

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS NOVEMBER 2022 FROM CLLR KEVIN BULMER

GENERAL OCC REPORT

LIBDEM/GREEN/LABOUR WAR ON MOTORISTS CONTINUES IN OXFORD

A wide range of initiatives are either in place or being consulted upon. These include:

- ZEZ (Zero Emissions Zone): Non-electric cars are charged or fined if they enter the area
- LTNs (Low Traffic Neighbourhoods): Through traffic is blocked from certain areas
- Traffic Filters: The city is to be split into four sectors and cars without permits will be unable to travel directly from one sector to another
- Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs): Cars without permits are fined if they park in certain areas
- WPL (Workplace Parking Levy): Businesses are to be taxed if they provide parking spaces for employees

While understanding that traffic is a huge issue in Oxford, the Conservative Opposition wonders whether this is overkill and is concerned about the amount of Council time and Council Tax money being devoted to Oxford in comparison to towns and villages.

OXFORD ZERO EMISSIONS ZONE (ZEZ) GENERATES £120,000 IN FEES & FINES

The Cabinet Member in charge of Oxfordshire's highways insists the ZEZ scheme is not being used as a cash cow. Rolled out as a pilot on a handful of city centre roads in February, the ZEZ scheme sees automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras police charges between £2 and £10 for any vehicles that produce emissions. The prices will double from August 2025. The charges apply between 7am and 7pm every day on Bonn Square, Queen Street, Cornmarket Street, part of Market Street, Ship Street, St Michael's Street, New Inn Hall Street and Shoe Lane. It is set to be extended to cover much of the city centre next year, subject to public feedback.

HIGHWAYS OFFICERS DEVOTE LOTS OF TIME & EFFORT RESTORING LTN BARRIERS

The Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) in Oxford remain unpopular with many residents and the barriers are frequently vandalised at great cost to the council. Cabinet Member Andrew Gant said: *"We will continue to make safe and reinstate all damaged bollards that have been forcibly knocked down or uprooted. Vandalism of this kind is a serious criminal offence and correcting it takes a lot of time and effort from our highway officers."*

TRAFFIC FILTER PLAN TO SPLIT OXFORD INTO FOUR SECTORS

The intention is 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.

WORKPLACE PARKING LEVY

The plan is to tax businesses on every parking space they provide to employees. The decision whether or not to pass this charge on to the employee rests with the company.

CONSERVATIVES ATTEMPT TO SAFEGUARD OF COUNCILLORS' PRIORITY FUND

Conservatives successfully moved a motion at October Full Council to request that as part of the Budget process, the administration gives full consideration to extending the Councillors' Priority Fund, which is due to expire at the end of the year.

LIBDEMS PASS MOTION TO CUT VAT

The LibDems put forward a motion to Full Council in October stating Government should immediately introduce various subsidies and cut VAT to 17.5%. The motion was passed despite Conservatives pointing out that whatever the merits or not of the proposal, the administration was once again wasting council resources trying to get involved in central government issues way beyond the council's remit. Councillors are not junior MPs and they should focus on local matters. It is believed the motion was centrally generated by LibDem HQ as almost identically worded motions have been debated at other LibDem councils.

LIBDEM/GREEN/LABOUR ADMINISTRATION CONTINUES VEGANISM CAMPAIGN

Conservatives moved a motion at October Full Council to put a brake on the administration's veganism campaign but were unsuccessful.

HOMELESSNESS IN OXFORDSHIRE

Housing associations, charities and local authorities in Oxfordshire have come together to embark on a programme to help tackle homelessness in the county. OCC has helped to form the Oxfordshire Homeless Alliance, commissioning partners to improve homeless services by taking a collaborative approach to support those experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

COUNCIL BUDGET

This year, the government is not expected to hold a spending review, so government funding will not keep pace with inflation, leading to a predicted funding shortfall of over £30 million next year. OCC is also estimating around £20m of other demand-led pressures, which include: the growing nationwide costs of supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities; the rising cost of social care and care placements for both children and adults; and a national shortage of social care workers leading to a reliance on agency staff.

OCC DECLINES THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTMENT ZONES INVITE

Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of OCC, has written a formal letter to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up to explain why OCC has decided not to bid to be involved in Whitehall's investment zones initiative. Given that this decision has been made, the Opposition is questioning why time and money is to be wasted at Full Council in November debating a motion praising the decision.

UPDATED PARKING STANDARDS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS APPROVED

On Tuesday 18 October, OCC's cabinet approved an updated guide for parking standards for new developments. It means developers will need to work collaboratively with the council to help achieve the targets set in the [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#) (LTCP), which was adopted earlier this year. The LTCP aims create a net zero transport system in Oxfordshire by 2040, improving health and wellbeing, tackling the climate emergency, reducing private vehicle use, and prioritising walking, cycling, and public transport. While supporting many of these objectives, Conservatives are questioning how the restrictions will apply in rural areas where residents are still very much dependent on the private car.

I'd point out that the so called net zero system makes no notice of if the cars powered by electricity or fossil fuels but is just anti-car full stop.

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REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS DECEMBER 2022 FROM CLLR KEVIN BULMER

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/budget consultation 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." I've always had a concern about the blanket rollout of 20mph and whether the £8million would have been better spent on a targeted approach.

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