

REPORT TO ROTHERFIELD GREYS PARISH COUNCIL SEPT 2022

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

The Conservative Opposition remains concerned that the LibDem/Green/Labour coalition running the county council continues to pursue ideological objectives way beyond the remit of the council, the core functions of which are: adult & children's social care; education & learning; and highways.

PROTESTS AGAINST DRAG QUEEN STORY TIME FOR CHILDREN AT LIBRAIRIES



As previously reported, the planned drag queen story time classes for primary school children in council libraries sparked fury from many parents. The events took place during August provoking demonstrations and counter-demonstrations with a heavy police presence. Without going into the detail of the debate, Conservatives are asking voters who switched their vote to the LibDems if this is the type of thing they want the council to get involved in, or whether it should focus on the fundamentals of running local government.

LIBDEMS ATTEMPT TO MOVE A MOTION TO CUT VAT

The LibDems put forward a motion to Full Council in July stating Government should immediately introduce various subsidies and cut VAT to 17.5%. The motion was not debated due to lack of time, but is believed to be coming back to Full Council in September. Conservatives have pointed out that whatever the merits or not of the proposal, the administration is once again wasting council resources trying to get involved in central government issues way beyond the council's remit. Councillors are not junior MPs and they should focus on local matters. It is believed the motion has been centrally generated by LibDem HQ as almost identically worded motions have been debated at other LibDem councils.

LIBDEM/GREEN/LABOUR ADMINISTRATION RAMPS UP VEGANISM CAMPAIGN

The administration continues to push its vegan agenda under the guise of climate action. A new website promoted by Oxfordshire councils called Climate Action Oxfordshire features links to the Vegan Society. Pressure group the Countryside Alliance has responded by stating that the vegan policies which OCC has adopted should be dropped because they undermine British farmers. The alliance is urging councillors to withdraw from the campaign which encourages residents to give up meat and adopt a plant-based diet. It argues that in order to make an environmental choice, it is more important for consumers to know where food comes from and how it is produced. At the OCC Full Council meeting in September, Conservatives will again try to reverse the imposition of vegan meals at council meetings. Conservative Councillor Yvonne Constance will ask members to reinstate meat and dairy on to the menu and to support local producers. She will move that: "This Council resolves to offer locally produced menus at Council-catered events, including meat, dairy and vegan options, or to make alternative provisions for members, staff and attendees to facilitate personal choice." I am seconding the motion and will say: "We are not opposed to vegan food, but we want to serve local food rather than flying in mangoes from abroad. And we want there to be a choice. It is not right to impose ideological dietary opinions on others."

KENT COUNCIL FINDS 20MPH ZONES DO NOT PROMPT LESS CAR USE

The introduction of a 20mph speed limit zone did not encourage people to ditch their cars, an independent report for Kent County Council has found. The local authority implemented the lower speeds in Faversham and Tonbridge as a trial in September 2020 in an effort to encourage more cycling and walking in the market towns. However, the recent report from transport consultants Agilysys said:

"Car usage remained virtually unchanged following the introduction of the 20mph limits".

Conservatives are going to ask the administration whether this new information will have any impact on OCC's plans to spend £8m changing signs from 30mph to 20mph in Oxfordshire. As reported last month, data from the Cuxham trial in Oxfordshire showed that the introduction of a 20mph limit resulted in a very small average speed reduction of between 3 and 4 mph, with over 50% of traffic exceeding the 20mph limit. Thames Valley Police issued this statement on 20th July:

"With regards to the introduction of 20mph limits across the county... Thames Valley Police fully support the Department for Transport guidance, which as you will be aware, clearly states that such limits should be self-enforcing as there is clear evidence to show that sign only schemes do not result in effective speed reductions."

COST OF GENDER-NEUTRAL TOILETS

Subsequent to the Cabinet decision to further investigate the provision of gender-neutral toilets in all council buildings, OCC's Property Director confirmed that OCC has 905 sites and that each of these would have to be assessed. Ignoring the cost of any actual work required, just this assessment could cost in excess of £90,000 if each individual assessment cost £100. If the actual work costs £1000 per site on average, then the total cost would be in the region of £1m.

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE DRAFT CENTRAL OXFORDSHIRE TRAVEL PLAN

OCC has launched a consultation on its draft Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan, which focuses on potential ways of taxing motorists to reduce car use in and around the city of Oxford. Residents and parish councils can respond to the survey on Let's Talk Oxfordshire:

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/central-oxfordshire-travel-plan>

Meanwhile, opponents of the hugely divisive Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme in Oxford have launched a legal bid to overturn the council's decision.

SPECIFIC REPORT FOR ROTHERFIELD GREYS

SPEED BUMPS AHEAD OF ENTRANCE TO VILLAGE GREEN AND SATWELL CLOSE

I have been copied on an email requesting the above. Please advise if the PC wants this matter progressed. It would probably involve a preliminary speed survey and it is likely the PC would be liable to cover the cost of that and all subsequent costs.

PAVEMENT THROUGH VILLAGE

At the May PC meeting, I advised that initial thoughts from officers are as follows:

- Cost likely to be in the region of £50k (based on 1.5m width, assuming £120 p/m²).
- Some isolated damage / loss to private hedges fronting the highway is likely, either due to current encroachment or from the necessary excavations.
- It would be necessary to cross the road at least once, for some twice, in order to use the f/way to access the main amenities (church and pub) when coming from the east, which might be ignored given the short distance and likely habitual current behaviour of walking in the road.
- The footway could be criticised for 'urbanisation' of the current semi-rural setting.
- A section outside the church looks to have a grass-crete / mesh type earth stabilisation for parking cars – need to understand how this area is used for routing of f/way etc.

An in-depth assessment with costs is to follow.

As a reminder, OCC has previously indicated it could not justify funding such a footpath, so the parish would need to draw on its own resources, perhaps CIL monies.

I have chased yet again, but there is no update to the previous response, which was:

I apologise for the length of time that this has taken to progress.

At the present time the Traffic Team in the South are working hard on a number of key maintenance matters that have been taking up the majority of their time.

We are happy to assist with a parish funded scheme at this location and the team will undertake an in depth assessment and costing for it when they are able to do so.

We will also discuss the scheme with our colleagues in the highway operations team to ascertain the potential for them to assist the parish sooner than we currently can as a team.

The authority are keen to progress such parish led schemes and we will ensure that the scheme can be developed as soon as reasonable practicable.