

## What the new coalition leading Oxfordshire has planned over the next four years

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PLANS to dual the A40 between Oxford and Witney could be 'reviewed' by the new coalition of Liberal Democrats, Greens and Labour who have replaced the council's former Conservative leadership.

The Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance has set out ten shared goals for its term of leadership, the first of which is a commitment to 'tackle the climate emergency through rapid decarbonisation, proper accounting of carbon emissions and ambitious targets, as well as supporting climate resilience'.

It is unclear yet how the new administration's agenda will play out, but the council's new leader has said plans to dual the A40 between Oxford and Witney will be reviewed, with the aim of adding in a train line alongside it. Liz Leffman, the new Lib Dem leader of the council, said: "We need to look at what the positives of the project the previous administration put together are. One of the things we would like to see is if it is possible to incorporate a train line between Witney and Oxford into the plans; not to build it, but to make it possible in the future."

The alliance led by Ms Leffman, formed after nine days of negotiations following the local elections results count on May 9, has agreed common terms based on the manifestos of the Greens, Lib Dems, and Labour. She said: "The main difference from the last administration is this is very much an alliance between three different parties that are bringing their own interests and skills to the table." The new council leader added there would be a 'greater emphasis' on working with other organisations, like district and parish councils, as well as with Oxfordshire's sciences and technology businesses to tackle climate change 'locally, nationally and internationally'.

Liz Brighouse, the council's new Labour deputy leader, said there were also plans to reform how the council ran its adult and child social care offerings, the largest areas of spending for the council. On adult social care, Mrs Brighouse said 'social enterprises or co-operatives' could be created as new models for offering social care in people's homes, instead of using the services of large, expensive companies.

She also said that the new administration would look at how a youth service for Oxfordshire could be revived after being cut during the austerity years. Mrs Brighouse said: "There are serious issues around SEND needs and children's care. "There is a real mental health crisis for children at the moment."

The Labour group leader added she thought there would be a close working relationship with the Labour-run Oxford City Council. In the past, there have been suggestions of bad blood between the formerly Tory-run county council and Labour-run city council, but Mrs Brighouse contested this.



Liz Brighouse, Pete Sudbury and Liz Leffman, the group leaders of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance.  
Picture: Andrew Gant

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She said: "I don't know if there ever has been a strained relationship. "I work very closely with Susan Brown at the city council and speak to her most days. Her ward is in my division.

"I think we will be working with them as we always have done to make sure our residents, who are also their residents in the city have got the best services in the ways they need them."

Pete Sudbury, the county's Green group leader and new cabinet member for climate change delivery and environment, added the council may seek to change its way of making decisions. This could mean the Conservatives, who no longer lead the council, could still have a say in how it is run.

He said: "We have all agreed there is a need to review the way the council works so we can have some kind representation from the Conservatives as well. "A lot of people voted for them and their voices have that democratic legitimacy and their ideas are certainly worth listening to."

The Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance commands a total of 39 seats on the council, with the rest divided among the Conservatives (22), Stefan Gawrysiak of the Henley Residents Group, and independent Les Sibley.



The A40 near Eynsham. Picture: Damian Halliwell.

At a meeting on Tuesday, (19 May 2021) the new council administration was officially sworn in, alongside the new council chairman and deputy chair and scrutiny committee members.

Oxfordshire County Council is an 'upper tier' local authority with responsibility for roads, social care, libraries, education, and strategic matters in the county. It works alongside district councils, like Oxford City Council, which manage rubbish, housing and leisure centres.

The election results revealed on May 9 saw the Conservatives lose control of the council, after either ruling it alone or in coalition with other parties for most of its history. There have previously been Lib Dems in cabinet positions, but it is believed Ms Leffman is the first of her party to lead the council.

## **The shared goals of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance**

1. Tackle the Climate Emergency through rapid decarbonisation, proper accounting of carbon emissions and ambitious targets, as well as supporting climate resilience
2. Tackling inequalities and providing opportunities for everyone in Oxfordshire to achieve their full potential
3. Prioritisation of wellbeing – improved outcomes for residents and improved air quality and access to libraries, cultural facilities and the arts
4. Review and reform of the social care system to prioritise end-users and carers with a focus on co-operative and community provision of social care, helping those who want to stay in their own homes
5. Increased investment in an inclusive, integrated, county-wide active and sustainable travel network fit for the 21st Century to improve choice and reduce car journeys across the county
6. Improved access to nature and green spaces for all communities, and landscape-scale nature recovery across the county
7. Supporting all our children and young people to achieve improved health, wellbeing and educational outcomes; improved provision for children with additional needs; all decision-making to have regard to impact on young people and future generations
8. The creation of a resilient local democracy where decisions are devolved to the lowest possible level and residents are meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect their lives
9. Support for local employment and businesses, working with partners to make Oxfordshire a centre for green and sustainable technologies through a local 'Green New Deal'
10. Responsible management of the Council's finances, reducing wasteful outsourcing.