

Stonesfield Parish Council Report from District Councillor Genny Early

11 June 2024

After my first month in role, I thought it might be useful to outline what the actual job has involved so far.

The work of the council and its paid officers covers the areas of planning, waste collections, maintenance, business support, grant-making, affordable housing, homelessness & supporting parish councils.

The council is currently governed by an alliance of The Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green groups, which was agreed first in 2022, and agreed to continue, following the May 2nd 2024 elections.

The council is now made up of 21 Liberal Democrats, 13 Conservative, 11 Labour and four Green Party councillors.

My role as a district councillor is to work within the systems as they now are, trying to make sure that the existing policies are followed while also changing the conversation, working out what needs changing, and feeding in ideas for policies when they are reviewed.

Together with Cllr Tim Sumner, our role is also to try to connect the 4 parish councils and the residents in the Stonesfield & Tackley ward with the help that residents need on all WODC matters, and others. It also involves supporting community groups, and connecting them with sources of help.

Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2)

Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) funding was awarded in 2023 to Oxfordshire County Council to retrofit the homes of low-income residents living in energy inefficient homes (up to £38,000 per property). Residents who could benefit from the funding should be directed to register their interest with the delivery partners:

<https://www.welcomethewarmth.org.uk/register-your-interest>

Thank you for your help in reducing fuel poverty and carbon emissions in Oxfordshire.

Responsibilities

I sit on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

One proposal going to the Executive Committee this month is to upgrade the public open space CCTV cameras covering the areas of Carterton and Witney to high definition digital, together with the installation of five new cameras in Chipping Norton. It further recommends the Council joins the Thames Valley Police CCTV partnership, with an associated transfer of CCTV assets and operational responsibility to TVP under a 'single owner' model; and moving monitoring arrangements to a shared Oxfordshire hub.

I also act as substitute on the Uplands Planning Committee, which I will be attending this month.

Today I spent some time with the WODC Community Wellbeing team.

- Move Together and You Move programmes to help those facing financial and physical barriers to being active
- Community Safety Partnership locally and countywide – links with the Police and Crime Commissioners office
- Grants – Westhive
- Public art commissioning
- Resident Support – dedicated phone support for those struggling day to day and a wealth of knowledge about support services
- Community Food network – tackling food poverty and the Oxfordshire Food Strategy
- Community link roles at the heart of communities – in Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton
- Working with OCC, NHS and countywide health partners – linking with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Working with the VCSE (Voluntary sector) and community groups

YouMove

YouMove provides low cost activities for families with a child or children in receipt of benefits related free school meals or are in need of support across the county. There is 50% discount on all pay as you go activities at Better Leisure Centres, including during weekends and school holidays. It also includes a free access pass to Blenheim.

<https://www.getoxfordshireactive.org/youmovewestoxfordshire>

Biodiversity policies

Government guidance (published on 17 May 2023) is that, as a public authority, town and parish councils must: consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. agree policies and specific objectives based on their consideration. act to deliver their policies and achieve their objectives.

Useful links:

- <https://www.slcc.co.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Model-biodiversity-policy-30-October-2023-1.pdf> (guidance and template for parish council biodiversity policy)
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty#who-must-comply-with-the-biodiversity-duty> (As a public authority, understand what the biodiversity duty is and how to comply with it).

Local Biodiversity

Polecats are in the region! I found a roadkill pole cat between Witney and Curbridge. Polecats were trapped pretty much to extinction at the end of the 19th century. So it is great news that they are recolonising lowland Southern and central Britain.

The local rare plant: now is the time for Meadow clary to flower! It is still holding its own in lots of sites located around Stonesfield, including at Combe, the Saltway and at Stonesfield Common. Let me know if you would like to be involved in monitoring and safeguarding these rare plants, which are a lovely reminder of what the Romans ever did for us.

The White Horse

I would like to offer my thanks and congratulations to the Back the White Horse committee for getting us to the grand opening on Friday, with our new tenants. I wish the new tenants all success!