



CHARLBURY TOWN COUNCIL

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ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Here we are at the end of the Council's first full year under the combined new management of councillors and clerk.

We hope that residents are seeing changes - from signs encouraging you to use the buses (use them or lose them), to new playground and park equipment, and lower speed limits alongside traffic-calming measures. These are just some examples of the council delivering on its stated objectives to work towards making Charlbury safer, greener and healthier - an even better place to live and work.

Of course, the Council can't do that on its own. Working across our chosen strands of activity - food, journeys, buildings, land & nature, and energy - we are delighted at the number of residents stepping up to get involved. From launching a local food market, to opening their homes to show sustainability in practice, and working across town - and in our nature reserves - to create spaces that are welcoming to wildflowers, birds and insects. We hope that residents will embrace these initiatives and adopt new practices in their own lives that will help reduce our overall environmental impact.

Charlbury is not an island. Our environment is shared with other communities and some have already approached us to ask if they can work with Charlbury to deliver on some of our objectives. We will have a preliminary meeting in the summer to bring together a number of nearby villages to talk about how working together we can deliver more, better and faster.

Cllr Liz Reason, April 2023



WHAT THE TOWN COUNCIL HAS BEEN UP TO OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

EXTENSION OF 20 MPH SPEED LIMITS

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is encouraging 20mph restrictions in towns and villages across Oxfordshire to:

- Make streets safer
- Encourage residents to walk or cycle
- Reduce noise and pollution

The Town Council knows from consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan, engagement on the Community-Led Plan and elsewhere that reducing traffic speeds is a matter of great concern for very many people in the town. In September 2022, the TC sought residents' views on the implementation of a town-wide 20mph speed limit: 76% of respondents were in favour of the reduced speed limit. Following an OCC formal consultation (Traffic Regulation Order) where again a large majority was in favour, the 20mph was agreed and we now await its installation.



TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAYS



Location of zebra crossing

The Traffic Regulation Order also consisted of a consultation on a zebra crossing on The Slade, by the primary school. Again, results for this were overwhelmingly in favour. Costs for this will be split between the Town Council and the County Council, and again we await its installation.

Following a previous Traffic Regulation Order process with the County Council, you will probably have seen:

- New double yellow lines on the junction of Thames Street and Nine Acres Lane which enables a better traffic flow
- The removal of the last parking bay on Browns Lane which stops buses getting stuck
- Timed parking bays on Market Street to support local shop customers

Also new this year are signed routes to the station, thanks to funding from GWR:



Dragons' teeth at the entrances to the town:



And a buildout on Banbury Hill:



PLANNING

The Town Council is a consultee on all planning applications within the parish of Charlbury and as such, submits comments on those applications to West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC). As the local planning authority, it is WODC that ultimately approves or refuses them. To enable the Town Council to submit its consultee comments, the Planning Committee, which includes all councillors, meets monthly to consider new planning applications within the parish. During the year 2022/23, the planning committee considered 45 applications. The planning committee also considers any planning appeals within the parish and comments as appropriate. On two occasions during the year, the town council has addressed the WODC Uplands Planning Sub-committee on issues of particular concern to Charlbury.

Meetings of the planning committee are open to be public as observers and members of the public are also welcome to address the committee regarding current applications. We are pleased that several members of the community have taken up these offers throughout the year.

During the year, the town council was successful in having the Bell Hotel registered as an asset of community value (ACV) so that a six-month moratorium could be imposed on any sale to enable a local consortium to bid. In the event, a moratorium was not necessary, and the new owners appear committed to the restoration of the building and the re-establishment of a successful hospitality business.

Since the adoption of Charlbury's Neighbourhood Plan in June 2021, the Town Council's planning committee has paid particular attention to matters addressed by policies and objectives within that plan when commenting on applications. Building on the Neighbourhood Plan, the town council is engaging closely with WODC on key elements of planning policy with particular emphasis on housing affordability; energy efficiency and net zero commitments; and protection and recovery of the natural environment. We will be taking an active role in consultation with WODC during the coming year on the preparation of their new Local Plan.

Cllr Peter Kenrick

HOME COMFORTS

The Buildings Working Group has been developing the 'Home Comforts' project. This aims to:

- Help Charlbury residents to understand how they can make their homes more energy efficient (warm in winter, cool in summer with lower running costs)
- Develop whole house refurbishment plans for ten key house types which reflect the majority of homes in Charlbury
- Engage with planners at WODC to discuss the implications for planning guidance and policy



Ten Charlbury residents have given permission to allow their homes to be surveyed by Cosy Homes who will prepare a whole house plan for each of them. These whole house plans will be published in a report which will draw together the lessons that can be learned for each housing

type. The report will be published and made available to all residents. The results will be shared at an event as part of Big Green Week (10-18 June).

ACCOUNTS

Charlbury Town Council has made a conscious decision not to increase the precept (the amount collected from residents to fund local projects) for the year 2023-2024 due to the cost-of-living crisis. This means that the budget is very tight for the forthcoming year. So good financial management is, as always, essential.

Charlbury Town Council's income for the financial year 2022-2023 was £203,295. The income consisted of the 'precept' (see below) supported by the usual income from the allotments and the cemetery. Additionally, this year, several grants were applied for and received. These were from:

- FCC Communities Foundation for new play equipment at Nine Acres
- Rural Community Energy Fund for a feasibility study for a micro-hydro turbine at Mill Field
- WODC for Jubilee celebrations
- National Lottery for Coronation celebrations
- GWR for signage for route to the station
- Environment Agency for a rock ramp fish pass feasibility study at Mill Field
- WODC part funding for the Traffic Regulation Order

Expenditure this year (2022-2023) focused on grants to local groups, town maintenance, administration, grass cutting and loan repayments as well as spending the received funding as above. Total expenditure was £175,920 (excluding VAT).

On 31st March 2023, Charlbury Town Council's bank accounts held £56,383. Full accounts are below:

INCOME	2022-2023
Precept	127,446
Burials/Memorials	8,770
Grants received	52,425
Other Income	5,586
VAT repayment	9,068
TOTAL INCOME	203,295

EXPENDITURE	
Administration	50,303
Grants	14,035
Town Maintenance	9,029
Loan Repayments	16,455
Projects	66,828
Grass/hedge cutting	13,852
Other	15,516
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	186,018

General Fund	39,106
Add Total Income	203,295
Less Total Expenditure	186,018
Balance at 31st March	56,383

ONGOING AND FUTURE INITIATIVES

REPAIR OF WEIR AND POSSIBLE FISH PASS

The Town Council, with funding from the Environment Agency, has just received a feasibility study assessing the practicality and viability of replacing the existing weir on the River Evenlode at Charlbury with a rock ramp fish pass. Many factors need to be discussed before any further decision is made, not least finding funding for this work.



CAR CLUB

In 2022, the Town Council asked the town what it thought of the idea of a car club. The response was enthusiastic, with 143 people saying they were definitely or maybe interested.

There are two ways car clubs work. There are traditional cars clubs like ZipCar or Commonwheels, which provide their own cars – Charlbury is too small for these schemes to be viable. There are also peer-to-peer systems, which would mean Charlbury people borrowing and lending private cars via a service provider's website or app. There is no risk to lenders – insurance and vetting of renters is all taken care of by the service provider. Read [here](#) about how peer-to-peer systems work for lenders and borrowers.

The Town Council has decided to promote any peer-to-peer car club that sets up in the town. Currently, HiyaCar is the only such provider, with [a small car for rent on Hixet Wood](#). We are encouraging all car owners in the town to consider adding their car, perhaps a second car, to the HiyaCar system. We believe that a peer-to-peer car club could transform the way that Charlburians drive, freeing up kerbside parking and freeing up cash in car owners' and renters' wallets. For peer-to-peer car sharing to work, we need to see a range of cars (big, small, older, newer, et cetera) being offered on car club websites and this means **YOU!**

Not sure? Please contact the Clerk if you would like to chat to owner of the Hixet Wood HiyaCar about how the system has worked for him. Or why not sign up and borrow his car for an hour to get first-hand experience of what's involved.

THE COUNCIL E-BIKE

We have now had the e-bike for a year, thanks to Liz Leffman's funding, and a successful loan scheme is running. Huge thanks to Mark Jarman who has been fundamental to this loan scheme by checking over the e-bike between loans and ensuring each borrower is fully informed of how to use it. Unfortunately, Mark has had to step down from this role so we are currently looking for another volunteer. Thanks also go to Windrush Bike Project for supporting the scheme and offering training to service the bike.

To borrow the e-bike, please go to <https://charlbury-tc.gov.uk/borrow-the-council-e-bike/>



MAKING IT EASIER TO CYCLE AND WALK AROUND TOWN

The Town Council is working with the County Council to draw up a plan for improving walking and cycling opportunities in and around Charlbury, as a key part of our Highways and Transport Strategy. We are using the established framework of a Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which has helped us in planning engagement, gathering information, and now designing and prioritising improvements.

The LCWIP process ensures that all voices have an opportunity to be heard; that proper design guidance is followed; and that we learn from best practice as demonstrated in other towns' LCWIPs. Charlbury is leading the way as one of the first rural communities to use this systematic approach to supporting active travel.

Over the past year, we have drawn together data on travel patterns within and across the town and have consulted with residents to establish their needs, particularly those of vulnerable road users such as disabled people and users of school and early years provision. With OCC officers, we have visited key areas of the town to consider how safety can be improved. As a result, some measures are already in the pipeline, such as the extension of the 20mph zone and a new zebra crossing outside the school. Recommendations for further measures are now being drawn up, and the draft LCWIP will be shared with residents for comment in the early summer before formal consultation by OCC.



Once adopted, the LCWIP will be available to OCC for future transport planning, to WODC for planning-funded improvements and constraints, and to the Town Council for our own planning.

LAND AND NATURE

The Land and Nature working group (LNG) is a mix of councillors and (very knowledgeable) volunteers.

The group provides recommendations and practical support to the Council to enable nature recovery on Council-managed land. In the past year the Council has:

- Piloted restoration of the original flood-plain meadow in the Mill Field, using seed collected from an ancient meadow at Lower Swell
- Introduced clauses discouraging the use of peat-based compost and pesticides into the allotment tenancy agreement
- Worked with contractors and WODC to alter the timing of grass cutting on verges and some green spaces, allowing wildflowers and insects to reproduce in the early summer
- Continued the nature-friendly management of the cemetery, including wildflower areas
- Created a new wildflower area in the Ticknell Piece playground

In addition, the LNG works with partners (such as the Wychwood Forest Trust and the Evenlode Catchment Partnership) and local organisations to promote nature recovery throughout and around the town. Initiatives that we are involved with include:

- Restoring wetland habitats at Wigwell Nature Reserve
- Meadow creation and tree planting at Southill Solar
- Supporting wildflower areas and a reptile survey in St Mary's churchyard
- Hedgerow planting and other conservation activities at the primary school
- Raising awareness about hedgehogs and their need for access into and out of private gardens (13cm holes in walls and fences!)
- Water quality/riverfly monitoring
- Hedgerow survey training



We recognise that the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and that restoring our nature and wildlife needs to take place urgently and at landscape scale. National and regional nature recovery strategies are now being developed - but these need to be translated into specific local actions. The Town Council is therefore working with Finstock and Fawler to demonstrate how parishes can develop a local Nature Recovery Plan (NRP) based on local knowledge, data and engagement with landowners, land managers and residents; the goal of the NRP is to expand, improve and connect wildlife-rich habitats. Supported by the Oxfordshire Treescapes Project, we are beginning by creating a map of current habitats and identifying opportunities to improve or add to them. The next important stage will be engaging with the community and particularly with landowners/managers to arrive at an agreed plan. Finally, the implementation will take time and investment - we are seeking funding to enable us to provide ongoing support, including by coordinating volunteers.

CHARITIES AND COMMITTEES

NINE ACRES RECREATION GROUND

The Nine Acres recreation field, (which is just over 7 acres) is the town's largest recreational asset and is managed for the town council, by a group of volunteers, principally made-up by users of the area, known as the Nine Acres Management Committee (NAMC). The committee meets at the Sports pavilion normally on the second Tuesday, every two months. If any member of the community has any concerns or recommendations to be considered by the committee, please feel free to e-mail pauldarrenjenkins@gmail.com. As with all volunteer groups, new members are always welcome!

Football Pitches and Playing Areas

As detailed within last year's report, we were successful in securing £26,000 of funding from the Football Foundation to improve the quality of the playing surfaces on all three playing areas. However, subsequent investigation has indicated that the stone layer is at a much higher level than first anticipated (in some places fractionally underneath the playing surface) which causes a major safety concern. Therefore, the cost associated with maintenance and improvement, over the next five years, is now likely to be much higher. We are working closely with the town council to develop a long-term strategy to ensure the recreational areas can be used regularly and safely for many generations to come.

The good news is, for the current year, we have received additional grants from the Town Council of £2,000 and the Football and Sports Club of £2,500, to get the programme going. Therefore, we will shortly be laying 80 tonnes of top dressing onto the main pitch. This will be followed by digging out various areas of stone on the junior pitch nearest the tennis courts, replacing with soil and reseeding. This is just the start....

The Tennis Courts and Club

The Tennis Club continues to thrive and is working with the NAMC to explore the potential of resurfacing courts 1 & 2 to a much higher quality surface, ideal for tennis, whilst also looking to replace the existing floodlights with a more sustainable LED system. Courts 3 & 4 will always remain as more multifunctional, and therefore need a harder surface allowing other uses such as basketball to be played. However, sadly, leaves from overhanging trees outside NAMC's control, still cause difficulties and disruption to the courts and their use.

Pavilion

The pavilion has recently had repair work undertaken on the shower area. Painting and decoration are planned for the current financial year, but the building is generally in good repair.

Play Area

Through the hard work of Lisa Wilkinson and Nick Johnson, funding was secured through the FCC Communities Fund to purchase and install two new items of play equipment, at a cost of over £25,000. Feedback from the community to the addition of the climbing web and ground trampoline has been very positive. We still get minor occurrences of misuse of the equipment and the new benches, so we will be shortly fixing the benches in various locations across Nine Acres. Finally, a thank you to Nikki Rycroft and her team for planting two new trees at Nine Acres, near the children's play area. Their growth will hopefully be aligned to the growth in use of the facilities we can now offer on Nine Acres.

Paul Jenkins, Chair

THOMAS GIFFORD TRUST

The Thomas Gifford Trust is delighted to report that over the past year, bustling activity at the Charlbury Community Centre has again become the norm. In many cases regular participation in both the sporting and social arenas now exceeds pre-pandemic levels. Youth Club attendance is at capacity, and there are pickleball and Pilates classes every day. Bookings for the Sports Hall and the TG Room are full, and the pop-up gym continues to be very well-used seven days a week. The centre was registered this past winter as a Warm Hub and has evolved now into a Warm Welcome hub; in particular every Friday morning the café is a buzzing and social place to be for many senior members of our town.

The very healthy level of volunteering in our community was celebrated last summer with a barbecue on the community centre patio. Despite a deluge of rain, it was well-attended by many of the 200 who gave their time so generously during the pandemic. Also, in recognition of the remarkable efforts of these volunteers, we had a visit from Sophie, Countess of Wessex, who met with some of them at the Community Centre and then participated in a tree planting on The Playing Close to mark the occasion.

While the community centre continues to provide full and part-time employment, it also relies on a core group of fantastic regular volunteers to fully staff the café and reception desk. Our volunteers have recently been honoured by being nominated for the King's Award for Voluntary Services. Equivalent to an MBE, this is the highest award offered to voluntary groups in the UK.

Although in the past the Trust has been lucky enough to secure ample funding to help cover many of our running costs, this year the very steep rise in energy prices means that our budget was stretched. To mitigate this situation, a thorough review of how and where we might be able to reduce energy usage was undertaken, and happily we have now overhauled our air handling system which should make a real impact, and the centre has put in place many other energy-saving measures that will add up. Finally, we have investigated whether increasing the array of solar panels on the roof would further help sustainability, received a quote which is being considered, and meanwhile a detailed survey of our daily energy costs is in progress.

Much of the Trust's energies this year have been focused on planning for the new permanent gym that will be built as an extension to the existing centre. The planning application has now been submitted, and the Trust will be working to ensure that the costs involved balance with the future value to the health and well-being of our community. Design plans are displayed in the community centre for everyone to see. It is hoped that construction will be underway in the coming year. The other exciting development has been the realization of the Charlbury Community Workshop, sited on the land between the centre and Charlbury Medical Centre. Much work and community engagement has gone into the creation of the workshop and how it might evolve, and it is envisioned that it will be led by those involved. Its aim is to have a self-sustaining and affordable facility for repairing, making and training in a variety of practical crafts. The workshop has now got its own Charitable Incorporated Organisation status, so going forward it will be independent, yet initially supported by TG Trust. The best opportunity to see the workshop and find out more will be at the opening day and community barbecue on 20th May.

With the increasing variety of activities on offer, we are really aiming for there to be something for everyone at the Charlbury Community Centre. *Catherine Ball, Trustee, Thomas Gifford Trust*

CORNER HOUSE AND WAR MEMORIAL HALL

The Corner House garden has become a delightful town centre space to be enjoyed by everyone. In fact, we are now calling this “the People’s Garden” simply because we want it to be enjoyed by all. You are welcome to just walk in through the open gate in the Browns Lane wall, or walk up the drive and wander in. The long border behind the wall was installed and maintained by the Garden Society and is looking better all the time but there are further garden areas surrounding the terrace on the side of the Memorial Hall: just follow the signs to the Garden and Green rooms.

Tables and chairs are provided so you can stay a while if you wish.



The Corner House and the Memorial Hall exist to promote the wellbeing of the town and host all kind of things for community benefit. The Corner House itself permanently features Cornerstone as a community hub for sharing fresh fruit and vegetables as well as organizing a local food box scheme for some Charlbury families facing hard times. The Community Bookshop on the ground floor and upstairs is the place to look for books fact or fiction – all at bargain prices!

The Memorial Hall is popular for a whole range of activities and events, some of which are sure to appeal to everyone.

Please continue to make use of these local assets provided for the common good. The trustees appreciate the support of donations and financial support, especially the ongoing Street Fair and other activities which contribute towards necessary improvements.

Roy Scott, Chairman of the Trustees

CHARLBURY EXHIBITION FOUNDATION

The Charlbury Exhibition Foundation (CEF) is a charity to promote the education of young residents of Charlbury. We trace our origins back to bequests made by local people, Ann Walker in 1667 and Richard Eyans in 1666. Most of our income comes from renting out our main asset, the Old Grammar School, and from our modest investments.

The Old Grammar School was built in 1837 and is a Grade II listed building. Since 1975 we have rented the Old Grammar School building to another local charity, the Charlbury Pre-School. The objectives of CEF and Pre-School are complementary, the promotion of education for young people living in Charlbury, which allows the building to be used for the purpose originally intended by the donor, Ann Walker, whose name is inscribed on the front of the building. We work closely with Pre-School to help them achieve their objectives in the best possible conditions.

Traditionally, the rent CEF receives from the Pre-School has been used to fund grants given each autumn to local young people who are in further education at college or higher education at university or who are on apprenticeships. In the five years to 2021 we awarded some 226 grants totalling over £65,000.

Last year the CEF began an ambitious programme to improve the energy efficiency of the Old Grammar School, which has been little altered since it was built. Working with other local charities we identified as immediate priorities, insulating the building to modern standards and installing secondary glazing on the windows, draft-proofing doors and windows, and replacing the elderly

inefficient gas heaters. Those measures will contribute to the climate-change challenge and will be of lasting benefit to the Pre-School children in improving the conditions in which they are taught and to Pre-School in reducing the environmental impact and energy costs each year.

We have, with financial support from the Charlbury Beer Festival and SusCha for which we are very grateful, been able to complete the first stage of that programme at a cost of over £17,000. As further funding becomes available, we shall work to complete the other improvements in our programme.

In those circumstances, CEF decided with great regret that it was not able to make grants to students and apprentices in 2022. We shall review the position again carefully later this year.

Janet Burroughs, Chair of the Trustees, Charlbury Exhibition Foundation

CHARLBURY CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CCAAC)

CCAAC was set up at the instigation of WODC to act as a local advisory committee to the Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee on all planning applications which affect the Charlbury Conservation Area. Its purpose is not only to consider planning applications but also to advise on all steps to maintain, improve and enhance the character and appearance of the Charlbury Conservation Area.

Present members of the committee are:

Reg James (Chair) - co-opted

Sarah Potter (Vice Chair) - Charlbury Society representative

James Williams - co-opted

Juliet West (Secretary) - co-opted

Andrew Graham (WODC representative)

Liz Leffman (WODC representative)

Councillor Tony Merry (Town Councillor)

Councillor Dan Raymond-Barker (Town Councillor)

Nicolette Lethbridge - Elected at the Parish Meeting

Sue Wooley - Charlbury Art Society representative

Diana Gold - co-opted

Peter Smith - co-opted

The committee meets each month and in the last year 45 planning applications in or relating to Charlbury were inspected and commented on to WODC if thought necessary. We also had a special meeting at the request of Dan Raymond-Barker to discuss sustainability issues in relation to buildings in the Conservation Area.

We meet in the Green Room and, as there was previously no WIFI there, Tony Merry kindly downloaded the application details and displayed them on the wall with his laptop and projector. We have repeatedly tried to make sure that our comments are placed on the WODC website with the applications as this only seems to happen occasionally and haphazardly.

Reg James, Chair, CCAAC

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT

Last May, a new administration was formed by the 15 Liberal Democrats, nine Labour and two Green Party councillors with additional support agreed with two



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
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of the three independents, called the West Oxfordshire Alliance. The Conservatives became the opposition. I was elected Leader of the Council.

With a mandate from the electorate, the alliance swiftly agreed the priorities in order to support our communities with the cost-of-living crisis by providing direct help to those that need it most by making sure the £150 council tax rebate was implemented. We set up a New Initiatives Fund of £750,000 supporting local people with living costs and providing grants to organisations such as Chippy Larder and Witney Food Bank.

The cabinet, now known as the executive, went on tour to Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Woodstock and Carterton holding their meetings with local communities and engaging with local residents listening and responding to the issues that matter to them. Consultations with local communities and community organisations, held at FarmEd, Wood Green and online, started on the early stages of the Local Plan I and members of the executive have additionally held Facebook Live Q&A sessions and taken forward suggestions they made.

Climate change is being tackled with parish and town councils engaged in 'New Initiatives' forums and actions including the Waterways Day that sought to address, (with campaign groups like WASP and Thames Water), the issues that affect our local environment and the pollution and sewerage discharges into our rivers. We now hold meetings for the first time with Thames Water and have an agreement that they will no longer be able to state 'no objection' to new housing developments when planning permission is sought. We will be engaging on a new mapping initiative with them over the whole district with regard to flooding issues, maintenance planning and infrastructure investment.

The Council has in this short time, secured Rural Prosperity Funding to be used for local projects; environment/local business support and grants will become available so that the benefits can be enjoyed in support of new local projects.

The Council has agreed to upgrade the facilities in the Town Shop in Welch Way as well as refurbishment of the Council chamber so that it has the greater community access and use-a brighter and more modern approach so that communities can use it with the added technology so that meetings can be held virtually as well as live.

Charlbury, Finstock and Fawler are communities I am proud to represent and facilitate the needs of organisations and local people who make things happen in our town and villages and I will do everything I can to sustain those events, happenings and services to the best of my ability.

Cllr Andy Graham

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT



Now 2-years into its first 4-year term, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the progress made by the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance administration since taking control from the Conservatives. Its vision is laid out in its 9 priorities, that includes 'putting climate at the heart of everything we do'. The IPCC's 'final warning' to humanity in March this year, puts back into focus the importance of following through on this commitment – even in the face of rising opposition from conspiracy

theorists, climate change deniers, and those who would wish to see a much-diminished role for the County Council.

The County Council is responsible for delivering a range of services to residents of Oxfordshire, including adult social care, children's services – including for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and of course, maintaining Oxfordshire's highways and transport infrastructure, and a range of other services, including libraries, fire and rescue, and coroners' services.

Adult social care is largest responsibility of OCC in terms of spend. Demand is growing due to our ageing population and an increase in complexity of needs. In Oxfordshire, we are seeking to manage this demand with a pioneering 'Oxfordshire Way', that aims to keep people active and independent for as long as possible in their homes and communities. As part of this, OCC has been promoting a scheme to empower small scale care businesses in the community to thrive. Support is provided to 'micro-enterprises' to navigate the paperwork and start out as a commercial enterprise. An all-age unpaid carers strategy review is also ongoing to better support this vital group in our communities. Plans for the assisted living facility as part of the Rushy Bank development are fully funded by OCC and will come forward as part of that development.

Children's services remain a challenge, particularly in the area of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) The service receives this year a boost to its budget of 12.3% (£18.8m), which will provide much needed funds to improve the assessment of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in particular. The county was also successful in bidding for £5.2m to fund new residential homes for children with autism and children with adverse childhood experiences.

In transport and highways, the county is leading the way, alongside the Welsh government, by moving to 20mph as the speed limit for villages and towns. The newly adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) is a radical change from the previous plan, and places an emphasis on active travel, public transport and reducing car journeys. Its ambitious targets to reduce car journeys by 25% by 2030 and 33% by 2040 will shape infrastructure decisions going forward, and be a powerful tool when developers seek massive car-centric developments.

I am delighted that the plans to extend the speed limit across the town and to reduce speed on Spelsbury Road to 30 mph has been approved, along with plans for a zebra crossing on The Slade near the primary school. I am also pleased that after campaigning for many years to get the lines on Nine Acres Lane extended, this has finally been done, making it a lot safer. I also worked with the Town Council to get lines painted in other parts of the town and to improve parking in the Town Centre.

Responsibility for parking enforcement has moved from being managed under contract by WODC to being directly managed by OCC, but the arrangements for residents on Church Lane and Dyers Hill will remain in place, so that they can park on the single yellow lines on those streets. However, we may need to find a better solution to this going forward as it also allows people to park there and use the station. I will be liaising with the Town Council over this.

Additional investment is being made in taking on stubborn highways flooding issues that will see more projects brought forward in 2023 and 2024 to take on problem areas, and I am pleased that we have also included in our budget funding for the improvement of footpaths. A new strategy for

managing roadside verges has also been agreed, making it possible to improve biodiversity while also ensuring safety through visibility at key points on the roads.

Finally, I am very aware of the very poor state of our roads. The potholes this year have been absolutely atrocious, and the subject of much comment on the Charlbury Forum. The very hot period last summer, followed by heavy frost earlier this year and torrential rain in the past 6 weeks has led to more than usual potholes opening up, and they can't be filled if they are full of rain. Government gives Oxfordshire £15 million a year to manage our roads – we need £45 million just to stand still. We have allocated £15 million from council tax but that still leaves a shortfall of one third of what we need. Earlier this year the government announced a £200 million fund to “tackle potholes”. That amounts to just £3.7 million for Oxfordshire. The potholes have been marked up with white paint which means they will be filled and I have seen some work happening this week. Please report any potholes, or other road defects, on Fix My Street, or send me an email.

Cllr Liz Leffman