

Parish Report: May 2026

Dear Parishes

I hope you have all kept well in the hot weather, and are enjoying the beneficial impact of the current rain on your gardens (I certainly am!). I've also been pleased to see the surface dressing programme extending across the area, which will extend the life of the roads.

Since my last report, we have elected a new Leader of Oxfordshire County Council. Tim Bearder represents Wheatley but grew up in Wendlebury so understands our area well! We have also made some major changes to Cabinet – creating a new role to facilitate the move to unitary authorities, and splitting the transport role to have a role entirely focused on highway maintenance separately from strategic transport projects.

I have also been appointed to cabinet covering Economy and Environment – a new role combining two previous roles that will enable us to focus on good, green lasting growth as well as flooding and waste management. It will definitely keep me busy!

The biggest news is the release of road safety data for Oxfordshire showing that Oxfordshire has bucked the trend in road safety, seeing a fall to an all-time low in serious road accidents even as surrounding areas have seen numbers rise. This is a real vindication for our work around road safety – particularly the 20mph zones – but there is clearly more we can do, which is why I'm so excited about the introduction of the Quiet Ways pilot, which will move things forward further in some areas.

All the best

Laura

What I've been working on:

Drains: I am continuing to chase a small number of drains that were missed. I have now been promised they will be looked at, but I'll continue to chase this.

Islip Bridge: I organised a community meeting so the project leads from OCC and the contractor M-group could answer questions. This gave some much-needed clarity on parking, which will be available on both sides of the bridge for short visits (e.g. school drop-offs coming from Noke). There are major issues remaining around farming given the overlap of the planned closure with harvest season and I am working to resolve these. For up to date information please follow me on Facebook or visit the project site: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/roadworks/future-transport-projects/islip-bridge-improvement-work>

A41 Cycle Lane: Unfortunately the planned cycle lane along the A41 will need to be built on the North side (Bicester side) rather than the south side (Otmoor side) due to trees on the planned route. I am working with OCC and the parish to upgrade cycle

routes to connect from National Cycle Network 51 through to this new route to enable those that want to be able to cycle into Bicester safely.

HGVs: residents in several villages have raised concerns about HGVs being routed through unsuitable routes during road closures and existing restrictions are not being enforced. I have asked the council to ensure diversions are clearly marked as not suitable for HGVs and that this is communicated with satnav companies. I have also written to Bucks council to ask them to enforce agreed routing around the Magnolia Park development just across the border.

Blue Badges: After my intervention to get additional funding for the team given a surge in applications since the congestion charge came in, the waiting time has now dropped to three weeks. This is a fantastic turnaround that will make a massive difference to people applying.

In County Hall: I spoke at Cabinet in support of the Quiet Ways programme, where Blackthorn has been identified as one of the pilot locations. I'm really excited at the difference this will make to road safety – especially combined with other measures like the ongoing reviews of the 20mph zones and the A and B road review.

Road and Right of Way Closures

Roads:

06/07/2026-28/08/2026: Islip Bridge closed for structural repairs

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

County Council Business

Road Safety: Provisional figures have shown an improvement in road safety in Oxfordshire, with the number of Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) falling by 18% even as the wider Thames Valley area saw a 20% rise.

<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshire-bucking-regional-trend-on-road-safety-as-casualty-figures-fall/>

Quiet Ways: Cabinet approved the Quiet Ways programme which will be piloted in 10 locations around the county. A call for applications was launched and I have forwarded this to parishes I knew were interested – if you are interested and didn't receive it, please let me know. In order to be considered for inclusion, a project must have the support of both the parish and the County Councillor. More information here: <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/new-quiet-lanes-programme-to-create-safer-walking-and-cycling-routes/>

Low carbon energy projects: Oxfordshire is consulting on new programmes to promote community benefit and community shared ownership of new low carbon energy (in practice mostly solar) projects. This will provide a streamlined way for new solar to contribute to communities, as well as a structured system for community shared ownership. It is voluntary but will bridge the gap until mandatory government rules come in in 2028, and will not affect planning decisions, rather applying once planning decisions have been made. You can comment on the consultation here: <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/help-to-shape-how-communities-could-benefit-from-future-low-carbon-energy-projects-in-oxfordshire/>

Eynsham Park and Ride: work is beginning to connect Eynsham park and ride to the road network, and it is expected to open in 2027. Explainer on the saga from the BBC here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cqxp1vxvz1eo>

Healthy snacks in schools: a pilot providing healthy snacks in four secondary schools has seen an improvement in attendance and behaviour. It will now be rolled out to other schools prioritised to focus on those with large numbers on free school meals. <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/healthy-school-snacks-help-oxfordshire-pupils-arrive-ready-to-learn/>

Congestion charge benefits: the next tranche of funding from congestion charge funds has been announced. The free park and ride will transition to a £3 combined ticket until the end of the financial year, and NHS and school workers working in Oxford will get free parking and onward travel at park and rides. A hospital express bus will also be trialled later in the year from Parkway park and ride up to the JR – avoiding the slow service currently provided by the 700 (this was something I pushed for). A number of projects to support walking and cycling will also be supported, although the exact projects are TBC.

Highways 2027-8: the county has issued a call for nominations for roads for the resurfacing programme. I can nominate up to three roads to be inspected and considered for inclusion – I have a list of many more than three roads that I'll be looking at but please let me know if you think your road needs to be at the top of the pile and I will come and look – even if it isn't on the list for this year, I hope this approach will continue and we'll have other opportunities to nominate roads in future.

Water safety - important safety message from Mike Adcock, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Please can you share an important safety message with residents across your communities, particularly families with children and young people.

When the weather is hot, it's natural for people to want to cool off and spend more time outdoors. Sadly, there have already been a number of water-related deaths across the country during the recent hot weather, including here in Oxfordshire.

Open water can look safe, but it often isn't. Cold water shock, strong currents, hidden hazards and sudden drops can catch people out very quickly, even experienced swimmers. These risks are often underestimated, and every year they lead to serious incidents, particularly involving young people.

With more free time during the summer holidays, it's important we help children and young people understand these dangers and make safer choices.

Our advice is:

- Do not swim in rivers, lakes, quarries or reservoirs.
- Choose safe, supervised places such as swimming pools or lifeguarded areas.
- Never jump or dive into open water.
- Keep back from edges and unstable banks.
- Look out for friends and avoid encouraging risky behaviour.

If you see someone in trouble in the water, your instinct might be to jump in to try and help. But entering the water yourself is dangerous and can put you at risk too.

Instead, remember **Phone, Float, Throw**:

- **Phone** 999 to get help – do not enter the water yourself
- **Float** encourage the person in the water to float on their back to keep their airway clear
- **Throw** something that floats to help them stay above water

You can find [more advice and resources](#) online.

We'd really value your help in sharing this advice in your communities, in whatever way works best locally. It can also help to prompt conversations with children and young people about the risks of open water, particularly during hot weather.

Our firefighters see first-hand how quickly these situations can unfold, often with little warning.

If we all share this message, it can make a real difference in protecting our communities, reducing harm and saving lives.