

# REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS MAR 2022 FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

## GENERAL OCC REPORT

### BUDGET MEETING OVERSHADOWED BY FARMERS' PROTEST



At the County Council budget-setting meeting on February 8<sup>th</sup> the left-wing administration forced through a whopping 5% Council Tax increase, despite the Conservative Independent Alliance showing how the increase could be limited to 3.5%. However, the meeting at County Hall was overshadowed by a farmers' protest outside. As previously reported, the administration is trying to impose a vegan diet at all council-catered events. Richard Binning, a beef farmer from Steventon, said: "The message they are sending out is really dangerous - they are suggesting it's ok to eat avocados from Brazil, instead of our wholesome British beef." The farmers' protest received national press coverage. The motion to impose the vegan diet has to be ratified by the OCC Cabinet at its meeting on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Conservatives will be addressing Cabinet and urging them to seek change through education, persuasion and choice, not diktat.

### **BAD WEATHER IS THE PERFECT STORM FOR ROGUE TRADERS IN OXFORDSHIRE**

Residents are being warned to be wary of cold callers or leaflets offering to do work on roofs after the recent storms. OCC's trading standards team believes it is a perfect opportunity for rogue traders to take advantage of residents who have a leaking roof or broken tile. Any Oxfordshire resident who has concerns about cold calling or potential scams can contact the Citizens Advice National Consumer Service on **0800 144 8848** or by visiting its website [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk).

## **CONTROVERSIAL PROPOSALS FOR RESTRICTIONS ON CARS IN OXFORD**

OCC and Oxford City Council last month revealed highly controversial joint proposals to cut car use in the city with the introduction of a city-wide workplace parking levy, traffic filters and a wider Zero Emission Zone (ZEV) to cover the entire city centre. The chairman of Oxford High Street Association condemned the proposals and said: "I am totally depressed by what these two councils are doing to our city." More details on the ZEV below.

## **BRITAIN'S FIRST ZERO EMISSION ZONE (ZEV) BEGINS IN OXFORD**

Britain's first ZEV started on 28 February. Launching as a pilot, the streets included in the ZEV are: New Road, Bonn Square, Queen Street; Cornmarket Street, New Inn Hall Street, Shoe Lane, Market Street, Ship Street and St Michael's Street. The ZEV pilot is a precursor to the introduction of a larger ZEV covering most of Oxford city centre next year (2023), subject to further public consultation. The ZEV pilot will operate from 7am - 7pm, all year around. All petrol and diesel vehicles, including hybrids, will incur a daily charge unless eligible for a discount or exemption. However, zero emission vehicles, such as electric cars, can enter the pilot area free of charge. The charge will vary from £2 to £10 per day depending on the emission levels of the vehicle. Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras have been installed to enforce the zone. The scheme has been criticised as being a tax-raising measure and not a true ZEV, as all vehicles are allowed into the zone as long as they pay the tax.

## **BID SUBMITTED TO DELIVER 159 ELECTRIC BUSES FOR THE OXFORD AREA**

A new fleet of state-of-the-art electric buses could be coming to Oxford and its surrounding areas after a bid for government funding was submitted. OCC last month applied for £32.8 million from the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme. Along with £6m from the council and £43.7m from bus companies Go Ahead and Stagecoach, the scheme could deliver 159 electric buses and the infrastructure to charge them in a package worth £82.5m. If successful, the electric buses would operate in an area stretching from Kidlington in the north to Sandford in the south, and from Cumnor in the west to Wheatley in the east. There are no proposals to support the south of the county.

## **PARTNERSHIP WITH CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Efforts to unpick the agreement between OCC and Cherwell District Council continues. A joint officer working group has been established to review the extent and cost of the current arrangements. The group reports to the member-led Joint Shared Services and Personnel Committee, and is made up of the two chief executives, monitoring officers and s151 officers. Once the group has completed its initial review, it will then prepare a transition plan. The Conservative Opposition continues to press for transparency in relation to the costs when they have been identified and quantified.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

OCC is currently conducting a wide range of consultations at the moment. Residents can make their views known by responding. Current consultations include: Local Transport and Connectivity Plan; Location of cameras to enforce traffic regulations; Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and Library and heritage services. An interesting recent example is the proposal to make permanent the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) in parts of Oxford. The consultation showed that 74% of respondents objected to the measure or had concerns, with just 26% in support. This has resulted in the administration putting the brakes on the scheme at the last moment, which was due to be approved last month. It will be reconsidered by Cabinet later in the year. <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk>