

Oxfordshire County Council Parish Briefing

1. Councils commit to cutting traffic congestion and improving public transport into Oxford

Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council announced bold plans to tackle congestion on all major routes into Oxford and improve public transport connections into and across some parts of the city, particularly the city's eastern arc. (This is an area outside the city centre that links parts of north Oxford, Marston, Headington and Cowley).

The two councils want to make a real improvement to journey times for commuters and quality of life for residents, including improved air quality, by reducing the number of cars travelling into and around the city. The key points of the 'Connecting Oxford' proposal are:

- Restricting car traffic by introducing additional 'bus gates' (similar to the restriction on Oxford's High Street) across the city to improve journey times for people travelling into and around the city, and so road space can be reallocated to improve walking and cycling routes
- New high frequency fast bus routes connecting neighbouring towns and the Park & Rides to Oxford's eastern arc, which is seeing the greatest growth in employment but is currently less well served by public transport, particularly around the ring road
- New and improved cycle and walking routes, including utilising space created by removing vehicles from the road to provide safe and attractive alternatives to driving into and around the city
- A charge for workplace parking provided by larger employers in the eastern arc, which would help fund the proposed transport improvements and create a disincentive to drive to work. Discounts for the new bus services would be available for staff of employers paying the workplace parking levy
- Improved journey times for commuters driving into and around the city as a result of less congestion

More than 60% of all journeys into Oxford are by car, with the trend of car-dependency likely to continue as more jobs are created by the city's thriving local economy. The latest figures show that the number of journeys is on track to increase as predicted by a quarter (25%) between 2011 and 2031 unless steps are taken to reduce car-based traffic.

Poor public transport connectivity to parts of Oxford means some of the area's major employment sites have no direct bus service or connection to a Park & Ride site. Travelling by bus can mean using two or more bus services which results in long journey times. For example, travelling from Witney to the Headington area currently takes 82 minutes on a bus in the morning peak.

Severe traffic congestion is also having a negative impact on existing bus services. Oxford Bus Company has confirmed bus speeds in the centre of Oxford are 38% slower than in 2006, and so has put around one third more buses on the road to meet the timetable.

The combination of traffic restrictions and the introduction of a workplace parking levy create positive incentives for commuters and residents to use other modes of transport, and for employers to reduce the

incentive to provide free or subsidised parking for staff. Nottingham introduced a workplace parking levy in 2012 that continues to fund improvements to its local bus and tram network.

The two councils are now asking for comments and ideas from residents, commuters, businesses, transport operators and other organisations to feed into the detailed development of the proposals. The feedback will be used to develop a detailed project proposal, including a full business case that sets out the costs and benefits of the scheme.

Further information: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/connectingoxford

2. People with hidden disabilities to benefit from Blue Badges

People with hidden disabilities, including autism and mental health conditions now have access to Blue Badges, removing the barriers they experience when they travel. This is a national change to the service being introduced by the Department for Transport as part of the governments Inclusive Transport Strategy. The County Council administer this service locally on behalf of the Department for Transport. Under the new guidance, Blue Badges will be extended to those with hidden disabilities, including:

- People who cannot travel without risk of serious harm to their health and safety or someone else's
- People who cannot travel without "very considerable psychological distress"
- People who have very considerable difficulty when walking, meaning "both the physical act and experience of walking"

To be eligible for a Blue badge an applicant must meet one of the two eligibility criteria set out in the legislation which governs the scheme.

- 'Eligible without further assessment' (Previously known as 'automatic')
- 'Eligible subject to further assessment' (previously known as 'discretionary').

Full details of the Blue Badge service in Oxfordshire, including eligibility and how to apply can be found [here](#).

3. Roadwork permits will reduce delays for road users

New powers have been approved that will give Oxfordshire County Council more control over roadworks. From December the council will introduce a new system that means companies wanting to work on roads around Oxfordshire will have to apply and pay for a permit in order to work on the highway.

These will clearly set out how the work will be done, the duration, times of work and how traffic will be managed. When there are clashes between different sets of work the council will also require companies to collaborate more closely to minimise disruption.

Companies that need to work on the roads will benefit from the fact that securing a permit means that they have effectively booked the road space that they need. The permit scheme operates to conditions that are the same across the UK, meaning it will be easier to work consistently across council borders.

While the council will have the power to refuse permission for planned work to take place if it believes the proposed timings or planned approach will cause unnecessary disruption, emergency unplanned work needed for things such as pipe bursts will be unaffected.

The council's highways team hope to achieve a reduction in roadwork duration - removing around 8,900 days of work from Oxfordshire's roads annually – around a 10% reduction.

4. County council leads new multi-agency plan to reduce suicide risk

A partnership of Oxfordshire organisations committed to reducing the suicide rate are gathering views on the services and community supported need to mental health crises that can lead to suicide.

Official statistics published on Suicide Awareness Day earlier this month show that the suicide rate went up significantly last year in England and Wales for the first time since 2013, with men representing three quarters of the total.

Suicide rates in Oxfordshire are slightly lower than the national England average. Between 2016 and 2018 there were a total of 155 deaths by suicide in Oxfordshire. Of these, 126 were men, which means that that deaths in men outnumbered those in women by more than four to one.

In Oxfordshire there is a determination to reduce the number of deaths by suicide. The Oxfordshire Suicide Prevention Multi-Agency Group formed in 2014 and brings together public, private and charity sector organisations, all of whom are committed to suicide prevention.

The Oxfordshire suicide prevention group is about to revise its action plan and wants to hear from people in Oxfordshire who have been affected by suicide or who may have had suicidal thoughts themselves.

The strategy and action plan will contribute to the reduction of suicides and will be informed by research and national guidance as well as local intelligence, such as circumstances and risk factors, so that prevention approaches can be better targeted. Self-harm can be a suicide risk factor, so the multi-agency group want to include self-harm prevention as part of the action plan. Examples of work from this group include:

- Training to GP practices following the death of a patient so they can support family members and feel more skilled in spotting the signs
- Oxfordshire County Council trained 70 mental wellbeing champions who can spot the signs of mental distress and open supportive conversations
- PHE/NHSE online suicide awareness training disseminated across Oxfordshire professional networks to better equip front line staff to spot signs of suicide and self-harm
- Suicide awareness training for security staff at Westgate shopping centre by Samaritans

As part of the developing the new action plan, the prevention group is looking at encouraging self-help groups, particularly for men, that have proved successful in other parts of England.

Survey: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/suicidepreventionsurvey

5. Oxfordshire County Council works on action plan to go carbon neutral

Following last week's climate strikes, Oxfordshire County Council has confirmed its commitment to reducing its own 'carbon footprint' to zero by 2030.

The council started a long-term programme five years ago to cut carbon emissions but Councillor Yvonne Constance, cabinet member for the environment, accepts that young people have challenged organisations such as the county council to move faster.

Since the county council motion in April 2019 acknowledging the climate emergency, the council has been working on a new action plan to accelerate the climate action programme to become carbon neutral by 2030.

The council has already delivered an average 6% per year reduction in carbon emissions since 2011 – double its target - but is determined to do more. Oxfordshire County Council is delivering a series of 'green' initiatives, including helping install more solar panels on schools.

Project LEO – Local Energy Oxfordshire – is another example of partnership working, with the county council joining a consortium led by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, together with the universities and Oxford city council to develop a localised approach to sustainable energy generation and use.

As part of its 'big switch', the council is committed to replacing street lights with low energy lighting over the next four years. This will reduce Oxfordshire's greenhouse emissions from streetlighting by 70%. The investment will also include a communications system between streetlights, allowing dimming of groups of lights when they're not needed.

The council supports a 65-strong network of Community Action Groups (CAG) at the forefront of community-led climate change action. They organise events and projects on issues including waste, transport, food, energy, biodiversity and social justice.

Groups are working to establish community fridges to reduce food waste and share surplus. They run workshops, teaching residents how to repair items, keeping products in use for longer. Working with local businesses, they help them reduce their impact on the environment and set up refill stations for water and detergents to reduce waste from single use plastics.

6. County council leader calls on South Oxfordshire councillors to approve their local plan

In response to a question at the county council meeting on 10 September about the future of government housing infrastructure funding (HIF), council leader Ian Hudspeth called on South Oxfordshire district councillors to adopt their local plan next month (10 October). He highlighted the implications for infrastructure funding across the county of not doing so, saying:

"We have been successful in bringing in government funding of £535 million for infrastructure, which is really good news. But there is a problem in South Oxfordshire related to our first, successful housing infrastructure fund bid for Didcot garden town. To go ahead, the government require that there is positive progress made with the Local Plan.

"If councillors in South Oxfordshire take the decision on 10 October not to approve the submitted local plan, then immediately the garden town project stalls and we risk £218m of vital funding. If we do not succeed with the first housing infrastructure project, the government has made it clear we are unlikely to succeed with the second bid for improvements to the A40 worth £102m. That in turn throws into question the projects already funded through our growth deal, which would need to be revised.

“If they take the decision not to approve the local plan in its current form, they will be risking a total of £535m of much-needed infrastructure for Oxfordshire. That can’t be right, because residents want this infrastructure. So the decision taken by South Oxfordshire councillors is not just about South Oxfordshire – it’s about the whole of Oxfordshire.

“That’s why I am urging South Oxfordshire councillors to consider the wider implications when they make their decision next month.”

7. Fast food restaurants encouraged to take away fire safety advice

Fire safety advice for fast food restaurants and takeaways has been offered by Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service throughout September as part of National Business Safety Month. A major concern is people sleeping in premises with sleeping accommodation adjacent or above, where the means of escape passes through the commercial part of the building.

The fire service has carried out 85 visits so far, and crews found six locations that raised concern about the safety of people sleeping in the premises. Prohibition notices have been served to prevent people from sleeping in those buildings. Notices are issued in the most extreme of circumstances, where lives would be lost in the event of a fire. The six prohibition notices have directly made 20 people safer.

The campaign aims to provide those with responsibility for businesses and public buildings with information and advice to reduce the number of fire incidents and false alarms in the workplace, both of which impact on business safety and productivity.

Businesses are encouraged to ensure they have taken the steps required by law to protect their premises and employees from fire. Fire crews have also been giving advice on preventing arson attacks and reducing false alarms.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Kind regards



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