

District Councillor Report – Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, January 2024

Happy New Year to you all!

Joint Local Plan 2041

The public consultation for the next stage of our new Local Development Plan (joint with the Vale) **launches on 10th January**. I encourage everyone to have a look, especially to the 'In a Nutshell' part. Please submit feedback using the very user-friendly new online platform.

A direct link to the consultation document is:

<https://jlp.southandvale.gov.uk/>

A direct link to the Emerging Policies map is

<https://jlp.southandvale.gov.uk/pages/policies-map>

There are events planned across the District to make it easier for people to look at the documents and suggested plans. This is the 'Preferred Options' stage.

We will ask for people's thoughts on proposed approaches across various policy areas, from reducing carbon emissions and nature recovery, to protecting and enhancing local heritage, meeting community infrastructure and transport needs, affordable housing, jobs and economic opportunities, and more.

New policy areas which previous local plans haven't covered

include policies to protect valued landscapes, tranquil places and dark skies.

Backed by extensive feedback gathered in 2022, newly commissioned studies and the latest industry research, the councils are proposing to reduce the number of new houses needed each year, improve minimum standards for water and energy efficiency, increase biodiversity and the number of affordable houses developments need to deliver, and more.

Warm spaces

Residents needing a warm place this winter are welcome to come to our leisure centres, which are opening up as Warm Spaces again this year. The following centres are available for people to come to charge their phones, have a warm drink and a friendly chat: Abbey Sports Centre, Didcot Wave, Henley Leisure Centre, Parks Sports Centre and Thame Leisure Centre.

The Warm Spaces scheme will run from **9am-2pm on weekdays** in the café and communal areas of the centres. All the centres have been registered on the official [Warm Spaces website](#)

Progress on climate and nature projects

Our climate and nature advisory committee (known as Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee – CEEAC) meets twice each year and the meeting in December considered reports on the progress the council is making.

The Climate Action Team and their colleagues have been **focusing on saving energy at leisure centres** (which make about 40% of our emissions) by using existing systems more efficiently and using grants to add renewable energy systems and other carbon saving measures like replacing halogen bulbs with LED (Light-Emitting Diode) lights and installing destratification fans which don't consume much energy around the pool side which slowly push rising air back down and keep the centre warmer.

This had recently been completed at Didcot Wave and will be monitored to see how well it works.

The Committee heard about the

Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray project which was presented by Alison Offord from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT).

The area was highlighted as one of the priority strategic scale landscapes to focus on nature recovery effort and the current boundary brought together a number of existing conservation target areas and biodiversity opportunity areas across the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire borders.

The committee agreed to advise our Cabinet to support this project in any way the Council can.

Progress on **'retrofitting homes' to save energy and reduce carbon emissions** was another item for the committee.

The team has been adding information about improving the energy efficiency of homes and businesses to the Climate Action Oxfordshire website.

They have published a briefing on retrofitting homes and community buildings which summarises the retrofitting support and funding that is available to help district, town and parish councillors to promote energy efficiency and retrofitting advice in their areas. The guide is available on the South website.

They have hosted two webinars for town and parish councils and community groups – the first of these took place in July and focused on improving the energy efficiency of community buildings. Recordings of the presentations are available, again on our website.

The second took place in November and focused on how groups can support and encourage retrofitting of homes in their areas.

Didcot Garden Town team is organising **an energy champion training session** with the Low Carbon Hub – local community groups and organisations are being invited to train as energy champions.

The Council has **two thermal cameras** that community groups and town and parish councils can borrow free of charge. Demand has continued to be high, with the cameras already reserved for most of the 2023/24 season.

South and Vale councils each have £100,000 to spend in 2024/25 for 'green' skills courses to enable at least 50 residents to gain a 'green' qualification or complete a relevant skills course.

The committee has also planned a number of working groups on specific topics for the next year:

- Waste Strategy Task and Finish Group (held on 28th November)
- Climate and Nature Recovery Action Plan Joint Task and Finish group 15th January 2024
- Waste strategy - potential follow up session
Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Climate Adaptation and Resilience actions the District Council can take.

If you would like to read these reports along with the carbon savings measurements, please see the agenda for CEEAC here: [Agenda for Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee on Monday, 11th December 2023, 6.00 pm \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://southoxon.gov.uk)

Local green spaces grants available

A reminder in case you know a local volunteer group or community organisation focused on nature recovery and biodiversity. They could be eligible for funding from SODC.

We've teamed up with the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) to manage the applications. The next deadline for applications is **8th January 2024**. For more information, please contact Rachel at TOE on admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk.

Grant scheme for people without gas boilers

For residents who live in homes without gas boilers – they may be eligible for energy efficiency upgrades for their home, such as insulation, solar panels and heat pumps, all funded by the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2). These upgrades can help to reduce energy bills and make homes easier to keep warm.

The grants are available to homeowners and landlords whose properties are not heated by gas boilers, with a household income of less than £39,000 and with a low energy rating (D-G).

Please spread the word and ask people to visit welcomethewarmth.org.uk to find out more.

Spring has launched at the Cornerstone Arts Centre

The new spring season at Cornerstone Arts Centre launched last month with some great shows, classes and workshops for everyone to enjoy, starting in January 2024.

Highlights include Patti Boulay: Diana and Me, The Great Big Dinosaur Show and comedian Jo Caulfield with her show Here Comes Trouble!

Plus, new for 2024 you can see National Theatre Live productions on the big screen with Skylight, Dear England and Vanya available to book now. More details can be found on [the Cornerstone website](#).

And don't forget it also has a lovely licensed café serving probably the best coffee in Didcot and delicious locally-produced and freshly made food!

And finally... Bad weather and waste collections

If bad weather affects waste collections this winter, here's what will happen:

If we don't manage to empty somebody's bins on the scheduled collection day, please leave them out for two more days and we'll do our best to come back and catch up.

If, after three days, we haven't managed to empty them, please bring them back in and we'll empty them next time they're due – if this happens, you'll be able to leave extra waste out beside your bin in a suitable container.

We'll keep people up to date with the disruptions on our websites, social media, and through the local press and media. Please call the Biffa call centre on 0300 0610 610 if there are any queries.

Contact me here for any District council issue:
sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk.

Or call me & leave a message:

01235 635566