

Report from Cllr David Hingley

I have served as Oxfordshire county councillor for Milcombe since 2025 and have thoroughly enjoyed working on behalf of residents to represent the village on the council. A lot of my work locally goes into representing individual residents and dealing with specific casework which I will not go into here but which, suffice to say, is always a most fulfilling responsibility. Much of that casework is to do with highways matters, from road safety issues to escalating repair work, and I have been pleased to work on these concerns in support of village residents.

Housing Development

As councillors know, the local area and in particular Bloxham has witnessed a high level of housing development in recent years and continues to experience a large number of speculative applications especially to the south of Bloxham. As county councillor, I have argued in my submissions that the cumulative impact of these developments needs to be taken fully into account in determining applications, and importantly that highways matters are crucial concerns not least in terms of safety.

Bloxham Primary School / S106 monies

Relating to Bloxham but of relevance to some Milcombe residents. I secured a site visit in Bloxham with the relevant OCC Cabinet Member and with OCC officers to discuss concerns around highways safety outside the primary school earlier this year. As a result, a programme of potential work has been identified, however no timetable for this work or portions of it has been confirmed and as such I will continue to argue for early provision of measures in the locality, given the high importance we all attach to these. I also arranged a separate site visit with OCC officers to discuss approx. £35k of S106 funding that has been unlocked and allocated for use on highways measures in Bloxham. I hope these measures once agreed upon and adopted will be of benefit to Milcombe residents who travel to and through Bloxham.

Balanced Budget / Highways

OCC has set a balanced budget for 26/27, despite a challenging national picture. This was done in the face of significant government funding cuts but nonetheless covering essential services like adult social care and SEND, while also investing in valued services such as libraries (including the nearby Adderbury library), and maintenance of highways and drains, tackling the previous administration's stated policy of 'managed decline' of our highways. A programme of repairs and road surfacing has been instigated and is ongoing, however adverse weather conditions over the winter has necessitated further investment which the council has provided. It is important that where possible residents report deficiencies on Fix My Street so that they are added to the maintenance schedule, however these can also be reported to me so that I can escalate them directly and I have done this on behalf of Milcombe residents. The county council also undertakes highways redressing works in areas of need and Milcombe has been on the list for this. A full programme of gully clearance also took place during the year across the county.

Local Government Reorganisation

Of course OCC is on course for being abolished by the government thanks to its programme of local government reorganisation (LGR). Under current plans, this will see the county and district councils removed by 2028 in favour of a unitary council that will cover all services currently provided by OCC and Cherwell. There are three proposals for LGR in Oxfordshire: a single county unitary favoured by the OCC Cabinet, which would see the whole county served by just the one authority; a two-unitary authority model favoured by the district councils, which in our case would cover Cherwell, West Oxfordshire and Oxford City (the other authority to cover Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and include West Berkshire); and a three-unitary model favoured by Oxford City Council which would see a Greater Oxford with the city boundaries expanded to include the southern section of Cherwell, leaving our area to be included in a small unitary serving the 'rest of Cherwell' (Banbury / Bicester and surrounding areas) plus West Oxfordshire. The government – not our councils – has the final say on the matter and has recently concluded its consultation – a decision on which model will be adopted will (we are told) be advised this summer. Once the decision is made the present councils will work flat out to set up the new body/bodies – as it is proposed that the unitary/unitaries will come online in April 2028, with a 'shadow' unitary being established from May 2027 to run alongside the final year of OCC and CDC.

Devolution

Discussions are also ongoing with regard to setting up a potential authority at the regional level, a so-called Mayoral or Foundation (non-mayoral) Strategic Authority. Talks have been progressing for such a body to cover the Thames Valley area of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, potentially including Swindon. Buckinghamshire have been invited to participate but have so far declined to engage in talks. No decision has yet been taken by the government as to whether to proceed with a devolved authority for our area or not.

In conclusion it has been a real pleasure representing Milcombe over the past year. I am grateful for the support of parish council members and of residents who contact me, and I look forward to serving the village over the coming year.

Cllr David Hingley

OCC councillor for Milcombe (part of Adderbury, Bloxham & Bodicote division)