



May 2025

Annual Parish Update

Vale of White Horse District Councillors

**Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and
Cllr Debra Dewhurst**

It's hard to believe, but we are halfway through our four year term on the council. As you may have seen from our monthly updates, at the end of 2024, the government produced a white paper on "Devolution" outlining their plans to change the structure of local government. Things have been moving quite quickly and the Vale of White Horse District Council has a preliminary proposal, working together with South Oxfordshire District Council and West Berkshire Council. All councils in the country will have to submit their final proposals by the November. What it means in practice, if it all goes ahead, is that Vale of White Horse Council will not exist as we know it in 2 years' time. There will be a new council, with fewer councillors.

As you know, there was a general election in July 2024 which saw big changes both locally and nationally. Locally, we elected a Lib Dem MP for the first time and nationally we saw a change of the government. Councils are already beginning to feel the effects of the Labour government as they push forward with their manifesto on topics such as Local Government Reorganisation, housing targets and changes to the planning system.

Additionally, the Liberal Democrats won a majority, by getting over half of the seats, on Oxfordshire County Council at the 1st May local elections. Cllr Rebekah Fletcher is the new Lib Dem county councillor for Harwell, Western Valley and Blewbury which is a very similar area covered by Hayleigh and Debra.

Although Debra and Hayleigh are elected as ward councillors for Blewbury and Harwell, they may also hold roles on the council outside of this. As in previous years, Hayleigh served as Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and a member of the scrutiny committee. She also sits as the council's representative on the Didcot Powerhouse Advisory Board.

As district councillors, we are expected to attend the Vale of White Horse Full Council meetings where we can bring motions to council or ask questions. You can see which motions were approved in the past council year here <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/approved-council-motions-2024-25/>

Over the last year we have continued to ask questions and push for answers regarding the missing GP surgery on Great Western Park. As you will see later in this report, this continued pushing has finally led to some success.

The council publishes performance reports on its website which is located here on the Data Hub - <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/data-hub/>

Feel free to ask us any questions about the work of the council.

As usual, 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

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 also produce monthly updates to keep you updated on our activities and general council news.

Our Councillor Facebook Pages:

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

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. 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](#).

Last year, BOB ICB approved a business case for the project. Woodlands Medical Centre were selected to run the surgery and a developer was selected to produce a plan and build out the project. All of last year, we were all waiting for a planning application to be submitted. The officers at Vale meet regularly with the BOB ICB and the developer to ensure progress.

We were extremely pleased to see that the planning application was submitted at the start of this year and was given planning permission under delegated authority of the planning officers at Vale of White Horse District Council at the start of April.

Let's hope we can see spades in the ground in the near future. We will both continue to put pressure on BOB ICB to press forward with the project and also communicate milestones with residents.

Valley Park

Valley Park is the 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.

Valley Park is rapidly starting to take shape with the building of the first parcel of homes started and houses now for sale. Persimmon have about 50 homes occupied, and Taylor Wimpey only a couple though they have also had about 40 sales. There are about 850 homes with planning permission as it stands, though both developers will continue to apply for planning permission for parcels of homes which are usually about 150 – 250 each time. Notably, a Primary School was given planning permission in the last year as well as the spine road. Coming soon, we expect to see applications for some more of the primary streets as well as some green infrastructure.

We have regular meetings with the planning officers to understand what is currently in the planning system and what is coming forward. As always, if you notice something you have questions about or aren't happy with, please contact us and let us know. District Councillors have the power to call applications into planning committee for them to be decided by a group of councillors, rather than delegated to a planning officer. However, there is a certain timeframe in which to do this.

As with Great Western Park, Valley Park comes with an allotted amount of money for healthcare provision. We want to ensure that this money is used promptly, unlike with Great Western Park. The money for healthcare for Valley Park is slightly different in that it can be used for either providing a healthcare facility or the money can be used to improve healthcare provision at other sites within the local area and the NHS BOB ICB will make that decision. The release of the money has various trigger points and the first trigger point is much sooner than it was for Great Western Park. We will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that what happened on Great Western Park is not repeated.

Climate & Environment

[Climate Action Fund 2024/2025](#)

In total, 21 local organisations have been offered support with their climate-friendly projects. They included parish councils, community groups, two churches, a pre-school, a museum and a tennis club. They were collectively offered just over £141,000* to help with a wide variety of projects which aimed to save energy and resources, help nature recovery or educate residents on how they can help make sustainable choices. The projects listed below are the ones from our ward area, or are applicable to the whole council area.

Organisation/group	Description
Low Carbon Hub (District Wide)	Provide energy assessments for six community organisations in the Vale. Providing each with several bespoke energy reduction measures.
Little Pippins Pre-school	Changing the pre-school's existing lighting to LEDs.
St Matthews Church Harwell	Energy audit of the Church Hall and changing existing lighting to LEDs.
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)	Delivery of nature education sessions at BBOWT's Sutton Courtenay education centre and at two identified community hubs in Faringdon and Wantage.
Sustainable Blewbury	Restoration of Quaker Wood through site preparation and tree planting, providing an amenity for the community.
Fusion Arts (District Wide)	Two climate events for the Vale's creative arts community, to facilitate discussion on specific areas of climate action. Plus a Carbon Literacy accredited training session for those working in the arts sector.
Oxford Wood Recycling Ltd (District Wide)	A series of free wood craft events, inspiring people to rethink their relationship with natural resources (i.e., timber) in the home and beyond. Workshops are designed to be a starting point for challenging 'throw-away-mentality'.
Blewbury Parish Council	Second phase of funding to support the installation of two EV charging points at the village hall.

So if you are a community group planning a project with a climate action focus then please check out the Vale website as this years' fund opened on 6th May.

<https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/community-support/grants/climate-action-fund/>

Local Government Reorganisation

On 19th February, the Vale of White Horse District Council held an additional meeting to discuss Local Government Reorganisation and the agenda and minutes can be found [here, on the Vale website](#).

In a White Paper published in December, the government has expressed its intention to bring an end to two-tier council arrangements like in Oxfordshire. This is where district councils provide services like recycling and waste collection, planning, housing need and environmental protection; and the county council provides social care, transport, education, fire and rescue, libraries and more. The government's plans would mean all of these services would be provided by a single council, known as a 'unitary'.

In February, the government invited the Oxfordshire councils to bring forward proposals for unitary councils in their area. Initial plans must be submitted in March, with final proposals due in November.

Alongside all of the Oxfordshire councils Vale of White Horse District Council officers are working openly and constructively to discuss a number of options on how to set up new unitary councils in the area that meet the government's criteria and best serve the needs of local communities. With that in mind, officers from Vale of White Horse District Council are also in discussions with colleagues from South Oxfordshire District Council and West Berkshire Council about the possibility of a unitary council for an area that combines the existing geographies of those three councils.

Council News

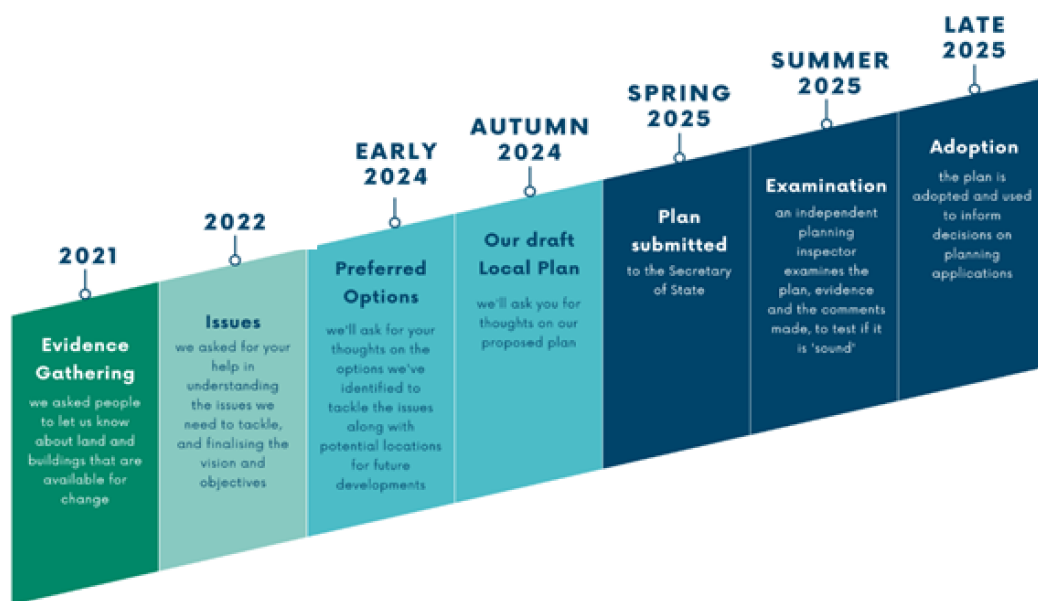
Joint local plan & planning

Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils have been 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.

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.

As outlined in the graphic, the plan is currently at examination stage. The government introduced changes to the NPPF – National Planning Policy Framework last year, but our plan was so advanced that we expect to still be able to use this system of working. The Planning & Infrastructure Bill that is currently going through parliament, will also introduces changes to the planning system. The government wants to speed up the planning process, and wants to do that by removing powers from councils and planning committees.



Council Budget 2025/26

On Wednesday 12 February, district councillors voted to maintain investment in key services while ensuring excellent value for money for residents. The Vale's council tax remains one of the lowest among all shire district councils nationwide and substantially lower than the equivalent charge in neighbouring Oxford City, demonstrating the council's commitment to keeping costs low while delivering high-quality services.

Thanks to the council's careful financial planning, residents can look forward to receiving continued quality from the services they rely on; from one of the country's very best waste and recycling collections to first class housing and homelessness support, vibrant leisure facilities, vital community support and essential planning services and licensing and food safety checks, all delivered by their district council.

The approved budget features funding to deliver improved leisure facilities, including a teaching pool at Wantage Leisure Centre and an artificial pitch in Faringdon. Money for these projects comes from Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding the council has secured from developers of new homes. This funding will also help to pay for tree planting and biodiversity projects over the next three years.

The budget also secures the council's Community Hub through to April 2027. This valued service provides practical support and advice to residents with cost-of-living concerns, including helping people to meet the cost of energy bills, household essentials and food.

Vale of White Horse District Council receives just 7 per cent of the total council tax that its residents pay each year. The rest is divided between Oxfordshire County Council (78 per cent), Thames Valley's Police and Crime Commissioner (11 per cent) and local town/parish councils (4 per cent).

Council tax for services provided by the Vale between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 will be set at £161.69 for a Band D property. This means just £3.11 per week for a wide range of services including waste and recycling collections, community support, leisure services, parks and play areas, housing and planning services, environmental health and licensing.