

HENDREDS AND HARWELL ROUND UP – NOV 23

***** OCC NEWS*****

SEND Improvement: Steps are being taken to improve the support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). A priority action plan has been developed by organisations involved in the delivery of SEND services, including Oxfordshire County Council and the NHS, along with the county's parent carer forum. The plan will need to be approved by Ofsted. An Improvement Board meeting will take place in November. The action plan has been submitted to Ofsted and we hear back in 70 days, meanwhile the council is continuing with what's in the plan, for example kicking off the Improvement Board (which has an independent chair). Meanwhile I am pushing for earlier and more urgent local provision for SEND, there is an allocation for an SEN school on Valley Park, but Didcots provision is greater than that alone, we need more. Hope to update soon, as plans are afoot.

Public Transport

In December in the run up to Christmas, single fares in Oxfordshire will be capped at £1.

Extension of bus fare cap: The current £2 single bus fare cap offer will end on 31st October 2023. A further period of 13 months of fare cap will follow after October, but with single fares capped at £2.50. There are no details available yet regarding whether there will be any change to the operators participating, the information will be on the DfT's bus fare cap.

Bus News

Current tendering:

1. There is currently a tendering process in progress which, subject to successful conclusion of contract awards, will lead to the following changes in November. Timetables will be available by mid-October.

2. **Route 94 (Didcot – Blewbury):** Following receipt of BSIP funding, this service will be improved to operate hourly over two slightly different routes – service 94 will run between Didcot, East Hagbourne, Blewbury and Upton, roughly every two hours, and a new 94A circular route will also serve West Hagbourne, the Astons and Moretons, again roughly two-hourly, following a similar route to the former 94S service. This will re-introduce regular bus services for the **Astons** and **Moretons**. Chilton and Harwell Campus will no longer be served – these places are now served by route X34.

3. **New services:** Several new services are expected to commence on 6th November, reinstating some routes which were lost in 2016 as a result of local authority subsidy withdrawal. Initial contracts are until March 2025, in order to gauge demand. There is one route in this locality:

4. **Route 68 (Faringdon – Wantage):** This service will reconnect Longcot, Fernham, Uffington, Kingston Lisle, Westcot, Sparsholt, Childrey, the Letcombes and East Challow (Sarajac Avenue) to Faringdon and Wantage with up to four journeys on Monday to

Saturday. Peak hour services operate to/from Wantage. This service is funded by the Council's new budget for rural and community transport

5. Further opportunities are being examined for services in remaining parishes with a population of >500 which have no service i.e. Chesterton, Sunningwell, Bourton, West Hanney, Barford St John & St Michael and Cuddesdon & Denton.

Rail strategy

1. Work to update the Oxfordshire rail strategy is beginning and will build on existing work such as the Oxfordshire rail corridor study. Timescales for completion is the end of this financial year.

2. The County Council passed a motion on 12th September, calling on the Cabinet "to consider building on the 2018 Statement of Opinion by commissioning, before the end of this financial year, while funding resources remain available, a DfT-compliant Strategic Outline Business Case, and an initial assessment of financing options for a new rail station for Wantage and Grove". This is now to be followed up with Cabinet.

OCC Budget 2024-2025: Cabinet agreed an [approach](#) to setting the 2024/5 budget. Continued inflation and demand pressures (particularly in SEND and adult care) mean the council is currently forecasting £30-40 million in additional costs in 2024/5. The council's financial strategy includes a 4.99% rise in council tax for 2024/5 with 2% ring fenced for adult social care. Details of the proposals will be published in November.

Oxfordshire tops table for county councils tackling climate change: [Oxfordshire](#) was rated the best performing county council in the UK on climate change by the Climate Emergency UK climate action scorecard.

Reducing disruption caused by utilities & developers: The County's new plan for charging an increased daily fee of £2500 (instead of the £300 fixed fee) to utility companies that dig up major roads is being [consulted](#) on. By law it is restricted to 5% of Oxfordshire's roads and so will focus on busy, critical parts of the network. Surplus funds will be reinvested. The DfT is encouraging all councils to adopt schemes like this.

Homes Upgrade Grants: Money is available for off-gas grid homes to improve energy efficiency (including solar). To [quality](#) a resident (renter or owner-occupier) must live in a home rated EPC D or lower, and have a household income of less than £39,000

Winter and Incident response

Contact Officer: Paul Wilson, Group Manager - Area Maintenance and Operations, paul.wilson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

1. The County Council's Winter service will recommence on the Friday 27th October 2023 and will continue through to Friday 5th April 2024. Below is a bulleted summary of the winter service and the preparations being made.
2. • Weather forecasts received daily at 1100hrs, with updates at 14:00, 16:00 and 21:00hrs, also regularly if forecast changes significantly,
3. Treatment decisions based on the bespoke Oxfordshire forecast are made by a small team of decision officers, taking into consideration any other prevailing conditions and previous treatments.

4. We have a fleet of 30 vehicles of various sizes serving 27 routes, particularly necessary where there are restrictions on the Network, such as weight and width restrictions on structures.
5. When we are treating, the gritting vehicles locations can be seen live at [Gritter tracker](#)
6. These routes enable OCC to treat approx. 1920 km of the County's roads in approximately 3 hours or less, which equates to approximately 42% of the whole network. A figure which is above the average of the peer authorities in this part of the country. We will only treat the prescribed network which is shown on [one.network](#) under the 'Driver information' layer
7. There are currently approximately 1300 salt bins across the county, remember we only fill the bins once at the beginning of the season. The salt is precured by our term maintenance contractor Milestone, OCC pay for the salt that is used to treat the network or used to fill the salt bins. Salt bin locations can be found at the following link [ArcGIS Web Application](#)
8. Salt bins on the network are filled pre-season on request by Town and Parish Councils having identified those in need.
9. The Parishes have been invited to request their free bulk bags of salt to use for their resilience and so far over 100 requests have been received
10. The average spend over the previous 5 years on the winter service is approximately £1.8 million
11. For further information regarding the winter service please visit [Salting, gritting and snow clearance | Oxfordshire County Council](#)
12. Urgent highway situations can occur at any time both during and out of office hours, in response to this we are continually trying to improve the customer reporting processes, as such we are promoting the use of a single number, this being the standard Highway Enquiry number 0345 310 1111.
13. During normal working hours this number will be answered by one of our customer service colleagues and triaged as required. During out of hours and at weekends and bank holidays there will be a standard answerphone message requesting the customer to phone a different number which will direct them to The Answering Service (TAS). TAS is a third party provided service who will triage the enquiry and deal with any urgent highway calls as appropriate.
14. In the event of a severe emergency, customers should still call 999 for one of the blue light services.

SESRO - Oxfordshire County Council lodged comments on draft water resource regional plans and individual water company draft Water Resource Management Plans (WRMP24) in February and March 2023. A report was brought to Cabinet on 24th January 2023 and the matter was considered also at Scrutiny on 25th January 2023. We said that there is no need for the South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO). Various other options to provide resilience in future water supply are largely supported, including the Severn Trent Transfer (STT). The water companies released their decisions on 30 August 2023 – they consider there is a need for SESRO and intend to continue progressing the reservoir option towards a Development Consent Order. The Water Resource Management Plans have been forwarded to the Secretary of State to approve. Various meetings and discussions are underway. Detailed information was made available in November 2022 for each of the strategic water supply options in the country, including the SESRO and STT. The information is available on the water company websites and through the website RAPID which is the Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development, made up of a team from the Environment Agency, Ofwat and the Drinking Water Inspectorate. RAPID has received this information as they have a series of 'gates' for providing funding to progress the options. RAPID's draft decisions for 'gate two' were released for public consultation on 30th March 2023, and we provided an officer response prior to the closing date of 11th May 2023. RAPID's decisions released on 29th June 2023 indicate that all the strategic water supply options that the water companies want to progress, should do so. The next 'gate three' deadlines are varied between November 2023 and December 2029. The 'gate three' deadline for the SESRO is January 2025.

*******NEWS IN BRIEF*******

Town and parish council charter: Online [questionnaire](#). Draft to be published in Jan

Boundary review: [Consultation](#) open from 3 October to 11 December.

Highways works: Check this OCC website showing [upcoming highways repairs](#)

20mph applications close: Applications for 20mph closed on [31 October](#)

*******PARISH ROUND-UP*******

Will send separate notifications to each parish council throughout the month on individual consultations, casework or enquiries.