**ANNUAL REPORT FROM CLLR NICHOLAS FIELD-JOHNSON**

**OCC BUDGET 2024/25**

**COUNCILS SECURE £600M ADDITIONAL FUNDING PACKAGE**

Communities Secretary Michael Gove announced this year a total of £600m of additional funding for local authorities in England – including a £500m addition to the social care grant, and a £100m increase in core spending power. OCC is expected to benefit to an amount of approximately £5m.

**BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25**

This unexpected development noted above means that the Liberal Democrat/Green administration and opposition groups had to rework their Budget proposals. As previously reported, the minority administration cannot pass a Budget without support of the opposition parties. A meeting of Full Council on Tuesday 20th February took place and a budget was approved.

Full details of the final budget are available on the council website. These show that the Budget will result in extra borrowing of £23.45m. The Budget continued to focus on Oxford-centric matters, including Oxford parking zones, Oxford ANPR cameras, Oxford congestion, Oxford ‘Mini-Holland’ project (at a capital cost of £2m per year) and an Oxford ‘Citizens’ Assembly’ (at a cost of £150,000).

Despite repeated resident surveys and feedback from Councillors which show that roads and drains are near the top of the list of resident concerns, they still fail to get a mention and are not a budget priority. It is likely satisfaction with the council will continue to decline. (The latest ‘Residents Survey’ shows that ‘Maintenance of roads’ was rated by 67% of residents as one of their four most important council services, but just 19% were very or fairly satisfied.) I will continue to campaign for more funds to be spent on fixing the potholes and mending the sharp road verges which continue to cause tyre damage.

**SAVING OUR WINDRUSH - FURTHER TESTING EQUIPMENT IN PLACE.**

I am pleased to report that new river testing equipment is in place in the Windrush and I was able to contribute funding to WASP to purchase the equipment.

**Windrush Against Sewage Pollution** (“WASP”) will manage the sophisticated testing equipment and will be responsible for the continual assessment of the river. This equipment will allow the local community, via WASP, to trace the releases of sewage from storm drains and elsewhere into our river and provide a comprehensive picture of the scale of pollution from what is described as the routine dumping of untreated sewage in some areas.

Thames Water continues to be criticised for its continual dumping of raw sewage into our rivers, especially for the long-term events which, when caused by groundwater infiltration (as many are) are not legally permitted. Now that we have professional testing equipment the Windrush can be monitored and excess discharges identified, effectively ensuring that there is a greater deterrent to pollution from any source in place. It may prove to be the case that Thames Water will have to file for bankruptcy this year and be placed back under public ownership

**Ensured HGV ban in Burford was approved.**

After 15 years of stalemate and with the help of the Burford Town Council, one of my first tasks was to ensure that OCC approved and implemented the HGV ban which came into place in October 2020. It was on an initial 18 month trial period which was to become permanent.

HGVs have caused significant damage to buildings and the Victorian underground pipes which meant that action had to be taken. It was also seriously damaging the tourist industry in Burford.

**It is with great regret that the present OCC Administration reversed this decision.** However we will continue to campaign for a limitation of HGVs in our towns and villages.

In October, with BTC, we met the new Cabinet Member for Highways, Judy Roberts who fully understood the issues facing Burford: its economy, building destruction and pollution incurred by the HGVs. We still are waiting for the County-wide HGV report. However, funding is needed to be provided to fund the project and this was approved in the February OCC budget.

The County-wide HGV study continues and is now focused on the positioning of cameras and collecting data. The main focus is on the Windrush Valley (including the Burford area) and Henley. We are still hopeful that a ban on 18 ton HGVs will be approved for Burford.

**Burford Bridge.**

In October, a meeting was held with OCC Officers to discuss the planned repairs to Burford bridge. They witnessed the HGVs on Burford bridge and lack of space for pedestrians.

Although progress has been slow (it is now almost two years since the original accident), repairs have at last started this month.

**Speeding in our Villages – 20mph is plenty campaign.**

Speeding remains a major problem in our villages and I will continue to back the 20mph speed limit in our villages and have provided funding for the 20mph signage in Burford and also supported the campaign and signage in Swinbrook, Taynton, Shilton and Brize Norton.

**Active user and supporter of Fix My Street and to repair potholes.**

OCC has drafted in more staff to carry out inspections and contractors Skanska are sending out more teams to carry our repairs. An additional Dragon-Patcher is now in action on the road network travelling round on an ‘inspect and fix’ basis on the rural network. OCC have pledged that defects that make roads hazardous will be dealt with within 24 hours. Remember, if a defect has paint markings around it then it has already been scheduled for repair and does not need a new report. OCC’s own machine, along with the shared Dragon, has fixed over 21,000 potholes. It is expected that the new one, over the next twelve months, could fill up to 14,000 more.

**Continue to support local charities through my Priority Fund.**

I support and fund various projects in my Division:

**Carterton**: Supported local bus service and two Food banks to assist residents.

**Brize Norton**: Supported speed limit signage and the Humble Bumble café.

**Burford**: Raised funds for HGV signage and 20 mph signage

**Swinbrook**: Provided funds for 20mph signage and also two CCTV cameras

**Asthall:** Provided funds for village signage and a community bench.

**Taynton:** Provided funds for village sign and support for 20mph speed limit.

**Shilton:** Supported 20mph speed limit in village.

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