

**County Council  
Tuesday, 10 February 2026**

**SPEECHES**

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# Agenda Annex

**Petition: Instate a Weight Limit on Hinksey Hill** (presentation by Cllr Linda Goodhead 10.2.2026)

This matter concerns the changes to the Lodge Hill Interchange – the construction of which is now well underway – and the two new slip roads are already appearing.

As soon as these plans appeared in 2019, it became apparent that traffic going north from Southampton heading to Oxford would be able to leave the A34 at this junction, and take a route through Bagley Wood and down Hinksey Hill. This would happen whenever their Sat Navs showed congestion ahead on the A34, which is a frequent occurrence as the traffic builds back from the 50 mph section approaching Botley. We appreciate that there is nothing that can be done about cars choosing to do this, but our concerns are the HGVs on these minor roads.

Oxford Road through Bagley Wood is narrow and undulating. There are no pavements and not even verges in parts. However, it is a recognized Cycle and Footpath route as part of Oxford Greenways. Chandlings Prep School is situated on this road and I am told by the Head that some children do cycle to school. Bagley Wood is now a much used recreation area in the Green Belt, especially since St John College removed the need for walkers to have a permit. Oxford Road, and its continuation as the residential area of Hinksey Hill, are unclassified roads and highly unsuitable as a by-pass route for HGVs.

Safety of cyclists, walkers, and residents leaving their properties, is our main concern. In particular, we already have experience of the BMW car transporters travelling at speed when the A34 is closed.

When the Lodge Hill project was first mooted our concerns were taken to the OCC, and our County Councillor Bob Johnson reported to the Parish that we were to get the weight limit as part of the Traffic Calming measures. We had no reason to object to the planning application. In the intervening years we were reassured that the weight limit would be in place when the new sliproads were opened and that it was fully funded. We have maps of the planned signage dated April 2023 which clearly show the new weight limit.

We also have an email from the Project Manager regarding the Weight Limit, dated May 2023, in which he says ‘the commitment is there from OCC to ensure these proposals are implemented ahead of the construction works’. We were lulled into a false sense of security.

Suddenly, in November 2024, Bob reported that at the latest Briefing from the Officers he was told that there was now insufficient funding for the signage on the A34 as this costing had been overlooked in the budgeting. A shortfall of over £100,000 was mentioned.

Almost everyone we have spoken to agrees with the merits of the weight limit proposal as we are trying to prevent the formation of yet another dangerous Rat Run before it begins.

We ask the Council to look again at the funding for the signage and put it high on their list of priorities. I believe they are looking at ways to make savings. If the weight limit can be instated at the same time as the completion of the new Lodge Hill slip road this will avoid possibilities of yet further funding needs for replacement signage.

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## Agenda Item 8 Budget and Business Planning Watlington Relief Road

The council's Performance And Corporate Scrutiny Committee asked if councillors have been provided with an Options Appraisal that alternatives to a relief road offering better value for money have been considered. Oxfordshire Roads Action Alliance (ORAA) considers the Options Appraisal and decision to progress to Stage 2 was flawed. The council did not carry out a public consultation as required when highway authorities are developing expensive proposals for new roads. The scheme was proposed as a long term solution to air quality problems in Watlington, but the county excluded the most relevant expertise on traffic and air quality at Watlington in its options appraisal.

Low cost alternatives have been put forward as part of the budget papers to consider value for money, including ANPR enforcement of the 7.5t weight limit at Watlington. The council accepts better enforcement of the weight limit is required, a weight limit makes it a simpler process and it has £1.6m for HGV interventions. Low emission strategies to manage traffic have also been proposed that have strong expert evidence supporting their effectiveness. Because neither of these alternatives were properly considered in the Options Appraisal councillors are left without the information on which to base a decision.

Expenditure of public monies would be to improve active travel and market towns. It was justified in this budget line last year to Oxfordshire Roads Action Alliance as removing traffic improves market squares, but Watlington does not have a market square in the way Abingdon or Wantage for example have. The proposed new road would create separation through new residential neighbourhoods with high levels of fast traffic discouraging active travel, and traffic and HGVs will still be in Watlington.

The proposed expenditure would not benefit Oxfordshire's towns, or Oxford. Watlington is classed as a larger village. It is in what the Boundary Commission described as a rural division of the county that does not share the issues of towns. Benefits to active travel are necessarily small in a settlement the scale of Watlington compared to investing in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans. To ensure value for money in initiatives aimed at replacing short internal car trips with walking and cycling, when practical, the Department for Transport requires an urban population of above 10,000. Watlington has planned development of 313 homes to 2041 allocated in its neighbourhood plan. These homes have been granted as standalone developments by the land use planning authority with no objection from the highway authority on highway safety or air quality grounds and with no condition on occupation the county builds a relief road.

The Watlington Relief Road was not meant to cost the council anything from its reserves. The county has 304 parishes and 15 town councils to consider. ORAA believes there are effective and low cost alternatives that the Climate Impact Review confirms would be better for the climate, and that the expenditure now required is unsustainable for a council with many other demands on its dwindling finances.

Thank you for your time.

Debbie Davies Oxfordshire Roads Action Alliance 10th February 2026

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**TEXT OF SPEECH BY RICHARD DREW ON BEHALF OF SHIRBURN PARISH COUNCIL TO THE OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL ON 10.02.2026**

I am speaking on behalf of The Shirburn Parish Council which will be severely impacted by the proposed Watlington Relief Road and who have significant concerns that as Cllrs you are being asked today to approve a budget where you do not have the very clear information about both costs and the sources of funding proposed to be used for delivery.

The process by which “alternatives” were considered in Chapter 3 of the Environmental Statement in December 2023 is not properly evidenced and appears to be influenced by subjective bias and the scoring system adopted is a flaw in the ES work.

The scheme that was taken forward from the options was for an “edge road” a description that is no longer valid. The community severance created by the construction of a relatively high standard link between new developments and the remainder of Watlington undermines the objective of “facilitating active travel”

To date Oxfordshire County Council have spent in excess of £4m on a highway scheme that does not have planning consent and for which no detailed design has yet been undertaken yet it is stated to be a scheme that is fully funded. You will note that £3m has been added to the cost of this scheme in the 2026/27 budget that you are being asked to approve today.

This has increased the current cost of the proposed Watlington Relief Road to £22.3 m which equates to £8,286 per head of the Watlington population

Cost inflation for complex road construction schemes such as the proposed Relief Road is currently 8% per annum.

Cabinet has not been asked to make any formal decision on this project since its meeting on the 21st September 2021 at which the Portfolio Cabinet member “agreed to keep Cabinet informed should any risks emerge in the funding of the project. That was five years ago.

HGV's are already contravening the 7.5 t “except for access” weight restrictions through Watlington and where cheaper and arguably more effective measures to the Watlington Relief Road are available. At the Shirburn Parish Meeting held on the 19th January 2026 Cllr Higgins advised that the weight restriction would be getting ANPR camera enforcement but not until the autumn, potentially after Oxfordshire County Council Planning & Regulation Committee will have been asked to consider the planning application. The Cllrs will be aware that South Oxfordshire District Council has removed Watlington as an Air Quality Management Area.

Shirburn Parish Council requests as a minimum that if unsecured funds are approved today by the Full Council that this decision is subject to a project spending review prior to any further expenditure but that as Cllrs you do not have sufficient information to approve this scheme and that it should be removed from the 2026/27 budget.

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Hello, I am Steve Bolingbroke and I am a Parish Councillor in Watlington.

Those of you who know me will know that I have been a long standing critic of OCC's management of the Watlington Relief Road project.

However, since last November we have seen a step change in the support from the political leadership and the engagement by senior Officers. Our confidence that the road will finally be delivered is growing and we thank the current administration for that.

The most important sign of OCC's commitment is today's budget proposal. The increase is a response to our request that the project be fully funded to meet the inflation increase caused by the delayed start and the enhanced climate change mitigation measures required by the Environment Agency.

To remind everyone, Watlington has been campaigning for this road for 60 years.

We voted overwhelmingly in a referendum to accept 400 houses in return for the road. 400 was more than our allotted number and represents a 40% increase in the size of our town.

But it was a price we were willing to pay to get the traffic heading to the M40 out of our historic town centre.

Much of the road has already been built by the housing developers and they are paying £3m towards the rest of the scheme.

The need for the road is clear to anyone who knows South Oxfordshire and it has had cross party support since the beginning. I registered to speak at today's meeting when I saw the amendment proposed by the Green Party to cancel the project.

I am not sure the Greens understood the strength of feeling about the relief road but over the weekend I think they found out.

I congratulate them on their good sense in withdrawing the amendment and welcome their promise to visit Watlington. I will be delighted to show them why a relief road is the only solution to the town's traffic problems. I will also show them the work that the Parish Council is doing to promote Active Travel routes, deal with flooding and decarbonise the town.

I have listened carefully to the previous speakers. They have been long standing opponents of the scheme and I admire their dogged persistence in the face of overwhelming public opinion. Neither of them, nor the people they represent, actually live in the town.

But you really have to have some guts to complain about the escalating cost of the scheme when you have made the vast majority of the objections over three public consultations, have lobbied statutory consultees to enter objections and have retained a KC to challenge any decision.

If you are really concerned about the public cost, accept that you have lost and let's get the road built.

I urge the council to support the democratic decision of the residents of Watlington, pass this budget and, when the time comes, grant planning permission for this vital road.

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