

District Councillor Report 2021229

Road drainage

We have been pestering OCC and the Vale, to whom some of the work is delegated, about road drainage. When the responsibilities changed in 1991 poor communication meant that landowners who now had most of the responsibility for ditch maintenance were poorly informed or supported and many of these have been badly neglected for at least 2 decades! There is a lot of catching up to do. The worst stretches in this ward are Gramps/Smith's Hill and Holborn Hill in Letcombe Bassett, Warborough Road in Letcombe Regis and Whitelands Road connecting West Challow with the B4507. There are also patches on the B4507 at Sparsholt and the Blowing Stone (near the house not the pub). We have been reviewing the worst of these with the Vale Flooding Officer to see what can be done to ameliorate some of this neglect. OCC also need to be involved since some of the road drainage system is blocked and there is clearly no point in clearing out ditches if the water can't go anywhere. This is ongoing and more of this in due course.

Flooding

We are now in contact with the Vale and OCC (and awaiting a response) to see whether we can meet them jointly to develop a strategy for maintaining a comprehensive road drainage system for Warborough Road, Gramps/Smiths Hill and Holborn Hill.

Health

I am the Vale representative on JHOSC (county health scrutiny committee) as my background is in infectious disease. We had an interesting meeting on Nov 25th.

The Covid update involved a heat-map indicating that after restrictions were dropped in June levels of infection went up in 20-24 yearolds followed by other youngsters. It increased steadily again in September in school-age children followed a month later by it appearing in their parents generation and from there it has spread into older age groups. The guidance on mask wearing is common sense. I won't preach but 90% of hospital cases are in those who have not been unvaccinated. I know that there are some irrational but real concerns about this vaccine but how does it differ from the childhood vaccinations that everyone received years ago? No difference at all is the answer. For protecting populations and preventing disease they are all very effective and there is nothing dodgy about them at all. I have worked with vaccines all my life.

We are all concerned about the current Omicron variant. The number of cases in Oxfordshire and nationally are through the roof with more than 1,000 new cases daily in the county. However, in contrast to early last year tis has not resulted in a significant number of deaths. In fact in the last 7 days, none at all (now 1!)! However, the OUH is very worried about staff shortages and we hope to get some figures from them in February at HOSC. Care homes re also very concerned about increasing staff shortages from illness.

The review of county-wide provision of community health services, which took over from our much-slated OX12 review, is ongoing. This looks a much more reasonable and rational approach than that taken for the OX12 postcode. It is quite clear from some of the international literature that the emphasis will be, wherever possible, of being cared for, recuperating and aging at home to try and improve the efficiency and quality of care. It is recognised that community hospital beds will be needed and there is a national "bed optimisation" programme underway. We have asked for more information on this but at least it was stated that should beds be discontinued permanently at Wantage Hospital then a public consultation will be carried out.

The timetable for all this is that short-listed options will be discussed in March 2022.

I carried out my own research on infection control procedures in care homes in late 2020 and found that the care homes associations were not using the best and most comprehensive sources of advice and information. This was submitted as a report to HOSC and accepted by the Director of Adult Care Services so we hope that protocols in care homes and other institutions will be improved for this winter and beyond.

Healthwatch/Community First Oxfordshire is carrying out a survey and review of rural isolation. This is important not just regarding loneliness but also in access to services. The result of the survey will be published in March.

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AONB and Environment

We had a meeting of the Council of Partners (the Vale is a partner) of the North Wessex Downs AONB on Nov 9th. A number of topics were discussed including the govt response to the Glover review on Landscapes, the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme which I have mentioned before, dark skies and Farmer Clusters. I can provide more details if requested.

I have been in touch with the Letcombe Brook project and The Fresh Water Habitats Trust to see what might be done regarding improving the several streams that cut across our parishes, particularly Childrey Brook in the first instance, together with their surrounding environment.

Planning

We have seen the first intention to apply for planning permission for one of the plots of land submitted in the call for sites in May. This one is between East Challow and Wantage just north of the A417 and is at the screening application stage to determine whether an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is needed – It is bizarre and I'm not sure why they go through this stage at all! This involves the Vale working through criteria set out by Central Government as to whether additional EIA assessments should be submitted with any future planning applications. East Challow village is producing a Neighbourhood Plan (at public consultation stage), a major point for which is to keep Wantage, Grove and East Challow as separate settlements. East Challow is the worst affected by these submissions following the call in May since there are several plots almost surrounding the village.

I will keep you informed on any others that come out of the woodwork.

Many will be aware that Lovat Parks Ltd, a caravan park operator has bought Britchcombe Farm, below Whitehorse Hill and thereby acquired lawful development certificates enabling them, we believe, to station mobile homes. A similar screening application has been received by the Vale for bases for caravans, surfacing for car parks, minor internal access roads plus the laying of general utilities (Water, electricity and drainage).

The Vale has increased its input into planning enforcement. As always, prioritisation of cases will be done but hopefully we can get a more proactive approach to this (which is necessarily reactive, of course).

Puppy sales

We have had reports in East Challow of puppy selling. The Vale is following this up but if there is any evidence of this in other villages please let me know.

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Ridgeway Ward