

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS MARCH 2025

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

OCC BUDGET 2025/26

The minority Liberal Democrat/Green administration at OCC has published its Budget for 2025/26 on the council website. Despite receiving more Government funding than expected, the administration has kept the Council Tax rise at 5%. The Conservative Opposition had put forward amendments to limit the rise to 4.5% and to spend over £6m more on roads and flood measures, but they were voted down at Full Council on 11th February.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND DEVOLUTION

OCC is not in the fast track for reorganisation, so the elections scheduled for May will go ahead. The government has asked Oxfordshire councils to submit an interim plan for a new unitary authority or authorities by 21 March 2025, with a full proposal by 28 November 2025. In parallel with this, OCC is continuing discussions with neighbouring authorities across the Thames Valley about a future mayoral strategic authority. Meanwhile, Vale of White Horse District Council has declared it favours combining with West Berkshire District Council.

NEW WALKING AND CYCLING ROUTES INTO OXFORD

Residents are being asked for their views on plans for six new walking and cycling routes into Oxford from towns and villages within an eight-mile radius. The proposal to create a series of 'greenways' – high-quality paths in urban or natural areas prioritised for pedestrians and cyclists – comes from a joint project being developed by OCC, Oxford City Council and the University of Oxford. The consultation runs until Tuesday 18 March. To take part, visit [Let's talk Oxfordshire](#).

NEARLY 10,000 CIGARETTES SEIZED FOLLOWING TRADING STANDARDS OPERATION

Almost 10,000 counterfeit and smuggled cigarettes and other tobacco and nicotine-based products have been seized following a series of visits to retail premises by OCC's trading standards team. The raids, carried out on 21 January, were part of Operation CeCe, a national initiative to tackle the sale and supply of illegal tobacco products. Officers were accompanied by specialist tobacco detection dogs, which can sniff out contraband in concealments within till points or hidden in storerooms. Premises involved included off-licences, convenience stores, food retailers and barbers in Banbury, Kidlington and Oxford. The operation resulted in the seizure of 9,340 illegal cigarettes, 700g of counterfeit hand rolling tobacco, 180 unit packs of non-compliant nicotine pouches and 42 disposable electronic cigarettes, or vapes, with a capacity of nicotine containing liquid nine times the maximum allowed. The total street value of the haul was approximately £5,000.

CONTRACTORS APPOINTED FOR STAGE TWO OF DIDCOT INFRASTRUCTURE SCHEME

OCC has officially entered into contracts with GRAHAM Construction Ltd and AECOM to deliver stage two of the Didcot and surrounding areas major infrastructure (HIF1) scheme. GRAHAM is undertaking the detailed design of the Culham river crossing and the Clifton Hampden bypass elements of the scheme while the detailed design of the Didcot Science Bridge and the widening of the A4130 is being led by AECOM. Segregated two-way pedestrian and cycle facilities will feature along the entire route. Detailed design is underway, with construction expected to start in early 2026.