

District council report

Neighbourhood Plan

With the support of Julia Evans, the RFO I have started to put together the complete first draft of the Neighbourhood Plan. It has many holes which need filling and extensive tidying up but at least it is beginning to take shape. Once it is complete it will be circulated amongst the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for comment and it will then go to the Vale for a pre-submission consultation.

There remain a few outstanding issues. We are still waiting for the complete Landscape Character Assessment from Bluestone which I have chased up.

You will also recall a request for walkers to check the parish's footpaths. Anna and I have made a start on these and it has opened up a discussion point for the parish council which I will bring to the next meeting. Basically, the paths that extend north from the centre of the village are in poor shape and many of them either overgrown or obliterated! In some places there are wooden bridges over ditches which look as though they were all installed at the same time probably 30 years ago. Some have lost planks and some planks are rotten. These footpaths and bridleways need to be managed since if they are looked after they will perhaps be used more often. My understanding was that landowners are required to maintain them, something which we will tackle. However, I have also sought advice from the county countryside officer and the Trust for Oxfordshire, the latter because I have been told that they have a fund for stiles and bridges etc. These enquiries are ongoing.

Speeding

This remains a serious and worrying problem. You will know that a police check caught 6 drivers speeding through the village and one with no insurance!

Trevor and I met with Mark Francis from Oxfordshire Highways to discuss installation of SIDs. It was a very useful meeting and Mark gave us a few useful tips about installing and use. OCC Highways are prepared to pay for installing the posts on which they sit. You may remember that we had a serious discussion with Highways about the choice of SIDs available since we were advised that only the Westcotec kit was authorised. I was worried about this since they are more expensive and heavier than the kit produced by Elan Cité, and Westcotec is a member of the body that authorises these things – so smelt a bit fishy to me. Elan have also now got their act together and are also authorised providers. East Hanney have been using these for some time (illegally! 😊) and they are very successful at bringing average speeds down. This is something that we should consider for the next financial year.

Mark also mentioned that other options for reducing speeding might be possible (as we did not get the roundabout at the Crest site entrance!!) including a chicane between the village and KA's. We are also exploring this option with him.

A417 School house manhole covers

This has been a noisy nuisance for some time since after the fairly poor road surface repair following the drainage issues at the Crest site the manholes were replaced but fitted badly rattling every time a vehicle went over disturbing the local residents. A replacement made a few weeks ago was not much better. Pestering Highways paid off and last week they were replaced with heavier-duty covers and this seems to have solved the problem – permanently, hopefully!

Woodhill Lane and flooding at Haynes

This is a longish-term item. The bad flooding that occurs from time to time is a result largely of poor drainage at this point as a result of the semi-blocked road-side drainage, tree roots in the underground pipe leading to Woodhill Lane ditch, poor flow in the ditch itself and poor flow in Woodhill Brook, the latter as a result of vegetation and rubbish. Most of the Woodhill Lane ditch has now been cleared (together with a stretch of hedgerow – we are trying to contact the agent about this!). Vanessa and I had a chat with the Wasborough agent about starting to clear Woodhill Brook and he agreed to get this done in stages. Ive also been in touch with Leigh Travers at the Vale since some of the PCC responsibilities are delegated down to the Vale and they are watching the drainage system down there carefully.

Childrey Brook

Having looked in some detail at the Woodhill Lane ditch/Woodhill Brook I've also followed (on Google maps!) Woodhill Brook into Childrey Brook and up to where it meets Letcombe Brook and into Ock. I have had a couple of conversations with Wild Oxfordshire and the Letcombe Brook Project about Childrey Brook and whether it might be incorporated into the Letcombe Brook project or something similar might be done in terms of Nature Recovery. Just thoughts at the moment but comments welcome.

Planning

We have/have had a number of planning applications on the table. Id like to get comments on the planning process since (it seems to me) that with the information supplied in planning applications it is sometimes (i) difficult to ascertain why the proposed work is being done, and (ii) what the important detail is. I will feed any comments back.

Letcombe Hill Yew Tree

Many will know that the yew tree at the bottom of Letcombe Hill is interfering with the electricity cables but, despite local residents offering to pay for the work, no-one would cut it without knowing whose responsibility it was! OCC rejected the suggestion that it was theirs despite this being seen on the land registry and there was an opinion that it was owned privately. The conversation got nowhere slowly but OCC offered to come out and take a look with the result that they agreed to take on the responsibility as it was on the border of the adjacent property. This work will be done in the autumn, probably September.

Wider issues

North Wessex Downs AONB

At the recent meeting of the Council of Partners (on which the Vale sits) the new Chairman, Sarah Nichols, whose background is in industry (communication, fund raising etc) mentioned that AONBs are going through many changes including the proposal to change their status to more closely resemble National Parks, all of these becoming Protected Landscapes. The Environment Bill will push through many changes affecting how farming is done with more emphasis on land stewardship and Nature Recovery. This will be done through the Environment land Management Scheme (ELMS) moving away from the CAP. To this end Defra are increasing the income to the NWD AONB three-fold. This will enable farmers in the AONB to propose fund projects with these aims in mind under a Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) initiative.

Increasing the profile of the NWD AONB is important and improved signage on major roads into the AONB has been proposed.

Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee

Oxford Health are continuing to develop their county-wide Community Health Service Provision Strategy which is replacing the OX12 review. We have considerable concerns over this new review not only in terms of the extent to which it seems to resemble the OX12 review with all its faults but also in the proposed effects on Wantage Hospital. As before the proposal is for the in-patient beds to go replaced by a number of services. I am not convinced by the rationale of their strategy having read some of the relevant literature on which it is based. A workshop has been proposed to discuss these issues.

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July 12 2021