

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS MARCH 2024 FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

OCC BUDGET 2024/25 REVIEW

OCC Full Council met for a marathon 10-hour session on Tuesday 20th February to debate budget proposals. The minority LibDem/Green administration put forward their proposals, then the Conservative Independent Alliance (the official Opposition) and the Labour Group each put forward proposed amendments.

The Conservative Independent Alliance sought to:

- slim down the 50-strong PR/Strategy team
- refocus the ever-expanding Climate team
- push back the Oxford congestion measures that are intended to extract £57m from motorists over a five-year period (see over page)
- allocate more money for vulnerable children (particularly Special Educational Needs and Disability)
- meet demands from residents to spend much more on roads and drains.

Regrettably, these ambitions were thwarted by the LibDem/Green and Labour groups.

At the end of the meeting it became clear the debate had been pointless as the minority administration accepted the Labour amendments in their entirety. The fact that the revised budget papers had been pre-prepared suggested this was always the intended outcome, and that the minority administration believed they could not run the council without wholehearted Labour support.

Full details of the final budget are available on the council website. These show that the Labour amendments accepted by the administration will result in a massive extra borrowing of £23.45m. As usual, Labour focused on Oxford-centric matters, including Oxford parking zones, Oxford ANPR cameras, Oxford congestion, Oxford 'Mini-Holland' project (at a capital cost of £2m per year) and an Oxford 'Citizens' Assembly' (at a cost of £150,000).

The nine priorities of the administration remain unchanged:

- 1) Climate Emergency
- 2) Tackle Inequalities
- 3) Health & Wellbeing
- 4) Social Care,
- 5) Sustainable Transport
- 6) Nature Access
- 7) Children's Opportunities
- 8) Vibrant Democracy
- 9) Business Cooperation.

Despite repeated resident surveys and feedback from Councillors which show that roads and drains are near the top of the list of resident concerns, they still fail to get a mention and it is likely satisfaction with the council will continue to decline. (The latest 'Residents Survey' shows that 'Maintenance of roads' was rated by 67% of residents as one of their four most important council services, but just 19% were very or fairly satisfied.)

OXFORD CONGESTION MEASURES: FINES AND CHARGES OVER FIVE-YEAR PERIOD

Expanded Zero Emissions Zone £25m
Traffic Filters (Four-zone plan) £11m
Workplace Parking Tax £21m

Total £57m. Figures from OCC Business Plans and Budget.

LATE NIGHT OPENING OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES TO CEASE

At a 'Cabinet Member Decisions Meeting' on 22 February, the Deputy Leader of the Council (and senior Green councillor), Cllr Dr Pete Sudbury made the decision to cease late-night summer opening at Household Waste Recycling Centres on Thursdays from 1 April 2024.

UPDATE ON HIF1 DIDCOT PLANNING APPLICATION AND ORDERS

In July 2023, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities called in the planning application for the HIF1 Didcot and surrounding areas major infrastructure project, following OCC's planning and regulation committee's vote to refuse the application that OCC had made to itself. A conjoined planning and Orders (compulsory purchase order, side roads order and bridge scheme) public inquiry will take place at [Bee House in Milton Park](#), and will sit for 22 days across a 12-week period. The sitting dates of the inquiry will be:

- 20 to 23 February
- 27 February to 1 March
- 26 to 28 March
- 16 to 19 April
- 23 to 26 April
- 8 to 10 May (set as reserve days)

OXFORDSHIRE IS A COUNTY OF SANCTUARY

On 7 November 2023, a motion was passed at Full Council stating that migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, are set to continue to be welcomed in Oxfordshire with the county council reaffirming the county's status as a place of sanctuary. The Conservative Independent Alliance Opposition voted against the motion on the basis that it was too sweeping and dealt with matters outside OCC's remit, such as calling on the UK Government to repeal the Illegal Migration Act and the Nationality and Borders Act, and to withdraw from the UK-Rwanda partnership. The motion has subsequently been reaffirmed again by Liberal Democrat Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, who has signed a pledge to fight the anti-refugee laws on behalf of the council.

STREET WORK STARTS IN PREPARATION FOR OXFORD TRAFFIC FILTERS TRIAL

Work started on 26 February on Oxford streets to prepare for the hugely controversial £6.5m scheme to install six traffic filters as part of a trial approved by OCC's Cabinet in November 2022. These filters will split the city into four zones, and only authorised vehicles will be able to pass freely between the zones, with all other traffic being diverted onto the ring road to get from one zone to another. The trial is due to start in October this year, after Network Rail's work to improve Oxford Station is complete. Before then, contractors working on behalf of the council are installing signage and cameras in stages until September, with most work expected in May and June.