October 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) - we're back on

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.) The government hit pause at the start of September. At the end of this month (October) it has now been unpaused. As before the government has kept their original "minded to" decision to pursue the 3 unitary model but timescales have all been pushed back a year. Our villages will all be part of the Ridgeway Council that will be most of the existing Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils combined with West Berkshire. Shadow elections to this new council are now to take place in May 2028 (rather than the original timeframe of May 2027). This means the existing district and county council will continue and there will be local elections to the Vale of White Horse district council in May 2027.

Devolution - proposals for a mayor move forward

This is different to LGR and relates to "strategic authorities" that cover a wider geographical area of around 1.5 million people.The government has now confirmed it intends to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley covering Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon. Buckinghamshire which is not included could join at a later date. The proposed new authority would act as a new layer of local government led by an elected mayor and take responsibility for decisions on transport, infrastructure, housing, skills, economic growth and investment, giving local areas greater control over issues that affect their communities. You read more on the Council's webpage

Cearn Solar Farm

As mentioned in my last report, a proposed solar farm around villages to the north of Wantage (Cearn Solar Farm) has been announced. This month, the applicant has sought a "Scoping Opinion from the Planning Inspectorate, on behalf of the Secretary of State, as to the scope and level of detail of the information to be provided within the Environmental Statement that will accompany its future application." This is one of the first steps in a National Strategic Infrastructure Project (NSIP) which means the decision on this project will be made by the government. Although the district council does not make the final decision on the proposal, the Council is a statutory consultee and, as such, we will be closely involved in the decision making and examination process. Our council officers are currently reviewing everything, and we will submit a response by the 23 November deadline.

There are several other NSIPs in the works in our area including the proposed reservoir. At the full council meeting this month we passed a motion resolving, amongst other things, to continue to listen to residents and work hard to ensure NSIPs located in the district are conducted as sensitively as possible and also bring new benefits to the local area. I was involved in drafting the various amendments to ensure the motion was the best it could be.

The Leader of our district council is also going to write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport to raise questions and concerns about the impact of the proposed development.

Additionally, I will continue to feed in comments related to the areas affected in our villages: Looking at the initial plans, the footprint of the development could include some land in the north of West and East Challow so I will feed back the need to carefully manage construction traffic along the A417 and through our villages in addition to thoughts on how our views can be protected as much as possible. Let me know if there is anything else you would like me to consider when representing the ward. In addition to the district council being contacted, I am aware that several parish councils in our area have also been contacted and asked for what information they think should be provided in the Environmental Statement so if you have suggestions please contact your parish clerk ASAP - the deadline for them to respond is 23 November 2026. I will let you know of other opportunities throughout the process when I become aware of them.

Joint Local Plan 2045

As mentioned previously, we have started working on our Joint Local Plan 2045. At the end of this month we published our catchily titled "Gateway 1 Self-Assessment Summary", which assesses our readiness to start the statutory 30-month plan preparation process. It covers things like how we got ready to prepare a new local plan and how we'll consult on the plan. The Joint Local Plan 2045 webpage has the latest information.

New planning process

Changes to planning - National Scheme of Delegation webpage has information on what is changing including information on the Gateway Test our Council is introducing.

Affordable housing success

Good news on housing locally: our Council has been in the top three councils in England for delivering affordable homes, with more than 2,000 affordable homes provided between 2021 and 2026. The recognition reflects the work being done through the planning system to ensure new developments include affordable homes, helping more local people find housing that meets their needs.

Extra garden waste collection

Garden waste permit holders can put out up to four extra sacks of garden waste for free alongside their brown bin **between 2 and 13 November**, on their usual collection day. Just make sure the sacks contain garden waste only, are left untied and no larger than standard 60L refuse sacks.

Wellbeing and Employment Fair

As part of the councils' Be Together programme, there's a free Wellbeing and Employment Fair coming to Great Western Park, Didcot, **on 16 November (10am-2pm)**. It's a chance to find out about local support services, training, careers and job opportunities, with a range of organisations on hand to offer advice and guidance.

Everyone is welcome to drop in, and a quieter session is available to book from 1pm to 2pm for those who would prefer a calmer environment.

Bus plans across Oxfordshire Survey

The public consultation for “OxBus 2040: Plan for Bus” is now live on Let’s Talk Oxfordshire! View the documents and complete the survey online **by 17th November**.

There are also drop-In events across the county where officers will be available to answer questions and listen to concerns. The event being held nearest us is at Cornerstone Arts Centre, Didcot on Friday 13th November 10am-2pm & 3pm-7pm.

Living Essentials Fund open for applications

The Living Essentials Fund is now open, with grants of £1,000-£20,000 available for local charities and community groups supporting people facing financial hardship, housing issues, food insecurity and energy costs. Applications **close on 23 November 2026.**If your group might be eligible, details can be found on the Oxfordshire Community Foundation website.

Community Climate Resilience Survey

Community Action Groups Oxfordshire is looking for residents' views on how communities can become more resilient to climate challenges. Complete a short survey to share your thoughts.

Reminder of 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. 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.

Reminder to 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**.

Reminder about the Great British Energy grants

Great British Energy (GBE) has £20 million in grants for organisations, towards clean energy projects under community ownership and 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



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(31 October 2026)