

Focus on Parish Councils – Monthly Update

March 2026

Cllr Ben Higgins

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Dear parish councillors and residents,

February saw the budget for 2026/27 passed at full council at its meeting on the 10th. I also held my regular drop-in session in Watlington and was pleased to be joined by our MP Freddie Van Mierlo. Having parish, district, county and national government representation in one room to help residents with queries was very powerful, and everyone took a lot from the session which was well attended. I continue to work closely with Freddie and his team, as well as parish councils and meetings. I also work productively with the excellent district councillors in the Rotherfield part of the division. I am finalising a date for a drop-in session in Stoke Row to be announced soon and am always open to holding them anywhere there is demand.



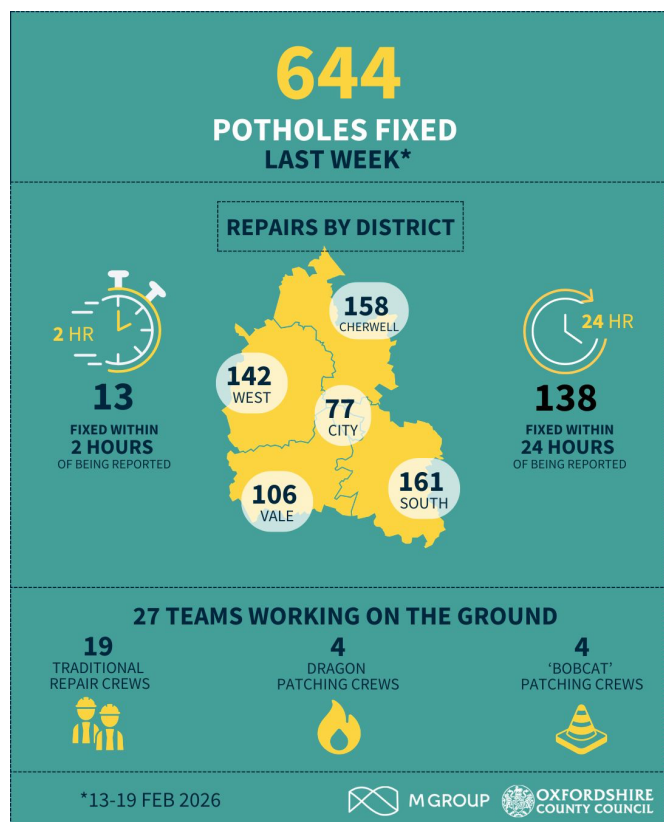
OCC News

1. Highways

During February, highways have continued to be a dominating theme in my correspondence. I have been escalating issues where they have been reported to me, and now the weather has at least improved to some degree then I am hopeful that permanent repairs will start to catch up with the rate of damage.

There is some good news to share on that front. The A4130 from Bix to Crowmarsh, through Nuffield and Nettlebed is due to receive surface dressing early in the new council year, around May. Crews have been going through in recent days carrying out pre-dressing patching work, which is addressing a lot of the defects. Couching Street and Shirburn Road in Watlington is receiving their dressing in late April.

The gully clearing has also commenced in the southern part of the division, with crews active in Rotherfield Peppard and Stoke Row as I write this. This should have some positive impact on surface water drainage. The budget passed in February allocated an additional £4m of capital spending across 2 years for repairs to gullies which have found to be blocked or damaged during the clearing process.



I have three sessions of visits with highways engagement in March covering a significant part of the division, so hope to also be able to prompt some improvements from those. I am undertaking my “super-user” training as well which will allow me to report some defects directly for fixing.

2. National Praise for Oxfordshire’s local nature recovery strategy

Oxfordshire’s local nature recovery strategy (LNRS) has been featured by UK100, a national network that highlights strong local action on climate and nature. This recognition highlights the positive work we are doing to protect and restore our natural environment.

Our LNRS was shaped with partners, land managers, community groups and experts across the county. It sets out clear, evidence-based steps to support wildlife, improve habitats and strengthen resilience to climate change.

UK100 praised the strategy’s shared approach and the practical way it supports nature recovery. It also recognises the contribution of all partners involved. You can read the full article on the UK100 website.

3. Community Health, Marmot Place and reducing health inequalities

Ansaf Azhar, Director of Public Health and Communities, attended the recent Community Health Development Officers (CHDO) network meeting. The CHDO programme, a legacy of the community insight profiles, is funded by public health. CHDOs are hosted within the city and district councils and play a key role in our neighbourhood work. CHDOs help connect services, build partnerships, and support community-led health and wellbeing. The updates shared showed the real difference they are making.

Over 250 people joined the recent Oxfordshire Marmot Place webinar and heard examples of partners using Marmot principles to reduce health inequalities. You can hear more in the Marmot in Action video - <https://vimeo.com/1154676726?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

The next webinar takes place on 17 March at 1pm. Details are on the Healthwatch Oxfordshire website. (There’s no registration link, so please add it to your diary manually.)

The public health annual report 2026, with more updates on this work, will be published later this year.

4. Kidlington Waste Site

Work continues at the Kidlington waste site with steps being taken to manage the waste on the land and protect the River Cherwell. Recent activity includes vegetation clearance at the site entrance. A new jumbo sandbag wall is now in place and is working well to hold waste back and stop it reaching the river. Water-quality sampling was completed on 5 January and the latest results have been shared.

You can see photos, a short video and the full update on our Environment Agency

update page - <https://engageenvironmentagency.uk.engagementhq.com/thames-regulated-industry-sites>

5. Community Hubs

Along with Community First Oxfordshire, we are working to understand more about what the community hubs there are across the county. This will help us strengthen the visibility and voice of community hubs. In general, we're interested in hearing from those who:

- Have a building they regularly operate from;
- Run or host a range of activities for the public/their community which have a social, economic, health or environmental benefits; and
- Hold relationships with people in your local community and/or other community groups.

The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete - <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/community-hubs-survey>

6. Consultations

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

- National highways and transport network 2025 – a nationwide survey on public satisfaction with transport and road services (open until 28th February 2026)

7. Funding

I have made my allocations under the SODC councillor grant scheme, which are in the process of being awarded.

There is an OCC councillor priority fund scheme open – the link is below. Any applications need to be discussed with me before submission under the scheme rules.

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/communities/councillor-priority-fund>

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 – relief road continued planning delays, CIL funding, Church St/Chapel St/New Road.
- 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.
- Pishill with Stonor – mobile phone coverage with retirement of analogue phonelines, road condition.
- 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, chicane (alternatives after recent trial).
- Swyncombe – issue with unpermitted development on lotted land.
- Nettlebed – community sports facilities, cycle path from Nettlebed to Bix.
- Rotherfield Peppard – repeated issue with drain cover, road conditions, junction of Stoke Row Road/Gallowstree Road.
- Highmoor – flooding issue on Holly close