

District Councillor Report for Letcombe Regis 20230316

Council Tax.

We have all just received our council tax bills!

The Vale budget has been finalised and published. This forms a relatively minor component of the full bill most of which goes to Oxfordshire County Council.

You may be surprised to know that the Vale continues to charge one of the lowest district council tax rates in the country. Our budget includes a below-inflation increase in Council Tax of 3.4 per cent for 2023-24. For a Band D property, this equates to £5 a year (just under 10p a week), bringing a total charge of £151.69 a year (£2.91 per week) - which is more than 25 per cent lower than the national average.

Increases in Council Tax are never popular but we hope that this below-inflation increase is at least acceptable to most residents. The increase was approved at district council by all councillors from every party.

Household help.

Although the Vale has now closed the Household Support Fund and are no longer accepting any new applications for this fund, help is still available for anyone struggling with the high cost of living.

Applications already received are currently being processed and all applicants will be informed about whether their application has been successful or not. As there are a high volume of applicants, anyone who has not yet heard back is advised not to contact the councils or advice centres about their applications so that teams can focus on working through the applications - these are being worked through on a first come, first served basis.

Support is still available through the council's Community Hub team who offer a wide range of advice, including information on free or affordable food banks and council tax support. The Community Hub Team can also help to signpost people for debt advice and other cost-of-living support and provide information on housing support as well as guidance on how people can look after their mental health and wellbeing. Anyone in need of support can contact our Community Hub team during office hours on 01235 422600 or they can email communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk Please let any neighbours know about this if they do not use the internet.

We have spent £139,615 to help people with the rising cost of food and energy bills and added £60,000 to funds from the county council to boost the money available to provide support when it's most needed.

Vale EV charging points.

The Vale District Council's installation of Electric Vehicle chargers at its car parks has seen charging volumes double in its first six months. In June last year 62 EV chargers were installed across five of the council's car parks in Abingdon, Faringdon and Wantage as part of the county-wide Park and Charge scheme. The number of charging sessions has gone up by 60 per cent in the first six months of installation. During the same period the average amount of electricity consumed has doubled, meaning that people are now using them for longer charges. Since the first chargers went live in summer 2022 there have been 3,631 charging sessions in the first full six months, which equates to around 169,000 EV miles. This represents a saving 45,863kg of CO2 if those miles had been driven in a petrol or diesel car.

Childrey Way.

We are still waiting to hear from OCC in response to the many representations made regarding school transport for Childrey children and Childrey Way and the results of the several appeals by parents.

You may have seen the Herald this week resulting from us pestering the reporters. It seems absolutely unlikely that this proposal will be approved because child safety is a key issue here but everybody is trying to keep up the pressure. I also know that something similar was an issue or Letcombe Regis with children walking the footpath to KAs which was resolved sensibly!

The Blowing stone pub

You may also have seen that the Herald reported on the application to the Vale by the owner of the Blowing Stine pub in Kingston Lisle to convert it into a house – a private as opposed to a public house. For your information villagers are very upset about this and fighting the proposal. There are a number of reasons including Covid and the lack of enthusiasm and energy of the owner. We all remember how the Greyhound was before Catriona took it over!

Oxford Station and Botley Rd

Network Rail have announced details of the works planned at Oxford Station, which will include Botley Road being closed for two spells – the first taking place this year beginning in April and lasting six months, and a second spell of seven months taking place next year.

All the details are in the Network Rail briefing below and attached. We've also attached the press release the county council issued this morning for your information.

Wantage Hospital – again!

Oxford Health and Wantage Town Council Health sub-committee are planning a co-produced workshop to discuss the future of Wantage Hospital. The future is assured but the exact nature and combination of the services provided remain uncertain and many would like to see a minor injuries unit based there. No date set as yet for the workshop.

Cllr Dr. Paul Barrow

20230316

Paul.Barrow@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/Cllr-Dr-Paul-Barrow-104943001583284>

District Councillor for Ridgeway Ward