

SODC Monthly report - September 2021

Cllr Caroline Newton - Haseley Brook Ward

Community Grants

The SODC Councillor Community Grants are now open for applications. I have a sum of £5000 to allocate to community groups and parish councils in Haseley Brook ward. See this link for more information and the application form. Do get in touch with me if you are considering applying for your organisation.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/grants/councillor-community-grants/>

Planning

5 Year Land Supply

You may recall that two successive planning appeals have recently concluded that SODC has lost its 5 Year Housing Land Supply. This is a situation which seriously weakens the force of the Local Plan and leaves the district open to speculative planning applications. The first of the appeals related to Little Sparrows in Sonning Common. SODC understands that the High Court is expected to hear its case for a review of Inspector's Planning Decision on 9th of December.

Enforcement

Alongside its role in considering planning applications, SODC is also responsible for investigating suspected breaches of planning rules (often brought to its attention by parish councils and residents). In early December, in order to deal with a backlog of cases, SODC adopted a new Planning Enforcement policy. It will now 'triage' cases and will only look into and enforce the most serious ones. Some councillors are concerned about where this leaves people worried about neighbours' building developments, and the Council has agreed to review the policy after 6 months.

Solar Farms

The proposal to build the Cornwell Solar Farm near Stoke Talmage was given permission at the planning committee in October. The Harlesford Solar Farm application (Tetsworth - S of the M40 near Great Haseley) will be considered at the planning committee on 15 December. Consultations are continuing on Dodswell Farm (Tetsworth - N of the M40 at Milton Common)

Waste Collection over Christmas

Just a reminder that waste collections over Christmas change due to the Bank holidays. Information is available on the SODC web site or alternatively via the BinZone App for smart phones (which will keep you up to date on waste matters all year round).

Domestic Abuse

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are working with local charity Reducing the Risk of Domestic Abuse to highlight the issue. They have stencilled messages in district council car parks as part of the '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence', an annual international campaign which began on 25 November with White Ribbon Day – the International day for the elimination of violence against women, and ends on 10 December with Human Rights Day.

The stencils ask one of three questions:

- Do you feel like you are walking on eggshells?
- Are you afraid of your partner?
- Are you worried about someone you know being controlled?

and also include the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service's Helpline number **0800 731 0055** (Mon-Fri 10-6 Sat 10-4) and Reducing the Risk's website reducingtherisk.org.uk, where people can go to find help and advice.

The councils also have several other schemes and projects that help residents' safety and ensures they have access to support should they need it, including Ask for Angela, Safe Places and 'Safe Journey, Safe Destination'.

COVID business support

SODC is managing the distribution of Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG) to local businesses hit by COVID restrictions. Start-up Grants of up to £15,000 are available to businesses set up since 1 April 2021 and Hardship Grants of up to £15,000 for businesses in travel, tourism, wedding industries, nightclubs, theatres, events, breweries, wineries and English language schools.

In South Oxfordshire, £4.2 million of Government funding has so far been distributed in 3 rounds of the ARG.

Housing and Homelessness

South Oxfordshire has a target of 280 affordable homes to be built in 2021/22 funded by the Oxfordshire Growth Deal (by central Govt) and developers' commuted Section 106 sums. In the first half of the year, 168 were completed.

The number of rough-sleepers in the district continues to fall - one at the end of November. There were 5 households in emergency accommodation.

Community Hub supports residents with calls and supermarket vouchers

We've seen an increase in requests for support from our Community Hub team. For the month of November, we've handled 217 enquires resulting in 11 food parcels and 56 referrals for further support. We've also called 242 residents to offer help and made 163 follow up calls to those who had received a test and trace payment as a result of needing to self-isolate. A total of £17,500 in supermarket vouchers has also been given to support residents self-isolating.

Household Support Fund has opened

The government's Household Support Fund (HSF) is now open in South Oxfordshire, offering a very important lifeline for households who may struggle to afford life's essentials over winter. The money will primarily be used to help pay for food, energy, and water bills for residents, but other costs can also be covered.

The council is using the HSF to offer support to residents through a voucher scheme. The fund is open to any resident who is struggling and can't afford basic household essentials.

To find out about the scheme or seek help residents can call Citizens Advice on 0808 278 7907.

Free parking days return for the run up to Christmas

Don't forget to spread the word – we're helping shoppers buy local this Christmas with the return of our popular free festive parking days in council-owned car parks.

We provide the annual free parking days to encourage people to shop locally for Christmas presents and to catch up with friends and family in our great pubs, cafés and restaurants during the festive period. This year it's even more important to help to support local businesses following the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Free parking in South car parks is available on the following days:

- Didcot – Mondays – 6, 13 and 20 December
- Goring – Saturdays 4, 11 and 18 December
- Henley – Fridays 10, 17 and 24 December
- Thame – Saturdays 4, 11 and 18 December
- Wallingford – Thursdays 9, 16 and 23 December

On the above days there's no need to display a ticket, however maximum stay times will still apply in specific car parks – more details on this at southoxon.gov.uk/parking