

Oxfordshire County Council News January/February 2026

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Last Full County Council on 10th December

Our Green Party motion in opposition to the giant 'Abingdon Reservoir' or South East Strategic Reservoir Option, recently named 'White Horse Reservoir' was voted for unanimously.

Our opposition at this juncture was founded on the absence of a requirement for a full Emergency Discharge Plan in advance of planning consent.

A letter has now been sent by OxonCC to the Secretary of State concerning this. The reservoir will be ten times the volume of Farmoor Reservoir and 4.5 times its surface area. South Oxfordshire District Council also passed a similar motion days later.

A LibDem motion, which we Greens seconded, also passed. This was recognising a requirement for greater community cohesion in light of the recent climate of fear engendered by the lamp post flag flying campaign supported by the 'Raise The Colours' far right group. An action plan is being worked on.

Next Full Council on 10th February 2026

This will be to agree the County Council budget for 2026-2027. There will therefore be no motions tabled by any party and no questions asked of Cabinet.

The context for the budget is from a total population of 725,300, 18% are aged 15 or under, 18% are 65 or over which is about 130,000 of each.

Rural areas have a higher proportion of elderly residents leading to concerns about isolation and access to services.

Key age-related issues include providing for the needs of the elderly, ensuring services for children and youth are maintained (education, youth clubs, etc.) and enabling working-age adults to access employment and transport.

Severe budget pressures derive from rising demand in services like Adult Social Care and Special Educational Needs (SEN), inflation in contract costs, and legacy budget shortfalls.

Compounding this is the Fair Funding Review 2.0 by central government, which will overhaul how councils are funded from 2026/2027. This is all against a backdrop of unfinalised Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution.

The government has just provided indicative budgets for councils for three years so some planning has been made easier, but there is an identified shortfall of £5.4m this next year and this amount increases over the following years.

It appears that the Council Tax will be set to rise, probably at 4.99% per annum for the foreseeable future.

Improving our fire service

The public consultation on the future of Oxfordshire County Council's fire and rescue service which includes the proposed closure of Henley Fire Station was extended until the end of January 2026 from 20th January as originally scheduled.

Rob MacDougall, Oxfordshire County Council's fire and rescue service's Chief Fire Officer, said: "I'd like to thank everyone who has already shared their thoughts on our proposals through the public consultation, we've had over 900 responses to date.

Based on the interest shown, and because we want as wide a contribution of opinions as possible, we've now decided to keep it open for another couple of weeks, until the end of this month."

The consultation is available online at [Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#). My apologies if this report lands with you just too late to contribute, but the 'Facts First' document on the above page states the changes planned.

Wicklesham Quarry

OxonCC have controversially approved a major commercial/industrial development on top of Wicklesham Quarry outside Faringdon. Almost all of the 29-acre Site of Special Scientific Interest would be de-listed and

access to 150 species of fossil contained in the globally unique Faringdon Sponge Gravels lost.

X

OxonCC has announced that it will stop using X, including its separate account for travel updates, OxonTravel from April.

Other public bodies such as Cherwell District Council have also decided to leave over concerns about the rise in hate speech and abuse towards women and girls.

Oxford Railway Station

The existing Botley Road Rail bridge will be demolished between 1-8 February. The walking route will be changed and train services from Oxford to Didcot will be replaced by buses. Check journey details [here](#).

Leaving County Hall

OxonCC is leaving its current premises at the end of 2026. County Hall is being turned into a four star hotel. The council is returning to its former building Speedwell House, but is seeking temporary accommodation until Speedwell House is ready for occupation.