

# REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS JANUARY 2025

FROM CLLR NIGEL SIMPSON

## Cherwell District Council

### Cherwell local plan 2042

The Cherwell local plan consultation is open for comments from residents. Comments need to be submitted by 11.59pm on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

[Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042 - Cherwell District Council - Citizen Space](#)

### Bodicote House to Castle Quay move.

Following a competitive tendering process, the council has appointed the workspace specialists as its main contractor.

The company is converting the former BHS and Gap shop units into modern offices. Workplace Creations has previously completed several public sector relocation projects and office conversions in shopping centres.

## Oxfordshire County Council

### RESIDENTS' SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the OCC "Residents' Satisfaction Survey" have just been published. It shows disappointment in rural areas, while residents the city of Oxford are more content.

Key points are:

- Overall satisfaction with council below Local Government Association average
- 32% believes the council provides value for money
- Oxford residents are far happier with the council than those in rural areas
- 57% of residents believe the council doesn't keep them well-informed
- 43% of residents are satisfied with council services (this is boosted by higher levels of satisfaction in Oxford)
- Maintenance of roads is rated by 68% of residents as the council's most important service, but does not feature in the list of council priorities (see below)
- Only 14% of residents are satisfied with the council's level of road maintenance
- Road maintenance is far more important to residents than anything else (apart from in the city of Oxford)

- The level of satisfaction with the local area as a place to live has declined from 84% in 2021 to 72% in 2024
- Residents were asked to give feedback on the council's nine priorities, but they were given no opportunity to say that the priorities were wrong e.g. road maintenance should be a priority
- OCC's no.1 priority is Climate Change, and in 2021 38% of residents agreed with this, but that has now fallen to 18%
- The clear message is residents want day-to-day practical matters (particularly roads) prioritised over ideological objectives – just 3% of the council's annual spend currently goes on 'Highway Maintenance'

As a reminder, OCC's nine priorities are:

1. Put the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
2. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
3. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
4. Support carers and the social care system.
5. Invest in inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport.
6. Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.
7. Create opportunities for children and young people.
8. Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.
9. Work with businesses/partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

There is a perception in rural areas that the city of Oxford receives favourable treatment. Net satisfaction figures with respect to the way OCC runs things add weight to this:

- Oxford 36%
- Cherwell 14%
- South Oxfordshire 14%
- Vale of White Horse 10%
- West Oxfordshire 6%
- 

## **PENSION FUND DIVESTS FROM TOBACCO, THERMAL COAL AND TAR SANDS**

Investments into companies that derive significant revenues from thermal coal, tar sands and tobacco production have been excluded from investments by the county's Pension Fund Committee, which is hosted by OCC with representatives from other organisations as members.

## **[Experience Oxfordshire data provides insight into the recovery of Oxfordshire's visitor economy](#)**

Recent data published by Experience Oxfordshire, the county's Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) and destination management organisation, show the

volume of visitors and the value of tourism within Oxfordshire grew in line with inflation during 2023 indicating a steady journey towards post-pandemic recovery.

**The Economic Impact of Tourism in Oxfordshire (2023)** report, commissioned by Experience Oxfordshire, shows a 7% rise in both the volume and value of the sector when compared to 2022, with its value rising to £2.3 billion; a contribution to the local economy created by some 28.4 million visitor trips. Tourism accounts for 39,399 jobs, 10% of the county's total employment.

The rise in volume and value indicate that Oxfordshire is following the national pattern, seeing a growth in the number of international visitors to the UK and a drop in the number of UK residents taking trips at home when compared to 2022, which was a particularly good year for domestic tourism.

2023 was a year in which the rising cost of living and a 7% average rate of inflation continued to impact on real tourism growth. Overall visitor numbers to Oxfordshire in 2023 are still 8% down on 2019, and 9% down in real-term value. The number of overnight trips made by international visitors was up 9% at 784,000 (up 2% on 2019); in comparison the number of overnight stays by UK residents dropped 5% to 1.5 million, (28% down on 2019).

The majority of overnights stays, 59%, were spent in paid accommodation with 41% of visitors staying with friends and family. Of trips made to the county 49% were for holidays, (down 3% of share from 2022 share, with business visits rising to 25% of total trips made. The largest proportion of visitor expenditure, 32%, was on food and drink, with shopping accounting for 23% and accommodation for 22%.

Of the Oxfordshire districts, Cherwell, home to Bicester Village and Banbury's Castle Quay Waterfront, received the largest proportion of trips made to the county during 2023 (26%).

## **RESIDENTS TO BE COMPELLED TO PRE-BOOK VISITS TO HWRCS**

OCC is to introduce a booking system for residents visiting the county's [seven household waste recycling centres](#) (HWRCS), thus people will no longer be able visit the sites without pre-booking. Cllr Pete Sudbury, Deputy Leader of OCC made the decision on 14<sup>th</sup> November, at his cabinet member's decision meeting. OCC maintains there is no evidence that the introduction of booking systems will lead to an increase in fly-tipping.

## **FREE BUS TRAVEL FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS IN OXFORD**

OCC is to partner with Asylum Welcome to instigate a six-month pilot scheme to enable free bus travel for asylum seekers accommodated within the city of Oxford. Asylum seekers stay free in hotels and are entitled to a weekly allowance. OCC has been working on the free travel scheme with local organisation Asylum Welcome following the decision made by the OCC Cabinet back in June that it should become a Council of Sanctuary. It is calculated that around 275 asylum

seeking people accommodated within Oxford would be eligible. The pilot scheme will cost around £31,000.

## **MEN ENCOURAGED TO GET THEIR FREE NHS HEALTH CHECK**

Men over 40 are being encouraged to get their free NHS health check. The free Oxfordshire County Council funded health check can lower a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and (certain types of) dementia. NHS health checks are funded by the county council's public health team, which exists to improve the health of local people and protect them from preventable health issues – helping local residents live safe and healthy lives and play an active role in their communities. Everyone eligible, aged 40 to 74 in England, will be invited for a free NHS health check once every five years (apart from those already seeing their GP for certain conditions).

## **HIF1 PLANNING INQUIRY COSTS £29M**

The result of the public inquiry into plans for a £269million road scheme (HIF1) has been announced. The proposals include creating a dual carriageway on the A4130 from the A34 Milton Interchange towards Didcot, new bridges and a Clifton Hampden bypass. In July 2023, [Michael Gove called in the planning application](#) after OCC applied to itself for planning permission but the OCC planning committee refused it – despite recommendations from officers that it should be approved. Local government minister Matthew Pennycook has now approved the application. The costs associated with both the CPO and Planning Public Inquiries are estimated to be around £1m. This figure does not include the inspector costs, which are not yet known. The inflationary increase of the construction works due to the delay in commencement is estimated to be 15%, which equates to approximately £28m.

## **OCC AIMS TO GO BEYOND NET ZERO BY REMOVING CARBON EMISSIONS**

OCC has become the first local authority in the UK to set a target of going beyond net zero when it comes to carbon emissions. The council's Cabinet has committed itself to extending the current carbon neutral target for its own estate and move into carbon dioxide removal. The cost of this initiative to the Council Tax payer is £110,000 (including 'carbon offsets'). Critics claim residents are being short-changed by the council going way beyond its remit and mistakenly positioning itself as a climate change leader, and that it should get back to basics and deliver better services to residents.

## **PIZZA, POLITICS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS**

More than 40 young people from across the county came together in November to talk politics and enjoy some pizza, as part of OCC's Future Generations Fortnight. The session was open to all in Oxfordshire aged 11 to 18. It aimed to help them get an understanding of local democracy and encourage them to get involved in politics.

## **SUPPORT FOR OXFORDSHIRE FARMERS**

An Opposition motion in support of Oxfordshire farmers was passed at Full Council on 10 December. The Leader will now write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ask that introduction of the family farm taxes be reconsidered for the sake of environmental protection and food security.

## **OXFORD TRAFFIC MEASURES TO BE QUESTIONED**

A motion as amended by the Opposition was passed at Full Council on 10 December that called for the establishment of a resident & business group to be set up to consider the impact of the proposed traffic measures that could cost Oxfordshire motorists £57m over five years.