

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS DECEMBER 2022

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

The focus of the administration remains centred on Oxford, Oxford traffic and highly ambitious aims relating to climate change.

COUNCIL BUDGET

The Budget process is now underway and it is likely the administration will impose a 5% increase in Council Tax on residents. Residents can have their say on the council's budget proposals between 18 November and 19 December by visiting oxfordshire.gov.uk/budgetconsultation and completing the online survey.

OCC WORKING TO RETAIN BUS SERVICES IN THE CITY OF OXFORD

Following Oxford Bus Company's announcement of the withdrawal of bus services to parts of the city, recognising that this will adversely affect many local residents, OCC has launched a tender process for replacement services. Earlier in the year, the council set aside up to £2.5 million over the next two years to protect previously commercial services at risk of withdrawal as a result of lower passenger numbers and spiralling bus industry costs. The news has been received with anger by rural communities with failing bus services who question why they don't get the same level of treatment.

COSTS OF LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOODS IN OXFORD SOAR



OCC spent has acknowledged spending £73,000 repairing vandalised plastic bollards used in Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes at Oxford's Divinity Road, St Clement's and St Mary's areas. The total may have risen since that figure was released. Steel bollards are now to be installed at a cost of £100,000 after the "unprecedented levels of vandalism". Conservatives are questioning the vast sums of money being poured into this divisive scheme that might benefit a small number of residents in Oxford, while rural residents are complaining that budgets for mundane matters such as drain repair are inadequate.

OCC TO SPEND £6.5M ON TRAFFIC FILTERS SPLITTING OXFORD INTO FOUR SECTORS

The administration intends to create four 'Sectors' within the city: North, South, West and East. When the traffic filters are operating, for cars without a permit, movement within each sector is unrestricted, but direct movement between sectors is not possible and requires use of the ring road. Affected motorists will face much longer journey times and distances. The intention is to force a change in behaviour. At the Cabinet meeting on 29th November, a record number of individuals and organisations spoke passionately for and against the highly controversial proposal. The meeting was attended by police armed with tasers and security guards. The chamber had to be cleared at one point. The proposal was approved by Cabinet.

LEICESTER CITY-WIDE WORKPLACE PARKING LEVY PLAN AXED

Plans to introduce a working parking levy in Leicester have been scrapped. Leicester City Council was proposing a scheme that would have seen firms with more than 10 parking spaces paying £550 a year for each space. After more than 4,000 people responded to a consultation, the council has shelved the plans. OCC is poised to go into its own consultation for a very similar scheme in Oxford. The Conservative Opposition is asking the administration if this new evidence from Leicester will be taken into account when deciding whether or not to proceed with this highly controversial 'tax on jobs'.

OCC LAUNCHES A TEN-YEAR PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF COUNCIL PROPERTIES

The principles underpinning a ten-year plan to manage and rationalise the wide variety of buildings owned or managed by OCC was approved by the Cabinet on 15th November. OCC owns 905 sites around the county, including 13 offices. As part of the proposed review, officers would be asked to develop plans to rationalise this "operational estate" of offices, including options and business cases for Oxford city centre office accommodation. There is cross-party agreement that property is a long-term issue and cross-party consensus is essential. To this end, a cross-party Cabinet advisory group is to be formed to advise on the issue.

CLIMATE CHANGE REMAINS AT HEART OF ALL COUNCIL'S DECISIONS

On 15 November the council's Cabinet reaffirmed its commitment that climate change remains at heart of all council's decisions. While supporting the general ambition about climate change, the Conservative Opposition remains concerned that the immediate day-to-day concerns of residents are being side-lined as a result of lofty ambitions that while expensive, will in reality will have little impact on the climate.

NEW EVIDENCE ABOUT LACK OF EFFECTIVENESS OF 20MPH LIMITS

A new study from Queen's University Belfast, Edinburgh University, and the University of Cambridge has found that reducing speed limits from 30mph to 20mph has had 'little impact' on road safety. The data was collected over 76 streets in the centre of Belfast prior to the introduction of the 20mph rollout, and then one and three years after they were installed. That information was then compared with data collected from nearby streets where the 20mph are not in place. Further analysis of the data revealed that when compared with areas that had retained their previous speed limits, the new 20mph limits led to minimal change in short or long-term outcomes for road traffic collisions, casualties, or speeding. The data also showed that the average traffic speed fell by only 0.2mph after the first year. This increased slightly after year three to 0.8mph. An RAC road safety spokesman said: "Our research shows drivers are less likely to comply with a lower limit if they don't believe it's appropriate for the type of road."