

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS APRIL 2016 FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE

PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY COUNCIL

On Thursday 25th February a surprise announcement was made by Oxfordshire's District Councils and Oxford City Council. It called for the abolition of the County Council and the establishment of four district quasi-unitary councils, to include parts of Gloucestershire and Northamptonshire. In addition, the announcement called for the creation of an unelected quango to be known as a 'Combined Authority' to take on difficult areas of responsibility currently with the County Council, such as social care and major road projects. So, this would mean four councils spread across three counties, plus an over-arching unelected "Combined Authority". This is still a two-tier system, which the Districts claim they want to abolish. The District Councils are now in the process of commissioning management consultants to produce a report to evaluate their proposals.

The Oxfordshire County Council view is that a single county-wide unitary authority is an option that should be considered since it would provide significant savings, enabling much valued services to be maintained. Indeed, two or three unitary councils should be included in order that all options are equally evaluated. It had thus been forced to begin the process of commissioning a separate management consultant's report. As a result of County and public pressure, District Council leaders have now agreed to commission a report covering all the options. However, the terms of reference of the Districts' revised brief has not yet been agreed between County and Districts and may yet lead to the production of two reports.

STREET LIGHTING

OCC's current Street lighting contract with Scottish & Southern Electrical (SSE) was until March 2024, however, the contract contained a single break point at 1st April 2016. In July 2015, SSE served notice on OCC that they intended to activate this break clause as the contract was not affordable to them for its full duration. Negotiations to achieve a compromise were unsuccessful. OCC therefore has to implement interim arrangements while a new maintenance contract is procured. The interim contract is expected to last 18 months. For the first 6 months there will be an emergency/make-safe service only. Beyond that period OCC will look to increase the level of service provided to more than just emergency/make-safety activity as appropriate.

The street lamp LED replacement project is a one-off capital programme of works funded through DfT's challenge funding. A separate procurement arrangement is being made for this project to ensure its continued delivery as planned.

It is appreciated that there will be concerns locally about the impact of this interim arrangement and reduced level of service, but in a time of significant financial pressures, the termination of the current street lighting contract provides an opportunity to procure a new and improved street lighting contract. The county council will also be able to take advantage of recent improvements in technology and general advancements within the sector.

DRAGON IGNITES BATTLE AGAINST POTHOLES

A new weapon is being deployed in the battle against potholes on Oxfordshire's roads. The 'Dragon' – so called because of the fire breathing nozzle it uses to dry out potholes – is a mobile patching machine that has already fixed many hundreds of potholes and a multitude of other defects on the county's roads. Skanska, OCC's highways maintenance contractor, has added

the Dragon to its arsenal against potholes and is using it to good effect across Oxfordshire, Cambridge and Peterborough. The machine repairs an average of 20 defects day and has filled up to 44 potholes in one shift. So far it has fixed just short of 2,000 in Oxfordshire. The traditional method of pothole repair consists of a two-person gang and a lorry manually filling the potholes with hot tarmac. In the right circumstances, potholes filled using the Dragon can cost as little as £10 compared to £70 for traditional methods. It is also safer and provides a more environmentally sustainable solution. The potential savings that Dragon brings allows additional focus on repairing many of the defects that have yet to form into potholes. These repairs can be done at the same time due the multi-function repair capabilities of the Dragon. It can fill pot-holes, seal cracks and provide a thin overlay to minor surface damage. This preventative maintenance saves money in the long-term as the repairs are all undertaken at the same time.

RECYCLING CENTRES TO OPEN LATE ON THURSDAYS

Opening hours on Thursdays at OCC's Household Waste Recycling Centres will be extended from 7 April to 29 September. The sites will be open until 8pm on Thursdays in addition to the normal hours of 8am-5pm every day (including Sundays). The Household Waste Recycling Centres can accept a wide range of materials for recycling including garden waste, textiles and electrical items. Food waste should always be placed in the food caddies provided by the district council and collected as part of the kerbside collection scheme. More information about the sites, including layout and a full guide to what can be recycled can be found at <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk>

KEEPING HGVS MOVING WHILE REDUCING THE IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

A free online mapping tool has been launched to help freight and logistics companies plan their routes through the county. Oxfordshire Freight Gateway is linked to the National Freight Journey Planner and is designed to help logistics managers and drivers of large goods vehicles to select the most appropriate routes for their journeys in Oxfordshire. A suitable route is provided based on the vehicle's weight and dimensions and journey details. Details here: <http://freightgateway.co.uk/oxfordshire/>

OXFORD CITY CENTRE'S NEW TEMPORARY LIBRARY NOW OPEN

The central library closed February 27 as part of ongoing redevelopment work at Westgate. A new, smaller, temporary library has now opened in Oxford's Castle Quarter with facilities including books, audio books and DVD's for adults and children. Due to the size and facilities available at the site of the temporary library, Internet access, reference information, newspapers, journals and music services will not be available. However these services will still be provided at other libraries in the area. The library service's Reference Online service and eBooks and eAudio lending services will also be available. Redevelopment of the whole Westgate building is the reason for the relocation – with the central library set to reopen back in its original building in October 2017. The existing front of the current Central Library building will be replaced to become part of the new curving wall forming the south side of Bonn Square marking the entrance to the new Westgate Oxford.