

Report Cllr Andy Graham (District Councillor and Leader of WODC)

As this year draws to a close I find myself reflecting back on the last six months, and despite the challenges that we have all faced this year, and during the pandemic, I feel determined not to lose sight of everything that has been achieved by this Council and what I have been doing for you in Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler.

We believe that success comes from true partnership working, openness and transparency with the core belief that the council belongs to those who vote for it. We have fostered relationships with neighbouring authorities to look at ways to develop more effective infrastructure provision and joint service opportunities.

We have invested in refurbishing the council chamber to encourage greater community use, made it easier for residents to access the town centre office and have made our consultations more open with the use of our new platform, Commonplace.

We responded quickly to the cost of living crisis by providing direct help and support to those that need it most and 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 and will 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 continue to look at ways to make the lives of our residents easier.

We are attracting inward investment for local businesses to grow through our £762,000 allocation from the Rural Investment Fund, which will benefit our villages and a further £1m from the Shared Prosperity Fund. We are also addressing the needs of young people and have appointed the Council's very first Youth Champion India Mae Thomson from Finstock to advocate for the voices of our younger residents. We are committed to improving life for younger people with a £100,000 fund to support youth initiatives, and through protecting and enhancing pitch sports with the adoption of our Playing Pitch Strategy.

We have made some great progress in providing affordable housing in the district by directly investing in a ground-breaking scheme to build net-zero carbon, affordable, custom-build homes at Walterbush Road, Chipping Norton. We also continue to progress the Salt Cross Garden Village, which will provide more much-needed affordable housing and even self-build and custom built homes.

Our priority has always been to make it easier for you to talk to us and we have taken our Cabinet on Tour so that you can get involved in our decision making process in Charlbury and Chipping Norton to date.

We have also developed our Local Plan, which was consulted on in October last year. We received an excellent response to this consultation with over 4,000 visits to the new digital platform and received hundreds of comments.

We know how important it is to residents to see the council acting on issues that are important to you. We have called on Thames Water to do more to stop raw sewage being pumped into local rivers by increasing the capacity of sewage treatment works and also provide more transparent monitoring of sewage discharge. We held our first Waterways Day in November to give residents an opportunity to share their views with those involved in Watercourse management which was a sold out event.

I will continue to work hard for you, putting you at the forefront of everything that dlo. I am sure that 2023 will bring different challenges, but we are ready to face these challenges as your Councillor and Leader of the Council.