

## **District Councillor Report for East Challow Parish Council 20250108**

### **Vale Shared Prosperity Fund**

Central government has been giving money to local authorities for improving the local environment. There is the REPF (Rural England Prosperity Fund) which is aimed at supporting farmers who want to diversify and also for strengthening rural businesses. We have received the £3000 to develop a paper and online tourist map/guide highlighting footpaths and other rights of way and identifying historical and other assets which might bring visitors into our villages to use the pubs and cafes. I have been told that ours will be linked to the Vale's tourist centre and the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust which should widen its reach.

We had an online meeting in December with an update on the SPF (Shared Prosperity Fund) with some examples of those who received money including the Vale who are doing something similar to our map/guide to bring tourists into south Oxfordshire and promoting the visitor economy. Others were Nature Trails, Active Travel and supporting community start-up companies.

### **Full Council Dec 18th**

The Full Council met December 18<sup>th</sup>. The Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which benefits those in circumstances of particular hardship, was discussed and it was proposed and agreed that a new claim could be backdated as before but the period would extend from 6 months to 12 months.

A motion was passed asking the Secretary of State to review the level of resources towards flood mitigation.

Councillors also voted to support an independent proposal to increase their allowance. I thought that this was unnecessary and would be received badly so did not support it.

### **Flooding at Mellor's**

The s19 report on flooding on the A417 at Mellor's has been published by OCC. A formal report was required because the road was closed for more than 2 weeks.

The description of what happened was complete but we know what happened and more or less the sequence of events.

The conclusions and recommendations are interesting:

1. The landowners must desilt their sections of Childrey Brook. OCC will then continue to monitor.
2. After the brook has been cleared OCC assets will be checked. For me this must be the inspection chamber at the end of the ditch which continues to spew water onto the road.
3. Review and repair the road!
4. Do an annual check of Childrey Brook.

So, nothing new here. I think some of the OCC assets could and should be checked before the landowners clear their bit of the brook but which does also very much need to be done.

To find this report just Google Oxfordshire County Council flood investigation reports.

I asked Highways Engagement to put up a couple of "Uneven Road Surface" signs either side of the section of the A417 where the surface is awful. They are now in place and not in ideal positions (I did think about moving one but its probably OK) but better than nothing.

I am also asking the NFU and the CLA to remind their members about clearing ditches and waterways across their land.

### **A338 at The Ark**

I have asked about the road closure at The Ark (A338). The TTRO has been extended. The reason for the permit request extension is that the central 3 bridge spans are flooded out and the central arch is partially weakened (due to slots cuts in the underside of the masonry awaiting reinforcement installation), with 3 weeks of work left to complete.

Because the water level is so high the contractor has applied for an Environment Agency flood risk consent variation to be able to locally install temporary dams early in the New Year to allow us to complete the works even if the levels are to rise.

### **Local government reorganisation**

The government has decided to move towards larger local government units with a mayor with the goal of devolving more political power to the regions. I'm not sure that this will make local government easier or better but we have no choice.

We currently have parish and district councils working very locally and county councils, and one does wonder how well the county-level works in Oxfordshire - we all know the condition of the highways and surely more could be done with schools.

Central Govt wants to eliminate district councils and combine district council units (mine, for example, covers 7 villages from East Challow to Kingston Lisle) with county council units producing unitary authorities with councillors covering an area somewhere in between a county unit (<18 villages) and the district unit (in this case 7 villages).

I don't know how this is going to shape up. The county of Oxfordshire as such may disappear as a local government administrative unit which might expand to include Bucks and West Berks (We already administer all health care across this big unit (Bucks, Oxon, west Berks, BOB) which has not been an astounding success, I have to say. What will happen to the districts, we don't know. The Vale of White Horse might, for example, merge with South Oxfordshire and West Berks which are all relatively rural areas but no one knows at the moment what's going to happen but it will all have happened by the time of the next election! The plan will probably give central government fewer units to deal with but I am worried that having far more villages for each councillor to deal with will reduce the interaction between councillors and residents. Having a mayor will get things done but maybe there will be less influence from the villages so that worries me too,

### **Report from Thames Valley Chief Constable**

On December 10<sup>th</sup> we had the online annual report from the Thames Valley Police Chief Constable. It was very interesting. There was a discussion about having mobile average speed cameras (the ones we see on Motorways) for the A420 which is an accident black spot and the use of ANPR which helps to catch people who don't pay at petrol stations and are then reminded about their absence of car insurance. 80% renew within two weeks and the

remaining 20% are found to be petty criminals. Not much about drug dealing though which is a pain in some of our villages.

Cllr Dr Paul Barrow

Ridgeway Ward

Vale of Whitehorse District Council

4<sup>th</sup> Jan 2025