

**ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY 2021**

**Agenda item 7: County Council report**

County Councillor Report to Abingdon Town Council

Cllr Emily Smith, Abingdon North Division, Oxfordshire County Council

**Lodge Hill Update**

I am pleased to report that after much work, campaigning and pushing by councillors, council officers, residents and our MP, work on the diamond junction at Lodge Hill is moving forward and a planning application is due to be submitted in April.

The County Council will be holding a ‘virtual public exhibition’ in early March to show people the planned designs and to make any changes before the planning process begins. Ahead of the public exhibition, the plan is to share the exhibition information with the Town Council and parish councils that are impacted so that Cllrs have the details before the public exhibition begins.

**North-West Abingdon Development Highways Safety**

The County Council, and me as the local member, formally objected to an amendment to the planning permission for the North-West Abingdon Site for 30 of the 200 homes to be occupied before highways works were complete. There were a number of objections on Highways Safety grounds and the developer withdrew their application, which is a positive outcome.

**County Budget Setting**

Local government finance continues to be a challenging, with Covid adding to the funding pressures and uncertainty caused by the now multi-year delay to a Fair Funding Review for councils. The County Council Cabinet met on 19<sup>th</sup> Jan to agree a budget which includes a general council tax increase and an additional rise to help cover rising costs in Adults Social Care. The budget will now be debated by full council on 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. The budget papers as approved by Cabinet are available at: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&Mid=5929&Ver=4>

**Covid Update**

The County and District Councils continue to work very closely together and with NHS partners on the response to Covid. The Director of Public Health is employed by the County Council and is leading the collective effort in Oxfordshire.

Covid case continue to rise across the county. The lockdown has slowed the rises a little but we still have 4 times the number of cases that we had at the start of December and the number of Covid patients in hospital beds continues to rise sharply. The number of deaths since Christmas have also risen sharply.

The County Council has take on many more Home Care cases to enable people to leave hospital earlier than the usually would to free up beds in ICU, and are working across the Oxfordshire System to coordinate Covid Secure businesses, Test and Trace and support the vaccination rollout. Please keep encouraging people to stick to the lockdown rules and ask for support to isolate if needed.

### **Free School Meals and Winter Support Grant**

I have had a number of queries about Free School Meals from parents. In Oxfordshire, the County is using the Winter Covid Support Grant provided by government in two ways: the county is giving most of the grant funds to local schools funds to pay for food parcels or in most cases vouchers to families entitled to free school meals during the holidays. This was operational over Christmas and will be in place at half term and Easter. The rest of the Winter Covid Support Grant has been passed to District Councils who are working closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau to provide top up grants for families as well and funds for adults in need of food, cooking equipment or financial advice as a result of covid.

Families entitled to free school meals should talk to their school for more information and others can contact the district council's community hub or the CAB directly.

I submitted a question to the County Cabinet member for Education about the quality of the food parcels and how the quality is being managed by the Council and encouraging the council to issue vouchers rather than food parcels. The question and answer which talks in more detail about what's available is available in the Addenda to the Cabinet Papers:

<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/b19343/Addenda%20Tuesday%2019-Jan-2021%2014.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=9>

### **Councillor Priority Fund Spend**

Cllrs Rooke, Fawcett and I thought you might like to see which groups we have supported with our Priority Funds over this financial year. The grant scheme has now closed and while there a couple of applications still to be processed we will have used all of our total £45k allocation for this year to support organisation and residents from Abingdon – most but not all of the projects this year have been providing local support to people through the pandemic.

- Abingdon Foodbank
- Abingdon Community Fridge
- Be Free Young Carers
- Citizens Advice Oxfordshire South and Vale (IT equipment to expand remote service provision)
- Farm Ability (supporting people with disabilities to access learning remotely)
- Maggie's Cancer Support

- Earth Trust (Redesign of the education and outreach provision)
- The Abingdon Bridge (COVID-19 Emergency Support Programme)
- 2nd Abingdon Scout Group (Covid-safe activities)
- Oxford Care Leavers Association (Christmas gifts for care leavers)
- St Nicolas Primary School (Laptops for remote learning)
- County Council Laptops for pupils scheme (Abingdon area)
- County Council Highways measures: Northcourt Lane speed survey, new road markings on the Clevelands/Northcourt Lane junction and 'slow' signs on Norman Ave, bollards outside St Nicholas Church in Abingdon Town centre
- Abingdon Carousel Children's Centre