

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT from CLLR CAROLINE NEWTON

March 2019

SODC Budget

The SODC budget was approved at Full Council on 14 February.

SODC' element of the Band D council tax for 2019/20 will be £121.24, an increase of £5 from 2018/19, an increase of 4.3%.

The budget-setting has taken place in a tough economic environment for local authorities in which our funding from Government has been reduced dramatically. This increase should allow us to maintain our range of services, with no diminution in quality. However the financial pressures have led us to reduce our Community Grants budget from £800,000 in FY 18/19 to £500,000 in FY19/20. Watch this space for information about what kinds of grant will be available and how communities can apply.

Infrastructure

The Chancellor's Spring Statement included a welcome commitment to funding long-awaited road-building in South Oxfordshire. The joint bid from SODC, Vale of the White Horse and Oxfordshire County Council for Housing Infrastructure Funding has resulted in £218 million from central government for major transport schemes in southern Oxfordshire to help deliver homes in Berinsfield, Culham, Didcot and Harwell.

They are:

- A new river crossing at Cuxham
- A 'Didcot Science Bridge' on the A4130 - going over the railway line and the Didcot A Power Station site
- Improvements to the A4130 from the A34 Milton Interchange
- A Clifton Hampden bypass.

Waste

South Oxfordshire has recently been confirmed to be the second best recycling local authority in the country. Last year, we recycled or composted 63% of all our waste.

As a council we are very proud of this record. I'm the SODC Cabinet member responsible for waste, and I am very aware that it's the result of the commitment of our residents, council officers and of our contractors, Biffa, who are responsible for collecting the waste from our Green bins (which goes to Edmonton to be recycled), our Black (or 'Grey') bins (which is incinerated at Ardleigh to create energy), our Green Food bins (which goes to the anaerobic digester at Crowmarsh), and our Brown bins (which is composted at Crowmarsh).

To help you manage your own household waste, check out the Binzone app (available free from the App store) which tells you which bins are due out this week; and the new recycling wheels which help you check which items go in which bins. They're available from libraries across the district.

Officers hold Biffa to very high standards, and we aim to ensure that our residents receive excellent service. Any complaints should go to waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk or to me (caroline.newton@southoxon.gov.uk)

You can now recycle crisp packets, notoriously difficult to recycle because of the composite plastic they contain, a part of a national campaign set up by Walkers in which SODC is taking part. Collection boxes are available at the moment at the Council's office building in Milton Park and at the Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot.

Food Hygiene

One of the critical - but often un-noticed - functions of SODC is to ensure the safety and cleanliness of food businesses. Our food hygiene inspection team works hard with the food industry in the district to maintain and increase the standards, and the vast majority of food establishments here have good levels of compliance. 66% of businesses have a Food Hygiene Rating of 5 or 'Very Good'.

However, we respond harshly to restaurants which put their customers at risk, and recently prosecuted a restaurateur in Wallingford whose restaurant our officers had twice found to be infested with rats. Shomosta Majumdar, who owned the Anokhi restaurant in Wallingford was fined £960, ordered to pay the council's costs (£4,232) and banned from participating in the management of any food business. This was the first time a food business operator in South Oxfordshire has received such an order.

Council Tax Prosecutions

We have also been pursuing residents who fail to pay Council Tax.

In February, 7 residents of South Oxfordshire were fined after failing to return information relating to demands for unpaid Council Tax.