

## **SODC Monthly Briefing - February 2022**

**Cllr Caroline Newton, Haseley Brook Ward**

### **Finance**

Council will meet on Thursday 17 February to consider the 2022/23 budget proposed by Cabinet. The budget proposes an increase in £5 for an average band D property - so residents in Band D properties will pay £136.24. District Councils can raise tax by no more than 2% or £5, whichever is greater.

### **Climate Action**

A new Climate Action Plan (CAP) has been agreed by cabinet which aims to ensure SODC meets its goal to be carbon neutral by 2025. Staff will receive training to ensure they are aware of the impacts of carbon emissions and the council will move to digital-by-default approach to meetings to help cut down on vehicle emissions. The council will also support local efforts to tackle the climate emergency.

The CAP will ensure that a focus on environment is central to all of the council's activities - though I share the doubts of many members of the council that it will be able to ensure or measure progress towards the carbon-zero target.

### **Covid Grants**

Whilst previous business grant schemes have ended, a new Omicron Hospitality and Leisure grant has now gone live. It will remain open until 18 March 2022. The amounts awarded will range from £2,667 to £6,000 depending on rateable value of the property.

A new discretionary Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund will go live soon for businesses excluded from earlier grants (tho not those with a nil rates bill).

In the meantime, fraud checks continue to be made - in accordance with Govt instructions - on the £500 isolation and other grants distributed by SODC.

### **Planning**

#### Strategic sites:

Grenoble Road: a formal pre-application process is due to start and a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) will be drawn up within the next few months

Culham Residential Site : a PPA/pre-app is underway and a formal application is possible before the end of the year.

Culham Science Centre: Masterplan to be submitted to inform future applications

Berinsfield: Pre-app likely to begin Autumn 2022

Chalgrove: expecting a revised application - no timescale to date

Northfield: a PPA is being prepared.

#### Enforcement

There are 423 open cases logged, with 17 new cases in January, and 202 cases waiting to be allocated. 16 cases were closed

The Enforcement Appeal relating to Toll Lodge Farm, Tetsworth was dismissed - ie determined against the applicant.

Last year's boom in applications for planning permission seems to have eased somewhat: January saw 327 applications, a drop of 22% from January 2021.

The first of a series of Government consultations on supporting regulations was launched in January. The *Consultation on Biodiversity Net Gain Regulations and Implementation* will inform how biodiversity net gain will be applied to the Town and Country Planning Act

## **Business Development**

The Government-funded Virtual High Streets project continued to progress through contract negotiations and was expected to be signed off in early February. It will consolidate independent traders across the district on a single virtual marketplace platform that will allow the public to support their high street through online shopping.

## **Housing**

The housing team continues to see a significant increase in approaches from residents at risk of homelessness compared to last year. Emergency accommodation placements have also increased following the introduction of the Government's 'Protect and Vaccinate' program for those at risk of rough sleeping from 20 Dec 2021. As of 31 January, 5 households were in emergency accommodation in South Oxon.

## **Rough Sleeping**

At the end of January, **zero** rough sleepers were recorded in both South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse since 2013 and for the second month in a row. This reflects the intensive work of the housing team to identify households at risk of homelessness and prevent rough sleeping happening in the first place.

if you see someone rough sleeping please call the SODC out of hours telno 01235 422410 or Street link on 0300 500 0914.