



Monday 6th January 2025
Monthly Parish Update
Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and
Cllr Debra Dewhurst
Vale of White Horse District Councillors

Hello from Hayleigh and Debra

Happy New Year! We hope you had a restful and joyous festive period and are looking forward to whatever 2025 has to bring for you.

Over December, we had meetings with officers about adoption of open spaces on Great Western Park and with planning officers about Valley Park. If you have any questions about these, let us know.

There were quite a few updates from national government just before Christmas that will affect our council and our area.

- Firstly, the approval for the HIF1 road was issued by the Secretary of State. The aim is that the impact will be positive and ease congestion around Didcot and the surrounding area, improving air quality and increasing active travel options. We know this will be welcome news in our parishes. There is more information [here](#). The project includes, widening of the A4130, Didcot Science bridge connecting Great Western Park over the railway to Didcot power station, a new river crossing point and the Clifton Hampden bypass.
- When local authorities make planning decisions, they refer to the National Planning Policy Framework. This document gives planning officers the guidance they need, alongside our local policies in our local plan, to either approve or refuse applications. On 12th Dec, the government issued updates to the NPPF. Whilst there are further parts to come – such as reform of how planning committees work in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill due this year – the intention of the new government's NPPF is clear, to build more and faster. For a summary of the changes, the Local Government Association has summarised [here](#).
- The government issued a devolution white paper on 16th Dec. *What does this mean?* The paper outlines Labour's plans to reorganise local government structures across the country, essentially abolishing District Councils in favour of larger unitary authorities, strategic authorities and elected mayors. Although, the paper is named 'Devolution', the paper is removing a layer of local government that sits more closely with our local areas and decisions will be made more remotely. We do not yet know what this will mean for our District area, but be assured that although we may not agree with this ideology – our leader on Vale of White Horse, Cllr Bethia Thomas, and the officers intend to cooperate with the government and our neighbouring councils to seek the best deal possible. You can read the leader's letter to the Oxfordshire County Council leader, Cllr Liz Leffman [here](#).

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](#)

Council News

[Full Council – 18th Dec](#)

For the council papers for this meeting, head [to the Vale Website](#).

Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne asked a question about the Great Western Park Dr's surgery.

F. Question from Councillor Gascoigne to Councillor Crawford, Cabinet member for finance and property

Getting appointments to see a GP continues to be difficult across the district and indeed the country. In Didcot and the surrounding villages, this has been particularly difficult due to the growth in housing numbers and BOB ICB not yet providing the promised GP surgery on Great Western Park. I understand that the Vale officers have been working with the local NHS body, BOB ICB, to facilitate its delivery. Can the cabinet member provide an update with where we are, a projected timeline for delivery and what the next steps are?

The council is currently working with key stakeholders to progress the GP surgery on Great Western Park. The next step in the project is for the medical centre's appointed developer to submit a planning application, which we are expecting before the end of January. The Local Planning Authority will then need to determine the application, which will take a few months. In line with the LPA's published timescales, we are anticipating a decision by mid-2025. Page 7 In the meantime, work is well underway to arrange transfer of the site from Taylor Wimpey to the council; all parties are finalising their due diligence before transfer can take place. Once the site is transferred, respective legal teams will work together to complete the various lease and funding agreements. Whilst these matters are already well progressed, timescales will depend on resolving some final matters and making sure the necessary steps are taken to complete the agreements in the right order. Council officers meet regularly with the NHS Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), medical practice and their appointed developer, to ensure things continue to progress.

[A statement from Cllr Bethia Thomas, Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council](#)

This year seems to have galloped by and I can hardly believe we are now so close to Christmas! As I think back on the last 12 months, it's definitely been another very busy year for us all.

I'm proud to say, in spite of many challenges, we've collectively achieved a great deal and there are numerous highlights I will take away from 2024: from record numbers of visitors at our wonderful Abbey Meadow outdoor pool this summer, our continued investment in good quality leisure facilities, through to becoming social landlords again for the first time in over 20 years with the purchase of 18 homes, and our firm commitment to delivering affordable homes for our communities.

Our Community Hub has done a fantastic job to help residents with cost-of-living concerns including providing advice on free or affordable food and health and wellbeing support. Helping to prevent people from becoming homeless remains a very important focus, and one that's making a big difference – last year our housing team prevented over 343 households in the district who were at risk of becoming homeless, from becoming homeless.

[Read the rest on the Vale news site.](#)

Councils' future plan takes next step forward

A plan for the future in South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse has taken its big next step forward. The two district councils have been working together to produce a Joint Local Plan (JLP), which aims to help meet their local communities' need for affordable housing, jobs and infrastructure while tackling the climate emergency.

Following a series of successful public consultations, which produced strong and positive feedback, the plan was submitted in December to the Government for the examination stage.

Simplified ten-day planning to power greener growth at Milton Park

Milton Park, the UK's largest single ownership innovation community for science and technology, is poised to support thousands of new jobs sustainably. The news follows the adoption of a refreshed LDO enabled by the completion of an innovative Section 106 (S106) planning agreement, which focuses on green travel.

The LDO, which has now been adopted by the Vale of White Horse District Council, will enable the delivery of flexible laboratories, offices and amenities.

Members allowances to rise for first time in four years

Councillors hope a rise in allowances will open the door to a wider group of people being able to represent their local communities.

Vale of White Horse District Council has agreed to a rise in councillor allowances for the first time in four years, following recommendations from an independent panel.

However, councillors have agreed that their final allowance total should be less than recommended, as councillors believe that 40 per cent of their time should be recognised as "public service" rather than 33 per cent as was recommended.

An independent panel, made up of members of the local community, put forward a recommendation for a basic councillors' allowance following a review of the allowances in the district.

The scheme was last reviewed in the Vale of White Horse in 2020 and implemented in April 2021.

At the Council meeting on 18 December, members considered the recommendations of a Joint Independent Remuneration Panel and agreed to apply the revised allowance scheme based on a basic allowance value of £7,514 from 1 April 2025.