



Focus on Parishes with Cllr Freddie van Mierlo (Chalgrove and Watlington)

February 2025

OCC NEWS

Budget: OCC has set its [budget](#) for the period for 2025/6. The Council had greater flexibility to invest in services this year with an improved settlement from the new government. However, this was conditional on setting council tax at the maximum 4.99%. Additional funding is being put towards our highway network with £50m for maintenance, including on pothole prevention work like reducing flooding and earlier resurfacing. The administration also delivered another year-on-year increase for SEND and children’s services, as well as £1 million for early years support. Funding was also secured for the delivery of the Watlington Relief Road. The budget was supported by the Liberal Democrat/Green Group and Labour Group, with the Conservatives abstaining.

Devolution and local government reorganisation: Oxfordshire was not selected by the government to be in the ‘fast lane’ for reorganisation and devolution. This means the changes will likely take place in 2027/8, rather than 2026. Councils are preparing to put forward proposals for local government reorganisation, with options including a whole Oxfordshire unitary authority, or multiple smaller unitary authorities. These drafts will be submitted by 21 March 2025 with final proposals due in November.

Local elections 2025: The government confirmed that elections to Oxfordshire County Council will take place in 2025. This will take place on the previously agreed new boundaries that include divisions for Chalgrove & Thame West, Watlington & Rotherfield and Benson & Crowmarsh.

Rural inequalities: The county would like to here from residents their experiences of rural inequalities, including difficulties in rural areas in accessing health and social care, housing, employment, and infrastructure. This is part of the ‘Oxfordshire [Marmot](#) Place’ initiative (after Sir Michael Marmot). Please send your insights to marmot@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Bus services: Changes are being made to some of the subsidised services for rural areas following a retendering:

122/123	Red Rose Travel	Watlington – Reading via Sonning Common/ Kidmore End	Will be operated by Carousel Buses instead of Red Rose Travel Services renumbered 112/113 No timetable changes
126/127	Red Rose Travel	Watlington – Thame via Chalgrove/Postcombe	Will be operated by Carousel Buses instead of Red Rose Travel Services renumbered 116/117 Minor timetable changes, service 117 now serves Moreton

620	Carousel Buses	Princes Risborough – Henley College via Chinnor & Watlington	New service for Henley College students on college days only
-----	----------------	--	--

NEWS IN BRIEF

Blue badge abuse crackdown: [Magistrates](#) fine 23 year old man found to be abusing blue badges
OCC now on Bluesky: Follow the council on the social media channel [here](#)

CONSULTATIONS

- **Pharmacies:** [Input](#) to an assessment of the need for community pharmacies in Oxfordshire (deadline 9 March)
- **Home to school transport and post 16 transport policy:** [Input](#) to survey by 2nd March
- **Free period products:** [Input](#) to survey on providing menstruation products in all council buildings
- **SEND Conversations:** OCC is hosting further information sessions on improvements to SEND services on 18 and 25 March. Sign up [here](#)

GRANTS

Green grants: [Grants](#) are available to support activities for Big Green Week (Deadline 14 March)

PARISH ROUND-UP

Not all parishes are covered – below is a selection of the main updates.

Brightwell Baldwin:

- **Potholes:** Reported to OCC for actioning

Ewelme:

- **CLEUD:** The applicant has submitted further evidence, available on OCC's website. The issue will come before another planning and regulation committee meeting for a decision.
- **Drains:** Jetting has been scheduled for Parsons Lane
- **136/139 bus:** Contract for services 136/139 expires in August 2025, and the tender process for reprocurring these services will start in March. Changes to might be possible to services 33/33A at the same time.

Swyncombe:

- **Potholes and drainage:** Issues have been reported to OCC Highways

Watlington

- **Relief Road:** Funding was secured at OCC's budget meeting. The next step will be for the planning application to be determined by the planning committee. If this happens, the road will be able to be progressed to construction
- **Charlotte Coxe Trust:** The independent report into the future governance options of the trust was provided by Geldards. A meeting has been scheduled for March 13th for the Charlotte Coxe Trust committee to consider its findings and agree on a way forward.
- **Red Kite View to Cuxham Road path:** SEE have committed to fixing the severed cables which will allow the contractor to finish the work on behalf of Bloor Homes.