

Chair's Report. Nov 1st, 2023

Good evening,

I see one of my roles as Chair of this Council as representing the group and the village at various forums and making sure our voice is heard on important matters. With that in mind, I attended the "OCC Town and Parish Council Charter Summit" on October 26th. (I attended virtually) To be honest I wasn't sure what OCC wanted but it was made clear that they intended to produce a Charter for the county that would set the tone of how all levels of government within the county would work together. Hence the two key questions which I want to share with you. The responses given are from a range of Chairs – in my group all but one from villages of various sizes.

The first breakout question was **"What does stronger partnership working look like?"**.

Responses:

- what partnership?
- start with respect for Parish Councils and the work they do, know your parish councils,
- OCC communication is dire as it is either one way, top down, or intermittent (answering queries),
- be timely with responses and that doesn't include a 14 day notice that you have received our email.
- Partnership is a working together of equals – not currently happening

Second breakout question: **"How can we enhance democracy?"**

- Listen, engage, action, then people will acknowledge the leadership and vote.
- Do they read the Neighbourhood Plans across the county and hear the voice of the people through them No. Our plans represent what people want and need. Your plans should reflect this. Stop spending on vanity projects that cause people to disrespect you - ie. vegan food only.
- Villages and towns have two huge issues: Planning and Infrastructure (and dogs!). We deal with our various districts on planning. Infrastructure is elusive and parishes don't feel they have a voice in designing or coping with them: A34 is a case in point. Who is going to solve this problem?
- Several parishes mentioned that they knew the folk in their area would not bother to vote in an election of any sort over the next few years. There is disengagement because they don't see the effect of expressing their concerns or much help in sorting out problems. There is a sense that we are "done to". Many examples were given from how S106 money is managed and actually paid out, 20mph in villages roll out (we were promised consultation) and even when we gave our request, something different happened, (significant and clear example of ignoring the will of the parishes).
- Many consultation documents take two or more years to develop, they come to us with sometimes hundreds of questions and a six week turn around. Often we spend

hours responding and find that our voice has not been heard at all. Some chairs have stopped responding. Other issues: the time it takes for a problem to be solved, easily one year for a simple problem.

We had a good group leader whose job is: Performance and Insight Leader, of the Communications, Strategy and Insight Team – an example of a job function that we did not know exists or exactly what the remit is.

I'm usually pretty positive but must admit, there was strong consensus from, in particular, villages.

Participants in our group agreed that the work of the elected councillor for one's area made all the difference. (Thank you Nigel!)

ONPA (Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance)

- There are now 90 NP groups across Oxfordshire
- Our group is developing a NP training session for Chairs of PCs and how to use it when replying to planning apps
- Monthly meeting was about NP Reviews, various district issues (ours being the reply to the draft consultation document)

Chair's Group

- As you know I meet with a group of Chairs from other villages. Each of us has ongoing issues that are not being resolved. After over one year of pressure, we have a face to face with Yvonne Rees, outgoing CEO of CDC, next week. I'm particularly interested in talking to her about enforcement of planning conditions with developers and communication with Parishes. I.e. there is so much correspondence between applicants and CDC and none of it reaches us i.e. a recent decision between OCC and CDC to approve the removal of a verge in North Lane to provide parking – in contradiction to the NP.

Stop the Arc

- This group has not disappeared but is, in fact, keeping an eye on the formation of a group under a new name but with the same purpose to develop a heavily populated ARC between Oxford and Cambridge

Key task - with the recent resignation of Colin Rosser as a Parish Councillor, I will now focus on finding volunteers to stand for the PC. Please share any ideas.

Note: FOOD BANK -this Saturday, Nov 4th at the shop

D Bohm
Chair