

GENERAL OCC REPORT

OCC IN STATE OF 'NO OVERALL CONTROL' (NOC)

As reported last month, the 'Fair Deal alliance' running OCC collapsed in acrimony at the end of September after Labour withdrew, and the LibDem/Green group is now attempting to run the council with a minority administration. The council make up is now:

LibDem/Green: 24

Conservative Independent Alliance: 21

Labour: 14

Independent: 3

The Labour group has submitted a motion for Full Council on 8th November proposing a cross-party, quasi-committee system. The Conservative Opposition is considering its response.

NEW CABINET

Details of the new Cabinet can be found here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/about-your-council/oxfordshire-councillors/oxfordshires-cabinet>

COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2024/25 UNDER DEVELOPMENT

The OCC Budget process for 2024/25 is now underway. Given the NOC status of the council, the development and approval process is likely to be especially challenging.

CONTROVERSIAL LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOODS (LTNS) WILL REMAIN

The hugely controversial low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) in east Oxford are to remain, following a decision by OCC's Cabinet at a packed meeting on Tuesday, 17 October. This is despite the fact that the 18-month trial has been lambasted by residents and businesses. Cabinet also approved the use of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras in place of existing physical barriers, which have been repeatedly vandalised. ANPR cameras do however have the advantage of permitting selected vehicles through the barriers, which will make LTNs work better.

HEAVY RAINFALL AND HIGH RIVER LEVELS IN OXFORDSHIRE

Consistent rainfall in recent weeks has led to higher than normal river levels on many watercourses in Oxfordshire with further wet and windy weather in the forecast linked to Storm Ciaran. Below is useful information for local people to monitor the situation in their part of the county – especially when the Environment Agency issues flood alerts or the more serious flood warnings. There are also links to the Met Office's weather warning bulletins.

- The Environment Agency's information relating to current flood alerts and flood warnings and the five-day flood risk for Oxfordshire can be found here: <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/location?q=Oxfordshire>. This page also captures flood alerts and warnings from areas immediately adjacent to the county.
- The Met Office issues weather warnings when severe weather is expected. These give an indication of problematic weather that may be on its way to Oxfordshire and could further influence river levels. Details here: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/uk-warnings>
- OCC has produced a 'flooding toolkit' which provides advice and support for residents and businesses. It can be found here: <https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com>

GOVERNMENT AWARDS £1.9 MILLION OF EXTRA BUS FUNDING FOR OXFORDSHIRE

Sunday single fares in December in the run-up to Christmas are set to be capped at £1 after Oxfordshire was awarded extra government funding to improve bus services. A countywide day bus ticket valid for all operators could also be created after Oxfordshire was promised an additional £1.9 million to improve bus services over the next two years. It comes on top of £12.7m from the government in August 2022 following the council's successful Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) application. The additional £1.9m of funding – known as BSIP+ – is for measures that will increase long-term patronage, help maintain service levels, ensure essential social and economic connectivity for local communities and promote innovation.

POLICE AND OCC REAFFIRM 20MPH SPEED LIMITS EFFECTIVELY 'VOLUNTARY'

In response to parish council criticisms about the lack of effectiveness of OCC's £8million 30mph to 20mph sign-changing exercise, the Oxford Mail has reported that a spokesperson for Thames Valley Police has said:

"We enforce speed limits based on evidence and threat and harm principles and officers will always deal with situations they encounter operationally. We also rely on the public to provide information and would encourage anyone with information about speeding or poor driving to please report it so that we can gather information about a particular area and take action where appropriate. We would ask people to report online on our website or by calling 101. While we share the council's enthusiasm for road safety and making improvements for all road users, it is also important that the introduction of 20mph speed limits is done in conjunction with Department for Transport guidelines."

OCC confirmed the voluntary nature of the 20mph in its reply:

"Although [OCC] is working alongside Thames Valley Police, who are responsible for legal enforcement of the speed limits, there is an emphasis on drivers adhering to the new limits through a change of mindset, rather than enforcement. It is hoped that as 20mph areas become more common, breaking the limit would become socially unacceptable for drivers."

FURTHER EXPANSION OF CLIMATE CHANGE TEAM & CLIMATE CHANGE SURVEY

OCC is currently in the process of recruiting a 'Climate Change Outreach Officer'. The position is to 'to develop and deliver our stakeholder engagement and outreach strategy to engage, inspire, motivate, and facilitate action on climate change, and promote resilience to a changing climate, across a wide range of audiences in Oxfordshire'. OCC is also advertising for a Climate Change Team Leader. Additionally, OCC is conducting a survey soliciting views on climate change. Details can be found here: <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/climate-change-2023>

RESIDENTS WARNED AGAINST COLD CALLERS OFFERING PROPERTY REPAIRS

Residents are being warned to be wary of cold callers offering to do property repairs after the recent storms. OCC's Trading Standards team is receiving an increased number of complaints about cold callers and leaflets for traders being put through the door, resulting in some reports of overcharging for work, charging for unnecessary work and completing work of poor quality. Jody Kerman, Head of Trading Standards at Oxfordshire County Council says: *"Don't agree to offers of building work, home repairs or maintenance that come from a cold call. Don't be afraid to say no, don't be pressured and check with others if the work is required and what is a fair price to pay. If it's out of the blue, it's not for you! I encourage people to 'take five' – stop and take a moment and think, do I really need this work done? Obtain other quotes and seek advice, and recommendations for trades people from friends and relatives."*

District Councillor Report for East Challow Parish Council November 8th 2023

County Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Oxfordshire County Council is asking residents to comment on the new draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy – open for comment until November 12th.

Although we are a relatively wealthy county we face challenges from an ageing population, increased demand on existing services, mental health and wellbeing concerns in young people and significant inequality in our health with poorer outcomes in some parts of the county.

County partners (county and district councils, city council, GPS, the county NHS and Healthwatch) are developing a strategy that hopes to have input from residents to help deliver what is needed to support people to make healthy choices, live independently and stay happier and healthier for longer.

Of course, there are many factors that contribute to health and wellbeing, some of these being economic and some environmental but all contributions help.

Oxfordshire County Council are now asking whether the strategy makes sense for you in your community? You can have your say at <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/health-wellbeing>.

Local schools and young artists

The Beacon in Wantage is contacting local schools and youth groups to display artwork on the Beacon Art Wall, showcasing local young talent and celebrating the community in the building.

New Community bus service – at last!

November 27th will see the first route 68 community bus service serving our village (<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/new-bus-services-coming.../>). The 68 will come from Faringdon and serve Longcot, Fernham, Uffington, Kingston Lisle, Westcot, Sparsholt, Childrey, the Letcombes, East Challow and Wantage. The service will be Mondays to Saturdays (except Public Holidays). Pulhams Coaches (www.pulhamscoaches.com/) will be running the service until March 2025. I have had some discussion with the chair of Stanford in the Vale parish council about how this might be extended after this time. I am not sure where on Sarajac Avenue the bus will stop. I am concerned about the effect on the Uffington bus and am in touch with and discussing options with John Hatcher who runs their community bus.

B4507 Speeding issues

There is interest in reducing the speed limit along the B4507, from the 30 mph limit near Wantage to the West Challow turning, and on the A417 from near the West Challow turn to Haynes, possibly to 40 mph. This is being discussed with East and West Challow and Letcombe Regis parish councils.

Heavy rain and flooding

Recent heavy rain led to flooding yet again on the A417 at Haynes and Mellor's in East Challow. The drainage ditch along Woodhill Lane (and which takes the water from the bend near Haynes) does function – at least better than it did – but Woodhill Brook into which it runs is badly overgrown and water backs up. I have asked The Wasborough Estate to clear this stretch but they have done nothing so far!

However, the ditch that runs along the A417 into Childrey Brook does not flow well and we are concerned that the drainage pipes under the A417 at Haynes and just west of Mellor's might not be functioning well. I am going to investigate these – also Land Brook this side of the Challow Station bridge and Stutfield Brook further towards Stanford in the Vale.

These parts of the road are the lowest section of the land that runs up to the B4507 and collects all the water so in rain as we have had we will always get some flooding but it should not be this bad.

Childrey Way

Residents will have noticed that Childrey Bridleway has been repaired but the work has not been completed. I have been told by the contractor that the surfacing will be done as soon as the weather improves.

REPF (Rural England Prosperity Fund)

This fund is levelling up money won by the Vale from central government to support local rural businesses, farmers for diversification, refurbishment of buildings as community centres, biodiversity, tourism etc. There are several ways that our village could be involved in projects which can be discussed, including supporting the Mission, improving tourism in this area, improving biodiversity through farmer clusters and supporting small businesses on the business parks.

Oxford Xmas Lunch

The Oxford Christmas Lunch will again be providing a free lunch and companionship this year.

The guests generally include refugees, the elderly, the homeless, those with mental health issues, those in food poverty and those who simply want to celebrate Christmas with others. A special feature of the lunch is that volunteers collect the guests, drive them to the lunch, eat with them and take them home, thus providing companionship as well as food. Families are also welcome as there will be lots of fun things for children to do.

This will take place at the King's Centre in Osney Mead, Oxford. Numbers are limited, so they'll need to take bookings on a first-come first-served basis.

The main limiting factor is the number of volunteer drivers they have – if people can transport guests, and potentially host them on a table, that will allow them to take more. They always need more minibuses and licenced drivers.

To book a place for someone you think would benefit from it, email Sarah at sara@oxfordchristmaslunch.org.

Road Lane rental – have your say

OCC would like to hear your views about a Lane Rental scheme they are proposing to introduce on some of Oxfordshire's busiest roads.

When companies dig up busy roads, that it can cause disruption to road users. OCC are proposing to introduce a scheme whereby companies are charged for works that are undertaken during peak periods.

The proposal is to introduce a scheme that will drive behavioural change in those working in the street, so less works are done at busy times or the works are done in a different way, minimising the disruption the works cause to everyone using or relying on the streets.

Background

Currently, all utility and council works undertaken in the streets of Oxfordshire are co-ordinated using a Permit Scheme that charges a fixed fee, at a maximum of £300, to only the utilities, to cover administration costs.

Proposal

Lane Rental replaces this fixed Permit Fee with a daily charge of £2,500. It is only proposed on our most critical busiest streets and is restricted to roughly 5% of all the streets in Oxfordshire, by legislation. It applies to all works in the street, not just utility works and the council's own works, such as housing developer works.

The daily charge only applies if the works are done in a normal way at the busy times of day, such as the morning and afternoon rush hours. The daily charge will produce surplus funds which will be reinvested back into Oxfordshire.

Lane Rental schemes have been successfully introduced in other councils and the Department for Transport are encouraging councils to implement them.

Have your say - link to the consultation <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/lane-rental-scheme...>

OALC and OCC Charter for interaction with Town and Parish Councils

OCC and OALC organised a meeting on October 26th for representatives of town and parish councils to explore the development of a charter which might improve the way in which the county council interacts with parish councils. There were 30-40 attendees from more than 300 parishes in the county. Certainly, even at district council level we receive little regular feedback/news from the county whereas we do get news updates from The Vale which I pass on. Issues such as improved communication and transparency were highlighted. The provision of regular news items from OCC to parish councils was felt to be a useful means of communicating with parish councils. Transparency in decision making and priority setting, for example in allocating funds to highway repairs, was also thought to be important since current decisions

are seen to be opaque and the perception is that they are subject to influence from councillors who “make the most noise”.

There was an interesting discussion about whether parish councils could vote on key county policy decisions. This would of course mean additional work for parish councils in scrutinising policy documents ahead of a vote.

There was also a long discussion on how local democracy could be improved. Many residents of working age are too busy with their jobs and family life to participate in local community activity with the result that parish council members are predominantly (although not entirely) of pension age. There is no problem with this providing that there is adequate positive interaction between parish councils and residents.

Please go to this link: <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ox-councils-charter> and click ‘TAKE SURVEY’ at the bottom of the page.

You can request a paper copy of the consultation documents by emailing: consultations@oxfordshire.gov.uk or call the county council's Customer Services Team on 01865 816000.

New Vale Food and warmth grant

A new food and warmth grant will help support people in our communities this winter who may otherwise struggle to afford essential things. The grant is aimed at local voluntary and community groups, and town and parish councils, who can use it to support those most in need in the districts. Organisations can apply for grants between £2,000 to £5,000, or up to £10,000 for collaborative projects between groups of two or more organisations. The grant can fund projects providing food and warmth to people who may otherwise struggle to access these crucial essentials over the winter. Please see <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/community-support/grants/food-and-warmth-grant-scheme-2023/>.

Brown bins

district council brown bin garden waste service in the Vale of White Horse can have extra garden waste collected for free, on their normal collection day only, between 30 October and 10 November. Householders will be able to put out a maximum of up to four additional sacks of garden waste, per brown bin subscription, next to their brown bin. To be eligible for collection, the extra waste must go in standard sized (60L) sacks and should only contain natural garden waste such as cut grass, plants or branches. Alternatively, it can be placed in boxes / containers totalling no more than a standard bin full. People are asked not to leave out rubble or builders’ waste bags alongside their brown bins as these won’t be collected.

Cllr Dr Paul Barrow

Ridgeway Ward

Vale of White Horse District Council

November 5th 2023