

District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, September 2021

Covid-19 Rates

Numbers of people infected are rising again, and this includes in those over 60. Please remember to test regularly with the Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) and if you feel unwell, get a PCR test. You can get free LFT from certain pharmacies and from test centres. It is recommended that people take a LFT twice weekly.

Better Leisure help with vaccine uptake

The company that provides leisure facilities, Better, have been invited to join Public Health England's drive to boost the uptake of the Covid-19 vaccination among young people.

Better is the only leisure operator in the country to be involved in the initiative and joins other businesses across to have pledged their support for the UK's vaccination programme, by offering incentives to vaccinated customers.

They are offering anyone between 16-30 years old a £10 voucher to be used against any membership at a Better-operated leisure facility and a three-day free pass to any of its leisure centres or gyms.

In order to take up the offer, local residents need to complete the form available on the Better website <https://www.better.org.uk/healthy-communities> and follow the simple instructions.

Customers will need to present their vaccination card or alternative proof on their first visit to their local Better leisure centre or gym.

Survey for the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

We sent out a press release earlier this week letting our clinically extremely vulnerable residents know that help is still available and to ask them what future support they may need. Furthermore, a survey has been launched to gather the feedback from those residents who were shielding, the survey can be found via the following link

<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-cev>. The deadline for responses is Sunday 19 September.

- If any residents are in need of support and advice, they can contact our Community Hub team 01235 422600 (our office hours are 8.30am-5pm Monday to Thursday, 8.30am-4.30pm on Fridays)

Email: communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

Garden Waste Collections Suspended

At the time of writing, in late August, the garden waste collections are still suspended. We acknowledge that suspending this in the middle of summer when many people have more garden waste than any other time is really frustrating, but it was the only option considering the shortage of HGV drivers and the continued need for staff at Biffa to self-isolate.

There is a contingency built into the service agreement with residents, which is that the guaranteed number of collections paid for over a year is 20, and normally there are about 26 collections each year. I hope that by the time you have read this, collections will have re-started but with the HGV driver shortage being so acute, we may have to make further changes. I will keep you updated as quickly as I can.

Council's support for refugees from Afghanistan

District Council officers are working closely with those from councils across Oxfordshire to address the needs of the individuals and families arriving in the UK from Afghanistan, whether on the resettlement scheme or part of the wider UK response to the developing refugee crisis.

Oxfordshire County Council is collectively leading on co-ordination of the support offered, including co-ordination with any voluntary sector agencies in Oxfordshire.

At this time, there are no specific large-scale requests from Government that impact on South Oxfordshire or Vale of White Horse. We remain in frequent contact with the South East Migration partnership and colleagues across Oxfordshire so that we can respond quickly if needed, although as of today, we have received no detailed request from Government or partners to secure additional accommodation.

We have made clear via the South East Migration partnership that we stand ready to do so. Thank you very much to everyone who has made donations for the refugees fleeing Afghanistan – at the moment no further donations are needed.

If residents would like to help further there are national charities that are now focusing on provision of aid to Afghanistan or if a more locally based charity is sought, existing voluntary organisations include **Asylum Welcome** in Oxford, who work extensively with the councils or **Care 4 Calais** in Reading.

Biodiversity ‘net gain’ in building developments

The District Council is supporting the Habitat Banking Pilot Scheme run in a partnership including four Wildlife Trusts – Berks Bucks and Oxon, Warwickshire, Cheshire, and Surrey Wildlife Trusts - and the environmental impact investment advisors Finance Earth.

Habitat Banking is designed to address developers’ need to deliver biodiversity net gain, which will soon be made law through the Environment Bill.

The scheme enables habitats to be created or restored before any biodiversity loss is caused by developments. The scheme has recently been successful in its funding application to the Governments Natural Investment Readiness Fund, and the funding will enable the partnership to create three pilot habitat bank sites in Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, and Cheshire over the next year.

The District Council has also been involved in the first of a series of workshops run by the Healthy Ecosystem Restoration in Oxfordshire (HERO) programme. HERO is a three-year programme supported by the Oxford Martin School.

It will explore how Oxford University can play a role in efforts to restore healthy ecosystems in Oxfordshire, by bringing the university’s strengths in academic knowledge, research capacity and convening power to support ongoing and planned nature recovery activities by local partners and stakeholders.

You can find out more about HERO on the following website

<https://www.biodiversity.ox.ac.uk/hero/>

Tree Planting policy on District Council owned land

The council’s draft Tree Planting Policy will be sent to the Climate & Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee (CEEAC) this week for final comments before Cabinet discuss, and hopefully adopt it, in time for the tree planting season this winter.

This is for all organisations who want to plant trees on Council-owned land, ensuring the trees are the right ones in the right place etc and that they are safely looked after so they thrive.

Neighbourhood Plans government pilot scheme

The Government’s Office for Place launched a pilot scheme aimed at supporting the preparation of design codes. They are seeking expressions of interest from designated **neighbourhood planning**

groups that are interested in setting standards for design in their local area.

The preparation of a design code provides neighbourhood planning groups with an opportunity to ensure that new development meets their expectations for greener, more beautiful homes, streets, public spaces and neighbourhoods.

The pilot scheme is also keen to explore the potential and role of design codes to address other priorities, including regeneration, the path to net zero and climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as bio-diversity net gain.

Successful bidding teams will receive funding and support from expertise drawn from the Office for Place and its advisory board. The Office for Place will work with the successful bidding teams to develop a detailed proposal and process for developing and producing a design code that is aspirational. The Office for Place will provide additional support in the form of expert advice and input via a programme of events and workshops likely to include topic-based workshops, roundtables and 1:1 support.

The deadline expression of interest form is **5pm on the 13 September**, and details are available from the [Government website](#).

Oxfordshire 2050 Spatial Plan

This consultation, the 'Reg 18' stage, can be found at [Oxfordshire Plan 2050 – Planning together for a better Oxfordshire](#). Webinars are being held, and anyone can join, to give an overview and there will be a Q&A session at each; please register on the website above. The date for the last webinar is 9 Sept (6-7.30pm).

This Plan is for the whole of Oxfordshire and we at South Oxfordshire have had a big influence on it, with climate concerns, changes in infrastructure and resident well-being having a high priority.

However, frustratingly, the number of new houses that Councils are obliged to provide is still dictated by government – this is the minimum number option in the Plan. Options with higher numbers are also in there and residents are being asked to give their view on what they think would be best for the County.

Evidence shows that building thousands of new houses does not bring prices down while there are existing other drivers pushing them up, so the reason for building more new homes in our District is for economic growth in an area with a very tight labour market.

But to achieve our Paris 2015 commitments and reading the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, there are many activities which we need to stop or slow down considerably, so continuing along the same economic growth trajectory will not get us where we need to be.

Let's continue to push this message, and if you can respond to this consultation, I would urge you to do so. I will be responding with simple statements that the transition to a just and fair carbon zero (or better still carbon negative) economy needs to take precedence over any other objective.

Future Oxfordshire Partnership

The group that used to be the 'Oxfordshire Growth Board' has changed its name to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership to reflect the changed priorities of some of the councils on it. The Partnership also now has an Environment sub-group to work on climate and ecological priorities across Oxfordshire and will work closely with the new Oxfordshire Nature Partnership too.

As ever, contact me if you need help on any District matters:
Sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk or 01235 799489