

District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, December 2022

Councillor Community Grant

We've extended the deadline for the second round of the South Oxfordshire Community Grant Scheme until midday Friday 20th January 2023, as some wards still have budget available.

We're keen to fund projects that support all the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and would encourage 'Action towards managing our climate emergency' and 'Protecting and restoring the natural world'

I know some of you will be keen to hear a decision on grants you have already applied for, so I intend to decide on these before Christmas.

This means I may not have anything left nearer the deadline so if you are thinking of applying for some of the grant, please do so as soon as you can or tell me you intend to.

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/community-support/grants/>

New tree roles for the councils

We have collaborated with the other Oxfordshire local authorities to create two new community tree and woodland planting roles.

The two new recruits will work to increase tree cover across the county through training volunteers and community woodland creation activities, thanks to £150,000 in funding from the Government's Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund.

<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/funding-to-create-green-jobs/>

Full Council meeting on 8th December – Question on the HIF1 roads project

I am asking a question of the Leader at the next Council meeting on the HIF1 road project plans because I have significant concerns about the project.

I will also ask him to write to Oxfordshire County Council to confirm the other proposals to mitigate the impact of the road and the housing such as changing the access to the two old bridges and other measures in Appleford and Sutton Courtenay.

Here is the question (HIF2 is for work on the A40):

"HIF2 has been paused for review because of issues with escalating costs and the impact on the Compulsory Purchase Orders.

Consequently, this Council needs to be informed of any possible changes to or impacts on the delivery of HIF1 from inflation or other costs pressures from, e.g. construction supply issues.

I am particularly concerned as Cycle Champion of any impact increased costs might have on the delivery of the active travel features of the project as these are vital to both SODC and OxonCC's travel and carbon reduction targets.

Please can the Leader seek reassurance from OxonCC that these features will not be downgraded or dropped if costs rise further and that South Oxfordshire District Council will be the first to be informed of any proposed changes or issues to the delivery of HIF1?"

New 'Housing Delivery' Strategy Agreed

The terms "Affordable housing" and "Social housing" are often used interchangeably. They mean housing at sub-market rent levels, usually provided by councils or housing associations.

However, "Affordable Rents" and "Social Rents" do have specific meanings. Both are defined by national government.

Affordable rent is defined as up to 80 per cent of market rents and Social Rents are calculated according to government rent regime guidance, and typically fall between 45 and 60 per cent of market rents.

In South Oxfordshire, the high cost of housing has meant that new homes and homes built for "affordable rent" remain unaffordable for many.

Although over 8,000 new homes have been built in South Oxfordshire in the past ten years, they are still unaffordable to many, with the average house price now equalling over 12 times the average salary. 40% of employees in South Oxfordshire earn £25k or less.

So, our new Housing Delivery Strategy which was agreed by the Cabinet in November sets out the framework within which we can start to address this problem and gives us the flexibility to work with housing partners to ensure that we start to deliver the houses that people need.

At the meeting in December, the Council will be asked to approve the allocation of £2m towards the purchase of houses for conversion to social rent properties as part of this new approach.

This new strategy will help to achieve our corporate plan priorities relating to the climate emergency, delivering affordable housing and improving community well-being.

The full strategy and action plan can be found on the SODC website in the Cabinet papers for the meeting of 10th November (pages 183-221)

<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/documents/g3140/Public%20reports%20pack%20Thursday%2010-Nov-2022%2018.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

Cycling Champion

With the launch of a new approach to ‘active travel’ and targets to reduce the number of car journeys in the County, I have been invited to sit on steering groups looking at local cycling and walking plans in Abingdon and Didcot.

I have also been contributing to a Strategic Active Travel Network across the County.

This is something I have been calling for since I first became a councillor – it is a plan of where the main routes for cycling and walking should be in the county, connecting into towns and significant ‘travel interchanges’ such as railway stations and bus stops.

As I speak to people in South Oxfordshire, I hear about how people want to cycle or walk more but don’t feel safe on both main roads and windy, rural roads.

Some people have contacted me about specific routes (the Bayswater Road, the road connecting Long Wittenham to Clifton Hampden, Berinsfield to Oxford along the Roman Road, Wallingford to Cholsey station for example) and have new ideas and plans already in place, **but I would like to hear more from anyone who would like to cycle or walk and what routes they need.**

Please feel free to get in touch using the details at the end of this report.

Our approach to embracing diversity

We have just approved a new Diversity and Inclusion strategy for the District Council which is designed to ensure that all services provided by the Council are accessible to all.

The strategy has as its statement of intent: “We strive to create an environment where everybody feels that they belong and has a voice which will be heard. We will embrace our differences, the unique talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and abilities of all our staff and residents. Together we will make a positive difference.”

The full strategy and its accompanying Action Plan can be found in the Cabinet papers for the 1st December meeting:

<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=121&MI d=3141>

Changes in the Community Infrastructure Levy charging levels

We have just completed a complete review of this levy (CIL) which provides councils at all levels with funds for projects related to the impact of new housing.

The new schedule differentiates between the financial viability of new houses in the different parts of the district (e.g. between Berinsfield and the rural parishes in the south of the district), and also separately categorises the more built-up areas of Didcot and Berinsfield.

For the first time, CIL will now be payable on building specialist housing for older residents in most of the district, and the actual rates charged per square metre will also increase to bring them more in line with those charged in neighbouring districts.

Our projections indicate that the new schedule, if adopted at the Council meeting, will generate around 70% more in CIL payments, which of course benefits parishes as well.

As a reminder, CIL is not payable on strategic sites in the Local Plan 2035, since these are subject to Section 106 agreements instead.

Oxfordshire Mind – support if you need it

Christmas can be a wonderful time but we know it can also be stressful.

If you become overwhelmed and struggle to cope [Oxfordshire Safe Haven](#) is a safe and welcoming space for when you've reached the point where it feels like there's no way out.

They're open 365 days a year, and you can think of them as being like A&E for your mental health, offering support to adults (18+) living in Oxfordshire.

There are also helplines that you can call if it becomes too much.

- **Oxfordshire Mind Information Line** 01865 247788 (Monday – Thursday 9.30 to 4.30, Friday 9.30 to 4.00)
- **Oxfordshire Safe Haven** 01865 903037 (11.30am to 9.30pm)
- **Samaritans** 116 123
- **Campaign Against Living Miserably** 0800 585858 (5pm to Midnight)
- **The Mix** 0808 808 4994 (for under 25's 4pm to 11pm)
- **CAMHS NHS for children's mental health** helpline 111

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