

County Council newsletter

June/July 2019

from Nick Carter and Jeannette Matelot

CYCLE RACE JUDGED A HUGE SUCCESS

The recent OVO Energy women's cycle race has been judged a huge success, with superb planning, minimal disruption to roads and traffic, and a boost to the local economy. Now the County Council will welcome the event back to Oxfordshire for another two years.

Thousands of residents and school children lined the route of the race on 12th June, between the starting line in Henley and the finish at Blenheim Palace, and many were showcasing their neighbourhoods to national and international TV audiences.



Alexa Lee, aged 10, *left*, from Appleton Primary School in Abingdon, officially started the race in Henley by waving her own flag. She had won a competition with a design that featured a cloaked cyclist on a multi-coloured background.

Winner Jolien D'Hoore, a 30-yr-old Belgian, *below*, was first to cross the finishing line at Blenheim Palace, at the end of an event which had taken several months of careful planning by the County Council. Now the Women's Cycle Tour will return to Oxfordshire in 2020 and 2021.

OCC wants this prestigious race to motivate residents, particularly young girls and women, to be more active and improve their health. The event also provides an opportunity to showcase Oxfordshire as a cycling destination and to increase tourism in the county.



FOOTNOTE: Ten competitors were taken to hospital after a collision during the race, which led to speculation about the cause of the crash. Here's what the race organisers said about it: "This was a racing incident and not in any way caused by road

conditions. We have worked carefully with Oxfordshire County Council, who spent three weeks inspecting the route and carrying out the necessary repair work. It is impossible to say what caused the accident.”

PACE OF GROWTH CONTINUES

Oxfordshire’s relentless pace of growth continues as the County Council has been awarded £218m funding to enable thousands of new houses to be built, including affordable homes, and create new jobs.

The funding was announced by the Chancellor in the Spring Statement and is part of the Housing Infrastructure Funding (HIF) programme from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

A variety of growth measures had previously been identified in the local plans of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils, and the HIF fund is linked with the Government’s ‘Housing and Growth Deal’ which has targeted 100,000 new homes in Oxfordshire by 2031.

The infrastructure priorities are initially focused on the Didcot area, including:

- A4130 widening from the A34 Milton Interchange towards Didcot;
- a new ‘science bridge’ over the A4130, Great Western Railway Line and Milton Road into the former Didcot A Power Station site;
- a new Culham to Didcot river crossing between the A415 and A4130;
- and a bypass for Clifton Hampden.

A lack of suitable crossings over the railway and river, coupled with the success of the Science Vale area, has resulted in heavy congestion. Construction is currently programmed from mid-2021 to March 2024.

The County has also submitted a HIF bid for substantial improvements to the A40. The improvements would be conditional on delivering 4800 new homes, including 2200 affordable. The bid includes:

- extending the A40 dual carriageway from Witney to the proposed Eynsham park and ride, including better cycling facilities along the route;
- extending the A40 westbound bus lane from west of Duke’s Cut canal and railway bridges to the proposed Eynsham park and ride;
- improving the A40 capacity and connectivity at Duke’s Cut canal and railway bridges, along with an eastbound bus route over the A40 Duke’s Cut bridges on the approach to Wolvercote and a link joining the A40 cycle route to National Cycle Network route 5 along the Oxford Canal.

OCC is adopting compulsory purchase powers to enable it to progress a number of schemes.

CALL TO SCRAP EXPRESSWAY

A group of planners have published their concerns about both the so-called Oxford-Cambridge Expressway and the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan. They are calling for the proposed road to be scrapped and for the 2050 Plan to go back to the drawing board.

They have issued two short reports, available here:

<https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/2019/06/04/scrap-expressway-say-oxford-planning-experts/>

Their critique of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan is "Balancing Oxfordshire’s Growth in a Climate Change Emergency", and their proposals to scrap the Expressway is “Oxford to Cambridge Corridor – an Alternative Strategy”.

Noel Newson, a former chief assistant engineer at Oxford City Council, explains: “The plans for Oxfordshire must take account of the climate crisis. It is folly to be building major new roads which will only add to carbon emissions. Instead, we should be planning to locate new housing where people don’t need to use a car for their every need. And of course, you don’t need HGVs to transport ideas between leading universities.”

FIRE SERVICE'S FLYING COLOURS

OCC's Fire & Rescue Service is celebrating its success in the first inspections of fire & rescue services carried out by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service was judged as:

- 'good' at *effectively* keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks;
- 'good' at *efficiently* keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks; and
- 'good' at looking after its people.

The Inspector, Matt Parr, commented: "Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service performs well in its core duty of responding to incidents and protecting the public from fire and other risks. It works well with other services in the Thames Valley to deliver a joined-up response to a broad range of incidents.

"Additionally, the service is good at analysing current and future demand. It utilises a risk-based approach to determine response capability, as well as techniques such as risk-modelling software and effectively sharing information with other services."

Most fire services around the country are stand-alone organisations, but some, including Oxfordshire's service, are an integral part of the relevant local County Council.

The Inspector added: "We were very impressed with the Oxfordshire service's range of education programmes as part of its '365Alive' programme. These include home visits, school outreach schemes, fire cadets and youth work, an interactive safety centre and the provision of road safety information. The service should be proud of its record in these areas.

"Broadly speaking, the service manages its people well. It is one of only 2 out of 30 services inspected to date which we have graded 'outstanding' for its values and culture. We found a positive culture throughout the organisation, with everyone knowing their role and purpose.

"The people of Oxfordshire should be proud of their fire & rescue service."

OCC's Chief Fire Officer Simon Furlong commented: "These judgements reflect the excellent work undertaken every day by my teams. I am sure you will join me in congratulating our Fire & Rescue Service personnel for being the best County Council fire & rescue service and also one of the best services in the country."

TRAFFIC SENSITIVE STREETS

OCC is responsible for coordinating road works across the county, including those undertaken by utility companies.

As part of this duty, it designates certain streets as 'traffic-sensitive', so that the flow of traffic can be regulated by managing when works happen. For example, no road works in the centre of Thame when the fair is in town.

The County's last full review of traffic-sensitive streets was 10 years ago, and this is now being updated to ensure it continues to be effective.

A list of traffic sensitive streets appears on OCC's portal, and everyone has an opportunity to review the proposed changes and additions by Friday 21st June. The link to the consultation is:

<https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/trafficsensitivestreets/consultationHome>

SCHOOL AIR QUALITY

The County is taking the first steps to improve air quality outside schools by restricting traffic flows.

A 'School Streets' scheme has been successfully trialled in other parts of the country, and now primary schools in Oxfordshire will be asked if they are interested in taking part.

The project aims to reclaim roads outside schools from traffic at the start and end of each day, reducing air pollution outside the school gates and making it easier for children to walk, cycle or scoot to school.

It will be discussed at the Oxfordshire Schools Clean Air Network seminar taking place on Clean Air Day, 20th June. If the scheme goes ahead, schools will need to engage with staff, governors, parents and the local community before registering their interest.

OCC's Public Health officers have already been investigating the possibility of introducing traffic restrictions outside the school gates.

Restrictions won't be enforced on main roads, and a full consultation will take place before any pilot scheme is implemented. Two to three schools will be invited to take part in an 18-month pilot.

In 2017 in London traffic was restricted outside seven Hackney schools at opening and closing times. Since then, the proportion of children cycling to school has increased by more than 50%, with traffic outside the school gates reducing by around two-thirds.

LIMITING LIGHT POLLUTION

The Campaign to Protect Rural England is urging county councils to limit the impact of artificial street lighting at night, after a survey found that just one in 50 people lives in a place where they can see the 30-plus stars which are only visible in a truly dark sky.

The CPRE has urged councils to consider switching off streetlights, in order to "limit the damage caused by light pollution, reduce carbon emissions and save money".

What do you think? Are there too many lights in your street? Would you have any concerns if some of them were switched off to reduce light pollution?

PARTNERSHIP BREAKS NEW GROUND

In view of the substantially changed political membership at SODC, it is worth updating the following item from our last County Newsletter. The footnote, in particular, merits the attention of the district council's new members.

OCC's partnership with Cherwell District Council is developing well since their integrated relationship began last October.

This is one of very few examples in the whole country of a county and district council sharing staff and services, and both councils have now decided to strengthen the partnership further.

They now share a chief executive, an assistant director covering regulatory services, public protection, trading standards, environmental health etc, an assistant director covering housing and commissioning, a lead officer for HR, and a legal and governance director. County staff are also sharing CDC's offices in Banbury, and these initial structural changes mean that capacity is retained in Oxfordshire whilst running costs are reduced.

The two councils are now looking at how to collaborate or align further in areas such as ICT, children's social care and housing.

Nick Carter comments: *"The ambition and extent of this project is breaking new ground — there are very few examples of a county council working with a district in this way, and none to this extent. People in central and local government throughout the country are watching closely.*

"Cherwell DC excels in innovative housing and regeneration schemes, while the County Council attracts infrastructure funding linked to housing, which improves the local transport network and other essential public services.

"The County's ambition is to maximise this combination of skills, resources and national funding to make housing and economic growth work to the benefit of everyone in the north of Oxfordshire. The way this growth is managed will benefit from ever-closer working between the two councils, and the relationship will also save money and provide more joined-up services for residents.

"I do hope the new members of SODC are closely monitoring these developments, because we should be aiming to replicate this arrangement in the south of the county."

NEW ROAD SURFACES

More than 50 miles of road across Oxfordshire are due to be given a new lease of life with a new 'surface dressing' technique which is designed to waterproof and extend their life.

The County is trying out a technique called 'Surface Seal', which is a treatment added to the surface dressing process, designed to prevent defects, cracks, and potholes. The surface seal also enhances the appearance of the new surface.

The cost of the work is about £3.5m which OCC sees as a good investment, potentially preventing the need for more costly resurfacing for several years. The County has already injected an additional £25m into fixing highways this and last year as part of a £120 million investment in infrastructure.

Surface dressing is a cost-effective way to extend the life of roads and is just one of a range of techniques to improve and preserve their condition. After a short bedding-in period, loose chippings are swept away and the surface is indistinguishable from others, except for the absence of cracks and potholes. Skid resistance is also improved.

YOUR VIEWS ON CARE HOMES

The County is gathering people's opinions on a new Care Home Strategy for Oxfordshire, and a survey runs until 8th July.

OCC wants to understand residents' views on its current care home provision, along with current and future challenges, and how these challenges can be addressed.

Feedback will help to develop a strategy which will inform the planning, commissioning and delivery of care homes and support services across Oxfordshire for the next three years. The plans will be created by people who use services, their families and friends, along with the professionals who work in the sector.

Any queries should be directed to Simon Brown on 07990 367801, or Lorraine Donnachie on 07795 291338.

NEW PLANS FOR HOME CARE

A recent review that explored options for the future of home care has concluded the County Council should not provide its own in-house service but should create a new partnership model with commercial providers.

The Council purchases home care for adults from the independent market, although this accounts for less than 50% of places in the county. The rest is purchased by self-funders.

During 2016/17, a number of home care providers exited the market, and this prompted Councillors to ask for a review of the system. The review concluded that an internally provided service would be too costly and would risk destabilising the existing care market. Instead, the report suggested creating a new model of partnership with the independent market.

FUND HELPS YOUNG FAMILIES

An £8.5m fund has been launched to assist young families to get onto the housing ladder, and community groups are able to apply for grants of up to £50,000 to help identify sites, obtain planning permission and provide other technical support.

Housing Minister Kit Malthouse said the initiative would "support volunteers who are passionate about building more of the homes we need in their communities".

Across the country, there are apparently 900,000 fewer under-45s owning their own home now than in 2010. The Local Government Association commented that the fund was a "positive step," but councils "also need to be empowered to build more affordable, good-quality homes at scale, and fast".

FLY-TIPPING INCREASES

New figures from the Dept for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs show that fly-tipping incidents have risen by 39% in five years – from 714,637 in 2012/13 to 997,553 in 2017/18.

Despite this rise, the Local Government Association says no convictions have incurred the maximum sentence of £50,000 fine or 12 months in prison.

While councils are able to issue fixed penalties for smaller instances of fly-tipping, the LGA has called on the Government to review guidance to the courts to ensure that the worst offenders face tougher sentences. The LGA also says the next Spending Review needs to ensure that councils have the funding required to investigate and prosecute fly-tippers.

The LGA's environment board chairman, Martin Tett (also the leader of Bucks County Council), said prosecuting fly-tippers "often requires time-consuming and laborious investigations, with a high threshold of proof, at a time when councils face significant budget pressures".

SCHOOL INSPECTION PRIORITIES

Ofsted's Chief Inspector has warned that schools "teaching to test" and failing to offer a "rich education" will be penalised under the regulator's new inspection framework.

Amanda Spielman has hit out at schools that drill children in year 6, aged 10-11, for their SAT's without offering a broader education including art, sport and music, because of an obsessive focus on achieving high exam scores.

The updated inspection framework will see exam results downgraded as a measure of quality in primary and secondary schools, and will reward schools providing a broad education, enforcing good discipline and cracking down on bullying and truancy.

QUICK ACTION AGAINST GANGS

OCC's social workers are joining forces with the police and NHS to support specific school communities if a school raises concerns that pupils might be targeted by gangs.

In these circumstances, professionals from each agency work closely as a support team surrounding the young people in question and their families. Local meetings for schools and other professionals are held regularly to identify children at risk of getting drawn into the drugs gangs.

OCC's social workers are set to use a new 'screening tool' as part of their work to help children being exploited by so-called 'county lines' drugs gangs and those at risk of being exploited. The numbers of such children are small, both locally and nationally, but the County Council is determined to make it hard for drugs gangs to operate in this way.

Working with the police, NHS and other organisations, OCC has also had success with a 'screening tool' that helps frontline staff to spot children at risk of sexual exploitation. Now the approach has been adapted to cover all forms of exploitation, including drugs.

The screening tool lists the factors that in combination would show if a child may be starting to become at risk of being exploited – triggering professionals to act quickly.

GREEN LIGHT FOR CLASSIC CARS

Plans to build a classic car museum on part of Enstone Airfield, near Chipping Norton, have been approved.

The proposal sparked strong opinions from supporters and objectors. Actor Sir Patrick Stewart was against the museum, while TV presenter Jeremy Clarkson was in favour.

The £150m project, which includes 28 holiday lodges, will transform a "scarred brownfield site", according to the developer, US businessman Peter Mullin.

CARBON-NEUTRAL COMMITMENT

The County has taken delivery of a new fleet of electric cars and vans for its Fire & Rescue Service and general car pool.

The vehicles can travel up to 160 miles on a single charge, and there are charging points at fire stations and County Hall.

OCC is committed to being carbon neutral by 2030 and is supporting sustainable energy projects such as Local Energy Oxfordshire and the V2GO charging initiative. It is also seeking to reduce the number of miles its staff travel by encouraging flexible working and greater use of 'virtual meeting' technology.

The initial price of an electric or plug-in hybrid vehicle car is offset by lower running costs over the lifetime of the vehicle. A full charge in an electric vehicle will give a typical range of 100 miles and will cost £2 to £4. Driving 100 miles in a petrol or diesel car will cost around £13 to £16 in fuel, around four times the cost of the electric car.

Read more here: <https://bit.ly/2vPwyDp>

ACTIVE CHALLENGE FOR PUPILS

Thousands of Oxfordshire pupils took part in National Walk to School Week in May, as part of the County's campaign to improve health and reduce congestion. More than 60 primary schools signed up for the challenge.

Walk to School Week is an extension of the 'WOW' project supported by OCC's Public Health team in partnership with Active Oxfordshire. The year-round walk-to-school challenge encourages children to collect badges each month as a reward for making active journeys.

Since the launch of WOW across Oxfordshire in September 2017, active travel rates in participating schools – including walking, cycling, scooting or 'park and stride' – have risen from 65%-88%.

Schools have also been urged to sign up to support Clean Air Day on 20th June, encouraging pupils to make active journeys and reduce air pollution outside the school gates.

OBESITY-LINKED HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS

Figures from NHS Digital show that 29% of adults are now obese, up 3% on 2016/17. Just over 20% of children leaving primary school are also obese.

Obesity-related hospital admissions rose in 2017/18 to 700,000, up by 100,000 on the previous year. NHS England called on the food industry to make further reductions in "junk calories and excess sugar and salt".

AUTISM BUNGALOWS TRANSFORM LIVES

Purpose-built bungalows are helping to transform lives for adults with autism and complex needs, in a partnership between specialists at OCC's adult services and Cherwell District Council's housing team.

Six properties in Bicester were developed jointly, and staff in the housing team at Cherwell have been working with the County's adult social care team to help place adults with autism.

Each bungalow has a sitting-room, bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. They are run by SeeAbility, a UK charity that supports people with learning disabilities, autism and sight loss, and they have been developed by 'Build!', an award-winning initiative by Cherwell DC which looks at alternative ways to deliver affordable homes for local people.

Meanwhile, OCC's much-valued 'Shared Lives' scheme that places people in need of adult social care into the family homes of local people has been described as "an extraordinary service" in a glowing report by the Care Quality Commission.

CQC inspectors have rated the service as 'good' across the board and 'outstanding' at caring. The Shared Lives scheme offers long-term accommodation and support, short breaks, respite care and day support, and there are 80 households of approved Shared Lives carers in the county.

ALCOHOL REDUCTION SERVICE

Public Health England is funding the development of alcohol services in Oxfordshire. OCC has been awarded a £215,000 grant to make it easier for people with alcohol problems to access help.

This follows a PHE enquiry in 2018 which found there are high levels of unmet need, with an estimated four in five alcohol-dependent adults not accessing alcohol treatment.

This funding is part of £6m allocated by PHE to local authorities for 2019-20. It will be used for projects across Oxfordshire, including a new stand-alone alcohol clinic provided by the community drug and alcohol service, Turning Point, which will support people who may not identify as dependent on alcohol.

The funding will also support a homeless hub in Oxford, along with a family-focused county-wide community project, and a homelessness hub run by the Salvation Army in Bicester.

SETTLED STATUS AFTER BREXIT

With such a diverse local population, the County is offering support to EU, EEA and Swiss citizens applying for settled or pre-settled status in the UK. The assistance is to complete the ID verification process for the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS).

Thame library is one of 16 libraries offering the document validation service as Britain prepares to leave the EU. Settled or pre-settled status will enable European Union, European Economic Area or Swiss citizens to continue living in the UK beyond 30th June 2021.

If Britain leaves the EU on WTO terms by the end of October 2019, residents will have until the end of 2020 to apply to the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS). In the event of a Brexit deal, residents would have until June 30, 2021, to apply.

A successful application would entitle the individual to:

- work in the UK
- use the NHS
- enrol in education or continue studying
- access public funds such as benefits and pensions, if eligible
- travel in and out of the UK.

To apply to the EUSS, residents will need a current valid EU, EEA or Swiss passport, or a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) for family members of an EU, EEA or Swiss citizen. When completing an online application, individuals will scan their identity documents with an Android phone or tablet.

If the phone or tablet does not have near-field communication (NFC), the applicant can use an Android device at one of the 16 libraries to scan documents and complete the first part of the process. These devices are available at libraries in Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Botley, Carterton, Cowley, Didcot, Headington, Henley, Kidlington, Oxfordshire County Library, Summertown, Thame, Wallingford, Wantage and Witney. Users will need to bring their own smart phone to accept a pin verification code as part of the process.

Residents requiring support to complete the whole application can contact the Home Office's Assisted Digital Service on 03333 445 675 (weekdays 9am-6pm, or Saturdays 9am-4pm).

As an example, Rikke Hansen, who works at OCC's Community Operations, has successfully completed the EUSS process having moved here from Denmark in 2013.

She explained: “I decided to apply to the scheme as early as possible because I knew I wanted to stay in this country and I wanted peace of mind that it was sorted. Being able to participate in the democratic processes of the country I have made a home in is important, and because of that I am also considering applying for citizenship, which you can do a year after being granted SS.

“The application process is incredibly simple. It literally takes about 10 minutes and I got a response about three weeks later.

“The only inconvenience is that it isn’t possible to scan your ID using an iPhone and won’t be until the end of this year. For the Council to provide this service at Oxford Register Office and making Android phones available for use in the 16 libraries is a massive help.”

Information on who is required to apply for pre-settled or settled status can be found on the [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.

ASSISTANCE FOR HIGH STREETS

The County and district councils are being urged to bid for a share of the Future High Streets Fund, the Government’s £675 million pot of money to help local areas modernise their high streets and town centres.

The Government is also aiming to cut small retailers’ bills by a third and take 600,000 businesses out of paying business rates altogether, to help local businesses to provide more local jobs in their communities.

This total package of £1.5 billion is intended to support high streets, and it builds on an injection of more than £10 billion of business rates support since 2016.

However, Health Secretary Matt Hancock has recently described business rates as a “20th Century tax” which needs a “21st Century replacement”. During the Conservative leadership campaign, he said the business rates system was unfairly skewed against ‘bricks and mortar’ businesses.

And meanwhile, the Commons Treasury Committee has also been told that an overhaul of the business rates system is needed to address its disproportionate impact on retail and manufacturing.

Addressing the Committee, West Midlands mayor Andy Street called for councils to have the power to grant rates relief to new and expanding businesses, and to create free-trade zones with reduced business rates in town centres to boost business.

That’s a suggestion that we could get behind. On the other hand, the ‘Future High Streets Fund’ might provide a shot in the arm for some areas of Oxfordshire, but do market towns like Thame or villages such as Chinnor need to ‘modernise’ their high streets?

BENEFITS OF COUNCIL CONTROL

Schools under Council control are more likely to keep a good or outstanding Ofsted rating, or to improve if they are struggling, than those that switch to academy status, according to new research.

A report by the Local Government Association says 90% (9,400) of council-maintained schools have kept their good or outstanding rating, compared with 81% of those that converted to academies.

The study examined the Ofsted grades of almost 17,000 primary and secondary schools over five years. The LGA now wants the Government to change its rules that ban county councils from helping schools in need, which currently have to become academies.

LOCAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

This is an informative 'potted guide' to the County's historical and archaeological resources, compiled by Cllr Mike Dyer of Thame Town Council, and which deserves a wider audience.

Mike comments: "I have personal experience of the Oxfordshire Local History Centre in Cowley and found it invaluable when researching for the Thame Remembers project.

"The Archaeology unit, although with much reduced staffing over recent years, played a significant role in maximising the recent dig on site F and will continue to work with Thame Museum in helping us to make the most of the knowledge and artefacts from it."

Mike warns us that the details listed below are "a reminder to discuss with me and others if ever any of these resources are threatened by austerity or changes in funding priorities".

Oxfordshire History Centre

Otherwise known as the County Record Office or County Archives, at St Luke's Church, Cowley. This is much used for research (e.g. by Thame Remembers), and documents donated to Thame Museum are sometimes transcribed and then deposited at St Luke's.

Oxfordshire Museum Service

Based at the County Museum in Woodstock, where the Museum Development Officer (Arts Council funded) is also based.

Museums Resource Centre

Based at Standlake, this is the repository and principal store for archaeological finds in the county (apart from those on University land, which go to the Ashmolean). Conservation work is carried out and the collections are accessible to the public by appointment. This is where the archaeological finds from Thame ('site F') will be deposited, some of which will be later loaned to Thame Museum. The Tudor wall-paintings at Thame Museum are on long-term loan from Standlake.

Volunteering

The County Council promotes and supports volunteering at the County Museum in Woodstock and at the Museum Resource Centre.

Oxfordshire County Council Archaeology

This is part of the Environment & Planning directorate and based in Speedwell Street, Oxford. Advice on archaeological matters is given as part of planning guidance, and statutory consultation is applied to planning applications. The Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record (formerly the Sites and Monument Record) is maintained and made available to the public online. This is a major reference point for planning applications and part of a national network of Historic Environment Records. Thame Museum Archaeology Group has recently identified a new earthwork feature near Albury which has been added to the HE Record.

IN BRIEF

REVD GARRATT'S RETIREMENT SERVICE

The Bishop of Dorchester will conduct a special service at St Mary's Church in Thame to mark the retirement of the parish vicar, Revd Alan Garratt.

The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher will celebrate the 11 years that Alan and his wife Trish have given to the life of both the Church and the town. The service is at 6.30pm on Sunday 8th September, and Alan is due to retire the following month.

COUNTY'S NEW DIRECTORS

The County has appointed Rob MacDougall as its new Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety. He is currently Assistant Chief Fire Officer and will replace Simon Furlong, who is retiring later this year.

Ansaf Azhar has been appointed as OCC's new Director of Public Health, following the recent retirement of Jonathan McWilliam. Ansaf was Director of Public Health at Sandwell Borough Council in the West Midlands and will take up his new post in August.

COUNCIL POWERS

The House of Commons Transport Committee has called for councils to be given more widespread powers to issue fines for traffic offences.

The Committee argues that police forces do not enforce moving traffic offences such as blocking box junctions and driving in the wrong direction up one-way streets.

NEW ROUTE TO AFFORDABLE HOMES

A new kind of developer has selected Shrivenham, in south-west Oxfordshire, as one of four sites which together will provide 278 new affordable homes.

Having gained regulatory approval to act as a social housing provider, Legal & General has secured the first sites for its new affordable homes business. As well as Shrivenham, deals have been agreed in Cornwall, Bedfordshire and London. The company has committed about £55m through the first four deals, but has established a £500m pipeline.

A 2% income tax rise could help to pay for free care for the elderly at home, the left-wing Institute for Public Policy Research says. Making this element of social care free at the point of need would cost the taxpayer an extra £8bn a year.

The amount of countryside lost to housing estates has almost doubled in the last five years, according to analysis of figures released by the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood says learning to play the recorder at OCC's Music Service classes when he was a local schoolboy was vital to his subsequent success.

Schoolgirls take an average of three days off per term because of period-related issues, according to a poll which found that this was the most common reason for them to be absent, topping flu, holidays and truancy. Half of the 1,000 teenage girls questioned by PHS, a public health services provider, said they miss school due to their periods.

Nick Carter & Jeannette Matelot

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