

**Tuesday 15th September, 2026**

Monthly Update

Cllr Hayleigh Gascoigne*Vale of White Horse District Council*

Post summer energy

Autumn has begun and the weather has started to turn, though it remains unseasonably warm and dry. August is a quiet time at the District Council. Whilst projects and services are continued to be delivered, there are fewer meetings and therefore political decisions during this time. The Autumn months will surely make up for it, as there is an extra council meeting scheduled in September. This is necessary to make constitutional changes in order to meet the Government's new requirements on how planning decisions are made. Whilst their intention is to streamline, my fear is that there will be even less input from those you have elected to represent you.

Speaking of planning applications, I noted that a recent planning application for signage at the Great Western Park shops, is for a Greggs..!

Local Government Reorganisation

At the start of the summer, and just before parliament went on recess, it announced the geographies for the new unitary councils to be created. Essentially getting rid of District Councils and County Councils, and creating one level of council that delivers all the services. Whilst the officers at the Councils have been working hard to bring forward the plans set out by government (the three unitaries in Oxfordshire model), the start of September, and Parliament returning from summer saw a new announcement that the plans are "under review"! The minister says this is intended to provide confidence that the process has been followed correctly, and that any future decisions align with the government's priorities, are sustainable and can be implemented successfully.

This does, however, leave us in an uncertain position now. We don't know what the timeline of the changes is, what the changes will be, and really, if they will go ahead at all! When we have updates, I will keep you informed.

What we do know is that now the timeline is too short to elect councillors to these new councils next May, there will still be elections, for the District Councils (Vale and South) – something that would have happened anyway, before any of these changes were brought in by government.

Voter Registration Canvass

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Districts Councils are sending requests to more than 88,000 properties requiring the householders to check and confirm their voter registration details are correct.

The canvass helps the councils to keep the electoral register up to date, to identify anyone who risks missing their chance to vote at any upcoming elections, and to encourage them to register before it's too late. You only need respond once for each household.

Wayfinding signs

Visitors to or residents of Didcot may have noticed new wayfinding signs that have been erected across the town. The new signs aim to help people find their way around Didcot more easily, as well as encourage sustainable travel and strengthen connections between neighbourhoods, facilities and open spaces. The project, run by the Didcot Garden Town team, has been running for a while and funded by money from the government specifically for Didcot Garden Town, and contributions from developers.

During the installation, it appears that there have been a number of issues reported, such as inaccuracies on the signs. I have contacted senior colleagues at the council to understand how this has happened, and remain

hopeful that the issues can be fixed by the contractor. I believe the project is a great idea, connecting the various parts of Didcot, new and old, together.

I write these updates to keep you updated on what I am up to, what is happening at the District Council and other relevant local matters.

You can follow me and the Vale of White Horse District Council on facebook:

www.facebook.com/CllrHayleigh & www.facebook.com/whitehorsedc

The best way to get a direct response is to email me and my ward colleague, Cllr Debra Dewhurst.

hayleigh.gascoigne@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

debra.dewhurst@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Our Community Hub is here to help you

If you need help because you are struggling financially or if you are just finding life difficult, the council can help. Whether it's practical support or just advice, get in touch:

- Tel: 01235 422600 (option 3)
- Email: communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

Our opening hours are Monday to Thursday 8.30am – 5pm and Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm.

Not open at the weekend or bank holidays.

Cost-of-living support

Here is a [handy leaflet that explains what cost-of-living support you can get](#) from our councils and advice on other local and national organisations that may also be able to help.

Mental Health Support

ChatHealth, launched by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, provides confidential mental health support via text message, offering immediate access to advice and support for individuals experiencing a range of mental health challenges, including low mood, anxiety and stress, loneliness, relationship difficulties, panic attacks, self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

For more information, visit the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust webpage below.

oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/news/new-24-7-text-message-mental-health-support-service-launches-across-oxfordshire-and-buckinghamshire

Local News

Great Western Park GP surgery

I have recently been in contact with the BOB ICB to 1- ask for an update on the Great Western Park medical provision, and 2- ask that they communicate with residents, and publish updates more frequently. They shared with me a new webpage, where they will post updates. thamesvalley.icb.nhs.uk/about-us/improving-our-estates-within-the-thames-valley-icb

Valley Park

Local residents will know the pain of slow delivery of medical provision on Great Western Park by the local NHS service, BOB ICB. On Valley Park, the set up of the legal agreement is different, and therefore we expect to see something delivered much sooner. Once a certain number of people have moved in, the developer (Taylor Wimpey) needs to make an offer to the ICB of what the medical provision could look like, at a high level. The space/money has already been set out in the legal agreement. The ICB then has 12 weeks to decide what it wants to do. It could decide to take a lump sum of money to invest in other existing local services, or build a brand new provision on Valley Park.

Didcot Garden Town meeting

Residents, community groups and local business leaders are invited to attend the autumn Didcot Garden Town Community Update Meeting later this month to find out more about the future plans for the town and surrounding areas.

All are welcome to the event on **Wednesday 30 September from 17.00 -19.30** at Harwell Village Hall.

Attendees will be able to hear from representatives from South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils about the latest projects from the Didcot Garden Town team, the Broadway housing development project, heat recovery and heatwave resilience support with the Climate Team and updates on the districts' leisure infrastructure projects.

As well as council staff there will be representatives from other organisations which support the work of the Didcot Garden Town programme including:

- National Grid
- Didcot Powerhouse

Climate & Environment News

New campaign encourages residents to Waste Less, Clean Spaces, Better Places

Residents across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse are being encouraged to discover how a few small changes at home can make a big difference for their community as a new month-long campaign launches this September.

Recycle

Residents across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse are being encouraged to recycle with confidence this Recycle Week by following one simple message: Don't Guess. Check it before you chuck it.

Most households across the districts recycle regularly, but many of the wrong items still end up in recycling bins, sometimes up to 22 per cent, because people are unsure whether something can be recycled. Although well intentioned, placing the wrong items in the recycling bin can make it harder for good-quality materials to be recycled into new products. And, if items are messy (such as food residue or nappies), it can prevent whole truckloads of recyclable items from being recycled.

By taking a few seconds to check the Oxfordshire Waste Wizard (Oxfordshire.gov.uk/wastewizard) before recycling, residents can help improve the quality of recycling collected across the districts and make sure more recyclable items are recycled.

Zero Waste

People across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse are being encouraged to discover how preventing waste before it's created can be easier than they think as Zero Waste Week gets underway.

That could mean planning meals to reduce food waste, borrowing instead of buying, repairing broken items, refilling household products or donating unwanted belongings.

Throughout the week, the councils will be highlighting local refill shops, Libraries of Things and practical ideas that make it easier for residents to waste less without changing their lifestyle.

To find out more, visit whitehorsedc.gov.uk/Reduce&Reuse

Council News

Full Council meetings

The next Vale Full Council meeting is on 23rd September. The key purpose is to agree changes to the Council's constitution, in order to enact the Government's changes to planning rules, known as the national scheme of delegation, creating a one-size-fits-all approach. Their aim is to streamline the planning process, but our fear is that local voices will now not be heard, and there will be less democratic accountability.

Local government reorganisation (LGR) announcement

At the start of September, following summer recess, the government announced it will review its local government reorganisation (LGR) decisions across England. This has implications about the future of councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. The government has not yet agreed the scope of the review but aims to complete it by mid-October, although no firm commitment was given on timing.

In a joint statement, the leaders of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council expressed their disbelief and disappointment at the latest government announcement:

Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council:

“We’re deeply disappointed to have received this information at such short notice. All along, our councils have all done what government had asked of us in the preparation for local government reorganisation. Every pound and every officer hour spent responding to a process that is subsequently paused, is a resource that could have been spent on housing, social care, roads, planning and other frontline services. The uncertainty this has caused is a further erosion of our trust in government.

“We will now do our utmost to understand the way forward for our districts.”

Councillor Bethia Thomas, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council:

“This unexpected announcement today has come as a shock to us all at Vale and completely disregards the huge amount of time, money and effort we have put in so far to follow what has been asked of us.

“We will be seeking further clarity from the government on how this will affect the Local Government Reorganisation timeline in our area. We hope the government will provide the detail required urgently given the impact this announcement may have for us.

“In the face of such confusion created in Westminster, our priority remains to secure the best possible future outcome for our communities.”

Consultation on Councils’ second Joint Local Plan launched

A consultation has launched this week on the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils’ second Joint Local Plan. A local plan sets out how development will be planned and delivered over time to meet the current and future needs of people living and working in a particular area. It guides where development should go (and where it shouldn’t) including new housing and employment, as well as identifying the supporting infrastructure needed.

This stage of the process, known as a ‘scoping consultation’ is an initial step to get an idea of what communities, businesses and the planning industry think the plan should include and how the councils should approach future engagement.

The consultation runs from **Tuesday 8 September until Tuesday 29 September at 11.59pm**. People can take part online here: www.southandvale.gov.uk/JLP2-scoping-consultation

Visit www.southandvale.gov.uk/JLP2-scoping for more background information on the Joint Local Plan 2045 (JLP2) and all the ways to take part in the consultation.

Although it might seem unusual to start a new plan whilst the first plan is still being examined, due to government regulations we have to prepare ourselves for the next local plan. Many other councils around the country preparing their last plan under the previous arrangements are in the same position as us – so we are by no means unique in running two plans simultaneously.

Wantage Literary Festival

Wantage Literary Festival returns to The Beacon Wantage from Monday 26 October to Saturday 7 November, bringing more events than ever to the town during the National Year of Reading.

Brews & Books Café inside The Beacon will be open Monday to Friday, 09.45 to 13.00, with extended hours during the festival. Visitors can book tickets, enjoy a coffee and pick up a festival brochure while they are there. A little word to the book-wise: some events are expected to be popular, so don’t leave it too late.

Tickets are available online, by calling 0333 666 3366 or from Brews & Books Café.

Visit The Beacon website for the full programme.