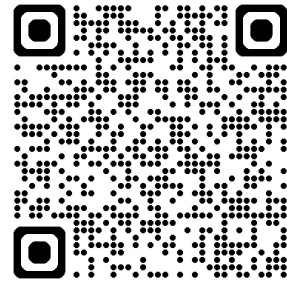


August & September 2026

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.) As I reported in my last update, after months of waiting, the government announced their preference for a 3 unitary model just before breaking up for summer. Since then, at the start of September, we learned that the government has put LGR on pause while it reviews its decisions on preferred options for LGR across England. We understand that the review is intended to provide confidence that the process has been followed correctly, and that any future decisions align with the government's priorities, are sustainable and can be implemented successfully. Although we have not had any time commitments yet we understand that shadow elections to the new councils are now unlikely to take place in May 2027. (Local elections will take place instead.) While the review is underway, we've been asked to pause work that is directly related to establishing new authorities but can continue with preparatory work where it supports future decision-making and enables us to move at pace once the review is complete. I will share more information when I can.

Devolution

This is different to LGR and relates to “strategic authorities” that cover a wider geographical area e.g. the whole of the Thames Valley (rather than “just” Oxfordshire). We are expecting an announcement of a new wave of strategic authorities soon, more detail on fiscal devolution in the Autumn budget (end of October) and then a Devolution White Paper “Autumn” (likely alongside Autumn Budget). Like with LGR, I will share more information when I can.

Cearn Solar Farm

The recent announcement of a proposed solar farm around villages to the north of Wantage (Cearn Solar Farm) has re-raised questions over how best to achieve a balance between (1) the clear need to decarbonise our energy supply against (2) the need to preserve our area's character and heritage. This is likely a National Strategic Infrastructure Project (like the proposed reservoir) so the decision will likely be made by the government. However, we will be doing all we can to engage with consultation - various councillors including the council's cabinet have already met with the developers - and as always we will be doing our best to represent your views and do what is best for everyone who works and lives in the Vale. As opportunities come for you to feed in your thoughts please do so - I will let you know of such opportunities when I become aware of them.

Joint Local Plan 2045

As mentioned previously, we have started working on our Joint Local Plan 2045. [The Joint Local Plan 2045 webpage](#) has more information.

New planning process - we reluctantly approved constitution changes

Significant changes are coming to the world of planning from the end of October, including a new standard national system that will see more applications determined by council officers.

Government reforms to planning committees are set to come into force from 31 October 2026, with big changes in the way the planning process works locally.

Key changes include:

- Where previously, every local council created its own rules, the new system creates one standard rulebook for the whole country
- Most everyday planning applications will automatically be handed to professional planning officers to decide. Only very large, complex, or highly controversial projects are allowed to be decided by a planning committee.
- A smaller project can only be pushed up to the committee if it passes a strict “gateway test” to demonstrate that the proposal has significant impacts affecting the wider community, and that request will need to be agreed by a nominated officer.
- A cap on committee sizes at a maximum of 13 members and enforcement of strict planning training and certification requirements.

At a special council meeting in September, we met to discuss the impact of the planning changes and consider the necessary constitution changes needed. After a lengthy debate, we approved the necessary changes. Basically my take is that we’ve done the very best we can to make sure local voices continue to be heard within the new restrictions that are being introduced by the government. We have worked hard to identify opportunities for elected councillors to input to the new process – maximising the number of applications that can be flagged as appropriate to be decided in public by the planning committee.

To not have made the changes would have left the council facing legal challenges and further loss of control over local planning decisions. Following the meeting, the Council’s constitution will now be amended to take effect from 31 October to ensure decision-making arrangements follow the law.

Residents, parish councils and statutory consultees will continue to play a vital role in planning decisions by submitting comments on planning applications for planning officers to consider, and to speak at planning committees when they do happen

Local climate project grant success in our ward

I was delighted to see that one of the awardees of the Climate Action Fund was the Court Hill Trust for installation of solar panels at the Court Hill Centre in Letcombe Regis. Also across the district, heat pumps and habitat restoration projects were among 15 projects to receive a total of £100,000 in grant funding through the 2026/27 Vale Nature and Climate Action Fund.

Mapping upgrade

Alongside recent changes to the Planning and Land Charges system, the council also took the opportunity to upgrade the interactive mapping system on the councils' websites, which you can use to search for publicly available data in our communities including planning applications, tree preservation orders and land owned by the councils. More information is available on the website, including guidance on how to use the map: [Maps of public data](#)

“Don't Guess. Check it before you chuck it.”

Most households recycle regularly, but many of the wrong items still end up in recycling bins, sometimes up to 22 per cent, because people are unsure whether something can be recycled. Although well intentioned, placing the wrong items in the recycling bin can make it harder for good-quality materials to be recycled into new products. And, if items are messy (such as food residue or nappies), it can prevent whole truckloads of recyclable items from being recycled. You can now check [the Oxfordshire Waste Wizard](#) before recycling to help improve the quality of recycling collected across the Vale and make sure more recyclable items are recycled.

Vehicles conducting gas surveys (Oct-Dec)

A company called Picarro on behalf of SGN, will be carrying out Advanced Leakage Detection (ALD) surveys across the Vale as part of ongoing efforts to enhance the safety, reliability, and efficiency of the mains gas network infrastructure. They will use a specially equipped survey vehicle that will detect and analyse trace levels of gas emissions from underground mains. Surveys will be undertaken between October 2026 and mid-December 2026. To ensure comprehensive data collection and accurate readings, the survey vehicle will make six passes along the designated routes at different times during this period. The surveys are being carried out mostly at night and involve multiple passes. The vehicle carrying out the surveys will be identifiable through being branded with both SGN and Picarro livery. SGN's [gas network survey vehicles webpage](#) has more information.

Help shape the future of community cohesion in our district

Vale of White Horse District Council (together with South Oxfordshire) are developing a new 5-Year Community Cohesion Strategy and have commissioned national organisation Belong to support this. You can [take part in a survey](#) to share your views and experiences about where you live, work or learn. It takes about 15 minutes to complete and you can choose to remain anonymous. The survey **closes on Friday 13 November**.

The team would also be delighted to hear from local community groups who could host a visit to meet residents, volunteers, staff and community leaders in the places where they already gather, to listen to their experiences and learn more about what community, belonging and neighbourhood connections mean to them. If your organisation would like to invite the Belong team to visit, let me know and I'll put you in touch.

Didcot Substation Community Fund consultation

National Grid wants your feedback on how a new £530,000 Community Fund linked to work at Didcot substation might best be spent. The Fund is intended to support community priorities in Didcot and surrounding areas, helping deliver lasting benefits for local people and places. You are invited to [complete a two-minute survey](#) by **27 October 2026**, to tell

National Grid what matters most in the area and help shape how the funding is spent and ensure it reflects local needs and aspirations. For more information about the consultation, including frequently asked questions, please visit [the National Grid website](#).

Great British Energy grants

Great British Energy (GBE) has announced £30 million to support the growth of community energy. The funding package includes:

- GBE Community Fund: £20 million in grants for organisations, towards clean energy projects under community ownership.
- Up to £2.9 million for advice services supporting local groups to develop community energy projects.

Applications **close on 12 November 2026**. To find out more about the fund, eligibility and how to apply please see the [GBE Community Fund webpage](#)

Half term in Wantage

Families looking to get outdoors can take part in a free Halloween-themed Xplorer event at Wantage Memorial Park on **Wednesday 28 October**. Children and their grown-ups can follow a navigation challenge around the park, finding markers and solving clues as they explore together. [Book your space for Xplorer here](#)

The Beacon in Wantage has a range of creative activities and entertainment planned for the half term. Young people aged 9 to 16 can have a go at stop-motion filmmaking at an Animation Station workshop on **Saturday 24 October**, while younger children and their families can enjoy painting, sticking and imaginative play at Monkey Makers on **Tuesday 27 October**. For details visit the [Beacon website](#)

[South and Vale Councils Holiday Activities webpage](#)

Don't miss your chance to vote

Did you have a Voter Registration Canvass email this September? With local elections taking place in May 2027, it is to check and confirm your voter registration details are correct so you can be sure you can take part. It only takes a few minutes to respond online, and each household only needs to respond once, even if more than one person living there receives the email. The email will have come from a different, longer email address: electoral.services.south.oxfordshire.and.vale.of.white.horse.district.councils@notifications.service.gov.uk

If you receive a Voter Registration Canvass email – just visit HouseholdResponse.com/SouthAndVale - enter your unique property codes found on your email and then update and submit your household information. Don't forget to include the names and nationalities of everyone aged 16 or above at this address.

If you add any new names to the property – they will also need to complete a separate registration application. They can do this at gov.uk/register-to-vote.



Cllr Hannah Griffin
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(14 October 2026)