

Oxfordshire County Council Parish Briefing

1. SODC local plan

The decision by the new Liberal/Green coalition at South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) to defer endorsing the emerging Local Plan has serious implications for the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid which would provide £218 million of vital infrastructure for the Didcot area.

The preferred options of the coalition at the council meeting on 18th July were to either revise or withdraw the emerging Local Plan although any decision was deferred. Should either of these options be taken then the probable outcome is the collapse of the HIF bid with the consequent severe impact on the Didcot area infrastructure. This would then probably mean South's existing Local Plan would come under pressure and large-scale speculative planning applications might come forward on inappropriate sites. Neighbourhood Plans that many town and parish councils have spent time working on will continue to provide some protection, but there is a real danger that developers might seek to exploit the situation as there would be no new Local Plan for Neighbourhood Plans to align with.

Problems are not confined to SODC; if there is no HIF then the Vale Local Plan could also fail.

This could mean that within months of new administrations in South & Vale taking office, both Local Plans might fail resulting in the loss of £218 million for vital infrastructure in Didcot. A further consequence could then be the failure of the £215 million Growth Deal which contains £60 million for much needed affordable homes.

The only way to protect both Local Plans and deliver £433 million funding for Oxfordshire is for SODC to confirm it will not withdraw the emerging Local Plan but will satisfy its ambitions by seeking a review at an appropriate time in the future.

2. Oxfordshire County Council starts planning to replace Kennington bridge

Oxfordshire County Council has announced that the A423 Kennington Bridge is to be replaced at an estimated cost of around £40m.

The bridge and road will remain open for at least two years before construction work starts while design takes place.

Inspections for planned maintenance work to replace supporting bearings to extend the life of the bridge revealed that deterioration was quicker than expected and repairs are no longer a viable option.

It is on the route of the proposed Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme and culverts need to be installed under the A423 close to the bridge to allow water to pass through efficiently during normal times and in times of flood to give additional capacity to the area.

We are exploring all options for funding, including the DfT Challenge Fund and appealing to central government for support and working with rail and utility companies with an interest in the site.

3. Permit schemes to streamline utility roadworks

The County Council is set to introduce a permit scheme to replace the current unwieldy Noticing Scheme whereby utilities companies have a loose obligation to inform OCC of roadworks.

A permit scheme will assist the County Council in achieving tighter management of roadworks on the highway, including reduction of durations which will enable more works to be completed, supporting the delivery of developments and increased infrastructure programmes.

Improved management of roadworks was identified by the Highways Department as a priority in February 2019, and the proposed introduction of the street works permit scheme will address this.

The differences between 'Noticing' and 'Permits' are:

Noticing scheme	Permitting scheme
A "general duty" on undertakers to use "best endeavours" to co-operate on co-ordination works with limited specific controls.	Ability to control methods, timings and use of road space & opportunity to scrutinise them.
Notices are free to apply for. Cost pressure on authority to approve notices.	Permits attract a fee to be processed. The cost of operating a scheme is offset via fees.
When a notice has been served works can continue irrespective of any changes.	A paid for permit variation is required for changes. All variations will be scrutinised.
Authorities are reactive to works taking place on network.	Authority can be proactive in managing and scrutinising works.

4. More charging points to support electric vehicles

The electric car revolution is set to continue in Oxfordshire thanks to a successful county council bid for a slice of a £37m government fund. Oxfordshire is set to host to two major initiatives to provide more charging points for electric vehicles (EVs) across the county.

The projects have been awarded funding from Innovate UK as part of the government's £37 million investment into British engineering to transform electric charging infrastructure, revolutionising the experience for the record levels of EV drivers on UK roads.

Park and Charge will see up to 300 chargers installed in residential 'charging hubs' using car parks located in residential areas where properties don't have their own off-street parking.

The second project, VPACH (Virgin Park and Charge), will use existing Virgin Media cabinets to reduce the cost of installing roadside EV chargers and minimise the amount of street clutter needed for power supply.

5. Work to start on Bicester's new 600-pupil school

Work is set to begin on a brand new 600-pupil school for Bicester as Oxfordshire County Council continues to plan to meet demands for the school places in the county in coming years.

Since 2011 more than 6,000 new places have been created in Oxfordshire secondary schools. Further planned changes in the 2020s – including Whitelands and a new all-through school in Grove Airfield – will see the overall number of school places created since 2011 rise to around 8,000.

The Whitelands Academy is being built within the Kingsmere Village Community. It will have 26 classrooms, special educational needs provision including a garden, a four-court sports hall with changing facilities, external social spaces including allotments and sports pitches for rugby, hockey and football and a multi-use games area. The academy sponsor is The White Horse Federation.

Other new schools have already been created at the Space Studio, Banbury, Bicester Technology Studio, Heyford Park Free School, Aureus School, Didcot, UTC Oxfordshire, Harwell near Didcot and the Europa School, Culham. The Swan School in Oxford will open in September 2019 with temporary buildings and permanently in 2020.

Around 88 per cent of children and their parents for their first choice of school in Oxfordshire in 2019 despite continued rising demand for places. The county is consistently ahead of national averages for first places being awarded.

6. Radical changes that improve the lives of families are set to be introduced in Oxfordshire

A pioneering approach that has radically changed the way children's social care operates in Hertfordshire is set to be adopted by Oxfordshire County Council.

The "Family Safeguarding" model has seen the number of children on child protection plans by fall 55 per cent in 30 months in Hertfordshire. Social workers have been working in small integrated teams centred around individual families in need alongside experts providing specialist mental health, drugs and alcohol, and domestic abuse services.

By taking a "whole family approach" rather than focusing on just the child, families have been able to access the support they need from within that one team of experts. The model focuses on supporting families by offering intensive help around some of the challenges they may face particularly domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse.

As a result, in Hertfordshire, there's been a 39 per cent reduction in the number of days children spent in care, a 53 per cent drop in hospital admissions for adults in the families and a 66 per cent reduction in contact with the Police for domestic abuse.

Children's social care teams in Luton, Peterborough, Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire have also been adopting the new approach. Central Government and Ofsted have both praised Hertfordshire's work.

There has been 80 per cent rise in children in care from 2011 to 2019. There are now 780 children in care compared to 425. On current trends and without the changes we plan, children in care would rise to around 915 by 2023.

This new approach that has been pioneered in Hertfordshire will offer a way of beginning to reverse those trends.

7. Council seeks out more local foster carers

Oxfordshire County Council's cabinet has agreed a £1m investment in its in-house fostering service, which will increase the number of local carers and reduce the number of children who are placed with carers outside of Oxfordshire.

By enhancing the support given and amount paid to foster carers, the county council's in-house service will become competitive with independent foster care agencies and other providers across the country.

Like all councils in England, Oxfordshire County Council has experienced large rises in the number of children entering care over the last decade. In 2011 there were 425 children in care, now there are around 780.

In April 2019, 54 per cent of foster care placements in Oxfordshire were with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) with the majority being out of county (144 in 2019). National best practice suggests a local authority should aim to have 70 per cent of their mainstream carers in-house.

8. Free school transport for disabled young people is retained

Young people with special education needs and disabilities will continue to be funded by Oxfordshire County Council, following a decision by Cabinet members on Tuesday, 16 July.

A cross-party group of councillors reviewed the service for students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) aged 16 or older to find savings needed by the council in response to reduced government funding.

The council has worked with 14 SEND schools to identify the necessary £300,000 of savings for post-16 home to school transport; removing any current need to change existing SEND free transport arrangements. A separate fund has also been created to provide transport for children to go to after-school activities.

After consulting with schools and parents, a new approach to providing home to school transport has been agreed without needing any changes to the council's policy for entitlement to free home to school transport. The council believes it will be able to make further savings in the future. Savings will be made by:

- Route rationalisation – routes into 12 schools have been streamlined to use vehicle capacity more effectively
- Bardwell School in Bicester has agreed to use their own school minibus to support home to school transport and other schools will be encouraged to do the same in future
- Encouraging other modes of travel, including parents to take up direct payments for travel to support their own arrangements.

9. New Director of Adult Social Care announced

Stephen Chandler has been appointed as the new Director of Adult Social Care, starting in September. He is currently Director of Adult Services and lead commissioner with Somerset County Council, where he featured in the recent Panorama programmes about care funding.

Mr Chandler gained national recognition for leading the transformation of Adult services in Somerset, as well as being system lead with the NHS for a number of urgent care work streams. He replaces Kate

Terroni, who left Oxfordshire County Council in May to take up a post as chief inspector of adult social care with the Care Quality Commission.

10. Campaign to recruit ‘Shared Lives’ carers for adult support service

The county council has launched a campaign to recruit more carers for its successful Shared Lives service. Shared Lives is funded by the county council and allows adults in need of social care to live their lives more fully and independently and feel part of a family household.

There are currently 80 Shared Lives carers providing a home to about 120 adults in the county. They provide anything from occasional short breaks or daytime support through to a longer-term, full-time arrangement.

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All carers receive ongoing support and training from social workers to ensure delivery of high-quality, person-centred care.

To find out more about joining the shared Oxfordshire Shared Lives scheme call 01865 897971 or visit our website www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sharedlives

11. Friends groups helping libraries to flourish

The county council sees library friends groups as crucial to maintaining a library services to communities across Oxfordshire. The council offers support to existing groups and is encouraging new ones to start.

More than 20 friends groups are now active across Oxfordshire County Council’s network of 43 libraries, helping to extend opening hours and putting on a host of events, with hundreds of volunteers are now involved across the county.

Library staff meet regularly with each group to build and retain constructive working relationships and discuss issues, concerns or ideas.

North Leigh Library is the latest to form a group and is now on the lookout for more volunteers.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Kind regards



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