

<b>Title</b>	County Councillor's Report
<b>Author</b>	Cllr Robin Bennett
	Berinsfield & Garsington Division
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<b>Contact</b>	<a href="mailto:robin.bennett@oxfordshire.gov.uk">robin.bennett@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a> 07979 646815

## **Oxfordshire County Council Budget 2022-2023**

OCC has just agreed the first budget of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance, a new administration for Oxfordshire which has been forged around a shared commitment to nine priorities.

The three political parties of the Alliance (Lib Dems, Labour and Greens) are working together because we want to see a greener, fairer, healthier Oxfordshire.

We want to build on our strengths while confronting the challenges we face: addressing climate change, tackling inequality, strengthening the resilience of individuals and communities, fostering more social cohesion and common purpose.

Our initial budget proposal in December had more than double the number of responses received last year. We have sought to reflect these in the budget, and have added:

1. £500,000 to support the review into home-to-school transport, with a particular focus on supporting more active travel and more sustainable transport opportunities.
2. We are offering tenants of the Council in community assets a one-year rent holiday to take account of financial pressures on many community and voluntary organisations.
3. We will undertake a strategic rail feasibility study to advance the proposals for new rail links to Cowley, Grove/ Wantage, North Cotswolds and West Oxfordshire.
4. We are investing to accelerate our work on active travel in the county: planning for new walking and cycling schemes and including them in any future proposals.
5. Further investment to (a) support projects that will generate future savings for the Council budget; (b) make early interventions to improve the lives of children and young people; (c) accelerate our climate response.

The Alliance called on national government to respond to the challenges facing local government in a meaningful way through the autumn spending review. Unfortunately, they did not. Instead, in adult social care for example, they directed that local authorities should use Council Tax to meet rising costs.

In some areas, we have found that the sums provided for capital projects by the previous administration were inadequate, for example we have had to budget £27m extra for Kennington Bridge.

The largest example is the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF1) scheme linking Didcot and Culham; When the previous administration committed to deliver this, it accepted the full financial liability for any additional costs.

We now face disruptions to the supply chain, very significant inflation and labour shortages in the construction sector, which will hugely increase the expense of such projects. We have asked officers to take a more sober and realistic assessment of the costs and risks associated with major programmes.

The OCC budget also included £8m over three years to allow communities across the county to bring in 20mph limits in built-up areas; it's great to see such a positive response already.

### **20mph limit and peafowl petition**

I was very happy to support applications from both Nuneham Courtenay and the Baldons parish councils for 20mph limits within the villages (as you can already see installed in places like Long Wittenham and Cuxham).

These applications will now go forward for consideration by highways officers, with the default being to support.

There is £8m in the OCC budget to support the necessary legal costs and signage changes for communities across Oxfordshire over the next three years.

I was also very glad to help get the community's petition on peafowl crossing the A4074 heard by OCC Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> February. My colleague Tim Bearder, the cabinet member for highways management, displayed an excellent awareness of the history of Nuneham Courtenay, and I will continue to discuss with him possible solutions for the safety of these much-loved birds.

## **Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council end formal partnership**

Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council have both agreed to bring their formal partnership arrangements to an end. The arrangement between the two councils, which has taken the form of joint services under a single chief executive, has been in place since September 2018. Recruitment will take place for the post of permanent chief executive for the County Council.

## **Public engagement on proposal to move Oxford United FC to Stratfield Brake (Kidlington)**

Oxford United Football Club has proposed to develop a new 18,000 capacity football stadium with linked leisure and commercial facilities at Stratfield Brake in Kidlington (on land owned by the County Council). In addition to the stadium, the club's proposal includes facilities such as a hotel, retail, conferencing and training and community grounds.

After February's public consultation, OCC Cabinet will consider whether to proceed with negotiations at its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> March.