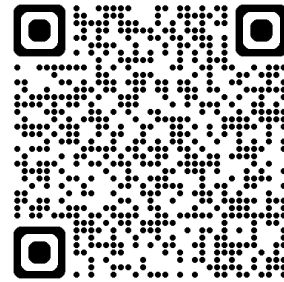


July 2026

VOWH District Councillor Report
for Ridgeway Ward

You can now view this report (and previous ones) at
<https://steady.page/en/a-view-from-the-ridgeway/>



Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

LGR relates to scrapping our district and county council and having “unitary” councils that do everything that is currently spread across district and county. (Existing town and parish councils will still provide very local services to their communities.) After months of waiting, the government have now announced that their preference (aka “minded-to” decision) is for the [three unitary authorities proposal](#) for Oxfordshire. The “3UA” model means that from 1 April 2028 (“vesting day”), our seven existing councils in this area will be replaced by three new unitary councils.

The new councils will be:

- Greater Oxford Council – covering Oxford and its immediate surroundings.
- Northern Oxfordshire Council – covering most of the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts.
- Ridgeway Council – covering most of the existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts, combined with West Berkshire.

Our parishes are therefore going to be part of the new Ridgeway Council. The exact makeup of the wards/divisions inside the new councils are still to be decided but work is underway to get this clarity as soon as possible.

The next step is for a structural changes order (SCO), expected later in 2026. This will set out the legal basis and process for moving to the new council's arrangements. From that point, our existing councils will enter a transition period, working together to prepare for the new structures. In May 2027 you will be able to elect councillors to the shadow council. Between May 2027 and April 2028, these elected members act as shadow councillors, setting budgets, choosing a leader, and hiring top staff, while our existing county (OCC) and district council (VOWH) still run daily services up until the new councils officially come into effect on “vesting day”.

During the transition, residents and businesses should continue to contact existing councils in the usual way. County and district councillors like myself will continue to help residents through existing routes.

On vesting day, the shadow authority dissolves, the old county (OCC) and district councils (VOWH) end, and the shadow councillors seamlessly come out of the shadows(!) and transition into the official, full-powered Ridgeway Council.

Joint Local Plan 2045

As mentioned last month, we have started working on our Joint Local Plan 2045. New government regulations mean that at the same time as working towards adopting our first Joint Local Plan, we are required to start preparing our next plan for the area, which would run to 2045. Despite the timescales being after when our District Council will no longer exist,

it is still important to get this right as the Local Plans “move to” to the new unitary council and will be applied to the area that they were developed for.

The first consultation stage of the new plan-making process is the Scoping Consultation where we will be seeking views on what the new plan should contain and how we should approach future engagement on the plan. This consultation will be open from Tuesday 8 September until Tuesday 29 September 2026. The government regulations only allow us to accept responses submitted within the published consultation period. It is also worth noting that this scoping consultation will not be consulting on any proposed policies or strategies – that will come later in the process.

[The Joint Local Plan 2045 webpage](#) has more information.

Wantage Market Place

The Oxfordshire County Council’s consultation survey closed on 8 July, receiving a high number of responses. They are now in the process of reviewing and analysing all the feedback received. They anticipate having a draft report finalised in early Autumn 2026. Like myself, Wantage Town Council have reservations relating to a number of issues with the proposed plans and posted [a statement regarding Oxfordshire County Council’s proposed Market Place improvements](#). The Town Council owns the centre Market Place also the area outside The Bear Hotel and any works in these areas will need the Town Council’s permission.

Cool spaces

Following a discussion at a recent full council meeting, advice and guidance for community groups and managers of community buildings who want to set up Cool Spaces is available on our [climate webpages](#).

Reminder: Cost-of-living support and advice drop in

The next stops on the Community Hub team’s roadshow providing advice on housing support, energy and heating grants, and other ways to help manage household costs will be:

- **Tuesday 11 August**, 11am to 1pm at Didcot Baptist Church, 43 Wantage Road, Didcot, OX11 0BS

You are welcome to drop in to the roadshow venue at any time, no bookings are required. I will share further dates as I hear them.

Proposed travellers site at Challow Station

Permission has been refused for the creation of 12 Traveller and Gypsy pitches together with the formation of hardstanding, a play area, and the erection of 12 day rooms (self-build).

This follows many months of work by the team and multiple deadline extensions causing a great deal of uncertainty to residents and businesses in the area. Thank you to all residents for taking the time to share their thoughts on the application with me.

Recycling Centres

Back in June we passed a motion around recycling centres and fly-tipping. One of the main actions was for us to write to Oxfordshire County Council who operate the recycling centres. You can [read our letter](#) and [the recently received reply](#). The response includes confirmation that Oxfordshire County Council will undertake a formal review of the HWRC access arrangements and booking system, with the findings to be published in December 2026.

Land charges system update

The [Land Charges system](#) launched on Monday 13 July after a major upgrade and is now accepting land charges searches. We've been warned there is still a delay in processing of searches beyond the normal eight-day turnaround period. This process is taking a bit longer than normal as it's a new system and the team needs to undertake rigorous additional checks to ensure all information is returned correctly.

We have arranged extra team resources and staff to help get things moving. The team will deal with searches in date received order and updates are being published on our websites to keep everyone informed (at time of writing, the page was last updated 6 August 2026).

We know the downtime has affected many people across our district, so I would like to pass on the team's thanks to everyone who has waited patiently while these vital improvements were completed. For information on the delays to the launch of this system, please see [the Joint statement from leaders of the councils](#) (the system is shared with South Oxfordshire).

Business rates - ahead of the curve

Early July we approved a new one-off discretionary business rates relief scheme for 2026/27 for pubs and essential rural businesses across the Vale. This is in recognition of the ongoing financial pressures facing hospitality and rural businesses, many of which provide vital services, sustain local jobs and act as valued community hubs. The package will provide additional rates relief to around 120 businesses across the Vale, helping pubs across the district meet rising costs while also supporting village shops, post offices and other sole businesses in rural areas that provide a vital service to their community.

Eligible businesses do not need to apply - the relief will automatically be awarded to qualifying business rates accounts, with revised bills confirming the reduced amounts being issued within the next month.

The scheme includes:

- A 15 per cent business rates relief top-up to all 78 eligible pubs across the district, matching the level of relief already provided by the government.
- A new 15 per cent discretionary relief for certain other qualifying rural businesses that are the only business of their type within a rural settlement, such as the only post office, village food store or petrol station, but which do not qualify for mandatory Rural Rate Relief because of their rateable value.

White Horse Community Lottery

The White Horse Community Lottery is run by our District Council, was launched in 2021 and this year will give out more than £8,000 to community organisations across the Vale. Since launching, the community fund has distributed a total of £39,543 to local good causes. So far you can support local charities such as [The Ray Collins Charitable Trust](#) and [Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale](#). If you would like to register your voluntary organisation or community group as a good cause, and start generating regular unrestricted income, [simply head to our official White Horse Community Lottery website](#), or email communityenablement@southandvale.gov.uk.

Wantage Leisure Centre is fit for the future

Wantage Leisure Centre is now running on renewable energy following the completion of a multi-million-pound energy efficiency programme which installed two large air source heat pumps, 106 solar panels and extensive insulation.

A government scheme provided our District Council nearly £6m towards upgrading the heating systems at Wantage Leisure Centre and the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre in Abingdon, where similar work is also close to completion. In addition to the government funding, money for the work has also come from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – which is money generated from new building developments in the area which goes towards local infrastructure, including projects such as this. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has also contributed towards this decarbonisation work.

When the work at both leisure centres is finished, overall carbon emissions should be reduced by more than 25 per cent.

Do you work with young people?

Oxfordshire Here4YOUth offers free, confidential support and advice for young people aged 8–25 who may be experiencing issues with alcohol or drugs as well as support for those up to age 18 if they are affected by someone else's use. The service also supports concerned families and parents.

Any professional can refer to Here4YOUth by filling out the quick referral form on their website or by calling 01865 590825. A referral to CAMHS is NOT required.

You can find more information on [the Oxfordshire Here4YOUth website](#).

A musical prelude at The Beacon

The Beacon's Autumn/Winter Season is just around the corner and here's a little preview of some of the music acts coming to their stage:

[Beatles Complete](#) – Saturday 26 September at 7.30pm

[80s Night with Sledgehammer](#) – Saturday 3 October at 7.30pm

[Noasis](#) – Friday 16 October at 7.30pm

[The Wall of Floyd](#) – Saturday 28 November at 7.30pm

For more details on these and other shows take a look [at The Beacon's website](#).

Council meetings

Meetings are where councillors make the decisions that affect you. [Find out how you can watch and take part in council meetings and when they are taking place](#)

Cllr Hannah Griffin

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(9 August 2026)