

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 17th July 2023

Councillor Community Grants Funding available

A new round of funding from the Councillor Community Grant Scheme has launched in South Oxfordshire, to help local charities and organisations across the district.

Every ward in South Oxfordshire is given funding to support local projects that directly benefit local residents. Organisations can now apply for grants from £250 up to a maximum of £5,000 from each ward councillor where the project is located.

As district councillors we have the choice of projects to approve but seek input from our parish councils to help inform those choices. Please consider the current priorities in the parish and consult with us.

Before applying, do get in touch with Mike and Leigh to discuss the project. Applications are made online and are open until midday on Friday 20 October 2023.

The last round of funding awarded £179,824 to help 99 projects - including biodiversity and wildlife, mental and physical health and wellbeing, community buildings and recreational areas.

You can find out more about the Councillor Community Grant scheme, including eligibility, on our website at www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants or by contacting the Community Enablement team at grants@southandvale.gov.uk.

Rural England Prosperity Fund

SODC has secured funding from the government's Rural England Prosperity Fund, which can be used to provide a boost to projects such as creating rural business hubs, setting up community energy schemes, and diversifying farm businesses beyond agriculture.

Any organisation with legal status (inc. public, private and third sector) will be able to apply for the funding when it opens in the Autumn. Interested parties are encouraged to send an expression of interest before the scheme opens.

More details can be found on the website - <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/business-and-economy/advice-for-businesses/rural-england-prosperity-fund/>

South Oxfordshire Bathing Water Status

Organisations across South Oxfordshire are planning to apply for bathing water status on the River Thames at Wallingford and Henley.

SODC is aiming to work with Wallingford Town Council to make a joint application to Defra for granting bathing water status. It is also supporting the bid for bathing water status being made by Henley Town Council. Both applications will be supported by environmental charity Thames21.

Thames21 will use data gathered from the 2023 bathing season in the applications. This will include the numbers of those using the river as well as water samples taken by Thames21 and local trained volunteers. Thames21 plan to publicise the water quality data on an online story map on their website during the bathing season.

If bathing water status is awarded, Thames Water would be legally required to treat waste outflows to a much higher standard, while the Environment Agency would need to monitor (and publish) water quality findings from May - September.

"If the government is unwilling to support cleaner waters in South Oxfordshire, the council will move ahead towards that goal, working with Thames21 and our other partners", commented Cllr Freddie Van Mierlo, SODC Cabinet member for climate change and nature recovery.

There has been interest in our ward, from both Shiplake and Eye & Dunsden.

(Mike and Leigh are supportive of proposals from our ward, and would be pleased to discuss further.)

Make a Splash at Riverside

The newly refurbished splash pad at Riverside Park and Pools in Wallingford will be welcoming visitors from Saturday 8 July. Opening times are 9am to 6pm, and it is free to use with no bookings required.

The refurbishment work, which started in May, has introduced lots of new and exciting features including: water arches, play zones and much more. A new disabled access pathway has also been installed. SODC deployed 'community infrastructure levy' revenues to help fund the improvements.

Rubbish and recycling updates!

SODC is advising residents to contact Biffa directly in first instance with any issues over missed or incorrect waste bin collections. They can be contacted either by phone on 03000 610610, or at admin.southoxford.biffa.co.uk

Please then escalate to the SODC waste team if Biffa do not resolve in a satisfactory manner - waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk , or by calling 01235 422146.

Additionally, please report any fly-tipping via southoxon.gov.uk/flytipping or call 03000 610610. SODC will take firm action, and indeed recently an individual had to pay £1,400 after dumping garden waste near Great Haseley.

Have Your Say on Air Quality

SODC are running a survey on new proposals to enhance air quality in the local area.

Please offer your views here - <https://survey.southandvale.gov.uk/s/AirQualityActionPlan> . The survey closes on 27 July.

This builds on the previous plan, which led to a consistent reduction in nitrogen dioxide, one of the main pollutants measured. However Henley remains a problem.

Covid-19

The reliability of data on Covid cases is now much reduced following the end of test and trace. However national figures have shown a strong fall in cases.

At 1st July 2023, **reported** cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of **2** (it peaked at 1,504 on 6th January 2022) – a very low level - albeit that reporting may be somewhat incomplete. (Many don't report it.)

Gateway

SODC continue to progress the potential from the Gateway project in Didcot. This project is in partnership with Homes England to regenerate and develop a derelict area of central Didcot opposite the Railway station; the area will include housing developed by Homes England and a mixed use office and commercial building. The building will provide council offices lost in the fire of January 2015 at Crowmarsh and commercial space for let. The council would save rental costs and receive rentals from VoWH council and commercial tenants. A draft design for has been put together for the office and commercial building following expert design and planning input. This will now be developed as a planning application and be subject to detailed costing quotes.

Housing Strategy and Local Authority Housing Fund

Government has recognised that the refugees from Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine have contributed to pre-existing pressures on social housing. In order to make a contribution towards helping this Government are offering a couple of “Local Authority Housing Funds” whereby councils will be supported in the purchase of extra housing stock but government grant of some 40+% of the total cost. Councils will be enabled to borrow the balance of the investment to be funded and paid down by the future rents from the properties. This housing stock will remain owned by (district or unitary) councils after purchase – even after they may cease to be needed by the specified refugees. No refund of grant will ever be required by government.

SODC intends to participate in this scheme and hopes to acquire some 23 homes. These will be supported by suitable staffing and create the potential for more housing acquisitions in the future – subject to government facilitation and sustainable financial scope.

Homes for Ukraine – call for landlords

In Oxfordshire, many arrangements between hosts and Ukrainian nationals have continued for quite a long time and some are coming to an end. SODC are launching a campaign (with other councils) aimed at encouraging landlords (or potential landlords) to come forward for more information about housing Ukrainians.

Many Ukrainians in Oxfordshire will have settled in local communities and found work, so identifying a range of affordable properties across the county is very important to allow them to start rebuilding their future with more independence.

Please share with your local networks. Landlords can contact the central housing team on oxfordshirehousingcapacity@southandvale.gov.uk or calling 07858687569 or 07849574859. For more information, visit our [South Oxfordshire Homes for Ukraine webpage](#).

Local planning cases

The White House/Poplar Eyot case was deferred for a site visit but will appear at an upcoming planning committee. Willows Reach has gone to appeal.

Leigh Rawlins & Mike Giles

District Councillors