

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 30 MARCH 2022

REPORT TO ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

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COUNTY COUNCIL

OCC budget passed

In February, the first budget of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance was passed. The Conservatives failed to present any amendments to the budget. The budget increases investment to support some of the most vulnerable residents in our county, including in SEND provision, adult social care, and youth and children's services. Other priorities to receive boosts were the climate emergency, buses, traffic enforcement, and road safety. The budget also takes into account a backlog of underfunded major infrastructure projects which the previous administration failed to fully cost, including replacement of the Kennington Bridge and projects around Didcot.

Russian invasion of Ukraine

Cllr Liz Leffman [released a statement](#) agreed by all parties and Cabinet, condemning, in the strongest terms, the actions of the Russian military and restating our position of support for the people of Ukraine.

The government has announced the launch of its [Homes for Ukraine scheme](#) and supporting website. The scheme will offer a route to those who want to come to the UK who have someone here willing to provide them with a home.

An urgent national webinar with leaders, chief executives and Lord Harrington, Minister for Refugees in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), was held last week, where the minister outlined the need for local authority support to make this scheme work. Many questions were asked and raised about our roles and responsibilities across the different levels of local government – safeguarding, administering payments to sponsors and funding support, wraparound care services, schooling, short and long-term planning. A further webinar was held by the LGA today with the director general for local government and public services at DLUHC but with limited further information. The government has confirmed it will issue guidance on all this to us shortly.

OCC is already working closely with partners across Oxfordshire – the city and district councils and health – to look at resources and support that may be required for a collective response to this scheme. As soon as we know more from government we can respond and share more, including updating our [dedicated webpage](#).

For now we can direct people to [register as a sponsor](#) if they are interested and from today, the visa application process can begin from Ukrainians and immediate family members who already have named people willing to sponsor them.

COVID-19

Rates of COVID-19 are continually changing and any statistics provided here are likely to be out of date by the time they are viewed. You can view the latest figures on the Oxfordshire COVID-19 dashboard here: <https://phdashboard.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

It has been confirmed that all COVID-19 testing sites in the county will close from 30 March (previously 31 March) in line with the ending of mass testing. After this point tests will only be available for those groups and settings identified by government. The testing sites will then be decommissioned and handed back to their owners. As there are hundreds of sites across the country, this process may take several months.

The Witney test centre at Woodford Way is being closed, ahead of the national deadline, on Saturday 19 March so the car park can be returned back to local use. Local residents will continue to be able to book tests at the alternative local, regional and mobile sites, or order a test online, up until 30 March.

Government bus service funding extended

Buses continue to be under financial strain, with passenger numbers down on pre-pandemic levels, with some minor changes in service for Abingdon detailed in my December update. Following calls to the government to extend pandemic grants, the government announced additional funding. Bus companies will still face a potential cliff edge in 6 months' time however, unless passenger numbers begin to rise or the government steps in again. On a similar theme, Oxfordshire County Council has made an ambitious bid to electrify the fleet of buses in Oxford in cooperation with the bus companies. If successful, the bid could see 159 electric buses operating in the Oxford area that would save 9,200 tonnes of carbon each year (about 6,000 cars worth).

Cabinet to pursue detailed discussions for possible new Oxford United stadium

A proposal from Oxford United FC to lease land from us to develop a new 18,000 capacity football stadium is set to be discussed by the club, council representatives and other stakeholders based on objectives that have been guided by public feedback. Earlier this year the football club asked to lease 18 hectares/44.48 acres of land at Stratfield Brake in Kidlington for 250 years. At the 15 March meeting, Cabinet approval was given for discussions to begin – with the council's objectives to be strongly influenced by feedback received from the public. There's [more about this](#) in this news story.

Oxford Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ) pilot launches

A pilot of a small area of central Oxford has begun to test out the technology that will be used for the Zero Emission Zone. The full ZEZ will come into force in 2023 (subject to a public consultation).

Lodge Hill New south facing slip roads for A34 at Lodge Hill, North Abingdon

Latest information from officers is that the planning application is on track for submission 'this spring', with an ambition to receive planning approval this summer, followed by commencement of works on site by the end of the year. At the moment the scheme is progressing through planning and design stages as intended following the 'virtual exhibition' last year and subsequent incorporation of feedback. The funding remains in place and all parties involved are aware of the strategic importance of delivery in order to unlock housing growth in north Abingdon and adhere to the conditions outlined at outline planning permission.

Abingdon reservoir

OCC has called for revived plans to build a seven square kilometre reservoir between Abingdon, Steventon and East Hanney to be dropped. A draft regional plan for securing future water supplies includes proposals for the south east strategic reservoir option (SESRO), which would cost up to £1.4 billion. Similar proposals were rejected by the government in 2011 following a public inquiry. [Further details](#) are available online.

Abingdon Bridge

No further updates. The latest information we have from senior officers is that it remains the intention of OCC to undertake the repair to the bridge in the coming Spring (2022) when temperatures for the lime mortar are more favourable and the water levels in the river are lower and slower. This is because the repair will be done from a series of barges beneath the arch of the bridge.

OCC Councillor priority fund

The Councillor Priority Fund, supporting Councillor priorities in their local areas, is still open to new applications. The fund is at the discretion of the individual county Councillors to award. Councillors each have £15,000 for the two-year period 2021-2023. Personally (Cllr Ley) I do still have some amount remaining, so please disseminate this information to your residents who might benefit from the fund. For more information and to apply please visit <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/community-and-living/thriving-communities/councillor-priority-fund>

Ongoing consultations

There are two consultations ongoing, although please note that additional consultations are being started often.

Please **encourage your constituents to have their say** by sharing the relevant links. For details of all other live consultations visit [Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#).

Consultation	Link to consultation	Closing date
Oxfordshire's overarching domestic abuse strategy consultation 2021 – 2024	Let's Talk Oxfordshire	12 April 2022
'Be supported' survey 2022	Let's Talk Oxfordshire	24 April 2022

OCC Meeting Information

Links to view all county Council virtual public meetings can be found on the [meeting details](#) page on the county Council website –click on each meeting in the calendar to view the link. For those requesting to speak, committee officers will make the necessary arrangements for them to attend the meeting. Recordings can be viewed after each meeting.

There have been cases where some members of the public are unaware of which local Council is responsible for which services. The following links are useful pointers to exact lists of the three Councils' responsibilities:

www.abingdon.gov.uk

www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk