

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS **MARCH 2023** FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

COUNCIL TAX TO RISE BY 5%

The unexpectedly generous Local Government Funding Settlement left OCC with £9m more than anticipated at the time the draft Budget was drawn up. This presented the administration with an opportunity to cut the proposed Council Tax increase from 5% to 4% which they failed to take. The administration is ploughing on with pet projects the Opposition view as indulgent at a time when household budgets are under pressure. The alternative Budget put forward by the Conservative Opposition showed how the increase could be held at 4% without impacting on key services. The OCC Director of Finance confirmed the Conservative Budget was robust.

SOME OF THE EXPENDITURE ITEMS CHALLENGED BY CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION

£6.5M on Oxford traffic filters (the four-sector plan)
£3.0M on tree planting
£0.5M pedestrianizing Broad Street in Oxford
£0.2M developing Oxford Workplace Parking Tax
£173k repairing Oxford Low Traffic neighbourhood barriers
£152k advertising 20mph campaign
£30k on 'Living Wall' in Council car park
£5k on vegan lunches in County Hall

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT SPARE SEATS SCHEME CANCELLATION

Dear Parents/Carers

WITHDRAWAL OF SPARE SEATS SCHEME ROUTES 2-WT05 and 2-WT08: The Baldons, Blackbird Leys, Garsington to Wheatley Park School

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) provide school transport where there are children who qualify for free school transport according to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

Prior to the Full Council meeting on 14 February, councillors were bombarded with emails from concerned parents and pupils alarmed by the administration's decision to withdraw the 'Home To School Spare Seats Scheme' in certain areas. Councillors understand that 235 children could be affected by bus service cancellations between now and September, with as many as 1,384 children facing their school bus service being taken away as bus contracts are retendered. The Conservative Opposition proposed an additional £100,000 in their budget to fix this problem, however, as stated above, this was voted down by the administration.

OXFORD TRAFFIC FILTERS FUNDRAISER TO MOUNT LEGAL CHALLENGE

An appeal to raise funds to mount a legal challenge to Oxford's traffic filters (the four-sector plan) has raised £50,000 of its £80,000 goal in three months. The Go Fund Me appeal has had 551 donations since it started in November 2022. The key grounds for the legal action relate to a deficient consultation process, non-disclosure of data to support the traffic filters within reasonable timeframes of the consultation and, the group believes, an absence of impact assessments prior to making the decision or, if any impact assessments have been made, to make them publicly available. A leading Oxford law firm, has been instructed and the first step has been taken by issuing a letter of intention to OCC.

THOUSANDS JOIN PROTEST AGAINST TRAFFIC SCHEMES

On February 18, thousands of people joined a protest in Oxford against measures where roads are shut off to stop motorists driving through. Campaigners against Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) and traffic filters (the four-sector plan) gathered in Broad Street and marched through the city. Thames Valley Police said: "Our officers are facilitating peaceful demonstrations, supporting the public's right to protest whilst keeping the community safe."



NEW 20MPH RESTRICTIONS WILL MAKE JOURNEYS TAKE LONGER SAYS BUS CO

An Oxfordshire bus company has claimed that OCC's 20mph programme across the county will negatively impact bus journey times. Oxford Bus Company has said that many of the roads involved in the proposal and the reasons behind this decision do not justify the introduction of the 20mph limit. The group has also said that this will negatively impact bus journey times. The company's Managing Director Luke Marion said: "The roads involved constitute movement corridors where frequent and planned mixing between traffic and vulnerable road users does not happen to a level justifying the introduction of the 20mph limit. This will have a negative impact on bus journey times that would result."

OCC GIVEN A GOLD AWARD BY STONEWALL

OCC has been given a gold award by Stonewall for its work supporting LGBTQ+ staff to be themselves at work. The Conservative Opposition agrees with OCC's support for staff, but questions the council's participation in the Stonewall programme given its high cost to the council. Many Government departments, local councils and the BBC have left Stonewall as concerns over its relative treatment of different minority groups have increased.

VISITORS TO HWRCS ASKED TO SORT OUT THEIR WASTE BEFOREHAND

Visitors to Oxfordshire's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) are being asked to separate recyclable material from their general waste before disposing of it. OCC wants residents to sort their mixed rubbish out before their visit, in a bid to prevent items that can be recycled from ending up in the general waste and bulky skips. Visitors are encouraged to separate their recycling so it can be put into the relevant containers which are on site, including plastics, card, textiles and shoes, metals and electrical items, before setting off. It remains to be seen what impact this will have. Details of where to find the nearest HWRC is available at oxfordshire.gov.uk/recyclingcentres.

COUNTY PARTNERSHIP REAFFIRMS ONGOING SUPPORT TO UKRAINE

Local authority partners across Oxfordshire marked the invasion of Ukraine by Russia a year ago by reaffirming their joint commitment to continue to provide vital help and support to those affected. The county council, city and district councils all observed the national one-minute silence at 11am 24 February and flew the Ukrainian flag to stand in solidarity with Ukraine. The councils, alongside health and voluntary and community sector partners, formed a dedicated working partnership to enable a joined-up response to the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme launched in March 2022. This partnership has evolved to work collectively to support all refugees and those who seek asylum in the county and will keep supporting Ukrainian guests, and their hosts, as the war in Ukraine continues.