

Woodstock Annual Town Meeting March 26th 2024.

West Oxfordshire District Councillors' Report

GENERAL MATTERS.

The WODC Alliance of Lib Dems, Labour and Greens continues to work effectively. Some changes are obvious most notably at Woodgreen offices. The reception area for the public coming to Woodgreen offices or for meetings with the Registrar to record births, marriages, deaths, has moved further along the site. There is now a very audio-visually up-to-date room where Council meets but which residents can hire for meetings, parties, weddings and other community activities. The Committee rooms and the toilets on the ground floor public foyer are in the process of being upgraded. Departments previously in the next door Elmfield building have moved to Woodgreen offices so Elmfield is now wholly rented out benefitting Council's income.

During the year WODC purchased the site of Marriot's Close in Witney with the intention of owning a good investment and improving the retail offer in Witney. The Christmas Market there was a great success with many more customers visiting the site than over previous similar periods.

The Council is in the process of reclaiming some departments which had been run by Publica. This is a consequence of a review of the efficacy and efficiency of the Publica set up by *Human Engine*. The process of repatriation of roles will be gradual and Publica will continue to manage some of WODC's departments. Yes, it will cost money to change the set up but Publica fees would have increased if it continued to run as before.

PLANNING

You are probably aware that the appeal against WODC's refusal of the extension of the 'behind Hill Rise' development from 120 homes to 180 homes was approved by the Appeals Inspector. So, at some point construction there and on the Banbury Road site (also approved with more homes than the Local Plan thought appropriate) will proceed.

The application for around 450 homes on the Perdiswell Farm site (just into Cherwell District but next door to Park View) was withdrawn by Blenheim last summer. Currently the area looks as if it will be covered with cables etc in relation to the Botley West Solar Farm proposal instead if that proposal goes ahead.

Low level lighting at the Bowls & Tennis Club was approved by Uplands Planning sub-committee recently. Conditions require the light to be restricted in spread and only on when the courts are in use. It will not be used after 9pm. Approval does not necessarily mean there will be flood lighting of other sports areas. An application for lighting tennis courts in another community was refused at the same meeting as the Bowls & Tennis Club lighting was approved.

BOTLEY WEST SOLAR FARM PROPOSAL.

Currently the response on the consultation for the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), to which councils and many residents responded, is under consideration by HMG. WODC's report was robust and pointed out that the information on many aspects of the proposed development were without sufficient detail to provide informed comment. WODC will produce a report on the impact of the proposed development on the District and the communities affected. Later in the year we expect the formal proposal for the project which may have been significantly modified as a result of all the comments received. This will be the time when WODC – and all of you – can respond and give views on the proposal as a finalised.

LOCAL PLAN

The Local Plan 2021-2041 is currently being developed. Whilst local concern over the Plan usually focuses on housing numbers, we hope this Plan will have strong policies supporting efforts to achieve Carbon Neutral communities; fossil fuel reductions; biodiversity promotion; encouragement for active travel and, where development is taking place, infrastructure development *before* housing rather than development getting away with providing a financial contribution towards infrastructure development sometime in the future. It is agreed to go for Grampian conditions in relation to water and sewage with new developments. (A "Grampian condition" is a planning condition attached to a decision notice that prevents the start of a development until off-site works have been completed on land not controlled by the applicant).

WOODSTOCK SURGERY.

For many years we have been trying to find a solution to the need for a new doctors' surgery in Woodstock. We all know the buildings are totally inadequate. We had great hopes of getting an agreement to build a new surgery on the Old Police Station site. However, over the years both of us have been trying to get a new surgery site, NHS aspirations for a doctors' 'surgery' have developed into medical centres providing more associated facilities. The Police Station site is said to be too small for this. We need also to get some answer on whether Woodstock would be able to get NHS support and funding for a new surgery. Funding for new facilities is in great demand.

WOODSTOCK SWIMMING POOL

After we have both expressed our concerns over the short period of the year allotted to the Pool being open (just during the school summer holidays) we have achieved some improvement in the times the Pool is open. There will now be morning and evening cold water swimming from May until September. There is an exciting range of activities around and in the Pool put out by GLL and there seems to be flexibility in that if we have another very hot summer/early autumn, Pool opening might be extended. Do try and use the Pool to encourage WODC to recognise its value to local people. It is hoped refreshment facilities will be improved by using Yellow Submarine who have a very good reputation for catering provision. (Yellow Submarine is a well-established training provider in Oxfordshire for people with learning disabilities and autism. And could even link up with the Ormerod School. Potentially it could form links with the Ormerod School).

COUNCIL TAX.

WODC is not immune to the effects of rising prices, particularly those for fuel for its buildings and vehicles, and salary increases (often determined by national bodies). Government support for local councils has fallen over recent years and we must plan for even further loss of government support in future years. In order to balance the budget, WODC's portion of the Council Tax will be £124.38 for a Band D home. This is a £5 pa increase, the amount above which we should need to hold (and win) a referendum on the increase. It is important that Council has sufficient funds to maintain services; keep property up to date and in good repair; and make changes to support the future of all our communities.

The item in the budget which, apart from the overall Council Tax component, will be the most noticeable increase for many residents, is the increase in green bin collection charges to £50 pa per bin from April 1st 2024. Woodstock is the town with the lowest Council Tax in the whole of Oxfordshire.

Clrs Julian Cooper & Elizabeth Poskitt