

SODC Monthly Briefing - June 2021 - Councillor Caroline Newton

COVID-19 Grants

SODC is responsible for administering COVID business grants - and since April 2020 has distributed a total of £42.8 million in central Government grant payments to businesses. Recently this has included:

Restart Grants - The Government announced a new set of restart grants and rate reliefs in the Spring budget. So far SODC has paid £2.5 million in Restart Grants to local businesses.

Additional Restrictions Grants - This is a further Government-funded discretionary scheme for ratepayers not covered by the budget provisions (eg events companies). 1600 businesses in South Oxfordshire have been offered Remobilisation Grants; all payments are expected to have been made by 30 June.

Test and Trace Isolation Grants - The Government has extended the scheme to June and widened the scope of eligibility. SODC has distributed £94,000 to 188 applicants (just over 50% of those who applied).

Counter-fraud - SODC has been supporting fraud checks on applications to all the grant schemes. Whilst most businesses that initially failed the Government's National Fraud Initiative have subsequently been found to be genuine applications, SODC has passed two cases to solicitors to consider criminal proceedings, and several suspected fraudsters have undergone interviews-under-caution.

Financial support is also available for residents who have been hit financially by the pandemic. Residents are asked to get in touch with the Community Hub team at SODC where they can get help in the form of advice, supermarket and fuel vouchers or through the direct payment of energy or water bills. Contact the Hub on 01235 422600 or email communityconnectors@southandvale.gov.uk

Waste Collection

General services have been disrupted by a shortfall in staff in Biffa, and the knock-on effects of May's Bank Holidays. Biffa is advertising for HGV drivers to strengthen its team.

Garden Waste services have been further disrupted by the transfer of the management of service from Capita to an in-house SODC team. There is a backlog of 1500 applications for Garden Waste bins in South and Vale district councils. It is estimated that it will take 6-8 weeks to clear the backlog.

Planning

Congratulations to Tetsworth Neighbourhood Plan team: the Tetsworth NP was adopted in May - along with 6 others in South Oxfordshire following a successful referendum. There are now 26 'made' neighbourhood plans in the district, with many others under development. Meanwhile, SODC has submitted an application to take part in a Government pilot on a simpler approach to NDPs.

The Planning and Enforcement teams are dealing with record numbers of applicants. In May they received 390 new planning applications (an increase in 48% on May 2020). Enforcement has 377 open cases, which amounts to 57 per officer (against a normal average of 30).

Homes England (HE) withdrew its application to build a new settlement on the site of Chalgrove Airfield following a meeting with SODC and the Civil Aviation Authority on 7 May. But this is not

likely to be the end of the development: it is expected that HE will submit a new application towards the end of 2021 or the start of 2022. I am continuing to work with communities in Haseley Brook to mitigate the impact such development would have.

Oxford-Cambridge Arc - News is expected soon from Government on the first phase of its Spatial Framework (which will indicate the scale of the expectations for growth in the region). The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is also due to publish its spatial strategy shortly - and officers and officials are working to ensure the two visions are aligned.

The applications for solar farms at Harlesford and Cornwell (Tetsworth and Great Haseley) are still under consideration, and the applicants have been asked to provide more information. There is likely to be further consultation, and the applications will be referred to planning committee. Work on a likely application to build a third solar farm near Milton Common is less far advanced: an environmental impact assessment Scoping Opinion has been submitted.

Car parking

Changes in charging in SODC car parks went live on 1 June. All town-centre car parks have the same charging period (0900-1700 Mon-Sat, and 1000-1700 on Sundays) with one-hour free parking during the day. There are new waiting limits in Chinnor's High Street car park. Half-priced parking permits will only be available for electric vehicles.

The exception is Goldsmith Lane car park in Wallingford which is part-owned by Wallingford Town Council (0900-1700 Mon-Fri, 0900-1400 on Saturdays, and 2 hours free parking Mon-Sat).

And finally...

SODC's home improvements agency has a charitable organisation called the Mears Foundation that offers grant funding and volunteer support to projects and organisations that work to support asylum seekers, the elderly and homeless people, and that tackle issues such as social exclusion, isolation, poverty, mental health and violence. Do get in touch with me if you think your project or organisation might qualify.

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