

Report from County Councillor Ian Corkin

2021/22 has been another very busy year. Local government has been on an almost constant emergency footing for some time now; Brexit planning morphed into the largest civil emergency in 80 years as Covid impacted all aspects of our life. In common with all my parishes, Launton residents responded magnificently and the work of local government was made immeasurably easier because of community volunteers, who did everything from providing friendship, groceries, medicines and of course, manned the vaccination centre and allowed the NHS to roll out the programme that has ultimately given the vast majority of us our freedoms back. Now, we are actively engaged in responding to the crisis in Ukraine, and once again community volunteers are leading the way. The arrival of guests from Ukraine represents the third refugee crisis in as many years, the other two being refugees crossing the channel and those evacuated from Afghanistan. In all cases, our area has willingly played its part, ensuring all of the necessary wrap around services are available to help ensure the best possible outcome. I am also very happy to help visitors with council related matters as they settle into the community.

Locally, the area remains under immense development pressure. I recently circulated a list to the PC of all of the major projects I am engaged in and I hope my track record of standing up for our rural villages is well known. Protecting those things we value most will remain a key priority. I have also continued to work on a range of other issues, including flooding, highways, maintaining bus provision, EW rail, the A41 corridor review and development pressures, as well as confidential casework on behalf of individual residents. I was also happy to assist the Launton Village Players with a grant towards equipment to help them rehearse in safety during the pandemic. Indeed, I am committed to helping communities recover from Covid and I still have funds available to help with local schemes that help bring people together.

As for the wider County picture, the landscape has been changed by the election results last May. The county council is now controlled by an unstable Liberal, Labour, Green alliance, which is allowing the wilder margins of that group to set much of the agenda and in the last 12 months we have seen this translate into some very odd decisions: .

- Their first decision was to introduce gender neutral titles
- Then they raised councillor allowances, particularly for cabinet members
- They have incensed local farmers and food producers by introducing a Vegan only catering policy, claiming lower food miles, then delighting in pineapples, mangos, and kiwi fruit flown in from around the globe
- But at least that's consistent with a cabinet member flying to a climate conference in France that could have easily been reached by train or indeed virtually
- They've committed to gender neutral toilets in all county council buildings, without any idea how much it will cost
- Promised to restrict housing developments and then voted for 380,000 new homes per year at their national conference
- They routinely ignore public consultations and petitions
- Have plans to ban buses from some park & ride bus lanes, allowing only bikes to use them and forcing busses to join the queueing traffic
- Under resourced the village 20mph initiative, so there are now huge backlogs and delays
- Increased car parking charges 3 fold in some locations
- Borrowed £88million this year alone, at a cost of over £5million per year in interest to council tax payers
- Maxed out the 22/23 council tax, making it one of the highest increases in the UK at 5%
- And will introduce a work place parking levy and expand the road charging zone in Oxford

I mention these things because it is impacting on the decisions OCC make and the levels of service that residents can expect. Tax, borrow and spend, underwritten by the hard pressed council tax payer, is in my opinion, no way to run a county council, whose substantive responsibilities remain Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Highways.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the PC and all of the volunteers who do so much good in our community.