

ROBERT COURTS

District Councillor The Bartons Ward

Monthly Report - January 2015

I hope that everyone has had a very Happy Christmas, and may I take this opportunity to wish you a Happy New Year?

This report marks the end of my first calendar year as your District Councillor; I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to grips with all aspects of my job, from planning to housing, in my role on the Economic & Social Scrutiny Committee, and in considering the paperwork on wider Council matters that comes across my desk. Above all, I have enjoyed meeting and helping many more people either in connection with their concerns, or in the course of my duties. I look forward keenly to the coming year and to continuing to work with you all.

I would like to give a short round up of the wider **District Council position** at the close of one year and the start of the next, before I turn to reporting my own activities over the last month.

I am proud to be a part of one of the highest performing and most **cost-effective** District Councils in the country, providing free parking in town centres, helping to nurture a buoyant local economy, whilst protecting vital front-line services. The Cabinet will be setting the Council's budget for the forthcoming financial year in February and is proposing to freeze Council Tax for the fifth year running.

The District Council's prudent financial planning has stood us all in good stead in the face of ongoing funding cuts. The shared working programme, which has already delivered millions of pounds in efficiency savings, will be developed further in the coming year. This careful planning has put the Council in a position to support projects bringing huge benefits to West Oxfordshire.

Perhaps the most significant this year is the rollout of **superfast broadband** across our district. The District Council is playing a huge part in this in backing an independent service provider in an effort to secure 100% coverage across our rural District. Work continues on this project and we look forward to seeing this develop over the next 12 months.

The Council has also been able to help many local communities with **grants** towards rebuilding or refurbishing community facilities, towards community projects and some special grants to commemorate the World War One centenary.

As many of you will know, our emerging **Local Plan** has been updated in response to the findings of the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). More than 3,000 comments were received during the consultation period in the summer and every single one is being considered, with further evidence, technical and expert advice being sought to help shape the latest version of the Plan.

It is of vital importance for the future of our District that a robust Plan is put in place as soon as possible and the District Council hopes to submit a final version to the Government for independent examination in the coming months.

For me personally, December itself has been a very busy month; I have attended and reported to all three Parish Councils/Meetings at Sandford St Martin, Westcote Barton, and the regular Steeple Barton Parish Council meeting.

I was pleased to see such a brilliant turnout at the **Preschool Christmas Bazaar** at the Sports & Social Club on the 6th December; there were lots of games available. Thanks to Kat's luck with the tombola we even benefitted from a bottle of wine! I understand that lots of money was raised and I congratulate all involved.

The Christmas spirit was very evident throughout all the villages this season; I was delighted to see the school choir perform with such confidence to great effect at the St Mary's, **Steeple Barton Carols** and Readings service, an atmospheric event made all the more enjoyable with lots of mince pies and mulled wine! There was a fantastic turnout at the **Carols around the Tree** at the Fox Inn, Westcote Barton,

which made for a hugely enjoyable event for all, and a welcome debut for the new village choir, Bel Canto. Many congratulations to everyone involved with organising all those events.

I have been successful in some **housing** issues this month; clearly this work is 'behind the scenes' and I cannot give more details due to its confidential nature. However, this work continues.

I have asked for the **hedges** that are obscuring road signage on Kiddington Hill to be cut back; I am told that this has been raised for action and will monitor the same.

More broadly, I continue to investigate reports of **road defects, signage concerns**, and hope to see small repairs take place on an ongoing basis.

I have requested clearance of the drain at the end of the "no through road" in **Ledwell**; I am told that this is to be cleared within 28 days. A representative is also to look at the track which has become very rutted and messy. I will keep abreast of progress and report back in due course.

I have written to Stagecoach to make clear how vital the **S4 bus** service is for our villages, and to ask them not to make any changes that affect the service for the worse.

I would like to draw the **Rural Transport Fund** (minibuses) to everyone's attention: <http://www.rsnonline.org.uk/services/£25m-rural-transport-fund-opens>

The **surgery dates** for 2015 start on the 3rd January, thereafter the 14th February (please note the later than usual date,) 7th March; all at the Fox Inn, Westcote Barton.

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