

# **REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS SEPT 2024 FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW**

## **GENERAL OCC REPORT**

### **COUNCIL COMMITS TO £0.5M SPEND ON DEVELOPING WORKPLACE PARKING TAX**

OCC Liberal Democrat Cabinet member for infrastructure and development, Judy Roberts, agreed with officers' recommendations to approve £500,000 spending on technical aspects of development work around the planned workplace parking tax at her decisions meeting on Thursday July 18. A Team Leader is being recruited on £50k pa. This is despite the fact that the proposal is hugely controversial and hasn't even been out for public consultation yet. Critics observe that it is clear that the proposal will go ahead, whatever the result of the consultation.

### **OCC TO BE A COUNCIL OF SANCTUARY FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS**

OCC council leader Liberal Democrat Liz Leffman, has written to the Home Secretary stating:

*“Our ambition in Oxfordshire is to support a refugee and asylum system that ensures a warm welcome for all new arrivals and embraces and supports independent living for those staying in the county. Oxfordshire is enhanced by the contribution of a range of diverse communities living here and we are committed to playing our part in the overall national and international challenge. To that end, Oxfordshire County Council is currently working towards becoming a Council of Sanctuary.”*

This follows Full Council in July when Liberal Democrat Cabinet member for Finance, Dan Levy, confirmed that the administration was looking at ways to provide free or subsidised bus travel to asylum seekers from its funds, if financial support from HM Treasury was not made available.

### **HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN TO LOSE AFFORDABLE BUS TRAVEL TO SCHOOL**

At Full Council on 28 March 2023, the Opposition tabled a motion expressing regret about the apparent loss of bus places for children attending schools across South Oxfordshire and Cherwell using the 'Spare Seats' scheme. This scheme allows parents and guardians with children not eligible for free home-to-school transport to pay to use spare seats on school buses. Almost 18 months on, the issue continues to cause concern with a further round of children set to lose their school bus places, particularly in Cherwell and West Oxfordshire, from the start of the school year. This is despite a motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition being passed at Full Council on 9 July 2024 designed to ensure that “school bus places can be maintained and, where possible, increased”. As many as 800 children are thought to have a Spare Seat to school on 29 bus routes into 25 schools across Oxfordshire. The future of the scheme, which has been running for over 30 years, is a huge worry to schools and families across the county.

### **CONTROVERSIAL OXFORD FOUR-SECTOR PLAN POSTPONED AGAIN**

The controversial plan to split Oxford into four sectors for traffic management purposes by using six 'traffic filters' has been postponed yet again. This is because Network Rail has postponed the replacement of Botley railway bridge and is unable to reopen Botley Road in October.

### **FREE ELECTRIC BLANKET TESTS**

Residents are being encouraged to take up the offer of a free electric blanket check. Sessions will be held at locations across the county this autumn. Appointments can be booked by visiting <https://service.oxfordshire.gov.uk/blankettesting> or calling 01865 895999.

### **UPDATE ON POLICE POSITION ON 20MPH LIMITS**

The Oxford Mail reported on 8 August that the Chief Constable said that speed cameras "do not work at 20mph" when questioned during the annual 'Crime and Disorder' meeting held in July. Previously, as a result of political pressure, Thames Valley Police changed their position on 20mph limits from 'Object' to 'Concerns'. Their concerns can be summarised as follows:

- Compliance with 20mph limits is a challenging issue as there is a difference between the achievable results of the various available schemes. For example, a sign-only scheme will only have a limited effect on the mean speeds.
- If a speed limit is set too low and is ignored then this could result in the vulnerable road user being less safe. It can also cause a dis-proportionate number of drivers to criminalise themselves and could bring the system of speed limits into disrepute.
- Thames Valley Police have no policy to enforce based on arbitrary speed limits alone but will enforce based on threat of harm, risk and resourcing.
- There should be no expectation that the police would be able to provide regular enforcement if a speed limit is set too low as this could result in an unreasonable additional demand on police resources and there are no additional resources.

## **OCC CRITICISED FOR NOT PUBLISHING 20MPH DATA**

OCC normally publishes its [road casualty report](#) every year but for reasons the council has explained as "reviewing the content", it is yet to publish any yearly analysis since 2021. Councillor Eddie Reeves, leader of the Conservatives on the county, said: "Why County Hall has ostensibly withheld publication of such data like a vital road casualty report, is beyond me." He added in relation to road casualty statistics there are "serious questions" about whether 20mph zones are "even enforceable" and "the emerging data on traffic accidents suggests little, if any, positive impact".

## **HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES TO CLOSE FOR CLEANING AND REPAIRS**

People planning to use Oxfordshire's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) are being warned about a series of short closures in September and October to enable essential work to be carried out. For safety reasons, OCC Council will be shutting the centres for two days – although never at the same time – to allow for deep cleaning and essential maintenance. This includes jet washing the sites and structures, repainting lines and safety areas, as well as other general work to improve the customer experience. The closing dates are:

- Stanford in the Vale, near Faringdon: Monday 2 and Tuesday 3 September
- Ardley, near Bicester: Thursday 5 and Friday 6 September
- Drayton, near Abingdon: Monday 9 and Tuesday 10 September
- Oakley Wood, near Wallingford: Thursday 12 and Friday 13 September
- Dix Pit, Stanton Harcourt: Monday 23 and Tuesday 24 September
- Alkerton, near Banbury: Monday 7 and Tuesday 8 October.

All closures are on quieter weekdays to minimise disruption and sites will reopen at 8am the following day. Residents are asked to plan ahead, ideally holding onto their waste until the site reopens or, if that is not possible, visiting one of the neighbouring sites. The deep clean for Redbridge HWRC in Oxford will be carried out later in the year and full details will be provided in due course. More information can be found on Oxfordshire County Council's website, including details of alternative sites during the closures. Users are reminded that to use their free DIY waste allowance, they need to book an appointment for their visit on the council's website. Residents with van or trailer permits can use these at any of the HWRCs.