

# **Eynsham Parish Council**

## **Chairman's Report 2017 – 2018**

It is with some sadness that I read my report from last year and reflect on how badly treated the village has been by both Oxfordshire County Council and West Oxfordshire District Council over the past twelve months. It is extremely disappointing to see that residents have not been listened to when raising concerns about both expansion of the village to the west and north and the Park & Ride on the A40. Both local authorities have made no effort to address excellent points raised by residents and support from our local Member of Parliament has also been sadly lacking.

### **Neighbourhood Plan and Western and Northern Extensions**

Work on the Neighbourhood Plan was completed and the final document was submitted to WODC. I would again like to thank the Group who have worked so hard to produce this plan against an ever changing Local Plan and particularly as WODC has at times been less than helpful, would might even say obstructive. The Plan is now being considered by the Inspector, a process which has taken much longer than we would have wished and we await her comments with interest.

Like many residents we remain disturbed by the manner in which WODC dumped their idea for a “Garden Village” on us with no consultation and a clear objective to undermine our Neighbourhood Plan. In the Local Plan enquiry in July, they finally admitted that this development would not be separate from Eynsham as they originally promised, but would be a “distinct” part of the village. They subsequently changed their Local Plan to say that it would only be separate from Hanborough and Freeland. The proposed scheme does not appear to meet the requirements of the Government for a Garden Village and certainly the guidance makes it very clear that there should be local consultation and support. In addition, it is now very clear that WODC have made little attempt to understand the area they propose to allocate and their Local Plan document tries to dismiss many of the objections which we and others have to this scheme.

Many of you will have attended the Public Meetings we held on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2016. In fact, the turnout of between two and three hundred shows the level of concern. At the December meeting, the Leader of WODC sat on a panel to hear your questions and despite us chasing on a number of occasions, we are still waiting for answers. I know that many of you drew your own conclusions about the performance of Cllr Mills on the evening and I thank you for letting me know by email, telephone and stopping me in the street. For the past twelve months we have continued to press for the commitments given to residents at that meeting to be honoured and I regret to report that nothing has been forthcoming. I would urge you all to write to Cllr James Mills and press our case, but do not be too disappointed if you receive no response. Copies of your emails and letters would be very welcome as we build our continued objections to their plans.

### **The A40 and Park & Ride**

As I reported last year, this has been a major challenge. Again, I know many of you responded to the consultation and I thank you for all your support. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) still seem determined to spend £37m on this scheme to provide a Park & Ride and one way bus lane in the direction of Oxford, despite the fact that many people have pointed out how flawed the plan is. They are now in the process of preparing a “Business Case” for central Government to consider if the money they are seeking should be made available. We still consider this whole project to be a vanity scheme at OCC and a complete waste of money. We await the Business Case (promised for May) with interest and have already asked our Local Member of Parliament to secure us a meeting with Chris Grayling in order that we can demonstrate how flawed this plan is.

In the interim, OCC continue to spend the £3.2m they are gambling on getting approval. Their own Cabinet papers admit that they are at risk of not getting this money back and I regret to say that it may well be residents of Oxfordshire who will ultimately have to pay a very heavy price for this folly.

We still believe, and have seen no evidence to the contrary, that the proposed Park & Ride is in the wrong place, that a one way bus lane will make little or no difference to the traffic flow from Cassington to the Wolvercote roundabout, and in fact the scheme will make matters worse west bound. The proposal by Witney Town Council that the Park & Ride should be at Shores Green at the end of the dual carriageway seems to us to make complete sense and will better serve the whole District.

Both our County Councillor and District Councillors have continued to support us in this matter and again I would ask all residents to write to OCC expressing your concerns. I know many of you have and thank you for sending me copies of your submissions.

### **Finally**

I want to try to end on a positive note. Despite the matters I have focused on, our various committees and voluntary groups have continued to deliver some great benefits to the village. Thanks to Footpaths, Fishponds and Play Area Committees we have seen continued improvements to facilities during the year. Joan Stonham has continued to work miracles on the Web-site, Eynsham News and the Eynsham Directory. Work has been undertaken to clear weed from the dipping pond and channels at the Fishponds and we continue to work on the wildflower meadow. The Footpaths Committee has entered into a licence to install a further piece of artwork at Wharf Stream Way by the lock and is working with Will Glanfield on designs. Improvements continue to be made to all three play areas including the installation of new play equipment at Dovehouse Close, replaced parts, maintenance and regular inspections at all 3 play areas. The Play Areas Committee is currently working on goal mouth refurbishment work (Old Witney Road and Dovehouse Close) and new multiplay equipment (Old Witney Road play area). Many thanks to all who have contributed during the year.

The Council has now entered into a 3 year contract with Ubico for weedkilling and grass cutting which is aimed to provide a consistently good standard of service and allow for improved budgeting. Tree and shrub maintenance for Council owned areas is to be undertaken at the end of the summer/early autumn. The Council continues to seek sponsorship/obtain grants to refurbish the 3 roundabouts on the B4449.

Our new Clerk has settled in well and I know many of you have appreciated her help during the past year. She has been very busy and is likely to be even busier going forward. As many of you know she only works part-time, but it is our intention to look at increasing her hours to accommodate the growing village and the additional responsibilities which are now part of the job.

We are currently advertising vacancies for a new Responsible Financial Officer to look after our Accounts and offer Katherine additional support, and a Play Area Supervisor/Maintenance Operative to undertake general maintenance to Council properties and play areas.

The continuing support from the village during the past year has been appreciated more than ever. The turnout to public meetings and those who have attended both the Local Plan Enquiry and various meeting at WODC has been exceptional. Please keep us advised of your thoughts on the matters raised in this report and anything else which we may be able to help with. If you feel that you have the time and skills to assist further, then please drop me an email or give me a call.

*Gordon Beach*