County Councillor Report
Chinnor division
27th October 2026

Cllr Georgina Heritage
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Local Matters and what I've been doing this month

Henley & Thame councillors recently had our quarterly group Localities meeting, which is an opportunity for officers from various departments to provide information and presentations about OCC's work, with a local focus. Goring's councillor and I requested that a representative from **Streetworks** should attend our next meeting. Both of our divisions have suffered badly from roadworks co-ordination and communication problems over recent weeks, and we would like a face-to-face opportunity to discuss these issues. We feel strongly that Streetworks needs to take on board the real impact for residents (and councillors) when it goes wrong in our villages.

Following last month's roadworks problems in Chinnor, I promised to share the message I received from Streetworks' Network Co-ordination Manager so that residents and parish councillors could read it if they wish. The email is as follows:

Dear Cllr Heritage,

Thank you for your email and for sharing the concerns raised by residents. Russell quite rightly escalated this over to me to review. Apologies for the slight delay in response.

Firstly, I would like to offer a sincere apology for the disruption experienced across Chinnor and for the confusion caused by these works proceeding after residents had been advised that other planned works on Lower Icknield Way had been postponed.

I fully understand your disappointment, particularly after you had communicated the postponement to residents in good faith. The subsequent appearance of different works at the same location understandably created the impression that OCC was not coordinating activity consistently. I am sorry that this placed you in a difficult position with residents and undermined confidence in the Council's management of the network.

The UK Power Networks works relate to the installation of new 11kV high-voltage electricity cables to maintain and reinforce the local electricity supply. These are planned utility works rather than emergency works.

Having reviewed the circumstances, the UK Power Networks permit was granted while the B4445 closure remained in place. Although the works may fall within a category that can be permitted within a Section 58 restriction because of their connection to electricity supply, further discussion should have taken place before the works commenced. This should have considered both the Section 58 restriction and the wider impact of undertaking works on another key route serving Chinnor.

Once the concerns were identified, OCC officers engaged directly with the promoter and attended the site. Additional reinstatement requirements have been agreed with the promoter to protect the recently treated highway, and measures were requested to improve traffic flow, including manual control or signal optimisation between 07:00 and 19:00.

To address the specific points raised:

- *We acknowledge the severe congestion reported on Lower Road, Lower Icknield Way and High Street.*
- *The works are not emergency works. They are planned electricity infrastructure works being undertaken by UK Power Networks.*
- *A Section 58 restriction does not prohibit every category of work. Certain works relating to new or essential utility supplies may still proceed. However, this does not remove the need for advance discussion about timing, coordination and protection of the recently treated highway. If you wish, further information on exempt works and reduced restrictions set out by the DfT can be found in section 6.5.1 of the Code of Practice for the Co-ordination of street and road works here.*
- *You are right that Oxfordshire County Council has a statutory Network Management Duty to coordinate activities on the highway network and minimise disruption wherever reasonably practicable. Within Network Coordination we do our utmost to fulfil that duty, balancing the needs of residents, businesses, road users and utility companies, who themselves have statutory duties to maintain and improve essential infrastructure. Whilst residents understandably see the congestion and disruption caused by works on the network, a significant amount of coordination takes place behind the scenes to prevent clashes, amend timings and challenge proposals before works are allowed to proceed. Unfortunately, on this occasion, the combination of the B4445 closure and the UK Power Networks works created a greater impact than we anticipated and, with hindsight, I believe the coordination could have been managed better. For that, I apologise.*

The permit is currently programmed to run until 9 October 2026, although the works may finish sooner if progress allows.

We will review the circumstances internally to understand how the permit was granted without the necessary wider coordination discussion and what changes are needed to prevent a recurrence.

I appreciate that this explanation does not remove the disruption residents have experienced, but I hope it provides an honest account of what happened and reassurance that the concerns are being taken seriously.

On the subject of roadworks, you might be interested in following this **blog by Cabinet member for Transport Cllr Gareth Epps** : How we're working to control roadworks and keep our network moving

Our Localities meeting also touched on **Local Plans** outside of the county but which affect South Oxfordshire. I was reassured that OCC has been feeding into Buckinghamshire's Local plan from a cross-boundary perspective. I spoke very strongly on Chinnor's suffering highways infrastructure, and officers confirmed they are highly conscious of the impact of Buckinghamshire's housing plans on our area (particularly Princes Risborough for us in Chinnor), and this engagement is ongoing. I've since received an email from the Director of Economy and Place, Robin Rogers, about this. He visited Chinnor with me some months ago and is involved in out-of-county Local Plan feedback. He has asked if I would like the opportunity to discuss this further, and of course I responded positively. I'm looking forward to his assistant getting back to me.

The public consultation for **OxBus 2040: Plan for Bus** is now live on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire platform and I very much hope our parish councils and residents will get involved. We all know that public transport can be so important in our rural villages yet there is so little of it! To promote the consultation, officers will be holding five drop-in events, and the South & Vale based venue is Cornerstone, Didcot. I'm aware of parish councillors' frustration about this and have contacted the department in support of our parishes, explaining that the southeast of Oxfordshire is poorly served by public transport, our parish councils are keen to engage, yet we're not even offered a local drop-in session. If another session cannot be arranged at this stage, I've asked what additional officer support and engagement we can have in this area. I will update parish councils when I receive the response.

The documents and survey can be viewed via this link: OxBUS 2040: Plan for bus | Let's Talk Oxfordshire

On **local Highways** related matters,

- Residents expressed concern about parking by visitors of the small Children's Home in Chinnor. I contacted the relevant officer who has spoken with the Service Manager for the Children's Homes on the disturbance it has caused. The staff in the Children's Home are aware they must use the prescribed car park and are ensuring that visitors know to use parking spaces and don't block the pathway.
- District Councillor Ed Sadler and I were made aware of a property on Hill Road, Chinnor which suffers from surface water flooding in wet weather. In his capacity as a local flood warden for OCC, on Saturday Ed joined the homeowner and cleared as much debris from drains and gullies as possible. More rain was forecast so Ed also

called Highways who came out with sandbags. I am now following up with OCC, but credit goes to Cllr Ed Sadler for putting the hard work in, especially during the storm. A Highways officer has confirmed that a defect has been raised to have the gully further up Hill Road cleaned and jetted to get it operational, which can take up to 28 days. The roundabout section also needs a deep clean but due to the amount of maintenance required, this may not be achieved so quickly. We're now looking for a further update on this. I'm now aware of a similar problem in Hill Road in Lewknor, so our flood warden Cllr Ed Sadler and I are also following this up.

- I reported some failed micro-surfacing in Manor Road in Towersey which resulted in Highways reviewing the work with the contractor, and a plan is now in place to bond and make good the problem areas. I was pleased the issue was looked into quickly. It's definitely worth reporting any defect concerns like this on FMS, which I can then follow up directly if it helps.

I'm keen to share this because it's very local to us: Residents and visitors are being invited to have their say in a survey on options for a walking, wheeling and cycling route between **Thame and Haddenham**, including connecting with Haddenham and Thame Parkway station. OCC and Buckinghamshire Council are sharing initial route options for feedback, with the survey open until Tuesday 24 November.

The two councils are assessing different route options to understand how feasible they would be and identify any significant challenges, costs or barriers to delivery.

This engagement is being carried out jointly by the two councils. The survey is available on OCC's engagement platform, Let's talk Oxfordshire, for people to share their feedback on the proposals. The survey closes at 11.59pm on Tuesday 24 November 2026.

There will also be two drop-in events where members of the public can view the information in person and speak to project officers:

- Haddenham on Thursday 5 November 2026 from 3pm to 8pm, in the Conference Room at Haddenham Parish Council
- Thame on Saturday 14 November 2026 from 10am to 3pm, in the Upper Chamber at Thame Town Hall.

After the engagement period closes, the feedback will be reviewed alongside the technical evidence. Oxfordshire County Council and Buckinghamshire Council will then make a joint decision on what happens next.

Away from highways and transport, I really enjoyed attending the opening of **Aston Rowant Primary School's new library** on 9th October. It was quite beautiful to hear the children singing and to see how much they enjoyed both the opening event and the library itself. What felt especially poignant was the simple joy of actual, physical books in a world dominated by digital screens. And also having a new quiet reading building, knowing that so many of our village schools struggle for space. None of this would have been possible without the concerted fundraising and organisational efforts of Laura Purse, who led this substantial project.

Council Matters

I'm admittedly nervous about writing about **Local Government Reorganisation** as it's such a moving target at the moment and we may receive news soon, however in the past couple of weeks OCC took the formal step of issuing a legal letter to Government ahead of a potential judicial review regarding LGR in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. The council has been asking government to provide the evidence and analysis that informed its minded-to decision in July to create three unitary councils across this area. In the absence of a response, OCC has now formally issued a pre-action protocol letter that provides the legal basis for requesting the evidence and documents underpinning the government's decision-making. OCC's leader Cllr Tim Bearder explains his position in this video

Devolution has also been highly topical this week, with the next phase of devolution across the country being expected to be made imminently by Government. Following discussions on devolution with Jim McMahon, Minister for Local Government, Devolution and Regional Growth last week, the leaders of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Swindon were advised they should write to him by Monday of this week to confirm whether to accept Government's offer of the development of a new mayoral strategic authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley. The new authority would be led by an elected mayor. It would bring new powers and funding to the region. For this reason the leaders have agreed to the proposal in principle.

Our leader (Cllr Tim Bearder) and Windsor & Maidenhead's leader (Cllr Simon Werner) have written jointly to the minister about concerns that remain unresolved. These include how police, fire, NHS and other public service boundaries would work without Buckinghamshire in the initial MSA. The letter also highlighted the link between local government reorganisation (LGR) and the risk that the combined arrangements could create more leaders, boundaries and complexity, rather than less. However, both councillors support progressing the current offer so that we have a seat at the table to shape the detail and ensure we have coherent public service boundaries and accountable governance.

A plan has now been approved by Government to deliver better and more expert specialist support for children and young people with **SEND.** OCC's response to national education reform for children and young people with SEND was submitted to the Department for Education in June 2026. This followed publication nationally of the schools white paper 'every child achieving and thriving' and the SEND consultation 'putting children and young people first.'

The reform plan has been supported by £4.9m investment from Government for 'experts at hand and local authority SEND transformation' and to support the partner organisations in implementing its ambitions over the next three years.

The government's approval means Oxfordshire will receive a high needs stability grant which will significantly reduce the current deficit in the dedicated schools grant. Almost every local council in England faces a SEND high needs deficit because the cost for support has vastly

outstripped the funding provided by central government. Factors across the country, not just in Oxfordshire, contributing to these deficits include increased demand for education, health and care plans (EHCPs), and a lack of funding for inclusive mainstream and state special school capacity, forcing councils to rely on costly independent and specialist placements.

Support for children with SEND is supported through a local area partnership, which includes Oxfordshire County Council; NHS Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (formerly NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board); Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust; Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum.

After writing last month about work that OCC is doing to support the environment and climate change adaptation, I'm pleased to share news on some ambitious **nature recovery initiatives** in Oxfordshire. Plans to bring Britain's rarest tree species back to Oxfordshire, restore a chalk grassland habitat in the Cotswolds, and a wildflower meadow restoration project in Eynsham are among six significant nature recovery projects identified for further work in the county.

After the successful partnership working that led to the publication of the local nature recovery strategy (LNRS), OCC is now continuing its work with the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP).

The OLNP is launching the first of Oxfordshire's strategic nature projects – a growing portfolio of the county's most ambitious nature recovery initiatives, now live on the OLNP's website. It will include 15 projects, with these six already promoted and more to come:

- Black poplar project to recover Britain's rarest tree species back to floodplains in Oxfordshire.
- Cotswolds Savannah project: a large-scale chalk grassland and mosaic habitat restoration project on 2,000 hectares.
- Evenlode landscape recovery project restoring habitats, soil health, and waterways. Led by farmers without sacrificing food production.
- Thames Valley wildflower meadow restoration project in Eynsham, including the acquisition of a new piece of land.
- Ock and Thame landscape recovery project, including benefits for people, food, farming, and nature.
- Reconnecting Bernwood Otmoor and the Ray project.

Each project has been assessed for its strong alignment with the LNRS, which the council published in November 2025, and its potential to deliver lasting, landscape-scale change. The projects include key actions to connect habitats across the county, support the recovery of priority species, and build greater local resilience in the face of increasingly extreme weather events.

Beyond nature recovery, the strategic projects each offer a variety of key wider benefits for people and place – cleaner water supplies, greater flood resilience, more opportunities for communities to connect with nature, and improvements for health, wellbeing and local economies.

Given that these projects are at different stages and different scales, the right kind of support will vary. For some, philanthropic or grant funding will be the right fit. For others, public sources such as agri-environment payments or woodland creation grants may be more appropriate. As projects mature, opportunities through emerging nature markets are also expected to open up. You can see the projects and get in touch with them directly through the OLNP's website