

January report

Since May I've logged exactly 100 enquiries under the Council's enquiry system. As of 18 December, 15 remain outstanding; a learning point from this relatively new system is that some have had a response and been 'closed', but before the requested action has been agreed.

I am picking up directly the worst/deepest highway defect reports: it is peak 'pothole growing season', and at times urgent action is needed to prevent hazards and vehicle damage. The three weeks after Christmas were particularly bad for "frost and thaw" – perfect pothole weather. The County Council has announced additional crews have been hired and deployed. This further increases the borrowing that is necessary to keep highway conditions just to their present "steady state" level, but is better than a position of "managed decline".

Please encourage residents to submit photos with reports on FixMyStreet [if safe to do so]; it reduces the need for officers to visit and investigate if it's clear a report is necessary – a fix can then be actioned without further delay. Many of our roads were constructed in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and there is no nationwide plan to maintain them in the way that might be expected for other strategic assets.

Budget

Officers have now published budget numbers of the Government's financial settlement for Oxfordshire, published on 18 December. It was certainly no better than the expectation of £35m of cuts over the next three years (the raw cut is £24 million – the cost of the whole libraries service – by comparison). Options were explored to fill the £5.4m funding gap this year (on Government figures which assume a maximum council tax increase). The gap grows substantially in subsequent years.

Planning and related issues

The [interim report of the Oxford Growth Commission](#) was published by the Government on 15 December. At a first reading, it will receive a mixed response. It talks of increasing housebuilding totals even further above existing levels, while not mentioning the 11,000 homes currently with planning permission but unbuilt across Cherwell. More locally, it notes the need to consider cumulative impacts and what are described as 'potential clashes' – though it doesn't suggest how they will be addressed.

Movement & Place Plan – now due March

It was clear that a lot more work needed to be done for the renamed Bicester & surrounding villages Movement & Place Plan. This will now go to Cabinet in March. There's been a 'work in progress' version shared with town/parish/district/county councillors and I have suggested text to fill in some of the remaining gaps. These were well aired in a call for councillors.

Meet our new gritters!

30 new gritters for salting roads across the county over the winter season have been named. Radiospread, Alfred the Grit, Agatha Gritstie, Prof Stephen Thawking and Snowy Beauchamp [my favourite] are amongst the names chosen. Deddington Primary School has a gritter in its name too.

Household Waste Recycling Centres

A booking system has been introduced [similarly, separately in West Northamptonshire]. During the year, Redbridge will need to close for urgent structural work, and the change will be reviewed. Bookings are free for domestic users resident in the county and can be made [here](#) or by calling 01865 519800 during working hours. Non-residents will need to pay £15.

Shaping the future of our fire and rescue service

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue has a consultation on a set of proposals for improving safety, efficiency and resilience of the service. This consultation has now been extended, and closes on 30 January. I'm a member of the joint consultative committee with the Fire Brigades Union; I've spoken to firefighters from a number of stations and raised concerns directly with the Chief Fire Officer.

[Please offer your feedback here.](#)

Carers Phone Friends

This is a new service from Carers Oxfordshire to support unpaid carers by connecting them with trained volunteers who understand the challenges of caring. Please promote this service across your networks. You can [find out more, make referrals or volunteer here](#): or by calling 01295 234850.

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