

County Councillor Report for Faringdon Division

Bethia Thomas, September/October 2022

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Much has changed since I wrote my last report. With the sad news of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, we all paused and took a moment to remember her life and dedicated service to the country and commonwealth. I know many of the parishes within the division had made their own arrangements to mark this significant moment and I am grateful to all of those involved. As usual, Faringdon did a fine job paying its respects and reflecting on her life, and I was honoured to be able to play a small part in this commemoration.

Sadly, time in politics does not stand still for long, and a lot has happened nationally in the short time since then, with the already worrying economic picture clearly deteriorating since the mini budget and the turnover in government positions. Despite this, councils are at the forefront locally, assisting residents and we will be continuously looking at ways the council can help alongside our partners as we have done throughout the pandemic.

As well as this, I am working with a number of local groups to create a network of warm spaces that may be needed over the winter for those who are struggling to heat their home. We hope to produce an information sheet shortly that will help residents in Faringdon and surrounding villages with advice over the winter; I may ask some of you for help to distribute the fliers in some of the parishes over the coming weeks.

We have a lot of plans for the winter, and with the council's support we already know that one of these warm spaces will be located in the newly refurbished library; I am looking forward to seeing the new look for Faringdon when it reopens next month. According to Faringdon's librarian, Sheena, the refurbishment is all going to schedule and as the months get colder over the winter, I will be transferring my councillor surgery to the library again.

With this work on our library, and the recently resurfaced footways in Faringdon I feel as though the town is finally getting the focus it deserves and look forward to working for further improvements in the area.

All the best,

Bethia.

News from Across the Division

Buckland

After coming to your parish meeting in September, I have been copied into communications about the 20MPH Zone for the village and the speed monitoring devices which the parish is funding. Since the parish meeting, I have also had a chance to meet with residents at Buckland Marsh, to discuss the measures we are taking closer to the river. It has been decided that, following the speed survey results, the area will become a 40MPH Zone and plans are being drawn up to make this happen – in this case I will be using some of my councillor priority fund to help seed the budget allocated to the works

I am also following up queries about footpaths in the village and the signage improvements along the A420 – I will let you know as soon as I hear anything new.

Buscot

I was glad to have attended the parish meeting in Buscot earlier this month. Several points were raised at the meeting and I have tried to follow them up since then. There was some discussion about the results of the speed survey, with the suggestion that we may run another in the summer next year, and also to look at the results from the result of the Eaton Hastings summer survey to see if it reflected the need for a change in Buscot. The results of the Eaton Hastings survey have come through but are inconclusive and I am in discussion with officers to see what the best course of action would be in this case.

Continuing on the theme of the road safety, I followed up the query about the use of mirrors on highways – again officers informed me that their use is not recommended and can only be installed legally through an application process which involves evidence of RTCs in the area. I had also asked whether the parish would like me to investigate the history of RTCs in the area as I have access to a free site that will give some detail – let me know.

I have also made an inquiry to the committee of Faringdon Community Bus to see if they are able to visit the village as requested at the parish meeting – I am awaiting their response.

Coleshill

I am looking forward to your next meeting. Following emails between the parish and county, I have seen that officers are now working on the programme of works for the 20MPH Zone through the village and the associated chicane and will get back to you with a start date shortly. I did investigate a query raised in an earlier meeting about the road surface further down the hill, but unfortunately it was not deemed significant enough for works at this time, but I can obviously follow this up at another point.

Concerns over call outs to Thames Valley Police were raised at the last meeting. I followed this up with PCC Matthew Barber who got back to me recently with a response saying, “this sounds extraordinary, and entirely unacceptable”. I believe action has now been taken to ensure communications are clearer and more well coordinated between the services.

Eaton Hastings

After meeting with you in the summer, we agreed that we would conduct another speed survey through the village – the results of this survey are now back, but unfortunately are inconclusive. While the speed has now indicated that we could lower the limit to 40MPH, it is so close to the threshold that, as far as I understand, the police would not recommend this action. I am writing to the Cabinet Member for Highways, Cllr Andrew Gant to see if he would support this reduction, as it would be his decision to make should it not be resolved at this stage. I would also ask him if there is anything that can be done to forward the cause

of reducing the overall speed limit on this stretch of the A417 from Faringdon to Lechlade. I will forward on the results and other information when I know more.

Faringdon

Since my last report we have seen the refurbishment of the footways in the town centre; I hope you will agree that with this has brought significant improvement to the area, and that the number of complaints coming in about this will reduce in line with these works. As well as this, we have seen an extensive programme of work throughout the town recently, swapping the old-style streetlights to new LEDs. This will cut the carbon emissions of the council significantly and is key to meeting our climate targets. While this work continues, it is not to say that we have stopped working on other improvements and we will be discussing several issues around highway surfacing, speeding and civil parking enforcement at our next FATAAC meeting. I have recently found out that the roads and footways of Folly Park View seem to have been adopted from the developer only recently – with this news I am now tracking down who is responsible for their upkeep.

Other issues to report include:

- Folly View Primary – the academy is handling the transfer of the new school and should be moving students into the site very soon; as you know I had asked the question about the design of the school at the last full council meeting and I believe the council has now got back to the town council to explain the decision and plans for the future.
- Faringdon Infant School Site – I have still not heard anything more from the Department for Education about the future of the site; they have been assessing the site for its suitability as a SEND school – I will let you know as soon as I hear any further news.
- Faze Site – I noted the letter FTC sent to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property, Councillor Callum Miller and followed this up with a reinforcing statement asking that he strongly consider the council's request to retain this as community land.
- Library Refurbishment – now well underway, the refurbishment is going to schedule, and should be open again in November; I had been investigating the use of the upper rooms for COGS however they may have found alternative accommodation.
- S106 Social Service Contributions – awaiting a response after receiving an initial answer from officers.
- Roundabout at the United Church – following this up; in my opinion it needs repainting; and several of the bollards also need replacing.
- Speed Signs – the council reported that these were not working; I discussed this with officers, and they confirmed that these static signs do not display a positive message if you are going at the correct speed, only a negative if you are going over the speed limit; that said, further investigations have revealed that the sign at the top of Park Road may not be working as it should – this has been reported and the power supply checked.
- Graffiti and Debris on the A420 – this was also raised at the FTC meeting; I have raised it with officers, and it is on the agenda for FATAAC.

I am happy to announce several payments from the Councillor Priority Fund – to the Bromsgrove Day Centre for funding activities for their clients, and to the Youth Club to continue its work into the next year.

Great Coxwell

I am sorry I missed your last parish meeting. We will be following up the issues raised there at the next FATAC meeting and they are already on the agenda. If anyone would like to attend and speak, they are welcome to, but would have to register with the town clerk. I have confirmed no further action would be needed for the CPF which should now have been transferred to your accounts – I am looking forward to seeing the works to the Reading Room once they are completed.

Little Coxwell

Apologies for not making your last parish meeting. Fortunately I had been able to attend meeting with Grundon the before. I have not heard anything back from my enquiry about the terms of reference, and whether residents should attend the liaison group meetings; I will chase this up and let you know as soon as I hear anything further.

I am also aware of your request to install the new bollards in the village, but believe Mark Francis is already working with you on this. A date is being arranged to programme works on the new speed limits in and around the village.

Littleworth

I must apologise for not being more connected with Littleworth over the last few months. I believe that now the vegetation on either side of the A420 leading up to the bus stop and on the opposite side of the road has now been cut back. I am sorry for the length of time it has taken to get to this point. If possible, I would like to meet with a representative of the parish to discuss any outstanding issues, as I will not be able to attend the meeting in December and would like to make sure that we are able move things forward in the interim.

Other News and Updates

Meetings

Since my last report we have had another full council meeting, having been postponed due to the period of mourning. I asked two formal questions of cabinet members, one, as mentioned previously, concerning the gas boiler installation at Folly View School, and the other to confirm the creation of warm spaces in libraries and other council run public buildings, and to clarify the support the council is offering residents over the winter months. The decisions taken are given on the website: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk> October will also see the postponed FATAC and Locality Meetings go ahead and we will have a packed agenda for both. If anyone wishes to attend FATAC they are welcome to register with Sally Thurston to speak during public participation time.

Cost of Living Crisis

We are all well aware that the cost of living has spiralled over the last few months. This will affect all of us in one way or another, and we as a council are there to support our most vulnerable residents, and offering grants to make sustainable energy improvements to your home. Further information about this is available on the website: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/help-rising-living-costs>

During Covid we were acutely aware that one of the most important things we could do for residents was to provide the correct sources of information to help support and guide them. We are also aware that some of our most vulnerable residents do not have access to the internet. To ensure that everyone has the same access to information, I have been working with a team of volunteers and community groups to produce an information sheet to

deliver to each household across the division. We have also created a programme of events to create a series of warm spaces in Faringdon and elsewhere and will be promoting these in the leaflet. If you are able to help deliver these fliers in your area I would be happy to hear from you.

Covid Updates

As most people are aware, the numbers of Covid 19 cases have been on the increase. Fortunately, because of the success of the vaccine rollout locally, the symptoms for many of us have been minimal. If you need any further information, please go to:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/coronavirus-covid-19>

Ukraine

This is a critical time for our Ukrainian guests as the original six-month placement scheme is about to come to an end. If you or anyone you know is experiencing difficulty in homing or rehoming a refugee or refugee family, it is vital you get in contact with the council's refugee service. Details can be found on the website:

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/ukraine/support-ukraine-guests

Charity Walk

On Sunday 21st of August I completed a 28 mile walk from Oxford to Eaton Hastings to raise funds for Oxfordshire Search and Rescue (OxSAR or the Lowland Rescue) and the Firefighters Charity while flying the flag for The Thames Path and Active Oxfordshire. In October we also held a charity evening to raise further funds and enjoy a talk from Al Sylvester MBE. With the generosity of residents of the division and supporters we managed to raise a total of over £3,500. The fundraising page is still open so if you would like to, you are still able to donate at: www.lowlandrescueoxfordshire.org.uk/thameswalk

Green Day

I was happy to support both the Vale and County Councils at Faringdon's Big Green Day at the beginning of the month. I was there representing the Faringdon Litter Pickers and enjoyed spreading the word to residents about the benefits of cleaning up the environment. I was glad to have been joined by other residents from around the division including members of Greener Great Coxwell.

Contact Details and Funding

I would like to remind you again of the Councillor Priority Fund which allows me to fund community projects to benefit residents across the division may be still available. Details of this fund can be found on the website.

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. As mentioned previously we will be moving into the newly refurbished library in Faringdon for our surgeries as soon as it reopens. I am aware that this may not suit everyone, but if individual parish representatives would like to meet up between scheduled meetings, I am more than happy to accommodate most requests.

As always, my full details are available on the website, or you can contact me directly using my council email address: bethia.thomas@oxfordshire.gov.uk