

SODC ward councillor's report

Shiplake – 11th September 2023

Main news - HIF 1 / Planning update

At their meeting on 18 July, Oxfordshire County Council's Planning and Regulation Committee resolved to refuse planning permission for a package of transport schemes around Didcot known as HIF1. Although this is a county council responsibility, there are related implications for new development and infrastructure in South Oxfordshire. Delivery of some strategic and other sites require this infrastructure.

The four elements of the HIF1 scheme are:

- A4130 dualling - linking Valley Park to Didcot Science Bridge.
- Didcot Science Bridge - a new bridge across the railway line and the former Didcot A power station site.
- Didcot to Culham River Crossing - a new link road and bridge over the River Thames.
- Clifton Hampden bypass - a new bypass to re-route traffic away from Clifton Hampden and Burcot.

All four elements sought to include new high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure.

There were 8 reasons given for refusal, including concerns about the design of the proposed bridge over the River Thames; the remained EA concerns and objections.

Separately there are costing challenges because Covid and design delays, plus inflation – particularly for construction labour and materials has been significant. The project is costed at £296m of which UK Gov and existing developer s106 funding covers £270m; OCC has agreed to cover up to £30m to complete delivery.

Rather than allowing OCC to resolve the issues, Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove has called in the application and in that process it will go to a Planning Inspector, although the SoS can disagree and vary the Inspector's decision. The presumption is that the SoS will want the application approved. There is some limited scope for changes through this process; indeed given the reasons and objections some are likely to be needed.

There was a special SODC council meeting on 29th August. It was agreed that in principle the HIF1 infrastructure is needed promptly for the benefit of Didcot and the district, but should be of good sustainable design and to seek to support aims to become a net zero district by 2030, support biodiversity and minimise any harmful impact of the scheme on the district's natural and historic landscape, including the River Thames.

News in brief

- Councillor community grants: A budget of £5,000 is available to each district councillor to fund initiatives aimed at restoring our natural world, and improving community wellbeing. Applications can be made by parish councils, and are [made online](#). The deadline for this phase 1 is **20 October 2023**. Please do feel free to contact grants@southandvale.gov.uk for guidance.

- Bathing water: SODC is supporting Wallingford's application for bathing water status. Charity Thames21 are submitting the application and have launched a [public consultation](#). Mike Giles recently spoke with Thames21 about potentially supporting theoretical future bids from Shiplake and/or Eye & Dunsden – they are open to doing so. However, they note that potential sites must meet certain criteria (including minimum swimmer numbers and some infrastructure).
- Views sought on S. Oxon landscape character: An [online consultation hub](#) has been launched for the 2023 update of landscape character evidence for South Oxfordshire District Council. The aim is to support the work of the Council and to underpin policies in the emerging Joint Local Plan by reviewing and refreshing landscape evidence. LUC are supporting SODC as consultants.
- Work on the AONB extension continues with parish reviews and work for the next phase by the consultants.
- £50,000 fund for climate and nature: SODC is funding a £50,000 grant pot for projects to enhance nature and biodiversity and access to it. Applications for grants between £1000 and £15000 should be made to [The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment \(TOE\)](#). Deadline 2nd October. Contact: admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk
- 'Let it Bee' has been judged a success: SODC allowed nature to take over at [17 specific sites](#) in parks and open spaces to make them more bird, bee and butterfly friendly. Across these sites, council parks teams have reported an increase in the abundance of wildflowers and plants. (Where appropriate key walkways etc have been mown by exception.)
- Covid-19: At 3rd September 2023, **reported** cases in SODC were at a weekly rate per 100k of population of **18** (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.). However a new variant of interest has been identified: BA.2.86. The government have reacted by bringing forward inoculations for the vulnerable and 65+ groups – offering Covid and Flu jabs. There are a lot of mutations in the new variant but the risk not yet fully known.

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors