

District Council Ward Report, Hail Weston, 17th July 2018

A14/A1 Road closures

The A14/A1 road closures have resulted in increased traffic coming through the local villages, including HGVs, which may be over the 18 tonne weight limit if they are carrying loads. Together with many residents, I contacted Highways England to alert them to the issue of HGVs ignoring the official diversion, and asked the Police to enforce the vehicle weight limits. This has attracted local and national media coverage, including questions being asked in Parliament. Signage in some areas has improved, though the diversions are still ambiguous in places, leaving drivers confused or they are simply ignoring the official diversion routes. I will continue to monitor the situation, and report problems, though some disruption is inevitable given our proximity to the A14 and A1 road schemes.

Neighbourhood Plans and Community Plans

Last month, I was asked a question by a Parish Councillor in respect of the difference between Neighbourhood Plans and Community Plans.

I will forward a document which is a few years old now from South Oxford Council which addresses this very question. Though slightly out of date, the key principles should remain the same.

“Community led plans (CLP) can help a community assess current and future potential issues and think about all aspects of community life in an area and set out a plan of action. A CLP is evidence of a strong community that has given clear thought to its needs. It can include land use, planning issues/issues around development locally. Although it has no formal weight and cannot allocate development sites, a CLP could be a material consideration and could be taken into account in considering e.g. planning applications in the area and grant applications. It may sometimes be appropriate for communities to complete a CLP as a preliminary to preparing a neighbourhood plan.

Neighbourhood planning empowers communities to shape the development and growth of a local area through the production of a neighbourhood development plan, a neighbourhood development order or a Community Right to Build Order. Neighbourhood Plans, once adopted, become part of the local statutory development plan and will form the basis for determining planning applications in that area as well as protecting green spaces.

Further details are on the accompanying document from South Oxford Council.

HDC Customer Services Centre

The main customer services centre which deals with all calls to the District Council will be switching to an automated call handling system in order to cope with the complexity of calls coming in. The new system will give the council more control over the calls and enable them to direct the call to an advisor who can help at the first point of contact - which is saving the customer time as they currently join a queue, or even queue twice if the first advisor has to pass on the call. The menu has 5 options to pick from: bins, council tax, housing, planning, and benefits. For all other queries, enquirers hold the line.

HDC Website retains 4 star rating

The Digital Team have been awarded a maximum of 4 out of 4 stars from the Society of IT Managers (Soctim) for a second year. Soctim stated that 37 out of 414 councils (9%) received 4 stars in 2017.18. Of the 200 shire councils, only 9 gained 4 stars.

Cyclecar Cycle Warning System

In other news, HDC has fitted some of the new refuse vehicles with the Cyclecar cycle warning system. This system is fitted to HGV's to alert cyclists and other vulnerable road users when the vehicle is turning left - a manoeuvre that is believed to be a major cause of cycling injury across the UK. HDC refuse vehicles are fitted with an illuminated bicycle 'strike through' sign at the rear to alert cyclists that the vehicle is indicating left. At the same time, an audible speaker announces the vehicle's intended manoeuvre. Each vehicle is also fitted with sensors located on the nearside that detect when a cyclist is travelling beside the vehicle. This in turn alerts the driver that a cyclist is near and to be cautious.

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