

## **Report from District Councillor July 4th 2024**

### **The North Wessex Downs National Landscape**

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NL) (former Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AONB) is monitored by the Local Authorities that part fund it (50% also comes from Defra). This forms the Council of Partners who meet regularly. We met on July 2nd in Hurstbourne Tarrant. Costs are clearly going up and local authorities are being requested to increase their financial input. There is also now an absolute requirement for local authorities to ensure that the local environment and biodiversity is improved rather than being conserved. The agri-environment is changing with greater emphasis on improving these two issues which make up the landscape and nature that we all love and the NL has a number of projects some funded by Defra and some by the lottery. Large projects include Farming in the Protected Landscape (FiPL) and Farmer Clusters where local farmers get together to develop more sustainable methods of farming. All these ideas are good and need to be brought out into our area to the north of the NL. Good ideas for the near future.

### **Local bus services**

Wantage Town Council has set up a Community Bus Group to set up a local bus service using s106 money from the Kingsgrove and some of the Denchworth housing developments. Because of the source of the money a local bus service covering the small villages East of Wantage, including Ardington and Lockinge. A company has been set up to run this and a consultation is underway requesting the views of residents. The next public meeting will be in the Beacon on Wednesday 10th at 7.30.

Our 68 bus service is independent of this group (although I sit on the group) and our concern is that we can maintain our service after March 2025. Discussions are underway with OCC to see how this might be done, either independently or together with the X35 bus route or the Uffington bus.

### **Local guide/map**

I have submitted a grant proposal to the Vale for the Rural England Prosperity Fund (for rural diversification and tourism). The proposal is to produce a paper map covering East Challow to Fawler covering footpaths and byways, historical and natural assets, pubs and cafes. Map on one side with numbered assets and the assets on the reverse with photos and text. There will be an online version hosted by parish council websites. There will be QR codes on village notice boards taking visitors to the online version. If we are not funded The Vale say that they are also interested in supporting this.

### **Highways engagement**

In response to the winter flooding Highways have restructured with a new post to set up an engagement team to interact more closely with villages and their particular problems. The Engagement Team visited West Challow recently to discuss the appalling state of Orchard Gardens and to explore new passing places on Silver Lane. The 40m stretch of potholes in Orchard Gardens were eventually fixed (two journeys and a bit of pressure needed). They also visited Letcombe Regis to look at the completely blocked drainage system on Court Hill that floods the Mill and we hope to get them out to Letcombe Bassett to look at Gramp's Hill where there is a risk of subsidence. We are constantly

pestering OCC about finalising the repairs at Mellor's on the A417. Pressure is being put on a landowner dragging his feet in clearing silt out of Childrey Brook. Unbelievable that they are not playing ball!

### **Canal Weir Project**

West Challow Parish Council and The Wilts and Berks Canal Trust have some money to build a small weir half-way along the canal between East and West Challow to regulate the water in the canal and reduce the flow along the ditch to the A417 (which itself has been dug out by the farmer). This will reduce the flood risk to the bungalows on Cornhill Lane and reduce flow to the A417 drainage system.

### **East Challow football**

The Rising Stars are going from strength to strength and I watched a 5-a-side match last Saturday watched by at least 20 parents. The toilet is now also functional with running water!

### **Crest Nicholson and McTaggart and Mickel housing sites, East Challow**

These have not yet been handed over to the Management Companies. The Crest site has a large number of blocked drains and a considerable proportion of dead planted trees. The southern grass meadow is beginning to look better – I saw Goldfinches in it last week. The northern meadow leaves something to be desired but was done later. Nothing done about the requested hedges yet.

### **Warneford Hospital**

HOSC members had an update from Oxford Health and the BOB ICB about an application to the government for modernising Warneford Hospital, the old mental hospital between The Churchill and Oxford Brookes. The old infrastructure is from the 19th century and is in urgent need of attention. The plan is to turn the old hospital into a new Oxford University Graduate College, build a new hospital fit for the 21st century and a new research block to look at mental health. As with many of the changes that are taking place in community medicine the NHS is looking to treat early cases at home to avoid patients become hospitalised. As with all these changes resources are key but the proposal is that Oxford Uni will contribute 3/5 of the sum needed.

**Cllr Dr Paul Barrow**

**Ridgeway**

**4th July 2024**