

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

MORE LIBRARIES OPEN ACROSS THE COUNTY

19 of our libraries have already re-opened, with more to follow this month. Locally, we now have seven core libraries open: Abingdon, Thame, Didcot, Cowley, Henley, Wallingford and Berinsfield. Plus Faringdon, Sonning Common, Watlington, Woodcote and Chinnor Community libraries are opening during the week commencing 12th October.

The library network is part of my Portfolio of responsibilities, and I am delighted that the County Council has been able to open so many, in a very COVID-19 safe way. It has not been as easy as you might think, but I feel it is so important to provide our residents with a safe and secure public space at a time when other venues are facing huge challenges. We ask visitors to wear masks, register with the contact tracing system, use hand sanitiser and keep their distance. All returned books are quarantined for 72 hours before being put back on the shelves. We are still not collecting any fines!

RETURN TO SCHOOL GOING WELL

This week as the Cabinet Member responsible for the Education Service, I was also pleased to be able to issue a press release **praising parents, carers, pupils, teachers and school support staff** for their commitment to ensuring a safe return to the classroom, despite the continued national challenges of COVID-19.

Pupil attendance in all Oxfordshire schools is currently significantly higher than the national average: **For Oxfordshire maintained schools, it was 93.3% on 29th September, compared to 88.7% across England.**

Schools are working hard to carefully manage their COVID-19 safety measures. They are regularly communicating details to parents, carers and pupils by letter, social media and online virtual meetings giving parents confidence to return their children to the classroom, maintain attendance, and enhance their children's wellbeing.

Head teachers and members of the Council's public health and education teams have put in place robust processes so that schools, colleges and early years settings can respond quickly and appropriately to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

COVID-19 UPDATE

South Oxfordshire continues to remain at alert level green. But **Oxford City**, currently at amber alert status is edging closer to a **red alert level**. The sharp rise in cases in Oxford is a fast-moving situation and the County Council is monitoring it very closely. We are working with partners to send increased and targeted warnings that call on people to follow the government guidance.

The **NHS COVID-19 APP is now live** – please download it if you can. The more people who use the APP the more we can keep each other safe and stop the infection rates rising. If you do not have COVID-19 symptoms please do not book a test. You could be taking a test away from someone who really needs it, like a key worker.

COVID SECURE TEAM – a new development

To help ensure that government safety rules are being applied, a new COVID Secure Team is has been established across Oxfordshire. Funded by the County Council's NHS Test and Trace grant, and delivered jointly across all Oxfordshire councils, the Team's aim is to encourage compliance by businesses and the public and to provide a visible and reassuring presence on the county's streets.

THE COUNTY NEEDS MORE CARERS

Residents across Oxfordshire are being encouraged to find their career in care thanks to an innovative partnership between our own Oxfordshire Employment and Style Acre. The Careers in Care programme, which has been extended to 31 March 2021, is designed to bring individuals closer to voluntary and paid employment through bespoke work experience. Oxfordshire needs more people to consider care as a career, so please help raise the profile of this fantastic programme with residents in your community.

VIKINGS REUNITED

A family is being reunited from our Museums Service after 1,000 years and an Oxford Massacre

Two Vikings from the same family are to be reunited more than 1,000 years after their deaths, thanks to help from our Museum Service. We have a skeleton that is one of at least 35 men and boys believed to be victims of Oxford's St Brice's Day Massacre of AD 1002, in which dozens of Danish raiders, settlers and their offspring were thought to have been executed on the orders of the King Aethelred II of England. The skeleton is held at our Museum Resource Centre in Standlake, West Oxfordshire.

Now DNA evidence has shown that a male skeleton, discovered during an excavation in Denmark, is closely related to one of the Oxfordshire victims – known as SK1756.

Next year, SK1756 will be taken 'home' to Denmark to be included in a Viking exhibition alongside the latest Danish discovery – believed to be a close relative such as an uncle, nephew, grandfather, grandson or half-brother.

In the meantime, SK1756 is set to be featured in a Danish TV documentary about the Vikings. The Director of the National Museum of Denmark, Dr Rane Willerslev, visited Standlake with a television crew on Thursday, September 24, where he interviewed Oxfordshire's Curator of Archaeology, Angie Bolton, for the documentary.

Dr Willerslev said: "It was strange to see this skeleton – one of your ancestors – which had been hit eight to 10 times in the head and stabbed several times in the spine, just lying there in front of you."

The mass grave was discovered in 2008 when archaeological excavations took place ahead of a development in the grounds of Oxford University's St John's College. Research shows that they had all been massacred at the same time, probably in AD 1002.

Isotopic analysis suggests that some of the victims originated from within the UK, Denmark and Germany. The massacre was

prompted by King Aethelred's frustration at his inability to stop Viking invaders from raiding England.

"I don't think there will be any hard feelings towards the Brits," Dr Willersley joked. "People always think the Vikings went overseas and killed and plundered, but here the situation is turned around. It's payback!"

The documentary and the exhibition, due to open at the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen in 2021 and run in various forms until 2024, show that the Danes still embrace their Viking heritage.

The Museums Resource Centre is the principal store for all archaeological sites excavated or studied in Oxfordshire. Collections include sites and objects from every period of human history – prehistoric, Roman, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval.

As many of you will know, I am an archaeologist, and just couldn't resist telling you about this fascinating discovery. The Museum Service is also part of my Portfolio, and very dear to my heart.
