Vale of White Horse
District Councillors' Report

Watchfield and Shrivenham Ward

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Ward Overview

Shrivenham Golf Course Planning Inquiry

Viral and Kat attended most days of the three-week planning inquiry, and along with County Cllr Emma Markham, we addressed the Inspector about our concerns regarding: loss of a community facility and sports facility; the shocking and ongoing sewage discharges from the treatment works that will pollute the site; highways concerns; loss of green space; effect on the Tuckmill Nature Reserve; loss of a settlement gap between the villages; and the ignoring of the Shrivenham Neighbourhood Plan and Vale Local Plan. Many residents spoke brilliantly on behalf of the community, and we hope that the Inspector will reject the plans.

100 houses at land North of Townsend, Cozens Gr and Buckland Dr, Shrivenham- P26/V2692/O

We reported on this last month, as an update the application determination deadline has been extended to the end of November and the public consultation now extended to 12th Nov.

P25/V1646/FUL Old Hayes Solar Farm, Coleshill – new consultation period.

After an extremely long and frustrating delay, the applicant has submitted revised plans, and a new consultation period has opened until 2 December. We will be looking closely at the new information to see whether substantial concerns about flooding, biodiversity, highways, connection route, and a lack of community benefit have been addressed. We are also taking very seriously the cumulative impact of solar projects locally, particularly given the recent proposals for a West Oxfordshire Energy Park nearby.

Shrivenham, Application to reduce EV charging commitment

Retail Unit Bingham Turner Way Shrivenham - P26/V4547/NM

This was a planning application submitted under section 96A (non-material amendment) by the developer, and if approved would have seen the provision of 8-EV chargers + trunking for future capacity reduced to a single EV charger for the whole site. A section 96A does not require any public consultation as it is expected to be a policy compliant change.

Having considered this application, Viral asked officers to reject it as an **invalid non-material amendment,** as reducing agreed infrastructure directly conflicts with OCC highways and Vale policies.

Following our intervention the developer's agent has **withdrawn the application** and is now expected to submit under section 73, which unlike a non-material amendment is subject to public and parish scrutiny and can be brought to planning committee under the new delegation scheme in this case.

Shrivenham has a severe shortage of public EV charging points, stripping away previously approved provision is unacceptable.

Muck store and house - Great Coxwell (P26/V2641/O & P26/V2144/FUL)

Significant concerns have been raised by residents regarding these two applications. The consultation period is still open, and we strongly encourage residents to submit comments. To make representations as impactful as possible, if a specific planning concern has already been covered, we suggest keeping your submission brief by simply noting your agreement or disagreement with the relevant points made by the Parish Council.

We have discussed these schemes with planning officers, who confirmed that due to the technical nature of agricultural developments, specialist agricultural and planning officers will assess the proposals. As a result, we should anticipate a longer determination timeline to allow for this.

Council News

New Planning "Call-In" Rules from 1 November

Under new rules laid down by central government, the old "call in" process whereby councillors could bring applications to planning committee has been replaced by a National Scheme of Delegation that is much stricter about what can and cannot be brought to committee. The key message is that parish councils and residents should continue to take all opportunities to respond to planning consultations to make their voices heard, and to get in touch with us if you would like to know whether a particular application can be proposed for committee.

More information about the changes is here: Changes to planning - National Scheme of Delegation - Vale of White Horse District Council

Local Government Reorganisation

We previously reported that local authority reorganisation into unitary councils was on hold, however on 29th October the minister Jim McMahon announced LGR for some counties would resume, and this included Oxfordshire.

The government has indicated it intends to proceed with the 3-Unitary proposal from Oxford City for Oxfordshire, which will create North Oxfordshire, Greater Oxford & Ridgeway.

As Chair of Vale Scrutiny committee, Kat is currently working with Cabinet members and senior officers to ensure that the financial implications of this decision are discussed publicly at the next meeting of the committee on 30 November. Issues we are raising include that the financial calculations for the three-unitary model were made by Oxford City without input from Vale officers, and the concerns about West Berkshire's financial position that we know many residents hold.

Assuming everything progresses, we expect District elections in May 2027, and shadow unitary elections May 2028 ready for vesting day in 2029, this will mean district councillors elected in 2027 will only serve 2 years before Vale ceases to exist.

We will update further as we know.

Devolution to Strategic Mayoral authority

In a last-minute agreement between ministers and leaders of all 13 councils in Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Swindon, last week's budget included provision for progressing the Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Further details will follow; however, unlike the previous proposal that excluded an elected mayor, and consequently offered no meaningful devolution or funding from central government, the current model would establish a full strategic authority with dedicated financial backing.

We have raised grave concerns regarding the democratic accountability and governance of this model, notably:

- **The £5,000 candidate deposit**, which creates an undemocratic financial barrier to standing for election.
- **Sweeping executive control**, with elected mayors able to appoint unelected board members on six-figure salaries and dictate major public spending with little to no local scrutiny.