

Title	BRIEFING TO GORING DIVISION PARISH COUNCIL FEB 2021
Authors	County Councillor K Bulmer
Meeting	Goring-on-Thames Parish Council Meeting 14 th February 2022

OCC Budget

Today, the Conservative Opposition at Oxfordshire County Council voted against a Council **Tax rise of 5%** pushed through by the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance comprised of Labour, Lib Dem and Green Councillors.

Further details of the budget can be found [here](#) and sees Oxfordshire County Council increase its share of Council Tax to the legal limit – **the joint highest in the country.**

Day-to-day spending will increase by over £6.2m – equivalent to 1.5% of Council Tax – with further spending financed by record borrowing of over £88m at a cost of an extra £5.3m a year – or 1.3% on Council Tax.

Leader of the Opposition, Eddie Reeves, said:

"This budget is a bad deal, not a fair deal, for families.

"The Left-wing coalition in County Hall simply doesn't share the values of hardworking people in Oxfordshire: not content with forcing people to eat vegan at Council events, 'progressive' Councillors are now forcing families to pay for a traditional tax and borrow budget at a time when families' energy and food bills are rising.

"A Conservative-run County Council would not increase Council Tax to the legal limit like this. Such a large increase is unnecessary and leaves Oxfordshire County Council with the joint highest rise in the country.

"Not all investment in services is wrong, but now is not the time for such a large amount of extra spending. It totals more than £6.2m – equivalent to a 1.5% rise in Council Tax before their borrowing plans are taken into account.

"Future taxpayers will also be forced to pay for borrowing of nearly £90m, which will cost us an extra £5.3m a year to service the debt – that's another 1.3% on Council Tax."

The Conservatives' Shadow spokesman for Finance, David Bartholomew, a former Cabinet member for Finance, added:

"The Government has been generous with its Local Government Settlement, investing [9% more](#) in local government this year – the highest in over a decade. In practical terms, that means the Council receiving £9m more this year than it expected to last year. Rather than use this extra money in imaginative ways to help residents, the administrative has buried most of it into an opaque fund called the 'Budget Priority Reserve' and chosen to tax-and-borrow more today to make up the 'shortfall'.

"This administration is intoxicated by power that it has never previously enjoyed and is ideologically driven to spend money at a time when prudence should be the watchword. As the Cabinet member for Finance during the last administration, I put plans in place that would have seen a maximum rise of 4% on the basis of a pessimistic settlement from Whitehall. With this fresh Government investment, we could have cut our Council Tax rise to less than 3.5%."

The Conservatives' Deputy Leader, Jane Murphy, who is also Leader of the Conservatives' Opposition on South Oxfordshire District Council, observed:

"The last Conservative administration never borrowed a penny from external sources. Now, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Councillors are proposing extra debt of almost £90m in a single budget cycle.

“Currently, we have no clear idea about how it will all be spent, but my concern is that Liberal Democrat and Green Councillors’ mismanagement of South Oxfordshire’s Local Plan is now at risk of leading to extra capital spending on the Didcot Garden Down, the Appleford Bypass and other important projects.

Liam Walker, Shadow spokesman for Highways, commented:

"The proposed capital borrowing of nearly £90m is staggering. While some of this might be unavoidable, much is open to question. Residents in the city of Oxford may or may not welcome £500,000 being spent on Broad Street pedestrianisation, but I'm sure residents outside the city will question whether this is a good use of their Council Tax in such challenging times.

“I was also very disappointed that my suggestion for free 'Park & Ride' for one year using the surplus settlement funds fell on deaf ears.

For myself I note that despite very vocal support for buses no money has been found by the administration to support buses despite asking government for more money. This is at a time when bus services are being cut & more cuts to come. Also the administration has plans to remove bus lanes and turn them into cycle lanes, not noticeable helpful for non oxford residents who use bus or very supportive of bus companies.

Those who wish to dip into the tome that is the administration budget may wish to look at page 15 where under “what we spend on council services”, will see that it is somewhat lacking in detail in that next to every item it says ‘xxx’ rather than an actual % or a figure.

OCC/CHERWELL JOINT WORKING

The administration (despite praising it as a success) has decided to cancel this agreement and disband the joint CEO and joint working. We have no substance as to why this decision has been made or more worryingly the likely cost, which given it was announced at a budget setting meeting is somewhat a surprise.

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Title	District Councillor Update – January 2022
Authors	Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers Ward member for Goring and South Stoke
Meeting	Goring-on-Thames Parish Council Meeting 14 th February 2022

Climate Action Plan a major step to reducing council emissions

South Oxfordshire District Council could take a major step to becoming a carbon neutral organisation next week when Cabinet members are asked to approve the council’s Climate Action Plan. The Plan outlines how the council will achieve carbon neutrality by 2025 – this means the carbon produced from the council’s buildings and services will be balanced by the amount removed from the atmosphere.

If adopted, the Plan would signal some important changes for how the council delivers its services, where it makes investments, the policies it adopts and projects it supports.

Staff and councillors would receive training to ensure they are aware of the impacts of carbon emissions and the council would adopt a digital by default approach for council meetings to help cut down on vehicle emissions. The Plan also outlines how the council will support local efforts to tackle the climate emergency.

Cabinet members will consider the council’s Climate Action Plan on Thursday 3 February. The Plan follows significant work from officers and councillors, and feedback from parish councils, local climate action groups and from the council’s Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee which met earlier this month. To ensure the council is open about its progress towards the targets, officers will carry out quarterly reviews of the action plan and report to the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee and Cabinet.

The Plan Can be found here: <http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/documents/s25765/Report.pdf>

Homelessness in South Oxfordshire

The Council’s housing team worked intensively in the weeks up to Christmas to ensure households at risk of homelessness had sustainable accommodation

It is pleasing to report that the number of rough sleepers recorded as of 31 December 2021 was **zero** for both South and Vale. This is the first time since 2013 there has been no rough sleeping recorded across both Districts and is testament to the success of the Councils’ strategy of preventing homelessness. South Oxfordshire was the first council in Oxfordshire to adopt the ground-breaking Housing First approach to preventing homelessness, a system that has since been adopted across the county

Support for residents struggling

With the cost of living crisis impacting families across the country, a reminder that the Council is supporting residents struggling to afford household essentials. Using money from the Government’s Household Support Fund, we are helping pay for vulnerable households’ food, energy, and water bills and other essential household costs.

The funds are not restricted to people who receive benefits, and a range of factors are taken into consideration when assessing applications. The scheme ends in March 2022. Please see details on our website:

[Household Support Fund - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/household-support-fund)

Neighbourhood Plan pilot

Small communities in the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire will now have an opportunity for greater influence on how and where houses and other developments should be built in their area.

After the two district councils put together a successful joint bid for government grant funding of up to £45,000, [the government has announced the districts will be part of a national pilot of a new, simpler approach to Neighbourhood Planning](#).

Neighbourhood Planning is a process where a community – usually led by the town or parish council – can develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and influence development in their local area.

While many communities have already benefitted from developing their own Neighbourhood Plans – 41 have been adopted in the two districts combined – they are hard work to produce and can take a long time.

As part of the pilot, the two councils will now design and trial a new simpler form of Neighbourhood Planning, which should make it available to a much wider variety of communities.

Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District councils will be inviting communities to take part in the trial very soon. Community groups taking part don't have to be town or parish councils, which means "unparished" communities would be able to get involved.

Four communities will work to produce what the district councils are calling a "Local Placemaking Plan". In these the local community can set out what matters to them, and their infrastructure priorities. The trial will test how a simpler form of neighbourhood planning could have real influence in planning decisions.

Planning Enforcement

The updated **Planning Enforcement Statement** has been approved by Council. The statement sets out the new approach to the triage and handling of complaints to improve efficiency and transparency and to help address the large backlog of complaints that has built up since the start of the pandemic. The team currently has some 700 live investigations with 241 matters still unallocated across the two Councils.

The Planning Enforcement Statement was previously been updated in 2016. The new Enforcement Statement and approach will be subject to quarterly appraisal as part of the Council's ongoing performance review process and the Statement itself will be reviewed after 12 months.

[Microsoft Word - 2021-12-17- Enforcement Statement Final \(southandvale.gov.uk\)](#)

Local Government Finance Settlement

The government announced its provisional local government finance settlement on 16 December, the fourth consecutive one-year settlement. It amounts to a real-term cut in council funding for SODC and for many other councils around the country. While government has claimed the settlement amounts to a 4% increase in funding, just 1% of this is government funding, the rest requires local authorities to increase council tax by the maximum allowable without a referendum.

New Gambling Policy

At Full Council on 6 December, Council also agreed a new gambling policy. A key change is the passing of a "No Casino" resolution meaning that applications for casinos will not be considered in the District. This was agreed on the basis that the district is not a suitable location for a casino, that casinos bring the potential for criminal exploitation and money laundering and that casinos expose the vulnerable to the risk of gambling harm and problem gambling.

Over £6.5 million given for transport and school improvements in South Oxon

Over £6.5 million will go towards transport improvements and school extensions in South Oxfordshire thanks to funds the district council has raised from housing developers. South Oxfordshire District Council **has allocated £6,564,745.43 to Oxfordshire County Council** to help widen pavements, join up cycle routes, improve road safety and to expand schools in the district, as the authority that oversees transport infrastructure and education provision, to ensure the right facilities and infrastructure to manage the increase in new residents.

The money was collected from the Community Infrastructure Levy, known as CIL, which is paid by developers to help provide new and enhanced infrastructure to meet the demands of extra people moving into the area.

New traffic junctions, cycling and pedestrian routes are set to be completed in the district including a new roundabout and road safety signs for the school around Mill Lane in Chinnor.

For children walking or cycling to school, a new pedestrian crossing will be created on Wantage Road in Didcot near to Didcot Girls'. For other areas, new crossings will be built near to Lidl in Wallingford, on Wellington Street in Thame and on Gravel Hill in Henley. Various schemes to widen pathways are also being funded in Benson and Towersey.

Funds to enable new traffic calming measures will be created between Goring Heath and Crays Pond, between Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount, and on the B4009 in Lewknor. Plans also include installing new lighting and a pavement on the triangle in Fyfield along the A420.

As well as road improvements CIL funds will help local schools to increase in size and improve facilities to help accommodate families moving into the area. Wallingford Secondary School will be expanded to allow an extra 300 pupils and the size of local primary schools in Benson, Chinnor, Cholsey will be extended to each accept around 100 more pupils.

OCC Local Transport Plan Consultation

The county council is working to produce a new Local Transport Plan. The local transport plan is the long-term county-wide transport strategy, called the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). You can find it [here](#)

The consultation closes on 16 March 2022. The Planning Policy Team at SODC will be responding on behalf of the council.

Can you help us spread the word to reduce your waste in 2022?

We are running a short social media campaign at the start of the year to remind people to reduce their waste where possible. This supports the councils' joint aim to help tackle the climate emergency. Why not join in and share our social media posts?

Among the messages, we're asking people to buy fruit without packaging, to seek out zero-waste products and to buy previously owned products where possible. We are also reminding people to use reusable water bottles and shopping bags too.

You can see them on our websites here: [Reducing your waste & increasing your reuse - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/reducing-your-waste)

Title	Correspondence
Authors	Compiled by the Clerk
Meeting	Goring-on-Thames Parish Council Meeting – 14 th February 2022

Message from member of public; regarding Pyramidal Orchids at the Burial Ground.

Good evening,

I was just wondering if Goring council cut the grass on Whitehill burial ground also know as burntwood cemetery? Every year I see a group of Pyramidal Orchids “Anacamptis Pyramidalis“ That just before they flower get cut down. The Pyramidal orchid isn’t an overly rare species of Orchid especially in Goring but is becoming more and more uncommon throughout the U.K. I just wondered if I could possibly make a small cage or a sign to protect the patch from whoever cuts that grass to try and protect them.

I look forward to your response

The member of public was duly responded to letting them know over a succession of e-mails, how, when and what has been done in the past with regard to pyramidal orchids including but not limited to

- Why cages were not permitted and direction to the policy
- That this item had been raised with the mowers before and they had tried to spare them
- That when areas of the burial ground are left to grow we receive numerous complains at the unkemptness of the burial ground.
- That the orchids do grow in the field immediately adjacent to the burial ground.

The member of public followed up the email with multiple further correspondence, including the following:

- I have been in contact with BSBI (the botanical society of Britain and Ireland) regarding the orchids and they advised me as well as contacting the local MP to also ask if you are the most senior person I can speak to at the council regarding this issue?

I have also been advised by BSBI that you should be able to give me the name of the contractors who cut the grass and speak to them directly?

Failing this they also said to start a Twitter campaign and to contact goring gap news paper to start the ball rolling.

Having exhausted the known policies of the Council, the Clerk now kindly asks the Council for further direction as to how to proceed with this matter.

For further information, see [here](#).

Title	Convex Mirror
Authors	Clerk
Meeting	Goring-on-Thames Parish Council Meeting – 14 th February 2022

Definition of a Highway

In the common law of England and Wales, a highway occurs where there is a public right of passage over land at all times "without let or hindrance" that follows a particular route.

There are three kinds:

1. A footpath is a highway over which there is a public right of passage for pedestrians.
2. A bridleway is a highway that does not permit motor vehicles. Some bridleways also debar the driving of cattle.
3. A carriageway allows vehicles, animals and pedestrians.

Previous debate on this matter

At a meeting of the Parish Council in November, it was considered to "To approve applying for installation / installing a convex mirror on the street lamp outside the Community Centre" It was also recorded in the minutes, as detailed by an attendee that "OCC would not endorse the installation of new mirrors", and it was then approved to implement a trial installation.

Action of the Clerk to seek Highways Approval.

As written on the November agenda ".. approve applying for installation.." and after confirmation that all installations on a highway must be approved by OCC Highways, the Clerk carried out their due diligence and sought the approval for the installation. For further clarification, the installation, whilst would be attached to a Parish Council owned streetlamp, would be located on a Highway, and directed at a highway for the intention that any highway users would make use of the mirror when exiting Croft Road and thus joining Station Road

Response from OCCH

From a look at the junction on [Google Maps] I would recommend that other measures are considered.

This is because OCC traffic signs policy does not allow for new mirrors to be installed on the public highway except in exceptional circumstances.

Unfortunately mirrors can cause more problems than they solve, for example they can cause glare which can reduce diver visibility and reduce safety. Also mirrors can create a false sense of confidence for drivers that the junction is clear leading them to proceed without the necessary caution. So it would be best if other methods can be used to help drivers go to & from Croft Rd.

From google maps (link) - Station Rd - Google Maps – it would appear that there is vegetation present either side of the junction. The picture is from 2016 but I am assuming that the current layout is somewhat similar?

I would suggest (if it is not the case already) that if the vegetation where to be trimmed back to the edge of the highways boundary, there would be a better site line for road users exiting croft road.

Clerk’s Further Investigations.

After I sent on the information regarding the lack of permission to install the mirror. I was questioned as to whether 3 other mirrors need to be taken down also in like with OCCH policy. Specifically:

- Mill Road / Wallingford Road junction



This falls under OCCH policy:

7. Implementation of equipment on the highway other than that approved is not permitted, this includes traffic mirrors. Any existing mirrors that exist on the public highway shall be maintained by Oxfordshire County Council.

- Manor Road, opposite the Barleycorn (The Clerk visited this morning, this appears to be mounted on private property, for the purposes of the opposite property being able to exit a private driveway from Wey Cottage), **it is not on a public highway for use by general highway users.**



- Reading Road opposite South Point, (mirror not showing on street view – which was last updated, Sept 2014), but again will have been installed for people exiting a private driveway, **whilst immediately adjacent to the public highway, it cannot be used by general highway users.**



What was not made clear to the Council at that time though, was that it's not just that they do not endorse, convex mirrors; they specifically do not permit new installations of mirrors.

Conclusion

- Installation of a mirror, in this location has been expressly not permitted by OCCH:

Policy: TSP5

Oxfordshire County Council shall not be permit, other than in exceptional circumstances, the erection of traffic mirrors on any part of the public highway.

- No installation can occur on a highway without OCCH permission and current mirrors may remain:
7. Implementation of equipment on the highway other than that approved is not permitted, this includes traffic mirrors. Any existing mirrors that exist on the public highway shall be maintained by Oxfordshire County Council.
- With the knowledge that *"...mirrors can cause more problems than they solve, for example they can cause glare which can reduce driver visibility and reduce safety. Also mirrors can create a false sense of confidence for drivers that the junction is clear leading them to proceed without the necessary caution."*
 - Should the Parish Council proceed with the installation, knowingly without OCCH permission and with the knowledge as detailed above, should an accident occur, and the insurers found that the mirror could be to blame, the Parish Council would be liable for any claims, due to material loss, injury or death of a highways user.
 - The Council was incorrectly told that OCCH do not endorse mirrors, not that they were not permitted, and therefore made the decision without being presented with all the facts.

Inclusion on an agenda within 6m of the previous decision.

The 6 month rule for items to be entered on an agenda again exists to prevent the same item being entered multiple times on to an agenda in the hope that eventually a different decision will be made. In general practice, where materially new information is available, which would likely have resulted in a different decision being made in the original debate it is accepted that it should be considered again.

Recommendation

The Council reconsider the previous decision considering the new information, that being:

1. All installations on a Highway must be approved by OCCH.
2. OCCH do not give permission for the installation of a mirror in this location.
3. Should the installation be completed, Goring-on-Thames Parish Council would be liable for any accidents which occurred as a result of the installation.

It should further be noted that the Clerk has received communication suggesting that the Clerk is personally campaigning to not install the mirror. The Clerk has nothing to personal gain from the installation, or not as the case may be, of said mirror. It has also been suggested that the Clerk should have just not contacted OCCH and no one would have been the wiser. The Clerk does however have a duty to do their due diligence in the execution of the function of Proper Officer of the Council. To suggest that the Clerk should have just ignored the verified information that all installations on a highway need Highways approval, suggests that the Clerk should be negligent in their duty to protect the interests of the Council.