

OCC (Sonning Common & Henley South) councillor's report

Shiplake – 14th July 2025

Oxford Congestion Charge Proposal

On the 17th June the OCC cabinet approved a congestion charge scheme to go out to a 4-week consultation from 23rd June.

The scheme is framed as a temporary congestion charge for cars in Oxford. The proposed scheme would involve a £5 daily charge for cars entering six specific locations during certain hours, with exemptions for permit holders and other eligible groups.

The consultation will run until August 3rd, with a final decision on the scheme expected in September. If approved, the scheme could be implemented as early as autumn.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

- **The Charge:** A £5 daily charge would apply to cars entering six locations in Oxford.
- **Locations:** The charging locations include Hythe Bridge Street, St Cross Road, Thames Street, St. Clement's Street, Marston Ferry Road, and Hollow Way.
- **Charging Times:** St. Clement's Street, Thames Street, and St. Cross Road would be affected from 7am to 7pm daily. Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way would be affected from 7am to 9am and 3pm to 6pm, Monday to Saturday.
- **Exemptions:** Blue Badge holders, carers, and other groups will be eligible for permits that exempt them from the charge.
- **Consultation:** The public consultation will begin on June 23rd and run until August 3rd.
- **Decision:** The County Council's Cabinet will make a final decision on the scheme in September. If approved the scheme could go live in the autumn.

This scheme comes in the wake of Network Rail indicating that the Botley road bridge works could continue for up to 18 months.

A Citizens Assembly with representative residents from all around Oxford – including surrounding rural areas – agreed to maximise use of Park & Rides and to apply congestion measures to free the buses to run better.

When investment in a new fleet of electric buses was agreed by UK Gov, bus companies and OCC, it was agreed as a condition that congestion and bus travel times should improve by 10% - with anti-congestion measures. However the Botley Road problems have caused delays in action and in fact the Abingdon road (from Redbridge Park & Ride) to Oxford City times had worsened by 17%! The bus companies were bitterly complaining.

Finally it was decided that action could wait no longer and this proposal – of course with a proper consultation – was launched.

Henley HGVs

Together with Stefan Gawrysiak, I met with OCC officers and we reviewed the results of evidence studies done with ANPR cameras. Unfortunately not all the cameras worked all the time of the study, albeit that the worst problem covered traffic travelling east – away from Henley.

The data was also complicated in that is an HGV stopped – say in a lay-by – the presumption made was that it had made a delivery. This was purely based on timing.

Thus there were discrepancies with data gathered by the Henley HGV watch group. More needs to be done to understand the data.

There are some new powers to help with infractions from or by moving vehicles. These may offer extra options from a "Part 6" agreement.

It might be possible to have a temporary scheme to limit pass-through vehicles of over 18T. It was suggested that previously only the police could sanction vehicles and that they would have to do that by stopping the vehicle, checking its delivery paperwork and seeking to evidence its route. (Of course this is virtually impossible.) However ANPR cameras could track the vehicles whose dwell time through Henley was short and who would be "frequent flyers" to target and stop.

Other options postulated were having a permit issued to local and Henley-delivering companies and then to clamp down on the others.

All options will continue to be considered.

Committees

The Pensions Committee reviewed the Oxfordshire LGPS pension scheme and current investment challenges. The volatility caused by the Trump administration disruptions and tariffs plus global conflicts were creating abnormal and uncertain conditions. The future of the US\$ as the primary global reserve currency and the dependability of US bonds and stocks are rather less certain than in past times. The investment strategy may need to change to balance risks.

Audit & Governance reviewed audit reports and emerging statutory accounts as efforts are made to catch up on Covid-induced delays.

Place Scrutiny reviewed the PCC & Chief Constable's Annual Report. This generally showed good progress. However it was flagged that action on 20/30 mph speeding and shoplifting was important to show that the writ of the TVP and rule of law runs in all arenas.

Health & Wellbeing considered a range of health issues and services. It was noted that NHS England is being abolished with some limited part of its staff and functions to become part of the UK Gov Dept of Health. It was also noted that the ICBs are having their budgets cut by an arbitrary 50%. Amazingly when asked what impact this might have on healthcare and the integration of Primary plus Secondary Healthcare and Social Care and their integration it was widely suggested very little and potentially some benefits! It was suggested that in fact some of the superstructure actually got in the way!

Council on 8th July

Council noted and approved the annual Health Overview & Scrutiny report and also the Internal Overview and Scrutiny report for the 2024-25 year.

It supported a motion on SEND calling for UK Gov action – including on the "Statutory Override" or "High Needs" deficits incurred by OCC and all tier one councils. Nationally these deficits amount to more than £3bn and are soon expected to rise to £5bn.

A much amended motion on support for buses and disadvantaged users – particularly younger ones was approved. However cabinet had already agreed that any net income from the temporary congestion charge would be used to support Park & Rides, buses and other needed transport and highways needs to help reduce congestion and support safety.

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