

County Councillor Report

Chinnor division

30th October 2025

Cllr Georgina Heritage



What I've been doing - Meetings and Council Activity

- I have attended several briefings this month, with subjects including LGA and the new temporary Oxford Congestion Charge. There will be more on these subjects below. We are now preparing for the full council meeting on 4th November (details of which will be in my next report).
- I spent some time “canvassing” in the division with our MP Freddie van Mierlo. This was **not** party election campaigning but rather to have direct contact with residents, if they wished to talk with us. It can be easy to become bogged down by council commitments, or to be reactive to residents’ emails and calls rather than proactive about learning about local issues. It was definitely time well spent. I really enjoyed the engaging doorstep conversations and it’s something I look forward to doing more of.
- I have been preparing for the **Place** visit from senior officer Robin Rogers on 12th November. This meeting will include (but is not limited to):
 - B4009/Lewknor Turn to consider the possibility of a footpath from the A40 turning to the bus stops, and also to view the parking situation (including opposite the M40 slip road) *ref AR @ KB and Lewknor parish councils*
 - Parking issues on Estover Way, Mill Lane/Cherry Tree Road, Station Road, Church Road, Cromwell Court/Lower Rd and Thame Road; speeding on Lower Icknield Way *ref Chinnor parish council*
 - Thame Road works *ref Sydenham parish council*

This meeting is not just about Highways but it’s understandable that these matters feature highly in residents’ and parish councils’ concerns. I would like to express my thanks to parish councils for highlighting these areas of concern for this visit. The visit will also be an ideal opportunity to discuss the potential new Chinnor traffic committee, and I’m very grateful to parish councils for your positive responses on this. I intend to explore what other opportunities there might be for parish councils to gain more direct access to officers and services.

Having been corresponding with Towersey's clerk regarding some ongoing highways issues, I also hope to use this visit as an opportunity to address these matters if we have not received a response from Vision Zero/Highways officers by this date.

This particular visit will be an initial tour so the officer can get a feel for the priorities of the Chinnor division. My hope and intention is that the visit will lead to a more detailed exploration of the matters that need to be addressed and improved in our area.

Public consultation - Fire and Rescue Service

A public consultation on improving Oxfordshire's Fire & Rescue service has opened, and a proposed new operating model has been launched.

As Oxfordshire grows and changes, the council needs to ensure that fire stations, resources and people are in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of our communities and improve the safety, efficiency and resilience of our service. The proposed changes to how, where and when Wholetime and On-call firefighters operate will enable OCC to better meet service demand day and night across Oxfordshire. The intention is to improve both emergency response times and expand the reach of this vital prevention and protection services to all communities.

On-call firefighter staffing levels continue to decline in Oxfordshire, with a 36 per cent reduction in the number of full-time equivalent on-call firefighters over the last 10 years. This is affecting the ability to respond to emergencies when demand is highest, which is during the day.

There is currently greater availability of resource – fire engines and firefighters – at night when demand is lowest, and lower availability during the day when demand is higher. This impacts response times in the day.

The consultation opened on 28th October, and you can find all the details, including the supporting data and frequently asked questions via [Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#). The link to take you directly to this particular consultation is here: [Consultation on proposals to improve Oxfordshire's Fire and Rescue Service | Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#)

Oxford Congestion Charge

The new temporary congestion charge went live on 29th October, as did three months' free bus travel from Oxford's Park & Rides (and future income from the scheme will also be reinvested in transport initiatives and savings for the public). You should be able to find the

information you need about the congestion charge here: [Oxford's temporary congestion charge for cars | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

The council is updating its FAQs, but please let me know if you have any queries about this. I applied for an Oxfordshire residents' permit a couple of weeks ago and didn't encounter any issues with the process, but I fully appreciate there may be initial teething problems and I will always ensure you get an answer if there is anything you're unsure about or are having problems with. There was a decent explanatory piece on the BBC News website yesterday which I thought might be useful to residents. I will copy & paste the article below (and the link is [Oxford's new £5 congestion charge explained for drivers - BBC News](#))

Youth support in Oxfordshire receives government funding

Support provided for young people by Oxfordshire County Council and partners has been recognised by central government through a Local Youth Transformation Pilot grant of £634,347.

OCC is one of the few in the country that continues to invest significantly in youth services, despite having no statutory obligation to do so, and this funding will be used to help shape a sustainable model for youth services that can be adopted both locally and nationally.

This new funding from government will not be invested directly by Oxfordshire County Council. Over the next few months it will be distributed among local partners that provide youth support, for them to allocate to projects across the county.

Oxfordshire County Council already runs a targeted youth support service, working directly with children and young people from across Oxfordshire, aged 11-18 (up to 25 years for those with additional needs), and was originally launched in 2021. Its work includes one-to-one support for young people to identify aspirations, build confidence and strengthen their community connections. Group work in schools addresses key issues such as exploitation, violence against women and girls, and risks associated with social media. Detached street-based youth work responds to local communities affected by crime and anti-social behaviour, building positive relationships in young people's own neighbourhoods.

The council recently initiated a [peer review](#) involving the National Youth Agency, representatives from the youth sector, as well as trained young reviewers, to ensure the service continues to meet the needs and aspirations of the young people it serves and supports.

More information about the targeted youth support service is available on the [Oxme website](#).

Local Government Reorganisation - Councils ready to discuss the future shape of Oxfordshire and West Berkshire's local government

Councils across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire are set to submit proposals on the shape of future local government reorganisation across the area.

In late 2024 a request was made by government to all remaining two-tier areas across England (county and city/district councils) to submit an interim proposal(s) for a new single-tier (unitary) authority or authorities by 21 March, followed by a final proposal(s) by 28 November.

The options submitted in March were:

- [A single unitary council for Oxfordshire](#) – Oxfordshire Council.
- [Two unitary councils](#):
 - Oxford and Shires Council – created from the existing city/district councils of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire.
 - Ridgeway Council – created from the existing district councils of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, and the unitary council of West Berkshire.
- [Three unitary councils](#):
 - Greater Oxford Council – covering Oxford and its Green Belt.
 - Northern Oxfordshire Council – covering most of the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts.
 - An adaptation of Ridgeway Council – covering most of the existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts combined with existing West Berkshire unitary

Scrutiny committees, cabinets, councils and executives – as appropriate to the seven councils – will be asked to debate and approve the detailed documents to be submitted to government before the 28 November deadline.

The government will then decide what form unitarisation will take in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, with an announcement expected in mid-2026. On current timetables, a shadow authority or authorities would begin operating in April 2027 before a new structure or structures come into full operation on 1 April 2028.

The options will be published on the following dates:

- 29 October: Option 2 will appear on the Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, West Berkshire, West Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse council websites.
- 31 October: Option 1 will appear on Oxfordshire County Council's website.
- 31 October: Option 3 will appear on Oxford City Council's website.

Councils will consider and discuss their proposals on the following dates:

- **Cherwell District Council:** Council on 10 November and Executive on 13 November. All-member briefings have been held in the lead-up to submission.

- **Oxford City Council:** Special Scrutiny Committee on 5 November, Cabinet on 10 November, Council on 24 November.
- **Oxfordshire County Council:** Place, Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 November and Cabinet on 13 November.
- **South Oxfordshire District Council:** Council on 6 November, Joint Scrutiny Committee (with Vale of White Horse) on 10 November, and Cabinet on 13 November.
- **Vale of White Horse District Council:** Council on 5 November, Joint Scrutiny Committee (with South Oxfordshire) on 10 November, and Cabinet on 14 November.
- **West Berkshire Council:** Council on 4 November, special Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 10 November, and Executive on 12 November.
- **West Oxfordshire District Council:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 November, Council on 12 November followed by the Executive on 13 November.

Cowley Branch Line to be reopened

Last week the government announced £120 million of funding to reopen the Cowley Branch Line to passengers, and create two new stations at Oxford Cowley and Oxford Littlemore in south-east Oxford.

The reopening of the line will connect communities in Littlemore, Cowley, Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys to central Oxford, in under 10 minutes, and then directly on to London Marylebone. It will also connect four of Oxford's growth areas along one route from ARC Oxford (formally the Oxford Business Park), The Oxford Science Park and the Ellison Institute of Technology, Oxford West End (next to Oxford Station), and Oxford North (near Oxford Parkway).

The project to reopen the Cowley Branch Line to passengers has been a longstanding priority for Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council, and today's announcement is the result of many years of work and commitment from local partners.

Cllr Liz Leffman, OCC Leader, said: "This is wonderful news and well deserved after all the hard work that so many organisations have put into making this happen. The Cowley Branch Line will form a critical part of our Oxfordshire Metro concept of fully integrated public transport and active travel links, connecting communities and businesses.

"This week the county council agreed an initial £10m investment in our emerging new OxRail 2040: Plan for Rail and we look forward to presenting ambitious and deliverable plans for additional services and stations right across the county to support sustainable economic growth."

The announcement was followed by a special event in Oxford when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, The Rt Hon James Murray MP and Lord Hendy, Minister of State for Rail joined by local leaders from across the public, private and academic sectors to travel along the

Cowley Branch Line from Oxford Parkway, followed by a visit to the Ellison Institute of Technology.

Ellison Institute of Technology has also unveiled it plans to invest £10bn over the next 10 years on talent and science programmes, in addition to the two million sq ft campus in Littlemore. The Cowley Branch Line project has been a key factor in unlocking this nationally significant Foreign Direct Investment.

The councils, along with ARC Oxford, The Oxford Science Park, and the Ellison Institute of Technology, have worked together to fund a £4.7m business and investment case, which was submitted to the Department for Transport earlier this year by Network Rail.

Reopening the Cowley Branch Line to passengers will help connect communities in Oxford, providing quicker and more sustainable connections. The line is designed to be an accessible and affordable option for local travel. The city and county councils will work to ensure fares to and from central Oxford are in line with other similar-length journeys – for example, from Oxford Parkway to Oxford.

So far, £4.7m has been invested in feasibility work and local partners will be asked to contribute £35m to the total construction cost. Both the city and county councils have already committed funds to this and will work with other landowners to secure further contributions.

Work will also be carried out to identify the additional infrastructure needed to connect the stations to their local communities. This could include new bridges, pedestrian and cycle routes, and better connectivity with the bus network.

Reopening the Cowley Branch Line will bring wide-ranging benefits to Oxford and the surrounding area by unlocking thousands of new homes and could create over 10,000 new jobs. It will help to reduce congestion, cut carbon emissions, and provide the rail capacity needed to support East West Rail and government growth priorities. It is forecast to attract almost one million return journeys each year.