

District Councillor Debby Hallett's Report to North Hinksey Parish Council

22 January 2015

1. **Fire at Council Offices:** On 15 Jan 2015, an arsonist set fire to the council offices in Crowmarsh Gifford. The building is essentially destroyed; it's a complete write-off and will probably be rebuilt. That will take about 3 years, early estimate at this point. In the meantime, new premises are being sought for the 400 staff of Vale and South Oxfordshire District Council.

Emails are working again. The permanent websites are back online, although a number of online services, like online the planning applications register, rely on other IT systems that have not yet been restored, so won't yet work properly.

Planning deadlines will be extended for the amount of time the systems are down. (They aren't yet up (11:55am Weds 21 Jan 15))

You can see the latest updates here: <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/news/2015/2015-01/latest-news-council>

It's satisfying that there was complete insurance cover for both building and contents, and that our business continuity plan is ensuing business services are back up and running again as soon as possible. It's difficult with staff having to be relocated in several different places.

2. **Questions to Council.** As you may have read in the newspaper, the Leader of the Vale council decided that questions would not be verbally answered in public at the full council meeting in December. Instead, written answers were provided. Unsatisfactory, but it is their right. The Liberal Democrat group submitted several Botley-relevant questions:
 1. **Question to Councillor Matthew Barber**, Cabinet member for legal and democratic services: What response should petitioners expect when a petition is presented at full council?
A: Petitioners who present a petition to Council are normally advised that their petition will be passed to the relevant officer or committee for consideration.
 2. **Question to Councillor Elaine Ware**, Cabinet member for Economy, Leisure and Property: What's the status of the free wifi the Vale planned to install in Botley?
A: The free wi-fi is installed at West Way, Botley and is operational. However, there remains an outstanding issue of landlord's consent for the placement of some of the equipment. Vale officers are working with all parties to resolve this issue as quickly as possible and will not be promoting the service until consent has been obtained.
 3. **Question to Councillor Matthew Barber**, Leader of the council: In the light of hundreds of people objecting to the Doric plans and signing petitions asking the Vale to terminate their land sale contract with Doric, what does the Leader of the Council have to say to the people of Botley?
A: Throughout the progress of the application I have reminded Cllr Roberts that the Vale is not the applicant in the planning application and it must, and has successfully, separated [sic] its dual roles as planning authority and land owner. The Vale as land owner did not put forward the proposals and I have personally and publicly raised a number of the concerns of the community with Doric. The Council's planning committee has independently considered the facts of the application including representations from both the applicant and objectors and unanimously rejected the proposal. The Council has a contractual arrangement with Doric which is extended by their decision to appeal. Whilst I am

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disappointed by the appeal, I am confident that an alternative solution can be found and have already committed to meeting with West Way Community Concern in the New Year.

4. Question to Councillor Elaine Ware, Cabinet member for economy leisure and property:

In June 2013, after completion of the Leisure and Sports Facilities Study, the Cabinet Member said there was to be a "follow up piece of work" that would include surveys of community or village halls. When is this survey due to be completed, and when will the report be available?

A: The surveys of community and village halls form part of the survey work that is being carried out currently for the joint playing pitch strategy and associated work. Survey work takes a number of months to complete, particularly given the need to capture both winter (football and rugby) and summer (cricket) seasons for the strategy. The report on the strategy and associated work is expect in summer of 2015.

5. Question to Councillor Charlotte Dickson, Chairman of the General Licensing Committee:
Please would the Chair update the Council on the state of the AQMAs in Abingdon, Botley and Marcham?

A: Abingdon: There has been some reduction in NO2 levels over the last couple of years. If this improvement continues, next year we will consider reducing the size of the air quality management area (AQMA).

Botley: The NO2 levels in Botley have remained constant over the last 7 years and remain above the Air Quality Objective. It is very difficult to influence the number of vehicles on the A34. We will be looking at the feasibility of erecting barriers along the southbound carriageway and the district wide air quality action plan has actions to reduce the overall emission which hopefully will have some effect on the NO2 emissions on the A34.

Marcham: We will be carrying out a consultation process with residents in Marcham about the AQMA and in early 2015 we will be taking a report to Licensing Committee recommending that the council formally declare the area.

Wherever there are weak answers, we will pursue.

3. **Doric's Appeal:** they lodged it, or so we hear. There's been no news from the Inspector's office.
4. **Local Plan 2031:** In the final consultation, where comments go directly to the planning inspectorate, I included my own objections in those submitted by the Liberal Democrat Group. We objected to the use of Doric's redline map as a map of Botley town centre. And we objected to the plans to locate strategic housing sites within the current Green Belt, without a joint Green Belt review by all the neighbouring authorities. In general, I favour a more joined up, cross-authority approach to meeting housing needs.
5. **Neighbourhood Planning:** I'd like to find ways to remove cost as an obstacle to parishes creating their Neighbourhood Plans. Watch for the budget debates next month at Vale. Experience has shown there are two obstacles to successfully creating a neighbourhood plan: costs, and finding a couple of passionate committed people to lead the effort and make sure it happens. I'm working to remove the first one. What can we do about the second?
6. **Planning Applications:** The planning inspector upheld the appeal against refusal at 26-28 Westminster Way. It was pointed out that there was no objection to noise pollution for the application for flats next door (no policy in the Vale addresses building houses in areas of noise pollution, I guess). And there is apparently inconsistent interpretation of what is under-provision of car parking. I find we (locally, we) repeatedly do not understand (or is that we don't agree

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with?) County's parking standards with respect to local planning applications. I've decided that if I'm re-elected, I'm going to tackle this. Their standards define a *maximum* number of car parking spaces (not a minimum, which is what would seem a rational approach). I get that they are trying to encourage use of public transport by under provision of parking spaces. But I question the efficacy of their strategy and want to try to do something about it. (I say, 'If I am re-elected', because it will take more time than I now have left.)

7. **Planning in more general terms.** With the lack of any national or regional planning body or vision, and the delayed Local Plan, the absent Neighbourhood Plan (though not for much longer, I understand) we are left adrift with the NPPF. We try to do our best to fight against unreasonable development, using what we know and what we can learn. A particularly meaty area is what is meant by 'sustainable development'. I've asked some professionals for help in understanding what is intended by 'sustainable development'. It's a big topic, and made somewhat obscure by little actual national guidance on what's meant. I'll blog about what I learn and update you on any action I decide to take in pursuit of more skill in arguing. It's difficult to argue against the experienced developers' applications when we don't have the skill or knowledge to understand the issues. Lack of a plan of any sort here is killing us.
8. **HMOs:** Houses of Multiple Occupancy. I asked for info about the rules, and what it all means for us here in North Hinksey. See my blog: cllrdebbyhallett.com/2015/01/12/hmos-in-our-area-2/
9. **Consultations:** To participate in all Vale consultations, you have to register; do that here: <https://consult.southandvale.gov.uk/portal/vale/>
 - a. Radley Neighbourhood Plan Designation, through 25 Jan 2015.
<https://consult.southandvale.gov.uk/portal/vale/planning/pol/np/rad/rd>
 - Oxfordshire, several are open now:
https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/system/listConsultations?type=0&sort=ca_opendate&dir=desc
10. **My portfolio responsibilities are Legal & Democratic Services, and IT, HR, and Customer Services.** Regular meetings with Heads of Services in these departments keep me aware of what's going on. If I can ever help the council or residents in any of these areas, I'm happy to do it. Please contact me.
11. **Online presence in four ways.** Facebook: facebook.com/DebbyHallettLD (you don't need to be a registered Facebook user to see this page, but you do in order to comment).
Twitter: twitter.com/DebbyHallett_LD
Various news items and opinions on my blog (new URL): CllrDebbyHallett.com
Sign up to my email newsletter here: bit.ly/18TbbzU. I send one out every month or so, or when there's urgent info.