

## **District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, June 2021**

### **Local Elections**

The marathon set of local elections was run safely in this area by SODC's Legal & Democratic team, with the vote count taking place over four days at Abingdon's White Horse Leisure Centre. The outcomes of the various polls are a new Police & Crime Commissioner, Matthew Barber (Conservative), and a new group running Oxfordshire County Council, called the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance, a partnership between the Liberal Democrat, Green and Labour groups. This is the first time in over 130 years that the Conservative group has found itself in opposition.

Several SODC Councillors from all parties are also OxonCC Councillors including Robin Bennett, elected as County Councillor for all the parishes in my SODC ward (except Long Wittenham, who have Cllr Pete Sudbury, re-elected). I very much look forward to working collaboratively with the new County Council administration, with whom we clearly share many values and strategic priorities, and specifically with Robin in my ward. Robin is the leader of the Green group on SODC so I have a close working relationship with him already.

### **New Appointments at SODC**

SODC Council met in person for the first time since early 2020 on 20<sup>th</sup> May for its Annual Meeting. This was quite an odd set up, in person but on Teams too, with two Councillors unable to join in person so participating via Teams but unable to vote because of the legislative restrictions. The Council appointed a new Chair, Cllr Jo Robb, the first time that a Green Party councillor has chaired SODC, and we adopted seven new Neighbourhood Plans. I was appointed as the SODC rep on the Police and Crime Commissioner Panel which holds that post holder to account for the agenda he has set out. I am also the Chair of the Climate & Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee of the council, appointed last February.

### **New Climate Emergency Pages on SODC Website**

I am delighted to tell you about the launch a new set of pages on the SODC website, designed to inform everyone about what the Council is doing and giving guidance and practical information on what individuals, communities and businesses can do to reduce carbon emissions and support/collaborate with the actions being taken by the Council and other authorities. These pages will also be used to report on the progress being made within the Council and within the District to achieve

our carbon zero targets set out in our Corporate Plan (2025 within the Council's own operations, 2030 across the District).

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/about-the-council/tackling-the-climate-emergency/>

All feedback on the new web pages will be highly appreciated.

### **Town & Parish Forums**

The Climate and Ecological Emergencies was the main topic of the Town & Parish Council Forum, which took place on 27th May. The meeting was recorded, so anyone who was not able to attend can watch the presentations. We had 20+ councillors attend, and I found it really useful to hear feedback on our climate action plan and inspiring to hear ideas on how we can work collaboratively to make progress.

We are planning to hold Town & Parish Council Forums regularly, potentially as frequently as once a month, with each one focusing on a different topic. Hopefully this will also help Parish Councils to work collaboratively on issues of common concern – such as motorbike noise and speed nuisance along the A4074.

### **Waste Collections**

Due to ongoing issues with recruiting HGV drivers, some waste collections might be later than normal. This is a national problem because Covid prevented new HGV tests taking place and there is also more demand for HGV drivers with home deliveries increasing. As a result, Biffa have a shortage of qualified drivers at the moment.

### **Riverside Pool Reopening on May Bank Holiday**

SODC's leisure operator, Better, will be opening the outdoor pool on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> May in line with their normal opening schedule. In future you will have to book a session via the Better App or their website, and there will be a one-way system in operation in the changing area. The Splash Park is due to open in June when all restrictions will hopefully be lifted, although this decision will be guided by government directions. For the Abingdon pool, which is in the Vale District area, please check out the website here: [Abingdon Outdoor Pool](http://AbingdonOutdoorPool.org.uk) ([AbingdonOutdoorPool.org.uk](http://AbingdonOutdoorPool.org.uk))

### **Performance Management at SODC**

As part of this Council's commitment one of the themes in our Corporate Plan, Openness and Transparency, we will be launching a new Performance Management Framework shortly, which will ensure that

progress towards achieving the objectives set out in our Corporate Plan is monitored, measured and reported to all interested audiences. Quarterly performance reports will be published on the SODC website and this will be a good way for local residents and businesses to hold the Council to account for how it spends public money and how it responds to the needs of the local community. An interim performance report to be published shortly reveals how much has already been achieved since the new Corporate Plan was adopted in October 2020, despite the challenges and restrictions caused by the coronavirus situation.

### **The Cornerstone**

The arts centre café will be opening very soon. The Council-owned arts centre in Didcot has been closed to the public since March 2020 and has been used as a centre for the Covid hub activities for some of that time. The café will open first and then the rest of it is planned to open in September.

### **COVID Support Grants**

Throughout the year SODC have been providing supporting grants via government funding to those who have been hit the hardest, and this support is still available.

If anyone is struggling financially, I urge them to get in touch, and to do so before they reach crisis point. The Community Hub team are working alongside Citizens Advice to offer help in the form of advice, supermarket and fuel vouchers or through the direct payment of energy or water bills.

The support is there for all households: residents needing help do not have to be in receipt of any government benefits and can be given financial support through this funding more than once.

Call the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Community Hub on 01235 422600 or email [communityconnectors@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:communityconnectors@southandvale.gov.uk)

They can also contact Citizens Advice on 0808 278 7907

The deadline for this financial support from the Covid Support Grant is Friday 18 June.

You can find out more about the support available on our website [southoxon.gov.uk/covid19](https://southoxon.gov.uk/covid19)

Any queries on District matters, please contact me on 01235 799489 or email [sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk](mailto:sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk)