

Wantage and Grove Campaign Group

Campaign Manager's Report 2024



This is the report from the Wantage and Grove Campaign Group for the year ending February 2024.

As you probably know some 7,000 houses are in the pipeline for Wantage, Grove and the surrounding villages. At least 3000 are yet to be built.

The Joint Local Plan is likely to be released on 1 October 2024 for the final 6 weeks consultation prior to submission to the Secretary of State. This plan suggests that, with the exception of Dalton Barracks and the area between the Grove Airfield development and the Denchworth Road (both of which we knew about), no other "Major" sites will be required in the Vale. This doesn't mean that smaller sites won't come forward but sets a framework for development for the next few years.

But as the new Labour Government is planning to update the planning law, the numbers in this new local plan could still be increased and an additional 300 homes per year across the district could be required.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – now called National Landscapes - and the Oxford Green Belt will still mean that many of these new homes may be planned in our area so our simple green fields will be even more at risk.

Governments have argued that houses are too expensive and that by building millions of new homes, (more than we really need) the prices will come down.

We know from bitter experience that this isn't true. Developers will only build homes that they can sell and make enough profit to satisfy land owners and shareholders and pay nice fat bonuses to senior executives.

But developers are also the biggest contributors to all political parties and have the ears of cabinet ministers so all planning law is written in their favour.

Government guidelines say that development should be "sustainable".

We do not think it is sustainable to put thousands of houses where medical facilities are increasingly inadequate, schools are at capacity, there is little employment, and roads to where there is employment are unsuited to commuting.

In 2011 we came together to campaign for a better deal for our area.

As it says in our Aims:

We are not against any development in Wantage and Grove but:

- **Developments should be proportionate and sustainable**
- **The infrastructure should enhance and improve the quality of life for its residents**

So what about infrastructure? – schools, roads, railway, health, leisure and water etc.

We have two new primary schools and a few additional classrooms in existing schools. The nearest new secondary school is in Didcot which has a similar number of new homes of its own. The new secondary

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school planned for Grove Airfield should be built within the next couple of years but will only cover the years from 11 to 16.

We have one new mini-roundabout at the end of Springfield Road and the Wantage Eastern Relief Road may be completed and opened by the end of this year.

There are no dates for the Grove Northern Relief Road (from the A338 near Williams to the top end of the Grove Airfield Development) or even any agreed plans for the entire route.

There has been no improvement in parking in the centres of Wantage and Grove in many years. In fact the recent enhancements to the Beacon car park is likely to reduce the number of spaces available. Parking enforcement is now the responsibility of the County Council but you are still less likely to be fined for parking on a double yellow line than you are for overstaying your allotted time in a car park.

Grove Station is still a pipe dream and if the reservoir is built, the station may have to wait until all the construction has been completed (about another 10 years).

The expansion of the Health Centre (first drawn up when the new Health Centre first opened in 2003) was confirmed by NHS England in 2012 and finally delivered this year. All the new consulting rooms are now in use so should we start campaigning for the next expansion now.

Wantage Community Hospital has now formally closed to inpatients and the wards may get turned into consulting rooms for specialist services within the next 12-18 months so could reduce the number of people travelling to the Oxford hospitals for outpatient appointments.

No improvements have been made to the leisure facilities except improvements to the tennis club in the Millenium Park on Manor Road, new children's play equipment in the park (mainly funded by donations) and the addition of a new football pitch at Tugwell Field (without changing facilities or plumbing), although some new pitches etc should be available on Crab Hill and Grove Airfield eventually.

The promised new leisure centre has been cancelled and more than £6 million of developer contributions to leisure in this area has yet to be spent. There are finally some renovations being made to Wantage Leisure Centre but no dates yet for anything new – such as the long promised learner pool.

Then water. Thames Water has about the worst record of any water company for repairing leaks and raw sewage is released into the Letcombe Brook at any excuse but there are no plans to expand our sewage works.

We are still at risk from the plans for a new reservoir between Marcham, Hanney, Drayton and Steventon to increase the fresh water storage for London and Southampton. In theory this sounds like a nice amenity until you realise that they are not going to excavate the ground to make it ground level. It is planned to be built above ground and will be contained by walls between 15 and 25 metres high. That's about the height of an 8 storey block of flats and higher than anything else in the Vale.

Although the housing and leisure plans are agreed by the District Council, roads, schools, social care, libraries etc. are decided at County level. So good co-operation is essential and doesn't always happen.

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Health services are the responsibility of the NHS and NHS decision makers keep changing. BOB (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System) is the latest group with overall responsibility but still seem to be busy re-organising themselves rather than improving the services.

None of these organisations (the District Council, County Council or NHS) seem to be very happy spending money in OX12 so we have to be vocal about standing up for our small part of the County to ensure that they know we exist and need the infrastructure to make our lives sustainable.

This is where the Campaign Group comes in. We try to keep aware of any consultations, new strategies or plans which may affect OX12 from national level down and to participate to put forward our point of view.

We aim to keep you informed of anything that you can do to influence decision makers. We issue a newsletter by email about every 4 weeks to about 1000 people and used to write a column in the Wantage Herald every week. Unfortunately, the Herald decided to stop hosting the columns written by local groups to expand its puzzle pages and advertising.

We have a website and a Facebook page but don't post unless we have something important to say.

Issues which we have worked on in the last 12 months have included;

- Problems with Persimmon not delivering the infrastructure in the legal agreement in a timely manner on the Wellington Gate Development.
- Several consultations about the reservoir (now back to the largest possible size) in the proposals submitted by every water company in the South East.
- The fight to get the alleyway between Mary Shunn Way (King Alfred's East / Icknield School site) and Charlton Road made into an accessible slope not steps (finally approved June 2023 but still not done).
- The consultation on the new Joint Local Plan for Vale and South Oxfordshire.
- The lack of any consultation with local sports groups in OX12 in the development of leisure strategies for the new Joint Local Plan and the lack of the District Council to do anything about this.
- The worst roads in Oxfordshire with potholes everywhere – not helped by the weather.
- The final consultation on the temporary closure of the inpatient beds in the Community Hospital.
- The plans to change and/or make permanent the pedestrianisation of the Market Place in Wantage.
- Changes to the electoral wards for District and County Councils.

If you have a little time, then please think about joining our committee, otherwise just keep reading our emails and responding to any of the consultations which we find which are relevant to you.

Thank you for your support, we couldn't do any of this without it.