# **REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS OCTOBER 2019 FROM COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE**

# **Councils commit to cutting traffic congestion and improving public transport into Oxford**

Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council announced bold plans to tackle congestion on all major routes into Oxford and improve public transport connections into and across some parts of the city, particularly the city’s eastern arc.

The key points of the ‘Connecting Oxford’ proposal are:

* Restricting car traffic by introducing additional ‘bus gates’ (similar to the restriction on Oxford’s High Street) across the city to improve journey times for people travelling into and around the city, and so road space can be reallocated to improve walking and cycling routes
* New high frequency fast bus routes connecting neighbouring towns and the Park & Rides to Oxford’s eastern arc, which is seeing the greatest growth in employment but is currently less well served by public transport, particularly around the ring road
* New and improved cycle and walking routes, including utilising space created by removing vehicles from the road to provide safe and attractive alternatives to driving into and around the city
* A charge for workplace parking provided by larger employers in the eastern arc, which would help fund the proposed transport improvements and create a disincentive to drive to work. Discounts for the new bus services would be available for staff of employers paying the workplace parking levy
* Improved journey times for commuters driving into and around the city as a result of less congestion

The combination of traffic restrictions and the introduction of a workplace parking levy create positive incentives for commuters and residents to use other modes of transport, and for employers to reduce the incentive to provide free or subsidised parking for staff. Nottingham introduced a workplace parking levy in 2012 that continues to fund improvements to its local bus and tram network.

The two councils are now asking for comments and ideas from residents, commuters, businesses, transport operators and other organisations to feed into the detailed development of the proposals. The feedback will be used to develop a detailed project proposal, including a full business case that sets out the costs and benefits of the scheme.

**People with hidden disabilities to benefit from Blue Badges**

People with hidden disabilities, including autism and mental health conditions now have access to Blue Badges, removing the barriers they experience when they travel. This is a national change to the service being introduced by the Department for Transport as part of the governments Inclusive Transport Strategy. The County Council administer this service locally on behalf of the Department for Transport. Under the new guidance, Blue Badges will be extended to those with hidden disabilities, including:

* People who cannot travel without risk of serious harm to their health and safety or someone else's
* People who cannot travel without "very considerable psychological distress"
* People who have very considerable difficulty when walking, meaning "both the physical act and experience of walking"

**To be eligible for a Blue badge an applicant must meet one of the two eligibility criteria set out in the legislation which governs the scheme.**

* **‘Eligible without further assessment’ (Previously known as ‘automatic’)**
* **‘Eligible subject to further assessment’ (previously known as ‘discretionary’).**

**Full details of the Blue Badge service in Oxfordshire, including eligibility and how to apply can be found** [here](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/parking/where-park/blue-badge-parking-permits.)**.**

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# **Roadwork permits will reduce delays for road users**

New powers have been approved that will give Oxfordshire County Council more control over roadworks. From December the council will introduce a new system that means companies wanting to work on roads around Oxfordshire will have to apply and pay for a permit in order to work on the highway.

These will clearly set out how the work will be done, the duration, times of work and how traffic will be managed. When there are clashes between different sets of work the council will also require companies to collaborate more closely to minimise disruption. Companies that need to work on the roads will benefit from the fact that securing a permit means that they have effectively booked the road space that they need. The permit scheme operates to conditions that are the same across the UK, meaning it will be easier to work consistently across council borders.

While the council will have the power to refuse permission for planned work to take place if it believes the proposed timings or planned approach will cause unnecessary disruption, emergency unplanned work needed for things such as pipe bursts will be unaffected.

The council’s highways team hope to achieve a reduction in roadwork duration - removing around 8,900 days of work from Oxfordshire’s roads annually – around a 10% reduction.

# **Oxfordshire County Council works on action plan to go carbon neutral**

Following last week’s climate strikes, Oxfordshire County Council has confirmed its commitment to reducing its own ‘carbon footprint’ to zero by 2030.

The council started a long-term programme five years ago to cut carbon emissions but accepts that young people have challenged organisations such as the county council to move faster.

Since the county council motion in April 2019 acknowledging the climate emergency, the council has been working on a new action plan to accelerate the climate action programme to become carbon neutral by 2030.

The council has already delivered an average 6% per year reduction in carbon emissions since 2011 – double its target - but is determined to do more. Oxfordshire County Council is delivering a series of ‘green’ initiatives, including helping install more solar panels on schools.

Project LEO – local energy Oxfordshire – is another example of partnership working, with the county council joining a consortium led by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, together with the universities and Oxford city council to develop a localised approach to sustainable energy generation and use.

As part of its ‘big switch’, the council is committed to replacing street lights with low energy lighting over the next four years. This will reduce Oxfordshire’s greenhouse emissions from streetlighting by 70%. The investment will also include a communications system between streetlights, allowing dimming of groups of lights when they’re not needed.

The council supports a 65-strong network of Community Action Groups (CAG) at the forefront of community-led climate change action. They organise events and projects on issues including waste, transport, food, energy, biodiversity and social justice.

Groups are working to establish community fridges to reduce food waste and share surplus. They run workshops, teaching residents how to repair items, keeping products in use for longer. Working with local businesses, they help them reduce their impact on the environment and set up refill stations for water and detergents to reduce waste from single use plastics.