

## Focus on Parish Councils – Monthly Update

September 2025

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Dear parish councillors and residents,

I am looking forward to getting back to meetings after the summer recess. The next full council meeting takes place on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September.

This month sees the start of my monthly drop-in/surgery sessions with Watlington Parish Council, taking place at the parish council offices on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> September from 10am – midday (and planned for the first Thursday of each month afterwards). I am very open to running these in other areas of the division should there be demand.

There are currently issues caused by “lotting” in two areas of the division; this being the practise of dividing up parcels of agricultural or wooded land and selling it to multiple buyers, sometimes with misleading marketing which suggests the land may be suitable for development. As well as the parish councils in these areas, we are working with Freddie to look at raising the impact of this at a national level, recognising the importance of protecting our rural landscape.

## OCC News

### 1. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) update

Lorna Baxter and Karen Fuller recently had the opportunity to attend the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils Talking Tables event. The focus was on local government reorganisation (LGR) and representatives from town and parish councils eagerly participated.

Lorna, Karen and Tannah Collier (Policy Officer) guided the discussions with enthusiasm. The Talking Tables format encouraged dynamic exchanges where every voice was heard and some interesting questions posed. Key themes included the importance of maintaining local community identity amid administrative changes, resource allocation and reducing bureaucracy. While challenges were acknowledged, there was also optimism. Attendees considered innovative local engagement and neighbourhood governance opportunities.

The event emphasised the importance of keeping the conversation going together. It was clear Oxfordshire's towns and parishes are active participants in shaping their future, with a role for us to champion their interests. The event highlighted the strength of community spirit and the critical role of inclusive dialogue in local governance.

## **2. Oxford Congestion Charge - Update**

Free park and ride journeys and additional free permit types have been added to the proposal for a temporary congestion charge in Oxford, which will be discussed by Oxfordshire County Council's cabinet on 10 September.

The changes, based on consultation feedback, were reviewed by the council's Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 August alongside consultation reports, technical reports and other information. A decision on whether to implement the scheme will then be made by the council's cabinet.

CLLr Andrew Gant, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport Management, said: "We are very grateful to the thousands of people who have taken the time to respond and give us their detailed views on this important proposal for Oxford.

"Our officers have been carefully working through and considering those responses. All of this information along with officers recommendations will be presented to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in the last week of August. That committee will fully debate the subject and make its own thoughts and recommendations clear to the council's cabinet. A decision will then be taken at cabinet on 10 September. I look forward to reviewing all of the information that will be presented that day and debating this matter with cabinet colleagues."

## **3. Rural connectivity enhanced for nearly 200 public sites in Oxfordshire**

Residents are benefitting from faster broadband after Oxfordshire County Council completed its GigaHubs project at 192 public service and local authority sites.

The work significantly enhances digital connectivity across the county's rural and public service sites, marking a significant milestone in its commitment to improve connectivity through its digital infrastructure programme.

The GigaHubs project in Oxfordshire – jointly funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the council – has introduced gigabit capable broadband at schools, GP practices, fire stations, libraries, leisure centres, community centres, and museums, including in rural areas where fibre infrastructure is difficult and expensive to provide.

Funding from the council was sourced from income generated by its digital infrastructure programme.

Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, said: "The GigaHubs project has transformed the digital landscape of Oxfordshire, enabling libraries, community centres, schools and GP practices to offer enhanced services to residents.

## **4. Road maintenance programme continues**

The first phase of a major road maintenance programme in Oxfordshire has been completed on schedule, despite hold-ups due to weather.

Road users are now being asked to watch out for the next stage, which will involve highway crews repainting the lines and markings, and installing reflective road studs in the coming weeks.

Phase one of Oxfordshire County Council's £7.4 million surface dressing programme, delivered by its highway contractor M Group, began in April and finished on 15 June. Around 70 towns and villages were visited, with 938,336sq m of carriageway treated.

Councillor Andrew Gant, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport Management, said: "We were very lucky with the weather this spring and early summer. Surface dressing is extremely weather dependent, and we only had to rearrange a handful of shifts due to rain.

"We are grateful for the cooperation of road users during this time and ask them to be patient during the repainting process too. I hope they are noticing the improved quality of many of these roads."

In our area I have personally noticed resurfacing in recent months around Highmoor Cross, Nettlebed and Howe Hill into Watlington.

## **5. Healthwatch Oxfordshire annual impact report**

Healthwatch Oxfordshire have published their annual impact report which can be found [here](#). The organisation is currently under threat of abolition by national government. Introducing the report, Don O'Neal, Healthwatch Oxfordshire Chair, 2023-25 said:

"It's been another busy year for our small team who have worked hard on a wide range of topics, including eye care, hospital care and children's oral health. We also reported what we heard on challenges faced in areas where health inequalities are experienced, worked with two community researchers to report on community food support in the OX4 area and worked collaboratively with health and care providers to amplify the voices of people within new pathways for hospital discharge. We made Enter and View visits to identify practical improvements for patients, and continued our proactive programme of outreach visits across the county.

I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to share their experiences with us. Please do keep sharing your views and stories with us and we will continue to work on your behalf to ensure that patient voices are heard and acted upon by local decision-makers."

## **6. Consultations**

There are a range of consultations open on <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>, including:

- Oxford parking restrictions
- Oxfordshire school streets
- Public rights of way

### **Parish Round-Up**

I hope to attend Parish Councils in person as regularly as I can. Below are some notes on issues raised at recent meetings:

- Watlington – I recently completed a walk-round with several of the parish council team to look at damage caused by traffic using Chapel Street, Church Street, Cuxham Road, Love Lane, New Road and Pyrton Lane as diversionary routes during the gas works. I have reported a collection of issues to OCC and will be pushing for repairs to be expedited where possible.

- Britwell Salome – expansion of the 20mph area raised in parish meeting; has been followed up with OCC.
- Checkendon – review of application for extension of 20mph limit; flooding issue by pub
- Stoke Row – road conditions, lotting of woodland – with “Danish bunkhouse” and Airbnb letting now an issue.
- Pishill and Stonor – mobile phone coverage with retirement of analogue phonelines, community importance of Five Horseshoes pub (application now in).
- Cuxham – Chalgrove New Town and removal of bypass proposal, HGV traffic (including construction traffic), condition of roads.
- Nuffield – Speeding enforcement, speed limits on the A4130, condition of Ewelme junction next to May’s farm cottages, Fred’s field.
- Shirburn – 20mph limit request, traffic calming, condition of roads.
- Swyncombe – issue with unpermitted development on lotted land.