

Oxfordshire County Council Annual Parish Report 2025-26

Cllr Robin Jones (Berinsfield & Garsington Division)

(Berinsfield, Burcot, Clifton Hampden, Culham, Drayton St. Leonard, Garsington, Nuneham Courtenay, Sandford on Thames, The Baldons)

Email: robin.jones@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Mob: +44 7916 293681

Councillor Administration changes at County Council

Local County Council elections were held in May 2025. Previously Oxfordshire County Council was a joint administration between the Greens and Lib Dems but following the election the Green Party had more county councillors (seven instead of three), but with the Lib Dems winning 36 of the 69 seats available we Greens were no longer in joint administration, nor even official Opposition.

Until time of writing (with two councillors leaving the LD group in the last fortnight) the make-up has been:

(Administration) Lib Dems – 36 seats

(Opposition) Labour – 12 seats and Oxfordshire Alliance – 12 seats
(Conservatives after scooping up some independents)

Green Party – 7 seats

Reform – 1 seat

and one non-aligned independent (from the Henley Residents Group).

Wins and frustrations

As a Green Group, we got most of our motions passed, including asking for proper emergency discharge modelling for the Abingdon reservoir and payment of the Oxford Living Wage for all OxonCC staff to join the other 200 plus companies doing so in the county (and hopefully setting a precedent in the process for greater pay equality and workers' remuneration).

We have taken a fresh look at how the Council operates (the majority of our Group being new to local government), and are looking at means, cross-party, to tighten up the constitution and make it work better for everyone. We will be recommending tweaks at the July Full Council.

The Budget

In February we had opportunities to question the Lib Dem administration and OxonCC officers on their proposed budget for the forthcoming financial year and consider how we could amend it given declining

central governmental financial input over these final years of Oxfordshire County Council.

The national government is significantly reducing their contribution to most councils in the next three years – targeting their funds towards deprived areas.

For OxonCC this means that we will be short of c.£45m in the next three financial years (ramping up from £5m in 26/27 to £27m in 28/29).

When viewed as a whole Oxfordshire is a wealthy, thriving county – scratch the surface, however, and we find some of the most deprived areas in the country.

OxonCC is not in a bad financial position compared to many counties. With the vast overspend on children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities by all counties, many UK counties are carrying a substantial debt – enough in about 45% of instances to bankrupt the councils concerned in the near future.

Thankfully central government has finally stepped in to resolve this issue stating they will refund 90% of the overspend in this financial year. To OxonCC this is a significant sum.

The Green Party had the only amendment to the Budget accepted at February's full council. We gained £1m ring-fenced funding for maintenance of pavements, paths and cycleways throughout the County and further finance allocated to social cohesion and environment issues.

It's not all speeding, flags and potholes!

But mostly...

Looking back at resident complaints over the last year, the vast majority would fall into one of the three above. However, things might start looking rosier going forward.

Speeding is being addressed with new speed limits on the A4074 (and a redesign on the Dorchester bypass) and its tributaries. These haven't all been implemented yet with some coming in over the coming year.

We have also seen a bigger Thames Valley Police presence along the A4074. Any reduction in speeding limits will be ineffectual if it isn't backed up by a physical deterrent and consistent monitoring.

Culham Crossing The long campaigned for Toucan Crossing from Culham at Tollgate Road onto the A415 so that cyclists and pedestrians can cross safely has been approved and fully funded.

Roman Road Cycle Route from Berinsfield into Oxford has been fully technically scoped now, the next important step in realising a vital active travel route from South Oxfordshire to Oxford City

Flags are finally being properly pursued by OxonCC. Raise the Colours has been placing flags (of various guises) on OxonCC street furniture over the last six months. This has been incredibly polarising.

Some supporters claiming it to only be a Patriotic statement, others seeing them as nothing but a divisive and racist act from the far right of British politics.

For a brief period, OxonCC bought in a contractor to take the flags down, however even though this was undertaken late at night with the contractor personnel wearing balaclavas, they were threatened and had to stop.

During this period c.400 flags were removed at a considerable cost to the council. Recently OxonCC has issued a formal legal notice to Raise the Colours to stop them from placing flags on lampposts.

If the group does not comply with the letter, OxonCC will consider all available options to include, but not be limited to, civil and criminal proceedings against the organisation and individuals affiliated to it.

Potholes have been a nightmare this winter. From a Highways perspective they have been hit with the worst combination of weather – cold nights, warm days and rainfall way above our averages, exacerbated by the trend towards increasingly heavier cars.

February and March saw a tripling of pothole repair teams out and about in Oxfordshire – but with the sheer volume this still left many untouched, and OxonCC has seen claims for pothole damage increase vastly (500+%) versus the same period in 2025.

To avoid the same happening again next year OxonCC is spending £8million over the coming few months on surface treating our roads. Oxfordshire, according to the latest (2024) figures, has some of the busiest roads in the country with 4.79 billion vehicle miles travelled.

Very recently **household waste disposal** has been an issue. We are monitoring this new system (registering before going to the tip), looking at the data and allowing it to settle in.

If proven to be counter-productive and causing an increase in fly-tipping this will be challenged at future Full Councils.

Local Government Reorganisation

The public consultation on the above has recently closed. Three options have been put forward to the government on how Oxfordshire County and the district councils can be reorganised to pull all functions under one body, in theory, saving money and creating efficiencies.

As we are all now painfully aware (so much discussion!) the three options are:

- One Unitary: Oxfordshire (as now, but with the District Council functions merged in)
- Two Unitaries: North and South Oxfordshire (Ridgeway – incorporating West Berkshire)
- Three Unitaries: Greater Oxford (with a vastly extended boundary), North and South Oxfordshire

The government has currently indicated it will give a ‘minded-to decision’ around mid to end July. This will (probably) lead to elections in May 2027 for those standing for the new Unitary/s.

This new structure will run in tandem with the existing bodies for a period of a year after which a full handover will happen in 2028. Well, that’s the current plan!

What is unclear is what structure/s will be chosen by the government, and how a new government proposal we were notified of in March – “the **Greater Oxford Development Corporation**” (please see the SODC annual report for details on this) plays into this. Look out for another important consultation later this year.

Equally unclear as yet is the overall **Thames Valley Devolution** structure, where a Mayoral or Strategic Authority will sit above the new Unitary – again mentioned within the SODC annual report.

The LibDem administration of OxonCC has so far signed an Expression of Interest letter in this structure due to the huge amounts of funding the government is said to be backing it with.

These changes will undoubtedly impact parish councils, although we do not know how, yet. There will certainly be a lower representation through Councillors in any of the new structures (some areas more than others).

OxonCC Councillor Priority Grants

Each County Councillor is allotted £10k over two years and my funds are now fully allocated. I have taken the approach to split the sum as equally as possible between the Parish Councils I represent.

So far, I have been lucky enough to be able to provide funding towards:

- The re-instatement of the playing field in **Nuneham Courtenay**
- The replacement of the swing equipment in **Clifton Hampden's** play area
- The annual community event Berrifest and the Berin Centre in **Berinsfield**
- Penta Post musical equipment for pre-school children and children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in **Garsington**
- Speed Indicator Devices for Henley/Sandford Road in **Sandford**
- The Community Orchard in The Glebe recreation ground in **Culham**
- Village Green signage in **Marsh Baldon**

And Finally...

May I say what an absolute privilege and pleasure it has been to get to know you all and to learn from you all how best to be able to serve you. I look forward to at the very least another year with even more excitement than last year when starting, knowing as I do now what a selfless, informed and dedicated set of Councillors are doing their level best for all our residents on so many levels.