

**County Council
Tuesday, 11 February 2025**

SPEECHES

6. Petitions and Public Address (Pages 1 - 6)

Attached are the texts of speeches that have been provided to us.

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Petition to Oxfordshire County Council to restore scratchcards for visitor parking in CPZs

In November 2024 the County Council discontinued the issue of paper scratchcards to residents to put in visitors' dashboards, and replaced it with an online system of virtual permits.

While the Council claims this will "better serve residents" in circulated information letters, this change introduces unnecessary complications, excludes vulnerable groups, and creates challenges for enforcement and residents alike. I have yet to personally meet anyone who thinks it is a good idea. It is worse for residents and visitors than scratchcards because:

- Putting scratchcards on a visitor's dashboard is simple and straightforward. Juggling your phone or computer for every visitor is extra hassle, inefficient and risks errors.
- With no physical permit you can't check at a glance if someone is legally parked.
- Visitors may feel vulnerable as there is no physical evidence that they are legally parked, nor accessible online if there is a subsequent query or dispute.
- Residents must remember to track time limits online, extra stress if visitors stay more than 24 hours.
- There is a serious privacy issue - the computer will record all your visitors, personal, professional and commercial - what guarantee is there that this won't be hacked or misused ?
- Elderly and vulnerable people, often those most in need of visitors, will be least able to work the new system - it is discriminatory.
- Parking wardens will need to spend extra time checking cars via their gadgets, slowing down the process. This issue already exists with the removal of visible resident stickers.
- There is an increased risk of visitors being wrongly fined due to inadvertent input errors.
- What happens if the system goes down at arrival time, no permit can be entered, but it later recovers and the visitor is issued a fine. How can one prove it was the system's fault ?

There was no public consultation; only statutory bodies were consulted - several of whom did not respond, and of those that did more were against than in favour. This was only revealed in the recent 'equality assessment', only done last year, not when the policy was first voted without publicity in 2022. This assessment led to a minimal token concession, that effectively only those with **no internet, no phone and no friends** would be still qualify for scratchcards, circumstances almost impossible to fulfil !

With high unhappiness among residents with this change, a petition was set up on Change.org asking the council to think again, with the following wording following a preamble similar to that which I have just outlined:

"We, residents of Oxford, ask Oxfordshire County Council to think again about abolishing the scratch-cards used as visitor permits. Replacing these with online digital permits does not 'better serve residents' but will cause inconvenience, discrimination and frustration. The scratch-card system is not broken, don't 'fix' it with a much worse alternative !"

By Friday evening 2088 people had signed the petition, of which 1332 were Oxford or Oxfordshire residents. Within the city 531 came from OX4, 237 from OX3, 252 from OX2 and 106 from OX1, with 67 from OX5 (Kidlington), 50 from OX13 & 14 (Abingdon and around) with the remaining 77 from the rest of the county (including RG postcodes around Henley). 12 others from Oxford gave no postcode.

I am therefore here to present this petition and ask the council to rethink this decision which is clearly both inconvenient, unpopular and not in residents and visitors best interest. **It would be acceptable to offer residents the choice of scratchcards or virtual permits.** However arbitrarily stopping issuing scratchcards without consulting those directly affected looks like a dereliction of the duty to look after the interests of taxpayers and voters which is surely the purpose of local councils.

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Good morning.

My name is Laura Greatrex and I'm the Labour Candidate for Didcot West.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you briefly today.

My colleague and Councillor, Mocky Khan and I are calling for Hitchcock Way in Didcot to be widened to two lanes, alleviating congestion at the busy entrance to the car park for the Orchard Centre.

This short piece of road is a traffic pinch point and currently causes frequent traffic jams tailing back past the railway station.

This creates delays to buses and car users, generates fumes from idling vehicles and presents a safety concern as drivers heading straight on to Jubilee Way roundabout mount the pavement in frustration to get past the queues for the car park.

Our petition calls for the widening of Hitchcock Way to two lanes approaching from the west. We believe there is ample space on both sides of the road to accommodate the improvement without the need to reduce existing provision for cyclists or pedestrians.

Our concern is that the views of Didcot residents are not being heard by the current Lib Dem/Green County Council administration. Despite this issue being raised in multiple consultations having taken place in 2016/17; again in Summer 2022 and then again in June 2023 – they have not brought forward a solution that works for all road users.

In fact the County Council have ignored the issue of the traffic pinch point and only presented solutions for cyclists, pedestrians and wheelers in the Didcot Central Corridor project. We believe that our approach will benefit all road users not just one group or another.

Our petition is therefore calling for Hitchcock Way to be widened to two lanes alleviating the congestion and delivering for the people of Didcot.

Thank you.

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY RICHARD DREW ON BEHALF OF THE BEECHWOOD ESTATES COMPANY LIMITED TO THE OXFORDSHIRE FULL CABINET MEETING 11.02.2025

I am speaking on behalf of The Beechwood Estates Company Limited who own Grade I & II Listed heritage assets of national and historic importance and land on either side of the B 4009 through the conservation village of Shirburn.

The Company are concerned at the proposed funding provision in the 2025/26 budget recommendation of £11.1m from the fund to encourage and facilitate active travel and improve market towns for the as yet unconsented and now further delayed Watlington Relief Road which if constructed will have a significantly detrimental effect on Shirburn.

The total proposed fund is £15.2m, the provision of £11.1m represents almost 75% of this on one small scheme. The budgeted cost is £19.3m and the ongoing delays of the application will now only increase this cost.

The new residential developments at Watlington amount to 313 dwellings which were consented without any requirement for the WRR and supported by the County Council. We understand that the infrastructure subsidy for the WRR will be £64,000 per dwelling against a national average of £14,000 which cannot be considered "value for money" as required by central Government.

Watlington is not a "Market Town" in the same way as Abingdon, Thame, Wallingford and other towns in the County are. The Leaders budget overview states that the funding for the WRR will "take heavy traffic, including school buses and lorries, out of the historic Watlington town centre freeing residents to walk and cycle safely and improving air quality." This ignores expert opinion that there will still be buses and heavy traffic in Watlington. The proposed WRR has no provision for bus stops/laybys, inadequate cycle provision and there is no air quality issue in Watlington with no exceedances being recorded since 2018. There is an alternative low-cost scheme to improve traffic flow in Watlington which together with improved policing of the 7.5t weight limit would see immediate benefits. This has been ignored by the County and its agents to date.

There is no proposal or realistic expectation that public transport serving Watlington will be improved or increased and no funding from the County.

This expenditure is objected to by the Environment Agency and the County as Lead Local Flood Authority due to its unacceptable risk to the environment. The scheme will make flooding worse.

Furthermore, the scheme is not supported by the County's own Lead Transport Development Management Officer, or the Senior Tree Officer (PES) both of whom state that they cannot support this scheme and request further information as do those external experts acting for the Company and where environmental and ecological surveys have yet to be fully complied with.

The proposed expenditure does not accord with the County's own corporate policies and if approved will result in the County being exposed to further unquantified capital expenditure

The Company request that the Full Council does not approve the proposed expenditure on the WRR and immediately reviews the alternative low cost alternatives.

Thank you for your time on this important matter.

