

County Councillor report March 2022

I have recently been able to give the Town Council a donation from my Councillor Priority Fund towards the purchase of an electric bike for the Council's shared e-bike scheme. I have also been working with the Town Council to take forward an LCWIP for Charlbury, and participated in a meeting between Town Councillors and Joachim Muntane of OCC to scope this.

More generally, a pilot of a small area of central Oxford has begun to test out the technology that will be used for the Zero Emissions Zone. The full ZEZ will come into force in 2023 (subject to a public consultation). This is one of the measures we are taking to transform Oxford into a zero carbon transport city over the next few years.

A major issue at the present time is government funding for buses. Throughout the pandemic the bus companies have been supported financially but that is due to finish at the end of March. The number of people using the buses is about 65-70% of pre-Covid numbers which means that unless the government continues to support them the bus companies will have to axe a number of routes. Like many other county leaders, I wrote to the government requesting that they continue to support the bus companies and we have heard that they are prepared to continue funding till October 2022. This will benefit the X9 route. Meanwhile we are working on a campaign to encourage greater bus usage, especially among concessionary pass holders who were particularly reluctant to take the bus during the pandemic.

The ban on HGVs on Burford bridge was recently lifted and the county is now going to look at a county wide strategy for HGV movements. There was a lot of concern expressed by some of the surrounding villages, in particular Leafield, because of the displacement of lorries and this was taken into account when making the decision. As far as I am aware this did not affect Charlbury as the weight restriction discouraged lorries from coming this way. However it is time to consider HGV movements across the whole county rather than in the somewhat piecemeal way that has previously been dealt with.

There has been a lot of media coverage in the past few weeks of the decision by the council to approve a motion for plant-based food to be served at County Hall. This was because one of the Conservative councillors got a group of farmers together to protest, and Jeremy Clarkson then jumped on the bandwagon. The purpose of this motion was not, as some have said, to make everyone "go vegan", but to encourage everyone to consider ways in which we can reduce carbon emissions through modifying our diets and choosing to source food locally. I am in touch with Ian Wilkinson of FarmED, and we will be working together to encourage more sustainable food production across the county