

PARISH REPORT NOVEMBER 2017

OXFORD'S NEW WESTGATE CENTRE OPENS

TRADERS have welcomed a bumper weekend at Oxford's new Westgate as thousands of people packed the shopping centre on its first weekend in operation. Shops and restaurant chains said interest from customers had exceeded expectations, with business brisker than at any other opening they had experienced. Some 60 out of 125 shops and restaurants at the £440m shopping centre opened on Tuesday 24th October, with others opening since, and thousands of people took advantage of their first opportunity to have a look around. Councils, transport operators and Westgate have been working closely on a coordinating travel plans aimed at making it as easy as possible to visit the Westgate and minimising journey times into the heart of Oxford. The best way to travel into the city centre is to use the park and rides or public transport wherever possible. New variable message signs have been installed on the outskirts of Oxfordshire to update people on space availability on the park and ride sites nearby and to direct them there. There are also temporary signs within the ring road which give directions, for those who have chosen not to use the park and rides, to city centre and Westgate. There's more information on travelling to the Westgate at: <https://westgateoxford.co.uk/your-visit/getting-here>

THE RACE IS ON FOR DRIVERLESS CARS

News that ground-breaking transport technology being pioneered in Oxfordshire has won a share of a £51million government prize has been welcomed by council leaders. Oxfordshire is home to Science Vale UK and some world leading science and technology companies who are blazing a trail towards more energy efficient and road safety. Organisations based in the Science Vale are working on pioneering projects such as autonomous cars and smart traffic management systems needed to support people travelling around the county. Remote Applications in Challenging Environments (RACE), which is based at Culham Science Centre in Oxfordshire, is to receive £6.9m from the Department of Transport towards their £10million project to set up a range of different test areas mimicking increasingly realistic city driving environments, where automated vehicles can be tested before being taken onto public roads. They are one of a number of companies that Oxfordshire County Council works with to drive progress on future transport technology.

COTSWOLD LINE

I attended the Task Force Board that is working towards improvements to the Cotswold line including Hanborough station and train frequency giving more choice for residents to access Oxford & London. There are representatives from the transport authorities covering the line along with Network Rail, Great Western Railway and user groups. The aim has to be to have a service matching that of Oxford Parkway.

FIREFIGHTERS

Across fire and rescue services women are significantly under-represented. In Oxfordshire, only 32 out of 530 operational firefighters are female. Chief Fire Officer Simon Furlong has made it a priority to diversify the service, which also has just three firefighters from an ethnic minority background. Taster days for females interesting in joining the service have been set up. Here they will be able to learn first-hand what it is like to be a firefighter and meet some of the women already working for the service.

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/taster-day-women>

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APPLY ONLINE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES

Applications for children due to start primary school in September 2018 can now be made online. Families with children born between 1 September 2013 and 31 August 2014 are urged to visit the primary school admissions pages on the county council's website to find out how to apply for places for next year. The council still accepts postal applications but recommends families apply online where possible, as this helps speed up the applications process. It also means families receive an automatic response confirming their application has been received and can be quickly notified if further information is needed. Those who apply online will also receive an email on allocation day, 16 April 2018, informing them of the outcome of their application. Postal application forms are available from all Oxfordshire schools and from reception at County Hall in Oxford.

HELP SOMEONE GET ONLINE – BE A DIGITAL HELPER AT YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

Oxfordshire County Council recently launched a campaign to recruit 'digital helpers' in libraries to boost the confidence and skills of those who need extra help to get online. Volunteers able to give up just a few hours a week are being sought at branches across the county to provide one-to-one support for people with little or no experience of using computers or the internet. The aim of the campaign is to help people:

- access services online – including council services
- access employment or training opportunities
- become more independent
- reduce isolation

To find out more or to sign up as a Digital Helper visit: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/digitalhelper

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