

# REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS **MAY 2024** FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

## GENERAL OCC REPORT

### **OXFORDSHIRE 'PARK AND RIDE' SITE BUILT WITHOUT ROAD ACCESS**

OCC has almost finished building a £51m 'park and ride' site with 850 spaces near Eynsham, but it remains closed because there is no access road. Concerns have been expressed that the site will sit unused for years until OCC secures funding to build the necessary road. However, the council stated that the park and ride site was intentionally completed ahead of the roadwork to save costs amid rising inflation and construction expenses. The broader A40 improvement plan, including bus lanes, is now subject to funding discussions with Homes England and the Department for Transport. OCC hopes to finalise funding agreements soon and to have the park and ride fully operational by 2027.

### **OCC SEEKS TO EMBED COMMERCIAL MINDSET**

OCC has launched an authority-wide strategy to “get the organisation thinking more commercially” – which could lead to “bigger opportunities” in the future. An overview of the commercial strategy presented to OCC’s cabinet, states that the council “aims to optimise organisational efficiency and generate sustainable revenue through innovative and responsible commercial activities”. Some councillors have raised concerns around the council’s need to get the right balance between commercial endeavours and serving residents. Councils have a very mixed record when it comes to making investments outside their areas of expertise.

### **HIF1 ROAD SCHEME**

A public inquiry into plans for a £269million road scheme has reached its final stages. Closing statements relating to the planning application for the [Didcot](#) and surrounding areas major infrastructure (HIF1) scheme were heard on April 23. OCC has been planning the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF1) scheme for almost a decade. The proposals included creating a dual carriageway on the A4130 from the A34 Milton Interchange towards Didcot, new bridges and a Clifton Hampden bypass. In July 2023, [Michael Gove called in the planning application](#) after OCC applied to itself for planning permission but the OCC planning committee refused it – despite recommendations from officers that it should be approved.

### **OFSTED JUDGES CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN OXFORDSHIRE AS “GOOD”**

Ofsted has judged OCC’s children’s services as good as part of an inspection that took place in February 2024. The assessment took place as part of the government’s [inspecting local authority children’s services \(ILACS\) system](#). Inspectors praised the county council for a number of improvements across its services [since its last inspection in 2018](#), which were also judged overall as good, leading to even better outcomes for children and young people.

### **HEADS OF TERMS AGREED WITH OXFORD UNITED FOR STADIUM LAND**

An agreement has been reached on heads of terms for OCC to lease land it owns near Kidlington for Oxford United to develop a new football stadium. The council’s cabinet agreed in principle for land known as the “triangle” to be leased at its meeting in September 2023. Detailed negotiations have now led to heads of terms being agreed. A number of other key legal and partnership agreements will follow to meet the council's strategic objectives and also to ensure that the club fulfils its commitments to the local community and sports groups.