



Matthew Barber
Police & Crime Commissioner
for Thames Valley

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner
The Farmhouse, Thames Valley Police HQ
Oxford Road, Kidlington, OX5 2NX

01865 541957
pcc@thamesvalley.police.uk
www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk

Cllr Liz Leffman
Leader of the Council
Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall
Oxford, OX1 1ND

7th November 2024

Dear Liz,

I am writing to raise my concerns about the plan by Oxfordshire County Council to reduce street lighting across the county. I have serious concerns about these proposals which I understand will be agreed at Cabinet later this month.

My understanding is that the Cabinet intends to proceed with these proposals without any wider public consultation, and I have grave concerns that both the plans themselves and the manner of their introduction will present a significant risk to both public safety and public confidence.

The local commander for Oxfordshire, Chief Superintendent Ben Clark, has already written to you on behalf of Thames Valley Police to formally object to these proposals. He has presented a range of evidence which demonstrates what many of our residents will feel to be common sense. Namely that badly lit streets can exacerbate both the risk of crime and the fear of crime.

It is of course true to say that some other councils have explored similar proposals, but these have not been universally successful. I understand for example that Cambridgeshire County Council reversed their decision and Derbyshire County Council cancelled the introduction of their reduced street lighting due to public concerns. The College of Policing, RoSPA and the IRAP Road Safety Toolkit all recognise the safety benefits of adequate street lighting.

One of my greatest areas of concern is for the safety of women and vulnerable members of the public, particularly on a night out. It is interesting to note that you are not currently proposing (although perhaps this is still to come) changes in town centres around the night time economy. This seems to suggest that you do recognise the benefits of street lighting to keeping people safe and making them feel safe – but only in certain locations. We know that both the fear of crime and the actual risk is not limited to town centres itself. Sadly people can become victims on their route home from a night out. These changes will mean that people will feel less safe walking home from a night out, or getting a bus back to their own town or village only to find that the last part of their journey will be in darkness.

It appears that unlike some local authorities that have invested in technology which would allow them to turn lights back on quickly in response to increased crime, public concern or in response to a particular incident, this will not be an option in Oxfordshire. Once the Cabinet decision is implemented there will be no opportunity to respond to specific concerns raised by the public or the police.

Following the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021 the Home Office launched StreetSafe to allow members of the public to anonymously raise safety concerns about public spaces. The single biggest cause for safety concerns raised by members of the public in Thames Valley is inadequate street lighting.

Thames Valley Police has been leading the way nationally in the work to protect women, particularly in the night time economy, with operations such as Project Vigilant. The unilateral dimming or switching off of street lighting may jeopardise not just the confidence that has been built up, but also the safety of women in our county.

Of course there are other areas of potential criminality that are of concern. Overall crime has fallen across Oxfordshire, but I want that trend to continue.

There has been excellent work by the police both through enforcement and prevention to tackle knife crime in the county. Knife enable crime has continued to fall in Oxfordshire over the last year, and earlier this year I attended a meeting organised by Oxford City councillors to look at how to continue the excellent joint work to continue to drive down crime. Creating an environment where people feel less safe at night risks putting some of those achievements into reverse.

One of the biggest concerns from the public, that has an impact on local authorities as well as the police, is anti-social behaviour. There are many examples where improved lighting has been found to deter or reduce anti-social behaviour. At a time when I have asked the Chief Constable to increase neighbourhood policing resources to help tackle such concerns, it cannot be helpful to reduce street lighting across the county.

Naturally I understand that the County Council remains under financial pressure, as do police budgets. Yet in recent years I have continued to invest, along with the districts and city councils, in improved CCTV to help deter and detect crime. I fear that your plans may limit the effectiveness of this investment. Lights are due to be dimmed in areas that currently have CCTV, and if new locations are identified it could be difficult to reactivate street lighting in those areas.

With all of these considerations in mind and along with the evidence highlighted by the police I would urge the Cabinet to reject the proposals and as a minimum, to carry out a proper consultation and to have adequate regard to the safety and fears of women on our streets. I remind you that crime prevention is not purely a matter for the police and under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 there is a statutory responsibility on the council to work in partnership to reduce both crime and the fear of crime, and hope you will consider these obligations in coming to your decision.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Barber
Police & Crime Commissioner