

# COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2014 – APRIL 2015

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## THE ANNUAL BUDGET

On the 17<sup>th</sup> February, Oxfordshire County Council met to discuss and agree its annual budget. From 2010 to the end of 2015, the council will have achieved savings of £204 million, and savings are set to reach £292 million. The Council relies on grants from Central Government and with the Chancellor of the Exchequer indicating a further £49 billion reduction for Whitehall departments; Councillors expect a need for further savings.

With this in mind, the Authority has decided that the council tax will rise but that it will be kept low at 1.99%, equivalent to 46p a week for a Band D property. We have also begun investigating the potential for savings from a Unitary Authority and agreed to remove the position of Chief Executive as soon as this is legally possible. The County Council has reduced the number of directors by 50% and senior management by 40% alongside an overall staff reduction of 30% but we remain committed to delivering the Living Wage for our lowest paid staff.

We are fortunate to have a real boost to the transport network and economic growth from the investment of millions of pounds in the City Deal and work with our partners at the Local Enterprise Partnership.

All Councillors have listened to comments from stakeholders and the Leader and Cabinet have been as transparent as possible with opposition leaders and taken on board comments from the Performance Scrutiny Committee. Following consultation, Councillors have decided to reinstate the £70,000 required for Community Action Groups.

## STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN AND GROWTH DEAL

Last May the County Council with the Local Enterprise Partnership and the district councils submitted Oxfordshire's Strategic Economic Plan to the Government. It is a vision for the local area to 2030 identifying the opportunities for growth based on clear evidence. It also highlights the barriers to growth and what action is required to remove them. The plan has determined the level of investment we have secured from the competitive Local Growth Fund.

In February the Oxfordshire Growth Deal was announced. It will see at least **£108.6 million invested in Oxfordshire** with £15.7 million confirmed in the first year. In addition, as part of the Government's on-going commitment to the Oxfordshire LEP, it has provided an indicative award of a further £92.9million of funding from 2016/17 onwards. This Deal will help to create up to 5,700 jobs, allow over 4,000 homes to be built and generate over £100m in public and private investment.

The key features of the deal are:

- Investing in substantial measures to **reduce the risk of flooding**, so that businesses can continue to operate, roads and railway lines are kept clear and people can be confident that their homes and businesses won't be damaged;
- Investing jointly with the University of Oxford in a new Centre for Applied Superconductivity, which will bring university professors and entrepreneurs together

to **collaborate on exciting developments in fields as diverse as computing, cryogenics, x-rays and MRI scanning and electricity storage;**

- Investing with the City of Oxford College, and Abingdon and Witney College, in **state-of-the-art skills centres** that will train local people in science, engineering and technology, providing them with the skills they need to get a job;
- Significant investment in **better transport links** including roads, parking and cycling networks – joining up Oxfordshire’s world class universities with its businesses and helping people get to where they need to be faster;
- Additional investment into the Oxfordshire Growth Hub to **help local businesses** access support and make the connections they need to grow.

The Oxfordshire Growth Deal is part of a **national £12 billion long-term programme to revitalise local economies**. The deals are the latest and greatest example of the British economy being rebuilt from the bottom up, and sharing the benefits of the recovery around the country. Local businesses and council leaders have been invited to open discussions immediately on the next set of projects to be funded, building on the momentum that has been established.

## **NEW TRI-COUNTY COUNCIL ALLIANCE TO BOLSTER GROWTH**

On 16<sup>th</sup> December, the Leaders of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, jointly signed a bold offer to Government to unlock further economic growth and significantly build on the £45 billion value of goods and services that the area already generates. In the offer, called 'A shared approach to driving prosperity', the three councils call on the Government to work with them to develop a brand new 'combined authority' alliance focused on their common economies of innovation, science, technology and creative industries. There is no intention of merging councils, however if this is successful then we may look at other common areas to work together to be more efficient.

## **CONNECTING OXFORDSHIRE, LTP4: CREATING 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY TRANSPORT**

Connecting Oxfordshire, a consultation document, set out the council’s ambitions for transport improvements across the county to 2031. The plan features a range of short, medium and long term solutions for road, rail, bus, cycle and foot, which have been shaped by discussions over the last year. This includes the Oxford Transport Strategy, which sets out ambitious plans for transport in and around Oxford city, including looking at mass transit solutions like rapid bus services along strategic routes, integrating transport modes by transforming the park and ride network and making it easier to cycle by introducing cycle super routes across the city.

There are also strategies aimed at all the main conurbations across the county including Witney, Bicester and Banbury as well as plans for the Science Vale and key strategic routes like the A40 and A420. The public debate on Connecting Oxfordshire fed into the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) and helped to ensure we have a transport system that enables residents to move around the county efficiently.

The plan includes a significant new road scheme at Clifton Hampden. It is proposed to build a road north from Didcot across the Thames to join the B4015 in front of the Culham Science Centre. This will join the A4074 at the Golden Balls roundabout, providing Clifton Hampden with a badly needed bypass.

On 27<sup>th</sup> January, the Cabinet of the County Council approved the Local Transport Plan (LTP4). It was sent out to further consultation between February and April. The plan will support the ambitions for

the county up to 2031, before which an expected 100,000 new homes and 85,000 new jobs are likely to be created.

## **FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Following the major flooding in 2007, the Pitt Review recommended that a single authority should be responsible for managing flood risk in local areas. This was endorsed by subsequent legislation, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, under which Oxfordshire County Council became the Lead Local Flood Authority for the County. The County Council went out for consultation on the strategy from June.

## **LAUNCH OF OXFORD STATION MASTERPLAN**

A masterplan for Oxford Station was launched on Thursday 24 July, setting out a long-term vision for major improvements to the station and surrounding area. The ambition of the plan is to create an exemplary gateway to the city that meets Oxford's long-term rail needs and acts as a focus for investment. The proposals call for higher quality public space, in and around the station and significant changes to accommodate the expected increase in rail passenger numbers over the next few years. The main features include: a new station building, new rail track and platforms, a transport interchange - including bus station and multi-story car park, development opportunities, better cycle facilities and improvements to Botley Road bridge. Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council and Network Rail are working together to develop the masterplan, in conjunction with the Department for Transport and First Great Western. The County Council's redevelopment of Frideswide's Square is already well advanced.

## **ROAD PROJECTS AROUND OXFORDSHIRE**

During the year the County Council has had a number of projects taking place. We try to minimise disruption as much as possible, but sometimes are restricted as to when we can do work (for example where Central Government funding has a time limit placed upon it). We assess the entire county's road network based on surface condition and vehicle usage so that we can get the best value for money from our limited funds. Much of the work will provide significant improvements that are expected to increase capacity and reduce journey times.

### **▪ KENNINGTON & HINKSEY HILL ROUNDABOUT**

The improvements to Kennington and Hinksey Hill roundabouts is a £6 million project that is designed to increase capacity by 30 per cent in the evening peak period for the 60,000 vehicles a day which pass through the junctions. The work was completed by the end of November 2014.

### **▪ DUCKLINGTON STAGE OF WITNEY TRANSPORT STRATEGY**

The Ducklington Lane corridor is the first phase of the Witney transport strategy and we have resurfaced Corn Street, and a large section of the B4044 Farmoor Road.

### **▪ A4130 BIX MAINTENANCE PROJECT**

The A4130 Bix maintenance project is a 2.5km section of dual carriageway located just north of Henley-on-Thames between Bix Village and Fair Mile at the junction of the B480 to Lower Assendon.

- **OXFORD CITY**

Work to redevelop **Frideswide Square** to improve the junction ahead of the new station and Westgate development is well advanced. As part of the Cycle City bid work at **The Plain** to improve the junction is also near to completion.

- **MILTON INTERCHANGE**

Major project work on the Milton Interchange and Chilton A34 Junction now under way will help to improve traffic flow along the A34.

- **A420 AT SHRIVENHAM**

The £3.5 million resurfacing of the A420 at Shrivenham was completed a week early.

- **A44 (NR WOODSTOCK)**

The recent work on the A44 will extend the life of the road for several more years.

## **COUNCIL WINS £12.9M FOR HIGHWAY DRAINAGE & STREETLIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS**

Oxfordshire County Council has been successful in bidding for £12.9m of Government money to improve street lighting, road drainage and carriageway condition in the county. The Council is one of 31 across the country to bid for one-off major infrastructure schemes. As part of the bidding process the council had to guarantee £1.6m of funding from its own budgets – **taking the total spending to £14.5m**. Some of the money will be spent on reviewing and **replacing Oxfordshire's older street-lighting with more modern streetlights** between 2015 and 2018. **Highway drainage will also be improved** in various parts of the county – which will in turn make road surfaces more resilient to poor weather and potentially lead to savings. Road edges will be strengthened where necessary.

The Council will also use the money to **install Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDs) systems that allow water to drain away from roads more quickly**. An example of SUDs is the use of swales – which have already been installed in some new developments in the county. Swales are shallow drainage channels with gentle side slopes in the ground where water running off sites, including roads, can collect and soak away. The council will now further develop a programme of work in line with its recently reviewed Highways Asset Management Plan.

## **OXFORD ASPIRES TO HOST FIRST WIRELESS ELECTRIC BUS PROJECT**

Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council are excited to announce a commitment to work on **a joint study for an innovative Wireless Electric Bus project**. Working in partnership with Oxford Bus Company, MBK Arup Sustainable Projects (MASP), and sister company eFleet Integrated Service (eFIS), the plan is to trial the use of double decker buses that can be wirelessly charged.

MASP, a joint venture company between Mitsui & Co., Ltd, and Ove Arup & Partners Ltd., and enabling company eFIS **have successfully implemented an electric single deck bus trial in Milton Keynes**. There is now a vision for all parties to study the technical and commercial feasibility of replacing the existing busy Park and Ride buses in Oxford with a fleet of around 20 new electric vehicles. **The buses will have zero tail pipe emissions and will be the first double decker vehicles of their kind to operate in the UK**. The new electric buses will recharge their batteries wirelessly during their working day. Power transmitted from a coil buried in the road at the Park and Ride stops will be picked up by a similar coil on the underside of each bus. Ten minutes parked over a coil will replenish the energy needed to run each bus for the day.

## **MINERALS & WASTE CORE STRATEGY**

**Affecting Dorchester, Warborough, Clifton Hampden, Burcot, Stadhampton, Chiselhampton, Newington, Drayton St Leonard, Berinsfield and Nuneham Courtenay.**

On November 25<sup>TH</sup> the County Council's Cabinet resolved to approve the proposed re-drafted Local Plan Core Strategy Document and the Local Area Assessment. It was not a unanimous decision. I abstained because I share the concern of many people who came to speak at the meeting from across the County over one particular, but crucial point. The new planning guidelines require us to conduct a Local Area Assessment of the amount of sharp sand and gravel extracted over the past 10 years to achieve a rolling average figure as the basis for calculating the amount we will have to extract up until 2030. If you do this the required amount for Oxfordshire would be 0.715 mtpa (million tonnes per annum). But the figure proposed and agreed was 1015mtpa, an increase of 42%. The reasons given were: special local circumstances that produced low levels of demand during the recession that led to the mothballing of pits, and the new housing figures in the SHMA (Strategic Housing Market Assessment). 100,000 new homes plus new infrastructure spread across the county will need gravel, but not immediately, and not all at once. A rolling average is designed to take care of fluctuations in demand. There was an opportunity here to just use the 10 year average figure which would have meant that it would be highly unlikely that any new pits would be needed during the life of the plan.

The residents of Clifton Hampden and Burcot are actively campaigning against an imminent planning application for a large gravel pit between Clifton Hampden and the river along the A415 up to the railway line. Here is a very real demonstration of how important it is to get a Minerals Plan in place. The success or failure of this application will depend upon the operators proving there is unmet demand in the County. The County Council rightly wishes to get a Plan adopted as soon as possible. But it will be up to a Government Inspector to decide the soundness of the new Plan which will be submitted in April 2015.

## **MINERALS & WASTE PLAN APPROVED**

The Minerals and Waste Core Strategy was approved by the County Council on 24<sup>th</sup> March. This was a huge setback for our local community groups, PAGE and BACHPORT who have fought a valiant campaign against it, mainly on the grounds that the Local Area Assessment (how much gravel has to be dug by the county each year) was still too high, and that the Council had failed to consult local residents on the final methodology they used to calculate it. Cllr Lynda Atkins put in an amendment which would have seen the figure substantially reduced. I supported this amendment and spoke in favour of it. Unfortunately on the day we were three votes short. Before it can be adopted the plan must go before an Inspector at an examination in public. This will provide local protestors with another opportunity to challenge the proposal. It will be up to the Inspector to decide.

## **GRENOBLE ROAD, THE GREEN BELT**

Hardly a day goes by without someone from the City Council taking up pages of newsprint to tell us why they need to develop 4,000 houses over the Oxford Green Belt at Grenoble Road. Meanwhile the debate over housing numbers rages on between the four District Councils and the City, who are unwilling to absorb thousands of extra homes that the City say they can't build. Until this argument is settled the County Council can only watch and wait. We oppose the City's plan for Grenoble Road for technical reasons, but we have to provide the infrastructure once we know where houses are going to be built. It would all be so much easier if Oxfordshire were a unitary authority. However, as every council concerned would have to agree, that looks unlikely unless it was imposed upon us by central government.

## **OXFORDSHIRE STRATEGY FOR CULTURE, HERITAGE AND TOURISM**

As residents in the county, the cultural and heritage sector provides us with so much to enjoy, it makes Oxfordshire the place it is and why we like to live and work here. It also contributes about £1.3 billion to our local economy through tourism and associated trades.

The County Council together with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership has recognised this considerable contribution and has embarked on the development of an overarching plan which will feed into the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan. It will allow organisations in the sector to respond quickly to opportunities and identify how and why culture, heritage and tourism encourage opportunities for economic growth. The plan will be used to support future bids for the funding of projects and programmes that deliver economic growth, jobs and investment in Oxfordshire. I'm delighted to be in a position to drive this project forward with the LEP, and look forward to becoming involved with all kinds of projects, people and programmes from across the County.

## **MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE CONSULTATION**

In September the County Council reviewed our mobile library service and found that whilst the service is clearly valued, many of the stops we currently offer are not very well used, and some are not used at all. After a three month consultation with users the service was redesigned, cutting out unused stops and staying longer in popular places and the larger villages. Everybody who currently uses our mobile library service will continue to receive a level of provision. It may however be offered in a different way.

## **Hundreds of volunteers now working in Oxfordshire libraries**

More than 500 volunteers are now working in Oxfordshire's libraries and our three-year plan is now in place for all 21 of the county's community supported libraries to have volunteers by April 2015. As part of budget savings the County Council has had to make across all of its services since 2010, the council decided in 2011 to save £270,000 by introducing volunteers to 21 of its 43 libraries by April 2015. Some of the 21 libraries, known as community supported libraries, have or will see an equal number of hours delivered by volunteers and county council library service staff, while others will have or already have two thirds library service staff and one third volunteers.

## **ACADEMIC RESEARCH OPEN TO ALL COUNTY RESIDENTS**

The County Council's library service has joined forces with the Publishers Licensing Society and Society of Chief Librarians leading to the computers at all 43 of Oxfordshire's libraries being linked up to a system that allows online access to research of many varieties. Called "Access to Research", the service offers access to research literature on art, architecture, business, engineering, history, languages, politics, philosophy, mathematics and the sciences, medicine and health and social sciences.

## **PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES**

Almost 90 per cent of children (89.09%) due to start primary school in September have been offered a place at their first-preference school – despite a large increase in the number of applications received by the County Council. Significant efforts to increase primary school capacity in Oxfordshire have been made in recent years, with permanent expansions at

many schools. Since 2009 the Council has added around 1,000 new reception places at schools across the county.

## **EXAM RESULTS**

### **'A' LEVELS**

Thousands of students received their 'A' level results on 14<sup>th</sup> August. Provisional data shows that results are similar to 2013 with 93% achieving at A\*-E in at least two or more subjects. Around 43% have achieved two or more 'A' levels at A\*-B. Confirmed results are always published later in the year.

### **GCSES**

On 21<sup>st</sup> August more than 6000 Oxfordshire students received their GCSE results. The Government has introduced a number of changes to the system so the County Council will only be able to provide the A\*-C percentage after the results are verified in the autumn. At this stage the council has received a mix of results from schools and academies, with some reporting their 'best results', and others reporting results based only on 'first exams' taken.

## **ADULT SOCIAL CARE GRANT**

Thanks to a successful bid by the County Council, we have been granted £459k to expand and develop social care in Oxfordshire. It will be spent on a range of initiatives designed to enhance social care delivery locally, including the establishment of a behaviour-based recruitment pilot and training on assistive technology that will allow people to be cared for in their own homes for longer rather than being admitted to a care home.

## **THRIVING FAMILIES INITIATIVE**

Latest Government figures show the 'Thriving Families' scheme run by the County Council has turned around the lives of more than 400 families in Oxfordshire – continuing to place the county among the best performing local areas. This is known nationally as the Troubled Families programme and has been set up to turn around 120,000 troubled families nationwide by March 2015.

New figures show the programme, in which a dedicated worker is assigned to each family to give hands-on support, has brought about positive outcomes for 444 of Oxfordshire's most troubled families, by tackling problems such as crime and antisocial behaviour, poor school attendance and unemployment. This means more than half (55 per cent) of the 700 families the council has worked with so far, have turned their lives around. This is well above the national average of 33 per cent. This success rate makes the county third best across the South East region, with only West Berkshire and Southampton recording a higher percentage, albeit having worked with fewer families than Oxfordshire, 116 and 685 families respectively, compared to our 700 families. The council has invested £1.6million in the scheme and Oxfordshire is trialling a DCLG Cost Benefit Analysis tool, the only Shire County to do so, which shows that for every pound invested the Thriving Families Team saves the public purse £3.22.

## **SERIOUS CASE REVIEW INTO CHILD EXPLOITATION**

Oxfordshire County Council fully accepts the findings of the serious case review into child sexual exploitation and apologises that the child protection system failed to prevent horrific abuse of six girls. The Independent Serious Case Review into Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire was published today (Tuesday 3 March 2015) by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board. The serious case review followed a trial in 2013 in which seven men were imprisoned for a total of 95 years for their crimes which took place from 2005-2011. The conclusions of the report follow on from an inspection by children's services inspectorate Ofsted in 2014, which rated Oxfordshire's child protection system as 'good' and described its approach to tackling child sexual exploitation as 'high quality'.

Jim Leivers, Oxfordshire County Council's Director for Children, Education and Families, said: "If we knew then what we know now about the grooming process, this would have been stopped much sooner. Before Operation Bullfinch people didn't believe something this horrible could happen. We are under no illusions about child sexual exploitation now. This was organised crime on a massive scale that we had not seen before. Girls were systematically groomed to think their abusers were their boyfriends. Social workers tried to protect individuals, as the Serious Case Review acknowledges. However, in some cases children were treated as wayward teenagers consenting to sex. That was wholly wrong. Our whole approach has now changed – children are believed, we can spot the signs of grooming and sexual exploitation and the Kingfisher team embodies that huge change." In addition to setting up Kingfisher, other action taken to tackle child sexual exploitation in Oxfordshire includes:

- 7500 staff now trained to spot warning signs of CSE and take action – including police, teachers, care workers
- Around 18,000 school children seen drama about child sexual exploitation and discussed the risks of grooming in class
- School nurses in every secondary school with role in identifying children at risk
- Building four new children's homes to keep most vulnerable children in Oxfordshire

## PARISH NEWS

### BERINSFIELD

**40 mph Speed limit** - On March 2<sup>nd</sup> the long awaited 40mph speed limit signs were put up on all the approach roads to the Berinsfield roundabout. The campaign for this limit to be imposed has been a very long one on the part of the County Council, the Parish Council and the village residents. But it just goes to show that perseverance can pay! I hope everyone who uses the roundabout either by car, bike or on foot will now feel far safer than before.

A 40mph speed limit is a fundamental requirement before the Highways Department will consider putting in a pedestrian crossing. Now we have it, we can re-start the campaign for a pedestrian crossing. I know how much the village wants one, and as a result I was prepared to fund a crossing out of my Councillor's Budget. Sadly, that budget was cut back, and has now been completely withdrawn. So the challenge is on for all of us to find the money, which could be in the region of £35,000. I will do all I can to help.

**Cycle Way** - At a recent Localities meeting I was able to promote the proposed cycle way from Berinsfield to Oxford on behalf of the Parish Council to Richard Jeremy, one of OCC's strategic planning officers who is directly involved with the development of the Local Transport Plan. He confirmed that it was not too late to get the scheme included into the plan by responding to the consultation which went out in February and closed in April.

**Day Centre** - The County Council is due to transfer our Adult Learning Service out to Abingdon and Witney College on 1<sup>st</sup> June. We have now agreed that The Union Cowley, Kidlington, Berinsfield, Banbury, Grove and Blackbird Leys centres will definitely transfer. The Berinsfield Day Centre's lease



with OCC Adult Learning will transfer to the College so they can operate as normal and expect no changes to their arrangement.

### **STADHAMPTON**

**65 Houses application** - I responded to the consultation on the planning application for 65 houses on land to the East of Newington Road, Stadhampston. I strongly oppose this development on the grounds that it would cause a dangerous escalation of traffic on the A329 which is a narrow country lane, already used as a rat run to the M40. It would also have serious implications for the County Council who is still responsible for the provision of school places. Stadhampston Primary School would have to be permanently enlarged to cope with the probable extra number of children. Both Icknield Community College and Lord Williams Academy would also need extra provision. A detailed response from OCC departments dealing with traffic, public transport, education, housing numbers, archaeological impact, library provision and waste management issues has been submitted. The Council would require the developer to provide Section 106 money in the region of £462,364.00 for the educational uplifts alone.

**New Village Hall** - I was able to donate £1,893.0 from my Community Budget towards improving access to information and signage about the new Village Hall. I hope it helps people find their way around, and to park with consideration for others.

### **CLIFTON HAMPDEN**

**New Infrastructure** - After much lobbying it's good that The Science Vale transport strategy in LTP4 contains a key new scheme, involving a new road north from Didcot, an additional Thames river crossing, joining the B4015 close to the access to Culham Science Centre and providing a direct link up to the A4074 at the Golden Balls roundabout. This new road would provide Clifton Hampden with a desperately needed bypass. The scheme would help to provide an additional link from south to north between the Science Vale and Oxford, in particular the major employment areas of Oxford in the Eastern Arc, as well as providing an alternative route to the A34. Improvements to access to the Culham Science Centre through increased connectivity by bus and cycle are also included.

### **SANDFORD ON THAMES**

**Village Hall** - I was delighted to attend the official opening of the newly enlarged Sandford Village Hall on 10<sup>th</sup> January. This very ambitious project was envisaged and delivered by the residents, who managed to raise over £500K through fundraising and sponsorship from organisations including the County Council. The new hub will feature a regular Saturday market and a Brunch Café.

**New Playground** - Through my Councillor's Community Budget I have also been able to support the Youth Playground Group in the development of their scheme for a new play area on the recreation ground.

**New Park & Ride** – As part of the County Council's objective of cutting the number of cars going in and out of Oxford, a series of six new Park & Ride facilities are proposed in LTP4 and planned to be sited outside the ring road. The nearest one to villages in this Division is proposed to be sited next to the A4074 on the Science Park at Sandford. To encourage people to use these new car parks a rapid, mass transit bus service will be provided to and from the City.

### **GARSINGTON**

Thanks to our Area Steward Keith Stenning for sourcing some S106 money (collected by OCC as a result of development in the area) that can be allocated for a much needed project in Garsington. The sum of £6,506.00 will be put towards the cost of the pavement build-out project on The Hill. With this amount of money available the Parish Council's contribution will not need to be as large as was feared when a second costing of £9,000 was recently submitted by OCC's contractors. The project is now scheduled to take place this summer. It will make it much safer and easier to cross from the Pub car park when walking to the school.