

# REPORT FOR OTMOOR PARISH COUNCILS and LANGFORD VILLAGE FEBRUARY 2017

FROM Cllr Tim Hallchurch

My web site [www.otmoor.co.uk](http://www.otmoor.co.uk)

Peter Barker's Otmoor Birds: <http://otmoorbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>

My apologies for not producing a January report. Every two years we visit our families in USA and Australia and close friends in New Zealand using a round the world ticket. We finished with a week in Thailand to recover from entertaining grandchildren but wonderful to see them all.

I have kept in daily touch by email and phone calls and hopefully have replied to all contacts over the period.

The main activates in both councils have been the 2017-18 budget and unitary authorities.

The major development has been the agreement between OCC, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse DC to propose a county unitary. This leaves Oxford City, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell with South Northants developing their own proposals.

Barry Wood, leader of Cherwell DC very much disagrees with the above proposals. A significant sticking point is that Cherwell DC has money in the bank and is running with the Graven Hill self-build initiative to make profits to save Cherwell DC Council Tax payers. OCC has long term debts from about 15 years ago, when the county under a previous regime, overspent and still owes around £50 million. Cherwell does not like the idea of its hard-earned savings being used to bail out the County. However, OCC with an independent study, has shown that a single unitary for the county will make considerable savings.

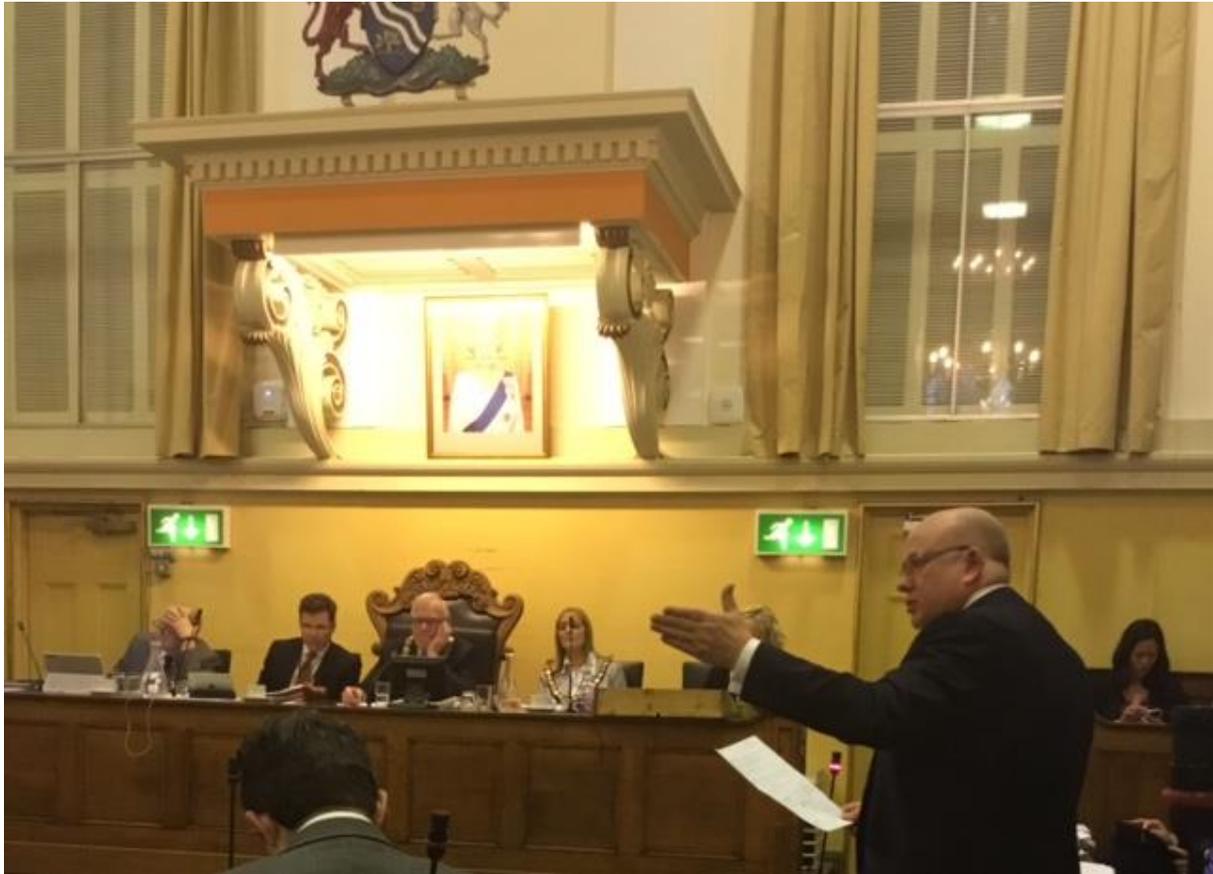
Another problem for Cherwell is the co-working with South Northants. It would not be possible to create a Cherwell-S Northants unitary without the agreement of Northampton CC and this would mean a change of county boundaries that would require an act of parliament. For Cherwell to join the Oxfordshire unitary as proposed by OCC then it would mean that Cherwell would have to divorce S Northants. This would not be such a problem as the council budgets and offices are separate but managed by joint a management team.

Quite understandably the Labour controlled City Council don't like the idea of a county unitary as it will likely to lead to Conservative control of the city of Oxford.

Central government may step in and force an Oxfordshire unitary and I expect that this will be the eventful outcome. That or leave things as they are.

## **County Council Budget Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> February.**

The County Council meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> February, after a seven-hour debate narrowly agreed at budget for 2017-18. Details are on the OCC web site but it will mean a 5% increase in Council Tax, about £65 for the average household.



Cllr Ian Hudspeth, leader of Oxfordshire County Council, addressing the council on 14<sup>th</sup> February.

## **Council leaders' statement on single unitary council for Oxfordshire**

Joint statement from leaders of Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council

Becoming a single unitary council will transform the way we deliver our services to the people of Oxfordshire for the better. But these are vital services that will impact on everyone. That's why the changes we make must without fail improve the quality of life for residents, their families and the communities they live in.

We have heard a range of differing views on how these services should be organised and between us, as the leaders of our councils, we have come together with others to make this happen.

It has been an incredible journey that has ultimately brought us all together in one place. The statement below sets out our aims for a single unitary council and how we are working together on a joint proposal to government.

- The leaders of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse councils have agreed to work together with Oxfordshire County Council on a joint bid to government to create a better council for Oxfordshire.
- There is now a strong consensus that in the context of reduced government funding and urgent need for capital investment, a step-change is needed in the way council services are run.
- Having looked at all the evidence, we are convinced that a single unitary council for Oxfordshire provides the best prospect for maintaining high quality services and securing badly needed investment in infrastructure.
- It is also essential that the new unitary council must protect the quality of life for everyone in Oxfordshire, in both urban and rural areas.
- All are agreed that enhancing local democracy and autonomy should be at the heart of the new model for local government, so that different areas can continue to make decisions that work for them. There can be no one-size-fits-all approach.
- The joint unitary bid will build on the foundation laid by the draft One Oxfordshire proposal, with significant improvements to ensure that the priorities of local communities, raised by district council partners, are fully addressed. Over the coming weeks we will be focusing particularly on:

Strengthening the model of local accountability, with decisions taken at a much more local level than offered by the area executive board model.

Ensuring locally held reserves are used for the benefit of local residents, while recognising the collective benefits of pooling resources to leverage investment.

Commitment to a revised model of council tax harmonisation across the county over a reasonable period of time.

Ensuring that the planning framework builds on existing and emerging local plans.

Establishing a housing company to ensure delivery of sustainable housing and infrastructure.

- It is essential that the model of local government incorporates the very different social and economic make-up of Oxford city and its vitally important economic importance to the whole county.
- We acknowledge that this is a complex issue to resolve and urge the city council to join the working group so that we can draw on their knowledge and expertise of running services in the city to develop a model of local governance that works for Oxford.

- The final proposal will also take full account of the comments and issues raised by residents and stakeholders during the One Oxfordshire public engagement exercise currently being carried out by the county council.
- We note that the 'more local' aspect of the proposal is proving to be of particular interest to residents. They also want reassurance that any change would focus on service improvement through joining up, as well as making savings.
- All councils must be involved in creating the new unitary authority and deciding upon the transition arrangements, with councillors for the county and districts working together to take key decisions, including appointment of an interim chief executive at an early stage of the process.
- Having agreed on the best approach to improving services and securing the infrastructure needed to ensure sustainable economic growth, we plan to jointly submit a bid to the Secretary of State in March. We want a quick decision so the new authority can be created as soon as possible.
- The next step is to form a working group of all the partner councils to develop a new proposal that represents the best deal for the people of Oxfordshire. We hope all the councils will be involved, and will also be asking our business and public sector partners for their input

**Cllr Ian Hudspeth**

**Cllr Matthew Barber**

**Cllr John Cotton**

**Cllr Matthew Barber, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council said:**

*"I believe that by working together we can truly transform the way we deliver our services to the people of Oxfordshire for the better. The Vale of White Horse District Council will play an important role in developing the final joint proposals for a unitary council ensuring they have a strong local influence and impact and offer our communities value for money."*

**Cllr John Cotton, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council said:**

*"Helping to shape the future of our county is of the utmost importance to South Oxfordshire District Council and I am committed to ensuring our local communities across the district continue to benefit from a council that understands local people's needs and aspirations."*

**Cllr Ian Hudspeth, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, said:**

*"Two weeks after publishing our draft proposal, I am pleased that three of the six councils are now working together to create a brand-new council for Oxfordshire that really will be the best of both worlds - lower cost and more local. I hope that other districts and city councils will join us to get the best out of the new council for their areas."*

*Most of all we now want to hear what residents think. Once people find out more, I think they will see that one unitary council offers the best way to protect services from future cuts and get the investment in roads and infrastructure that Oxfordshire urgently needs.”*

**Cllr Barry Wood, Leader of Cherwell DC, has responded:**

### **Vow for protection despite councils’ defection**

The leader of Cherwell District Council has refused to be pressurised into supporting plans for a single unitary authority as it would “wreak devastation on the people he is elected to protect”.

Cllr Barry Wood issued the battle cry after South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils announced they were now supporting proposals to create a single unitary authority for Oxfordshire.

The plans, which were outlined by Oxfordshire County Council, would replace the current two-tier structure comprising county and district councils and be replaced with a single authority responsible for delivering all services.

Cllr Wood said: “When the county council’s proposals for a single unitary authority were first unveiled, Cherwell stood united in opposition with Oxford City and the county’s other district councils – including South and Vale. The fact that these two fickle councils have now defected to support the county’s proposals does not alter my position or opinion that these plans would wreak devastation on the very people I am elected to protect.

“Time and again Oxfordshire County Council has proven it is inept at managing its budgets and responsibilities; its council tax has gone up year on year but service provision has gone down. Cuts were made to children’s centres, highway maintenance and bus routes, when the only thing that really needed to be cut – and wasn’t – was the grass.

“The idea of a one-size-fits all council is ludicrous; the issues affecting Banbury or Bicester will not be relevant to those in Wantage or Abingdon. We should be giving more control to local communities, not taking it away. And we certainly should not be placing such power in the hands of an authority which cannot manage the services it has now. By proposing a single point of contact, Oxfordshire County Council – with the support of South and Vale - is merely proposing a single point of failure and it is our residents who will suffer the consequences.”

Despite South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council now changing their opinion on the proposals, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxford City Council remain firmly opposed to the plans.

Oxfordshire County Council has continued to increase its share of council tax year on year, whereas Cherwell’s precept has remained frozen for the past seven years without any impact on service provision. If single unitary council were to be introduced, council tax precepts would have to go up to fund this.

Cherwell District Council is encouraging people to join them in opposing proposals for a single unitary authority by submitting feedback to Oxfordshire County Council at <http://www.oneoxfordshire.org/get-involved>

The closing date for submissions is 28 February.

## **Young people give their views on how to tackle 'sexting'**



**The views of Oxfordshire schoolchildren on how to tackle ‘sexting’ are being sought as part of a cyber-safety project by Oxfordshire County Council and Thames Valley Police.**

The authorities are asking schools to take part in a survey to inform approaches to combating the problem - which often involves children and young people sharing nude or sexually explicit pictures of themselves or others via smartphones and other devices. It is illegal to create or distribute such pictures of anyone under 18.

The aim is to build up a better picture of how sexting is affecting young people in Oxfordshire, and to hear their thoughts on approaches to raising awareness of the risks attached to this behaviour.

An online education resource pack has also been issued to schools and other youth settings with lesson plans and links to appropriate guidance and resources.

### **Pressures on young people**

Oxfordshire County Council’s Anti-bullying Co-coordinator Jo Brown joined students at Wheatley Park School to promote the survey and hear their views.

She said: “Sexting often occurs between young people who know each other and can be linked to the forming of relationships and wider sexual pressures on young people. It is often coercive and when images are created and shared inappropriately this can have very damaging effects.

“Consulting and involving young people is a crucial step towards improving efforts to tackle this issue and empowering them to keep themselves safe. We’re working with schools and other youth settings to make education around this issue as effective as possible.”

## **Cyber campaign**

Sexting is one of the issues highlighted by Thames Valley Police's #ProtectYourWorld cyber campaign, which launched in September 2016 to raise awareness of cyber-crime and encourage people to take steps to protect themselves online.

The Force worked with Oxfordshire County Council to run a Safeguarding Online Risks event in Oxfordshire, bringing together more than 100 professionals who work with young people across the Thames Valley to learn and share knowledge about online risks.

## **Long-lasting impacts**

April McCoig, Thames Valley Police cyber-crime advisor, said: "Young people may see sexting as harmless and while we do not wish to criminalise them, taking, sharing or receiving an image of this nature is illegal and can lead to serious consequences, including blackmail, bullying and harassment, which can have a long-lasting negative impact. It can also make young people a target of sex offenders.

"We are very pleased to be working with the council and other authorities on this issue and believe that getting young people involved is key to making a difference in changing perceptions and behaviour moving forward."

## **National Safer Internet Day**

The launch of the 'sexting' survey coincided with a wide range of activities which took place across Oxfordshire schools as part of National Safer Internet Day (SID). Schools were encouraged to hold lessons and workshops to discuss online safety and approaches to using the internet in a positive and constructive way.

Thames Valley Police also hosted a web chat about online safety for young people with questions answered by PC Kim Dugmore, schools and youth engagement officer for Oxford, and Force cyber-crime advisor April McCoig.

## **Training**

The council delivers training to staff working with children on behalf of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB). Further information, including advice for families can be found here as well as information for young people.

## **March 7 meeting will scrutinise Phase 1 of NHS Transformation plans**

A special meeting of the watchdog committee that scrutinises the local NHS has been set for Thursday, March 7.

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is made up of county, district and city councillors and co-opted members of the public.

The March 7 meeting will be held at County Hall in Oxford to formally scrutinise the proposals in Phase 1 of Oxfordshire NHS's Transformation Consultation and consider whether they are in the interests of local communities and health services in Oxfordshire.

The Committee is inviting written submissions of views and evidence from interested parties, key stakeholders and local groups before the meeting via the Committee officer to inform the Committee's debate and its formal response. Responses should be sent to [Julie.dean@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Julie.dean@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

People can still apply to address the Committee directly via the following link <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/get-involved-meetings>).

For the sake of ensuring that the wide variety of viewpoints are heard it is hoped that this will happen via different interests groups nominating one speaker to represent their overall view to the meeting.

The Committee's scheduled meeting on February 2 discussed the NHS plans for communicating and consulting on the proposals, but not their content.

I am a member of the HOSC and would welcome your view. The meeting agenda can be found on the OCC web site.

## Cherwell DC

All Staff Newsletter January 2017 by the Chief Executive, Sue Smith.

I hope that you all had an enjoyable break over Christmas and the new year. 2017 is going to be interesting and probably quite challenging for a number of reasons. The ongoing pressure from the reducing amount of Government funding for councils will continue, but so far, we have managed to deal with this as a result of our successful joint working and our move to a commercial approach. It is unclear at the moment what Brexit will look like and therefore the full impact is uncertain. However, it is likely to have some impact on the public sector and on us as individuals living and working in the UK. As more clarity emerges about whether it is a “hard or soft” Brexit, or indeed some other form that has not yet got a label, we will let everyone know what it means and the implications for us.

Alongside the EU negotiations, there was a fair amount of “noise” in the UK in 2016 about the structure of local government and whether a unitary structure should be introduced in two-tier areas like ours

that is where there is a county and a district council. Sajiv Javid, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has said that he will issue guidance on this in January. We will let you know when this happens and what, if anything, it means for SNC and CDC. In the meantime we are carrying on with our new approach of the Cycle of Growth and our three strategies; Commissioning, Commercialisation and Operational Excellence as set out at the all staff briefings. Phase two of the management restructure will commence shortly as will the recruitment of a new Chief Executive. We have put in place a number of secondments so that work can continue on the new approach. Some of these started in the summer of 2016 and have been extended. We have put in place one new set of arrangements to cover, on an interim basis, the vacancy of the Managing Director role at Graven Hill. Karen Curtin has become (again) the interim part-time MD and will also continue in her role as interim Commercial Director for SNC and CDC. In order to provide managerial support and focus for the Bicester Directorate, Jenny Barker will head up the team on secondment into a new role as Assistant Director, Bicester, reporting in to Karen. Claire Taylor (Assistant Director, Commercial Development and Innovation) will take on line management responsibility for HR and ICT, along with her current areas of responsibilities. Jo Pitman ( Head of Transformation) will continue in her secondment and is focused on developing the

quality model for our new approach, reporting into Ian Davies. James Doble will continue in his secondment into the Assistant Director, Transformational Governance role. All of the secondments are in place until the end of June.

So thanks for all the hard work in 2016 and now we are in 2017 I look forward to seeing you ready to face the challenges ahead. Sue

Sue Smith will be retiring this spring and the council is already looking for a new Chief Executive.

### **Team turns clean up to eleven**

Southwold is looking clean and tidy after Cherwell's street cleansing operatives removed 11 tonnes of waste.

Throughout the week beginning 23 January, Cherwell District Council's street cleansing team blitzed the Bicester estate, removing litter, graffiti and dog mess. Sixty man hours went into the blitz, as workers collected nearly three-quarters of a tonne of waste by hand, and over eight tonnes with their mechanical street sweepers.

Sixty-eight households made the most of the free bulky waste collections offered during the campaign. This led to a further 2.4 tonnes of large items such as sofas and white goods being taken away for recycling and safe disposal.

Cherwell carries out around six blitzes a year, focussing on getting areas which suffer from high levels of littering, fly tipping and other problems, back to their best.

**The blitz also included a sale on additional blue and brown recycling bins, which were knocked down to £18, to encourage people who needed extra capacity to recycle more.**

**Cherwell's bulky waste collection service is available all year round. For £16 people can have up to three items removed, including items such as furniture and white goods.**

For more information on blitzes in Cherwell visit: [www.cherwell.gov.uk/blitz](http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/blitz)

### **Free health walks follow routes to suit**

Residents are being invited to enjoy the great outdoors as part of a new programme of free health walks.

With the UK in the grips of a serious inactivity crisis, Cherwell District Council is encouraging people to come together and enjoy one of the most accessible and effective ways of staying healthy.

The scheme is being operated jointly with South Northamptonshire Council and takes in some of the districts' most picturesque scenery.

A recent report by the national Walking for Health partnership shows that being physically active cuts the risk of several major health conditions by between 20 and 60 per cent.

The Cherwell walks start out from a range of north Oxfordshire locations, including Banbury, Bicester, Bloxham, Kidlington and Woodstock. They take in flat ground to suit those after a gentler stroll, and hills for anyone looking for a more challenging hike.

Each route comes with three difficulty levels, ranging from 30 minutes to 90 minutes and longer.

Scheme co-ordinator Colin Hull is actively seeking new volunteer walk leaders, and is offering a series of free training courses that are running throughout the year. He is also running a competition to name the new scheme. Entrants should email him their suggestions for a chance to win a £25 voucher.

For more information, including details of training for walk leaders, ring 01327 322 337 or email [colin.hull@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:colin.hull@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk)

The full health walks timetable is included in the Best Foot Forward newsletter, which can be downloaded from <http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/healthwalks>

## **Otmoor Archaeological and Historical Society**

**WEDNESDAY, 1<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2017: 8.00 p.m. – ISLIP VILLAGE HALL**

**Dr. Eleanor Standley (Inst.of Archaeology & Dept. of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)**

***“Dress and Everyday life in the Medieval Period”***

**WEDNESDAY, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017: 8.00 p.m. – ISLIP VILLAGE HALL**

**Annual General Meeting followed by a short film**

**Oxfordshire Branch, English Speaking Union.**

Attached is the 2017 programme. All are welcome to our events subject to availability. Why not join us at an event and see if you would like to join. The ESU has a prodigious London Headquarters where members can attend events, have lunch and entertain their guests. See [www.esu.org](http://www.esu.org)

## School Holiday Dates 2017-18

<b>Term</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Spring half term	13 February 2017 – 17 February 2017
<b>Spring Term</b>	20 February 2017 – 7 April 2017
Easter holiday	10 April 2017 – 21 April 2017
<b>Summer Term</b>	24 April 2017 – 26 May 2017
Late Summer half term	29 May 2017 - 2 June 2017
<b>Summer Term</b>	5 June 2017 - 21 July 2017
Total	

<b>Term</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Autumn Term	4 September – 20 October 2017
(4 September is an INSET day)	
October holiday	23 October – 27 October 2017
Autumn Term	30 October – 19 December 2017
Christmas holiday	20 December 2017 – 3 January 2018
Spring Term	4 January – 9 February 2018
Spring half term	12 February – 16 February 2018
Spring Term	19 February – 29 March 2018
Easter holiday	30 March – 13 April 2018
Summer Term	16 April – 25 May 2018
Late Summer half term	28 May - 1 June 2018
Summer Term	4 June - 25 July 2018
Total	

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