

REPORT TO SHIPLAKE PARISH COUNCIL FEB 2025

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

OCC BUDGET 2025/26

The minority Liberal Democrat/Green administration at OCC has now published its Budget proposals for 2025/26. Details can be seen [here](#). Despite receiving more Government funding than expected, the administration intends to keep the proposed Council Tax rise at 5%. The Conservative Opposition will be putting forward proposals that limit the rise to 4.5% but by sweeping away vanity projects would enable the council to spend over £6m more on roads and flood measures. Full Council will vote on the proposals at the Budget meeting on 11th February.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND DEVOLUTION

OCC's response to the Government's white paper on devolution was agreed at a meeting of the Cabinet last month. OCC has sent a letter to central government requesting that Oxfordshire is fast-tracked for local government reorganisation. The Conservative Opposition broadly supports the concept of Unitary government for Oxfordshire but has concerns about a Mayoral Strategic Authority. The decision on whether to postpone local elections in May is due to be announced by the Government on 3rd February. Current OCC Leader Liberal Democrat Liz Leffman has stated: *"I have been holding constructive conversations with leaders in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire for several weeks. My preference is for us to be able to form a strategic mayoral authority with those councils, but we have not yet reached an agreement."*

MPS WHO HAVE RETAINED COUNCIL POSITIONS SINCE BEING ELECTED

Liberal Democrat County Councillors Calum Miller and Freddie van Mierlo have come under media scrutiny for failing to resign their positions since being elected as MPs. ITV News reported that Calum Miller attended 57% of county council meetings and Freddie van Mierlo just 25%. Freddie van Mierlo is also a District Councillor where he has attended 17% of meetings.

NETWORK RAIL TO DELAY REOPENING BOTLEY ROAD UNTIL AUGUST 2026

Network Rail has revealed that the redevelopment of Oxford Station, which has seen Botley Road closed to through traffic for 22 months, is further delayed. The [new programme](#) will see Botley Road reopen in August 2026, two years after it was due to be completed. OCC will now assess the impact of this on the timing of its own schemes, including the [sectorisation](#) plan.

JUST TWO 20MPH FINES EVERY WEEK ACROSS THREE COUNTIES

Thames Valley Police covers over 2,200 square miles and three counties: Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire. [The BBC reports](#) that on average just two fines for exceeding 20mph are issued each week across this entire area, so perhaps less than one a week in Oxfordshire. This data adds weight to the views of opponents of the scheme who say it is a waste of money, and infuriates supporters who say the scheme is clearly not being enforced.

OCC COMMITS TO LONG-TERM MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

OCC has committed to continuing to fund its share for mental health services in the region for the next decade. At a meeting of the Cabinet on Tuesday 21 January, councillors agreed to contribute £6.2 million each year, for the next ten years, into a pooled budget with health care partners, under plans to bring together existing mental health service contracts.

SPECIFIC OCC REPORT FOR SHIPLAKE

FMS ENQ251030964: CHURCH LANE POTHOLE

I had a site meeting with officers on Wednesday 5th February. I have arranged for the potholes to be made safe on a temporary basis within 28 days. For the long-term repair, officers are exploring potential treatments. However, this may not happen within this financial year. The PC may be asked to contribute towards the long-term repair.

TEMPORARY EMERGENCY FOOTPATH CLOSURE OF FOOTPATH-7 (GRID SU77947873)

OCC closed Footpath 7 in November 2023 as the surface had collapsed. After several missed deadlines, repairs were finally completed by Network Rail and the EA by towards the end of 2024. The path was reopened but the repairs appear to be inadequate and new sink holes have formed. OCC officers fenced off part of the area and contacted Network Rail concerning further remedial work. Network Rail engineers have now been out to assess the situation. Given the sink hole/scouring out, a much more substantial fix is required. Network Rail is now in negotiations with the EA for a permit to allow this to happen. This will take some time.

THAMES FARM/CROSSWAYS DRAINAGE DITCH FENCING ON A4155

At the beginning of January, persons unknown erected fencing around the drainage ditches on the western side of the A4155 opposite the war memorial. According to OCC officers, this wasn't done by Taylor Wimpey, Westbourne Homes or OCC. I have asked District Councillor Leigh Rawlins to contact SODC officers to see if they can shed any light on the matter.

A4155 CROSSING POINT NEAR HIGHLANDS HOUSE

As previously reported, officers have advised that as the Section 278 works are not 'completed' in accordance with the legal agreement and will not be until such a time as the on-site drainage matters are resolved and re-constructed, Taylor Wimpey (TW) remains responsible for the S278 works that have already been carried out. The Stage 3 Road Safety Audit had identified possible issues with the crossing point and the officers' plan was to ask TW to carry out speed surveys prior to first occupation. However, due to all of the site delays, and that other developments on that side of the road are building out, they will now write to TW to ask them to carry out the speed surveys, clear vegetation in the visibility splay and report accordingly on the speed survey information. I am awaiting an update. As previously mentioned, it is unclear who is responsible for the ditch fencing and verge clearing that occurred last week.

FOOTPATH ALONGSIDE A4155 FROM MEMORIAL AVENUE TO PLOUGH LANE

I had a site visit with an officer on Friday 22nd November and a plan has been produced which has been circulated to the PC. Officers have now met with potential contractors and an estimate is due shortly.

BOREHOLE WORK ON STATION ROAD / MILL ROAD

The borehole has been installed. OCC will clean down the area and repair verge damage.

ABANDONED CAR NEAR JUNCTION OF NEW ROAD AND MILL LANE

A black BMW X3 remains in the informal lay-by near junction of New Road and Mill Lane after being parked about two weeks ago. I have asked the clerk to contact the police or SODC in relation to the matter.