

Cllrs Katherine Foxhall and Viral Patel
Watchfield and Shrivenham ward
Vale of White Horse District Council

Annual Report for 2023 - 2024

Introduction

Since our election last May, it has been a privilege to begin our work representing the parishes and residents of our ward. It has been a challenge and a huge learning curve to start to understand how the council works, the organisation of the different teams, and the most appropriate ways of being effective. It has also been a joy to start to get to know the characters of our different communities and to speak up for this unique and special part of the Vale.

Local Case work

We have worked hard to make sure that residents know who we are and how to contact us, including residents' newsletters, proactive contact through social media where residents raise issues. Thank you particularly to the disseminators of our monthly reports through your contact lists. Often residents have questions related to planning, housing, bins need to report flytipping or want help accessing council services.

We have been working on a varied body of local case work, including:

- **Poor Quality Housing and Maintenance** – Katherine is supporting residents in Shrivenham to get action on inadequate maintenance, poor construction standards and environmental health issues.
- **Flooding** – our part of the county often feels forgotten. Officers have met Katherine on site in Buscot and Shrivenham to see flooding issues for themselves, help establish responsibility and to secure future improvements.
- **Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme** – Following feedback from parish councils Viral engaged with officers and the cabinet at the Vale to improve transparency and clarity with parishes where Afghan nationals are being welcomed into local military accommodation. There are three separate schemes in place to settle these families, with only one under the direct management of the Vale, however all schemes involve differing responsibilities across government departments, MoD, District and County councils, health, education and police. We are very pleased to see the flow of information has improved with regular update meetings, and Watchfield and Shrivenham parish councillors are able to continue doing their excellent work in supporting these families settle into their new homes.
- **Enforcement** – Viral is supporting residents and parishes with enforcement issues related to listed buildings, noise and disturbance from holiday lets, and boundary disputes. Katherine has been working with officers to get a waste drainage plans resolved on a development in Shrivenham; she will continue to push for a resolution that does not allow sewage to be released into the field behind.

- **Sewage Pollution** – the treatment works at Shrivenham remains a huge cause of concern. Katherine has been working with Windrush Against Sewage Pollution, the Parish council and senior officers to find ways to raise this issue, and seek commitment from Thames Water to upgrade the works.
- **Tuckmill Meadow** – Katherine is working with Friends of Tuckmill to help the group access the S106 funds and management support that the council committed early in 2023.
- **Little Coxwell Playing field** – Viral has been working with officers and the Parish council to secure a long-awaited lease for the village playing field, to ensure there is certainty to any investment proposed, and to minimise costs to the parish.
- **Elm Tree Surgery** - We met with partners from the surgery and will continue to support local efforts in any way that we can to try and secure a new site for Elm Tree surgery.
- **Planning** - we continue to scrutinise planning applications, taking care to determine whether they are to the benefit of our residents, responding to resident queries and consultations to highlight and re-enforce material planning matters. Some major cases - including Wicklesham Quarry and the Steeds Farm development - are just outside the ward but nevertheless have an impact on our residents.

Greens in Opposition

After the May 2023 elections, the political composition of Vale of White Horse made the four members of the Green group the only opposition to a Liberal Democrat group who strengthened their already large majority. In many ways Greens and Liberal Democrats do share many political values, and while we also benefit from an excellent officer team at the Vale, and the council's financial situation is significantly better than in many other authorities, our role at the Vale is to hold the Liberal Democrat group to account. Katherine was appointed Chair of Scrutiny, and this is proving a vital mechanism to hold executive decisions to account. Through council motions we have secured commitments to foreground nature recovery and to ensure that council contractors pay the Real Living Wage. We have amended Liberal Democrat motions regarding sewage pollution to make sure that the council takes responsibility for its own actions where it can. We monitor, regularly attend and speak at Cabinet, planning, climate, and audit and governance meetings.

The Year Ahead

As a group we will respond carefully to the development of Vale's new corporate plan (a public consultation has just started on Tuesday 16 April). We will also work to make sure that the next phases of the Joint Local Plan, as well as other strategies and policies, represent our residents' needs and priorities. We will continue to highlight issues of flooding, overdevelopment, and lack of infrastructure and to respond to major planning applications both within and outside the ward, and any other applications that are contentious in nature. Most importantly, we will work to support all our residents to be able to access council services when they need it. Please get in touch with us at any point if there are issues that we can help you with, and we look forward to working with all our parishes in the year ahead.

Katherine and Viral

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