

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS – JULY 2020 BY COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE

Didcot Housing Infrastructure Fund

An important milestone in the development of a major infrastructure project for Oxfordshire was announced on 19th June.

Oxfordshire County Council can confirm it has reached a funding agreement with Homes England for £218m from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) dedicated to providing access to the Didcot Garden Town area. The HIF scheme is administered by Homes England to help support the delivery of much-needed housing and supporting infrastructure.

This funding will allow the council to improve travel for residents, communities and business whilst supporting thousands of new homes and jobs. All schemes include segregated walking and cycling routes and will facilitate new bus services which will give people real sustainable travel choice.

This sum of £218m (towards infrastructure costs of £234m) will deliver:

- Widening the A4130 from A34 Milton Interchange towards Didcot from single to dual carriageway;
- A new bridge over the A4130, Great Western Railway Line and Milton Road into the former Didcot A Power Station site;
- A new Didcot to Culham bridge between the A4130 and A415; and
- A Clifton Hampden bypass

The lack of suitable crossings over the railway line and river coupled with significant housing and employment growth in the past three decades has resulted in severe congestion in the Didcot Garden Town and the surrounding area. The new infrastructure not only provides opportunities for sustainable travel along the new routes but enables traffic demand management measures to be implemented elsewhere to prioritise non-motorised traffic, where appropriate. It also provides new opportunities to connect areas of employment and housing for those on foot and bike using existing public rights of way.

A comprehensive landscaping strategy will be implemented that will include tree planting to make the routes greener and provide screening, helping to minimise their impact on the landscape. Improvements to biodiversity will

also be made where possible in line with the completion of a full Environmental Impact Assessment.

This funding will enable direct and convenient, sustainable access between new and existing homes and key employment sites in and around Didcot. The HIF schemes have been identified as essential in Local Plan development to deliver sustainable growth across South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse districts and Oxfordshire County Council has been working in partnership with the two district councils to help enable this necessary infrastructure.

Oxfordshire County Council held a [consultation](#) to hear residents' views on plans to support growth around Didcot in late 2018 and a second round in March-April this year. Analysis of the responses received to this latest consultation will be published shortly.

COVID-19 Update

From 4th July the Government is introducing further measures to ease the lockdown, but it is vital that we still remain vigilant. The County Council is working with partners across the County on plans to reduce the spread of the virus and to prepare for a response to any potential local outbreaks. This will enable us to return life to as near normal as possible for as many people as possible, in a way that is safe.

Libraries and Registration Offices

Much of the hospitality, culture and leisure sector will restart from 4th July, albeit with social distancing in place. We will be opening our libraries and registration offices gradually in the coming weeks and months. We are now able to register births again, and are currently registering babies born up to the end of April. We are planning a phased approach to opening our public buildings, with every precaution being taken to make sure this happens safely.

Safety Measures to protect Shoppers

In the public realm, people will notice signs to remind them to socially distance, and changes such as increased pavement space and one-way systems for pedestrians on narrow streets. We have also put in place changes to the road network to help support our town centres thrive again.

Good Neighbour, Safe Neighbour Scheme

With the easing of lockdown, there is the potential to leave a number of vulnerable people without support. Our new Good Neighbour, Safe Neighbour scheme can help. It has been devised by Oxfordshire's six councils to encourage people to check in on their neighbours and for people to contact their local council if they are concerned. I have attached a leaflet with this report, and would ask for it to be sent out to voluntary and community groups in your area.

Local History Comes to the Fore during Lockdown

People in Oxfordshire have been using lockdown to research their family history and local history more generally in far larger numbers than normal.

Many of the Oxfordshire History Centre's online resources had until recently only been available in the centre itself or from the county's libraries. However, the refreshed www.oxfordshirehistory.org.uk website is now more publicly accessible.

This saw the site receive an average of 8,500 visits per month in April and May compared to a monthly average of 5,000 during 2019/10. It's wonderful that increased amounts of our family and local history information are freely available for the first time and it's clear that people have been enjoying those opportunities in greater numbers during the lockdown period.

Meanwhile an Oxfordshire History COVID-19 '**Lockdown Pictures and Stories**' Facebook group was set up by Oxfordshire County Council's History Service at the end of April, for local residents to share their experiences of lockdown in words and pictures, as a publicly accessible legacy for future residents and communities. It has been accumulating members who have posted photographs and videos, which we have captured and archived. Hundreds of pictures have now been submitted.

It's also important that we document this unusual phase in the history of our county and the nation as a whole. We're glad that people are providing photographs and videos so that future generations can better understand and appreciate what the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 was all about in Oxfordshire.