

# Vale of White Horse - town and parish update – 14 January 2021

## We're urging residents to follow the lockdown rules to help stop the spread

We have an important message to send to our residents to urge them to continue to stay at home, avoid mixing with other households, and abide by the lockdown rules to help curb the rapid spread of Covid-19.

Rates across the whole of Oxfordshire continue to be much higher than before Christmas, and in recent days, those in the Cherwell district have been around 1,000 per 100,000 people, putting the area in the top 50 coronavirus hotspots in England.

We are currently in a significantly worse position than at the height of the first wave last spring, and the situation is continuing to deteriorate. Hospitalisations from the virus continue to rise rapidly putting huge pressure on the NHS, and the number of COVID related deaths are also beginning to rise again. We are now seeing more younger people admitted to hospital.

The stark national and local figures mean that things are not going to improve significantly unless people observe the lockdown rules in full.

Last March and April strict observation of the rules helped to drive down cases and we need to do the same now. The power to fight back against Covid remains in our own hands, so we urge everyone please to do everything they can to stop the spread.

For the latest guidance visit [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus).

## Winter Support Grant Scheme

We've just launched a new grant scheme to help residents affected by the pandemic to buy food and keep their homes warm this winter.

Following an allocation of £1.4million government funding, we've been working closely with the other Oxfordshire councils on the Winter Support Grant. The county council has allocated around £1M of that funding to provide free school meals, with the remaining money shared across the districts.

In the Vale we have been given £73,430 - [Citizens Advice South and Vale](#) and [Wantage Independent Advice Centre](#) will now distribute this funding on our behalf.

The advice centres can support people with supermarket vouchers for food and fuel vouchers to top up prepayment meters or with paying a heating bill. This will be alongside their usual package of advice and support around budget management, debt and benefit advice and any other assistance the resident may need signposting towards.

If a resident has received a food voucher from a previous scheme, or indeed support via free meals or any other route, they can still apply for a Winter Support Grant.

We are contacting community groups to make them aware of this support and information, and we'll also be letting people know via social media. We urge anyone in need of support to contact their local advice centre.

This funding must be spent by 31 March 2021. Those in immediate and urgent need should, as always, contact our Community Hub on 01235 422600.

## **Business support – Covid-19 grants update**

Businesses from the hospitality, accommodation or leisure sectors that remained open during the Tier 2 restrictions from 2 December to 25 December 2020, but whose trade was severely impacted during that time, can now apply for a Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) up to £1,800.

You can find details about this grant and the various other funding schemes that are currently available on our Business Support website - [svbs.co.uk](https://svbs.co.uk).

We encourage businesses in the area to sign up to our South and Vale Business Support mailing list by visiting [svbs.co.uk](https://svbs.co.uk) – this is the best way to find out as soon as grant funding becomes available locally. Updates can also be received by following the Businesses Support teams [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts.

## **Covid Marshals update**

Our Covid Compliance Marshals continue to visit our towns to help support local businesses to operate in a Covid secure manner and to keep the public safe.

Their role is to engage, explain and encourage businesses and members of the public to adhere to the latest guidelines to help keep everyone safe, including advising on social distancing and wearing masks.

With non-essential shops, pubs and restaurants currently closed, the marshals have shifted their focus to takeaways and are visiting them to provide advice, answer questions and, where required, handing out posters that can be displayed to remind customers how to queue and enter the premises safely. As you will be aware from the national press, the Government have asked Police Forces across the Country to increase enforcement action in relation to persistent COVID breaches.

## **Keeping safe in our play areas**

Like many of you, we have kept our public play areas open during this lockdown. However, with virus transmission rates still very high we know there will be some concern about people spending time there, particularly if a play area is busy or people aren't social distancing.

To help to address these concerns, and to remind people to follow social distancing and hand washing requirements, we've now placed new signs at the entrances of all our play areas, which remind everyone that **before entering**:

- wash hands before and after your visit
- if the play area is busy, please come back when it's quieter
- only one adult per child in the play area
- please follow social distancing

If we hear that one of our play areas is particularly busy, we will ask our Covid Marshals to visit the site to advise families about keeping Covid safe, as we strongly believe that information and positive reinforcement is key to securing high levels of compliance.

## Community infrastructure consultations

We want to hear what people think about how we raise money for infrastructure and the community facilities needed to support planned growth across the district.

We are asking people to comment on our draft Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule and the draft Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Both consultations run until midnight on Monday 8 February.

To find out more and to have your say visit the consultation pages for the [CIL Charging Schedule](#) and the [Developer Contributions SPD](#).

## Garden Waste suspension

Last week we published an open letter to all our Garden Waste customers explaining in a bit more detail why we haven't yet restarted garden waste collections following the usual Christmas pause in the service. The letter also includes some information on Christmas tree recycling.

Some residents have raised concerns about a disruption to a service they pay for directly, so our letter explains that we are confident we'll be able to fulfil our obligations to them this year.

We're aiming to review staffing levels with Biffa next week with a view to restarting the service as soon as possible after that. We'll let you know when we have more information.

You can [read our letter here](#).

## Vaccine Fraud alert

Throughout the pandemic, there have been a lot of scams circulating from people seeking to defraud worried and vulnerable residents. We are now also seeing a growing number of reports about scams related to the vaccine roll-out.

Scams include members of the public receiving text messages claiming to be from the NHS, offering them the opportunity to sign up for the vaccine. The texts ask the recipient to click on a link which takes them to an online form where they are prompted to input personal and financial details. In some cases, the online form looks very similar to the official NHS website.

### **How to protect yourself**

In the UK, Covid-19 vaccines will only be available via the NHS. You will be contacted by the NHS, your employer, a GP surgery or a pharmacy local to you, when you're able to receive it.

At no point will anyone be asked to pay for the vaccine.

- The NHS will never ask you for your bank account or card details.
- The NHS will never ask you for your PIN or banking password.
- The NHS will never arrive unannounced at your home to administer the vaccine.
- The NHS will never ask you to prove your identity by sending copies of personal documents such as your passport, driving licence, bills or pay slips.

### **What to do if you are targeted:**

- If someone receives a call, they believe to be fraudulent, they should hang up.
- If an email looks suspicious, do not click on any of the links - forward it to [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk).
- Suspicious text messages should be forwarded to the number 7726 which is free of charge.
- Anyone who believes they are a victim of a fraud, should report it immediately via [actionfraud.police.uk](http://actionfraud.police.uk) or by calling 0300 123 2040.

## **Great Western Railway revised services**

With the national lockdown in place GWR is now operating train services to a revised timetable. Anyone needing to travel is advised to check [GWR's website](#).

## **Do you know someone who makes an outstanding contribution?**

The Honours Committee are calling for nominations from across the UK to help make the Queen's Honours list as diverse as possible.

This could be the perfect opportunity to nominate people in your community who go above and beyond to make a real difference, including those who have made a significant contribution during the pandemic.

If you know of someone who fits the bill, you can nominate them using the [online portal](#).

To learn more about the nominations process, you can sign up for online training webinars which are available throughout the next two months. For more information and to book your place you please visit the [webinar registration form](#).

#### Communications

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

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