

SODC Monthly Report – Cllr Caroline Newton

July 2020

COVID-19 response

SODC continues to work closely with the other local authorities in Oxfordshire to address the exceptional challenges of COVID-19.

Contact visits by the Community Support Hub

In the past couple of weeks, SODC officers in the COVID-19 Community Support Hub have made 269 visits to check on the welfare of the 269 vulnerable residents across both districts that officers had been unable to reach by phone or email. They were able to speak to 161 on the doorstep and left letters where possible for the rest.

Council tax support available for residents

Approximately 6,000 residents in both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse have missed the latest payment on their 2020/21 council tax bill (excluding those who currently receive council tax support).

SODC is writing to these residents to make them aware of the outstanding payment and to encourage them to get in touch with us if they're experiencing financial difficulties. There's a number of options available to residents that may be struggling to pay their bill such as changes to payment arrangements, direct debit instalments, or applying for council tax support.

Above all, the message to anyone who is struggling to pay remains that they should contact our council tax team as soon as possible on to discuss the support available:

The number that they should call is - 0345 302 2313

New High Street Funding

South Oxfordshire has been allocated £125,160 by the Government to help our high streets move into the next phase of the lockdown.

The guidelines require the funding to be used for marketing or education campaigns rather than on physical changes, and SODC, in consultation with town and parish councils, is currently considering how it can best be applied here.

Virtual meetings

Since the start of lockdown, all council committee meetings have taken place virtually, on a platform that has excluded potential contributors from outside SODC. The council is working on providing a system that will allow the general public, town and parish

councils and other external organisations to contribute directly to those committee meetings. Should tests be successful, SODC is hoping to implement the new system within the month.

Planning

Chalgrove Airfield

SODC has received a formal, outline planning application to develop the site of Chalgrove Airfield from Homes England. The details can be found in the Planning section of the SODC website under the reference P20/S2134/O. I am seeking confirmation from SODC that it will extend the consultation period so that residents and parish councils will have time to consider and respond to the application.

Harrington

Last month, I coordinated a letter to be sent from John Howell MP and Conservative councillors from SODC and OCC, to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, underlining our opposition to the proposal to build 6,500 homes at Harrington.

Other Proposals

In recent weeks a number of other large proposals have come forward (not yet as formal applications) which would have major impacts on Haseley Brook ward and the wider district. These include solar farms at Harlesford (between Tetsworth and the Haseleys) and Cornwell (between Wheatfield and Stoke Talmage); a 200 acre warehousing distribution centre at Waterstock, on the border of Great Milton parish; and Reading Borough Council's plans for a third Thames Bridge and a 'Northern Relief Road' north of the Thames in South Oxfordshire.

Planning procedures

The SODC Administration has used COVID-19 emergency powers granted to the Council Chief Executive Officers to amend to the Council's Constitution relating to Planning.

Of particular concern has been the diluting of parish councils' rights to refer applications to the Planning Committee and for them and applicants to address the Committee directly.

The Administration maintains these changes will help clear a back-log of cases, but Opposition councillors are concerned that the changes emphasize speed at the expense of democracy. The SODC Conservative Group, together with a number of parish councils, has been lobbying the administration to reverse this change as soon as possible.

We have confirmed with the Secretary of State that it was not his intention that the emergency powers should be used in this way.

Planning enforcement update

SODC Planning Enforcement officers continue to adapt the way they work remotely to provide their service given social distancing requirements. Since Easter the team has been carrying out limited social distancing site visits, while recognising local situations where occupiers may be self-isolating or shielding.

New case requests for investigations, and expectations of the Planning Enforcement service, have now returned to pre-Covid19 levels. However, as a result of the ongoing challenges, the team cannot currently provide our 'normal' level of service but is working hard to balance outstanding and new casework.

Local Plan 2034

The Local Plan (the development strategy for the District) continues to progress through the examination stage. Virtual Hearing Sessions will start at 10.00am on Tuesday 14th July and will be conducted via Microsoft Teams.

Version 2 of the [Programme \(82.8 KB\)](#)  is now available which includes a list of invited participants for each session. A [Guidance Note for Participants \(84.3 KB\)](#)  has been produced by the Inspector and covers arrangements for the Hearings.

More information about the local plan can be found on the SODC web site at

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2034>

Oxfordshire Plan 2050

Along with other district councils, SODC is helping to prepare the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, which will set out the long-term plan for the whole county. The joint team has commissioned an Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment (OGNA), which will set out how many new homes will be needed in the county from now until 2050.

A formal consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Regulation 18 Stage 2 plan will take place in early 2021. Residents will be able to comment on the number of new homes needed and the broad locations for development up to 2050.

Recognition for our volunteers

Last month we were celebrating all the amazing work by volunteers in our districts and there's now an opportunity to get them formal recognition. If you would like to nominate someone you think has made an exceptional contribution to the response to the Covid-19 crisis in the UK please do visit: <https://www.gov.uk/honours/nominate-someone-for-coronavirus-work>

Waste and Recycling - Reminder

Collections for this Ward have been maintained at a near normal level of service during the CoVID19 crisis and now this is easing we do not expect to see any significant disruption. During exceptionally hot weather over the summer crews will be setting out earlier from time to time and SODC advise that waste bins are put out for 6:00AM on the day of collection when this happens. Details are posted on the SODC web site and twitter, but the safest thing is to put them out the night before where possible.

The collection crews are finding that there is an increasing trend in recycling bins being contaminated with non-recyclable items such as food waste and nappies. Where this happens, the bin will not be emptied and an explanatory note left.

Hopefully you saw our press release on Last month about contamination and our online recycling quiz - as a gentle reminder to residents to recycle responsibly.

It seems everyone loves a quiz - we have been delighted with the public response – in less than two days since it was launched it has been shared across social media and **more than 1,200 people** have taken part. We will be analysing the responses to see which items people are confident about and which they are unsure of and target later comms to help people put the right thing in the right bin.

If you haven't yet tested your recycling knowledge then [click here to take the Green Recycling Bin Quiz](#)