

County Councillor Report

Chinnor division

2nd June 2026

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Local Matters – What I’ve been doing

On Friday 22nd May I spent some time in Chinnor with Freddie van Mierlo MP, joined by Chinnor’s District Councillor Ed Sadler and OCC’s new Leader Cllr Tim Bearder (I was very pleased to get Tim to Chinnor in his very first week on the job!).

Our first and highly important visit was **Mill Lane Community School** where the headteacher kindly showed us around (including the fabulous forest school) and explained how long Mill Lane has been waiting for new classroom facilities. The “temporary” classrooms have long outserved their purpose and it was really important to me to represent the school’s urgent need for better facilities to the council.

I’m incredibly pleased and excited that following this visit some extra funding has been approved, with a larger building added to the project scope. I’m liaising with OCC leader Cllr Tim Bearder on these developments and I’m very much looking forward to offering more details on this project as soon as possible!

As well as the school, we visited community groups and particularly enjoyed exploring the superb **Chinnor Allotments**. Such an inspirational community asset, where we also learned about the important campaign to save peatland. I have a wildlife garden and pond in my own effort to protect ecosystems and biodiversity, but the immense knowledge of the Chinnor Allotments team is on a different level and I thank them for sharing it.

OCC Highways has asked councillors to submit local priorities for Oxfordshire’s **2027/28 highways maintenance programme**. I can nominate up to three roads in the Chinnor division that are most in need of resurfacing or major repair and improvement. This is about identifying potential priorities for consideration and there isn’t a guarantee that they’ll be included in the scheme – all suggestions will be assessed against technical criteria, risk and countywide priorities within a limited budget – but I’d very much like to hear from parish councils and residents regarding their priorities. Please email me with your suggestions. The deadline for submission is **19th June**.

A new **Quiet Lanes pilot scheme** will be introduced across Oxfordshire where there is local support, and I'm really pleased that work with Towersey parish council and residents has resulted in **Towersey** being nominated for the scheme (if the village supports it). This doesn't guarantee Towersey a place on the scheme and there is still some data gathering to do, but it could potentially be a really exciting outcome for the village, which suffers from traffic using it as a "rat run" to and from Thame. Place Officer Andy Sweeney attended Towersey's parish meeting in May to present the proposal and take questions. To be clear, if this is not a direction that Towersey residents choose to take then that's absolutely their choice, but it was great to see the village hall packed with interested residents, who fully engaged and asked many pertinent questions.

To explain, quiet lanes are designated roads where traffic is restricted to make it safer for people to walk, wheel, cycle and horse-ride. With no through traffic, quiet lanes can reduce vehicle numbers and speeds, lower the risk of collisions, and make minor roads feel calmer and safer. Children can play and learn to cycle safely, residents can even have regular street parties if they wish(!) while access is maintained for residents, farmers, businesses and emergency services.

If you feel your village might benefit from a quiet lane or you'd like to learn more about the pilot scheme, please get in touch with me, and have a look at this link: [New quiet lanes programme to create safer walking and cycling routes](#)

Towersey has ongoing problems with speeding and overtaking on Kingsey Road, and very sadly there was a fatal accident on this stretch recently. I've been engaging with Highways officers about this and they intend to review the speed limits on the road (and will work with Buckinghamshire Council where necessary), however part of the problem here and on many other roads that I receive a lot of correspondence about is **police enforcement**. Our area regularly suffers from groups of noisy racing motorcyclists, speeding traffic and other driving related offences that really need some police attention. I've taken this up with Cllr Gareth Epps (the new cabinet member for Transport) and Freddie van Mierlo MP and am in the process of arranging meetings with both, along with District Councillor Ed Sadler (who is also looking into the noise element of highways offences).

I was pleased to report on OCC's **SEND** improvements last month, but disappointed to learn from Chinnor's parish chair that Lord Williams School in Thame (where most Chinnor children attend) has lost a SEND teacher with apparently no plans to replace them. While schools have their own budgets which they manage as they see fit in order to maximise outcomes to suit their needs, I'm highly conscious of how many families in the Chinnor division this decision might affect. Lord Williams School sits in the divisions of my County Councillor colleagues Kate Gregory and Judith Edwards. They have a meeting at the school scheduled soon and intend to discuss this matter during their visit.

I'm not taking credit for this one as it's down to Chinnor Parish Council's dedicated efforts, but I'm pleased about the recent **Highways officer visit** to address the parking problems on Thame Road and consider solutions. The one thing I will take credit for is asking the officer to look at the pedestrian crossing on Station Road during his visit, as I'd received reports from a Chinnor parent that the crossing isn't fit for purpose and vehicles aren't stopping for children. We've since been advised that the line markings on the crossing will be refurbished over the next few months and the officer is working with colleagues in the streetlighting team to get the belisha beacons upgraded.

Finally, I'm going to take the liberty of mentioning a **motion I put to SODC full council** in my capacity as a District councillor. I'm mentioning it in my County report because it's in support of OCC's decision to work with partners to create an independent patient voice for residents. I happen to have a seat at OCC's Health table through my SODC Cabinet position and I wanted to use that seat to demonstrate how strongly the county's Health & Wellbeing Board (HWB) supports the retention of Healthwatch and its independence. I've learned on HWB just how important and effective Healthwatch is as the statutory independent champion for people who use health and social care services. The Government plans to abolish Healthwatch and transfer their function to Integrated Care Bodies and local authorities. I strongly feel that the loss of the patients' independent voice creates a conflict of interest. The motion was passed with cross-party support.

Council Matters

OCC held its annual meeting on 12th May, and this is usually the period in which councillors apply for cabinet positions or choose to step down from them. Our leader Cllr Liz Leffman had decided a while ago that she would step down before the County Council is abolished, and she felt it fair to give the new leader enough time to lead effectively before this happens. Cllr Leffman is quoted as saying, "It has been a huge privilege to serve as leader of the county council since 2021. I have very much enjoyed the role and the connections that I have been able to make with people all over the county, in all walks of life.

"However, now is the time for me to stand down. In May 2027, we will be having elections for the new unitary council or councils, and as I will not be standing for election, it is right that I hand over the leadership in the run-up to these elections".

Cllr Andrew Gant also chose to step down from Cabinet at this time, and I thank them both sincerely for their hard work and dedication. We held group elections which resulted in Cllr Tim Bearder (one of our local South Oxfordshire councillors) being elected as Leader, with Liz Leffman remaining on cabinet. Following an extraordinary council meeting on 20th May, the leadership and cabinet are confirmed as follows:

- Councillor Tim Bearder, Leader of the council

- Councillor Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources
- Councillor Sean Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
- Councillor Gareth Epps, Cabinet Member for Transport
- Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property
- Councillor Liz Leffman, Cabinet Member for Highways Construction and Repair
- Councillor Rebekah Fletcher, Cabinet Member of Adult Social Care
- Councillor Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities
- Councillor Judith Edwards, Cabinet Member for Local Government Reorganisation and Human Resources
- Councillor Laura Gordon, Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy

While I don't like to just copy & paste in my reports as a rule, I think it's important for residents to know who the new council leader is and what he stands for, so I've taken the following from the recent press release:

"Fairness, ambition and a belief that Oxfordshire can lead the way on key issues will be the guiding principles of the new leader of Oxfordshire County Council.

Cllr Tim Bearder became only the fourth leader of the authority since 2001 when he succeeded Cllr Liz Leffman at the Extraordinary General Meeting of the council.

He currently represents Wheatley at County Hall and lives in the village. He grew up in Wendlebury, went to school in Bicester and has also lived in Oxford.

The former BBC journalist addressed councillors after being elected to the role. Since 2021 he has served as both Cabinet Member for Adults and Cabinet Member for Highway Management.

He said: "It is a huge honour to have been given the opportunity to serve as Leader of Oxfordshire County Council. I do not take that responsibility lightly.

"Politics matters most when it improves people's everyday lives.

"I came into politics because I believe in fairness. Fairness between communities. Fairness between generations and fairness in the opportunities people have to live healthy, secure and fulfilling lives.

"I also believe deeply that Oxfordshire can lead the way — on climate action, on sustainable transport, on strong public services and on building a county where prosperity is shared more fairly.

"Difficult problems are not solved through blame or simplistic slogans. They require thought, honesty, evidence-based policy and the courage to make difficult decisions. That is the kind of leadership I will strive to provide.

"I want us to be ambitious for Oxfordshire, but also grounded in the realities people face every day — cost of living, access to care, housing pressures, congestion, pollution and the need to protect the environment that makes this county so special.

“We are at our best when we work together — with each other, with residents and with our partners across the county.”

Improved Road Safety Results in Oxfordshire

While I recognise we still have problems with speeding and collisions as mentioned earlier in this report, I’m pleased to report that the number of people killed or seriously injured (KSI) on Oxfordshire roads in 2025 fell by 18% to 213, according to provisional data issued by the Department for Transport. This compares with an increase of around 20% over the wider Thames Valley.

The Department for Transport published its provisional personal injury collision and casualty statistics for Great Britain on 28 May 2026. While the figures remain provisional and may be revised as additional data is confirmed, the early trends are encouraging for Oxfordshire.

The KSI measure is generally regarded as the most robust indicator within the provisional dataset because serious and fatal collisions are more consistently reported and recorded than lower-level incidents.

In February 2022, Oxfordshire County Council’s cabinet approved funding to support the roll-out of 20mph schemes in communities across the county at no cost to town and parish councils. Since then, more than 275 communities in urban and rural areas have requested and implemented 20mph measures.

Oxfordshire fire crews launch water safety campaign

Water safety advice is being issued, linked to concerns about people getting into difficulty in the county’s waterways. I appreciate this is a sensitive subject in the Chinnor area, bearing in mind the tragic fatal accident at Old Kiln Lakes last year, but that’s one of the very reasons why I felt I needed to include this update in my report. Just a few days ago the BBC approached councils for comments on people swimming in the Chinnor Quarry, and we know that social media groups outside of the area have been encouraging people to visit the so called “blue lagoon” of Chinnor, which we know is actually very toxic, very deep and very dangerous.

OCC’s Fire and Rescue Service warns that even on a hot day, the temperature of a body of open water can remain very cold, meaning falling or intentionally jumping in can result in a cold shock response leading to heart failure. They advise that if you are submerged in water unexpectedly, your body will gasp for air meaning that you could breathe in water and hyperventilate. This over breathing can make you lightheaded and, as your brain is deprived of oxygen, you may become disoriented.

If you choose to swim in the waterways or sea (**not** Old Kiln Lakes), let friends and family know your route near water and what time you should return. Carry a whistle and your

phone in a waterproof pouch to draw attention if you do get into difficulties. If you fall in, remember **to relax, lean back and “float to live” until you can control your breathing.**

Anyone witnessing someone in trouble in the water should call **999** or **112** and shout for help. They shouldn't enter the water themselves; instead, throw something in that will float.

Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service is warning that there are other dangers of open water. Please be aware of the following:

- Reservoirs, lakes, rivers and other inland water may look safe and inviting, particularly on a warm day. But there are hidden dangers below the surface that could make people ill, cause injury, even kill.
- Choose a lifeguarded beach if planning to go into the sea.
- Even on a hot day, the temperature of the water in a reservoir, quarry, lake and the sea can remain very cold. The low water temperature can numb limbs and claim lives.
- From the surface, it is not always possible to see what is under the water. This could be anything from large rocks to machinery, from shopping trolleys to branches and even fish hooks or broken fishing line, all of which could cause injury.
- The water in rivers and the sea might look calm but there could be strong currents below the surface, or strong rip tides that can pull the strongest of swimmers out to sea. Even reservoirs have currents, caused by working machinery.

Further information and advice are available on the water safety section of [Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue's YouTube channel](#) or visit the [Royal Life Saving Society UK's website](#).

Meningococcal Disease and local concerns

I often like to include updates from cabinet members and senior officers in my monthly reports if possible. A couple of months ago I included advice from Director of Public Health Ansaf Azhar on meningococcal disease after some local parents approached me with concerns about the Canterbury cases. I hoped I wouldn't need to return to this subject, but we've sadly experienced a recent small cluster of three cases linked to Reading. Tragically, one of the cases, a student at Henley College, died from the infection. It is important to be aware that the risk to the wider public remains low and there is no evidence of Oxfordshire cases. Meningococcal disease typically requires very close contact to spread, and large outbreaks, such as the one recently seen in Kent, are considered rare. For anyone concerned about the local cases, further advice can be found on this OCC page: [Meningitis cases in Reading](#)