

Annual Report to Eynsham from your three District Councillors.

March 2024



Your three District Councillors are, left to right, Andy Goodwin, Carl Rylett and Dan Levy.

WODC

West Oxfordshire District Council is run by an Executive comprising an alliance of Liberal Democrats, Labour and Green councillors. This year Dan took was appointed to the Cabinet at the County Council and so stepped down from his Finance executive role at WODC. Carl has stepped down from his planning executive role and is Chair of the Audit and Governance committee. Andy has taken on vice-chair of the planning committee.

WODC is committed to delivering for residents. One change you may have noticed is that you can now watch all council meetings live online and in playback. It is important to be able to hold your representatives to account. The council had fallen far behind in its investment and maintenance of its infrastructure. This is being addressed, in order to improve the services to the community. At the same time, this has reduced the number of buildings being used, and enabled income to be generated from their commercial use and from hosting residents' events.

All three councillors are actively involved in working with residents and with the Parish Council and have helped solve housing, education and other issues with them. The best way to get in touch via email – the addresses are below.

Thames Water

As is increasingly clear, our clean water and sewage systems are wholly inadequate. Central government and the Environment Agency governance of Thames Water is at the heart of the issue.

Eynsham has had a number of sewage spills. The work to fix the main sewer in Back Lane was started and then postponed and we are waiting for a restart date. Thames Water have been told clearly and loudly that their performance is unacceptable. At the same time the Evenlode suffers from sewage discharges from Hanborough and further upstream, and sewage is frequently discharged from Cassington Sewage Treatment Works into the Thames.

WODC has continual dialogue with Thames Water and the Environment Agency. In a major breakthrough Thames Water agreed to support Grampian Conditions in planning applications so that new houses cannot be occupied until the sewage treatment plants are upgraded to cope with additional demand. In addition, extra checks are being asked of developers at the early pre-validation stage of an application.

Planning.

WODC is developing a new Local Plan, to take the district to 2041. This sets out where housing should be and the infrastructure requirements, including where solar farms might be. This will replace the current inadequate 2031 Local Plan, which among other things led to housing being planned in a small number of strategic sites, none of which have yet been built.

These sites include West Eynsham and Salt Cross (just north of the A40 and Eynsham). In both cases the process of developing masterplans has been predictably slow. In Salt Cross, the developer objected to the Area Action Plan constructed by WODC, and a judicial review noted that the Planning Inspectorate's refusal to accept the Net Zero commitments in the AAP was unlawful. A great result – we are committed to combatting climate change and were disappointed that our efforts and those of local campaigners had been blocked.

The planning process for Botley West Solar Farm continues. The decision will be taken by Central Government.

WODC's role has been to comment on the inadequacies of the plans seen so far, and has highlighted the significant impact on communities and the environment. When the process goes to the planning inspectorate, WODC will produce a detailed local impact report. This is the most effective way we can ensure local concerns are heard by central government.

Westhive funding community projects

A key innovation this year was the establishment of Westhive, a community crowdsharing platform, for local causes to seek funding from WODC for projects. So taxpayer support can be magnified.

A new Spring 2024 round is open, with a deadline for applications of 24th April. More information at <https://www.spacehive.com/movement/westhive/about> or contact the Community Funding Officer at west.hive@westoxon.gov.uk

Separately, we have also made sure that key recipients of local support, such as Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, are moved onto longer term contracts, and can make longer term plans

Nature Recovery Plan

WODC has committed to a nature recovery plan to protect and improve the biodiversity of the land that it owns and to encourage other landowners to commit to biodiversity improvements, not least in planning applications, to help make West Oxfordshire a thriving place for both people and nature

Elections.

A reminder that we are entering a busy period of elections. There will be a general election within the next 11 months, with Eynsham now in the new Bicester and Woodstock constituency. This comprises an arc from the west around the north of Oxford, and is full of places with a similar make up to Eynsham, though none of them as pleasant! There will also be local elections in May for one of the district council seats, currently held by Andy.

It is important that people ensure that they are registered to vote and have the ID that will be needed. Note also that the rules on postal voting have changed. All the information is on the WODC website. www.westoxon.gov.uk

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