

REPORT TO ROTHERFIELD GREYS PARISH COUNCIL SEPT 2023

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

OCC APPLIES TO ITSELF FOR PLANNING PERMISSION – AND REFUSES IT

OCC has been awarded millions of pounds in Government funding to build roads and other necessary infrastructure to support housing in Didcot. It is known as the Housing Infrastructure Fund 1 (HIF1). Such construction requires planning permission, so OCC had to apply to itself for permission. Despite being Council policy backed by Cabinet and officers, the application was refused by the OCC planning committee. The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities subsequently called in the decision. This means there will be a review by the government-appointed planning inspectorate and the Secretary of State will take the final decision about whether to approve the application.

NATIONAL REVIEW OF LTNS AND 20MPH LIMITS

The prime Minister has ordered a review of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) and 20mph zones. The review will also consider increased funding for pothole repairs and examine town centre parking. The aim is to strike a balance between active travel schemes and not penalising motorists. The review will assess the impact of the schemes on the local economy and emergency services, and if necessary, the law may be changed to order their closure.

OXFORD SECTORISATION MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLAN PUBLISHED

Detailed plans for how OCC will monitor and evaluate the impact of splitting Oxford in to four sectors by using “traffic filters” have now been published. The monitoring and evaluation plan sets out how the council will measure the predicted impacts of sectorisation, based on evidence. Sectorisation will be implemented as a trial under an experimental traffic regulation order (ETRO), expected to begin in autumn 2024, after Network Rail’s work to improve Oxford rail station is completed and Botley Road is re-opened. The proposals have been hugely controversial and the councils hopes the monitoring and evaluation plan will dilute opposition. Documents are available to view on the council website:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/TrafficFilterMEPlanSummary.pdf>

FORMER “JUST STOP OIL ACTIVIST” APPOINTED BY OCC AS TREE OFFICER

A man from Stonesfield has been appointed as OCC’s Tree Officer, despite being punished with a 12-month community order in March for a Formula One track invasion at last year’s British Grand Prix. The man, along with five other protesters, was spared jail in March at Northampton Crown Court on but was found guilty of causing an immediate risk of serious harm by sitting in the face of fast-moving vehicles. He previously took part in Just Stop Oil antics in Oxford city centre in 2021 and hit out at the county council for a “complete lack of leadership on the climate crisis”. An OCC spokesman emphasised the officer was no longer involved with Just Stop Oil and his appointment was only made after a rigorous assessment.

NEW FIREFIGHTING EQUIPMENT LAUNCHED

Firefighters across Oxfordshire are now benefitting from new equipment consisting of improved face masks, body-shaped shoulder straps and hip belt, backplate and oxygen cylinders as part of OCC’s Fire and Rescue Service’s commitment to ensuring crews have the best protection.

TRIAL OF LONGER-LASTING ROAD SURFACE

A west Oxfordshire road in Middle Barton is being resurfaced with a high-performance material to test the product's ability to increase the life of a highway. OCC is carrying out the trial in North Street, with its contractor Milestone Infrastructure and their partner Aggregate Industries to develop the use of Gipave – a Graphene Plus-enhanced asphalt. A 725-metre stretch of the road will be laid with Gipave, while an adjacent length of road will be resurfaced using conventional high-performance asphalt, so that the two surfaces can be compared accurately.

FREE ELECTRIC BLANKET TEST

Residents are being encouraged to take up the offer of a free electric blanket check, part of OCC's programme to ensure everyone is safe, as well as warm, this winter. The electric blanket tests are normally very popular, with places limited, therefore, they must be **pre-booked**: by visiting <https://service.oxfordshire.gov.uk/blankettesting> or by calling 01865 895999 or by emailing duty.officer@oxfordshire.gov.uk The full list of dates and locations is provided below.

- Monday 18 September – Oxford City
- Tuesday 19 September – South Oxfordshire
- Wednesday 20 September – Cherwell
- Thursday 21 September – West Oxfordshire
- Friday 22 September – Vale of White Horse
- Monday 2 October – Oxford City
- Tuesday 3 October – South Oxfordshire
- Wednesday 4 October – Cherwell
- Thursday 5 October – West Oxfordshire
- Friday 6 October – Vale of White Horse

The actual address and a specific time slot will be provided at time of booking.

CHARGES FOR NON-HOUSEHOLD WASTE (DIY) AT OCC RECYCLING CENTRES

The Government has announced their intention to abolish charges on small amounts of DIY wastes brought to Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's) to help cut fly tipping. Larger amounts may still be charged for. OCC is awaiting further information and guidance of when this will commence, until then all DIY charges across all of Oxfordshire's seven HWRC's remain in place. The Government's announcement did not abolish all charges but set a minimum level to be accepted for free, larger amounts will still be charged for. At present the Government have indicated that the amount of waste accepted for free will be as follows:

- the quantity of waste per visit must be no greater than two 50L rubble bags or 1 bulky or fitted item no larger than 2000mm x 750mm x700mm, such as a bathtub.
- the waste must not be produced on a regular basis requiring HWRC visits more frequently than four times per household over a four-week period.

The abolition of the charges has been welcomed by the Conservative Opposition and many residents, but attacked by Green councillor Dr Pete Sudbury, OCC Cabinet Member for Climate Change, who said it did not make economic sense and would not solve fly tipping either. The abolition of charges was also attacked by Liberal Democrat County Councillor Freddie van Mierlo who is quoted in his local newspaper as saying: "A lot of people may perceive this as a good move but not everyone does DIY."

REDUNDANCY PAYMENTS OF £840K FOR JUST FOUR INDIVIDUALS

AT Full Council in July, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services confirmed that just four individuals received a total of £840k payments in respect of redundancy, PILON (pay in lieu of notice) and pension contributions. Overall, 36 members of staff were made redundant with a total bill well into seven figures.

SPECIFIC REPORT FOR ROTHERFIELD GREYS

PAVEMENT THROUGH VILLAGE

I understand that the PC has decided not to progress this project for the time being.

APPLICATION FOR 20MPH LIMIT

On 28 June, I received an email from the clerk requesting my support for an application for a 20mph limit in the village. I stated that my personal view is that the OCC proposal is a cosmetic, sign-changing exercise that will have little impact, despite costing the council £8million. (The evidence I have seen indicates any changes in speed will be very small and the majority of the drivers will ignore the limit; indeed, I have a 20mph sign outside my drive in Shiplake and I watch cars go past at 40 or 50mph.) However, I have always supported Rotherfield Greys Parish Council in any way I can, so if it is the will of the council to apply for the scheme, I confirmed I would not stand in its way. An acknowledgement of the application was sent by OCC to the PC on 01 August requesting evidence of community support.