

## County Councillor Report for Faringdon Division

Bethia Thomas, March/April 2022

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Since my last report our world has changed considerably, and while spring is in the air, our thoughts have inevitably turned to the conflict in the east and the war in the Ukraine. As I am sure you can all understand the council is working with other agencies to support incoming refugees, providing them with vital services as they try and establish themselves in the area. This is a complex process, so resources are being diverted to attend to this emergency, and on top of the continuing pressure put on us by the pandemic, council resources are stretched.

That said, with the start of the new financial year at the council, we may be seeing more works in the area, in particular the long-promised resurfacing of Faringdon town centre, and I think we can be looking forward to other activity across the division.

With the recent announcement of CIL spending in the area we have also been allocated £60,000 for a new refuge to be installed on the A420 crossing at Fernham Rd to Little Coxwell, £60,000 towards urban area bus infrastructure real time information units on the A420, and £35,000 towards the installation of the traffic calming chicanes planned for Coleshill.

Over the last few months I have funded three speed surveys in the area at Buckland Marsh, Eaton Hastings and Buscot. These were ordered following complaints of speeding, and in Buscot, the serious collision earlier in the year. At the recent FATAAC meeting we discussed the installation at several other sites across the division as I have had complaints about certain blackspots in the area. I will be discussing this with officers as well as the outcome of the current surveys to see what the next steps will be.

Works have continued on the A417 to clear ditches and cut grips on either side of the road around Buscot, and another site has been identified for works just outside Faringdon. I make a note of flooded areas when I see them and report them on Fix My Street whenever possible. Now that I know more about what I am looking for, I am happy to say I have had quick follow up actions from this system.

I have been able to allocate some more grants from my councillor's priority fund, and I know others have made enquiries. While I am happy to consider all applications I am mindful of spending it fairly, across the division to make the most of the monies available to me – unfortunately the fund was reduced by half by the previous administration, so I do like to make sure I have kept some in reserve for emergencies.

As always, I have given specific updates for issues affecting each parish. I would encourage you to get in touch with me directly if you have any queries; any major news stories will be available through the website at: [news.oxfordshire.gov.uk](https://www.news.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

All the best,

*Bethia.*

## [News from Across the Division](#)

### Buckland

After recent communications with the parish, I endorsed its application for the new 20MPH scheme. I have been assured that officers will be in touch as soon as they can progress it further and I will make sure that I am involved in any follow up action if it proves necessary. As stated previously I had ordered a speed survey for Buckland Marsh. I am awaiting further information about the status and outcome of this survey and will let residents know as soon as possible. I am pleased to see that the meeting with officers to review signage on the A420 was productive and would be happy to be involved in any follow up on this.

### Buscot

I was happy to have been able to attend the parish meeting in March. I have asked for an update on continued works to clear the ditches to reduce flooding in the area and am waiting on a response. I am also awaiting an update on the speed survey in the village and further up the road in Eaton Hastings. I am aware that I had promised to follow up concerns about wildlife on the river contacting various agencies for further information and advice.

### Coleshill

As mentioned in the introduction, CIL funds have now been secured for the planned chicane at the top of the village. With this in place plans can proceed. I have contacted officers recently to chase up any dates on this, and I am sure you will have an update shortly. I have been aware of the application for the solar farm located just outside Coleshill. At this stage it is a district council matter, but I will comment on it when comes through to county. I am sure my district councillor colleagues representing your ward would not mind me saying that I have been closely monitoring this situation as part of my role there.

### Eaton Hastings

Recently I have been in touch with Raymond Bull who has been working to convene a meeting of the parish. I have been helping with advice from both county and district councils on suitable locations and timings of this meeting and will be happy to follow this up to ensure we have a parish meeting in the next few months. I am pleased to have assisted in this as I think these events are crucial to local democracy, letting residents have their say on local matters. I have also introduced district councillors Elaine Ware and Simon Howell, so we should have a full complement of councillors when we meet. I have been in contact with residents to discuss the installation of the speed survey on the A417. It is the first step to be taken if the speed limit is to be reduced through the village. I hope to be receiving an update from officers shortly.

### Faringdon

As always I continue to work closely with the town council to ensure that we understand the issues facing the town including the 20MPH scheme, CPE, and of course any news on works to resurface the town centre footways. I have now had confirmation that this work is scheduled for this year and have been working with residents concerned that this will be prioritised, creating a petition to present to a meeting of council or cabinet when appropriate.

As a change to the format of this report I have added a section giving notes from FATAAC in the general news section below. Some of the projects I have been working on remain confidential at this stage. No firm decision has been made on the future of the FIS site but I am hopeful that ongoing feasibility studies will return a positive outcome and that Faringdon will be chosen as the site of a new SEND school in the county.

Other issues to report include:

- Faze – I have not seen any movement on applications on this site at either county or district but will keep monitoring it in the light of the ACV application;
- S106 Social Services Contributions – sadly still no updates, I will follow this up and see if I can get any further information from the team at VoWHDC;
- Drainage on Humpty Hill – I have an update on this and will circulate to council in a separate email, in short the infrastructure and drainage comply with the application;
- Footpath connecting developments onto the Fernham Rd – was at the site recently and will be working with officers to see if this can be made sound;
- Councillor Priority Payments – I have awarded just over £1000 towards resurfacing the Elms Tennis Court and hope that this will allow school students to enjoy tennis sessions in the future; I have also agreed to fund a mobile speed monitoring sign for the town that will help to inform drivers of their speed in the light of concerns about enforcement, particularly around the new 20MPH zone.

#### Great Coxwell

I have heard back from officers about the unauthorised signage on the road coming off the B4019 at Badbury and was told that they were due to be removed. I also popped into Annabelle's Nursery to talk about the signage at their crossing and have followed that up with officers – the nursery seemed happy with any changes that may be suggested. I received your request to the councillor's priority fund and am happy to consider it but have advised that because the sum allotted to each councillor had been significantly reduced by the previous administration, I have to consider each application with balance – if I was to grant the full amount I would have to think carefully about any further applications that the parish was to make in the future.

#### Little Coxwell

I have been in contact with representatives of the parish recently with reports of HGVs turning right onto the A420. I am happy to investigate any evidence of similar contraventions and would still like to see what can be done to monitor this more closely. With this concern, the application to reduce the speed limit in the village, the interest in the intersection at the Great Coxwell intersection and the recently announced refuge crossing the A420 onto Fernham Road, I thought it sensible to organise a site visit with highways officers and have been in contact to organise this. On a different note, I have recently discovered the delights of Gorse Farm, and took a pint of milk into the recent full council meeting to share with other councillors in their tea and coffees – I have been a supporter of local farming for many years and am very glad that such an innovative new business located within my division.

## Littleworth

I am looking forward to coming to some of the events I see advertised in the village newsletter. Recently I have been contacted to see if I am able to assist with the funding one of these events and am looking into the possibility of doing so. I have yet to hear anything further on the installation of a litter bin near the bus stop and will need to chase that up. New signs have been installed on the Thrupp Corner, however I believe there may still be signage missing so if anyone can assist with further details on the original layout I would appreciate it.

## Other News and Updates

### Ukraine

Unfortunately, since my last report the events in Ukraine that are eaching us have brought horrific news of war and suffering. As we are all aware the governments "Homes for Ukraine" scheme, set up to aide in the resettlement of refugees fleeing the conflict is calling on the services of the council to help with vital services and emergency accommodation. A number of useful links and further details can be found by searching "Homes for Ukraine" on the council's website.

### Covid Updates

Despite the feeling that we are back to normal, with the reduction of official measures to reduce the spread of the virus, the levels of covid in Oxfordshire are still, high with rates in South and Vale currently some of the highest in the country. It is unclear why this may be, but if you would like any further advice and support visit the website: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

### Notes from FATAC

I was happy to be elected chair of FATAC at its last meeting with DCllr Elaine Ware as my deputy. Cllr Ware represents Shrivenham and Watchfield and has an obvious interest in matters concerning the A420. At the meeting we had the chance to review the constitution to allow for changes in its composition and its focus. We will be inviting a representative of the bus companies to future meetings and have included highway maintenance to the committee's remit. Among topics discussed we were updated on the Faringdon 20MPH scheme and other 20MPH applications in the division, the intersection at the Great Coxwell roundabout, the possibility of making a section of Swan Lane in Faringdon one-way, and projects that could be funded by any future CIL contributions, and an update on CPE. The next meeting of FATAC will be held on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June at 10.00am.

On a related note, I had mentioned the possibility of forming an A420 working party to discuss the issues facing parishes along its length. However, councillors are not in alignment with the format this will take, but I will raise this as a topic at the next localities meeting to be held later this month.

### Other News

Recently the media has focussed on the council's approach to serving food at meetings. Much of this has been exaggerated but I do not believe this was intended as a slight against local farming; previously the food served was not locally sourced, was more expensive and under the previous administration, allowed for alcohol to be served, which I do not see as appropriate during council meetings.

Personally, I do not think the decision to serve exclusively plant-based food was the correct move for the council. I did not vote in support of this motion and spoke against it at cabinet when I spoke to many farmers outside county hall – I even met Jeremy Clarkson!

At the last council meeting I brought my own lunch, this happened to be vegan, but made up of waste food from the Faringdon Community Larder and ingredients from local growers and suppliers, taking in a bottle of milk from Gorse Farm in Little Coxwell to share with other councillors for their tea and coffee. I intend to do this again and find new ways to promote local farming at council where I can.

#### Councillor Activity Report

Since my last report I have authorised some grants from my priority fund. As well as the speed surveys already mentioned, I have agreed to funding the shortfall required to resurface the Elms Tennis Court in Faringdon and buy equipment suitable for the students of Faringdon Junior School so that they may use the courts for tennis sessions. I have also agreed to purchase a mobile speed sign showing oncoming traffic the speed at which it is travelling. The signs can be mounted on existing infrastructure and moved between areas of concern. I had thought that perhaps, if officers were agreeable and it was something that parishes would be happy to coordinate, a scheme to share this sort of equipment might give me the ability to fund another device for villages outside Faringdon.

Face-to-face surgeries have restarted both for the county and district, with appearances at the first Saturday Market of the month in Faringdon Town Centre from 11.00am. My full details are available on the website, and I am very happy for you to contact me directly using my council email address: [bethia.thomas@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:bethia.thomas@oxfordshire.gov.uk)