



Focus on Parishes with Cllr Freddie van Mierlo (Chalgrove and Watlington)

January 2025

OCC NEWS

Budget setting: OCC has analysed funding announcements by the government and proposed a balanced [budget](#) for 2025/6, with a recommendation for a 4.99% rise in council tax (with 2% ringfenced for social care). The budget setting process will determine revenue (day-to-day) spending, as well as the future of capital projects like the Watlington Relief Road. On 28th January, the cabinet will sign off its final proposals, which are then voted on at full council on 11th February by all councillors.

Devolution: OCC has [responded](#) to the government's White Paper on devolution and local government reorganisation. The government is seeking to abolish district councils in favour of unitary councils and create groupings of unitaries called strategic authorities (which can come with a mayor). Oxfordshire County Council is the lead authority in the process for our area and has expressed to the government a wish to be included in the first wave of changes. There are clear advantages to this, including avoiding a prolonged period of uncertainty. OCC's response focuses on what geography the strategic authority should take, expressing an interest in forming a Thames Valley authority. Options being suggested for unitarization include an Oxfordshire wide unitary authority, or multiple unitary authorities within Oxfordshire.

Local elections 2025: OCC's [letter](#) to the government's White Paper, includes a preference for local elections to the county council scheduled to take place in May to go ahead as planned.

Safeguarding children: The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) has been replaced by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership ([OSCP](#)). This implements revised statutory guidance made in December 2023. The OSCP will be equally led by three named statutory partners:

- Chief executive of Oxfordshire County Council;
- Chief executive of NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board; and
- Chief constable of Thames Valley Police.

Information on what to do if you think a child is at risk of abuse or neglect can be found here:
<https://www.oscp.org.uk/concerned-about-a-child/>

Potholes: OCC's share of a new pothole fixing budget from the government is £24.5 million. Whilst welcome, councils are calling for long term certainty with a multi-year financial settlement from the government. For context, OCC has an annual gap in funding on road maintenance from the government of £45 million.

Government approved 'HIF1' road: Following intervention from the government, planning permission has been granted for a major [infrastructure](#) project around Didcot.

NEWS IN BRIEF

CQC Inspection: The Care Quality Commission is currently inspecting OCC's adult social care.

New year's honours: Fire Chief Rob MacDougall has been [awarded](#) King's Fire Service Medal

Cycle training: Primary schools can request [bike training](#) for children through OCC

Defibs: The [British Heart Foundation](#) has a scheme to apply for a free defibrillator

PARISH ROUND-UP

Not all parishes are covered – below is a selection of the main updates.

Brightwell Baldwin

- **20mph:** Officers have confirmed work to install 20mph will begin early in the new year.

Berrick Salome

- **Benson Relief Road:** Construction [complete](#) on a section of the relief road
- **Drainage:** Meeting was held with the drainage group to discuss ongoing issues, including water contaminated with sewage rising Thames Water manholes.

Ewelme:

- **Wallingford cycling plan (LCWIP):** A meeting will be held in January with County, District and Town/Parish Councillors to discuss the development of a Wallingford Area Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

Lewknor

- **Manor Close:** No update – awaiting further news from developer & OCC (no response to chasing).
- **Hill Road steps:** No update – implementation should be this financial year.
- **Footpath damage from road traffic accident:** Officers have visited the site and will arrange for work to be carried out.

Nettlebed

- **Brick kiln:** Updates being sought on completion of work to restore the kiln

Watlington

- **Relief Road:** The application will be determined at a planning committee meeting in February (rather than January), with the budget to be determined also in February (see above).
- **Charlotte Coxe Trust:** The accounts will be reviewed and asked to be signed off in January by the Charlotte Coxe Trust Committee; the report by Geldards into the future governance of the trust will either be reviewed at that meeting or at a later meeting in February/March
- **Red Kite View to Cuxham Road path:** Representations are being made to relevant stakeholders (Bloor, SSN, OCC) to progress the work to completion as soon as possible
- **Damaged barrier:** OCC is seeking quotes for like-for-like replacement. However, as the barrier is not a threat to the highway, no timescale has been given yet for the work.