

COUNTY COUNCILLORS' REPORT

I have now reached the halfway stage in my present term as County Councillor for the Hanneys and Hendreds Division, how time flies!

The eagerly anticipated A415 Packhorse Lane trial scheme has been forecast to run for two weeks either side of the school summer holidays in July, to see the scheme work in normal traffic conditions and the slightly quieter holiday conditions, Peter Ronald and Steve Howell will confirm these timings, hopefully within the next week.

Unfortunately, the Government's part of the subsidy for the X15 bus service has ended and the Government would not renew it, so the County Council and Abingdon College have come up with a workable alternative. As a consequence the X15 bus service will end in its current form on the 2nd of June, and the new service (called imaginatively the X15!) will start on the 4th of June. There will be a connection at Abingdon for Wallingford, and although the service will not be as frequent at off peak times, it will be a regular and hopefully popular service.

The housing development on Packhorse Lane by Try Homes has caused some to criticise the County Council traffic "experts" (the same "experts" that have come up with a trial scheme for Packhorse Lane, and also the same "experts" that have identified funding for a permanent scheme should the trial be a success!). The criticism stems from the mistaken belief that the County Council could have prevented the houses from being built facing the road. This, of course, is not the case as house planning is the responsibility of the District Council, not the County Council. That said, the County Council also operates in a quasi-judicial role as the traffic authority for Oxfordshire, and it too can be overruled by a higher authority at appeal. Should a housing developer be prevented from building houses facing a road, when historically, houses have always faced that way, such as in the case of Packhorse Lane, the County Council would lose the case at appeal and this would be judged poor use of public money. This process seems harsh, and sometimes it is not the way that local government wants to be run. I believe that local government decisions such as housing and transport should be decided at a more local level, and should not be subject to the threat of appeal so easily.

This method of dealing with local issues locally is outlined in the Sustainable Communities Bill, which is a Private Members Bill (Nick Hurds MP) and is working its way through the committee stages at the House of Commons. Should this Bill become law (it has the support of more than half of the House from all sides), then more power will be devolved to locally elected decision makers. It is for that reason that I seconded a motion, of support for the Sustainable Communities Bill at County Hall recently, and it was passed unanimously.

At the Annual Parish Meeting of electors in Marcham last week, I received thanks from the Chairman of the parish council, for working for Marcham. That is what I was elected to do, and will strive to continue over the next two years.

CLLR IAIN BROWN

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ED VAIZEY WRITES...

It's a bit ironic, but at one of the busiest times in politics, Parliament is quite quiet. As Tony Blair departs, and Gordon Brown prepares to take over, there is not much going on in the House of Commons. Of course, the reason is obvious. There is no point in putting forward new legislation while we are waiting for a new Prime Minister. Also, with the long summer recess looming, most of the business is focused on the final stages of Bills that started going through Parliament last autumn.

One big issue that will affect most people reading this column is the introduction of Home Information Packs on June 1st. They have caused a great deal of alarm amongst members of the public and those involved in the industry. Although the scheme is well intentioned, it simply has not been well thought through in my June 2007

view. Key components such as the Home Condition Report, effectively an old fashioned survey of the building, will not be mandatory. As a result all we are left with is an ineffective shell of bureaucratic legislation, making the process of buying and selling houses more complicated and expensive than it already is. Added to this is the inadequate number of trained 'Home Inspectors' and the fact that the Government is rushing this legislation through, this could all lead to unnecessary chaos hitting our housing market this summer.

One of the most vocal groups in my constituency is cyclists. Since I started cycling to Westminster when I am in London, I have huge sympathy for their complaints. Parliament is being lobbied to make sure rail and cycling is more integrated, and I agree - there are very few facilities for bikes on trains, and almost nowhere to keep them at a station. I was shocked to learn the other day that Parliament has no - none at all - cycle storage facilities for people who visit Parliament. My visitor was told to park at St Thomas's hospital across Westminster Bridge!

ED VAIZEY, MP Wantage (Con)

MP'S SURGERY WITH ED VAIZEY

5.30-7.00pm, unless stated otherwise

June 2007	
Fri 8	Didcot , King Alfred Drive Community Centre
Fri 22	Wantage , Civic Hall
Contact Ed Vaizey by	
Post	The House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
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**PARISHIONER OF THE YEAR
CHRISTINE WHILD**

At an interesting electors' meeting on 24 May, which included a presentation by The Environment Agency and reports from our councillors and school governor, Christine Whild received her award as Parishioner of the Year 2007. The citation reads:

Marcham Council wishes to recognise and honour the achievements and contribution to the life and wellbeing of Marcham made by **Christine Whild**.

Her outstanding contribution to music in Marcham has taken many forms: her playing, organising and production of Marcham V.E. celebrations; her contributions to many performances by the Marcham Players and to services at All Saints' Church are but a few of many. She has been a stalwart member of the Marcham Women's Institute and has held a number of offices, playing a leading role in all its activities and generously sharing her many skill and enthusiasm with others. Her devotion and care of her husband Victor, through his long illness was an example to all and her unstinting work for charity, especially of the Local Alzheimers' Group, has been exceptional.

As a token of its appreciation and on behalf of the civil parish of Marcham, the Parish Council has presented this certificate to Christine Whild on the sixteenth day of May two thousand and seven.

This is the fourth Parishioner of the Year Award and all of them have been scribed and illustrated by calligrapher, Carolyn Blackmore. She also scribes entries in the Book of Remembrance in All Saints' Church (forms available from the church) and designed the frontispiece using images inspired by the light fittings and the floor grills!