

1. Councils commit to cutting traffic congestion and improving public transport into Oxford

Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council announced bold plans to tackle congestion on all major routes into Oxford and improve public transport connections into and across some parts of the city, particularly the city's eastern arc. (Area outside the city centre that links parts of north Oxford, Marston, Headington and Cowley).

The two councils want to make a real improvement to journey times for commuters and quality of life for residents, including improved air quality, by reducing the number of cars travelling into and around the city. The key points of the 'Connecting Oxford' proposal are:

- Restricting car traffic by introducing additional 'bus gates' (similar to the restriction on Oxford's High Street) across the city to improve journey times for people travelling into and around the city, and so road space can be reallocated to improve walking and cycling routes
- New high frequency fast bus routes connecting neighbouring towns and the Park & Rides to Oxford's eastern arc, which is seeing the greatest growth in employment but is currently less well served by public transport, particularly around the ring road
- New and improved cycle and walking routes, including utilising space created by removing vehicles from the road to provide safe alternatives to driving into and around the city
- A charge for workplace parking provided by larger employers in the eastern arc, which would help fund the proposed transport improvements and create a disincentive to drive to work. Discounts for the new bus services would be available for staff of employers paying the workplace parking levy
- Improved journey times for commuters driving into and around the city as a result of less congestion

More than 60% of all journeys into Oxford are by car, with the trend of car-dependency likely to continue as more jobs are created by the city's thriving local economy. The latest figures show that the number of journeys is on track to increase as predicted by a quarter (25%) between 2011 and 2031 unless steps are taken to reduce car-based traffic.

Poor public transport connectivity to parts of Oxford means some of the area's major employment sites have no direct bus service or connection to a Park & Ride site. Travelling by bus can mean using two or more bus services which results in long journey times. For example, travelling from Witney to the Headington area currently takes 82 minutes on a bus in the morning peak.

Severe traffic congestion is also having a negative impact on existing bus services. Oxford Bus Company has confirmed bus speeds in the centre of Oxford are 38% slower than in 2006, and so has put around one third more buses on the road to meet the timetable.

The combination of traffic restrictions and the introduction of a workplace parking levy create positive incentives for commuters and residents to use other modes of transport, and for employers to reduce the incentive to provide free or subsidised parking for staff. Nottingham introduced a workplace parking levy in 2012 that continues to fund improvements to its local bus and tram network.

Further information: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/connectingoxford

2. Oxfordshire County Council works on action plan to go carbon neutral

Following last week's climate strikes, Oxfordshire County Council has confirmed its commitment to reducing its own 'carbon footprint' to zero by 2030.

The council started a long-term programme five years ago to cut carbon emissions but Councillor Yvonne Constance, cabinet member for the environment, accepts that young people have challenged organisations such as the county council to move faster.

Since the county council motion in April 2019 acknowledging the climate emergency, the council has been working on a new action plan to accelerate the climate action programme to become carbon neutral by 2030.

The council has already delivered an average 6% per year reduction in carbon emissions since 2011 – double its target - but is determined to do more. Oxfordshire County Council is delivering a series of 'green' initiatives; including helping install more solar panels on schools.

Project LEO – local energy Oxfordshire – is another example of partnership working, with the county council joining a consortium led by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, together with the universities and Oxford city council to develop a localised approach to sustainable energy generation and use.

As part of its ‘big switch’, the council is committed to replacing street lights with low energy lighting over the next four years. This will reduce Oxfordshire’s greenhouse emissions from street lighting by 70%. The investment will also include a communications system between streetlights, allowing dimming of groups of lights when they’re not needed.

The council supports a 65-strong network of Community Action Groups (CAG) at the forefront of community-led climate change action. They organise events and projects on issues including waste, transport, food, energy, biodiversity and social justice.

Groups are working to establish community fridges to reduce food waste and share surplus. They run workshops, teaching residents how to repair items, keeping products in use for longer. Working with local businesses, they help them reduce their impact on the environment and set up refill stations for water and detergents to reduce waste from single use plastics.

The county council will report its action plan to full council in December.

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