

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS JANUARY 2025

FROM CLLR NIGEL CHAMPKEN-WOODS & KATE GREGORY

GENERAL OCC REPORT

OCC BUDGET 2025/26 CONSULTATION

A public consultation on the substance of the 2025/26 budget has now closed. The final proposals will be published this month and will then go forward to Full Council in February, together with Opposition amendments.

HIF1 PLANNING INQUIRY COSTS £29M

The result of the public inquiry into plans for a £269million road scheme (HIF1) has been announced. The proposals include 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. Local government minister Matthew Pennycook has now approved the application. The costs associated with both the CPO and Planning Public Inquiries are estimated to be around £1m. This figure does not include the inspector costs, which are not yet known. The inflationary increase of the construction works due to the delay in commencement is estimated to be 15%, which equates to approximately £28m.

OCC AIMS TO GO BEYOND NET ZERO BY REMOVING CARBON EMISSIONS

OCC has become the first local authority in the UK to set a target of going beyond net zero when it comes to carbon emissions. The council's Cabinet has committed itself to extending the current carbon neutral target for its own estate and move into carbon dioxide removal. The cost of this initiative to the Council Tax payer is £110,000 (including 'carbon offsets'). Critics claim residents are being short-changed by the council going way beyond its remit and mistakenly positioning itself as a climate change leader, and that it should get back to basics and deliver better services to residents.

PIZZA, POLITICS AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

More than 40 young people from across the county came together in November to talk politics and enjoy some pizza, as part of OCC's Future Generations Fortnight. The session was open to all in Oxfordshire aged 11 to 18. It aimed to help them get an understanding of local democracy and encourage them to get involved in politics.

SUPPORT FOR OXFORDSHIRE FARMERS

An Opposition motion in support of Oxfordshire farmers was passed at Full Council on 10 December. The Leader will now write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ask that introduction of the family farm taxes be reconsidered for the sake of environmental protection and food security.

OXFORD TRAFFIC MEASURES TO BE QUESTIONED

A motion as amended by the Opposition was passed at Full Council on 10 December that called for the establishment of a resident & business group to be set up to consider the impact of the proposed traffic measures that could cost Oxfordshire motorists £57m over five years.

Devolution

OCC has responded to the government's White Paper on devolution and local government reorganisation. The government is seeking to abolish district councils in favour of unitary councils and create groupings of unitaries called strategic authorities (which can come with a mayor). Oxfordshire County Council is the lead authority in the process for our area and has expressed to the government a wish to be included in the first wave of changes. There are clear advantages to this, including avoiding a prolonged period of uncertainty. OCC's response focuses on what geography the strategic authority should take, expressing an interest in forming a Thames Valley authority. Options being suggested for unitarization include an Oxfordshire wide unitary authority, or multiple unitary authorities within Oxfordshire.

Local Elections

OCC's letter to the government's White Paper, includes a preference for local elections to the county council scheduled to take place in May to go ahead as planned.