building on Greenwood Way, opposite the pharmacy, which has been constructed in the past year. This is a set of 80 new affordable *extra care* homes, made possible thanks to £2.9 million of funding from the Vale of White Horse District Council and the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The apartments will be fitted out for older people to help them live independently in their own home, with care staff on hand to provide any extra support they may need. For more information, see the [council press release](#) from last year.

Steventon Reservoir Objection

Many residents will be aware of the long-standing plans by Thames Water to build a large reservoir next to the nearby village of Steventon. There has long been local opposition to these plans due to the negative impact this 'megavoir' will have on the environment and the local community. Our county councillor, Sally Povolotsky, has been instrumental in the campaign against the reservoir during the recent consultation stage, along with the Group Against Reservoir Development (GARD) and the local Vale councillors. At the Vale council meeting in December, councillors voted to oppose the proposals unless further independent research is carried out on whether the company's plans are needed, especially compared to other potentially cheaper, less disruptive, and less environmentally impactful options. For more information, see the [council press release](#).

White Horse Community Lottery launched

Local charities and good causes in the Vale of White Horse can now get a funding boost from a brand-new community lottery launched by the district council last summer. The [White Horse Community Lottery](#) allows players to choose which local charity their money benefits. Residents can get involved by buying tickets which will cost £1 per week with 60p going towards the player's chosen local good cause. 20p of the remaining money goes into the central community fund, 17p towards the administration of the lottery, and 3p on VAT. The draw takes place every Saturday, with a jackpot of £25,000 going to anybody who matches a sequence of six numbers. The other prizes are £2,000, £250, £25 or three free tickets.

Since the launch, many good causes have joined the White Horse Community lottery and can now benefit from vital unrestricted funds and players can support the causes they care about the most. It's predicted that over the next year, the lottery will raise just over £28,500 for good causes in the district. Please spread the word to good causes in the area and encourage local voluntary groups and charities to register.

Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan highlights the council's priorities and strategic themes for the next few years. Every quarter, the council reviews progress against the projects in the plan – the work the council is doing to make improvements to the way it works and ultimately affecting the lives of the communities it serves. This is all the public domain for you to view [here](#).

Council Budget 2022/2023

Vale's 2022/23 budget protects frontline services, ensures important environmental, leisure and safety improvements and keeps Council Tax increase to under the rate of inflation. Despite a 6.2 per cent reduction in funding from government, Vale of White Horse District Council has agreed a balanced budget for 2022/23 and, for the first time in several years, is projecting to have surplus general reserves at the end of its 5-year reporting period. For more information, see the [council press release](#).

Parental Leave for Councillors

Although the position of local councillor can in theory can be held by anyone, in reality there is much more work to be done to make the role more accessible for everyone. One of the barriers for many people is balancing council duties with family life. At the end of 2021, Sarah joined a working group established to develop a new parental leave policy for councillors. And the policy was adopted by Full Council in the December meeting. You can find the policy [here](#), on the councillor allowances area of the Vale website.

Our new Parental Leave Policy sets out councillors' entitlements to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances. The policy aims to provide a positive environment for members with family responsibilities. It will help to ensure members are representative of our community, contribute towards increasing the diversity of experience, age and background of councillors, and also help us to retain experienced councillors and make public office more accessible to those who might otherwise feel excluded.

Our Motions and Questions at Council

As your district councillors, we have taken the opportunity to ask questions of cabinet members at Full Council Meetings, as well as propose motions to get the council to do something differently – such as improving a policy that affects the people living in our district. Our motions and questions are summarised below:

- March 2021: [Motion A: Working with CCGs to deliver better healthcare](#)
 - Question: [Protection of women and vulnerable people](#)
 - Question: [Infrastructure on GWP](#)
- October 2021: [Motion 1: VoWH to join UK100 to tackle climate change](#)
- December 2021: [Motion 4: Becoming a trans inclusive council](#)

Valley Park

2022 - First 246 homes: planning application now live

The planning application for the first 'parcel' of 246 homes on Valley Park is now live and open for consultation on the [online planning portal](#) – reference P22/V0539/RM. We (Hayleigh and Sarah) know how important it is to residents that these new houses are environmentally sustainable, and we will be pushing for this in our own consultation responses. However, we encourage all residents to comment on the application to ensure that everyone's views are heard - **the deadline for consultation responses is 29th April 2022**.

2022 – Millions of pounds secured for Valley Park infrastructure

The outline planning application for the Valley Park development was approved by the council's planning committee in July 2021. This came after the decision was initially deferred in February 2021 due to the three key issues we and the local community raised at the time: lack of health care provision, inadequate cycling infrastructure and insufficient sustainability commitments. These issues were addressed through placing additional requirements on the developers when planning permission was granted – see the '2021' section below for more detail.

The additional requirements were secured earlier this year via the legal agreement between the developers and the councils. The signing of this agreement means that [millions of pounds have now been secured for vital infrastructure, health provision and tackling climate change](#) as part of the planning application for Valley Park. Developers will have to provide the funds as part of an application for the homes – 35% of which will be affordable – at Valley Park near Great Western Park through what is known as Section 106. The money includes £200,000 for biodiversity improvements, four times more than applicant Taylor Wimpey originally proposed, that must be made before any development begins. There is also just under £4m for public transport, including bus shelters and bus services, to encourage sustainable travel to, from and around the site.

Following requests from Vale of White Horse District Council Planning Committee members, developers must also implement so-called 'green wave' technology to improve cyclist safety at the roundabout proposed on the B4493 Harwell / Didcot Road, as well additional cycleways to connect the site with the surrounding area. Also secured on site are allotments, sports pitches, a community centre, two primary schools and a special educational needs school, and two local centres to provide services meeting the daily needs of future occupants. £9m is secured for improving and expanding secondary school provision.

The contributions will ensure the development contributes to the aims of Didcot Garden Town, which sets out how to build new homes in a well-planned and sustainable way.

2021 – Planning Permission Approved

The outline planning application for the Valley Park development - 4254 new houses between Didcot and Harwell - was approved by the council's planning committee in July 2021. This came after the decision was initially deferred in February 2021 due to the three key issues we and the local community raised at the time: lack of health care provision, inadequate cycling infrastructure and insufficient sustainability commitments. These issues were addressed through placing the following additional requirements on the developers when planning permission was granted.

Healthcare

- Over £3 million to be provided for local healthcare provision in the area surrounding Valley Park, or
- Dedicated land for a health care centre on the Valley Park site and £2.8million to be provided towards its construction.
- All funding to be ringfenced for healthcare provision in the local Didcot area only.

Cycling

- Mega 5-arm roundabout design now much safer for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians with traffic-light controlled crossings at every junction.

- Traffic lights to use an innovative ‘green wave’ system which prioritises cycling over driving: automatic detection of cyclists synchronises the green traffic lights to allow unimpeded cycling across the roundabout.
- Full all-weather surface upgrade of the cycle path from Cow Lane through to the UTC at Great Western Park, providing an alternative cycle route between Harwell and Didcot for less confident cyclists and children riding to school.

Sustainability

- £200,000 payment for protecting biodiversity brought forward – to be paid before construction starts.
- Existing mature trees on the Valley Park site to be preserved.
- Zero carbon housing standards to be implemented as early as possible.

None of these improvements were in place when the Valley Park application first came to committee in February 2021, or when it was first approved back in 2016. We are delighted that by working together with our fantastic local community we have been able to collectively secure these improvements. Huge well done to Harwell Parish Council, Sustainable Harwell, HarBUG (Harwell Bicycle Users Group) and the Patient Participation Groups of the three Didcot Medical Centres.

[Click here to watch the Planning Committee Meeting online.](#)

[Click here to read our written statement submitted to Planning Committee.](#)

Tackling the Climate Emergency

This is one of the themes of Vale of White Horse district council’s corporate plan. We want to play our part in halting climate change and protecting it for future generations.

On 4 February 2022, the Vale signed off a new [Climate Action Plan](#) setting out steps we are taking to make this council carbon neutral by 2030. The plan brings into focus some of the significant work already being undertaken and was informed by some extremely useful feedback from parish councils, local climate action groups and from the council’s Climate Emergency Advisory Committee.

A new [Climate Action Fund](#) was also introduced. Applications for this grant pot of £50,000 opened on 14 March to help enable communities and local groups to take grass roots climate action or start projects to improve their local environment. Applications close on 25th April – so please get applying.

Tackling the Climate emergency will be a joint effort, and VoWH can amplify its efforts by working with others, for example with local sustainability groups and the Town and Parish Councils.

In November 2021, Cllr Emily Smith, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council, joined dozens of other local authority leaders from across the UK in signing up to UK100’s ‘Net Zero Pledge’, reaffirming the Vale’s commitment to meeting Net Zero carbon emissions at least five years earlier than UK government targets.

Cllr Smith signed up to the pledge following a motion seconded by Hayleigh at the Vale Council meeting on 6 October. By signing the pledge and joining [UK:100](#), the Vale is now part of a national network that gives local government leaders greater influence and resources in tackling the climate emergency and carries out ambitious and cost-effective plans for the transition to clean energy that involve the public and business communities.

This year, the Vale developed and adopted [a new tree planting policy](#), joint with South Oxfordshire District Council. This policy outlines five guiding principles we will follow as we work to protect, plant and manage trees on our land and seek to expand our tree cover. The ‘community’ principle provides guidance to residents on planting trees and offers advice on getting involved in tree planting projects, as well as ensuring access to green space, as we want to support communities across the district in taking their own climate action as we work together to tackle the climate emergency.

More than 150 volunteers joined the first [major tree planting event](#) from the tree planting policy, in Abingdon on Saturday 26 February. Members of local community group Abingdon Carbon Cutters and other volunteers from across the area planted 420 trees at Rye Farm Meadow. The work was the first stage of a project that will eventually result in 1,500 trees planted by the River Thames over the next three planting seasons.

In our efforts to cut carbon in our own operations, Vale of White Horse District Council successfully secured £361,746 of funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme last year to pay for eco changes to the [Faringdon Leisure Centre](#). The refurbishments will significantly improve the carbon footprint of the building, and it will become the Vale's first council-owned building to be powered entirely by low-carbon and renewable energy. This will save around 500,000kWh of energy over a year – the equivalent to the annual electricity use of 135 houses.

The Vale is also installing EV chargepoints across its car parks to help car owners make the switch to electric vehicles from combustion engine powered vehicles. The work is close to completion, meaning there will be 34 EV charging points available in Vales's Abingdon car parks, in addition to 12 at Portway car park in Wantage and 12 in Faringdon.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report. We will continue to keep you updated on council matters through monthly parish council reports, parish newsletter articles, and on our dedicated councillor Facebook Page: [Cllrs Hayleigh Gascoigne & Sarah Medley](#). Please do not hesitate to email us with any issues or concerns – our email addresses are below:

hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk and sarah.medley@whitehorsedc.gov.uk.