



April 2024

Annual Parish Update

Vale of White Horse District Councillors

Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and Cllr Debra Dewhurst

Here is our annual report for 2023/24. We will outline a few highlights of the past 12 months, some achievements and what the big ticket items for the near future are.

As you may realise, the Vale of White Horse District Council had elections in May 2023 where Hayleigh was re-elected and Debra newly elected to represent the ward of Blewbury and Harwell – which includes parishes of Blewbury, Harwell, Chilton, Upton and new for this year, Western Valley.

As in previous years, the concerns of residents are often centred around the delivery of amenities for the area as we grow and in particular, healthcare. At the July full council meeting, Hayleigh raised a question to cabinet members about the planned Great Western Park (GWP) Health Centre ([see written Q and A here](#)) and back in December, Debra spoke at the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting to raise the issue of healthcare provision in and around the Didcot area, where she challenged Dan Leveson, the Place Director for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) to give reassurances that the health centre planned for GWP will be built and asked him what is causing the delay. The officers at the council have been working closely with the healthcare provider and we are pleased to say that there has been significant progress behind the scenes, which you can read about later in the report.

This year, Debra served as cabinet member for Leisure Centres and Community Buildings and Hayleigh as Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and a member of the scrutiny committee.

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations who give so much of their time to support the community, as it is you that makes the community what it is. Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report. *We use monthly updates to keep you updated on our activities and general council news.*

We also post on our councillor Facebook Pages:

www.facebook.com/CllrHayleigh & www.facebook.com/Debra4BlewburyAndHarwell

The best way to contact us with any issues or concerns is via email

hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk and debra.dewhurst@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Cost of Living Support

If you or someone you know is in need of support, a reminder that the council has put together a [Cost of Living Help](#) webpage for more information about financial and housing support, and local community food services. You can also contact the council's Community Support Hub for practical support and advice: call 01235 422 600 (Mon to Thurs 8.30-5pm and Fridays 8.30-4.30pm) or visit www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/communityhub. [Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale](#) can provide you with free, confidential advice via 0808 278 7907. [Vale Community Impact](#) can provide free advice too, call them on 01235 765348

Local Issues

Didcot & Villages Healthcare

The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board, known as BOB ICB, is responsible for delivering healthcare in the local area.

BOB ICB approved a business case for the project in January 2024 which reaffirms their commitment to deliver the health centre and agrees the revenue funding. Woodlands Medical Centre have been selected to run the surgery and the ICB have selected and are working with a third party developer. Read more about the business case approval [here](#), on the ICB's website.

In terms of what we as councils can influence, the Vale is currently working with Taylor Wimpey on measures to take transfer of the site. Once the site is transferred to the council, we will enter into an agreement for lease with the Woodland Medical Centre's third-party primary care developer who will develop the facility (upon grant of planning permission) and then lease it to Woodlands Medical Centre.

A deed of variation was agreed on 7th March. The variation adds additional information to ensure that the health centre can be delivered using the third party developer approach, which would not have been possible under the original S106 (a legal document outlining what the developer provides).

On 1st March, the Cabinet member for affordable housing, infrastructure, development and governance at the Vale, Cllr Sue Caul, made the decision to approve the use from the 20% CIL public healthcare allocation of the infrastructure proportion. CIL stands for Community Infrastructure Levy and is money collected from developers. It can be spent on any number of local projects and this pot of money is allocated generically for healthcare. This is in addition to the S106 money ringfenced specifically for the GWP surgery. [Click here](#) to read more about it.

The council have been working with BOB ICB and encouraging them to be more transparent and share information with the public. For now, there is this [dedicated microsite](#).

The next steps are for the land to transfer to the Vale and for BOB ICB to work with their developer to submit a planning application for the surgery, which we hope to see both happening in the next few months.

Valley Park

Valley Park is a proposed new housing development of 4254 homes, situated on land to the west of Great Western Park and east of the A34, which received outline planning permission in 2021.

In our monthly parish reports we provide an overview of the current live planning applications for Valley Park. There often are several live applications relating to the development, however those labelled 'RM' i.e. 'Reserved Matters' are typically the most noteworthy as they request planning permission for specific parcels of housing on the development. Residents can provide comments on these applications.

Despite the outline permission going through almost three years ago, permissions for homebuilding are only just starting to be given. A parcel of homes for Persimmon was given permission last year, and at the time of writing, the first parcel of Taylor Wimpey homes will go to planning committee in mid-April for a decision. Part of the reason that these parcels take so long to get permission is due to the statutory consultation period – the period of time that residents and specific bodies (such as Environment Agency or Highways) can comment and feedback on applications. The officers go through all the feedback and also check if the application complies with both national planning policy as well as our own local planning policy and then they ask the applicants to make amendments to comply with this. This can often take several rounds before there is an application which meets our standards.

For example, the most recent parcel of Taylor Wimpey homes will be much more environmentally friendly, with solar panels and heat pumps instead of gas boilers.

Boundary review

The Local Government Boundary Commission is reviewing the ward boundaries within the District Council, to make sure councillors represent approximately the same number of electors, and that ward arrangements help the council work effectively. It wants to be sure that its proposals reflect community ties

and identities. The Commission is the independent body making this decision, but takes feedback from residents and the council itself on what changes, if any to make. Changes made will be in place at the next local election for the District Council, which is May 2027.

Climate & Environment

[Climate Action Fund 2023/2024](#)

A total of 14 organisations including parish councils, climate community groups, a pre-school and a drama group were collectively offered more than £56,000 from the Vale's Climate Action Fund to help with a wide variety of projects, which aimed to save energy, help nature recovery or educate residents on how they can help tackle climate change. The projects listed below are the ones from our ward area.

Organisation	Description of project
Blewbury Parish Council	Installation of at least two electric vehicle public charging points at Blewbury Village Hall, to assist EV users to charge their vehicles in the village.
Little Pippins Pre-School in Harwell	Installation of solar panels on Little Pippin's pre-school building.
The Harwellian Club	Project to set up and install interactive displays showing information and advice about the Harwellian Club's energy usage and the recently installed solar panels at the Harwellian social club.

So if you are a community group planning a project with a climate action focus then please check our grants page www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/grants. This years' fund opens on Friday 3rd May.

[Leisure centres install fan-tastic new energy saving measures](#)

In December 2023, the Leisure Facilities Team presented a [report](#) to the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee about the fantastic work they have been doing to decarbonise our leisure centres. The council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and pledged to become a carbon neutral council by 2045 and to have a 75% reduction in carbon emissions in the district by 2030. Our leisure centres made up 51% of the council's carbon emissions in 2019/20.

Since then the council has successfully applied for and been awarded SALIX funding from the government to add solar panels and heat pumps to our leisure centre buildings. Whilst also progressing smaller projects such as updating the lighting to LED lighting and thinking of ways to be more efficient with energy usage. For example, the council has just completed the installation of 11 destratification fans at the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre, in Abingdon. These are designed to stabilise the temperature at the pool by deflecting hot air, which has risen to top of the high roof, back down to the lower area where the pool users are.

Before the fans were installed, the pool's heating system had to work harder to maintain a comfortable temperature for swimmers at pool level, while the heated air naturally rose to the highest point in the building and heat was then lost through the roof.

The Leisure Team have used a combination of capital expenditure where projects are smaller, and S106, CIL and grants for larger projects. This has enabled the Leisure Team to ensure the additional capital has not been used from our reserves and maximised the use of developer funding.

Current data indicates that these smaller projects have already saved 113,152 kWh per year and with the larger projects, overall annual consumption will have reduced to 2.03 kWh per year from the 7.41 kWh per year seen in 2019/20. Over 72% reduction in kWh consumption will have been achieved by 31st Marh 2025.

Council News

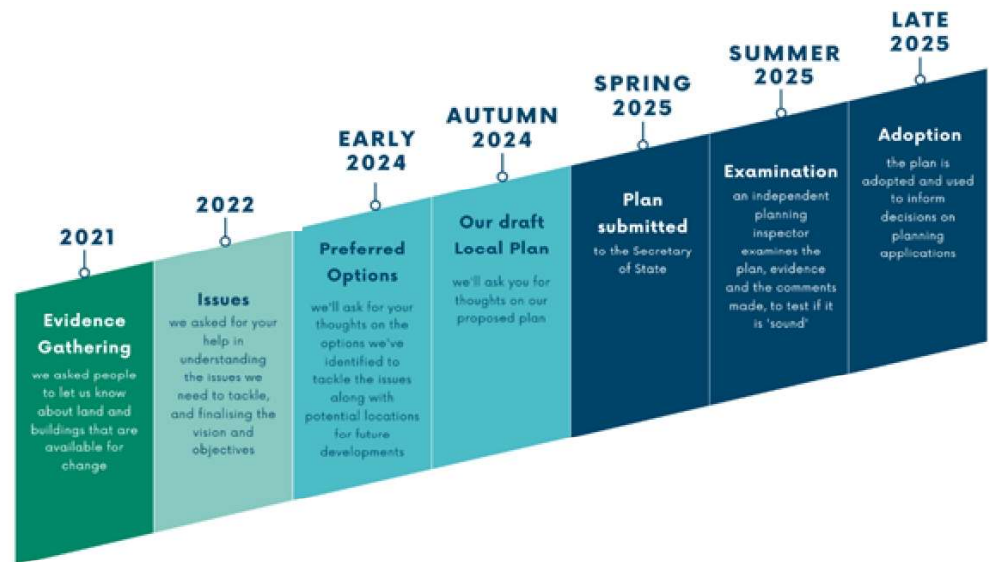
Joint local plan

Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils are working together to deliver the Joint Local Plan, which will guide what kinds of new housing and jobs are needed and where they should go.

Earlier this year, the two district councils collected the community’s feedback on councils’ proposed plans and draft policies across a range of topics, including climate, housing and jobs, environment, community facilities and more.

Determined to reach more people than ever before, the councils used innovative online engagement tools and held a variety of community events in unique and interesting locations to reach people who haven’t commented on local plans in the past, as well as those who regularly engage with council planning consultations. Testament to these innovative methods, around half of those responding to a *Joint Local Plan in a Nutshell* survey said it was their first-time taking part in a local plan consultation.

It doesn’t stop there, this is just one stage of the process and there will be more opportunity to engage with the creation of the plan to make it the best it can be. The diagram demonstrates that the next step, later this year, is to ask for your feedback on the draft plan before it is submitted to the



secretary of state. The policies that go into this plan, once adopted, are the basis for future planning decisions and any planning application that is submitted, whether for something small, like one home, or whole new estates.

Council Budget 2023/24

Despite major challenges, including below inflation funding increases, the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing economic and political uncertainty, thanks to careful financial management, the council has guaranteed vital public services, such as the district’s Community Hub which provides support to residents who are struggling financially, and will continue to invest in key areas which benefit people across the district.

For 2024-25, council tax for services provided by Vale of White Horse District Council has been set at £156.69 for a Band D property for the entire year. Vale residents will therefore continue to pay one of the lowest rates in the country for services provided by a shire district and significantly less than the equivalent fee paid by those living in Oxford.

The district council’s services are funded, in part, by only a small portion (7 per cent) of the total council tax paid by Vale households. This represents excellent value for money for residents, helping to pay for services, such as: household waste and recycling collections, community support, leisure services, parks and play areas, housing services, planning services, environmental health and licensing. For the detail of the budget, read the papers on the [Vale Website here](#).

The annual council tax bills are going out this month and the councils have put together [these videos](#) as a handy explainer to show you who provides which services and where the money goes.