

**Monday 10th November 2025**

Monthly Parish Update

Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne and**Cllr Debra Dewhurst***Vale of White Horse District Councillors*

Hello from Hayleigh and Debra

Sunday 9th November was Remembrance Sunday, and like every year, we honoured to be laying a wreath of Remembrance on behalf of the Vale of White Horse District Council. Each year, we parade down the High Street in

Harwell Village alongside veterans, cadets, parish councillors and other local groups.

National Government's plans to reorganise local government still dominates the discussion at the council, and the work of the officers. By the end of November, we will, as a council, have submitted a proposal to the Government for their consideration. To be clear, this will be their decision – and they have, in the case of Oxfordshire, three submissions to look at. The Oxfordshire unitary, the Greater Oxford model and the one which the Vale is putting forward alongside four other councils; Cherwell, West Ox, South Ox and West Berkshire. The proposal has the potential to save the most money of all the options – with possible savings reaching £59.8m a year. It would create authorities that are big enough to be efficient, stable and reliable, but local enough to care and be responsive to communities.

The proposal would create two councils covering the following geographical areas:

- **Oxford and Shires Council** would comprise all of the existing district areas of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire.
- **Ridgeway Council** would be made up of the whole of West Berkshire Council's area and all of the existing district areas of South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

The proposal has been designed to meet the criteria set out by the government earlier this year. The criteria called for all proposals to be for councils that serve populations of around 500,000, are financially stable, deliver high-quality services, are responsive to the needs of communities, and support positive growth across the region. Residents can read the full proposal or an abridged version on the website <http://twocouncils.org>.

In the last update, we explained the current position with the Joint Local Plan – which is still at the examination stage, though the Planning Inspectorate asked us to withdraw it. The Inspectors said the councils had failed in a “duty to co-operate” with Oxford City Council on the single issue of how many homes South and Vale should plan in their districts to help Oxford with its unmet needs. The councils wrote back to the Inspectors setting out concerns they had with the Inspectors' recommendation.

The latest development is that a few days later Matthew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning has written to the Planning Inspectorate, the organisation that oversees all Planning Inspectors, to request that they “be proportionate” in how they apply the guidelines related to the duty to co-operate, and to consider the context. The Minister's letter also welcomed Inspectors providing more opportunities during the examination process for councils to clarify how they've met the duty to co-operate.

Now [the two councils have written to the Inspectors again](#) requesting that they reconsider their initial conclusions in light of the Minister's letter, along with legal points the councils have raised, and Oxford's latest published housing figures – which show that we have already planned enough to cover the unmet need.

As a reminder, council meetings are held in public and if you wish to address council or committee, you can contact Democratic Services. 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.

Please also follow us on facebook:

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

Or email us: hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk and debra.dewhurst@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Local News

[SESRO consultation](#)

Thames Water has launched their statutory consultation for the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) Project, running until 11.59pm on 13 January 2026.

Community drop-in events

As part of this, Thames Water is also hosting community drop-in events which we have set out below. This is a formal consultation they need to undertake before they can submit their plans to government for the reservoir, which they currently intend to do in autumn next year (2026).

Thames Water is inviting responses from the wider public, and so you can provide your own, individual responses to the consultation through any of the following ways:

- Fill in the [online feedback form](#), accessible via the consultation website
- Email Thames Water's consultation response email address at SESRO@ipsos.com
- Fill in a printed feedback form, which are available from one of Thames Water's public consultation events, or by requesting that one is posted to you by Thames Water.
- Write to Thames Water free of charge at FREEPOST SESRO CONSULTATION.

All feedback must be submitted to Thames Water in writing by 11:59pm on 13 January 2026. Responses received after that date may not be considered. If you have any questions about the consultation materials or process, please contact Thames Water at info.SESRO@thameswater.co.uk.

Thames Water consultation events

In-person community information events:

- Saturday 15 November 2025, 10am - 4pm - Sutton Courtenay Village Hall, Hobbyhorse Lane, OX14 4BB
- Thursday 20 November 2025, 2pm – 8pm - Marcham Centre, Barrow Close, Marcham, OX13 6TY
- Friday 21 November 2025, 2pm – 8pm - Hanney War Memorial Hall, Brookside, East Hanney, OX12 0JL
- Wednesday 26 November 2025, 2pm – 8pm - The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BX
- Thursday 27 November 2025, 2pm – 8pm - Milton Hill House Hotel, near Steventon, OX13 6AF

Online events:

- Tuesday 18 November 2025, 1pm – 2pm [Book your place here](#)
- Monday 24 November 2025, 7pm – 8pm [Book your place here](#)

Next steps

Following the consultation, Thames Water will then consider the responses, then proceed to submit their plans to government – which they currently intend to do in autumn 2026. The government will then appoint Planning Inspectors to oversee and determine whether the plans will go ahead through a process called a Development Consent Order (DCO) application. Thames Water will need to demonstrate how they have taken in account relevant comments made during this consultation.

[Winter across the districts](#)

As the colder months approach, the councils have created a helpful guide to support residents through winter. The guide includes advice on keeping warm, support available through our community hub, steps to take during extreme weather, tips to prevent damp and mould, as well as information about our council services.

We work closely with our tenants to keep homes safe, dry, and free from damp and mould. [Under Awaab's Law](#), which is now in effect, social housing providers are required to respond quickly to reports of damp and mould. We're committed to meeting and wherever possible, exceeding these standards to help ensure all our homes remain safe and comfortable.

For more information go to - [Winter in The Vale - Vale of White Horse District Council](#)

Climate & Environment News

Tuckmill Meadows has some 'moo' residents

Meet Dorisse, Lucinda and KitKat – three Irish Dexter cows who have recently moved to Tuckmill Meadows nature reserve near Shrivenham as part of a nature recovery programme. Tuckmill Meadows, which is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), is owned by Vale of White Horse District Council and is managed by the Earth Trust with the help of Friends of Tuckmill volunteers.

Residents' guide to waste and recycling

The councils have produced new easy-to-read guides to help residents with their waste and recycling. The guides include what items go in which bin, who to contact if a collection is missed, how to reduce your waste and much more. There are two guides, available to view now on our website. Paper copies will also be provided to new homes.

- [houses with individual wheelie bins - guide to waste and recycling](#)
- [flats and properties with communal bins - guide to waste and recycling](#)

Help for town and parish councils

More of our town and parish councils are now wanting to introduce their own climate and biodiversity projects and strategies and are looking for advice on where to start.

The councils have developed a webpage hosting a variety of information for them from funding opportunities, ready-made strategies and case studies of other community projects which could offer them a framework for what they are trying to achieve. Take a look - <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/action-on-climate-and-nature/what-you-can-do-as-a-community/what-town-and-parish-councils-can-do/>

Energy saving measures - new information about funding

If residents are concerned about heating bills this winter, they may be interested in the councils' [updated energy saving leaflet](#) available on the website - <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/action-on-climate-and-nature/what-you-can-do-to-help-tackle-climate-change/retrofitting-your-home/>

The flyer comprises information about energy saving solutions from insulation to air source heat pumps and details of where people can get funding to help install these - including the new Warm Homes Grant.

Council News

Full Council – 22nd October

Significant public concerns around Thames Water's South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO) and the spiralling costs now associated with the proposed development, were raised at Vale of White Horse District Council's [full council meeting](#).

Councillors heard impassioned public statements from residents and local representatives before considering a [motion on the South East Strategic Reservoir Option \(SESRO\)](#) and discussed, amongst other issues, the emergence of much higher costs for the development. Capital construction costs have increased so far from an estimated £2.2 billion to three times that amount. Council unanimously approved the motion.

The Leader will now request that The Secretary of State directs Thames Water to prepare a new Water Resource Management Plan in the light of the significant change in costs, alongside writing to all the MPs representing parts of the Vale of the White Horse urging them to support the request. The council will continue arguing for the consideration of the alternative scheme, the Severn to Thames Transfer.

Man convicted after admitting eight-year council tax fraud

A Blewbury resident has been convicted of two charges of fraud after admitting to falsely claiming a single person discount on his council tax over an eight-year period.

Residents in receipt of the Single Person Discount on their council tax are reminded of their legal obligation to notify the council of any change in circumstances that may affect their eligibility for the discount. In

addition, the council conducts periodic reviews to verify that recipients continue to meet the criteria, specifically, that they remain the sole adult occupant of the property. If a resident's circumstances change, they must inform the council tax team without delay by contacting the Council Tax office or completing the [change of circumstances form](#). Failure to report any relevant changes within 21 days constitutes a criminal offence. This may result in the withdrawal of the discount and could lead to legal proceedings.

Record-Breaking Season at Abbey Meadow Pool!

This summer was a record breaker for Abbey Meadow outdoor pool in Abingdon with nearly 30,000 visitors coming to enjoy the facility. Vale of White Horse District Council and its leisure provider, GLL, who manage the pool, kiosk and splash pad for the council agreed a slightly earlier opening of the pool for summer season this year, and visitor numbers were double that from 2024.

Breaking the cycle of homelessness

Homelessness extends far beyond rough sleeping and can impact anyone, often without warning. It is frequently hidden, such as sofa surfing, encompassing individuals living in insecure, inadequate, or unsanitary housing, as well as those affected by domestic abuse. Proactive work to break the cycle of homelessness for vulnerable people and ensure support is accessible, effective, and timely is the focus of a new council strategy. Following a public consultation held in May and June, a new Joint Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been put in place by South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse district councils.

Postal vote reapplications

Residents who vote by post now need to reapply every three years if they wish to continue to cast their ballot this way.

Starting with a short trial in October, the council will write to people when their postal vote is up for renewal. The first group this rule change impacts, and who will receive a notification, will be those who applied for a postal vote on or before 31 January 2024. They will need to re-apply by 31 January 2026, otherwise their postal vote will expire.

You can find more information on postal voting on the [Electoral Commission website](#).

Social housing allocation policy changes now in place

Following a public consultation, the councils have now put in place an updated joint Housing Allocation Policy for both councils. The refreshed policy sets out the criteria on who can join the councils' housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated. See the policy on our website -

<https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/housing/social-housing-and-join-the-housing-register/>

Over £580,000 boost for local infrastructure in the Vale

Over the last six months, the council has transferred over £583,000 to invest in vital infrastructure delivered by the council, town and parish councils and other community organisations.

These investments have supported many projects — from public art and sports to eco-friendly improvements like solar panels.

As the local planning authority, Vale of White Horse collects financial contributions in the form of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 (S106) – this is the funding from housing developers to support the growth of the district when new developments are created.

Follow this link for a breakdown of [S106 funds have been approved and paid out and CIL monies transferred for Vale](#) (the document should download automatically).

Find out more about [CIL here](#) and [S106 here](#).

Magic awaits in Didcot as Beauty and the Beast opens in six weeks

With just six weeks to go until opening night, excitement is building as Polka Dot Pantomimes brings the much-loved classic Beauty and the Beast to Cornerstone Arts Centre this Christmas.

Running from **Thursday 18 December to Wednesday 31 December**, this spectacular family production promises a festive experience filled with laughter, music and magic.

Featuring a talented professional cast alongside local young performers, Beauty and the Beast is set to be a true community celebration and the perfect festive treat for audiences of all ages.

Tickets are on sale - <https://www.cornerstone-arts.org/whats/beauty-and-beast>

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