



Annual Report 2022

Cllr Freddie van Mierlo, Chalgrove and Watlington Division

Liberal Democrat

In May 2021, I was elected as your county councilor with 53% of the vote. It was part of a 'yellow wave' that saw Liberal Democrats become the equal largest party in the county, and also the equal largest party in the Henley constituency. A new administration was formed following the elections comprising of 21 Lib Dems, 3 Greens and 16 Labour councillors – the first non-Conservative administration in Oxfordshire County Council.

In the first year of taking control, the new administration has not wasted any time. We have developed new strategies for transport and HGVs, libraries & SEND. Instituted a new policy to meet our promise of delivering 20mph communities and secured grants following ambitious bids to central government to improve bus services. Youth services will be brought back for the first time since they were scrapped by the Tories. We have engaged closely in the Oxfordshire 2050 process to express our concerns on the projected growth targets being set and were a key driver of getting the ox-cam arc and expressway scrapped.

In February this year, the new administration's first budget was passed at Full Council. It is true that a rise in council tax comes at a time when the rising cost of living is hitting people hard. However, to continue to meet our obligations on social care – which makes up over half our budget – there was little choice. The Conservatives offered no amendments at the meeting. Having recently received my own council tax bill, I will pay it through gritted teeth, but knowing that the money is going to some of the most vulnerable residents in Oxfordshire.

As your local councilor, I serve one of the biggest divisions in the county – stretching from Nettlebed to Great Milton, and from Ewelme to Postcombe. Chalgrove village and Watlington town make up the largest settlements, but at my last count there are over 25 distinct villages and communities. I spend a lot of my time campaigning on issues important to Watlington and Chalgrove – as these also have a significant impact on the surrounding villages.

In Chalgrove, I continue to campaign against the airfield development. In August last year, I facilitated a meeting with the new Leader of the Council, Liz Leffman, and Martin-Baker, who currently use the site to test and develop ejector seats. In March 2022 I spoke against a reference to

the airfield development at cabinet in papers prepared for HIF1 – a housing infrastructure project around Didcot. In April, I brought a motion to Full Council to position the County as opposed to the development. It was voted down by a Con-Lab coalition, but I will continue to oppose in any way I can. In Watlington, two thorny issues have needed persistence to keep on track. The first is the new ‘edge road’ that will direct traffic away from the historic town center and the second is working to resolve a long-standing legal bind that has prevented a council-controlled property on the high street from being occupied for 12 years.

Across all villages and towns in the division I have championed local efforts to reduce traffic speeds and volumes. I’m pleased that many of the villages in this division have applied to have 20mph zones and have been successful in being part of the first tranche to implemented by OCC. I have used my priority fund to support the purchase of SID and VAS signs, and helped villages in accessing OCC matched funding to village gates and other traffic calming features.

As I look to the next 3 years, and the administration does too, we want to move from a position of firefighting and dealing with legacy issues, to making progress on our priorities. The way that planning works means some projects agreed by the Tories are locked into complicated processes that are difficult to unbind, but I hope that you as residents will see a shift over the next 3 years towards tackling the climate emergency and protecting biodiversity; taking on the inequalities in our county; improving social care and special educational needs provision; and investing in active and sustainable transport.

Not everything will be as popular as 20mph zones – I have had to have difficult conversations with local farmers about the change to plant-based meals at county meetings. No doubt when the Zero Emissions Zone in Oxford is expanded, and residents drive into Oxford for a fee, I will face more difficult questions.

Perhaps it is a dangerous thing post-Brexit to quote a former European Commission President, but I’m going to do it anyway. On climate change, Jean-Claude Juncker, said

“We all know what to do, but we don’t know how to get re-elected once we have done it.”

On a personal note, I’ve very much enjoyed my first year as a councillor. It hasn’t been easy, and there is a reason why most councillors are not of working age. It is very hard to make being a councillor compatible with full time or near full time work – but I live life by the motto, *if you want something doing well, give it to a busy person.*

The reason I ran was to be part of a thriving and welcoming community – and to serve them as best I could. On this metric, I couldn’t have asked for a better first year. Thank you.