

Eynsham Parish Council AGM 24th April, 2018

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) Councillor's Report

Your Councillors

You are presently represented on WODC by Peter Kelland and Edward James and Peter Emery.

Peter Kelland sits on the Development Control Committee, the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee (which looks at applications in Eynsham's part of the district) and Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Edward James sits on the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Licensing Committee and the Miscellaneous Licensing Sub Committee.

Peter Emery is standing down after four years sterling service and we will miss his energetic and punctilious examination of all issues during his time as Councillor, especially scrutiny of the Local Plan. He served on the Development Control Committee, the Lowlands Area Planning Sub-Committee and the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He was also Chairman of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee and acted as a 'super sub' on other committees as and when needed. He will remain a strong presence on the Parish Council and we thank him for all his hard work over the last four years.

We are available at all times by 'phone and email to help with issues affecting Eynsham and its residents. Much of our work includes helping with individual issues and acting as advocate for residents. We have helped with neighbour disputes, chasing waste collection, road damage, parking, holding housing associations to account and numerous other queries and problems.

Council Tax

WODC charges the second lowest Council Tax in England despite a 3% increase from this month in the share paid to WODC. We continue to protect front line services and grants to voluntary organisations. We also aim to keep costs down through shared working with other Councils. The WODC share of Council Tax provides services including planning, waste and recycling collections, street cleaning, leisure centres, environmental health, building control, housing services and administration of benefits.

Waste and Recycling

A new recycling and waste collection system started in Autumn 2017 and took some time to bed in. Collection was erratic in some parts of the village and as Councillors we made sure that residents' complaints were registered and collections were effected where they had been missed. Much of the problem related to a change in the personnel on the routes and their unfamiliarity with these routes.

Oxfordshire is one of the best performing councils at recycling and composting, with a recycling rate of over 59%. WODC has contributed massively to this success and we have exceeded all recycling targets set for 2020.

The garden waste charge of £30 has been a great success and is taken up by numerous residents. It should also be remembered that this can be shared between people where they live in apartment blocks or have low garden waste.

Planning

The WODC development plan continues to move forwards. Consultation on further modifications to the Local Plan ended on 9th April and responses have been sent to the Inspector for his consideration as he prepares his final report. The indications from Inspector Norman Rivett are that the plan is likely to be found to be legally compliant and sound meaning that we are able to fend off the unwanted planning applications which can emerge in the absence of a Local Plan.

Eynsham councillors (County Councillor, District Councillors and Parish Councillors), residents and planning groups have made every effort to highlight shortcomings, bring concerns and submit ideas and amendments to the Inspector's attention. These efforts on behalf of the residents will doubtless continue. As Councillors we aim to facilitate this discussion and attempt to shine light on the murkier processes of decision making. An Eynsham Liaison Group now exists to meet regularly with WODC officers and keep apprised of progress and developments. It is hoped that engagement such as this will help to keep WODC officers on their toes and residents properly informed and represented.

Central government is committed to a programme of home building and as a local planning authority we have a duty to provide housing at affordable prices along with social housing. On that basis we continue to look at applications with an open mind and are encouraged to do so by central government. West Oxfordshire is a district which needs to build a variety of housing that reflects the needs of all residents.

Eynsham does face many challenges in the near future. There are proposals for 1000 houses to the west, a link road and the garden village. On the latter there are no discernible dates for progress.

The A40 remains problematic and it is right that proposed development should be scrutinised on the basis of its relationship with the existing infrastructure. To this end WODC works closely with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). Councillors try to curb OCC's enthusiasm for a Park and Ride and other plans which we believe will not alleviate the present gridlock.

Leisure

WODC leisure centres are managed on our behalf by GLL under the brand name 'Better'. This contract was renewed for a further 10 years in August 2017. The new contract brought a significant level of investment. The Bartholomew Sports Centre in Eynsham has recently benefited from this investment spike with £65,000 spent on refurbishment and new equipment.

WODC also has grants available up to £50,000 for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.