

COUNTY COUNCILLORS' REPORT

The County Council budget for 2010/11 has been agreed and will include an increase in Council Tax of 2.75% (4.5% in 2005) . This is more than some would have liked, but a 1% reduction equates to something like £2.5million pounds, and if implemented, would lead to some drastic service reductions. The coming few years will be a challenge in terms of balancing the books at County Hall, as the government have postponed the Comprehensive Spending Review until after a general election, therefore leaving local authorities having to guess the levels of funding from government over the next 3 years. Oxfordshire is in a good position financially, as the reserves are strong.

Talking of a general election.....one of the talking points that continues to be popular is expenses paid to elected Councillors and MPs. I have lost count of the time that somebody points a finger at me and tells me I claim too many expenses, and "You've all got your snouts in the trough!" For the record - and all County Councillors expenses can be checked by the public online - I have claimed expenses once in the last 5 years, for a Park and Ride bus ticket from Botley to County Hall. I can claim 40 pence per mile for car journeys on Council business - all recorded and again, online. I have not claimed any mileage since January 2009, nor will I again in this Council term. We cannot expect officers at OCC to tighten their belts whilst Councillors do not. That said, you won't get rich being a County Councillor!

Moving on....I ask residents of Marcham for their experiences in crossing the slip road that goes Southbound onto the A34 at Marcham interchange. Children and pensioners will use this route to Abingdon for school and shopping. Whilst it is not strictly within my division, and is almost certainly the responsibility of the Highways Agency, I will investigate what can be done if improvements are needed. Kindly contact me if you have had problems crossing this piece of road. I have had one complaint already.

The County Council is moving close to secure a new Highways maintenance contract over a longer period with a different management structure. This should mean that we can drive much more value for residents out of the contract and see many more pot holes fixed much more quickly. The contract that is ending now was not my idea of best value, and I have been more than vocal to my Cabinet colleagues over it in the past!

The Public Inquiry on the proposed reservoir moves closer by the day, with submissions of case being delivered to the Inspector. I have submitted my case - spelling mistakes and all!

The next stage in the Newbridge Thames crossing project is for the meeting of Council Cabinet on 20 April to consider a report summarising the public's view from the consultation process. Anyone wishing to speak at the Cabinet meeting needs to apply to Committee Services following the rules laid down. See www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

It is felt by many people - myself included - that a new river crossing at Newbridge without a Marcham bypass would be a backwards step. It would enable the largest lorries to use the A415 all the way from the A34 to the A40 again, thus blighting Marcham. The money for the new bridge is ring fenced for a bridge and cannot be used to alleviate traffic elsewhere at present. If we get a change of government in June and Mr Cameron becomes the Prime Minister with a clear majority, he might like to consider alternative measures for the A415. The residents on the other side of the river from us want road improvements before a new bridge is built. Ed Vaizey MP and myself will continue to press the case for a Marcham bypass.

There has been much made of possible changes to fire cover from Abingdon and Didcot and the coverage for Marcham, Garford, Tubney, Frilford and Gozzards Ford.

April 2010

I attended a fire at Netherton last week in the roof of a thatched house, nobody was injured and the building was saved from destruction, despite being distant from all local fire stations! The fire cover and possible changes will not adversely affect my division, they will enhance it overall. If this were not the case, I would not support any changes. I have had some unpleasant mail - from persons who do not identify themselves - over this issue, but that is part of the job Councilors sometimes face.

Garford Parish Plan is now ready to be viewed by all. What a great job they have done, in charting out their future. Perhaps Marcham will do something similar, it is a lot of work, but all of the community can have a say and share the workload. Give it some thought, OCC and the Vale would be happy to guide Marcham through the process of Community Led Planning.

Happy Easter COUNCILLOR IAIN BROWN OCC

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ED VAIZEY WRITES...

I recently had a chance to catch up about our County Regiment, the Rifles. I suspect not many people realise that we have a County Regiment. If we think of the local military presence, we tend to think naturally of the Royal Logistics Corp at Abingdon, or the bomb disposal expert, 11 EOD at Didcot. But the Rifles are our County Regiment, formed over many years from regiments such as the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry and the Royal Berkshires. The regimental historian, Gary Sheffield, lives locally in Wantage, and he is keen to strengthen the connection between the Rifles and local towns and villages, like Grove. The Rifles are the most successful recruiting regiment in the British Army. One in four cadets wear their cap badge (the bugle). They march at 140 paces a minute, compared to 120 for the rest of the Army. Every day for the last four years, a battalion from the Rifles has been serving in Afghanistan. They have suffered significant loss of life, and severely wounded. The Rifles currently enjoy the freedom of Wallingford. I hope that we can do something in other towns and villages to celebrate their achievements, and recognise the strong and historic connection the regiment has with our area.



On local matters, I have not heard back on how the Anson Trust public meeting went, so if any one wants to get in touch, please do!

ED VAIZEY, MP Wantage and Didcot (Con)

MP'S SURGERY WITH ED VAIZEY

5.30-7.00pm, unless stated otherwise

9 Apr	Faringdon , Pump House
23 April	Grove , Old Mill Hall, Old School Lane
7 May	Didcot , King Alfred Drive Community Centre
21 May	Wallingford , Town Hall
Contact Ed Vaizey MP for Wantage and Didcot by	
Post	The House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
E-mail	vaizeye@parliament.uk
Web	www.vaizey.com
Tel	0207 219 6350

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FUND

Oxfordshire County Council's "Community Support Fund" is a valuable source of funding each year for about 30 organisations. The purpose of the grants is to increase the capacity of small voluntary groups; especially those complementing our aims and objectives: to support and promote strong communities so that people can live their lives as successfully and independently as possible and to provide effective and efficient support to the most vulnerable.

Groups can apply for amounts up to £800 and priority is often given to those with limited funds.

Contact Community Development Officer Brian Conroy 01993 704004 or brian.conroy@oxfordshire.gov.uk for more information.