

## **District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, October-November 2022**

### **Cost of Living Crisis**

Following the council's declaration of a Cost of Living Emergency in July, 'clinics' took place in Didcot over the August bank holiday weekend and in Abingdon on 19<sup>th</sup> September.

A county-wide Cost of Living Summit is happening on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October where representatives from all local authorities in Oxfordshire will share knowledge and best practice in how to support residents in need.

As ever, please direct residents to the Community Hub where officers can guide those in need to the support available: 01235 422600 or [communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk)

### **Homelessness**

As outlined last month, we are receiving growing numbers of reports of people sleeping rough in the district. We can expect these numbers to increase further.

Our Housing Team is expert at supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Please contact [housing@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:housing@southandvale.gov.uk) or call 01235 422 452 if you would like to discuss a housing issue or if you have concerns about someone who is homeless or is about to be.

South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) follows the Housing First approach: <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/about-housing-first>

### **Business Rates – Treasury Outturn at Scrutiny**

Following work by councillors, SODC commissioned external advisers to undertake a review of business rates premises in the district to identify any premises that should be paying business rates but were not on the rating list.

This exercise identified an **additional £2.6m of business rates, all from larger businesses, including backdated amounts.**

The council's share of this is estimated to be in excess of £500,000 of which just under £200,000 will be ongoing increase, contributing to the council's revenue budget.

The advisers will be brought in periodically to review business rates premises and ensure businesses required to pay business rates are on the register.

## **Speeding on the A4074 and A4130**

At the last meeting of the Police and Crime Panel on 23 September, where I am South Oxfordshire's representative on the panel, I asked Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Barber why no action had been taken to address the persistent problem of speeding and noisy motorbikes on the A4074 between H café in Berinsfield and Crowmarsh roundabout and Crowmarsh roundabout and Henley as well as on the A415.

I have also, along with a group of councillors representing the parishes affected, written public letters to the Police and Crime Commissioner to demand action on illegal speed and motorbike noise.

## **Social Housing in Wheatley**

At its last meeting, SODC's Cabinet considered an application for grant Funding by Soha Housing for the construction of new affordable homes in Wheatley, continuing the council's commitment to using developer funds to support the building of new zero-carbon social and affordable housing in the district.

This follows SODC's contribution of £500,000 towards three new houses for social rent being developed by Henley Housing Trust, a scheme to deliver social housing in Thame and the council's own development of social housing on Didcot Broadway. I will provide more detail when I can.

## **Grants**

The Capital Grants scheme closes on 21<sup>st</sup> October while the second round of the Councillor Community Grants scheme opens in November. I have received a number of requests for advice on grants.

If you would like to speak directly to an officer, please let me know so that I can put you in direct touch. The Grants team is excellent and very supportive and informative: <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/grants/>

## **Tree Planting Season**

As the tree planting season approaches and following the wishes of the King, the Queen's Green Canopy initiative will be extended to the end of March 2023 to give people the opportunity to plant trees in honour of Her late Majesty.

We are creating a record of all the trees planted across the districts for the Queen's Green Canopy. Please send images of the trees you've planted to [communications@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:communications@southandvale.gov.uk)

Greener Henley is planting trees and hedgerows again this year and is looking for landowners and parish councils who are willing to participate. Please contact Patrick Fleming for more information:

[flemings5@gmail.com](mailto:flemings5@gmail.com) They can provide trees and the people power to get large tracts of native hedgerow planted, all for free!

### **Full Council, 13<sup>th</sup> October:**

The agenda is available online but a key item is the outline of a motion listed below on so called investment zones:

<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=122&MIId=3055&Ver=4>

### **Investment Zones**

The government has proposed that so-called “investment zones” will see the lifting of “burdensome requirements” such as local consultation and environmental regulations including in designated areas like Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Parks. Development in these zones will be additional to that already agreed in local plans.

A motion is coming to council, proposed by Cllr Robin Bennett, stating that South Oxfordshire is already a key contributor to the wider UK economy and that democratic local plans with proper environmental and landscape protections are the best way to continue this contribution, not through “investment zones” and the sweeping aside of environmental and planning protections and consultations.

### **Move to Abbey House, Abingdon**

From 3<sup>rd</sup> October, Abbey House in Abingdon is the new workplace for the majority of SODC staff, though most will continue hybrid working.

Full Council meetings will be held at Didcot Civic Hall while all other meetings will take place at the Microsoft Teams Meeting Room in Abbey House unless otherwise advised.

This will finally mark the end of councillors and guests staring into their computer screens whilst sitting side by side in meetings!

Residents and parish councils will be able to continue to participate in Planning Committee and other meetings remotely, ensuring we have the best of both worlds.

To contact me:

[sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk](mailto:sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk)

01235 635566