

## **DC update for Nick Price 20220720**

### **Broadband roll-out**

At the risk of repeating what Paul Batchelor might report, Paul, Ian Stern (West Challow PC chair) and I met Craig Bower online for an update.

Roll out of Ultra-fast Fibre Broadband roll-out has been and remains confusing. The UK has decided to facilitate competition between companies which will in theory keep costs down. Openreach are converting all our copper wire phone connections to fibre and companies such as Airband are also competing in this area. Airband are not only laying out fibre but will be offering connections to individual houses. Openreach are different in that they are not Internet providers which is done through Sky, TalkTalk etc. In some places we may find that Openreach and Airband are laying cable in the same place!! Bizarre but true.

Once the fibre has been rolled-out in our area, which we are told by OCC will be completed by end of the second quarter of 2023 (connection from the street to distribution points such as telegraph poles), residents should be contacted by their internet supplier which will then organise the final connection from the street to the house including provision of a new router and suggesting the need for a new phone. In some cases Airband has already contacted many individual residents but there is not obligation to take up this offer which may be more limited than other providers.

Most but not all residents have internet. The phone connection provider will be required to ensure that during the change from copper to fibre residents who do not want internet access will continue to have a phone line. How this will be done is not yet clear.

### **Ock Catchment Partnership meeting 20220708**

I attended the meeting of the Ock Partnership at Farmoor Sailing Club on July 8th. The Ock Catchment Partnership is seeking to clean up river and stream water in the catchment area of the Ock and its tributaries including Letcombe and Childrey brooks, both chalk streams running through several of our parishes.

Thames Water announced this week details on their new £5m Catchment Partnership Support (CAPS) Fund to accelerate the delivery of the Catchment Based Approach in securing healthy freshwater ecosystems over the next five years.

The approach is based on learnings from three Smarter Water Catchment pilots, with the first phase seeing every Catchment Partnership in the Thames area receiving a grant of £22k in 2022-23 with £10K of that retained for shovel-ready projects.

After the meeting Jeremy Biggs of Fresh Water Habitats Trust took us around Pinkhill Meadows, a wetland reserve built from scratch, between the west border of Farmoor reservoir and the Thames. Pinkhill was dug as several artificial ponds in 1992 – with huge support from Thames Water. Rare plants have either taken root naturally or been introduced experimentally. There are cuckoos and several species of Warblers. It is a magical place.

### **Permitted Development**

Permitted development is the relatively small-scale development that residents might want to do that is not significant enough impact to require a full planning application. It is worthwhile finding out what can and what can't be done without obtaining planning permission. A good technical guide can be found at:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/830643/190910\\_Tech\\_Guide\\_for\\_publishing.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/830643/190910_Tech_Guide_for_publishing.pdf)

and some basic information about planning and permitted development rights (PDR) can be found at: [www.gov.uk/guidance/when-is-permission-required](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/when-is-permission-required)

We occasionally come across these and it is worth while checking up on your rights and responsibilities should a minor development be considered. The Vale Planning Team can also be consulted.

The guidelines cover the rules in Schedule 2 of the Order. Part 1 includes extensions, loft conversions and roof light, buildings and development within the curtilage of the house, driveways, chimneys and satellite dishes. Part 2 covers gates, fences and walls, exterior painting, EV charging points and CCTV. Solar panels are also covered.

In our area, changes made in 2018 allow the change of use from agricultural buildings to residential for up to 5 homes as permitted development. This does not apply within the AONB where planning permission is still required.

It is worth noting that changes to planning policy in 2020 are aimed at increasing flexibility to attempt to deal with the housing crisis (UK population has increased by 40% in 60 years – not surprising that there is a crisis). These include upward extensions, demolition of unused buildings and rebuilding as residential and pubs operating as takeaways.

### **Wantage Hospital and local health services**

Changes in the local health service seems to be a constant feature in these reports and on this occasion, I am not sure where to start!

We have been waiting for Oxford Heath (OH) to present their plans for community health service provision. I have been worried, as the Vale representative on HOSC, that this is a huge undertaking and we have heard nothing and will want to know the evidence base for any decisions taken, which was a major failing for the OX12 pilot study. Local concerns about the future of Wantage Hospital are certainly in OH's mind and we were invited to look around the hospital on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. OH presented the overall rationale behind community health services which we had heard before and the outpatient services which are currently run from the hospital including ophthalmology, ENT, eating disorders and mental health in addition to existing activities such as adult and children's speech, immunisation. We looked at the maternity unit, which is very modern but currently unused, as a result of staff shortages generally in Oxfordshire so that Wantage staff have been redeployed to Wallingford! I have suggested that we try for London weighting for NHS staff in Oxfordshire but that has been considered many time and is unlikely to happen.

However, at the May meeting of HOSC we were told of another layer of reorganisation to attempt to break to log-jam of acute bed shortages with the knock-on effects for the ambulance service. The emergency and community health service are to be merged into an Integrated Improvement Programme (IIP) again with the aim of accelerating the Home-First/Discharge to Assess policy. This is a huge transformation and it concerns me that we

have three reorganisations happening simultaneously: the BOB ICS, Community Health Services and now IIP. We don't know whether there are resources for all this.

### **Abingdon Reservoir – where are we?**

Water Resources South East (WRSE) published the summary and statistics of the Response to the consultation on their 'Emerging Regional Water Resources Plan' in May. There was across the board criticism of the Plan from Stakeholders, and as admitted by them, WRSE were taken by surprise at the scale and the level of dissatisfaction in the responses.

The Group Against Reservoir Development (GARD) are waiting to hear that WRSE have really listened. Ofwat have criticised the lack of detailed cost and environmental evidence in the plan and WRSE have committed to provide more in the draft plan in the Autumn. Interestingly, there was a lot of support for Severn Thames Transfer (300 out of 1150 respondents). This was GARD's preferred alternative to the Reservoir.

The WRSE response can be seen at <https://wrse.uk.engagementhq.com/our-regional-plan>, following the link to the "Emerging Regional Plan consultation response". Ofwat's criticism of WRSE is at <https://www.ofwat.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/14-03-2022-WRSE-regional-plan-letter-for-web.pdf>.

Further information can be seen at GARD's website ([www.abingdonreservoir.org.uk](http://www.abingdonreservoir.org.uk)).

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