

# District Councillors' Report, 2019-20

## Introduction

The District Councillors this year have been Carl Rylett, Dan Levy (elected in May 2019) and Ed James.

Ed's term of office was due to end in May 2020, but the postponement of elections because of the Covid-19 outbreak means that he will remain in place until May 2021.

Of extreme importance during the year has been the progress of the major planning applications within the parish. There have been a large number of these, and the councillors have repeatedly made the point to WODC that Eynsham is being encumbered to a greater extent than other parts of the district.

We are very pleased that the village adopted its Neighbourhood Plan in a Referendum, and by an overwhelming majority, which helps give weight to the views of the village in future planning applications. Thanks are due to those involved in putting together the Neighbourhood Plan in spite of the many hurdles along the way.

The Major planning applications in turn:

### 1. Cotswold Garden Village

The District Council's Area Action Plan will guide the planning, development and delivery of the Garden Village and describe a framework by which any planning application must adhere to, e.g. amount and type of affordable housing, environmental and design standards, services, drainage and biodiversity. It was due to go to Full Council in April but has been postponed until June because of Covid-19. A six week public consultation period will follow and a national planning inspector will judge whether the plan is compatible with the National Planning Policy Framework. At the same time the District will publish an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) to guide the necessary transport infrastructure, schooling and medical facilities for both the Garden Village and West Eynsham Strategic Development Area.

Meanwhile the developer, Grosvenor, is on the verge of submitting its outline planning application, but this may also be delayed.

The District Councillors have been working with local representatives, with the Parish Council, and with the District Council, to ensure that, given that we are obligated by the Local Plan to have the Garden Village, that it should be of the highest quality. It must have a genuine village feel, minimum car movements, green space, carbon neutral housing and enhance local biodiversity. It must have proper integration with old Eynsham, such that the two settlements can share facilities, including schools and medical facilities. In turn that means that it must be easy, direct and safe for people on foot, bike, horse or other non-motorised means to get across the A40. There must be cycle routes to Hanborough Station and to the Park and Ride.

In short we will continue putting the case that there must be no compromise in delivery of an exemplar development which adheres fully to garden village principles.

A competition to decide the name of the Garden Village has also been delayed until June

## **2. West Eynsham**

WODC plan to submit its Supplementary Planning Document (SPD, similar to an Area Action Plan but less detailed) for about 1,000 houses in West Eynsham in May although again this may be delayed

It is apparent there are differences of opinion between the 3 (or 4 if you include Taylor Wimpey on Thornbury Green) developers involved. We believe the District Council is best placed to put together a master plan for the development for the benefit of current and future residents. While more attention has been paid to the Garden Village thanks to the various consultation events, this development will also have a very significant impact on Eynsham. Like the Garden Village this development was part of the adopted Local Plan in September 2018 and whether we agree with that decision or not, we are pushing for the highest standards possible

## **3. Aurora Solar Farm.**

This is the solar farm proposed between Eynsham and South Leigh. It was supported by some villagers and opposed by others, including Dan. Planning permission was granted in March.

## **4. Minerals and Waste Plan**

In early 2020 Oxfordshire County Council submitted a Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2031 which indicated a strong preference for choosing a site on Eynsham's western border for extracting minerals. We made sure the District Council objected to this suggestion

## **Housing and homelessness**

WODC is the statutory body dealing with housing and homelessness in West Oxfordshire, and the councillors have been able to intervene successfully in a number of complex cases.

## **Refuse**

The Back Lane Bring Site has serious fly-tipping and littering problems, largely driven by unauthorised use by commercial users and selfish dumping by people from outside the village. The issues have been brought – a number of times – to the attention of WODC, and we await action.

Residents are reminded that it is an offence to leave rubbish outside the containers provided and that whatever the Council collects at the Brig Site can also be collected as part of the kerbside service. Also the Dix Pit site household waste recycling centre is nearby, next to Stanton Harcourt

## **Committees**

Much of the work at WODC takes place via scrutiny and development committees. Carl is Vice Chair of the Lowlands Planning Committee and a member of the Economic and Social Scrutiny Committee. The latter has covered such topics as local policing services, homelessness, health facilities and local

development plans (such as Area Action Plan). Carl was able to use this committee to persuade the Council to improve communication to EU Citizens of their rights to settled status post Brexit .

Dan is on the Finance and Management scrutiny committee.

### **Single Use Plastic (SUP) Working Group**

Carl participated in this small cross-party working party whose objectives were to highlight the issue of avoidable SUPs and reduce the amount of unavoidable plastic used across West Oxfordshire, to phase out the use of avoidable SUPs in all District Council premises, and to work with UBICO, PUBLICA and contracted partners to end purchase and procurement of avoidable SUPs through the Council's supply chain. Good progress was made and work will continue under the remit of the newly formed Climate Change Action Group

### **Climate Change Action Group**

This working party group of 7 councillors, including Carl, was set up in late 2019 after the District Council declared a Climate Emergency. The group has quite a wide remit for looking at ways it can address climate change. We are working on a Carbon Action Plan for West Oxfordshire, as the mechanism for delivering the Council's commitment to becoming a carbon-neutral Council by 2030.

One of the first topics discussed was how to raise the bar on environmental standards for new housing, with the Garden Village in mind as an exemplar development. Another was scrutinising the strategy for installing electric car charging points, which has so far been too slow.

### **The Future**

The councillors' role is to try to ensure that WODC is run for the benefit of residents and businesses, efficiently and effectively. We will continue to do so. At the time of writing, we are not holding any meetings even by remote conferencing, as regulations apparently prevent this from happening, even informally.

This is a time of great uncertainty and change. We support the Council in its work of facing unprecedented challenges. Nonetheless scrutiny work must continue and we will do our best to ensure that Witney listens to Eynsham, Cassington and South Leigh.

Another important role we play is a point of contact for all residents who have any individual issues or concerns, where we do whatever we can to help.

We note the current Covid-19 emergency has seen some 500 volunteers mobilise to support fellow residents who need help. A foodbank has been established, and neighbourhood support groups put into action. It has been heart warming to see the community coming together.