

Parish Report: March 2026

Dear Parishes

March seems to be upon us quickly! It won't come as any surprise that over February the main topic has been the state of the roads and between that and half term this is a slightly shorter report than usual.

I'd like to draw attention particularly to the Flood Wardens update – this will unfortunately be relevant to a lot of villages in this area and it may be worth discussing in your parish councils whether you would like to set up a scheme in your area – if so, I'd be happy to talk this through with you and support you to set up.

All the best

Laura



What I've been working on:

Kidlington Illegal Landfill: Work has begun on clearing it! It's estimated to take another 6-8 months but heavy machinery is onsite to begin the removal works. Watch out for the traffic lights and temporary speed limits in the area while the work is ongoing.

Roads: The state of the roads remains frustrating, but the recent budget includes the largest ever road repair budget and I hope this will enable us to begin getting on top of the problem. Unfortunately, Oxfordshire only gets £33 million from central government road grants, and the estimated cost of maintaining our roads – not improving them, just maintaining them – is nearer £48 million. The county has made up the difference from borrowing and reserves, but with wet, warm winters like the one we've experienced becoming more common as the climate changes, we need to be prepared for rising annual costs.

Locally, I've been pleased that some of the worst areas, such as Waterperry Hill near Horton-Cum-Studley, have been patched up and I hope that with drier weather, more areas will get permanent fixes.



Speed Limits and Road Safety: I organised two site visits to Merton and Blackthorn to discuss road safety improvements, including:

- Buffer zone speed limits in Merton so there is a spell at 40mph rather than a sharp drop from 60mph to 20mph
- Signage around a hidden entrance in Merton

- Moving the 20mph zones in Blackthorn to encompass the whole built up area and dropping speed limits on some roads in the village and nearby to 40mph
- A possible bus stop on the A41 to serve Blackthorn
- Junction improvements to the B4011/A41 junction to improve safety given a likely increase in traffic given planned development in the area

Many of these works are funding dependent and will rely on securing funds from developers, but getting in the system means we can pursue them if the opportunity arises. I am pursuing site visits in Arncott, Charlton-on-Otmoor and Wendlebury

Quiet Ways: the recently-passed budget includes some funds for Quiet Ways, which are essentially the rural equivalent of low traffic neighbourhoods: schemes to try and reduce traffic and enable walking, cycling and riding in rural areas. In this area, Wendlebury and Blackthorn have both been identified as potential pilot areas. Details for the scheme are still being worked up and once more information is available about how to participate, I will circulate to parish councils to see if any other villages in this area could be candidates.



In County Hall: I spoke in the Budget debate to raise concerns about the cut of £24 million over three years in the funding we will receive from Central Government, and the impact this will have on the service level we can provide. I noted that while we are – rightly – using reserves to try and get on top of road maintenance issues, we need to strike a balance between investment now, and maintaining the council's fiscal sustainability and avoid burdening future taxpayers. My seven-month-old future taxpayer was with me and was mostly charming.

Islip Bridge: I am chasing more information on the planned closure, so far with limited success, but I will share more information as soon as I get it.

Road and Right of Way Closures

Roads:

Speed Limit Change: the speed limit on Bicester Road heading out of Kidlington will be reduced from 40mph to 30mph to facilitate HGV movements while the illegal landfill is cleared. The temporary speed limit will be in place from 23rd February to 15th March.

02/03/2026-06/03/2026: Springwell Hill between Bletchington and Kirtlington will be closed for water connection works

16/03/2026-17/03/2026: Wheatley Road in Islip will be closed for surface patching works

23/03/2026-27/03/2026: Church St, Kidlington will be closed to facilitate clearing pole blockage and laying duct in footway and carriageway

22/04/2026-26/04/2026: Wheatley Road, Islip, will be closed for surface dressing works

14/05/2026-18/05/2026: Bicester Road between Launton and Bicester will be closed for a new water supply connection

Footpaths and Bridleways:

Footpath Closure in Hampton Gay and Poyle/Kidlington: The footpath running from the Islip Road to Bicester Road is closed until further notice due to the illegal landfill

Footpath closure: Footpath between Merton and Fencott/Murcott closed until October 2026 due to an unsafe bridge across the River Ray

Merton Footpaths: an update has been made to the definitive map of rights of way to ensure the footpaths in Merton join to the public road. Read more:

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/03894-merton>

County Council Business

Local Government Reorganisation: the government statutory consultation on the move to unitary authorities is now live and will be open until the 26th of March. This is being run by the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government, who will be making the final decision over the summer, and is the last opportunity for residents to express an opinion. You can view documents on all three options and give comments here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-reorganisation-in-oxfordshire>.

Flood Wardens: Oxfordshire County Council has extended its Flood Warden scheme after successful pilots. The roles are flexible, but can include reporting flood risks such as blocked ditches, helping council staff understand local flood risks and flood patterns, and supporting the community when flooding does occur. To read more or apply to become a Flood Warden, visit:

<https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com/flood-wardens/>

New electric buses: Grants of £1.405 million have been awarded to bus companies and community transport groups to support upgrades to their vehicles. Seven vehicle improvement grant applications 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.

Nature Recovery Strategy: the nature recovery strategy has been highlighted as an

example of best practice by UK 100, a network of councils coming together to address climate change: <https://www.uk100.org/knowledge-hub/oxfordshire-county-councils-local-nature-recovery-strategy-lhrs>

New 'place' websites: the council have produced new 'place-based' web pages to draw together information about a particular area. These are quite new so don't yet contain a huge amount of information but as they are built up I think they will be a useful way to access information in an intuitive way – please let me know if there is anything in particular you would like to see! The Kidlington site is here: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/your-place/kidlington>

A and B roads review: Oxfordshire are reviewing speed limits across A and B roads across the county. If any roads in this area are flagged as needing a change in speed limits this will be discussed with the parish council.

20mph Review: the 20mph programme is being reviewed, with a small budget available for possible changes where needed – this can include relocation of the signage and buffer zones. At the moment detailed information is not available but I will share this as soon as I know more.