

Focus on Parish Councils – Monthly Update
February 2026
Cllr Ben Higgins

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Dear parish councillors and residents,

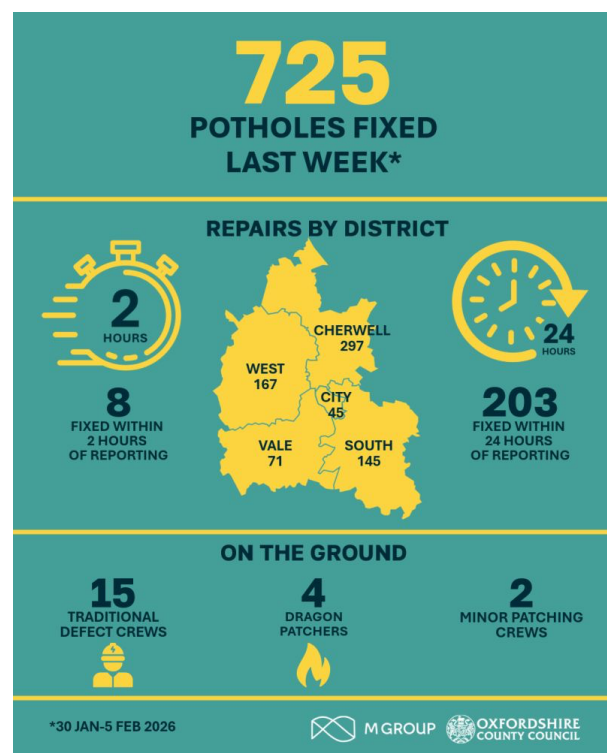
January as we all know has been a very wet month. We're entering peak pothole season, and I am receiving lots of correspondence from residents concerned about particular areas. I am escalating these where appropriate, which can result in a faster fix.



The council have started publishing a weekly graphic on our LinkedIn profile showing the number of potholes fixed in the previous week.

Crews have been doubled in response to the recent weather.

The council have been borrowing significant amounts of money in recent years, delivering the largest resurfacing and surface dressing programme in 20 years and clearing/inspecting gullies annually for the first time in years. The budget proposed by cabinet includes a £4m, 2-year capital spending commitment to investing in gully's. This year's programme to clear gully's has revealed that many need repair following years of neglect. The root cause of the road conditions is years of central government underfunding, but we are doing our best to hold our roads in "steady state" after years of the previous administrations "managed decline" approach.



OCC News

1. Budgeting

The budget meeting for full council is on Tuesday 10th February. I wrote in my previous report how the 3-year funding settlement sees significant withdrawal of funds from Oxfordshire. What it means in practise for us is that Oxfordshire residents are going to have to suffer the effects of the withdrawal of more than £24m of funding from central government (by 2028/29) through paying higher council tax and experiencing the resulting local service pressures. That said, we have worked hard to ensure the budget for the coming years delivers on our priorities.

The documents for the budget council meeting can be found here -
<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=116&Mid=7868>

2. Local Government Reorganisation

People in Oxfordshire are being urged to have their say as part of a statutory government consultation on the future of local government in the county.

The consultation launched on Thursday 5 February and will run until 23:59 Thursday 26 March.

There are three proposals being consulted on for Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire County Council is backing its One Oxfordshire proposal, which is for a single countywide unitary council – Oxfordshire Council. There are two other proposals – one proposing two unitary councils and the other three councils. Both of these include West Berkshire.

One Oxfordshire will create stronger, simpler services that are closer to communities, connected and cost effective.

It will bring all services together under one roof, protect high-performing social care, simplify and improve services through better coordination and save £63 million every year. One Oxfordshire will give residents one front door to access services, stronger local decision-making, and a unified voice that can drive investment, innovation and sustainable growth.

Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, said: “The government’s call for local government reform is both timely and necessary. One Oxfordshire offers a once in a generation opportunity to build a stronger, fairer and more ambitious future for the county.

“It is the only proposal that fully meets government criteria with the scale, efficiency and resilience to save the most money and withstand future financial shocks; the stability to protect and improve critical services; and the simplicity residents want.

“It will bring together all council services across Oxfordshire to create a new single authority, Oxfordshire Council, with the strength and voice to activate exciting and enduring change.

“We will reduce duplication, protect our critical services and have the scale to focus and invest in prevention and early help, tackling inequalities and homelessness.

“By bringing together all the levers of local government into a single, resilient authority, we can unlock the full potential of our people and places, drive innovation and deliver the high quality services our communities deserve.

“We urge people to have their say and take this opportunity to support our positive vision for the future.”

3. Nearly £5.5m million invested in cleaner and better buses after new vehicle improvement grants

Grants of £1.405 million have been awarded to bus companies and community transport groups to support upgrades to their vehicles for the benefit of passengers and the environment. Oxfordshire County Council has approved seven vehicle improvement grant applications that will collectively help fund 13 new electric buses, convert two existing minibuses from diesel to electric power, and deliver passenger enhancements to many other vehicles. The grants have been awarded under the council’s vehicle improvement fund, new for 2025/26, and funded through the Bus Grant awarded by the government. The fund was open to all operators of local bus services in Oxfordshire. The

initiative has attracted an additional £4.056m in collective investment from the operators, which will result in improvements in vehicles totalling £5.461m.

Councillor Andrew Gant, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Transport Management, said: "This is really good news and an excellent example of partnership working delivering real benefit and value to our residents.

"The purchase of new electric vehicles and improvements to existing ones has been made possible by the council's continued close working relationship with our bus operators through our Enhanced Partnership, soon to be strengthened further. We look forward to seeing passengers using them in the future."

Successful bids included the Oxford Bus Company's parent group Go-Ahead, which was awarded £1.204m towards the purchase of 13 new single deck electric buses to serve the Oxfordshire area.

4. Highways Walk-rounds

I now have 3 dates agreed in March with Highways engagement officers to visit most remaining parts of the division and look at areas of concern. I been asking parish councils for their input when I have been attending meetings and have a list building of areas to visit.

5. Future Generations events

What does the council do?

These two events are open only to primary schools in Oxfordshire, who can choose one of two dates:

Wednesday 4 March 2026 and Tuesday 10 March 2026.

Schools can bring up to 12 pupils from years 5 and 6. Spaces are limited and will be allocated on a first come first served basis through the booking form. Schools should complete the online registration form by 12 noon on 11 February 2026.

Democracy Café

This event is for younger adults aged 18-30 and living, studying, or working in Didcot and the surrounding areas to come together and engage in open discussions about the local issues that matter most to them. Each attendee will receive a free hot drink and a £10 voucher as a token of our appreciation for their participation.

We are currently piloting the use of Democracy Cafes as part of our Future Generations programme. This initiative aims to enhance the well-being of future generations and ensure that the council's decisions benefit not only the current population but also children, young people, and even those yet to be born.

This is a link to the My Life My Say website, where young people can sign up for free tickets to the event.

6. Consultations

There are a range of consultations open on <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>, including:

- National highways and transport network 2025 – a nationwide survey on public satisfaction with transport and road services (open until 28th February 2026)

7. Funding

The SODC councillor community grant scheme is now closed. Applications will be checked for compatibility with the criteria, and I will then be making funding decisions.

There is an OCC councillor grant scheme which I will share details of in an upcoming report.

Parish Round-Up

I hope to attend Parish Councils in person as regularly as I can. Below are some notes on issues raised at recent meetings:

- Watlington – relief road continued planning delays, CIL funding, Church St/Chapel St/New Road.
- Britwell Salome – expansion of the 20mph area raised in parish meeting; has been followed up with OCC.
- Checkendon – review of application for extension of 20mph limit; flooding issue by pub
- Stoke Row – road conditions.
- Pishill with Stonor – mobile phone coverage with retirement of analogue phonelines, road condition.
- Cuxham – Chalgrove New Town and removal of bypass proposal, HGV traffic (including construction traffic), condition of roads.
- Nuffield – Speeding enforcement, speed limits on the A4130, condition of Ewelme junction next to May's farm cottages, Fred's field.
- Shirburn – 20mph limit request, chicane (recent trial carried out and data being collected).
- Swyncombe – issue with unpermitted development on lotted land.
- Nettlebed – community sports facilities, cycle path from Nettlebed to Bix.
- Rotherfield Peppard – repeated issue with drain cover, road conditions.
- Highmoor – flooding issue on Holly close