



**Focus on Parishes with Cllr Freddie van Mierlo (Chalgrove and Watlington)**

**November 2023**

*Welcome to my monthly update, shared in the first week of every month.*

**Upcoming meetings:**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> November: Chalgrove Parish Council
- 6<sup>th</sup> November: Cuxham Parish Meeting
- 7<sup>th</sup> November: Full Council, Oxford
- 8<sup>th</sup> November: Ewelme Parish Council
- 9<sup>th</sup> November: Berrick Salome Parish Council
- 13<sup>th</sup> November: Residents outreach – Christmas Common
- 14<sup>th</sup> November: Watlington Parish Council
- 14<sup>th</sup> November: Brightwell Baldwin Parish Meeting
- 23<sup>rd</sup> November: Health Overview Scrutiny Committee, Oxford
- 23<sup>rd</sup> November: Britwell Salome Parish Meeting

\*\*\*\*\* **OCC NEWS**\*\*\*\*\*

**SEND Improvement:** Steps are being taken to improve the support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). A priority action plan has been developed by organisations involved in the delivery of SEND services, including Oxfordshire County Council and the NHS, along with the county's parent carer forum. The plan will need to be approved by Ofsted. An Improvement Board meeting will take place in November.

**Rural buses are back!:** New services for the Chalgrove and Watlington area will begin in November - the first time many areas will see services since they were cut in 2016.

- Watlington to Reading (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)
  - Service 122: via Nettlebed, Rotherfield Peppard and Sonning Common
  - Service 123: via Stoke Row, Checkendon and Kidmore End

- Watlington to Thame (Tuesday, Thursday)
  - Service 126: via Chalgrove, The Miltons, The Haseleys and Moreton
  - Service 127: via Lewknor, Postcombe, Tetsworth and Milton Common

In December in the run up to Christmas, single fares in Oxfordshire will be capped at £1.

**OCC Budget 2024-2025:** Cabinet agreed an [approach](#) to setting the 2024/5 budget. Continued inflation and demand pressures (particularly in SEND and adult care) mean the council is currently forecasting £30-40 million in additional costs in 2024/5. The council's financial strategy includes a 4.99% rise in council tax for 2024/5 with 2% ring fenced for adult social care. Details of the proposals will be published in November.

**Oxfordshire tops table for county councils tackling climate change:** [Oxfordshire](#) was rated the best performing county council in the UK on climate change by the Climate Emergency UK climate action scorecard.

**Reducing disruption caused by utilities & developers:** The County's new plan for charging an increased daily fee of £2500 (instead of the £300 fixed fee) to utility companies that dig up major roads is being [consulted](#) on. By law it is restricted to 5% of Oxfordshire's roads and so will focus on busy, critical parts of the network. Surplus funds will be reinvested. The DfT is encouraging all councils to adopt schemes like this.

**Homes Upgrade Grants:** Money is available for off-gas grid homes to improve energy efficiency (including solar). To [quality](#) a resident (renter or owner-occupier) must live in a home rated EPC D or lower, and have a household income of less than £39,000

\*\*\*\*\*NEWS IN BRIEF\*\*\*\*\*

**Town and parish council charter:** Online [questionnaire](#). Draft to be published in Jan

**Boundary review:** [Consultation](#) open from 3 October to 11 December.

**Highways works:** Check this OCC website showing [upcoming highways repairs](#)

**Benson relief road:** Construction has begun starting with food attenuation work

**20mph applications close:** Applications for 20mph closed on [31 October](#)

\*\*\*\*\*PARISH ROUND-UP \*\*\*\*\*

*Not all parishes are covered – below is a selection of the main updates.*

**Chalgrove**

- **Gladman planning application:** The Council is writing its response to the resubmitted planning application for 160 homes. As County Councillor I have contributed with an objection.

**Lewknor**

- **Lewknor interchange:** Muddy and narrow pathway reported to officers. General maintenance work will be carried out on 13/11/2023

- **Manor Close:** Issue has been escalated to chief executives of SODC and OCC. A meeting has been held with Beeks, who must complete the land gap application before the County Council can adopt the land. There is no planning enforcement action that SODC can take against Beeks, nor can OCC compel Beeks to complete the land gap application.

#### **Pishill with Stonor**

- **HGVs:** Signage to deter HGVs from restricted byway have been delivered and will be installed by end of November

#### **Shirburn**

- **Chicane:** Officers met on site with contractors to discuss installation of a chicane on B4009 at Shirburn

#### **Swyncombe**

- **Springalls:** Trading standards are monitoring the sale of land in small plots near Park Corner

#### **Watlington**

- **Charlotte Coxe Trust:** A meeting of the OCC Charlotte Coxe Trust Committee will be held before the end of the year to discuss the accounts
- **Red Kite View to Cuxham Road path:** No further update in October – being chased
- **Watlington Relief Road:** Planning application expected towards end of November. It is likely to go to planning committee in the new year.

# REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS NOVEMBER 2023 FROM CLLR KEVIN BULMER

## GENERAL OCC REPORT

### OCC IN STATE OF 'NO OVERALL CONTROL' (NOC)

As reported last month, the 'Fair Deal alliance' running OCC collapsed in acrimony at the end of September after Labour withdrew, and the LibDem/Green group is now attempting to run the council with a minority administration. The council make up is now:

LibDem/Green: 24  
Conservative Independent Alliance: 21  
Labour: 14  
Independent: 3

The Labour group has submitted a motion for Full Council on 8<sup>th</sup> November proposing a cross-party, quasi-committee system. The Conservative Opposition is considering its response.

### NEW CABINET

Details of the new Cabinet can be found here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/about-your-council/oxfordshire-councillors/oxfordshires-cabinet>

### COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2024/25 UNDER DEVELOPMENT

The OCC Budget process for 2024/25 is now underway. Given the NOC status of the council, the development and approval process is likely to be especially challenging.

### CONTROVERSIAL LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOODS (LTNS) WILL REMAIN

The hugely controversial low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) in east Oxford are to remain, following a decision by OCC's Cabinet at a packed meeting on Tuesday, 17 October. This is despite the fact that the 18-month trial has been lambasted by residents and businesses. Cabinet also approved the use of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras in place of existing physical barriers, which have been repeatedly vandalised.

### HEAVY RAINFALL AND HIGH RIVER LEVELS IN OXFORDSHIRE

Consistent rainfall in recent weeks has led to higher than normal river levels on many watercourses in Oxfordshire with further wet and windy weather in the forecast linked to Storm Ciaran. Below is useful information for local people to monitor the situation in their part of the county – especially when the Environment Agency issues flood alerts or the more serious flood warnings. There are also links to the Met Office's weather warning bulletins.

- The Environment Agency's information relating to current flood alerts and flood warnings and the five-day flood risk for Oxfordshire can be found here: <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/location?q=Oxfordshire>. This page also captures flood alerts and warnings from areas immediately adjacent to the county.
- The Met Office issues weather warnings when severe weather is expected. These give an indication of problematic weather that may be on its way to Oxfordshire and could further influence river levels. Details here: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/uk-warnings>
- OCC has produced a 'flooding toolkit' which provides advice and support for residents and businesses. It can be found here: <https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com>

## **GOVERNMENT AWARDS £1.9 MILLION OF EXTRA BUS FUNDING FOR OXFORDSHIRE**

Sunday single fares in December in the run-up to Christmas are set to be capped at £1 after Oxfordshire was awarded extra government funding to improve bus services. A countywide day bus ticket valid for all operators could also be created after Oxfordshire was promised an additional £1.9 million to improve bus services over the next two years. It comes on top of £12.7m from the government in August 2022 following the council's successful Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) application. The additional £1.9m of funding – known as BSIP+ – is for measures that will increase long-term patronage, help maintain service levels, ensure essential social and economic connectivity for local communities and promote innovation.

## **POLICE AND OCC REAFFIRM 20MPH SPEED LIMITS EFFECTIVELY 'VOLUNTARY'**

In response to parish council criticisms about the lack of effectiveness of OCC's £8million 30mph to 20mph sign-changing exercise, the Oxford Mail has reported that a spokesperson for Thames Valley Police has said:

*"We enforce speed limits based on evidence and threat and harm principles and officers will always deal with situations they encounter operationally. We also rely on the public to provide information and would encourage anyone with information about speeding or poor driving to please report it so that we can gather information about a particular area and take action where appropriate. We would ask people to report online on our website or by calling 101. While we share the council's enthusiasm for road safety and making improvements for all road users, it is also important that the introduction of 20mph speed limits is done in conjunction with Department for Transport guidelines."*

OCC confirmed the voluntary nature of the 20mph in its reply:

*"Although [OCC] is working alongside Thames Valley Police, who are responsible for legal enforcement of the speed limits, there is an emphasis on drivers adhering to the new limits through a change of mindset, rather than enforcement. It is hoped that as 20mph areas become more common, breaking the limit would become socially unacceptable for drivers."*

## **FURTHER EXPANSION OF CLIMATE CHANGE TEAM & CLIMATE CHANGE SURVEY**

OCC is currently in the process of recruiting a 'Climate Change Outreach Officer'. The position is to 'to develop and deliver our stakeholder engagement and outreach strategy to engage, inspire, motivate, and facilitate action on climate change, and promote resilience to a changing climate, across a wide range of audiences in Oxfordshire'. OCC is also advertising for a Climate Change Team Leader. Additionally, OCC is conducting a survey soliciting views on climate change. Details can be found here: <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/climate-change-2023>

## **RESIDENTS WARNED AGAINST COLD CALLERS OFFERING PROPERTY REPAIRS**

Residents are being warned to be wary of cold callers offering to do property repairs after the recent storms. OCC's Trading Standards team is receiving an increased number of complaints about cold callers and leaflets for traders being put through the door, resulting in some reports of overcharging for work, charging for unnecessary work and completing work of poor quality. Jody Kerman, Head of Trading Standards at Oxfordshire County Council says: *"Don't agree to offers of building work, home repairs or maintenance that come from a cold call. Don't be afraid to say no, don't be pressured and check with others if the work is required and what is a fair price to pay. If it's out of the blue, it's not for you! I encourage people to 'take five' – stop and take a moment and think, do I really need this work done? Obtain other quotes and seek advice, and recommendations for trades people from friends and relatives. I would also encourage getting three quotes from different traders before you agree to any work being done."*

**CONTACT DETAILS**

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District Councillor Update: Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers

Ward member for Goring and South Stoke

Oct/Nov 2023



Dear Goring and South Stoke parish councillors and residents,

Please see below my latest set of updates. There are several new grants schemes for PCs and community groups so please do have a read and apply as early as possible.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

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### **New grant scheme opportunity for rural businesses and communities**

We have just launched a pot of funding available for rural businesses and organisations based in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse. The fund is designed to support capital projects for

small businesses and community infrastructure that help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities.

You can find out more about the fund and the eligibility criteria by visiting the [South Oxfordshire District Council website Rural England Prosperity Fund \(REPF\)](#) pages. The deadline for applications is **24 November** – please spread the word to any small businesses or organisations you know and encourage them to apply if they are eligible.

### **Online Forum about energy efficiency in Homes**

We are hosting a free online forum aimed at town and parish councils and community groups to help residents bring down their energy use and costs. There will be outside speakers and a Q&A session. It takes place on Tuesday 14 November at 6-7.15pm. To register for the event, people should email [climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk)

### **Grants available now to help look after local green spaces**

If you know a local volunteer group or organisation helping nature, they could be eligible for funding from us. We've teamed up with Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) to help communities protect and enhance their local green spaces and improve access for residents to benefit from being in nature. The next grant application deadline is midday 8 January 2024. If you've got an idea and want to give your project a boost, we recommend you have a quick chat with TOE before applying. Contact Rachel on [admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk)

### **Grant scheme for people without gas boilers**

Do you know of residents in properties without gas boilers? The good news is that they may be eligible for energy efficiency upgrades for their home, such as insulation, solar panels and heat pumps, all funded by the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2). These upgrades can help to reduce energy bills and make homes easier to keep warm. **The grants are available to homeowners and landlords whose properties are not heated by gas boilers, with a household income of less than £39,000 and with a low energy rating (D-G).** Spread the word and ask people to visit [welcomethewarmth.org.uk](http://welcomethewarmth.org.uk) to find out more.

### **Grant Scheme to support people stay warm and access essentials**

A new food and warmth grant will help support people in our communities this winter who may otherwise struggle to afford essential things. Launched by South Oxfordshire council, the grant is aimed at **local voluntary and community groups, and town and parish councils**, who can use it to support those most in need in the districts. Organisations can apply for grants **between £2,000 to £5,000**, or up to £10,000 for collaborative projects between groups of two or more organisations. The grant can fund projects providing food and warmth to people who may otherwise struggle to access these crucial essentials over the winter.

The grant can cover capital and revenue costs for projects that support people with food and warmth, such as buying food and essential supplies such as household cleaning products, toiletries,



hot water bottles and blankets and cooking equipment such as saucepans and slow cookers. Projects might also include cooking clubs, gardening clubs and educational activities that promote healthy food choices and saving energy.

The grant scheme opened week commencing 23 October 2023 and closes at midday **27 November 2023. Decisions are expected to be made within four weeks. For more information on the grant and details on how to apply go to our [website](#)**

Support is also available through the councils' Community Hub. If you need support, call our friendly Community Hub Team during office hours on 01235 422600 (option 3) or email [communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk)

#### **Health and Wellbeing Strategy webinar and consultation**

Healthwatch Oxfordshire is hosting a webinar on Thursday 9 November from 12.15-1.15pm to enable people to find out more about the draft Health and Wellbeing strategy. There will be an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on the draft strategy. The webinar panel will include Councillor Liz Leffman, Dr Sam Hart and David Munday. Visit the [Health Watch Oxfordshire](#) website to find out more.

Furthermore, Oxfordshire County Council are asking residents to comment on the new county wide draft health and wellbeing strategy. The survey is open until 12 November. A partnership across the county has worked on a strategy that gives power to our communities to help deliver what is needed to support people to make healthy choices, live independently and stay happier and healthier for longer.

[Get involved and have your say via the county council's website.](#)

#### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities service update**

Steps are being taken to improve the support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Oxfordshire following Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission's local area partnership inspection of SEND services in July.

Progress is already being made in improving the timeliness of education, health and care plans for those who need them. **As of September 2023, 48 per cent of assessments were being processed within statutory time frames compared with 4 per cent in January 2023.**

The local area partnership members – including Oxfordshire County Council, NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, and Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – have been working, together with the county's parent carer forum and professional subject matter leads, to develop a **priority action plan with clear and measurable service improvements.**

#### **Affordable housing grant to help address urgent need**

More affordable, energy efficient homes will be built in South Oxfordshire thanks to a new improved grant process. As part of the district council's work to help meet the urgent need for

genuinely affordable housing in the region, local developers, Community Land Trusts and self-builders can apply for a Section 106 **affordable housing grant to build affordable homes that meet the councils' climate criteria**.

The council approved an improvement to the existing affordable housing policy to enable funds from Section 106 developer contributions to be used as a grant to build affordable homes that are energy efficient and cheaper for residents to live in and heat. The policy includes a revamped application process which includes clear evaluation guidelines and free expert consultation services for applicants who would like additional guidance.

The new application form now includes questions which determine how projects will minimise energy use and carbon emissions, as well as how they have identified locally appropriate species and set up long term management plans if they are adding tree planting and biodiversity improvements.

For more information and the application forms, please visit – [the South Oxfordshire affordable housing page](#).

#### **Changes to postal and proxy voting**

A series of national changes were introduced on 31 October for postal and proxy voting, and our officers have prepared [this briefing note](#) for members to explain them in a bit more detail. The changes include new identity checking requirements, online applications, restrictions on the number of people a person can act as a proxy for and maximum periods for absent voter applications.

#### **Free carbon Emissions calculator tool**

We've launched a free simple-to-use carbon emissions calculator tool for town and parish councils to measure their current carbon emissions using energy and fuel bills. It makes it easy to work out where carbon and cost savings can be made.

For more information, email [climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk)