

## **Report from Cllr David Hingley**

It has now been almost four years since I was first elected to represent Adderbury on Cherwell District Council, and I remain extremely honoured to have been trusted with the task (and privilege!) of standing up for the village's interests at the council, alongside my Lib Dem colleagues Rob Pattenden and Gordon Blakeway. I have also served as Oxfordshire county councillor for Adderbury for the past 11 months, which together with serving as Leader of Cherwell has kept me very busy on behalf of residents. The following are just some of the main high-level matters; obviously, a lot of work 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, or planning issues, and I have been pleased to work on multiple such matters in support of village residents.

### CDC Local Plan

This year saw the submission of a new Local Plan for Cherwell designed to meet modern and future local housing and employment needs, ensure Cherwell meets the targets mandated for us by government while protecting our villages and countryside, and aiming to allocate appropriate levels of housing in the right places to meet local needs, backed by appropriate infrastructure, with green buffers around settlements. The Plan is currently progressing through the various stages of inspection prior to being adopted, with an initial review having taken place. The Adderbury Neighbourhood Plan currently in development will sit alongside the Cherwell Local Plan to form a coherent set of policies for the village and wider area once adopted.

### CDC offices

CDC's move to Banbury has bedded in well and has meant the council is operating from central, modern premises that have earned a high environmental / energy rating in line with the council's operating ethos. The site at Bodicote House has recently been announced as to be sold to the Graven Hill Village Development Company, which while owned by the council operates under its own structures with its own business plan and management. It is hoped that with the sale now in progress a suitable and sustainable plan will soon come forward for developing the site in line with the needs of the area, in accordance with the Cherwell Local Plan.

### Balanced Budgets

Both OCC and CDC have set balanced budgets for 26/27, despite a challenging national picture. In the case of OCC this was done in the face of significant government funding cuts but nonetheless covers essential services like adult social care and SEND, while also investing in valued services such as libraries – including Adderbury library, which I have been delighted to support including through a talk at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary Church House celebrations – as well as 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. A full programme of gully clearance also took place during the year across the county.

With regard to CDC, the council under my leadership has succeeded in setting a balanced budget despite significant last-minute government changes to the council's finance settlement, which threatened to remove £2.335m from Cherwell between the provisional and final finance settlement stages, an unprecedented intervention from government. Following urgent and intense lobbying (including by myself), the government has supplied an Adjustment Support Grant to cover the shortfall in 26/27, however no such undertaking has been received as yet for future years, but we will continue to press the government for proper and meaningful funding levels for our residents. For the 26/27 budget, the administration has been delighted to respond to calls for funding of Banbury Museum, increasing the level of funding proposed in the initial budget, and to protect front

line services such as bin collections as well as investing more in temporary homelessness accommodation and in maintaining our popular health and wellbeing programmes, as well as dedicated investment for our town centres. In short, CDC is very well placed for 26/27 and residents can be sure that their council is being run efficiently and sensibly.

### Local Government Reorganisation

Of course both CDC and OCC are on course for being abolished by the government thanks to its programme of local government reorganisation (LGR). Under current plans, this will see the district and county councils removed by 2028 in favour of a unitary council that will cover all services currently provided by Cherwell and OCC. 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 Cherwell and OCC.

### 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 Adderbury over the past year, as indeed it has been for the past four years. I am grateful for the support of parish council members and of my district council colleagues, and look forward to serving the village into the future.

*Cllr David Hingley*

*CDC and OCC councillor for Adderbury, Bloxham & Bodicote*