# Burford Ward District Councillor – Annual Report – May 2024

How time flies! I am surprised to find myself already halfway through my 4-year term as your District Councillor. The West Oxfordshire Alliance of Lib Dems, Labour and Green parties has worked well and constructively, and I hope this will continue through this year.

(I have attached a list of achievements in the District for those who are interested in a glimpse of the wider picture.)

Progress has been slow on the main Ward issues this year, not for want of trying!

* Burford bridge over the Windrush: Trying to increase the pressure on OCC to repair the bridge and improve pedestrian safety on the bridge over the Windrush as we approach the second anniversary of the damage incident.
* Car parking: Working with Burford Town Council, seeking ways to expand Guildenford car park and make it more flood resilient, and to get publicly accessible Electric Vehicle charging points in Burford.
* HGVs: I am now a member of OCC’s Windrush Valley HGV Study Steering Group. At least the subject is live and we meet every two months or so to review progress. The next step is the specification and implementation of a new data collection exercise to understand the movement of lorries across the Windrush Valley.

My main committee workload has been on the Uplands Planning Sub-Committee where we consider applications brought to committee as major planning applications or where they are controversial. The combined planning sub-committees also met once as the Development Committee to consider and approve WODC’s consultation response on the Botley West solar farm application.

In addition, I am one of the Lib Dem representatives on the Local Plan Councillor Working Group which is monitoring the progress and reviewing the inputs to the new (2021-2041) local plan. This provides an opportunity to influence the direction of the Plan and have advance notice of what policies are emerging.

WODC’s three scrutiny committees have been combined into one, which meets monthly a week before the Executive’s monthly public meeting. This is a much more effective arrangement than before. Although I have been a member of this committee, I have not been able to attend several of its meetings as it often clashes with BTC’s monthly meeting.

My door (and email) are open to anyone wanting help with a District problem. It is easier for me to gain access to officers, than the general public, but not always! At least it is easier for me to demand a response!

For those who have a deeper interest in the workings of the Council, we have now upgraded the Council chamber and main meeting rooms to allow all our formal meetings to be followed live or available on-line afterwards. Do join us!

Hugo Ashton

*Councillor for Burford Ward, comprising Burford, Fulbrook and Taynton*

**Some initiatives and achievements at WODC over the last two years**

Since taking control of West Oxfordshire District Council over the last two years, in addition to delivering on our core statutory responsibilities, we have:

* Produced balanced budgets that protect services whilst investing in the future
* Begun developing a new local plan that will contain more realistic housing targets
* Helped to deliver 267 affordable homes in West Oxfordshire in 2023, including 164 affordable rental properties, 99 shared ownership properties and four First Homes
* Required that new housing will not be occupied until adequate sewage treatment capacity is in place
* Supported residents through the cost of living and energy crises
* Kicked off Witney town regeneration by investing in Marriott’s Walk and supporting other markets across the District
* Challenged Thames Water to stop polluting waterways at hot spots across the District
* Worked towards preservation and enhancement of the natural environment by securing funding and collaboration with other actors on a variety of projects across the District
* Partnered with the Environment Agency and community groups to make West Oxfordshire more flood resilient
* Stood up for the environment to ensure that Salt Cross Garden Village is built to net zero standard
* Launched Westhive, a new crowdfunding platform regime to channel Council funding to projects supported by the communities
* Made progress towards our net-zero goal through projects leading to decarbonisation of Council’s property and expanding our electric vehicle fleet
* Worked closely with Town and Parish Councils to help them respond to proposed Botley West Solar Farm project
* Listened to young people and invested in youth support
* Engaged with local farmers and food producers and set up a Food Action Plan
* Refurbished the council chamber and main meeting rooms to allow full on-line streaming of meetings and flexibility for community use
* Made the work of your councillors more transparent by streaming meetings online or on catch-up and making the Executive more accessible by holding meetings around the District (including in Burford)