

District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, Aug-Sept 2020

Coronavirus response

The number of referrals we're making following calls to the Community Hub continues to fall. In the last week (week up to 18th Aug), we made just one referral following an urgent call from someone unable to provide themselves with enough food. This is the latest in an ongoing trend, which is to be expected – in July the number of referrals was down by 40 per cent on June.

In relation to Covid infection rates, South Oxfordshire compares favourably to the other Oxfordshire districts, but in Oxford the rate has been rising slightly recently. This changes from week to week of course, and it is important to keep abreast of changes in regulations about what we can or cannot do.

Local Plan

As many will have heard, the Inspector (Jonathan Bore) gave his initial responses at the end of the Examination and indicated he accepted ALL the major large sites in the draft Local Plan as sound and legal. Councillors spoke at all the sessions, pointing out the many flaws and suggesting modifications. How many major and minor modifications are required is still to be seen. The council officers were forced by the Secretary of State's Direction to present the Plan to the Inspector and defend it.

I accompanied the Inspector on a visit to Culham Science Centre (as Chair of Culham Parish Council) to provide 'balance', as the developer rep and UKAEA were there too (it is a secure site so he could not attend alone). Culham and Clifton Hampden residents organised a small demonstration.

The next steps are for the Inspector to release his interim report, which will then be open to consultation to the public and then he will issue a final report and send to the Council. The Secretary of State's direction stated:

"...I direct that South Oxfordshire District Council: 1) Progresses the Plan through examination and adoption by December 2020...."

So, he is directing the Council to adopt it.

There is a short period after this (21 days) where it can be challenged in the courts.

Housing Supply

Here is the latest information on the national requirement for each District council to provide a projected minimum 5year housing supply (oddly named the 'the housing Land supply').

The latest annual statement based on planning permission data, site surveys and input from developers was published in July and shows that the district has a 9.15-year housing supply as of 1 April 2020 (so well over the minimum required supply).

A separate statement was produced relating to the draft Local Plan. This calculates the requirement based upon the draft Local Plan's housing numbers and shows a 5.35-year housing supply as of 1 April 2020, which would come into effect if and when the draft Local Plan is adopted.

So, despite some people's comments to the contrary, there is less protection from 'speculative development' if/when the draft Plan is adopted. Of course, there are

there things to consider in appeals of planning permission, for example the age of the polices in any Plan, not just the supply. But the higher the numbers of housing required, the more likely that a local Council is to be in breach of this requirement. The Council leader sent a letter to the Secretary of State requesting this condition be scrapped, but the letter she received in reply refused to consider this.

Our housing supply statements are on this webpage: <http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/housing-supply-statements>

‘Planning for the Future’ government consultation

The government has started its consultation to overhaul the planning system and reform the way development is allowed. The government’s stated aims are to streamline processes, achieve community engagement early in the process and increase the use of technology in consultation and provide interactive maps. It suggests the reforms will drive our economic recovery.

There is a lot of discussion in the press about the proposed reforms, but you can read the consultation paper, link below, and get your comments to the Government by the deadline, 29 October 2020.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf

Despite the government’s scrapping regional planning back in 2010 (when Eric Pickles was the Minister) because it was ‘too centralised’ this new system will impose housing numbers on local areas with even less wriggle room than we have now.

Assets of Community Value (ACV)

Here is a summary of how an ACV works:

- A nominating groups contacts SODC to nominate a piece of land or building
- We review the nomination and make a decision on whether or not it fits the criteria and is supported by sufficiently robust evidence – if it does, we’ll list it as an Asset of Community Value
- Once an asset is listed, if its owner wants to sell it, they must notify us of their intention to sell
- From that date, eligible community groups have six weeks to notify if they want to try to raise the funds and make a bid to buy the asset
- If they notify us within that six weeks, they then have a moratorium period to raise the money to buy the asset – this moratorium is six months from *the date the owner stated their intention to sell*
- During the six-month moratorium, the seller can sell to eligible community groups (should they choose to) but not to anybody else.
- Once the six-month moratorium has elapsed, the owner can choose to sell the asset to whichever interested party they choose – whether that’s a community group or a third party. Community groups **do not** have the option of first refusal and the owner is under no obligation to sell to a community group at any stage.
- ACVs last for 5 years only
- Since the regulations were first introduced and first ACVs were listed in 2014, case law has demonstrated the need to have much more robust evidence to support a listing, and we have strengthened our guidance to reflect this.

We have lots of information about nominating and selling an ACV including some great downloadable infographics of the nomination process on our website

Corporate Plan

We had an incredible response to the survey on our draft Corporate Plan– with 930 people filling in the survey.

We are currently analysing the comments, which will help us finalise the plans. The plans will then be approved through our democratic processes (Cabinet vote, Scrutiny committee and Council vote) this autumn.

Big response to the lockdown leisure survey

We have already received a great response to the lockdown lifestyle survey which launched 11th Aug. So far, nearly 950 people have completed the online form.

This is great news as a high feedback rate will provide us with a much better understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on our residents and a really good basis to work on new initiatives to keep residents active, healthy and happy.

If you haven't already done so, please go here: https://survey.southandvale.gov.uk/s/LockdownLifestyle_HowActiveAreYou/

The closing date is Tuesday 8 September.

'No more raw sewage in the River Thames'

SODC's recently created role of Thames Champion, Cllr Jo Robb, has written a letter to neighbouring councils and user groups inviting them to work together to stop raw sewage from being dumped in the River Thames and its tributaries.

Cllr Robb's role as Thames Champion is to encourage sustainability and improve access to the river so that everyone can enjoy the River Thames. The ward councillor for Woodcote and Rotherfield, took on the new role in June to tackle water quality concerns and enhance the biodiversity and cleanliness of the river system in the district and beyond.

The council is investigating ways to obtain Bathing Quality Water status for stretches of the Thames in South Oxfordshire, and asking to work with other councils and local river user groups to campaign for the removal of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) that can discharge untreated human waste into rivers and streams during heavy rainfall or floods.

Car Parking Charges

We have agreed to implement two changes aimed at ensuring that parking fees will continue to cover the costs of operating the car parks, including public toilets, over the long term:

- prices in all charging car parks are to rise by 20p;
- the all-day fee in Edinburgh Drive car park, Didcot and Wheel Orchard car park, Goring will increase from £3.40 to £5. This is similar to the rates in the neighbouring Network Rail car parks and so should help to free up more spaces in the town centre for shoppers.

These are the first price increases to be introduced in 13 years and reflect the annual increase in costs of running the car parks. These measures will be implemented in the coming months once a public notice period has concluded and new signage is ready. The council expects to have these revised charges in operation before 1 December 2020.

There will be a public consultation later this year on some **other** potential changes to parking. The council will ask people to comment on a number of options which will form its new parking order and determine how it operates its car parks across the district.

These options include:

- Standardising the charging hours across the district so that all areas are treated equally
- Introducing Sunday parking fees
- A full review of how permits work to ensure they are allocated appropriately, depending on the size and location of the car park
- Offering discounted permits for users of electric vehicles
- Introducing limited waiting period to address parking issues in the Chinnor

The council will consider all comments before finalising and introducing the new arrangements in 2021.

Cllr Rawlins letter

Cllr Leigh Rawlins has written a letter to Alok Sharma MP about events management companies being overlooked by the government's business grants and extended rate relief.

All Council and Committee meetings are all still going ahead online

There is now the opportunity of public participation at the beginning of any meeting, as there is in 'live' meetings.

Electoral Roll – yellow letters!

Please look out for the yellow letter which you may have already received from the district council – these started to be sent out from the start of August. These are 'Canvass Communication Form sent to every home requiring the residents to check and confirm the details of everyone over the age of 16 that lives in their property. This is something many local authorities need to do by law each year in order to ensure the electoral register is up to date. The letters explain exactly what occupants need to do - it is very important that residents read it carefully and follow the instructions to confirm any changes, by visiting householdresponse.com/southandvale – they will need the two-part code on the yellow letter to do this. Or you can post the letter back with any changes indicated.

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