

WODC VOICE

REPORTING BACK TO RESIDENTS ON YOUR COUNCIL

FEBRUARY 2023



HELP AND SUPPORT FOR TOUGH TIMES

Also in this issue:

IT'S YOUR COUNCIL





How we are reaching out to our communities

WATERWAYS DAY

Giving you the chance to speak to organisations
about watercourse management



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Cover image: Daniela Jenkins from Charlbury Community Centre
speaks to Andy Graham Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Welcome

I'm proud to welcome you to our first edition of WODC Voice. We have so much to tell you about as we complete a busy first eight months as a new Council. As well as us talking to you, we think it's vital that we make sure we listen to what you have to tell us. Our relationship should work both ways; this is, after all, your Council and the decisions that we make should have your views at their heart.

We have strived to engage more with residents and have taken our Cabinet on tour so that you can get involved in our decision-making process and we have more dates planned for 2023. More information on these can be found later in this magazine. We have also focused on waterways management over the past eight months and held our first Waterways Day in November 2022 which enabled residents to speak to the experts and ask the difficult questions about how we manage our precious waterways in the future. We have also made our consultations easier to access online, resulting in record numbers of residents giving us their views on our Local Plan.

In this edition, we focus on the good work of some of our local organisations that have been invaluable to communities during the cost of living crisis, and how you can access this support if you need it. It's been a tough period for many and we have reacted to help as many people as possible through direct financial support, practical help and signposting.

We also feature business support in this edition and have attracted inward investment through our £762,000 allocation from the Rural Investment Fund and a further £1m from the Shared Prosperity Fund. As much as this is good news for our district, we are aware that this time of year can present challenges for some businesses and have created a 'help for struggling businesses' web page to offer advice and signposting for businesses that need it. More on this later in this edition.

We will continue to work hard for you, putting you at the forefront of all that we do. We do hope that you find this edition of WODC Voice useful and that it keeps you up-to-date with what your Council is delivering for you.



**Councillor
Andy Graham**

www.westoxon.gov.uk

Working together to protect Langel Common for future generations

Residents from Cogges and the Newland area of Witney teamed up with West Oxfordshire District Council to secure the purchase of a much-loved green space in the centre of the town. The land, which was privately owned, was used as 'common land' and when it was listed for sale local residents teamed up with the Council and purchased the land to secure its future as an open space for all to enjoy.

Local resident and Chair of the 'Protect our Meadow' residents fundraising group, Phoebe Lloyd said, "It is a fantastic achievement that we, as a community, were able to come together

to generate the funds protect the meadow for generations to come."

Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, Councillor Carl Rylett said, "By purchasing this green space, the Council can prevent housing development and preserve public amenity in perpetuity and can work with communities to meet the current and future needs and aspirations of residents."



What do housebuilders help to provide in West Oxfordshire?

Did you know that Kilkenny Lane Country Park on the northern edge of Carterton was funded by developer contributions? Along with Woodstock Youth Club, which received funding for a new clubhouse in 2018. Developer contributions from new homes at Springfield Oval Witney provided financial support for a local community bus service to continue to operate, and Enstone Parish Hall was provided directly as part of The

Paddocks development at Enstone.

Last year we asked you whether we were using developer contributions in the right way and in the right places. Your views have helped us to shape the way developer contributions are used through our planning policies. Members will agree to formal adoption and once adopted the planning document will become a consideration for any future planning applications that come forward.

Oxfordshire County Council takes over parking enforcement

Parking enforcement for the streets of West Oxfordshire will be under the control of Oxfordshire County Council from 1 April 2023. If you have any questions or comments relating to parking on the streets, please contact Oxfordshire County Council at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

West Oxfordshire Enforcement Officers will continue to patrol the car parks.



Join our Hedgehog Highway campaign to give hedgehogs greater freedom to roam


Our Hedgehog Highway campaign continues to highlight the plight of our native hedgehogs and invites residents and local organisations to connect up more green spaces to provide a network of corridors to enable these creatures to travel in safety. Sadly, numbers of these once-familiar visitors to our gardens have declined significantly in the last few decades, partly due to the loss of their natural habitat.

Creating a small gap in a garden fence or wall, measuring just 13cm x 13cm, is a simple way to support them. A typical hedgehog can travel up to 2 kms in an evening as it searches for food and a place to nest. Creating new 'highways' is one way we can all work together to support the long-term prospects for these animals which are now flagged as vulnerable to extinction (Red List for British Mammals).

It won't be long until hibernating hedgehogs awaken from their winter sleep so there's no better time to get involved. Find out more about how to help: www.westoxon.gov.uk/hedgehoghighway

We'd love to see your Hedgehog Highway pics! Email them to: climate.action@westoxon.gov.uk to claim your free sign





COST OF LIVING SUPPORT

Help and support for tough times

The cost of living crisis affects all of us in one way or another as the prices of everyday essentials are rising. We understand that many in our communities are struggling to make ends meet.



As a Council, we felt it right to respond to the cost of living crisis by providing direct help and support to those that need it most. We played a critical role in making sure the government's £150 Council Tax rebate got to people as quickly and efficiently as possible. We have invested £750,000 into a 'New Initiatives Fund' to support the delivery of the

Council's priorities, support local people with living costs, and provide grants to organisations supporting people during the cost of living crisis. We have also pulled together local and national information all in one place to make it easier for people to find out what financial help is available to them.



We wanted to highlight some of the great work being done by two of the district's charities supporting people with the cost of living. We caught up with Rizvana Poole from the Chippy Larder and Mick Morris from the Witney Food Bank to find out more about how they are helping the community.

Could you tell me what Chippy Larder is and when and why it was started?

So the Chippy Larder is a hub in the community that echoes and truly reflects the diverse community in Chipping Norton. The aim of the Larder is to nourish, empower and connect our community through projects in food, finance and business.

It was formed around early 2020 and I was looking at the environmental impact we have as a community and as a country through food consumption and waste. I was looking at the levels of vulnerability within my community and I thought there must be some way to

tackle both of these issues at once, so I had to look into projects that were tracking food poverty, as well as food waste.

And that's when I came across Sophia which is a charity based in Didcot. They rescue surplus food from going to waste and make it available for people in the community. I wanted to take that up another level; not just looking at stopping food waste, but also looking at how we can empower the community through different projects.

So, when you set up the larder, was the main aim to either reduce food waste or support people, or both?

Yes, it was both and the only way that we could do it was by truly engaging with the community and pushing, pushing that message forward about the environmental impacts of food waste. But it's also about making the environment that we live in sustainable. We're so lucky to live in one of the most beautiful places in the country, and we should have access to the amazing food that's grown here.

The fact is, locally grown food is inaccessible for many, but through the larder, we ensure that people who wouldn't normally have access to locally produced, good quality food have an avenue to have access to it.

We're in the throes of a cost of living crisis. Have you seen a rise in the uptake of the service as a result of this?

Over the past couple of months, we've seen a steady increase in people coming in saying they want to join. And the fact is it's a community because it concentrates on food, finance, fitness and futures. It's not just the food element of it. So we've had cost of living support events where we have invited organisations like Citizens Advice, Mind, Age UK the District Council, and the leisure centre and it's a one-stop shop for people to come and get much-needed vital information and support.

We've seen this increase from people who perhaps didn't have to access support previously. So, I think the Chippy Larder as an organisation, and also the wider community, need to change our mind about what vulnerability looks like, what we had in our minds what vulnerability looked like.

We have to widen that net. So there are a lot more people who are in a state of vulnerability than we've seen previously, even pre-COVID. So we have to make sure that the provision is out there and it's accessible to everyone to get that information and make this provision easily accessible for everybody.

So how can people access the service? Do people need to live in Chipping Norton or is it open to all in West Oxfordshire?

The Chippy Larder is something for everybody. There's no prejudice, there's no agenda behind it. We are accessible via social media, so we have a Facebook page, and Instagram page, we have an email address, and we're open to the public for the community. On Thursdays from 1 pm until 6 pm, you can just turn up to have a look and see if it's something you'd be interested in.

But you can also get in touch with me either by phone or email and we can talk about what your options are, and what it is that you're looking for. It might not be food provision, it might be financial support, it might be signposting. You might have some queries about mental health.

If you're looking for employment or looking to draft a CV, we've got people who can support you with that. So there are lots of ways and lots of

different avenues to access the Chippy Larder. What we're looking to do is provide holistic, long-term support to encourage and empower people.

Contact the Chippy Larder:
chippylarder@gmail.com
chippylarder.com

When did you become involved with the Witney Food Bank?

It was during the whole food security debacle that was pushed forward by Jamie Oliver. I was pretty furious with that whole thing. But instead of doing what I usually did and start marching off on social media which is a relatively pointless exercise, I thought, why don't you actually go down to the food bank and see if you can be of some assistance.

I was doing that for a bit. And then one of the trustees approached me and said, would you be interested in helping us out at trustee level? And I said 'absolutely'.

So what does the food bank provide?

What we provide are all the things that you would probably expect in a food parcel. We pick, pack, and distribute parcels depending on who it's for - it could be a family or a single mum with two kids. And we're seeing more and more large families needing help, which is not a welcome trend.

We provide enough food to keep a person or keep a family for five days or so. Within those parcels, you'll find pasta, tinned meats, tinned vegetables, long-life milk juice, biscuits, snacks, etc. There might be pet food in there if the family has animals, toiletries, toothbrushes, tampons - whatever you would buy if you were doing your weekly shop. Food is carefully chosen to be nutritious and well-balanced.

Do people need to be referred to the Food Bank?

We're a frontline service that's always been a referral-based model. If people are struggling they can get referred by their GP, mental health worker, your church, your kids' teachers or somebody who knows the family or knows you well enough to be able to say 'this person's in trouble.'

Do you provide any signposting to other services?

We work very closely with Citizens Advice, they're really great. They can support people with their debt or with navigating the benefits system or whatever it might be. It makes the whole thing more sustainable. If we can help people get on top of their finances, there's one more person who doesn't need a food bank.

How can people help?

We simply couldn't operate if it wasn't for our volunteers. The charity sector is driven and exists because of the goodwill of volunteers. We always need more volunteers.

Keep donating to us! Also, people can donate cash. We have relationships with wholesalers now where we're buying wholesale food. We go to the cash and carry because we can buy the things that don't get donated, it's logistically easier as we don't have to send drivers to collect food, which means cash often goes further.

To give help:
witney.foodbank.org.uk/give-help
To get help:
witney.foodbank.org.uk/get-help

www.westoxon.gov.uk/costoflivingsupport

You can find out about the help available on our website, just search for 'cost of living.'



Cabinet goes 'on tour'

As part of the Council's drive to engage more with residents it has taken its Cabinet on Tour. This initiative sees the Council's cabinet members take the regular decision-making meetings, normally held at the Woodgreen Council office, and hold them within the community halls throughout the district.

The first Cabinet on Tour saw the meeting held at Charlbury Community Centre which was well attended by members of the public, with future meetings due to take place in Carterton and Eynsham. Members of the public are invited to come along and have their say about how the Council makes decisions on their behalf. If you'd like to attend to see democracy in action for yourself, there is no need to book, just turn up on the day and have your say.

Ask us anything on Facebook

We know that it's sometimes hard to talk to us at a time that suits you, so to make it easier we have launched our Facebook Live Q&A sessions, held in the evening when most people are home from work. The sessions allow residents to speak directly with councillors about any problems or concerns and give feedback about the decisions the Council makes.

The first Live Q&A at the end of last year saw Cllr Duncan Enright, Cllr Joy Aitman, and Cllr Dan Levy answer a number of questions about Salt Cross Garden Village, support for



residents during the cost of living crisis and decisions the Council has made on affordable housing.

Follow our social media channels for information on the next Facebook live Q&A session and email us your questions in advance communications@westoxon.gov.uk

Talking to our residents is 'Commonplace'

West Oxfordshire District Council recently trialled digital tools to engage with residents about the future plans for the district. The online consultation tools were used to engage with residents about plans for roads, paths, and cycle routes and also support for local communities and community transport. The consultation was promoted on the Council's social media channels and the website and invited residents to 'have your say' on matters that mean the most to them.

Funding for the project came from the Governments PropTech Engagement Fund which was a new approach to consulting with residents.

Carterton's next meeting will be held at 2pm on Wednesday 22 March at the Town Hall.



Important Information for residents

How to contact

West Oxfordshire District Council:

Send us an email:

customer.services@westoxon.gov.uk

Main switchboard: **01993 861000**

Out of hours: **01993 861000**

For urgent issues only such as flooding, dangerous structures or homelessness Telephone payments*: **01993 861045**

*24 hour payment line for Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates and Fixed Penalty Notices. You'll need the relevant bill or Fixed Penalty Notice to use this service.

How to report and

request various issues online:

westoxon.gov.uk/report-it

KEY CONTACTS:

Oxfordshire County Council

County Hall, New Road, Oxford,

OX1 1ND

01865 792422

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Thames Valley Police

Non-emergency - 101

Emergency - 999

www.thamesvalley.police.uk

Thames Water

www.thameswater.co.uk/contact-us

Report a Problem

0800 980 8800

www.thameswater.co.uk/contact-us/report-a-problem

Citizens Advice

0808 223 1133

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Reducing the

Risk of Domestic Abuse

01865 965055

reducingtherisk.org.uk/oxfordshire

Ground-breaking affordable housing scheme for Chipping Norton

We realise how important it is that local affordable housing continues to be built in the district and is accessible for residents. Our input ranges from granting planning permission to small-scale developers building under ten homes to deciding upon large-scale development and how they impact the local communities with several hundred, or even thousands of homes.

The Council has worked hard to bring forward land owned by the Council at Walterbush Road in Chipping Norton to be developed to deliver custom-built, affordable, net-zero carbon homes. Cllr Geoff Saul, Cabinet Member for Housing, said, "We are incredibly proud to bring forward this scheme in West Oxfordshire that we believe will be a national first in achieving custom-build homes that are both net-zero carbon and affordable.

It shows we are leading the way in pushing boundaries for more affordable homes that are much better for our environment. We hope it will be an example for others and we will see more properties of this type developed to help us tackle both the climate emergency and affordability crisis."

Council land brought forward for 200 homes in Carterton

Towards the end of last year, work began on substantial housing development in Carterton that will see 200 homes provided for people to live in the area.

The site at Milestone Road has been provided by West Oxfordshire District Council and is being developed by Platform Housing. Over the next four years, the new homes

will be made available through Platform's different affordable options. 105 of the homes will be available to rent, 12 as rent to buy, and 83 through the increasingly popular shared ownership scheme. This allows people to purchase a share of their home and then pay rent on the rest with the option to increase that share up to 100%.

Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council, Councillor Andy Graham said, "It's really important that there are 200 more homes that are truly affordable. We need to see more developments like this around the district so that families can get on the property ladder quickly and this is exactly the type of development we need."

Salt Cross 'exemplar' example of sustainable development

The Council is currently involved in one of the largest developments the district has seen in the last two decades and beginning its journey towards completion of Salt Cross. The development on the north side of the A40 close to Eynsham will see 2,200 homes built alongside a new science and technology park, with affordability, sustainability and biodiversity being key to this important local development.



Our staff working hard for you

The Council is home to all sorts of different roles, from customer services to environmental health and communications. We have asked two of our staff to tell us what it's like to work for a Council and what they enjoy about their role.



**Eloise Street -
Career Grade Planner**

I had a slightly unconventional route into the planning world. I graduated from University in 2017 with a degree in Geography and continued on to other jobs that were unrelated to my degree or planning. In September 2021, I saw an opportunity online to join the planning team and knew it was an opportunity I couldn't refuse.

My role involves dealing with householder planning applications for things like extensions, listed building consent applications, advertisement consents and minor developments. Once a week or so, I go out on-site visits which enables me to get away from my desk and keeps the role active and engaging. I enjoy that my role is very varied, no day is the same and it is all about prioritising my workload.

The most rewarding part of my role is finalising an application - a lot of work goes into the process and once the decision is finalised I feel great satisfaction in knowing that everything has all been tied together. I am motivated by knowing that an approved application can make a difference to someone's well-being and also impact the local community when it is a larger scheme.

One of my proudest achievements so far is taking an application to Planning Committee within my first month of being a planning officer. It was quite nerve-racking to talk to the Councillors about the application so early on in my role, but it provided me with the confidence I needed for subsequent planning committees. I have always had an interest in planning but will admit my knowledge at the start was fairly limited. One thing I was sure of, however, was that I wanted to work in a role that can make a long-term difference to the place I live. I knew I would have a fulfilling and successful career in planning and it is a job I am proud to do.



**Emmylou Brossard -
Safer Communities Officer**

My job sits within the Community Wellbeing Team and they do a huge amount of work to promote being healthy, mentally and physically. The team worked incredibly hard supporting residents during Covid and now is busy helping with the Cost of Living crisis. My role in particular encompasses anything related to safety in the community, which includes issues that impact individuals, families, and children. I work around a broad range of areas such as domestic abuse, child exploitation, fraud, counter-terrorism, and antisocial behaviour.

I used to be a project worker, so I was out and about more often, but now my role is quite strategic. I attend a lot of meetings to discuss how we do things both locally and across the County. These meetings sometimes look at how we respond to emerging issues across the district and county and help us decide what we can do to support communities. When it comes to supporting communities, I may be working with community groups, youth clubs, or schools - not necessarily residents directly - but the organisations that work directly with residents.

I've always wanted to work around social issues as they're really important to me. I knew very little about community safety when I came into the role, but I'd had roles in social work and I had volunteered with young people and supported living, as well as a wide range of roles

that were focused on youth and safeguarding. Coming into the role, I found that my background and the skills I had really transferred well and gave me a really good, holistic understanding of a lot of the social issues that I dealt with around community safety. I love my job. It's the best job ever.

A large project I have been working on recently has been the Youth Needs Assessment. Following on from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council wanted to understand what life was like for young people in the district. We know that young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic - not being in school, not being able to meet with friends, their own mental health suffering, or that of their family members. If the Council is thinking about how they can respond and make decisions that affect young people, they want to know what's going on for them, what they may be worried about, and how we can fit in with that.

So we sent a survey out in secondary schools earlier this year and between January and March we've now had just under 4000 responses to that survey. At the moment I'm forming a report and trying to make sure it's understandable for young people - lots of visuals and no jargon or acronyms.

I think it will also provide really important intelligence and information to youth groups and community groups that work around young people who might want to do a project or they might want to get really involved in their communities. So I'm really proud and I think it is going to be eye-opening and refreshing. It's really transparent and it's not about organisational slants to things. It's not about politics, it's about young people.



A very local plan

If you say the words 'Local Plan' most peoples' eyes glaze over with thoughts of pages and pages of planning speak, but this plan is probably the most important plan for the future of a population that a Council will draft.



So, what is it? Why do we need one and how can you get involved? We asked these questions to our Cabinet Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, Carl Rylett.

What is the Local Plan?

The Local Plan is the document we produce that sets out how development including housing, business construction, roads and facilities can benefit the people and environment of West Oxfordshire. The Government sets out how many homes have to be built in West Oxfordshire and the local plan is the way we can set out how these are best provided for in our area, taking into consideration the needs of the local population, the environment, and our local priorities.

Why does West Oxfordshire need a Local Plan?

Local Councils have to produce a Local Plan by law and they have to last for a minimum of 15 years. Not only do we have to produce one but we want to produce one to make sure development in our area is well thought out and works in the best way for businesses and residents. Also, through the process of creating a Local Plan residents get a chance to have their say on future development and we can listen and respond to your views.

What are we trying to do with our Local Plan?

We are committed to making sure development across West Oxfordshire is the best it can be for our local communities. We understand that development is challenging for local residents and our job is to try and manage it in the best way possible for everyone across the district, balancing the need for new homes and other development with the need to protect and enhance the environment and support our local communities.

What would happen if we didn't produce a Local Plan?

Without an up-to-date Local Plan we would be in a weaker position to determine planning applications from developers and therefore development could happen in a way that may not best suit the district or residents. These proposals may result in unsustainable, unplanned, piecemeal development across the district, without the required supporting infrastructure such as roads, schools, etc.

An up-to-date Local Plan also provides us with the opportunity to set much stronger requirements relating to climate change and the environment including zero carbon development and biodiversity net gain.

Do we have a Local Plan and how can people get involved?

We already have a Local Plan agreed back in 2018 but it needs to be updated and strengthened. So we are producing a new plan which will run to 2041. An initial consultation ran from 21 August to 5 October 2022. An excellent response was generated with over 4,000 visits to our new digital platform, Commonplace, and hundreds of useful comments left by residents. Those comments are currently being considered and will help to shape the scope and content of the new Local Plan which will be subject to further consultation in the spring. Follow our social media channels for information on further consultations and how you can get involved.

be kind to your mind

The District Council has a role to play in prevention, so the Be Kind to Your Mind campaign was designed to raise awareness about mental health issues as well as resources and services that are available across the district. Bridewell Gardens is one such service based near Witney that provides social and therapeutic horticulture in a working garden to adults living in Oxfordshire. A previous Bridewell gardener shares their experience below:

Insight from a mental health service user - Bridewell Gardens

"I have suffered several episodes of acute psychosis since my mid-twenties as well as long periods of depression and anxiety following each episode. I was in a psychiatric hospital having been sectioned when some fellow patients told me about Bridewell Gardens and what a beautiful place it was. They spoke about it so warmly that I was curious to find out more. After I was referred by my psychiatric nurse, I went for an informal visit and then started attending regularly once a week.

You are straight away part of a structured working day that is filled with learning and social opportunities. I was assigned a key worker at Bridewell who I met with regularly. She helped me to reflect on my progress and offered advice and acted as a sounding board for ways in which I might move forward with my life and make progress in my recovery. Staff at Bridewell keep up to date with the various opportunities available in the county such as volunteering and mental health support.

One in four people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England. Poor mental health increased during the Coronavirus pandemic and more so with the rising cost of living, which has been shown to hurt certain groups in our communities.

The greatest benefit of attending Bridewell for me was the social side, being part of a community. You learn to pull together as a team and share laughs while you work and this boosts your morale hugely. Also, the benefits of being outside in fresh air and such a stunning location really help with your well-being too, not forgetting the physical benefits of exerting yourself when turning the compost or digging. It's not just gardening either; Bridewell offers the chance to do woodwork and other creative activities using natural materials and produce from the gardens. Attending Bridewell gives you structure in a life that can be chaotic when you're unwell. I always slept well after my day at Bridewell.

Life has changed for me hugely since attending Bridewell, it speeded up my recovery and gave me the confidence to take a different tack in life. Encouraged by the Bridewell team, I embarked on a new career working in mental health which I have found to be incredibly rewarding.

This type of service is absolutely vital. It really is unique and offers people recovering from a severe and enduring mental illness the time and space needed to recuperate at their own pace. Everyone at Bridewell understands what it's like to live with and recover from a severe mental illness so it's like a stepping-stone from the acute services to the wider community. It feels safe and reassuring; you are encouraged to be yourself and seek support should you need it, with a friendly ear to listen. I wish more people knew about Bridewell and its benefits - it really is a life-changer."

Find out more about what help is available by searching 'Be Kind to Your Mind' on our website.



www.westoxon.gov.uk

How you can help recycle even more

We're immensely proud that the amount our residents recycle and compost puts West Oxfordshire among the best-performing local authority areas in England. In fact, 58 percent of what we collect from local homes each year will go on to be transformed, helping to reduce waste and protect our planet's precious resources.

One way you can help make the recycling service even better, is to ensure the right things go in the right container - and to recycle more of the right things more often. Getting it right ensures we are providing the companies that will eventually recycle your items with good-quality materials and not create unnecessary transport emissions by delivering unsuitable items to the recycling facility.

Make sure to do the following:

Items need to be loose

Don't bag items destined for the recycling bin. This allows items to be sorted quickly and efficiently when they reach the recycling facility. Plastic bags can also get caught in the machinery and can even stop the sorting process.

Keep textiles dry

Dirty or wet textiles are not suitable to be re-worn or reused, so put them in a carrier bag, with the handles tied, to keep them dry. Place the bag beside your blue-lidded recycling bin on collection day, not inside it. If you can, use a clear bag to help crews identify what's inside.

Plastics

Not all plastics are the same. Only put plastic bottles, punnets, pots, tubs, and trays into your recycling bin. The Oxfordshire Recycles' Waste Wizard tool can help you find local drop-off points for soft plastic film (such as carrier bags, crisp packets and pet food pouches) that aren't currently recycled at the kerbside. Find the Waste Wizard on our website: westoxon.gov.uk/wastewizard

Please give tins, bottles, tubs, trays, jars and cartons a quick rinse and clean foil before presenting

Food waste

Food sent for recycling will eventually be turned into renewable energy so let's make sure we don't waste this valuable resource. Food waste can only be recycled in your black kerbside caddy. Use compostable liners or leftover plastic bags (such as old bread bags) to line caddies to keep them clean and prevent food from sticking inside. Or wrap food waste in newspaper if you prefer.

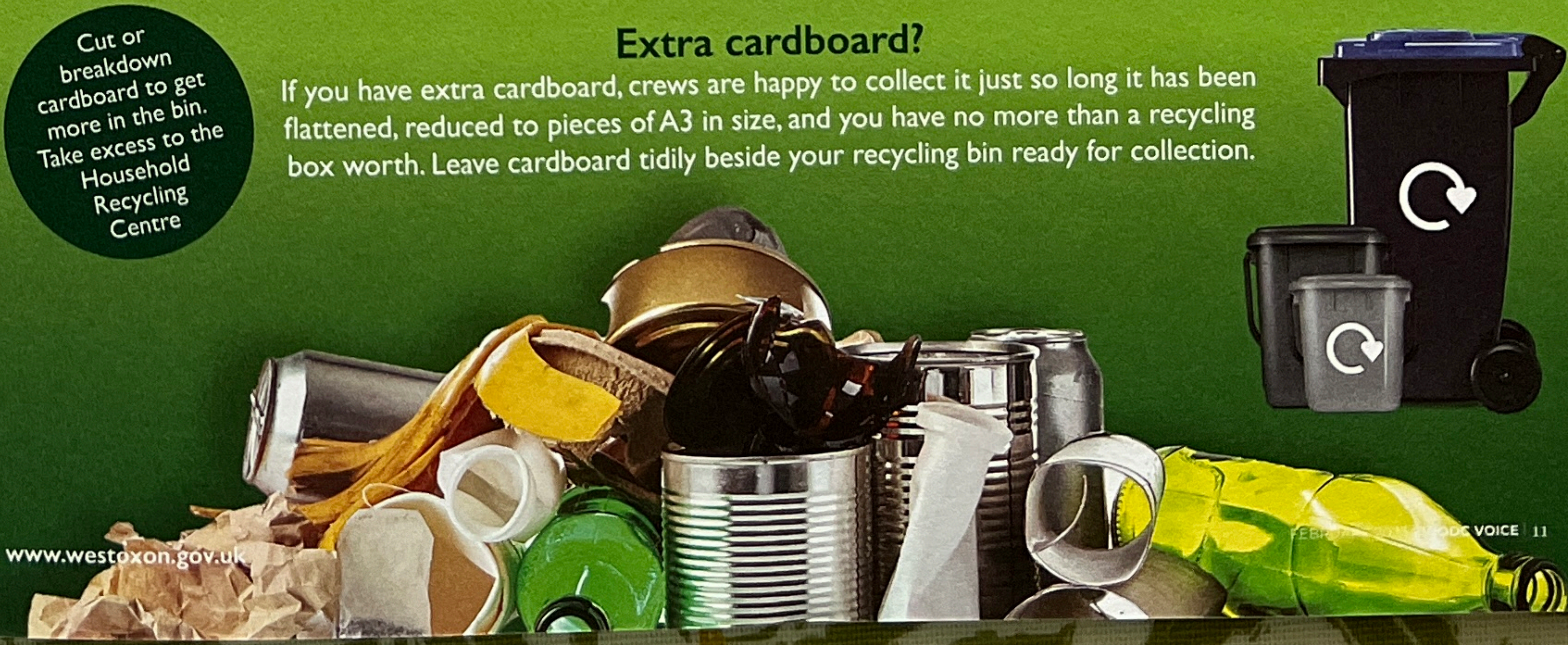
Wrap food waste in old newspaper if you prefer

Extra cardboard?

If you have extra cardboard, crews are happy to collect it just so long it has been flattened, reduced to pieces of A3 in size, and you have no more than a recycling box worth. Leave cardboard tidily beside your recycling bin ready for collection.

Cut or breakdown cardboard to get more in the bin. Take excess to the Household Recycling Centre

www.westoxon.gov.uk



Prosperity funds set to support innovation in West Oxfordshire

By Councillor Duncan Enright, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration

We announced two new funds this year that are being made available by the Government to support local businesses and communities.

The Shared Prosperity Fund, announced in April 2022, will provide £1m of funding over three years, with £70,000 in the first year, £141,000 in the second year, and £789,000 in the third year. Over the next couple of years, the funding will improve our town centres, support community groups, help to grow the local economy, and build skills and business growth in the area.

Following on from this funding the Government announced a second pot in September 2022, from the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) of £716,216 over a two-year period. The REPF has been set up by the Government to support capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure. The aim is to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities.

We have held a number of stakeholder meetings and run a call for project ideas to determine what projects might be delivered through these two funding streams. Investment

plans have been submitted to the Government for both programmes, with the SPF now agreed and the decision on the REPF due imminently. We will be publishing more information once it becomes available through our business publication, Business Matters. You can sign up for Business Matters via the Council's website westoxon.gov.uk/support/newsletter-signup

Support for businesses when it's most needed

We know that the period after Christmas can be a challenging time for some businesses. Tough trading conditions compounded by the cost of living crisis, rising inflation, and utility costs have created a dark time for many traders.

We want to offer help and advice for any business owner finding themselves in difficulty this New Year and have developed a web page that advises on how and where to get help. You can find this on the business pages of our website.

The Shared Prosperity Fund will provide £1m of funding



www.westoxon.gov.uk

Waterways Day

Giving residents the opportunity to speak to the experts in waterways management

Waterways Day took place on Friday 18 November when local residents and organisations involved in waterways and the environment got together to talk about how our waterways can be improved.



Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Cabinet Member for Environment and responsible for Waterways Day next to the River Windrush

The day consisted of a series of interesting and insightful talks from organisations such as Thames Water, Windrush Against Sewage Pollution and Oxfordshire County Council. Many residents found the day to be useful to gain a greater understanding of the responsibilities of different organisations and were able to engage with them directly.

Cllr Lidia Arciszewska, Cabinet Member for Environment, said, "It was fantastic to see so many residents who are passionate about the environment and our local waterways attend to share their perspectives. The discussions held throughout the day introduced many thought-

provoking topics and started conversations about the changes that need to take place to improve our water systems. We are very fortunate to be able to build partnerships with individuals who have such outstanding expertise, who are willing to get involved and make a positive difference to our environment and our waterways. It was a great success and I am grateful to all the organisations and residents who attended."



Are you flood-ready?

Certain areas across West Oxfordshire may be vulnerable to flooding. There are a number of steps you can take to help you prepare for flooding and resources on how you can effectively manage a flood.

For more information visit:
www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/flooding

Making a difference in your community

We believe that the best way to find out what communities need is for them to tell us. We know that they are best placed to decide what will make a difference to the lives of our communities. Our community grants enable communities to come to us periodically throughout the year to apply for funding to make their ideas a reality, and ultimately a positive difference in the place where they live.

The Council has a grants scheme to financially support local groups helping their community through the cost of living crisis. Eighteen groups have been given funding following applications last autumn. We caught up with Councillor Joy Aitman, Cabinet Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities to ask her why working with communities is a top priority.

Why are community grants so important?

They enable communities to do something specific to where they live. It's all very well for us at the District Council to go 'we think we know what you need.' But if people can come to us and say, 'actually, this is what we need, and we need your help to do it,' it's a better approach. And that's where the grants come in.

We've provided grants to organisations providing cost of living related services. What difference will the grants make to the different projects?

The cost of living crisis is going to affect lots of people in very different ways, and we hope that people feel confident that they're being supported and that there are places that they can go, especially people who are struggling with energy costs. They know that they can go to a warm space. It's not only the physical warmth, it's the interaction with other people. And if we can make that work, that's something special.

We hope we can provide grants for lots of different voluntary groups around West Oxfordshire from warm spaces to food banks too. There's one project in The Bartons that runs a minibus to help get people in rural areas to warm spaces. And it's those groups that know their community because we can't know everything about West Oxfordshire. So, we need them to tell us and then we can help them carry it out.

We've recently adopted something I know you're very passionate about. The Playing Pitch Strategy. What will it achieve?

I would like us to be able to ensure that local football teams and particularly children's teams; I know there's been a lot of talk about the increase in the number of girls' teams. We want to make sure that there are enough pitches for them both to train and play their matches without a conflict about who gets to use them at what time. We want there to be enough spaces for everybody to get their fair share. Children's teams and adult teams.

Protecting pitch sports for the future

We have adopted a strategy to protect the future of pitch sports, which will help communities secure the provision of facilities to support rugby, football and cricket, and other pitch sports in the future.

Local playing pitches to support sports are key to the health and well-being of many communities. These facilities are even more critical in areas where people may be struggling with the cost of living crisis by providing an inexpensive and accessible way to fitness and even friendship.

We want to make sure that sports pitch provision is considered a priority when planning new developments in the District and that all residents have reasonable access to open spaces where pitch sports take place.

To ensure that the strategy is delivered, we will recruit a new member of staff to establish partnerships and identify opportunities across the District.

Working to tackle the CLIMATE CRISIS

We're working hard to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies. Our Climate Action Plan and Climate Change Strategy set out how we plan to rise to these immense challenges both in terms of how we can adapt our ways of working to reach our net-zero carbon target as quickly as possible, and how, by working in partnership with others, we can support positive change in our district.

Take a look at some of our key projects from the past 12 months:

Supporting cleaner, greener driving

Developing an infrastructure that supports the decarbonisation of transport in the district is a key objective of our Climate Change Strategy. In partnership with Oxfordshire Park and Charge, 64 new Electric Vehicle Charging Points were installed last year in five of the District Council car parks to help motorists make the switch to cleaner, greener driving by providing more places to charge whilst 'on the go'. The new chargers also give local residents who have made the move to electric - or who are considering making the change - with no off-street parking, the ability to park for free overnight and charge their vehicles on a competitive tariff.

Find out more about the Park and Charge project at parkandchargeoxfordshire.co.uk

Keeping homes warmer this winter

At this time of year keeping our homes warm is especially important. With the current cost of living crisis and high energy bills, this is a worry that many of us are facing but for those living in the district's least energy-efficient properties, this can present an even greater challenge. This is because energy-inefficient properties are generally more costly to heat, can negatively impact the health of residents, and are less sustainable due to the extra energy needed to maintain a comfortable temperature within the home.

Along with other local authorities, we work with our partner, the National Energy Foundation, to deliver the Better Housing, Better Health (BHBH) service, to provide residents with free, expert energy help and advice, and to ultimately alleviate fuel poverty. Through the service, homeowners, tenants living in privately-rented accommodation, and landlords can also access a number of grant-funded opportunities to make improvements that will reduce the environmental impact of their homes and help reduce the overall running costs.

The measures available and who can access them depend on the eligibility criteria for each grant but can include cavity and loft insulation, low-carbon heating systems, better draught-proofing such as new external doors, low-energy lighting, and solar panels to help generate free electricity.

To see if you could benefit, visit bhbh.org.uk or speak to one of their friendly advisers on 0800 107 0044.

Aiding nature's recovery

Our natural world is under threat. As part of our local response to this global emergency, we have committed to protecting and restoring ecosystems and wildlife habitats to boost biodiversity in the district and help more species thrive. The District Council is responsible for a number of open, green spaces including Langel Common, Kilkenny Lane Country Park, Deer Park Wood, and North Leigh Common as well as many green verges. Co-working with our grounds maintenance provider, Ubico, and our Biodiversity and Countryside Land Management Officer, new land management plans have been developed for these Council-managed areas to help manage the effects of climate change.

The plans will ensure that over the years to come these spaces will offer a valuable haven for greater numbers of wildlife, provide an abundance of flowers to sustain our pollinating insects which play a crucial role in food production, and help mitigate the risk from flooding and maximise carbon sequestration benefits through the restoration of grassland areas and further tree planting.

Decarbonising our buildings

One of our key climate change objectives is making Council activities and operations more sustainable. A project that is very much in its early stages is the decarbonisation of Council-owned buildings. Towards the end of last year, our Cabinet agreed to explore the benefits of installing solar photovoltaic panels on some of our buildings to reduce their energy costs, make them more energy-efficient and move away from power derived from fossil fuels which are a major contributor to greenhouse gases. The project will explore in more detail the viability of installing the panels on both our own offices and also those premises let commercially to local businesses and organisations, giving more people the opportunity to access green energy. A full business case will be presented before this work can get the full stamp of approval.

A separate project looking to reduce emissions from heating our leisure centres and swimming pools, which are the single biggest contributors to our overall carbon footprint, is also underway.

Find out more about how we are managing our green spaces and volunteering opportunities by going to our website and searching for 'climate action'



The
Electoral
Commission

You now need
Photo ID to
vote at a
Polling station

Anyone voting in person in the local elections on 4 May 2023 must be registered to vote and will be required to show an accepted form of photographic ID to prove their identity before they are able to vote.

This is a national change to the law and includes those acting as a proxy on behalf of another individual. It will not affect anyone voting by post.

Find out more at

electoralcommission.org.uk/voterID

No ID? You can apply for free voter ID