

SODC Monthly Report – Cllr Caroline Newton, Haseley Brook Ward

June 2020.

CoVID-19 Matters

Cases of Covid-19 were first confirmed in Oxfordshire in early March. As of 2nd June, there had been 2,074 confirmed cases within the county (of which 365 were in South Oxfordshire – Public Health England). The Centre for Progressive Policy suggested early in May that Oxfordshire was one of the lowest risk areas based on several health indicators, ranking 139 out of 150 areas measured.

While the full economic effect of lockdown upon Oxfordshire will not be known for some time, claimant count data from the DWP showed that between March and April the number of claimants of unemployment benefit within the county rose from 6,655 to 12,240, an increase of 5,600 (or 84%). This current peak in claimants is considerably higher than that seen at the height of the financial crisis (9,635 in May 2009). SODC has not furloughed any staff and has no plans to.

The Community Support Programme

In mid-to-late March, South and Vale District Councils established a Community Support Programme (CSP) to help to provide support to vulnerable people. The CSP consists of 80+ members of staff who help to co-ordinate the councils' response to the pandemic. It takes telephone calls, e-mails and other requests from (or on behalf of) residents in need of assistance and puts them in contact with volunteers and organisations in their local area – this community-led support has been supplemented by additional council staff who have been carrying out urgent requests for the provision of food parcels and prescriptions. The councils' dedicated call line for support changed its open hours on 30th May. Opening hours are now 9am – 6pm Monday to Saturday – in line with the opening hours of the national shielded helpline.

Business Support

I have received a number of requests for help from local businesses which have had issues with their applications for the Government funded support grants and loans, and am pleased to say I have been able to quickly bring these to a successful resolution. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you need help with this.

Discretionary Business Grants

The new discretionary grants scheme for small businesses went live at the start of June. Again, let me know if you need help navigating this.

Grants

At the beginning of the crisis, a decision was made to change the rules of the scheme to make available £2000 of the Grant Pot to each councillor to enable us to help in emergencies where a small amount of money was needed. I have given grants to support community food parcels and to help fund a village COVID-19 newsletter. My colleagues have made contributions to food banks, small local charities supporting vulnerable residents, hi-vis vests for volunteers, support for community day centres . . . and many others!

Please let me know if you know of any group or individual who, because of COVID-19, is in urgent need of a small grant.

Planning

Planning Committee

After a pause at the start of lockdown, Planning Committees have resumed – on Microsoft Teams. This is a relatively new technology and as it needs to be secure and meet a number of legal protocols our usage is still developing. For the time being, SODC is restricting public and Parish Council representations to written submissions before the meeting.

Whilst the council needs quickly to find a way of ensuring PCs and the public can take part live, and that people without access to the right technology can be included, I think a move to virtual, recorded meetings might be a really positive development.

Harrington

No further information, but we continue to monitor the position given the concerns expressed by the few residents who have raised this as a potential issue.

Local Plan 2034

LP2034 continues to progress through the examination stage and the Inspectors first set of questions have been answered. Virtual Hearing Sessions will commence at 10.00am on Tuesday 14th July and will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. An outline programme for the hearings, his “matters and questions” document, and some guidance about the process. He has allocated 16 days across 4 weeks. Full details and how to watch and/or participate are on our web site at:

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

Council tax reminders

In mid-June SODC will send reminders to residents who have overdue unpaid council tax payments, excluding residents who receive Council Tax Reduction benefit – for example those who are in receipt of Universal Credit. One of the purposes of these reminders is to help identify people who are struggling to pay so we can explain the options available to them.

SODC is urging people to let the Council know asap if they are unable to pay.

Parking charges to be re-introduced

From Monday 8 June SODC will re-introduce parking charges in council car parks, with full enforcement starting 15 June.

Users must display a ticket, including for the free charging periods. Normal rates will apply. SODC will also start issuing new permits and re-issuing permits to anyone who's permit would've expired during the lockdown.

NHS staff and care workers who display a national COVID-19 parking pass can continue to park for free - to claim a pass, they need to email carparks.southandvale.uk@sabagroup.com, with proof of their employment.

Waste and Recycling - Reminder

As previously advised, at the start of the CoVID-19 crisis we had very real concerns about the collection of waste and due to the virus' potential impact on the Biffa crews, to what extent collections would continue.

There has been some disruption with the crews on the main collection vehicles being reduced from three to two due to the need for some isolation and social distancing. But on the whole the service has been maintained well. Please continue to report missed collections in the normal way:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/your-recycling-and-waste-collections/missed-collecti>