

**ANNUAL REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS
APRIL 2017 – APRIL 2018
FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE
BERINSFIELD & GARSINGTON DIVISION**

On 4th May I was re-elected as your County Councillor with a majority of 1,054, which represents 55% of the vote. I am really pleased to be able to represent you once again, and would like to thank everyone who supported me.

Whether you voted for me or not I will continue to work hard for everyone in my Division which covers Dorchester, Warborough, Shillingford, Newington, Stadhampton, Chiselhampton, Drayton St Leonard, Berinsfield, Burcot, Clifton Hampden, Culham, Nuneham Courtenay, Marsh Baldon, Toot Baldon, Garsington and Sandford-on-Thames.

The Conservative Party has retained control of the Council by joining into an Alliance with two Independent members as we did before, and I have been re-appointed to the Cabinet by the Leader, Cllr Ian Hudspeth. I will continue to drive our Asset Management and Property Portfolio, our Cultural & Community Services, and in addition I have taken over the County Council's Transformation Programme, known as Fit for the Future.

COUNCIL SET A BUDGET FROM A RESILIENT POSITION

OCC set a new budget from a resilient position having made difficult choices in previous years to manage a combination of squeezed budgets and the fact that more people need council services – especially in children's social care and adult social care. At the same time the council has been involving communities in services for their locality – ranging from support for older people and those with learning disabilities to library volunteers. The net result is that the council's finances are in a resilient position looking ahead to the 2018/19 financial year and planning for years up to 2022. Although proposed budget changes are not as extensive as in many previous years, like any organisation the council still has rising financial pressures that need to be matched by new savings so that a balanced budget can be proposed.

OCC agreed its budget at a Full Council meeting on 13 February following a five-hour meeting of all 63 county councillors. Council Tax will rise by 5.99%, the maximum amount allowed without a referendum. Key points include:

- Finances are sound compared to other councils, with difficult decisions having already been taken
- The Council Tax rise will deliver extra money for adults and children's social care
- Proposal to extend £500,000 contribution for homelessness for an extra year in 2019/20 (subject to consultation)
- 10-year programme to improve transport network and release more money for road maintenance
- £15,000 for each of the 63 county councillors to spend on local priorities in their area.

The Councillor's Priority Fund replaces the Stewardship Fund which was axed during the cuts. County Councillors will have a £15k fund for each of the next 2 years to support parish councils and community groups with small local projects. The criteria includes small highways projects which will be welcome news to many communities. In addition, OCC is prioritising children's social care with £1.9m extra being put in to this service. Overall this means £8.5m is being added to the budget for children's social care in 2018/19. This follows the central government announcement that it would allow councils to raise council tax by an additional 1% primarily to address financial pressures in children's social care. The council had proposed a 1.99% Council Tax, with an additional 3% precept for adult social care bringing the total proposed rise to 4.99% the same as last year. The additional 1% that has now been allowed takes the total rise for 2018/19 to 5.99%, with a proposed 2.99% rise in 2019/20. Other calls on funding include the local government national pay settlement where a total of £2.9m extra is required over 2018/19 (£1.4m) and 2019/20 (£1.5m).

GROWTH BOARD ANNOUNCEMENT ON HOUSING AND GROWTH AGREEMENT

The Oxfordshire Growth Board comprises the six councils: Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, together with the county's Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP). After many months of negotiations, on Budget Day (22nd November) it was announced that the Board had reached an outline Housing and Growth Agreement with Government. This will see an additional £215 million of investment over the next five years to build infrastructure, support the delivery of new homes and boost economic productivity across the county. This breaks down as: £30m pa for five years for infrastructure; £60m for affordable homes across the county; and £5m to develop a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan. The Board wants the five-year deal to be the first stage in a sustained partnership with Government to secure the ongoing investment needed to deliver properly planned growth and economic development over the coming years. This will support councils to achieve the ambition of 100,000 new homes across the county over the period 2011-2031, as identified through the 2014 countywide Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Local Plans. During the period of development all planning authorities will have their five-year land supply requirement reduced to a three-year land supply with that condition in place for the first three years of the new JSSP. The Housing Minister Dominic Raab visited Oxfordshire in March and officially signed the deal.

HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE FUND (HIF)

On 21 March the Government announced 44 bids which have made it through to stage 2 of its Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) to fund major infrastructure projects. Two of the three HIF bids submitted by OCC last autumn on behalf of Oxfordshire made it through and will now progress to a co-development stage:

Didcot Garden Town – £171m is sought for transport improvements including a Didcot Science Bridge and A4130 dual carriageway, a new river crossing at Culham and Clifton Hampden Bypass. This would support the delivery of over 22,000 homes in Didcot, Culham, Harwell and Berinsfield. Additionally, up to £70m of cycle and other sustainable transport improvements are proposed for inclusion in the bid plan.

West Oxfordshire Garden Village – £135m is sought for further upgrades to the A40, building on existing schemes and based on the approved A40 Long Term Strategy including development of the Rapid Transit network and additional highway capacity on A40 transport corridor. This would support the delivery of over 10,000 homes in Witney & Carterton, and around Eynsham.

Detailed business plans will now be developed for the £300 million of transport infrastructure investment behind these two bids. The Growth Board partners expect to hear in the autumn whether or not the two bids going through have ultimately succeeded.

OXFORD-CAMBRIDGE EXPRESSWAY

In December the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) published its report to Government on the Oxford-Cambridge development arc. It advised on the need for long-term investment funding for new transport infrastructure to harness the region's economic potential, to benefit local people and boost UK plc in a post-Brexit landscape. For the residents of South Oxfordshire and particularly this Division facing the potential of an expressway cutting a ten mile swathe through our countryside, there were encouraging signs in that the Commission recommended that a more logical route would be to follow existing rail and road routes (to the West and North of Oxford). But the Commission declined to be specific which is frustrating, and their recommendations are only advisory. It will be up to Highways England to make the final decision by Summer 2018. They were proposing to do this without a period for public consultation which I and many others found totally unacceptable.

On 12th December an overwhelming majority of County Councillors voted to support a motion tabled by Cllr Atkins calling on the Leader Ian Hudspeth to write to Highways England, NIC, the Transport Minister Chris Grayling etc asking on behalf of the County Council for an Independent Inquiry before any decision is taken on the preferred corridor for the Expressway. The timetable

for the project only includes an Inquiry afterwards, when the choice between North/West, Central or South of Oxford has been taken. It was encouraging to get such widespread support from right across the county. Sadly since then we have heard back from Highways England who declined to establish a Public Inquiry. They are however, engaging with County Councillors and gave a briefing on 27th March at which they showed their latest thinking on the three possible corridors. A cross party Cabinet Advisory Group has been set up at OCC to monitor and comment on the progress of the project. The County Council's official position is neutral, that of a stakeholder/consultee.

MINERALS & WASTE CORE STRATEGY

In July the County Council's new Minerals and Waste Core Strategy, which outlines the planning strategy and policies for the supply of minerals and the management of waste in Oxfordshire until 2031, received support from the Government's Planning Inspectorate. Following approval by Cabinet on 18th July it went to Full Council in September and was ratified. This was disappointing news for this area, since the new strategy contains key changes that may impact our ability to defend our countryside against large-scale gravel extraction in the future.

Crucially, there is now a presumption that 75% of extraction will take place in the south of the county, 25% in the West. And the Local Aggregate Assessment, which is the total amount of gravel that must be extracted per year has been set at 1.015 million tonnes. This is believed to be far in excess of what is actually required, thus opening the door to the unnecessary development of new extraction sites.

Part 2 of the Plan is now underway, and the call has gone out to the industry for site nominations. This area, particularly Berinsfield, Shillingford, Dorchester, Warborough, Stadhampton, Drayton St Leonard, Culham and Nuneham Courtenay are all listed as potential quarry sites. There has been a big response with many previous nominations being re-confirmed and a few additional sites being put forward. According to officers the potential yield far exceeds what is needed. Consultation on the different options will be undertaken in June/July 2018. The stellar work done by Parishes Against Gravel Extraction has kept this area protected for the last 10 years. But sadly, they are needed again now, as much as they ever were.

QUARRY APPLICATION AT CLIFTON HAMPDEN AND CULHAM REJECTED

After years of diligent and effective campaigning by local residents against the application for a huge quarry at Fullamoor Farm between Clifton Hampden and Culham it was rejected by the County Council's Planning and Regulation Committee on November 27th. The main reason was the unacceptable impact upon traffic and congestion in the area, particularly at peak times. The quarry would have generated 100+ lorry movements per day. A last minute attempt was made by Hills to save their application by agreeing to prohibit lorry movements at peak times. This failed to satisfy the Councillors as did the arguments that the quarry would not impair the construction of the North-South road from Didcot, the new river crossing and the Clifton Hampden bypass all of which now look as if they could be in place by 2025, which is really good news.

OCC STEPS UP POTHOLE WORK

Repeated cycles of ice, thaws and snow have created the worst possible weather conditions for roads over the last few months leading to a rise in reports on Fix My Street from 3,000 pre-Christmas to 7,000 during January. OCC has drafted in more staff to carry out inspections and contractors Skanska are sending out more teams to carry out repairs. An additional Dragon-Patcher is now in action on the road network travelling round on an 'inspect and fix' basis on the rural network. There is also good news in the form of almost £1m in extra funding from the Department for Transport in recognition of damage done to the roads by bad weather. This money will be spent on road patching later this year as that will give longer lasting benefits and better value for money. Defects that make roads hazardous will be dealt with within 24 hours as usual.

COUNCIL ENDS CONTRACT WITH CARILLION

In August 2017 Oxfordshire County Council agreed to exit a significant proportion of its contract with Carillion. Negotiations had been ongoing for many months and both parties reached a mutually beneficial settlement covering the construction side of the deal which was originally signed in 2012 and was set to last for 10 years.

On the collapse of the parent company in January 2018 OCC formally terminated its contract with Carillion LGS Limited effective from 1 February 2018. This brought forward the already agreed end of the contract negotiated last June set for the end of June 2018. OCC made a net payment of £10.65m to Carillion to cover construction work already completed.

Carillion also provided the Council with school meals and cleaning; maintenance of council buildings and property services. OCC acted quickly to ensure that these services continued through a mix of bringing the Carillion staff in-house; continuing with suppliers, and working with sub-contractors. We are proud to say that there were no job losses or any breakdowns in provision.

Like every other Carillion customer, OCC is now working out the most cost-effective way to complete construction work left unfinished by Carillion. The Council has taken over direct responsibility for commissioning future construction work and service delivery.

NEW DAYTIME SUPPORT SERVICE

Last year OCC implemented a new, sustainable model of daytime support for vulnerable adults in Oxfordshire. There are over 200 voluntary and community daytime support services provided across Oxfordshire. The vast majority of the 47 services that are currently funded by OCC are set to continue and have applied for and been awarded grant funding to support their move to more self-sustaining models. OCC is continuing to fund the Wellbeing and Employment Support Service and the Dementia Support Service, and is investing an additional £25,000 per year in increasing the capacity of these services to support people with autism and to train other services in dementia support. County Council provided Health and Wellbeing Centres and Learning Disability Daytime Support services were replaced by a new council-provided Community Support Service from 1st October 2017. This service provides flexible, person-centred support to meet a wide range of people's needs, delivered from 8 building bases across the county in Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Oxford, Wallingford, Wantage. Everyone using former services was offered an individual assessment and/or review and support to explore their options. For people who are assessed as not having eligible needs, there will still be a range of options, for example joining a local group, attending community and voluntary sector provided services or purchasing support from the new Community Support Service.

OXFORDSHIRE'S LIBRARIES ARE THRIVING

I was delighted to welcome Libraries Minister Michael Ellis MP to the official opening of the Oxfordshire County Library on 22nd February. The newly refitted facility at the entrance to the Westgate Centre welcomed more than 100 guests including John Howell MP, the High Sherriff Jane Cranston, Deputy Lord Lieutenant John Harwood, staff, volunteers and community groups who have helped ensure the county's 43 branches have a bright future.

Mr Ellis toured the library and spoke with staff and volunteers about its transformation and wider network of Oxfordshire branches. He said: *"This is a wonderful example of a library that is an integral part of the community. We want to see libraries thrive - not just survive – and this is a classic example of a thriving library. Libraries are still greatly valued by many people."*

Also among the guests was Philip Pullman, author of the famous *His Dark Materials Trilogy* who signed autographs and said, *"I'm very impressed with what I have seen. I knew the old library very well and used to use it regularly, and now it's looking absolutely splendid."* Since reopening just before Christmas the library has signed up 2,000 new members.

HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE UPDATE

After a period of consultation and assessment OCC has signed a new Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) contract that secures all seven sites in the medium term, with no change to the sites opening hours or days. Banners and leaflets are now on site at all seven HWRCs, informing local residents that there will be a change in non-household waste charges from the 1st October. The existing DIY 1,2,3 for free scheme is being replaced by a small fixed fee per item of £1.50 for non-household waste.

DRIVERLESS CARS TESTED AT CULHAM

News that ground-breaking transport technology being pioneered in Oxfordshire has won a share of a £51million government prize has been welcomed. Oxfordshire is home to Science Vale UK and some world leading science and technology companies who are blazing a trail towards more energy efficient and road safety. Organisations based in the Science Vale are working on pioneering projects such as autonomous cars and smart traffic management systems needed to support people travelling around the county. Remote Applications in Challenging Environments (RACE), which is based at Culham Science Centre in Oxfordshire, is to receive £6.9m from the Department of Transport towards their £10million project to set up a range of different test areas mimicking increasingly realistic city driving environments, where automated vehicles can be tested before being taken onto public roads. They are one of a number of companies that Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils work with to drive progress on future transport technology.