

Title	County Councillor's Report
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Parish	Thame Town Council
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OCC news: Budget:

Oxfordshire County Council will set its 2023-24 budget at the February full council. The budget is delivered within a context of high inflation and rising pressure for services, particularly in adult social care and children's services.

Councillors will propose a 5% rise in council tax, including a 2% adult social care precept. Judicious savings, a rising council tax take from increased population, and a better-than-expected government settlement also support the budget and mean drastic cuts can be avoided, despite the gap between the council tax rise and the rate of inflation.

Children's Services & SEND:

I am delighted to say that children's services will see an inflation busting boost of over 12% (£18.5m). In this climate, providing a real terms increase to vital children's services, including for special educational needs and other vulnerable children in care, has been difficult to achieve, but reflects where the priorities are for the administration. An addition £500,000 will be spent to speed up assessments (EHCPs) for children with SEND.

Adult social care:

Accounts for approximately half of OCC's budget and is particularly sensitive to inflation due to labour intensive nature of care. Because of the size of the budget, it is difficult to provide an inflation matched rise, however, adult social care will get a 6.7% (£14.3) increase to support its work, which will soften the impact of inflation.

Highways and travel:

When the administration took charge, spending was weighted towards short term cost saving, rather than investing to save over the long term. We will be investing £1.6m to reduce flooding on roads – clearing ditches and cutting through red tape (riparian rights!) that prevent action on the ground. Monies will also be used to clean signs and improve road markings. By investing in flooding prevention, we can reduce damage to road surfaces and save taxpayers money. However, it remains the case that successive grant reductions from government means that we have too little money to manage such a large network.

Climate:

It's easy to talk the talk on climate – but walking the walking is much harder. Amongst other initiatives, there is increased funding for trees planting (essential not only for carbon capture, but also localised climate resilience during hot summers)

Voluntary organisations, libraries, and other services:

Library services will be supported as the account for the loss of income from DVD rentals etc. Voluntary organisation will also again be given a year's rent holiday where they pay rent to OCC.

OCC news

Sustainable warmth grants: Home energy efficiency grants can be applied for [online](#) (*Deadline: March 2023*). OCC secured funding from the government's Sustainable Warmth Fund. Homes connected to the mains gas grid can apply for up to £10,000 and homes not connected can apply for up to £25,000 (means tested)

Call for hosts - Homes for Ukraine:

A campaign encouraging people to come forward who are willing to accommodate families from Ukraine has been launched. While the government is reducing payments from the current £550 to £350 in April, or £500 for those hosting beyond 12 months, OCC has committed to maintaining the current rate of £550.

Active travel:

OCC has secured over [£0.5M](#) from the government's Active Travel Capability Fund to invest in improving access to active travel. The county is also developing a plan for a 'Strategic Active Travel Network' that will link towns and villages. While only a plan at this stage, the data collected and planning done puts OCC in a good position to bid for government money when it arises.

Potholes:

Freeze thaw conditions over the past couple of months has seen a large number of potholes emerge. OCC are dealing with the backlog but will take some time. Please continue to report potholes using fix my street (reporting each pothole separately).

Coronation:

Apply for up to 10K funding from the national [lottery](#). See also government's guide on street [parties](#).

Electric buses: First vehicles in a fleet of 159 electric buses set to arrive in September.

Car Parking (Both)

Last month the Cabinet Member for Highways made the following decision:

- Approved the proposals as advertised proposals for changes to no waiting restrictions, taxi bays, street trader bays and trader permits.
- Approved amendment of the proposals for permit holder bays as follows:
 - i. Park Street, Nelson Street and North Street (except outside the Library) – are introduced as permit holder only bays.
 - ii. Current plans for permit holder bays or Pay and Display and permit holders are amended for High Street (plan 1), Upper High Street (including outside the war memorial) – to be introduced as dual purpose bays – retaining the current 2-hour limit (non-permit holders) and including exemptions for permit holders.

- Approval to put ON HOLD proposals for the introduction of Paid parking bays in central Thame to allow further work on linking plans with emerging transport and movement strategies. To be undertaken in discussion with the Town Council and be completed within a 6-month period.
- To approve inclusion of properties No.80, 81, 81a and 83 in permit eligibility for the Thame central area.

Bledlow Ridge Recycling Centre

Bledlow Ridge Recycling Centre has reopened with costs for Oxfordshire residents ranging from £22.34 to £387.60 per visit depending what type of vehicle and waste you have.

Conversations with officers are still ongoing to try and find a solution.

Thame to Haddenham Greenway (Kate)

An options appraisal is in the plan as a joint project between Oxfordshire County Council and Bucks County Council

Nelson Street (Both)

This is ongoing and we have had a number of meetings with the residents and officers to find a solution.