

**Monday 9th September, 2024****Monthly Parish Update****Vale of White Horse District Councillors****Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and****Cllr Debra Dewhurst**

Hello from Hayleigh and Debra

We hope everyone had a lovely summer, whether travelling, taking part in activities in the local area (perhaps at [Cornerstone's Didcot Garden Party!](#)) or hiding indoors from some of the more inclement weather. We find that the summer is a good time to recharge, as many of the parish council meetings we attend also have a break in October and it gives us all a chance to be ready for what Autumn will bring. For example – the Joint Local Plan (see later in the report). Residents continue to write to us about planning matters, works that Taylor Wimpey are (or not!) carrying out on GWP and parking issues.

In August, the Vale of White Horse District council submitted its response to the [public consultation](#) on Thame's Water's proposer reservoir for the district. Plans for the controversial reservoir near Abingdon have been criticised by local communities, with Vale of White Horse District Council urging water providers to consider alternative solutions more seriously. The reservoir is now even bigger than originally planned – at around 6.5 km² – almost as big as Gatwick Airport and unprecedented in scale. You can view the [council's consultation response here](#). The council also reaffirmed its objections to the reservoir in a [formal letter](#) to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 25 July. The letter set out the council's concerns around the proposed reservoir and requested a meeting to discuss the matter further.

At the start of September, the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Steve Reed MP signed off [Thames Water's Water Resources Management Plan](#), which supports the case for the reservoir. Obviously, we as councillors are disappointed at the decision as we feel there should be more scrutiny applied. This is a case of significant public interest and so should warrant a public inquiry. Ultimately, this won't be a local authority decision and so all we can do as a council is let national government know how we feel. We urge you as residents and parish councils to engage with an future consultations, inquiries and also write to your MP if you feel strongly about this topic.

As always, if you have any questions or suggestions for us as councillors, please do email us. As a reminder, council meetings are held in public and if you wish to address council or committee, you can contact Democratic Services ahead of time. If you need more guidance on this, please let us know!

We use these 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

Please get in touch with any issues or concerns via email

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

Community Support

Community Hub

The Hub can offer support and direct people to help on a range of things including Cost of Living, food support, etc. If you are struggling financially or just finding life difficult, the community hub can help. Whether it's practical support or just advice, please get in touch:

- **Call:** 01235 422600
- **Email:** communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

The office hours are 8.30am - 5pm Mon to Thurs, 8.30am-4.30pm on Fri (and closed on bank holidays).

[Find out more about the community lottery on our website](#)

Local News

Great Western Park

[Bus stops](#)

Taylor Wimpey will be replacing the vandalised broken glass in the bus shelters with Perspex in the near future. Please let Hayleigh and Debra or the Western Valley Parish council know if you see any further issues and we will contact Taylor Wimpey on your behalf as they are currently still responsible for them.

[GP surgery](#)

The site has been sitting dormant since early 2016 awaiting transfer, and Taylor Wimpey are getting close to finally being able to hand it over. They have been in several times over the years to tidy the space, but the latest clear-up has just been completed.

The next stage in the process is for BOB ICB to submit a planning application. The council and [the local MP](#) have been pressing them to do this ASAP.

[Northern Allotments](#)

The clear up of this area has been delayed (due to various contractual issues) but is due to commence shortly. It is a two-stage process, with one contractor removing the rubble and a second contractor clearing the remaining material thereafter. They expect the first phase to take 3 to 4 weeks, and another 2 to 3 weeks for the remaining clear up.

Climate & Environment News

[CEAC – Climate Emergency Advisory Committee](#)

On 16th July, Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne chaired the CEAC meeting where the net zero and interrim targets for Vale of White Horse were reviewed and discussed. The [full agenda pack](#) can be found on the Vale website and a recording of the meeting is on the [YouTube channel](#).

[Residents urged to ‘♥ your area’ to help cut down on litter](#)

A new campaign aims to tackle the issue of litter in our parks and streets.

The councils are installing banners on the same theme in key public areas in Abingdon, Botley, Didcot, Faringdon, Henley, Thame, Wallingford and Wantage.

[FREE places at green skills courses available for South and Vale residents](#)

More than 80 fully funded places are available on eco-friendly home improvement courses for people based in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have partnered with Abingdon & Witney College, OxLEP (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership) and education charity SOFEA to upskill local residents and businesses.

[Report states continuing air quality improvement in the district](#)

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have today published their joint Air Quality Annual Status Report, which shows a continuing trend in air quality improvement across both districts.

[New safer cycling map](#)

Cycling UK Oxfordshire has recently launched the [Oxfordshire Online Cycling Map](#) - showing the best routes for new or inexperienced cyclists.

The map was created by campaign groups and experienced cyclists including South Oxfordshire's cycling champion, Cllr Andrea Powell, aiming to encourage less confident, novice, and young cyclists to understand how they can cycle safely around their towns, villages, and communities, and to give more experienced cyclists new routes to try.

Council News

Full Council – 17th July

For the council papers for this meeting, head [to the Vale Website](#) and the leader's statement is [here](#). Questions and motions are usually on the business for Council meetings and on this occasion, Debra asked a question around the GP surgery on Great Western Park. Find the full question and answer [here](#).

The next steps for Councils' Joint Local Plan

Following two hugely successful public consultations, which saw South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District councils receive a Highly Commended award at the Planning Resource Awards 2024, the councils have now set out the next steps for their Joint Local Plan (JLP).

New champions to promote causes across Vale

Water and culture and heritage will be championed by two new Vale of White Horse District Council appointments. Councillor Andy Cooke will be covering water – which not only involves highlighting how vital water is to us and promoting ways in which to reduce our water usage, but helping the Vale hold Thames Water to account on their Water Management Plan proposals.

Councils purchase 45 homes for those in need

A new era for genuinely affordable, high-quality, council-owned housing has begun in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

It is over 20 years since the last council houses were sold in the districts and house prices and rents have spiralled. Now South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are tackling the problem head-on. The first of 45 homes being purchased and refurbished for those in the highest level of housing need are now ready for people to move in as phase one of the councils' drive to become long-term social landlords for local residents.

Local charities given helping hand with lottery funds

Sustainable Shrivenham and Abingdon Music Centre are two of 10 local charities whose community work has received a boost of unrestricted funding thanks to the White Horse Community Lottery. Marking its third anniversary this month (July) since its launch by Vale of White Horse District Council, the lottery has raised £82,975 and helped local organisations, voluntary and charitable groups who are committed to supporting our communities and natural environment.

Rain garden part of a range of improvements at Wantage car park

A rain garden is being installed at Portway car park to help manage rainwater and prevent overwhelming the drains during times of heavy rain.

The work will be part of a major refurbishment of the car park which began on Monday 22 July and will last for around eight weeks. Note that, during that time parking spaces will be significantly restricted at the site but pedestrian access will be maintained.

Wantage Leisure Sports Hall revamp complete

The sports hall at Wantage Leisure Centre has been given a new lease of life this month with a £24,000 revamp. The popular sports hall floor had seen better days, with the wear and tear from its constant use leading to general damage and worn-out lines. During August, the floor was sanded down and all the linework renewed.

Vale Leader's statement on Botley Road

Replacement of the railway bridge over Botley Road – which was due to take place at the end of July 2024 – has been postponed.

Cllr Bethia Thomas, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council, said: "Like many, I'm deeply disappointed with Network Rail's latest revelation that it will yet again fail to fulfil its promises about Botley Road. This is the second time Network Rail has moved the goalposts having completely underestimated the scale of the job and managed it poorly, heaping more misery on local people."