

REPORT TO FARINGDON DIVISION (Buckland with Gainfield, Buscot, Coleshill, Eaton Hastings, Faringdon, Gt Coxwell, Littleworth with Thrupp and Wadley and Little Coxwell) February 2021

All that is detailed within my monthly report is in the public domain. The report provides local news and a wider picture of the strategic work that Oxfordshire County Council undertakes and thus involves me both as your local County Councillor and as Deputy Leader for the County Council. Much of the strategic work has implications locally and is “useful” for the local town and parish councillors.

Safety Message:

Mobile phone distraction highlighted in Oxfordshire road safety campaign

Drivers are being warned about the dangers of using mobile phones while driving in a campaign launched by Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. Research has shown that using a mobile phone can impair driving ability more than being over the drink drive limit. **Andy Ford, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service’s Community Safety Education Manager, said:** “Most drivers are responsible and do not use their mobile phone whilst driving. But the few that continue to take risks by texting, surfing the internet or making or receiving calls are putting other road users and themselves in danger of harm.”

Drivers on their mobiles are much less aware of what is happening around them and can fail to see road signs, maintain a proper lane position or a steady speed. They also end up feeling more stressed and frustrated and are more likely to tailgate the vehicle in front or enter unsafe gaps in traffic. **Press quote - Councillor Judith Heathcoat, Oxfordshire County Council’s Cabinet Member for Community Safety, said:** “Motorists are four times more likely to be involved in a collision whilst using a mobile phone or being distracted in a vehicle, and their reactions are 50 per cent slower. Think twice before answering a call using hands free, and never take your eyes off the road. It is not worth the risk.”

The campaign is in collaboration with Thames Valley Police. Their officers will be focusing on detecting and prosecuting drivers who use their mobile phones behind the wheel. Further advice on safe driving is available on the [365alive website](#).

Oxfordshire County Council Budget Meeting 9th February. The County Council approved the revenue budget of £485m budget for 2021-22 which gives an average increase on a Band D house of £45. The Council had the option as per Central Government guidelines of increasing the council tax by 4.99% in total and 3.0% of this would have been aimed a funding social care specifically. However, we chose to take only 1% of this figure this financial year with the option of taking the other 2% to fund adult social care in the next financial year, 2022-23. The debate became very acrimonious with the Liberal Democrats arguing that we should have taken the full 4.99%. In much discussion during the preparation of the budget we felt that we should be aware of the financial hardship(s) that folk have borne since March 2020 with the Covid Pandemic. The Labour Group proposed several amendments to our budget – diverting £500,000 from general youth services funding towards wellbeing support for children with a further £225,000 shifted in the adult social care budget to fund apprenticeships working in social care and to search for smaller companies based in Oxfordshire who could provide care to those in need. These cash movements did not increase the budget proposals and the amendments were accepted. The Liberal Democrats had not proposed a budget or proposed any amendments and they voted against the budget! The budget means that there will be funding for 20mph roads, more investment for domestic abuse services, £4m additional funding for adult social care, extra funding for potholes and drainage schemes, £150k for apprenticeships, £330k for children’s services and £1 for youth services.

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for around 80% of local government spending in the county with the following services that it is responsible for:-

Adult Social Care, Public Health, Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service, Regulatory Services eg. Trading Standards, Roads and Transport, Waste disposal, Libraries, Museums, Coroners and Registrations Services – births and deaths.

Banbury shop owner guilty after fake cigarettes seized - A Banbury shop owner has been ordered to pay back £75,000 following a raid where counterfeit cigarettes were seized. Oxfordshire County Council’s trading standards team brought a prosecution of Narinder Singh Malhotra, the director of

Banbury Express Food and Wine Limited, which trades from 179 Warwick Road, Banbury. The case was heard at Oxford Crown Court. It came after trading standards swooped on the shop in June 2019, seizing nearly 3,000 illegal cigarettes following two earlier test purchases when Ukrainian Marlboro Gold cigarettes were sold for £6.50 a packet to undercover officers. The cigarettes seized were found behind the counter hidden in an empty box of Snickers chocolate bars and in the storeroom at the rear of the shop. Appearing before Judge Maria Lamb; Malhotra and the company pleaded guilty to 13 offences each. These included supplying cigarettes that were not labelled with the required picture or text warnings and possessing counterfeit Marlboro Red cigarettes with a view to selling them. It was the possession of the fake cigarettes that triggered proceeds of crime proceedings. Malhotra and the company were both sentenced to fines of £2,450 each and ordered to pay £75,000 within three months or face a custodial sentence of 12 months in default. He must also pay £6,220.70 in prosecution costs. All the seized cigarettes were ordered to be forfeited and destroyed. **Press quote: Councillor Judith Heathcoat, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Community Safety, said:** "Our trading standards team, working in partnership with Thames Valley Police and other agencies will continue to crack down on the sale of these illegal products. People can help us to stamp out illegal tobacco and create a healthier and safer Oxfordshire by being vigilant and reporting any suspicious activity using the illegal tobacco hotline." Anyone with information about the illegal sale of tobacco should contact **0300 999 6 999** or report it anonymously online at www.stop-illegal-tobacco.co.uk

Community Safety - People living close to Oxfordshire's fire stations are being encouraged to consider becoming paid on-call firefighters as part of the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) recruitment campaign in March. Oxfordshire County Council is looking to recruit local firefighters who participate in a wide range of activities in the local area, from responding to emergency calls to supporting safety needs. They also provide crucial prevention advice to help keep residents safe.

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service offers a flexible work pattern to fit around individuals' studies, work and family commitments. On-call firefighters participate in a wide range of activities in the local area, from responding to emergency calls to providing prevention advice; all to help keep residents safe, reduce harm and ultimately save lives. There are currently 390 on-call firefighters in Oxfordshire. Anyone interested can visit www.oncallfire.uk – to find out what is involved in the role. For residents wanting more information or to apply to be an on-call firefighter, they can email fire.recruitment@oxfordshire.gov.uk using the subject title on-call week enquiry.

Stay at home and drive COVID cases down - Oxfordshire residents, together with the nation, are being advised to continue to stay at home and follow the existing COVID-19 rules, which will begin to gradually ease from 8 March as part of the government's roadmap to bring England out of lockdown. The number of COVID cases across the county is continuing to fall, but the week-on-week reduction is now much smaller than it was earlier this month. For the week ending 19 February, the number of cases across Oxfordshire fell by just 5% compared to a drop of 40% in the previous week, while in Cherwell cases actually rose.

There is excellent vaccination progress across the county, with over 95 per cent of those aged over 75 having had their first jab, together with more than 90 per cent of those aged 70 - 74. Let's not delay this progress by becoming sloppy about how we abide by the rules.

Please follow public health guidance this is as important now as it's ever been, from maintaining your distance to covering your face when you go out. Every facemask and the example of washed hands makes a difference. They are simple, effective things that everyone needs to build into their daily lives. They remain an important step in our route out of lockdown."

Reaching out to people in priority groups who have yet to have their COVID vaccine

People in the priority groups for the COVID-19 vaccine who have yet to respond to their invitation for a first dose are to be the focus of a new scheme set up by Oxfordshire councils, the NHS and GPs. This service being launched is to help support those people if they want to have the jab. There are a range of reasons why people may have not arranged a vaccination - from difficulties in booking an appointment or arranging transport, to hesitancy or misunderstandings about the vaccine. Outreach workers from the community hub teams of the city and district councils across the county will be visiting residents who have not had a COVID-19 vaccine and offering them support to get an appointment if they want one. The outreach workers are from experienced teams which have been

visiting residents who are shielding or self-isolating throughout the pandemic. They will be dressed in clearly identifiable clothing, carry an ID, and follow all social distancing guidelines. Residents will be visited by teams from their local council.

Smoke alarm testing promoted in new Fire Kills campaign

Residents are being reminded that smoke alarms save lives.

As part of its Fire Kills campaign, Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service is asking people to test their smoke alarms as part of a regular household routine. **Press quote: Councillor Judith Heathcoat, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Community Safety, said:** "Fire safety should be a priority for every resident. They should ensure they have enough smoke alarms in the home and that they work. Smoke alarms can give the vital extra seconds warning needed to escape a fire. Fire kills. Please take sensible safety precautions by fitting and regularly testing smoke alarms."

To keep alarms effective in working order:

- Make sure there is at least one smoke alarm on every level of the home.
- Test your smoke alarms by pushing the button at least once a month.
- Check that the smoke alarms are less than 10 years old.
- Change the batteries every year. Never remove them to use in other electrical items.
- Fit smoke alarms in the right place – on landings and hallways, as well as in rooms that are used regularly, such as rooms that are being used by a vulnerable person as a bedroom. Also consider fitting them in rooms that contain electrical appliances, such as a heater or a phone charger.
- Take a moment to check on loved ones who may need help to ensure they are fully protected with working smoke alarms.

For further advice on fire safety visit www.365alive.co.uk email community.safety@oxfordshire.gov.uk or call 01865 895999.

Hedge Cutting on Coxwell Road – Great Coxwell

I feel I should correct a presumption that the hedge on Coxwell Road has been cut back by Oxfordshire County Council this is not so! The landowner has undertaken this work. The hedge has been coppiced – a long standing method of hedge maintenance where an overgrown and in some places as in this case has become potentially dangerous and has been cut down to encourage new growth to sprout from the stumps and roots. Landowners have a responsibility to ensure boundary trees and hedges are safe. The landowner has also cleaned out the ditch which will keep the water out of the fields and reduce water on the Coxwell Road in the Parish of Great Coxwell. (Hedge coppicing is legal between October and the end of March)

During the Covid-19 Pandemic I have not been undertaking my monthly County Councillor surgery, however, I can be contacted on either 01367 241468 Judith.heathcoat@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Thank you so much for all that everyone is doing currently, our medical teams supporting the Covid vaccination programme, our shops for maintaining food stuffs for us to buy, all the volunteers within the Division who have supported so many in our communities and officers of the town and parish councils.

Judith Heathcoat
Deputy Leader of Oxfordshire County Council
Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Regulatory Services

3rd March 2021