

Focus on Parish Councils – Monthly Update

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Dear parish councillors and residents,

It's been another busy month. This month in my capacity as cabinet member at SODC I introduced and proposed changes to the council constitution at a special council meeting. These nationally mandated changes mean that we are not legally allowed to enable parish councils or district councillors to call in applications for consideration by planning committee anymore. More details can be found here -

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/planning/councils-reluctantly-approve-constitution-changes-for-new-planning-process/>

OCC News

1. Local Government Reorganisation

There is no significant new news at time of writing to follow my report from last month. We are currently waiting to hear from national government what the timescale and process will be for the LGR process. I hope to have at least some news to share next month. What this does mean is that both the county and district council will exist in their current form for longer than anticipated, so both administrations are busy looking at budgeting plans in that context, as well as initiatives that were previously paused due to the impending LGR process.

2. Highways

There are several consultation exercises underway which parishes have and have had the opportunity to respond to, including speed limit reviews on major routes in our area, and a review of existing 20mph areas.

I am also aware of new applications for 20mph zones in parishes in my division, which I have confirmed my support for to allow them to progress.

3. Traffic Filters

With the reopening of Botley Road in Oxford, the traffic filters trial is now live. This uses the same locations as the Congestion Charge, but once you have used your allocated passes it is not possible to drive past a filter point without receiving a fine. With the reopening of Botley Road, it is possible to get anywhere in Oxford without passing a filter point. More details and guidance can be found here - <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/traffic-filter-trial-starts-in-oxford-on-monday-28-september>

4. SEND reform plan

Children and young people with SEND are to benefit from a plan to deliver better and more expert specialist support that has now been fully approved by government. Oxfordshire County Council's response to national education reform for children and young people with SEND was submitted to the Department for Education in June 2026.

This followed publication nationally of the schools white paper 'every child achieving and thriving' and the SEND consultation 'putting children and young people first.'

Councillor Sean Gaul, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Young People's Services, said: "Every child deserves an opportunity to thrive, and our plan sets out how we will deliver even better support for children and young people with SEND in their schools and closer to their homes. "More educational psychologists and therapists will be recruited to improve access to support through a new 'experts at hand' offer, inclusion support bases in mainstream schools will be created, and local support services will work through locality based teams."

The reform plan has been supported by £4.9m investment from central government for 'experts at hand and local authority SEND transformation' and to support the partner organisations in implementing its ambitions over the next three years.

The government's approval means Oxfordshire will receive a high needs stability grant which will significantly reduce the current deficit in the dedicated schools grant. Almost every local council in England faces a special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) high needs deficit because the cost for support has vastly outstripped the funding provided by central government. Factors across the country, not just in Oxfordshire, contributing to these deficits include increased demand for education, health and care plans (EHCPs), and a lack of funding for inclusive mainstream and state special school capacity, forcing councils to rely on costly independent and specialist placements.

Support for children with SEND is supported through a local area partnership, which includes Oxfordshire County Council; NHS Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (formerly NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board); Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust; Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum.

5. Quiet Lanes

Quiet lanes are designated minor roads where motor traffic is reduced to make it safer to walk, wheel, cycle and ride a horse. By removing through traffic, quiet lanes can reduce vehicle numbers and speeds, lower the risk and severity of collisions, and make minor roads feel calmer and safer.

A new quiet lane trial has been introduced on Shepherd's pit lane, Stanton St John. Other proposals being put forward by local areas are being considered, and I am aware of at least two in my division that have been suggested by parishes or residents.

All through traffic is removed using signs, speed limits and physical measures such as bollards or gates. An alternative route must always be available to maintain access for residents, farmers and landowners, local businesses and emergency services.

A variety of quiet lanes have already been introduced in Oxfordshire, in response to local concerns about motorised traffic flows, speeds, and road safety. They range from signage only to gated roads and full road closures. We have now formalised how we identify, trial, and designate a quiet lane to ensure the process is consistent across the county and will be trialling several new quiet lanes that use bollards or gates. This reflects evidence that shows signs alone do not change how drivers use a road. The quiet lanes programme is voluntary and locally led. They are only implemented where there is local support, a clear evidence-based case and a suitable alternative route for motor traffic.

More information can be found on the quiet lanes web pages of our website.

6. Consultations

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

7. Funding

The SODC councillor grant scheme is now open for the year, applicable to the Watlington Ward where I am a district councillor. Please contact me if you would like to discuss an application.

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, road conditions.
- Checkendon – review of application for extension of 20mph limit; flooding issue by pub
- Stoke Row – road conditions, lotting.
- 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