

SODC Monthly Report - July 2021

Cllr Caroline Newton - Haseley Brook Ward

## **Planning**

### Local Plan 2035

The application by the pressure group, Bioabundance, for a judicial review of the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 has been rejected by the Court of Appeal. This was the final appeal for the directors of Bioabundance.

### 5 Year Housing Land Supply

The threat of speculative development is hanging over South Oxfordshire District following the ruling last week by an independent planning inspector that SODC is failing to maintain its Housing Land Supply.

The ruling related to an application to build a retirement village in Sonning Common, but has implications for the whole district. The Inspector said: "Although the Council maintains there is a 5.08 year supply, the evidence before me indicates a housing land supply equivalent to 4.21 years. The implications of not having a five-year housing land supply are significant. Not only is there a shortfall, but it also means most important policies for determining the application are automatically out-of-date." This includes not only the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035, but also the Neighbourhood Plans that are part of it.

The ruling has serious implications for South Oxfordshire as it now makes it difficult - or even impossible - for SODC to refuse applications for development even if they are not sites allocated in the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plans.

In its official statement SODC has said it is "disappointed", and has reiterated that it believes it has a 5.33 housing land supply, and that it can demonstrate that at any future planning appeals.

Hopefully it will be able to do so - but nonetheless we can expect further problems like this in the forthcoming years because of the delay in the adoption of the Local Plan: because of that delay, work on the major sites in the Local Plan has been seriously pushed back. The subsequent Judicial Review brought by Bioabundance added a further 6-7 months delay. The Local Plan had been carefully constructed to bring forward housing at the correct speed to maintain the 5 Year Housing Land Supply. Work on the earliest sites is about 18 months late - and this may have serious implications on the council's ability to head off speculative building in the future.

I try to avoid bringing politics into these Monthly Reports. But as residents we have every reason to be angry that we are in this situation. It is the direct result of policies pursued by the administration at SODC - and is precisely what officers and other experts repeatedly warned might happen.

I am particularly concerned about the risk of Harrington coming forward, and am trying to get clarity on the implications this insecure situation would have for that.

### Water Planning

Water Resources South East are continuing their work to ensure security of water supply over the next 50-100 years. Many options are on the table, including the possibility of a reservoir south west of Abingdon.

### Solar Farms

The applications at Cornwell and Harlesford are still open. SODC planners are waiting for more information and are likely to refer to the Planning Committee.

Land North of A40 between Milton Common and Tetworth: submission of the Environmental Impact Assessment is awaited.

### Chilterns AONB

The Government published proposals this week to extend the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a national designation which gives greater protection from development to some of the most beautiful parts of this district.

The area could also benefit from the new Farming in Protected Landscapes programme which will provide funding for farmers and other land managers in National Parks and AONBs to make improvements to the natural environment and improve access on their land.

## **Finance**

### Business Rates Review

The Treasury has published its consultation for its Business Rates Review. It can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/hm-treasury-fundamental-review-of-business-rates-call-for-evidence](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/hm-treasury-fundamental-review-of-business-rates-call-for-evidence)

### Councillor Grants

The Councillor Grant Scheme is likely to open 12 July-24 Sept, with a second round 15 Nov-4 Feb. I will have a total of £5000 in grants for schemes across the ward this year. Do get in touch if you think your organisation might like to apply. In particular, please let me know if you might want to apply for the later grant period: that will help me decide whether to hold back money from the first round.

The Capital Grants scheme - for large, capital projects (improvements for village halls, playgrounds etc) - will be distributing at total of £320,000 across the South Oxfordshire district. It is likely to open in early Oct for 6-8 weeks.

### COVID Grants

SODC continues to manage the payment of COVID business grants. The total grant payments since April 2020 has been £45.3 million.

Test and Trace Isolation Grants: SODC also manages the £500 Government grants to people forced to isolate. It has received 199 successful applications (55% success rate) and paid a total of £99,500.

## **Services**

### Waste

SODC is working through the backlog of new customers waiting for garden waste bins caused by difficulties in bringing the management of the service back in-house. At the time of writing there was a backlog of 2,500 customers.

### Electric Vehicle Charging Points

SODC is working with other local authorities across Oxfordshire on a strategy for creating a network of charging points across the county. Part of this is to install points in council car parks - the "Park and Charge" project which is due to be complete by March 2022.