

## **REPORT TO WEST HENDRED PARISH COUNCIL SEPTEMBER 2019 FROM CLLR MIKE FOX-DAVIES**

### **Oxfordshire County Council starts planning to replace Kennington bridge**

Oxfordshire County Council has announced that the A423 Kennington Bridge is to be replaced at an estimated cost of around £40m. The bridge and road will remain open for at least two years before construction work starts while design takes place.

Inspections for planned maintenance work to replace supporting bearings to extend the life of the bridge revealed that deterioration was quicker than expected and repairs are no longer a viable option.

### **More charging points to support electric vehicles**

The electric car revolution is set to continue in Oxfordshire thanks to a successful county council bid for a slice of a £37m government fund. Oxfordshire is set to host to two major initiatives to provide more charging points for electric vehicles (EVs)

Park and Charge will see up to 300 chargers installed in residential 'charging hubs' using car parks located in residential areas where properties don't have their own off-street parking.

The second project, VPACH (Virgin Park and Charge), will use existing Virgin Media cabinets to reduce the cost of installing roadside EV chargers and minimise the amount of street clutter needed for power supply.

### **Work to start on Bicester's new 600-pupil school**

Work is set to begin on a brand new 600-pupil school for Bicester as Oxfordshire County Council continues to plan to meet demands for the school places in the county in coming years.

Since 2011 more than 6,000 new places have been created in Oxfordshire secondary schools, including Aureus School and UTC Oxfordshire, in Harwell Parish. Further planned changes in the 2020s – including Whitelands and a new all-through school in Grove Airfield – will see the overall number of school places created since 2011 rise to around 8,000.

Around 88 per cent of children and their parents achieved their first choice of school in Oxfordshire in 2019 despite continued rising demand for places. The county is consistently ahead of national averages for first places being awarded.

### **Radical changes that improve the lives of families are set to be introduced in Oxfordshire**

A pioneering approach that has radically changed the way children's social care operates in Hertfordshire is set to be adopted by Oxfordshire County Council.

The "Family Safeguarding" model has seen the number of children on child protection plans by fall 55 per cent in 30 months in Hertfordshire. Social workers

have been working in small integrated teams centred around individual families in need alongside experts providing specialist mental health, drugs and alcohol, and domestic abuse services.

By taking a “whole family approach” rather than focusing on just the child, families have been able to access the support they need from within that one team of experts. As a result, in Hertfordshire, there’s been a 39 per cent reduction in the number of days children spent in care, a 53 per cent drop in hospital admissions for adults in the families and a 66 per cent reduction in contact with the Police for domestic abuse. Four other children’s social care teams have also been adopting the new approach.

There has been 80 per cent rise in children in care in Oxfordshire from 2011 to 2019. There are now 780 children in care compared to 425. On current trends and without the changes we plan, children in care would rise to around 915 by 2023.

This new approach will offer a way of beginning to reverse those trends.

### **Council seeks out more local foster carers**

Oxfordshire County Council’s cabinet has agreed a £1m investment in its in-house fostering service, which will increase the number of local carers and reduce the number of children who are placed with carers outside of Oxfordshire.

By enhancing the support given and amount paid to foster carers, the county council’s in-house service will become competitive with independent foster care agencies and other providers across the country.

### **Free school transport for disabled young people is retained**

Young people with special education needs and disabilities will continue to be funded by Oxfordshire County Council, following a decision by Cabinet members on Tuesday, 16 July.

A cross-party group of councillors reviewed the service for students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) aged 16 or older to find savings needed by the council in response to reduced government funding.

The council has worked with 14 SEND schools to identify the necessary £300,000 of savings for post-16 home to school transport; removing any current need to change existing SEND free transport arrangements. A separate fund has also been created to provide transport for children to go to after-school activities.