

District Councillors' Report Faringdon Town Council

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It has been a busy month for us all since our last report, which kicked off with OVO Women's Cycle race and has continued at a pace with activities for both of us, as well as different council initiatives and actions.

1 OVO Women's Tour Cycle Race

I think it is safe to say that the OVO Women's Tour touched Faringdon in a big way, and while the district council was delighted that we were part of the team enabling the event, it wouldn't have had anywhere near the impact on the town, was it not for the dedicated participation of the town council, and Farcycles and individuals and groups throughout the town – great thanks to all involved in making this such a memorable day.

2 Planning

Following the objection by the town council to the application for nine new dwellings at Volunteer Way, on the basis that this is designated as employment land, and for other reasons we are currently arguing vehemently that the proposed development should not go ahead.

I have noted with interest the inquiry from the town council about the state of the shutters on the Volunteer in the town centre – I will investigate further with planning with the help of the town council if possible.

On other matters, the district council are running a series of planning training for town and parish councils; invitations should be going out to all councils in due course. The sessions focussed on Vale issues particularly are being held on Monday 9th September at The Beacon, Wantage at either 2pm to 4pm, or 6pm to 8pm – all welcome.

3 Leisure Services

Faringdon Leisure Centre has been undergoing a bit of a facelift, with the investment of £177,500 to refurbish the swimming pool changing area, including cubicles, toilets and showers. The sauna and steam room are also set to be fully replaced. The staff of the centre have dealt with the changes in the interim period very well, and the works are due to finish in mid-July.

4 Business support

The council is taking the closure of the Honda plant in Swindon seriously and is working on a package of targeted interventions to support affected local businesses and residents. More than 60 people attended the Economic Development team's Networking Business Breakfast on 26 June at Wrag Barn

Golf Club. The free event focused on the launch of South and Vale Business Support and the closure of the Honda plant. The leader of the council Emily Smith and Bethia Thomas both spoke at the event giving an overview of the current economic situation within the district. The business support team then shared insights into their roles and how they can support local businesses, with everything from marketing to planning permission and digital skills.

On the back of the success of events in Faringdon and Berinsfield, the team are delighted to announce another Pop Up Business School this time in Shrivenham scheduled for the Autumn; booking details will be advertised shortly.

5 Climate and the Environment

The district council are hoping to establish a new committee to help the council tackle issues around the climate emergency. The council declared a climate emergency earlier this year and the new Climate Emergency Advisory Committee would be a big step to ensuring the council meets its responsibilities towards meeting the challenge of this international issue, we will be voting on the motion on the later in the month.

The “Turn it off” campaign was launched to coincide with #cleanairday. Keeping your engine running – known as idling, contributes to an increase in levels of air pollutants, linked to a higher chance of developing lung cancer, heart disease, asthma, coughs and bronchitis, particularly in vulnerable people such as older people and children. The aim of our campaign is to encourage people to think about idling and if they are stopped for more than a minute or parked then they should turn their engines off. It makes sense from both a health viewpoint and a financial one. This is a very simple small step that everyone can take and can make a difference – we hope to be running an event in Faringdon to promote this ongoing initiative in the near future.

6 Housing and growth

Many councillors participated in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy workshops that were run in late June. Both sessions generated lively discussion and interesting ideas and the comments and suggestions received will help inform our new strategy to be released in the near future.

Members of the Oxfordshire Growth Board met in June to undertake a review of the role and governance of the Growth Board to ensure it remains fit for purpose now and into the future. The scope of the review is currently being developed and an update will be presented in September. The board is a joint committee of the six Oxfordshire councils, represented by their leaders, together with representatives from strategic partners. It was established in 2014 to enable joint working on economic development, strategic planning and sustainability and to oversee the work of the Housing and Growth Deal with the Government. There are three sub-groups feeding into the Growth Board; Housing, Infrastructure and the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.