

District Council Report 20221108

OCC grant retro-fitting

I have already mailed you about this grant for retro-fitting energy efficiency measures from the county council for low-income owner occupier or private rented households. Could you please ensure that relevant households in the parish are notified of this. The application is made online so please could you ensure that residents who might not have access to the internet are given support to enable them to apply. Our villages had good support teams during Covid and these may know the residents concerned and be able to help.

Rural isolation – GP and Pharmacy access

As an ongoing issue we are increasingly concerned about rural isolation, particularly since the reduction in community bus services and difficulties with accessing GP services. Healthwatch Oxfordshire produced a report on this earlier this year (<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Rural-Isolation-in-Oxfordshire-Report-March-2022.pdf>) which, despite some issues related to the method used, is highly informative. Although my main concern is the relatively small number of elderly or infirm residents, some of whom live in retirement bungalow complexes and who might not have their own transport or use the internet to access services easily, it also applies to youngsters some of whom may not be able to travel around locally. This topic is being discussed at the county health scrutiny committee (HOSC) in November and I will no doubt come back to this topic again.

Oxfordshire Health held a workshop on GP practices on October 17th where this was on the agenda which concentrated on the need to build primary care facilities for new housing development. The shortage of NHS dentists and the problem of their contract, which is very different to GP contracts was also discussed. You will no doubt have seen that work has started in earnest on the expansion of the Mably Way Health Centre. This is going to improve services locally but the issues mentioned above remain.

Access to pharmacies is also important. At a recent workshop we were informed that GPs are looking to delegate some of their consultation to pharmacies but access to these is also an issue.

South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS)

South Central Ambulance Services have been reviewed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and found to be inadequate in several areas of their service. The CEO has recently retired and the new CEO will now take over the improvement plan which was presented to HOSC recently. One of the related issues, which is mentioned frequently in the national media, is the delayed admission because patients are not being discharged from acute hospitals. This is also being addressed by integrating this part of the system with discharge to home/community hospitals. We are all hopeful that this reorganisation will be successful.

You will all know that health services in Oxfordshire are now amalgamated with those of Buckinghamshire and West Berks under the “BOB” ICS (Integrated Care System). The CEO has

recently resigned and moved on and an interim head has been appointed from The Royal Berks Hospital.

AONB workshop

The North Wessex Downs AONB is overseen by a Council of Partners, including the Vale, most of which contribute financially. The new Chair of the CoP is concerned that the relevant local authorities are not working together closely enough. At a recent workshop they identified 6 areas of improvement to improve the delivery of the AONB goals. These included (i) supporting the rural economy, since there was a perception that the planning process was an obstacle, (ii) delivering greater biodiversity and improvements in climate, (iii) improving communications between the local authorities and (iv) improving the scope for benefits from health and well-being. This might be done through social prescribing involving conservation volunteer groups and farmer clusters.

A meeting of the Council of Partners today in Basingstoke started to work through how best to achieve the goals set at the last meeting. This is ongoing activity but we are keen on raising the profile of the AONB.

The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) has selected the North Wessex Downs as a pilot for the first Protected Landscape in the UK for inclusion in the IUCN Green List as an accreditation of high quality protection and management of Landscape and Biodiversity.

Footpaths online

Please remember to notify any residents who have an interest in restoring local “lost” footpaths of the online presentation/Q&A session that we will have at 6.30pm on December 12th with John Gordon of the Ramblers Association. Please pass on the Teams meeting invite to anyone who might be interested.

Planning issues EIA, amendments etc

As you probably know, I am still unhappy with several aspects of the planning process including, (i) Environmental Impact Assessments being made by officers rather than councillors, (ii) The complexity of some applications, particularly amendments, which may involve 10s of documents to wade through. I have asked for some clarity with the suggestion that a single additional document be included that describes briefly the nature of the amendment., (iii) the subjective nature of decisions on substantial reconstruction. I have mentioned these things more than once to the planning councillors/officers but have got nowhere at the moment.

Cllr Dr Paul Barrow
Ridgeway Ward
20221108