

# **ANNUAL REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS APRIL 2016 - 2017 FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE**

## **ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE BERINSFIELD & GARSINGTON DIVISION**

The year April 2016 –April 2017 began with the surprise announcement made by the District Councils and the City Council calling for the abolition of the County Council and the establishment of a Combined Authority with an elected Mayor. Several alternative schemes were proposed all of which were shown to be unworkable. In February 2017 the County Council proposed a One Oxfordshire Plan for consultation whereby a single unitary council would be established. South Oxfordshire and The Vale of the White Horse Council recently agreed to promote an adjusted version of this plan called A Better Oxfordshire to central government with the County Council. This bid is currently lodged with the Secretary of State, and his decision is expected shortly after the County Council election in May.

### **Potholes**

The Council continues to fight the battle against potholes against the background of diminishing funds. Two Dragon Patchers have been purchased so called because of the fire breathing nozzle it uses to dry out potholes. The council fills over 35,000 potholes per year, and each Patcher can fill an average of 20 defects a day and up to 40 potholes in a shift. This costs as little as £10 compared with £70 for the traditional method. The Patchers can fill cracks and provide a thin layer to minor surface damage as well. This preventative maintenance saves money in the long-term as the repairs are all undertaken at the same time.

### **Oxfordshire Together – highway services**

Some of the Parishes in the Division have taken on the delivery of local highway services that the County Council will no longer be able to deliver, or will only deliver to the minimum statutory standard. Fortunately at the time of setting the budget for 2017 – 2018 in February there was £1,957,000 over and above that previously anticipated. £170,000 will be spent on additional grass cutting work on highway verges and £250,000 will be used for one-off funding for a pilot Communities Fund for parishes and towns to bid into for matched funding schemes following the changes.

### **Subsidised Buses**

Subsidised buses ended on 20<sup>th</sup> July. This has caused considerable hardship and inconvenience to residents in this Division. In mitigation the County Council established its Comet Service, a not for profit, bookable transport service for those who cannot access suitable public transport. It uses vehicles that usually take children to school and adults to day care centres. The service has been taken up by some communities such as Dorchester where it is well supported. Other communities such as Stadhampton and Garsington have worked to gain concessions from Thames Travel through a voluntary user group.

### **New Park & Ride at Sandford, and the Science Village**

During the summer the Council published its plans for five new park and ride sites to find solutions to increasing traffic and congestion on the approaches to and in the City of Oxford. It is suggested that one of the new sites is located at Sandford-on-Thames close to the A4074. A network of “Rapid Transport” public transport routes would provide connectivity in the city, including links between the proposed new sites and the City’s Eastern Arc (between Headington and Cowley phased over the next 15 years).

In February 2017 Magdalen College, Thames Water and Oxford City Council published their latest attempt to develop land that local people know as ‘land south of Grenoble Road’. They are calling it “The South Oxford Science Village”. It will include 3,500 homes, expansion to the Science Park, a school, up to 8 sports pitches, and community centre and shops next to the Kassam Stadium and a new roundabout on the A4074. It is clear that there is a strong body of opposition, supported by SODC and OCC. I have always opposed development on Green Belt land at Grenoble Road. There is no doubt that we must build more houses in the county, but deciding which are the most appropriate, sustainable and attractive locations for our residents is a very complex problem. I

informed Garsington Parish Council that the County Council owns a small holding known as Guydens Farm within the Green Belt off the Oxford Road at Garsington. While there have been approaches made to OCC by developers, the County Council has no agreements with any developers and views this land as financially and strategically uninteresting which chimes with the attitude of the Growth Board and supports SODC's continued opposition to development in the Green Belt east of Oxford.

### **Children's Services now "outstanding"**

After the horrors of Operation Bullfinch it is wonderful to be able to report that the Council's Children's Social Care Service is now judged to be among the nation's best. Only a quarter of councils – including Oxfordshire – have passed Ofsted's new harder inspection test for children's social services, according to the watchdog's annual report. The remaining three-quarters were found to be 'inadequate' or 'requiring improvement'. The report published in July ranks Oxfordshire among the best performing of 87 councils so far put to the test, with 64 of these failing to secure a 'good' rating. Oxfordshire is also one of just three areas where Ofsted and its partner inspectorates have completed the new Joint Target Area Inspection, which highly praised the council's work to tackle child sexual exploitation alongside its partner agencies.

### **OCC Response to Local Plan**

In September 2016 OCC's response to SODC's Local Plan criticised the decision to develop Chalgrove Airfield with 3,500 houses because it has significant drawbacks in terms of infrastructure. As the highway and infrastructure authority, the Council's preference was for development in the Culham Science Centre area and at Berinsfield, both of which have better transport links and are closer to centres of employment. It was gratifying to read SODC's modified second draft of their Local Plan recently published for consultation. The new plan embraces the increased housing for Culham, and further clarifies their plans for Berinsfield. However, Chalgrove Airfield remains a preferred site, but plans have now been drawn up for bypasses for Watlington and Stadhampton which should mitigate traffic pressures.

The Culham plan could be an international exemplar for sustainable communities, fit well with the emerging Didcot Garden Town and enable more success for the Science Vale. The planned new road from Didcot going north, the new river crossing, the road junction outside the Science Centre and a Clifton Hampden bypass all now in OCC's Local Transport Plan 4, would be viable prospects if such a plan comes to fruition.

### **Mineral & Waste Core Strategy**

The Examination in Public of the Minerals & Waste Core Strategy for Oxfordshire was held in September. The Inspector published his interim report in mid October. To the deep disappointment of all the community groups across the county including PAGE (Parishes Against Gravel Extraction) and BaCHPORT (Burcot and Clifton Hampden Protection of the River Thames) the Inspector did not accept our proposal that the Local Area Assessment (the amount of gravel that the county must provide per year) was far too high. The Inspector asked for a number of modifications to the plan and these took until after Christmas. At OCC's Minerals & Waste Cabinet Advisory Group in January there was no consensus to support the modifications or the plan. However when the Cabinet considered the officer's modifications to the plan shortly afterwards they decided by 9-1 to agree to them. I have consistently refused to support the plan and did not support the modifications.

The implications of this mean that the application for widespread gravel extraction at Clifton Hampden/Culham is more likely to succeed than it might have done. However BaCHPORT have developed a strong case and if the planning application at Fullamore Farm comes to OCC's Planning Committee in late April I will be supporting them in their objective to stop the quarry.

It is expected that a final report on the Minerals Plan will be presented to Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2017, and that the Core Strategy will be adopted on 11.07.2017. It then goes back to the Inspector for his possible ratification in the Autumn. In the meantime the community groups PAGE and BACHPort will continue the fight to protect our local environment with my total support.

### **Oxford to Cambridge Expressway**

Plans to improve connectivity between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge have been in development for several years. The focus is an 'Expressway' – a motorway-standard road – that would run east-west across part of southern Oxfordshire linking the A34 first to the M40 and then on to the M1. The plans received a boost in the recent 'Autumn Statement' with the Chancellor committing £23m to conduct a Strategic Study into the benefits, objectives, options and business case. This initiative is being driven by central Government and OCC will only have consultee status. One of the potential route options would cut straight across this Division running from Abingdon via Culham, Clifton Hampden, Sandford, the Baldons and Garsington to join the M40 near Wheatley. There is a great deal of work to be done on this scheme before any preferred options emerge, and it could be another twenty years before anything concrete happens.

### **Footpaths at Dorchester**

I'm sorry that the recent fencing at Bishops Court Farm, Dorchester has upset so many people to the extent that the issue is now covered in the national press. I have walked the paths myself over many years and more recently with the Parish Council and the County Council's Footpaths Officer. I have attended Parish Council meetings at which many residents expressed their dismay. I have been in touch with the new owner and would like to stress that he has acted entirely within his legal rights, and in some instances given way to the local pressure and adjusted the fencing as a gesture of goodwill.

However a large group of local residents felt so strongly that a protest group was established to force him to open up access across the Dyke Hills and the Day's Lock Meadows by applying to the County Council to have them designated as Village Greens and therefore open to residents for leisure activities. These applications have been lodged with OCC and will be judged on a strictly impartial basis. The process could take several months with a public consultation in April/May. If a solution cannot be found this issue will end up with a Public Inquiry and the High Court. Before Christmas OCC installed a small wooden footbridge at the point where the path has been broken down by the cattle and regularly floods at the big bend in the Thames. The County Council continues to work with the owner to try and develop an amicable solution.

### **White Lines, Yellow Lines**

I'm pleased that I have been able to help to alleviate a traffic problem in Warborough this year. Parking outside the school at drop off and pick up times was causing major delays for drivers and the new white lines now give through traffic the chance to take turns to get past using the designated no parking bays. In Garsington I'm also pleased that OCC is drawing up plans for double yellow lines down both sides of Pettiwell, where indiscriminate parking outside the breakers yard is becoming dangerous.

### **Berinsfield Childrens' Centre**

As a result of the County Council deciding to reduce the number of Children's Centres providing universal services across the county, the Berinsfield Childrens' Centre was identified as one of those that would no longer be funded after April 2017. It was also announced that Action for Children would no longer be the County Council's contractor for children's centres and cease its involvement with Berinsfield. I would like to thank their staff for the wonderful support and service they have provided for the community. A Working Group representing many of the village's organisations was formed and I have worked with them through the year to develop a business plan for the continuation of the Centre under the auspices of Employment Action Group. This plan was submitted to the Council's Transition Fund over the winter for consideration and I am delighted that in February the newly formed Berins Centre was granted £30,000 over three years with a rent-free period of 12 months, plus £5,000 for repairs to the building.

### **Berinsfield Day Centre**

I am a Trustee of the Berinsfield Day centre, which up until now has been largely funded by the County Council. Sadly it is also in the process of having to apply for further funding to the Transition Fund to continue after September 2017 due to the withdrawal of automatic funding. Our application was submitted at the end of March and will be determined in April/May in time to

start on 1st September 2017.

### **Berinsfield Redevelopment**

The District Council has announced a redevelopment plan for Berinsfield. This will encompass 2,000+ houses, new community/leisure facilities and shops. The County Council welcomes and supports this initiative and is actively working with SODC to co-ordinate plans for infrastructure and the co-location of services. I hope that both the Children's Centre and the Day Centre will be re-located to share accommodation with the library, the sports facilities and a café.

### **Berinsfield Pedestrian Crossing**

I have campaigned for a pedestrian crossing at Berinsfield for eight years, and was on the point of being able to deliver it when our Councillor's budgets were withdrawn. As a first step I did managed to get the speed limit reduced on all the approach roads to the roundabout to 40 mph, a pre-requisite for any pedestrian crossing together with the necessary street lighting. I am really delighted that thanks to SODC finding the funds a crossing is being installed this month as a result of both councils working together to achieve a safe crossing place between the bus stops on the A4074.

## **COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS**

Elections to Oxfordshire County Council are now just under five weeks away and there are a series of key dates in the lead up to the Thursday, May 4 poll. The last day for people to register to vote is Thursday April 13. Although this is a county council election, Oxfordshire's district councils are the authorities responsible for administering the electoral register and people should contact them if they are not already registered to vote.

The last date to apply for a postal and postal proxy vote is Tuesday 18 April and the last date to apply for a new proxy vote is Tuesday 25 April 2017.