

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS APRIL 2024

FROM Cllr Nigel Simpson

GENERAL OCC REPORT

CRACKDOWN ON ANTI-DRIVER ROAD SCHEMES AND BLANKET 20MPH LIMITS

On 17 March the Department for Transport published draft statutory guidance for councils on low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs), setting out that they must gain buy-in from local residents, businesses and emergency services when considering implementing new LTN schemes. Local authorities are expected to follow the guidance and ensure local people support their plans. Recent examples where councils have implemented these schemes without public support have been shown to cause disruption and have unintended negative consequences. If local authorities fail to deliver sensible road schemes that work for local people they could see future funding withdrawn, and under powers from the Traffic Management Act, the government could ultimately take control of an authority's roads where they are deemed to be widely mismanaged. Separately, councils have received strengthened guidance on setting 20mph speed limits, reminding them to reserve them for sensible and appropriate areas only – such as outside schools – and with safety and local support at the heart of the decision. Local authorities are expected to consider this guidance, and as with the LTN guidance, this could have implications for the awarding of funding in the future.

OXFORD ZERO EMISSION ZONE PILOT RAISES OVER £700,000 IN FIRST YEAR

OCC has announced that the Oxford city Zero Emissions Zone pilot generated £702,940 income from charges and fines over its first full financial year of operation. Critics have labelled this 'pay to pollute' scheme a policy failure but a financial success.

WORKPLACE PARKING TAX

The County Council administration is planning to introduce a tax of £600 per parking space on all organisations with more than ten parking spaces in the city of Oxford. In addition to businesses, schools and other public organisations are likely to be hard hit. This matter is back in the news as BMW has controversially been exempted from the tax as it is just outside the Oxford ring road
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd14mrk2yn3o>

WALKING AND CYCLING IN COUNTY TO GET £2.4M ACTIVE TRAVEL INVESTMENT

Oxfordshire is to benefit from £2.384 million awarded by Active Travel England – the UK government agency responsible for making walking, wheeling and cycling the preferred choice for everyone to get around in England. The funding has been awarded as part of the fourth phase of the [active travel bidding](#) process (active travel

tranche 4). Oxfordshire County Council has previously been awarded grants of £600,000 from phase one, £2.98m from phase two and £10.4m from phase three. As with previous active travel awards, the money is to be invested in supporting specific projects intended to improve walking and cycling infrastructure in the county. I am currently working with the OCC active travel team to deliver a safe cycling route linking Kidlington with Woodstock to the North and Oxford City to the South.

LATE NIGHT OPENING AT RECYCLING CENTRES TO END

A reminder that Oxfordshire's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) will no longer stay open late nights on Thursdays. The seven centres, operated by OCC, had previously opened until 8pm every Thursday between April and September. However, the extra service is being discontinued this year.

PLANS TO SPEND £2.23M EXPANDING SEND SCHOOL IN OXFORD APPROVED

Funding to expand a school that caters for children from Oxfordshire with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has been approved by the county council's cabinet.

A total of £2.23 million was approved by councillors at the 19 March meeting of cabinet to create 23 new places at Mabel Prichard Special School in Oxford. The school provides education and support for pupils with a range of severe learning difficulties and is managed by The Gallery Trust. The school is co-located with Orchard Meadow Primary School. It is also an academy and is managed by United Learning. It is proposed that Orchard Meadow Primary School will relocate its foundation stage accommodation into surplus space elsewhere on site, enabling the provision of the additional school places for children with SEND.

OXFORDSHIRE AWARDED £3.6M TO TRIPLE PUBLIC ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING

Oxfordshire will receive £3.6 million to triple its number of public electric vehicle (EV) chargers after the county's Local EV Infrastructure (LEVI) bid was approved. Money from the [Department for Transport](#) will seed fund a major rollout of infrastructure worth over £10m that will see more than 1,300 public chargers delivered in the county by the end of 2025. The rest of the funding will largely come in the form of investment from the EV chargepoint operators themselves.

OCC led the application in close collaboration with Oxford City Council and Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils. The programme aims to create a reliable, easy-to-use, contactless EV charging network spanning the county. This will give more people the opportunity to switch to an EV – regardless of where they live or their parking situation.

OVERSEAS CARE RECRUITMENT

Care providers across the south-east of England are being offered access to a new, Oxfordshire designed, [international recruitment system](#), helping to reduce bureaucracy and costs when hiring staff from abroad. Following a £2.54 million

investment from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), OCC's innovation service has developed the initiative, which includes the creation of a portal for care providers. The portal offers support around complex areas such as immigration and compliance. The service has worked with care providers to better understand the challenges faced in overseas recruitment. The county council has now announced it will partner with Borderless, a technology company founded in 2022, to deliver and further develop the migration platform.

HOUSING PROGRAMME THAT SUPPORTS ADULTS WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Four adults with learning disabilities and autism are celebrating receiving the keys to their newly developed, specially adapted home in Witney. OCC has invested £5 million into the Resonance Supported Homes Fund that has bought and refurbished the property, in partnership with housing provider, Golden Lane Housing. The home is the first of five properties planned for Oxfordshire, providing person-centred housing for adults with additional needs, with four more due to open in Banbury, Bicester, Kidlington and Horspath later this year.

£7 million road resurfacing programme to begin next month

- **Surface dressing will improve nearly 100 Oxfordshire roads in more than 50 towns and villages to help prevent potholes**

Nearly 100 roads across Oxfordshire will be improved as part of a £7 million highway maintenance programme beginning this spring.

Oxfordshire County Council and its contractor Milestone Infrastructure Ltd will be visiting more than 50 locations between 8 April and 3 June to carry out surface dressing work. The programme is part-funded by the government, with £2.629 million coming from the Department for Transport's road resurfacing fund.

Around one million square metres of carriageway will be treated, making it the biggest surface dressing programme undertaken in Oxfordshire for at least 20 years.

Motorcycle safety training coming to Kidlington and Thame

Motorcyclists are being encouraged to sign-up for specialist training sessions, designed to improve their safety awareness and riding skills.

The Be a Better Biker workshops are provided as part of road casualty reduction work by Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service and neighbouring local authorities.

Training covers a range of advanced techniques including:

- Manoeuvring
- Overtaking
- Cornering techniques
- An on-road assessment with a qualified observer
- A review of the on-road session.

The next sessions will take place at Kidlington Fire Station on Saturday 13 April and Saturday 11 May, and at Thame Fire Station on Saturday 27 April.

Andy Ford, from **Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service's community safety team**, said: "Whether you are a relatively new biker, returning to motorcycling after a break or a rider who has years of experience, our Be a Better Biker workshops are suited to all.

"The day includes classroom-based learning and a two hour practical ride out, where participants will develop skills to become better, safer riders."

Anyone wishing to take part must hold a full and valid motorbike licence and have access to their own vehicle to use during the course.

For more information, including booking fee and how to reserve a place, visit the [book a motorbike course website](#).

Cherwell District Council

First hour's parking free at Castle Quay throughout April

People are encouraged to visit Banbury town centre and benefit from a free parking trial at Castle Quay as the council seeks to provide a boost for shoppers and businesses.

People will get their first hour's parking free during April, every day of the week, at all Castle Quay car parks. The initiative builds on a previous, successful free parking offer run by Cherwell District Council at Castle Quay during the Christmas holiday period and new year.

Get ready to vote as registration deadline nears

North Oxfordshire residents who are not yet registered to vote are reminded that the deadline to register for the May elections is just a few days away.

On Thursday, 2 May, electors will go to the polls to vote for local councillors and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for the Thames Valley area. The deadline to register to vote is Tuesday, 16 April.

Those already registered to vote at their current address do not need to re-register. But anyone who has moved home since they last registered to vote, changed their name, or recently turned 18 must register to vote before midnight on 16 April.

Gordon Stewart, Returning Officer, said: “Registering to vote only takes five minutes. The council elections are an important opportunity for people to have their say on who is representing them in their communities. To have your say on 2 May, make sure you are registered to vote before midnight on 16 April.”

To vote at a polling station, people must show a photo ID. This includes a passport, a driving licence, specific travel cards, and many other options. People can [visit the Electoral Commission website](#) to find out which IDs are accepted.

Voters without one of the accepted types of ID [can apply for free ID online](#) or by completing and submitting a paper form to the council. These voters must apply by 5pm on 24 April to use their Voter Authority Certificates on 2 May.

Voters can vote in person, by post, or by appointing someone they trust to vote in their place, known as a proxy vote. The deadline to apply for a postal vote is 5pm on 17 April. The deadline to apply for a proxy vote is one week later, at 5pm on 24 April.

In addition to the district council and PCC elections, one-third of parish and town councils have elections, and in the parish of Deddington, there is a referendum on a new Neighbourhood Plan.

Electors can now [see who is standing](#) in district and contested parish council elections on Cherwell District Council’s website. They can also access a range of helpful information about voting at a polling station, the [voter ID requirement](#) and [postal and proxy voting](#).

Bicester Market Square transformation takes its next step forward

Cherwell District Council has appointed WSP, an expert in town centre regeneration, to help develop plans to rejuvenate Bicester Market Square.

WSP has vast experience in placemaking projects, most recently Hanover Square in London, and community consultations to harness the views and knowledge of the local community to shape successful projects.

Earlier this year, the council’s Bicester project team took a stall at the Friday market to meet residents and businesses, tell them more about the Bicester Market Square project and determine their priorities.

Some 296 people visited the stall and feedback from this informal engagement will provide context to WSP, who will engage with businesses, residents, and the wider community to help create ambitious proposals.

Over the coming months, they will extensively study the town centre, looking at parking, traffic flows, and pedestrian-friendly elements. A formal consultation will help finalise designs and plans later in 2024 following this work.

Ian Boll, Corporate Director for Communities, said: "We have the right partners in WSP to help rejuvenate Bicester town centre. We will work with them to continue listening to our local businesses and residents and understanding their aspirations for the market square. During our time at the Friday market, we heard from many who welcomed changes and from those who had concerns. We recognise the need to build on this and ensure businesses in neighbouring streets and the surrounding areas are heard.

"We recently delivered letters to businesses surrounding market square to inform them and ask them to be involved, and we hope to hear from many of them. We understand the importance of this regeneration project, and we will work with local businesses, residents, and the wider community to ensure we have a town centre that meets the needs of Bicester now and in the future."

Temporary Traffic Regulation Notice – S14 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 Temporary Road Closure at Kirtlington, Akeman Street

A request has been received from Morrison Water Services for a temporary road closure to apply to a length of Akeman Street, whilst essential utility repair and maintenance works are carried out.

A temporary Notice is being made by Oxfordshire County Council to implement the temporary restriction and will operate from 25 June 2024 up to and including 29 June 2024, 24 hours per day.

Please note that Notices for urgent works can last up to 5 consecutive days only.

A copy of the drawing showing the extent of the closure and also the alternative routes for traffic is attached.

Further information regarding the works may be obtained by contacting Sharon Peterson at Morrison Water Services on email sharon.paterson@morrisonws.com