

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – 2016/17

Peter Emery, District Councillor - A year of change and challenge

As one of the three elected representatives serving not only Eynsham but also Cassington and South Leigh this has been an unsettling time, a year of change and a year of challenges.

Our outgoing MP made few friends with the way of his leaving but it did give us an opportunity to move an ambitious and capable District Councillor, already a cabinet member in his first year as a councillor, into the vacated seat at the house. Robert Courts MP shows all the signs of being an energetic, committed MP who will serve West Oxfordshire very well. Having worked closely with him as a District Councillor I can commend his work ethic to you and assure you that he is an excellent choice.

I also made some moves within West Oxfordshire District Council. I said goodbye to the Human Resources and the Audit committees and took on the Chair of the Finance and Management Oversight and Scrutiny Committee, this, along with my membership of the Environment O & S committee lets me keep a close eye on the performance of both the Officers and the Cabinet members of the Council, just one part of the checks and balances that ensure that you the Council Tax paying resident gets good value for every pound spent by the council. During the past year I also joined Development Control and the Lowlands planning committee

The planning Committee is far and away the most challenging part of my work as your Councillor. Making decisions, often contentious and rarely simple, which directly affect residents is something that none of the committee members take lightly. As I write this the WODC Local Plan is in the hands once more of the inspector with public Hearings scheduled for May and July, the details are on the Eynsham Online website. The lack of a local plan, and the inability to prove that WODC have a five year land supply means that the whole of the district is being subjected to 'planning by appeal' as developers exploit the situation assisted by a piece of Government legislation, the NPPF, which is heavily biased towards giving consent as a matter of course. This has resulted in a situation where, until the WODC Local Plan is agreed by the Inspector later this year Planning Committee members have often had no choice but to agree to some developments they would normally have refused as refusing them would have resulted in an appeal and probable award of costs against the Council. I am sure that you would agree that knowingly refusing a development that would result in a financial hit would not be good management by your elected councillors. So, more than ever, the District needs that the Inspector agrees the plan before him later this year and then maybe we can get back to being able to say NO to inappropriate development. If you want a clear example of the challenge facing the planning committee members take a look at the minutes for Lowlands planning on 13.03.2017 Pages 2 – 9 cover in detail the two hour debate as elected members including myself and WODC planning officers sought to establish a valid reason to refuse a development in Bampton. We failed, but nothing better illustrates the 'tilted balance' the Government has set up in favour of house building at any cost. You will find the minutes, as always, on the WODC website.

On a more positive note I would like to congratulate the Eynsham Futures Neighbourhood Plan Group for completing the Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan, a massive and massively impressive piece of work completed by a dedicated bunch of volunteers – I salute you and I am confident that it will be supported by the village when the referendum takes place later this year.

For myself I look forward to representing the village where I live and which I love for another year before the residents use the ballot box in May 2018 to decide if I am worthy to continue.

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