

## **District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, June-July 2020**

I do hope you are all managing during this really worrying time. While we can all agree there have been benefits in terms of less pollution of air and noise, for many of us it has been miserable, scary and lonely, and for many families and groups of friends they have lost someone dear to them. I offer my sincere condolences to anyone who has lost someone to Covid-19 or an issue related to this pandemic.

### **Coronavirus response**

The newly established Community Hub at SODC has been extremely active in supporting vulnerable residents over the past couple of months. Activity levels have now started to reduce and are much lower in recent weeks, which very much reflects the way that local groups have established strong support networks for their own communities. **The Hub's new opening hours are 9am to 6pm, Monday to Saturday and closed on Sundays.**

As you can appreciate, these tasks are new to many of the staff at SODC, and some of the technical systems have had to be redeveloped to cope (e.g. the business rates system is set up to take money in from local businesses, not to send funds the other way). All of these new tasks also had to be absorbed at the same time as Council staff were being moved to home-working, having to deal with their own personal situations (home-schooling, self-isolating etc) and maintaining existing services such as planning and waste collection.

### **Business Support Grants**

17<sup>th</sup> June was the deadline for businesses to apply for the latest discretionary grants. Whilst the number of applications has steadily been increasing as the deadline approaches, as things currently stand it looks like we may still have some money left. If that remains the case after the closing date, we will look into running a short, second round of applications. In the meantime, businesses should go to South and Vale Business Support website for guidance, help and advice:

[www.svbs.co.uk](http://www.svbs.co.uk).

### **Local Plan**

I have asked the Inspector to speak at the Examination in Public in sessions addressing Grenoble Road, Culham, greenbelt, spatial strategy, infrastructure, Didcot Garden Town and Berinsfield. I am currently working through all the new documents added since submission of the Plan in March 2019 and writing statements for each of the sessions outlining my objections and issues. The first session is on

14<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and will run for four weeks, online. Many people have questioned whether this should be still be going ahead online in a national emergency, including me. However, as we know, the government supports this Local Plan process being completed by December 2020 and John Howell, MP has indicated his support for the Examination in Parliamentary questions. I have asked that it is live streamed and have heard that it is their 'intention' that it will be -it could hardly be said to be 'in public' otherwise, even if it is recorded and made public later.

## Planning Applications

Just to recap from my last report, planning committee meetings are now taking place online, and a new system for considering applications has been set up for six months, when it will be reviewed. The new system is as follows:

- If Parish Councils object to a **Minor** application, a planning officer will contact them to explain the likely recommendation and seek to resolve their planning concerns, but can determine the application, **unless the ward members calls it in**, in which case it will go before Head of Planning + Chair+ Vice Chair+ Ward member to resolve, and they will decide if it should go to planning committee or not for a decision.
- If Parish Councils object to a **Major** application it will go to planning committee for a decision if the planning officer recommendation is for approval.
- '**Other**' applications (householder) e.g. extensions is unchanged - do not go to planning committee if the parish/town council objects, **unless the ward member calls it in**, or the planning officers decides it should go to committee.

The statutory time limits remain unchanged as 13 weeks for major development and 8 weeks for all other types of development (unless the application is subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment, in which case a 16-week limit applies).

The public consultation period for an Application is 21 days (from the date the letter/notice is posted), and if there is a significant change to the Application following amended plans, a further public consultation period, usually 14 days, is undertaken. The Application can be called in to a Planning Committee by a district councillor with planning reasons up to 28 days from registration.

## **Adapting our roads to accommodate safe cycling and walking for social distancing**

I and my fellow Cycle Champions across Oxfordshire sent a second open letter to Cllr Constance at Oxfordshire County Council regarding Oxfordshire's first tranche of emergency active travel measures:

*We are the cycling champions for the City of Oxford, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire. While we welcome Oxfordshire's moves towards responding to the Covid-19 crisis and the reduced use of public transport and the need for people to give each other space, we are writing to urge the County to take more ambitious and effective measures and to do so quickly. We wrote to you on 6 May calling for urgency and a month later, and following the announcement of 5 June, we are repeating our call.*

*The Department for Transport will provide funding only if it makes a material change to the amount of space available to people walking and on bicycles. The measures announced so far amount mostly to the maintenance of existing cycle lanes, including vegetation clearance and line repainting, and to some creation of modal filters on some side streets mostly in the city. This is not in the spirit of the DfT instructions and nor will it create the space we need for people using active travel as the schools return and shops reopen.*

*Other parts of the country have already put in place pop-up lanes to make space for people on bikes and foot.*

*We need urgency before motor traffic builds to previous levels. We are offering to work with the County to create immediate and ambitious measures in our districts.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Cllr Louise Upton, Walking & Cycling Champion, Oxford City Council*

*Cllr Dan Levy, Walking & Cycling Champion, WODC*

*Cllr Eric de la Harpe, Walking & Cycling Champion, VOWH*

*Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Walking & Cycling Champion, SODC*

There is also a website called [www.widenmypath.com](http://www.widenmypath.com) where **you can submit a suggestion** for improvements to be made to an existing pavement or cycle path. Apparently, it is monitored by OCC, so worth using!

## **Car Parking Charges re-introduced**

With the gradual re-opening of shops and other facilities, car-parking charges have been reintroduced from 8<sup>th</sup> June in SODC-owned car parks. This is necessary as the Council was already not covering costs

of running the car parks and so will go some way to restore some of the Council's lost income. **NHS staff and care workers who display a national COVID-19 pass can continue to park for free.** To claim a pass, they need to contact their employer who will issue a permit to park in council car parks.

To avoid having to touch the payment screen make sure you download the Connect Cashless app – [connectcashlessparking.com](https://connectcashlessparking.com) and pay online instead (if you have a smart phone).

### **Oxfordshire 2050**

This is a county-wide strategic plan being developed for infrastructure and development in the county and it is worth contributing your ideas on how you would like to see Oxfordshire's future for living, working, connectivity and climate change -

<https://www.oxfordshireopenthought.org/>

As always, please contact me if I can help you in any District matter:  
01235 799489 or email [sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk](mailto:sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk)