

## ANNUAL REPORT TO GROVE PARISH COUNCIL MAY 2006

I'm pleased to be here this evening to give my report of the first year in this new term at the County Council. In fact, today has been a very special day at the County Council today because we have welcomed the Queen opening the Castle Heritage project and this was a splendid occasion, with fine weather and being able to celebrate this huge achievement. As many of you know, the conversion of the Oxford prison site has been going on for some time, but today has seen the fruition of much hard work by many partners. I would urge any of you who haven't been along there to go and certainly visit the area and the many restaurants there – you will be spoilt for choice!

We have had some re-organisation at County Hall since last May, one area has been dividing up Children's Services from Adult Social care with two directorships. We have also seen many changes in the NHS nationally and locally, but locally the effects on the changes to our Primary Care Trusts will mean that this will have a direct impact on our adult and social care. Although the County Council has been working closely with the health sector particularly around hospital discharges and where this impacts on care at home, any cuts in the health service has a knock on effect on the social & healthcare budget at the County and this will need careful monitoring over the next year.

In my new role as Leader of the Opposition at the County Council which took place last month, it will be part of my role to ensure we hold the Cabinet to account, and accepting that this Forum is not a political one, may I suffice to say that I shall do my best to do this effectively and this will be a challenge.

So bringing my work closer to home as your representative, first of all, may I say that it has been a challenge for both me and Cllr Moley, who now represent you in this large 2 member ward of Grove and Wantage, to ensure we are keeping ahead of issues affecting our communities. Tonight I shall mainly concentrate on the Grove issues, but of course, many matters concern both communities.

We have had some major roadworks undertaken over the last year, which for some is good news but of course that does cause disruption. Luckily, the closure on the A338 which took place over the summer, meant that at least it did not affect our schools and colleges. What it did bring home to us was how much traffic does indeed use our local roads, so the traffic lights at the bridge in Denchworth were a good decision. We also had re-surfacing at the Oxford Lane, and the next lot of works coming up this month will be an overnight closure on the A417 for 2 weeks starting on Monday (and I do have full details of this if anyone wishes to see me afterwards).

The housing consultation from SEERA was I felt disastrous, and many of you will have seen my complaints in the press about how badly publicised this all was. However, all this seemed a meaningless exercise when the Cabinet at the County Council decided to allocate an extra 1400 houses on top of what had already been agreed in the Vale's Local plan. Although we have protested about this, and have made many representations about it, so far, it looks likely that whatever happens, there will be major housing development here in Grove.

Of course, although the planning exercises and workshops are organised by the District Council of which I am no longer a member, I have attended and have been involved with some of the planning workshops which have been held recently and I do hope that many of you have been along to have your say. I was pleased to see many of you there on the Saturday workshop event. I will continue to stay involved with this as there will be many challenges, but no time to go into this here.

I was delighted to have helped to initiate the excellent new X30 bus service into Oxford. This came about from my motion to council about improving our public transport in Grove, and really wishing to get this in place ahead of any housing, we all know we have suffered here from a poor direct service, particularly in the evenings, and county officers, Stagecoach and I am grateful to Keith Clarke here at the parish council for his support of me in this, so that we can now benefit from this. Again, I hope many residents use this and we can ensure we keep it. Of course, there does need to be more improved services to the Harwell/Didcot/Milton Park area and this I have lobbied for as well, but currently this is subsidised by the County Council and until it is more frequently used, it cannot run commercially.

The other big public transport issue is the re-opening of our railway station here in Grove, and the Little Green People who we have heard tonight have been lobbying for this too and I have been in discussion with them about this. They will be holding a public meeting in June on the subject. I did address the Cabinet on the issue when I discovered the station had been given a low priority in the list of rail projects (as did Cllr Moley), and although the planning application had been submitted to the Vale, I was disappointed to find there were some unresolved issues, i.e. flooding issues and the environment agency, and of course, we do have the problems of finding a rail franchise willing to operate a service. This matter still needs to be resolved, but I am pleased that since I took the matter up at County Hall, Cllr David Robertson the portfolio holder for transport, has been taking it more seriously, and I welcome this!

I have visited all local schools. I am a Governor at King Alfred's school, and so keep involved with issues there. Delighted during Local Democracy week to have visited Millbrook School and Charlton Primary School which was really good fun especially listening to the views of our young people and how passionate they are about their community so I was able to answer many of their questions. Last week I was visiting Grove CoE school as they were voting on their new name for the new Foundation unit, and again, it was lovely to visit the unit and see the children there. They still have vacancies for places so I would urge any of you to go and have a look with a view to promoting this wonderful facility for our young children in Grove.

I believe I have covered many topics here this evening, but please do come and talk to me afterwards if you wish to discuss anything in more detail. And of course I always hold my surgeries once a month in Grove library (posters around village) and I will be there tomorrow.

**Cllr Zoé Patrick (County Councillor for Grove and Wantage)**