

## **District Councillor Report – Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, August 2025**

### **Community benefit from local renewables**

Councillors in South Oxfordshire have called for developers of renewable energy schemes to share benefits with the local communities that host them.

“New renewable energy infrastructure has the opportunity to contribute positively to the well-being and prosperity of local residents in the communities hosting projects” said Green Party Councillor Ali Gordon-Creed. “There is a great opportunity to deliver for climate and nature, and for our residents, if we get this right.”

A Motion put to the Council by Cllr Gordon-Creed was passed at the full Council meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> July and called on the Councils to write to Government on the matter, and to pledge to work with partners and developers to promote maximising opportunities for benefits to communities.

Community-owned Westmill wind and solar farms, for example, have an open access approach to land, have events and guided visits, educational resources and an annual funding programme granting around £40,000 each year to local projects.

### **New Administration, opposition and Local Government Reorganisation**

South Oxfordshire District Council continues to deliver on the priorities set by the Green and LibDem partnership, despite the LibDems pulling out of the partnership last May I am pleased to say, and with the reorganisation of local councils still taking up a substantial amount of officers' time, I and my fellow seven Green councillors as the main opposition will be ensuring that we hold them to account on these priorities for the next two years.

It is clear however, that Local Government Reorganisation will have a profound impact on how much the council can deliver outside of the statutory minimum for residents because so much time and effort will be required for this extensive change in how local government functions.

For information on the three current proposals for how any unitary councils could be arranged in Oxfordshire you can look at the new websites created:

[\*\*Our Proposal | Greater Oxford\*\*](#)

[\*\*Interim proposal | Oxfordshire County Council\*\*](#)

## Home - Two Councils

### Increase to the Revenue Grant pot

I am glad to say that supporting communities is still top of the agenda, and it is good news for community organisations in South Oxfordshire that the Revenue Grant pot has been increased by over half a million pounds.

The additional funding for the 2025–2027 Revenue Grant recipients was approved by South Oxfordshire District Council following a full council meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> July.

### Didcot 'Gateway' Council Offices

You may have seen recent news articles on the [Didcot Gateway development](#).

The Cabinet of SODC decided not to further progress the council office building project at opposite the railway station on the land now currently used as a car park in light of the government's plans to reorganise local authorities.

While I expected the project to be put on hold, I was surprised to hear they had cancelled the project entirely.

That part of Didcot is an eyesore, and one of the advantages of the office project was to transform the area to make it far more welcoming and attractive.

Now, although the site has planning permission for the office building, the site will remain as a car park for at least two years and, despite having planning permission for offices, its future is uncertain.

This is far from satisfactory, and inconsistent with Didcot Garden Town renovation aims.

I am, however, glad that a green light has been given for £10 million of funds that had originally been earmarked for the new building to be reallocated to buy new social housing, at least a decision in line with the Green/LibDem policies we made when the partnership between our two parties was still in administration.

Also, the £2.2 million cost of Didcot Gateway which was quoted recently on the BBC included the demolition costs of the old offices in Crowmarsh. Further details [are available in the report here](#).

## **Councillor Community Grants**

The grant scheme launches on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August and is open to not-for-profit community organisations whose primary purpose is to benefit the residents of South Oxfordshire this includes town and parish councils.

Organisations can apply for grants from £250 up to a maximum of £7,500 from each councillor (budget permitting).

For wards with multiple councillors, applications may be considered by all ward members together to determine funding, and organisations can apply to multiple councillors/wards should their project benefit a wider area.

More details about the grant can be found on the [South Oxfordshire District Council website](#).

## **Thames Water's Mega-Reservoir Plans**

Please see the [South East Strategic Reservoir Option Project update](#) from Thames Water. This is a huge infrastructure project for our area.

There is a new website setting out what the campaign group, GARD, think needs to be done instead, and challenges Thames Water's claims: [Group Against Reservoir Development | GARD](#).

They campaign for a 'smarter, sustainable water strategy in the South East that ensures resilience against population growth, climate change, and drought.'

Given the state Thames Water is in as a company, there is little confidence in claims they make about water security and sustainability.

It was announced last week that the Judicial Review against the Secretary of State's decision to approve Thames Water's Water Resource Management Plan which formally established the need for the South East Strategic Reservoir Option was dismissed.

This does not mean that the reservoir, due to be located between Abingdon, Steventon and East Hanney, will definitely proceed – but removes one of the major obstacles to it.

The outflow from the enormous proposed reservoir is due to rejoin the Thames at Culham.

If built, the reservoir would take years to construct and would be owned by a separate company set up specially for the purpose, rather than directly by Thames Water. It would be the 2nd largest reservoir in the UK.

Our water stress problems cannot be solved by fixing leaks alone but far more needs to be done in that department for people to start having more confidence in the water company that has a monopoly here; and it is difficult to support a huge project like this that is more about raising revenue for a failing company than providing clean water for people.

It is a salutary reminder that the purpose of Thames Water (and all the privatised water monopolies) is not to provide clean water and treat wastewater, but to make money for its shareholders.

More reservoirs are undoubtedly needed, but not on this scale and not created by this failing company.

### **South Oxfordshire Charitable Lottery**

From rescuing animals to supporting outdoor learning for children, eight local charities and community groups across South Oxfordshire have received a total of £7,000 in unrestricted funding thanks to the SO Charitable Lottery.

Funds support groups including The Oxfordshire Animal Sanctuary, who provide vital care for animals, and Friends of Ewelme School, who help children benefit from weekly Forest School sessions.

See our website [www.southoxon.gov.uk/lottery](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/lottery) for more information or look out for the social media posts.

For any support or queries please email me: [sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk](mailto:sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk).