

REPORT TO SHIPLAKE PARISH COUNCIL SEPTEMBER 2022

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

The Conservative Opposition remains concerned that the LibDem/Green/Labour coalition running the county council continues to pursue ideological objectives way beyond the remit of the council, the core functions of which are: adult & children's social care; education & learning; and highways.

PROTESTS AGAINST DRAG QUEEN STORY TIME FOR CHILDREN AT LIBRAIRIES



As previously reported, the planned drag queen story time classes for primary school children in council libraries sparked fury from many parents. The events took place during August provoking demonstrations and counter-demonstrations with a heavy police presence. Without going into the detail of the debate, Conservatives are asking voters who switched their vote to the LibDems if this is the type of thing they want the council to get involved in, or whether it should focus on the fundamentals of running local government.

LIBDEMS ATTEMPT TO MOVE A MOTION TO CUT VAT

The LibDems put forward a motion to Full Council in July stating Government should immediately introduce various subsidies and cut VAT to 17.5%. The motion was not debated due to lack of time, but is believed to be coming back to Full Council in September. Conservatives have pointed out that whatever the merits or not of the proposal, the administration is once again wasting council resources trying to get involved in central government issues way beyond the council's remit. Councillors are not junior MPs and they should focus on local matters. It is believed the motion has been centrally generated by LibDem HQ as almost identically worded motions have been debated at other LibDem councils.

LIBDEM/GREEN/LABOUR ADMINISTRATION RAMPS UP VEGANISM CAMPAIGN

The administration continues to push its vegan agenda under the guise of climate action. A new website promoted by Oxfordshire councils called Climate Action Oxfordshire features links to the Vegan Society. Pressure group the Countryside Alliance has responded by stating that the vegan policies which OCC has adopted should be dropped because they undermine British farmers. The alliance is urging councillors to withdraw from the campaign which encourages residents to give up meat and adopt a plant-based diet. It argues that in order to make an environmental choice, it is more important for consumers to know where food comes from and how it is produced. At the OCC Full Council meeting in September, Conservatives will again try to reverse the imposition of vegan meals at council meetings. Conservative Councillor Yvonne Constance will ask members to reinstate meat and dairy on to the menu and to support local producers. She will move that: "This Council resolves to offer locally produced menus at Council-catered events, including meat, dairy and vegan options, or to make alternative provisions for members, staff and attendees to facilitate personal choice." I am seconding the motion and will say: "We are not opposed to vegan food, but we want to serve local food rather than flying in mangoes from abroad. And we want there to be a choice. It is not right to impose ideological dietary opinions on others."

KENT COUNCIL FINDS 20MPH ZONES DO NOT PROMPT LESS CAR USE

The introduction of a 20mph speed limit zone did not encourage people to ditch their cars, an independent report for Kent County Council has found. The local authority implemented the lower speeds in Faversham and Tonbridge as a trial in September 2020 in an effort to encourage more cycling and walking in the market towns. However, the recent report from transport consultants Agilysys said:

"Car usage remained virtually unchanged following the introduction of the 20mph limits".

Conservatives are going to ask the administration whether this new information will have any impact on OCC's plans to spend £8m changing signs from 30mph to 20mph in Oxfordshire. As reported last month, data from the Cuxham trial in Oxfordshire showed that the introduction of a 20mph limit resulted in a very small average speed reduction of between 3 and 4 mph, with over 50% of traffic exceeding the 20mph limit. Thames Valley Police issued this statement on 20th July:

"With regards to the introduction of 20mph limits across the county... Thames Valley Police fully support the Department for Transport guidance, which as you will be aware, clearly states that such limits should be self-enforcing as there is clear evidence to show that sign only schemes do not result in effective speed reductions."

COST OF GENDER-NEUTRAL TOILETS

Subsequent to the Cabinet decision to further investigate the provision of gender-neutral toilets in all council buildings, OCC's Property Director confirmed that OCC has 905 sites and that each of these would have to be assessed. Ignoring the cost of any actual work required, just this assessment could cost in excess of £90,000 if each individual assessment cost £100. If the actual work costs £1000 per site on average, then the total cost would be in the region of £1m.

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE DRAFT CENTRAL OXFORDSHIRE TRAVEL PLAN

OCC has launched a consultation on its draft Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan, which focuses on potential ways of taxing motorists to reduce car use in and around the city of Oxford. Residents and parish councils can respond to the survey on Let's Talk Oxfordshire:

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/central-oxfordshire-travel-plan>

Meanwhile, opponents of the hugely divisive Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme in Oxford have launched a legal bid to overturn the council's decision.

SPECIFIC OCC REPORT FOR SHIPLAKE

POSSIBLE CLOSURE OF LEVEL CROSSING FOR RAILWAY MAINTENANCE WORKS

Further to my previous reports, I am still awaiting contact from Network Rail and OCC officers about the proposals for access to Bolney Road during the planned maintenance work.

MEMORIAL AVENUE/PLOUGH LANE SPEEDING ISSUES

I have been copied on emails between the clerk and OCC in relation to the above. We have previously discussed whether the PC wanted to arrange speed surveys at these locations (and Station Road) and I would be grateful for an update.

LOWES CLOSE OVERGROWN HEDGE

Further to my email of 19 July and a resident's email of 16 August, I would be grateful if the PC could confirm whether it has written to the hedge owner and received a reply.

FMS ENQ22924787: 'WIG-WAG' SIGN NEAR SHIPLAKE PRIMARY SCHOOL

OCC officer Jon Beale would like approval for the proposal in his email of 19 July.

OBSTRUCTIONS UNDER RAILWAY BRIDGE OVER MILL LANE

OCC has put a notice on the objects under the railway bridge stating they must be removed by the owner, or OCC will remove them. Some of the obstructions have now been removed.

VANDALISM ON THAMES PATH

I previously reported the damaged footbridge to officers and have had reassurances the bridge will be made safe. I have chased as no action has yet been taken.

RETIREMENT VILLAGE P21/S4102/RM & LAND ADJ TOWER HOUSE P21/S0859/FUL

OCC has confirmed no retirement village development may take place until the S278 highways agreement in relation to the footpath is made. I am advised that plans are currently being reviewed and that a site visit is planned to check the legitimacy of the current 'preparation' works. The situation in respect of the occupation of the two Westbourne Homes houses is less clear and I have raised questions with the case officer.

RETIREMENT VILLAGE P21/S4102/RM: SPEED LIMIT CHANGES

OCC has launched a consultation to reduce the speed limit from 40mph to 30mph having previously stated at the appeal that the 40mph limit was safe.

GENERAL SODC REPORT

STAFFING ALLOCATION

As previously advised, I have queried why six new FTE officers are being appointed into esoteric roles in the core climate action team, while there appears to be staff shortages in critical areas such as Planning, and Planning Enforcement.

SODC HQ MOVE

SODC will shortly be moving out of Milton Park and into temporary accommodation owned by VOWH DC in Abingdon. Given the vast surplus of council-owned property in Oxfordshire, Conservatives are pressing that this move should be made permanent and the vanity project of building a brand-new HQ in Didcot should be abandoned.

SPECIFIC SODC REPORT FOR SHIPLAKE

SHIPLAKE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

This is due for approval at a special Full Council meeting on Thursday.

‘THE BEECHES’ ENFORCEMENT INVESTIGATION

At the request of residents, I instigated an Enforcement investigation on 6th July. On chasing, I was disappointed to discover on 12th August that the manager had “only just been able to assign this case to an officer”.

‘POPLAR EYOT’ ENFORCEMENT INVESTIGATION

Officer engagement was this was very slow and it took eight months for an officer to be assigned to the case. Further site work is currently underway and officers advise a retrospective application is going to be submitted, so no enforcement action will be taken for the time being.

P22/S1193/HH: ADDITIONAL SHIPPING CONTAINER STORAGE IN MILL LANE

This will be determined by the SODC planning committee, should officers recommend approval.

P22/S1675/FUL IRIS HOUSE READING ROAD

The developer applied for a variation of condition 9 (footways) on application P21/S0859/FUL. The intention was to obtain approval to reduce a section of the footpath below the 1.5m width previously specified. The application has now been withdrawn.

P21/S4616/FUL ERECTION OF 11 DWELLINGS AT REAR OF CROSSWAYS

Issues relating to the HLS have been raised post-hearing, which has delayed the decision.

P21/S4271/RM WYEVALE 40 DWELLINGS

The developer has submitting an amended RM application and I am broadly supportive of the proposals. However, I strongly object to the plan to extend the 30mph limit towards Henley.

P21/S5382/FUL WYEVALE 55 DWELLINGS

I have queried why the refusal notice has still not be issued.

P20/S2808/DIS: THAMES FARM

Cllr Rawlins and I met with the SODC Deputy Chief Executive and Taylor Wimpey (TW) on 8th August to discuss site tidying and maintenance, and proposals for tree replanting. TW undertook to investigate the situation and respond by 22nd August; they failed to do this quoting ‘unexpected leave’ as the reason and said they would respond by 2nd September. They have again failed to meet their own deadline. I am continuing to chase.