

Report of District Councillors for Bladon, Blenheim and Woodstock to Woodstock Town Council Tuesday October 12th 2021

Cottsway.

At our suggestion, Cottsway Housing Association were asked to present an update to the Economic & Social Committee (ECO&SOC) meeting on September 16th. During the pandemic, Cottsway maintained out of office communications; contacted vulnerable customers during lockdowns; and prioritised health and safety issues and appliance servicing. They invested £21.6 million in building new homes over the past year and 130 homes were completed. In addition, Cottsway provided £25k grant funding for 13 community projects and, with WODC and Aspire charity, assisted 14 young people by expanding the Our House project. (In this project, needy young people live together in a house as 'trainees' and receive support to get back into employment, education, training).

When asked about the future of the Ryegrass site in Woodstock, we were told only that Cottsway are in discussion with WODC over future development there. They are aware of demand for older person housing.

In response to a question about age distribution amongst their properties, a recent reply from Cottsway states that 6.4% of residents were under 25; 55.5% were between 25 and 55; and 20.9% were over 55. To those who can count, these percentages do not add up to 100. The survey was small (91 replies out of 273 circulated) and it seems probable that not all those responding indicated their age group. So, it is difficult to know how much these numbers reflect the actual distribution of housing.

The majority (91%) of Cottsway housing in West Oxfordshire is social housing with two and three bedroom homes forming a large majority of both affordable rent homes and social housing.

Cottsway record 89% customer satisfaction reports. One of us pointed out that it was likely that the 11% dissatisfied were those who sought the help of Councillors. We stressed that Cottsway staff must have regular contact with residents; be sensitive when informing residents about changing situations; and always be considerate and respectful. We hope these concerns are conveyed to frontline staff.

Hensington Road site

Over a year ago both of us (together with Ian Hudspeth as County Councillor then) initiated informal Zoom conversations with the landowners of the Hensington Road Car Park/Old Police Station/Old Library area and with the Woodstock doctors, about the potential for working together to develop this area to meet some of the major needs of Woodstock: surgery; more parking; new library. A couple of meetings have been held between officers and representatives of the three landowners.

Unfortunately, the report to the October 13th WODC Cabinet, which was due to discuss *allocation of funding to support option appraisal for site development: Hensington Road, Woodstock* ie. provide funds to support a professional 'spec' of how the site might be developed, has not materialised. The two ward Councillors and the County Councillor are pursuing the matter with Cabinet and officers. We hope both that Cabinet will progress this allocation and that OCC and Blenheim will also provide a share of the funding for a professional appraisal.

WODC Officers had also suggested that any 'spec' should include looking at the individual sections as well as the three sites as a whole. Then, should the grander plan not 'get off the ground', WODC could consider what might be done just for the section they own. WODC ownership extends beyond the Car Park to the Union Street parking and garages and the Scout & Guide hut. It will be interesting to see what transpires.

New Garden waste bins.

WODC/Ubico have reached maximum subscription/collection capacity for garden waste. New or additional licences or sacks will not be issued until on-line purchasing begins again in mid-February 2022. We expressed concern to the Cabinet member responsible for the Environment about the frustration of new residents and the presumed loss of potential Council revenue. BBC News from Oxford would suggest that other districts are having similar problems due to shortage of waste collection vehicle drivers.

Churchill anniversaries.

Winston Churchill was born in November 1874 and died in January 1965. November 2024 will be 150 years since he was born and January 2025 sixty years since his death. Cllr Cooper has been in contact with Blenheim and various WODC Cabinet members for Leisure & Tourism, suggesting that plans should be made to celebrate the great man in the Blenheim/Bladon/Woodstock (he was a freeman of the borough) area over the winter of 2024/5. We believe that a world focus on Churchill in 2024/5 not only in Blenheim - which would seem essential – but in the surrounding communities should be pursued because of its touristic potentials.

2025 is also fifty years since both WODC, OCC and Woodstock Town Council came into being.....

WODC Cllrs Julian Cooper & Elizabeth Poskitt