

Emergency Meeting of Parish Councillors and Clerks – One Oxfordshire Proposal

I attended this meeting called by Cherwell District Council on 21st March 2017. About 50 councillors and Clerks were present. The meeting appeared almost unanimous in support of Cherwell's opposition to the plan. The reasons given were these:

While reform may be needed this is not the right one.

The reason for the proposal is that Oxfordshire CC is effectively bankrupt: this is not entirely their fault, since they provide a high proportion of statutory as opposed to discretionary services (eg social services, child protection). They have already cut all discretionary activities to the bone (roads, libraries, child care etc) and raised council tax to the maximum.

Their aim is asset stripping, to take over all assets of the District Councils and strip out all discretionary services in these, in order to fund their deficit.

HIGHER TAXES AND REDUCED SERVICES: LESS DEMOCRACY

The result will be the loss or diminution of all discretionary services provided by Cherwell.

Since council tax will need to be unified across Oxfordshire, and Cherwell pay the lowest rates, our taxes will go up.

Government will be centralised in the city of Oxford, which is inaccessible from north Oxon. I suggested moving the offices to Chipping Norton, which raised a laugh.

Decisions will be taken centrally by councillors who have no interest in the north. We shall not be able to support local issues such as the Horton Hospital.

It is not true that there will be long term savings, once the assets are used up. Oxfordshire has a proven level of incompetence in financial matters.

Cherwell has maintained the same precept for eight years, largely due to its sharing of services with South Northants, which would cease, and cause consequent problems for our neighbours. Cherwell has a healthy balance. North Oxfordshire DC has similar arrangements with Cotswold, Cheltenham and Forest of Dean. Oxford City maintains its opposition for other reasons.

We are three District Councils opposed to two (South, Vale of White Horse); it is suspected that these have changed their views because they belong to an enterprise zone, and believe that extra government money will flow to them, to the detriment of the north.

Oxfordshire CC conducted a deeply flawed and rushed survey: nevertheless 74% of individuals and 39 out of 48 organisations opposed their plans.

The final decision will be taken by the Secretary of State for Local Government; for him to agree a change 'a broad level of support' must be demonstrated. Please oppose this change, by writing to your MP, to the Secretary of State, Sajid Javid, and by signing Cherwell's petition before 1st April at

<https://change.org/p/stop-plans-for-a-unitary-authority-in-oxfordshire>

Oswyn Murray, Chairman of Sibford Gower PC